

Publication

Fischnetz: Involving anglers, authorities, scientists and the chemical industry to understand declining fish yields

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Author(s) Burkhardt-Holm, Patricia

Author(s) at UniBasel [Holm, Patricia](#) ;

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Editor(s) Hirsch Hadorn, Gertrude; Hoffmann-Riem, Holger; Biber-Klemm, Susette; Grossenbacher-Mansuy, Walter; Joye, Dominique; Pohl, Christoph; Wiesmann, Urs; Zemp, Elisabeth

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The Fischnetz project was initiated for two reasons: fish catches, especially of brown trout, have decreased by 60% over the last 20 years in many rivers and streams and the health status of numerous brown trout populations has been found to be impaired. Several cantons and members of the public requested that the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (Eawag) and the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) identify the causes and propose measures for improvement. This bottom-up initiative led to the transdisciplinary project Fischnetz, which started out as a nationwide network and lasted 5 years— from the end of 1998 to January 2004. The name of the network, 'Netzwerk Fischrückgang Schweiz', abbreviated 'Fischnetz', indicated the integrative and communicative nature of this approach. Its main objectives were (I) to document the health status and the fish decline, (II) to identify their reasons and (III) to suggest corrective measures. It was hoped that the fostering of networking would help ensure continued collaboration and information exchange after the end of the project. Broad public acceptance was, in part, reflected by the considerable financial support from all 26 cantons, the Principality of Liechtenstein, federal authorities, the chemical industry, and the Fisheries Association. In this article emphasis is placed on how the different stakeholders (fishermen associations, national and cantonal authorities, researchers and representatives of the chemical industry) were involved. In particular, building up a network was central to the integration of the already existing data and know-how of all participants. This was a prerequisite for identifying knowledge gaps and initiating research projects. The collaboration throughout the project ensured an efficient exchange of results, ideas and conclusions enabling the setting of new priorities and agreement on further procedure and proposed measures.

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