

Interactive comment on “The Entlebuchers: people from the back of beyond?” by U. Müller and N. Backhaus

Anonymous Referee #1

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General Comments:

The paper addresses a problem widely acknowledged in resource management strategies: how to deal with different and sometimes opposing representations of particular regions. It focuses on the visual representations and the mental images of two Swiss regions which recently becomes a biosphere reserve. Using a quantitative methodology to analyse these mental images it tries to offers a way of how to deal with incorporated knowledge not fully accessible to people. Moreover, incorporated knowledge as part of practical knowledge is analysed concerning its spatial implications.

The paper offers a valuable contribution to the discussions about spatial aspects of natural resource management and their cultural background. However, sometimes I got

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the impression that it represents two different papers, one concerning the methodological aspects of how to deal with mental images including their theoretical foundations, and one concerned with practical problems of nature reserve management. This is not to say that the case study in general is not relevant to show the practical value of the methodology chosen. But it seems to me that the space given to methodological and/or theoretical explanations is much broader than necessary, while sometimes important questions about the case studies are not raised.

Chapter 2 und 3 deals with these theoretical and methodological questions in detail. The paper used a constructivist approach, but takes into account also the physical dimension of spatial appropriation. What is missing, however, is a more explicit account of the broader societal context in which physical and mental appropriation takes place. Social structures and power relations are mentioned (p 94), but their practical relevance for the case study remains unclear.

In particular chapter 3 about the image analysis should be shortened. In the present form this chapter explains a lot of details regarding the research process, while important questions e.g. regarding the relevance of the quantitative approach and the relationships between quantitative and qualitative or between deductive, inductive and abductive dimensions of the methodology are not tackled in a satisfying way. It may be useful to address these methodological issues in more detail, but then these methodological questions should be explicitly placed in the centre of the article (and also in the title). I would prefer, however, to focus more on the case study and therefore shorten the methodological issues. Regarding this methodology the Anonymous Referee #2 made some points concerning the root indeterminacy of the visual image, which I would underline.

More important for me is the impression that the outcome of this methodology for the case studies - in reality, there is only one case study presented in the paper - are not really convincingly. It is not really a surprise that there exists tensions within an outside and an inside view, regarding the image of naturalness or the outstanding character of

a certain landscape. Some results that are important, however, are mentioned but not tackled in more detail, e.g. that the multidimensional meanings of sustainable development are simplified (p 105). In the following the paper explained that the Entlebuch region struggles with its image and needs to attract more attention. Therefore, it is not really a surprise that the region emphasizes such aspects from which their inhabitants believe that they can help to meet their needs. Thus, the image presented and their change in time is strongly connected with the interests of the people involved. Are the images therefore veiled in their incorporated knowledge? Why is it necessary to use such a complex methodology? At least the methodology should pay more attention to these connections between incorporated knowledge and interests structures. The relevance of the image analysis could be strengthened by dealing more explicit with these questions.

Nevertheless, this paper offers some insights in the relevance of spatial images for nature reserve strategies, which could be helpful for further conflicts. I suggest this paper to be accepted with revisions concerning in particular a shortening of chapter 2 and 3 and some more explanations in chapter 4. Moreover, not all figures seems to be necessary (e.g. 1) and some are not easy to grasp (e.g. 3).

Interactive comment on Soc. Geogr. Discuss., 2, 87, 2006.

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