

Contradictory or Complementary Concepts? Local Environmental Knowledge and Development Interventions in Peripheral High Mountain Regions

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Local environmental knowledge and development interventions in natural resource management patterns have often been regarded as highly incompatible and sometimes even conflicting concepts. Resource management in remote high mountain regions are prominent examples to analyze the interplay between indigenous knowledge systems and their modifications resulting from external interventions and environmental politics. Beyond ethnic and cultural particularities, mountain communities gain sustainability from altitudinal diversification of different agro-ecological zones and by decreasing the threat of failure of any of those resources due to natural hazards. Land use decisions are often based on sophisticated environmental knowledge. Especially in developing countries, high mountain regions are characterised by rudimentary accessibility, considerable spatial disparities and relatively low intra-regional exchange patterns. The diffusion of external innovations is often limited or retarded. On the other hand, local environmental knowledge systems are frequently romanticized as ideal elements of sustainable land use in sharp contrast to the project of modernization. Based on case studies from South Asia, the paper discusses colonial and post-colonial changes of indigenous land use and environmental knowledge systems and the underlying asymmetries of power.