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Title: Understanding the role of new commons in territorial development dynamics of mountain areas: findings from the Swiss Alps

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Abstract: Mountain regions are facing many challenges related to global social and environmental changes. Collective action and commons (in the sense of Ostrom, 1990) appear as a way to cope with these challenges; they have been, and continue to be, well-developed in many mountain areas, especially in the Swiss Alps. Today, we can observe the presence of new forms of mountain commons (in the sense of Hess, 2008) that were recently created and that are structured around resources other than natural (forests, pastures, water). Examples of new mountain commons identified in Switzerland include participatory cafés and grocery stores, self-help groups for parents, mountain heritage restoration associations or mountain hut management organisations (Gros-Balthazard, 2024). They participate to the productive function of the territory by providing goods and services and they also contribute to reinforce the domestic and residential base of the territory by increasing its quality of life. For example, in the village of Fang, in Anniviers valley, the reforming of an old institution, the Village Society, has revitalised the hamlet's life, with members restoring ancient heritage such as the mill and oven and organising events, path maintenance and village flowering. These initiatives, which are mostly non-profit organisations and cooperatives, therefore recreate or maintain social ties and contribute to an improved quality of life in those mountain villages. The desire to contribute to "living well in the mountains" is often a conscious and explicit goal among the members of these communities. Based on in-depth studies conducted in the frame of the ComMount¹ research project, this paper questions the way commons articulate different functions and, by this, can act as one of the pillars of mountain socio-economic system. It also questions the way they integrate into local development trajectories.

References:

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¹ Mountain COMmons: questioning past and present Commons to address territorial development issues in MOUNTain areas (ComMount), Swiss National Science Foundation, <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/212414>.