

Research Project

Issues with Europe - A Network Analysis of the German-speaking Alpine Conservation Movement (1975-2005)

Third-party funded project

Project title Issues with Europe - A Network Analysis of the German-speaking Alpine Conservation Movement (1975-2005)

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This project seeks to examine the complex negotiation processes in European politics by conducting a case study of European transport policy. European Union politics usually evolve in a complex, discordant field with actors at the regional, national and international levels. The study examines the disputes over European alpine transit policy between the 1970s and 2000s, with a comparative focus on Austria and Switzerland. It aims to assess to what extent environmental movements had an impact on European policy decisions at the national and supranational levels. The analysis is based on a network analysis focusing on the complex interplay between political and social actors, in particular around the German-speaking alpine conservation movement (Alpenschutzbewegung). The case studies of Austria and Switzerland include a member state of the European Union (Austria) and a non-member (Switzerland). Theoretically, the project contributes to a non-teleological, open-ended understanding of European integration.

The project will be carried out jointly by the University of Innsbruck (leading house), the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the University of Basel. It is broken down into three subprojects. Subproject A (responsible: Prof. Dr. Helmuth Trischler, Munich) analyses how conflicts between transport policies and alpine conservation were dealt with on the European level, in particular by the European Union and the Council of Europe. It examines the formation of concepts of ecology and nature preservation and their circulation between supranational institutions (like the EU), international NGOs (UN, IUCN) and nation states. A key point of interest is the Alpine Convention, a treaty between the eight alpine nations and the EU for the sustainable development of the Alps. The convention will also be used as a conceptual lense to better understand the role of techno-scientific experts in alpine conservation as a negotiation space of political, economic, environmental, socio-technical, and societal factors. Subproject B and C focus on regional and national authorities as well as the regional and transnational networks of the alpine conservation movement. Geographically, Subproject B (responsible: Prof. Dr. Patrick Kupfer, Innsbruck) deals with the case of Austria and addresses the disputes over alpine transit across the Brenner Pass, against the backdrop of Austria's joining the EU in 1995. Subproject C (responsible: Prof. Dr. Martin Lengwiler, Basel) focuses on Switzerland and on debates about alpine transit over the Gotthard Pass, particularly in the context of the so-called "Alpen-Initiative", which imposed a restrictive transport policy framework and had a lasting impact on Swiss-EU relations. The three case studies offer the possibility to write a transnational history of environmental movements and open a new perspective on Europeanisation. Methodologically, the coherence of the project relies on a common network analysis,

based on a state-of-the-art digital research instrument, Gephi, a software for social network analysis and visualization.

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