Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Limiting global warming to less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels requires comprehensive transformation of energy-relevant institutional, economic, and social subsystems, including changes to the dominant values and practices of actors/stakeholders in these different sectors. Achieving climate-neutrality is particularly important in mountain regions as they are disproportionally affected by climate change. However, a variety of context-specific characteristics – e.g. low population density, longer distances, sparse service infrastructure, socio-economic marginality, and dependence on agriculture and tourism – call for context-appropriate energy transition pathways that are harmonized with regional development strategies.

The Bernese Oberland in Switzerland is an important tourism destination with corresponding greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and a region with considerable hydropower production. Being aware of the impacts of climate change in the region, the "Regional Conference Oberland Ost" – a planning association of 28 communities – acknowledged the need to substantially reduce GHG emissions and set the goal "to develop the region towards a climate-neutral tourism region" in its 2019 development strategy.

In a three-year research project (2021-2023), we have been supporting the region in its efforts and have initiated a participatory process. The process is informed by the transition management approach by Loorbach (2010) and guiding principles from Wittmayer et al. (2018). It comprises four participatory workshops (WS) with selected actors from all relevant sectors (tourism, agriculture and forestry, energy, mobility, public authorities, civil society). In WS1, the actors analysed problems related to GHG emissions. In WS2 and WS3, they jointly defined visions, transition pathways, and a transition agenda. Finally, in WS 4, the actors will reflect on the process and its outcomes. A GHG balance and a survey among residents and tourists about their support for the visions and transition pathways will underpin the transition agenda. The project includes a one-year phase of experimentation to gather implementation experience and further develop the transition pathways.

In the presentation, we will provide an overview of our approach, summarize initial results and insights into the first three WS, and discuss context-specific challenges for transition towards climate neutrality in mountains.

References:

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