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Geohistorical study of landscape trajectories in three rural territories of the Val d'Hérens (Valais, Switzerland)

The landscape is a complex object with multiple definitions and public policies. It changes under the influence of natural processes or human activities. The evolution of the landscape is materialized by changes in land use, determined by climatic, socio-economic, historical or political factors (Bolliger et al. 2007). Today's landscape is the result of these changes over time. The geohistorical approach allows us to account for landscape transformations. Using old topographic maps and orthophotos, it allows us to highlight the different characteristics of land use changes over time and space (Baud et al. 2015). Permanences and inertias of a landscape are identified through the diachronic perspective. Within the framework of the Val d'Hérens 1950/2050 project - which aims to reconstruct the evolution of the territory since the 1950s and to reflect on different socio-economic and climatic scenarios by 2050 - we are conducting an analysis of the evolution of the landscape of this valley between 1950 and today. The main objective is to measure and quantify the transformations of the landscape and to identify the main causes of these changes through case studies carried out in three landscapes of the valley with different characteristics. This research shows that the landscapes of the Val d'Hérens have evolved in different ways in terms of speed and modality of transformations and causes. In the municipality of Vex, located downstream of the valley near the plain, the rural landscape has been transformed by the development of a ski resort in the 1970s and the low-lying areas are subject to relatively intense peri-urbanization. The commune of St-Martin, on the right bank, has experienced an important rural exodus which has resulted in a strong agricultural decline and phenomena of "landscape closure" (Brossard et al., 1993), associated with occasional actions of landscape rehabilitation, the result of an active policy of landscape projects and rural development. In Evolène, agricultural abandonment has been less noticeable, which is reflected in the careful maintenance of the meadows until recently. The next step will be to conduct landscape perception surveys in the form of participatory walks, in order to understand whether, beyond geographical (distance from the plain, topography) and economic (development of tourism, relative importance of agriculture) factors, socio-cultural factors also help explain these different landscape trajectories.

References

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