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Editorial

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Dear Readers,

The idea of a comparative approach to Alpine landscapes in New Zealand and Europe arose in the early 1970s, when one of the guest editors spent a year at the University of Canterbury. Since then, several individuals from different institutions in New Zealand and Switzerland have spent sabbaticals in the opposite hemisphere. By the mid-1990s, a decision was taken to publish a series of reports and papers focusing on a comparison of important ecological and socioeconomic phenomena in both Ka Tiritiri O Te Moana—the Southern Alps of New Zealand—and the European Alps.

Is the idea of comparative geographical studies between two regions still relevant, or is it outmoded? We believe it holds potential—and here we agree with a reviewer of one of the articles in this issue: students, scholars, and interested laypersons can benefit from such an approach. In particular, they can get an overview of general structures and prevailing processes in these complex mountain ecosystems.

We almost failed in the final phase of this ambitious undertaking for several reasons. Some of the authors were overburdened with workloads or were on fieldwork campaigns for extended periods. Others did not know or had never seen their coauthors. This required them first to discuss their approach. Thanks to modern telecommunications, they were able to coordinate their contributions, but even direct contact was sometimes difficult because of different time zones and schedules due to different seasons. Moreover, scientific points of view are not the same in every culture, and different values can give rise to difficulties in cooperation. The contributions here are not quite symmetric, and some aspects are not represented at all. Nevertheless, the experience of producing this issue was a rewarding one that has produced valuable results in a very special issue of a special journal.

We have now attained our goal. Therefore, we are very happy to present this special issue, although it obviously does not focus on mountain research in the way this journal typically does. Rather, it is an empirical comparison of two mountain ecosystems based on the existing literature. Finally, we would like to acknowledge that our success is due in great measure to the immense efforts of Managing Editor Ted Wachs, and Assistant Editor Anne Zimmermann. Anne's long connection with and interest in New Zealand were important to the successful outcome of this difficult venture. We would also like to thank the cartographer at the Institute of Geography at the University of Berne, Andreas Brodbeck, for his endurance and creativity and the journal's editor-in-chief, Hans Hurni, for his patience and goodwill. Our main thanks go to all the authors for their greatly appreciated contributions to a highly unusual publication.

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