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Uphill Struggles: The Politics of Sustainable Mountain Development in Switzerland and California

By Jörg Balsiger. Cologne, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009. 370 pp. US$ 118.00, € 79.00. ISBN 978-3-8383-2463-0.

Uphill Struggles is a substantial book based on the author's doctoral dissertation. As such, it is composed of 2 distinct strands that may be of relevance to rather different audiences. The first is theoretical: it aims to "establish a common theoretical framework for analyzing sustainable development processes in modern nation states" (p 1). This theoretical framework is applied to 2 distinct mountain ranges: the Swiss Alps and the Sierra Nevada of California. Thus, the second strand is an extremely detailed description and analysis of these regions and the policies that have emerged in and/or related to them. The author focuses particularly on the past 35 years but also provides the historical contexts of these 2 regions that are very different in some respects but, as Balsiger stresses, are both cultural landscapes.

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2—"Towards a Theory of Comparative Sustainable Development"—provides the theoretical basis for the study, drawing on and aiming to integrate literature, particularly from political science, organizational sociology, and social movement studies. The 55-page chapter introduces a range of concepts, including policy architectures, organizational landscapes, and policy landscapes, that will be of interest to social scientists from a range of disciplines. The chapter concludes with a justification and description of the very wide range of research methods, which include archival analysis, interviews, and the analysis of ballot data.

The following chapters come in pairs. Chapters 3 and 4 provide historical analyses of the 2 mountain regions. Chapter 3 comprises a comparative environmental history starting with the earliest phases of human colonization and initially concluding in the mid-nineteenth century, a key period during which previous land uses continued in the Alps of the newly-established Swiss Confederation but dramatic changes occurred in the Sierra Nevada, where the indigenous population of Native Americans was largely lost during the Gold Rush. By the end of the century, both regions were politically and economically marginalized. The chapter's remaining sections compare their subsequent environmental history in terms of agriculture, forests, water, nature conservation, and tourism. Chapter 4 begins with an excursion into the literature of regionalism, again from diverse disciplinary viewpoints, and then applies this to regional development policies and initiatives in the 2 regions.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine changes in the organizational landscapes or actor networks of the 2 regions, drawing particularly on interviews as well as archival sources. Chapter 5 begins: "The main question this book addresses is how we can explain that mountain policies for the Swiss Alps emerged 30 years earlier than for the Sierra Nevada, assumed dramatically different shapes, and evolved in diametrically opposite directions" (p 163). The chapter continues with an analysis of the role of lobbies and other actors influencing policies in the Swiss Alps, with a particular emphasis on "focusing events." A key point is that policies specifically for mountain areas had even emerged (1) in the late nineteenth century with regard to forests; (2) in the 1920s regarding agriculture; and (3) in the post-war period regarding support for economically vulnerable areas. In the 1990s, the policy emphasis shifted from economic to environmental issues; in Balsiger's terminology, there was a shift from a territorial (ie mountain-specific) to a functional approach. In contrast, in the Sierra Nevada, as analyzed in Chapter 6, policies specific to the mountain range emerged much later. Until the 1980s, despite the existence of a number of national parks in the region and substantial employment in agriculture, the Sierra Nevada's forests were the main focus of functional policies. However, in the early 1990s, environmental issues came to the fore, notably with the involvement of the private sector, which barely featured among the key actor groups in the Swiss Alps. In the present century, a cross-sectoral, multistakeholder territorial policy architecture emerged with the establishment of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in 2004. These 2 chapters, which present sometimes overwhelming detail, should be required reading for anyone who is interested in policy development in either region.

Chapter 7 begins with a third literature review—on regional identity and regional political solidarity. Both this chapter and Chapter 8 explore the extent to which regional identity in the 2 regions has been expressed through voting patterns—starting in the 1950s for the Alps and in 1970 for the Sierra Nevada—using social network analysis. This quantitative method contrasts greatly with the qualitative approaches of the previous chapters and provides results that emphasize how cross-sectoral integration and regional identity create feedback loops supporting territorial policy architectures. Thus, this chapter complements the previous ones and leads into the final chapter, in which Balsiger concludes that, despite rhetoric suggesting that "To the outside world, Switzerland embodies sustainable mountain development like no other country" (p 311), the territorial policy architecture now established in the Sier-

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ra Nevada is more conducive to sustainable development. Nevertheless, as he stresses throughout the book, policies evolve within their respective historical and institutional contexts, and one crucial factor is the level at which resources are controlled.

Overall, this is a valuable and thought-provoking book for anyone interested either in the 2 mountain ranges or in the theoretical perspectives Balsiger uses and develops. It has a few limitations: some of its conclusions may already be out of date, given that the work on which it is based appears to have been completed in 2007; it includes a certain amount of repetition; and it lacks final copy-editing. However, these are minor concerns, and Balsiger is to be commended for rising to the challenge of writing such an in-depth and insightful study of 2 regions whose inhabitants speak (and write in) a total of 5 languages.

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