LANDSCAPES  A history of the Swiss landscape: a look back offers ideas for the future

Mountains, lakes, picturesque villages: think of the Swiss landscape and these are the pictures that spring to mind. But do these pictures hold true – or, rather, do they still hold true? The landscape around us is changing constantly. Just as 15,000 years ago the landscape was molded by glaciers and weathering processes, now these formative interventions are being made by man. Today, the Swiss landscape is required to meet a diverse range of societal needs in a relatively small space. A look back at history can help instill some order into the changes happening today, and offer ideas for careful management of the landscape. It is with this in mind that Geschichte der Landschaft in der Schweiz (A history of the Swiss landscape) is published this spring. As Matthias Bürgi, landscape researcher at WSL and co-author of the book, explains: “Switzerland is, in a very real sense, a landscape laboratory. You’ll find almost all the landscape themes here that are discussed in other European countries.”

possible reason for this could be that critical points of view do not reach the journalists. Furthermore, says Zemp, the arguments relayed by the press were for the most part little differentiated and gave no grounds for the conclusions. Finally, some topics were scarcely analyzed in any of the three newspapers; for example, how the measures affected agriculture or the use of hydropower. In a recently published WSL report, the authors therefore recommend that project leaders inform the public about topics neglected by the media through means of panel discussions and newsletters. “More background information,” says Zemp, “would allow the general public to come to a more informed opinion on the planned renaturalization projects.”

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