Locals' and Tourists' Sense of Place

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A Case Study of a Swiss Alpine Village

The development of Swiss Alpine landscapes must comply with the needs of different interest groups. We assume that the way people relate to places, and particularly the sense of place they have, is a basis for their needs and aims regarding future landscape development. Conflicts among aims can be better understood if the underlying place relations are known. Therefore, we inductively examined differences between locals' and tourists' sense of place by means of a qualitative interview study in Alvaneu, a Swiss Alpine village. In social science theory, "sense of place" is used as an umbrella concept for manifold people–place relations. The findings reveal that the place characteristics relevant to sense of place are approximately the same for both groups. However, locals and tourists attribute different meanings and significance to these characteristics, and thus have distinct needs regarding landscape development. Consequently, a balance between appropriate economic development desired by locals and the preservation of the cultural characteristics and authenticity sought by tourists must be found when pursuing sustainable landscape development.

Keywords: *Sense of place; place meanings; landscape development; group differences; locals; tourists; Alps; Switzerland.*

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Introduction

What shapes people's relations to particular places? Do "outsider" and "insider" relate to the same places differently? The present study examines differences between locals' and tourists' sense of place in the context of a Swiss Alpine landscape.

The continual socioeconomic, political, and technological developments in the region of the Swiss Alps transform its landscapes. These transformations can change people's relationships to Alpine landscapes and lead to conflicts if the social meanings attributed to the landscapes are affected (Greider and Garkovich 1994; Muir 2003). This is because cultural landscapes, unlike objective and undifferentiated *spaces*, can be regarded as *places*, and are thus constituted and perceived by the meanings people attribute to them (Tuan 1974). In oth-

er words, landscapes are socially constructed in the context of particular actions, meanings and physical attributes (Muir 1999; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Morin 2003) and are thus the provisional result of social processes and individual experiences. However, different socio-cultural groups produce elements of the natural environment differently. Because of their distinct "lifeworlds" (*Lebenswelten*), they may attribute diverse meanings to the same spatial setting (Greider 1993). Thus, people establish different relations to places, depending on their cultural values, interests and individual experiences.

In recent decades, social scientists have developed a variety of concepts to describe people–place relations. Tuan (1974), a geographer, and Steele (1981), an environmental psychologist, introduced the broadest of these concepts, "sense of place," which amalgamates in its definition the meanings, attachment, and satisfaction an individual or group associates with a particular place (Stedman 2003). We understand this as an umbrella concept encompassing place relations as diverse as 'at homeness' (Seamon 1979), 'place attachment' (Altman and Low 1992), 'place dependence' (Williams et al 1992), 'place identity' (Prohansky et al 1983; Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 1996), or 'regionalization' (Backhaus and Müller 2006).

Recreation and tourism have become dominant agents of change in landscape development in rural regions of the Western world (Butler et al 1998; van der Vaart 2003; Palang et al 2005). This is also true for the region of the Swiss Alps (Wiesmann 1988; Siegrist 1998; Hunziker 2000). Thus, the place relations of residents and their needs and aims play a fundamental role in the context of development of the Alpine landscape, as well as the place relations of tourists. As they have a background of socialization and existence distinct from the locals, tourists have an "outsider's" view and therefore may perceive and value landscapes differently (Stremlow 1998). Such differences in evaluation of landscape and landscape change by different socio-cultural groups have been confirmed by survey studies using photo-visualization techniques (Hunziker 2000). To avoid landscape conflicts and enhance sustainable landscape development complying with tourists' and locals' requirements, the sense of place of members of both groups must be understood and evaluated with respect to differential meanings (Ewert and Stewart 2004).

Recent review papers on emotional relationships with places point out a research gap in empirical studies addressing tourist–place relations—in contrast to a variety of studies on local people's place relations (Stokowski 2002; Manzo 2003). A few studies exist, mainly in the field of leisure sciences, that examine tourist–place relations with the concept of sense of place (Hummon 1992; Hay 1998; Stedman 2003).

FIGURE 1 The village of Alvaneu, Canton of Grisons, Switzerland. (Photo by S. Kianicka)

These studies elucidate that for tourists, visited places can be as deeply meaningful as for locals, notably as symbols of important experiences or because of the places' restorative value. But empirical studies focus mostly on defining the constituents of sense of place, or on the strength of place relations. Stedman's (2003) quantitative study in northern Wisconsin demonstrates that sense of place is not just based on social constructions, but also on some material reality, ie on concrete landscape characteristics. Hay (1998) found in a survey study on Banks Peninsula, New Zealand, that the sense of place of local Maori people is deeply rooted, whereas the sense of place of tourists is rather superficial, due to different residential status and thus different ancestral and cultural connections. Still, no studies have examined the contents and conditions of sense of place, particularly with regard to group differences. Empirical knowledge of differences in sense of place between the 2 main interest groups with respect to Alpine landscape development, locals and tourists, is especially poor.

We hypothesize that due to the distinct social, cultural, and economic backgrounds of locals and tourists, resulting in a different evaluation of landscape developments, there are differences in the ways they construct place, symbols that are meaningful to them, and thus their sense of place.

Therefore, the following questions arise: are there differences in the ways locals and tourists relate to place and, if so, how do they come about? Which characteristics of place are significant for which group? Which landscape meanings do the groups share and which not? What underlies these variations? What do these differences mean with regard to future landscape development? We try to answer these questions by presenting an empirical interview study conducted in the Alpine village of Alvaneu in Central Grisons, southeastern Switzerland. Alvaneu is a small village where landscape-oriented tourism, focusing on local natural and cultural characteristics, is becoming an increasingly important economic sector.

Methods

The study is based on semi-structured interviews, a method appropriate for inductively examining people's views regarding a phenomenon (Berg 2001). The interview questions were grouped in 3 sets. The respondents were asked to describe (1) the peculiarities of the village, (2) their relationship with the place in general, and (3) the relevant local landscape changes.

The interviews were conducted between March 2003 and September 2004 in the Swiss Alpine village of Alvaneu (Figure 1; Table 1). The sample consisted of 24 persons, selected according to the Theoretical Sampling approach (Glaser and Strauss 1998). The objective of this procedure is not to get statistical representativeness, but to maximize the variability of opinions and perspectives expressed. The main variables according to which members of the 2 groups (locals and tourists) were selected were age, professional background, gender, and place of residence. Further selection criteria applied to tourists were the frequency and duration of visits (Table 2).

TABLE 2 Profile of interviewees.

Sex	Age	Occupation	Residential status
M	43	Public transport	Long-established (since birth)
F	66	Hotel and restaurant	Long-established (since birth)
M	53	Forestry	Repatriated (for 7 years)
M	69	Agriculture	Long-established (since birth)
M	59	Construction	Long-established (since birth)
F	47	Home	Newcomer (2 years ago)
F/M	27/29	Home/agriculture	Long-established (since birth)
F	65	Sales	Long-established (since birth)
F/M	59/60	Home/commerce	Tourists (1 week)
F/M	59/60	Administration/engineering	Vacation homeowners (for 1 year)
F	27	Municipality	From neighbor village (since birth)
F	48	Banking	Newcomer (15 years ago)
M	40	Municipality	From neighbor village (since birth)
F	18	Student	Newcomer (8 years ago)
F	63	Home	Vacation homeowner (for 21 years)
F	49	Home	Newcomer (for 4 years)
F	31	Teaching (kindergarten)	Vacation homeowners (for 2 years)
F/M	65/68	Teaching (high school)	Vacation homeowners (for 5 years)
M	34	Primary school teacher	Repatriated (for 6 years)
F	39	Home	Vacation homeowner (for 1 year)

TABLE 1 The political community of Alvaneu. (Source: http://www.alvaneu.ch/portrait/fakten.html, accessed on 9 November 2005)

The political community of Alvaneu	
Area	Albula
District	Belfort
Altitude	1205 m
Community area	3557 ha
Inhabitants in 2003	440
Employees/jobholders	138
Total workplaces	43
Agriculture and forestry	19
Industry and trade	7
Service sector	17
Overnight stays in 2003	12,500

The contents of the transliterated interviews of 1–2 hours' duration were analyzed using the Grounded Theory approach according to Glaser and Strauss (1998), with different steps of thematic coding as described by Flick (1995:206–211). The first step involved thorough reading of every single interview text and assigning appropriate thematic codes to short passages (open coding). These open codes were then assigned to broader categories that were important within the scope of research. In a second step, a coding manual was made, consisting of central "axial" categories representing the C-coding family (causes, contexts, consequences, conditions) suggested by Böhm (2000). Every single interview was then coded using this manual, with the aim of detecting key categories and their relations with other categories (axial coding). The final step comprised further examination of the interview texts, with the aim of clarifying existing key cate-

gories and their relations to other central categories (selective coding).

Findings

Overview
The interview analysis resulted in a large variety and complex interplay of concepts relevant to the respondents' sense of place. After grouping the concepts into several key categories, we developed a triangular model in which these categories can be positioned and their interrelations with other categories visualized. The 3 poles of the model represent central categories found to cluster as meanings referred to frequently by respondents: 1) *individual;* 2) *society*; and 3) *existence. Individual* refers to a person's very subjective needs; *society* to the needs of social integration; and *existence* to people's livelihoods and property. We located the single key cate-

FIGURE 2 Key categories relevant to locals' sense of place. The different shades of gray indicate affiliation with different superordinate categories, while the different sizes indicate frequency of mention by interviewees.
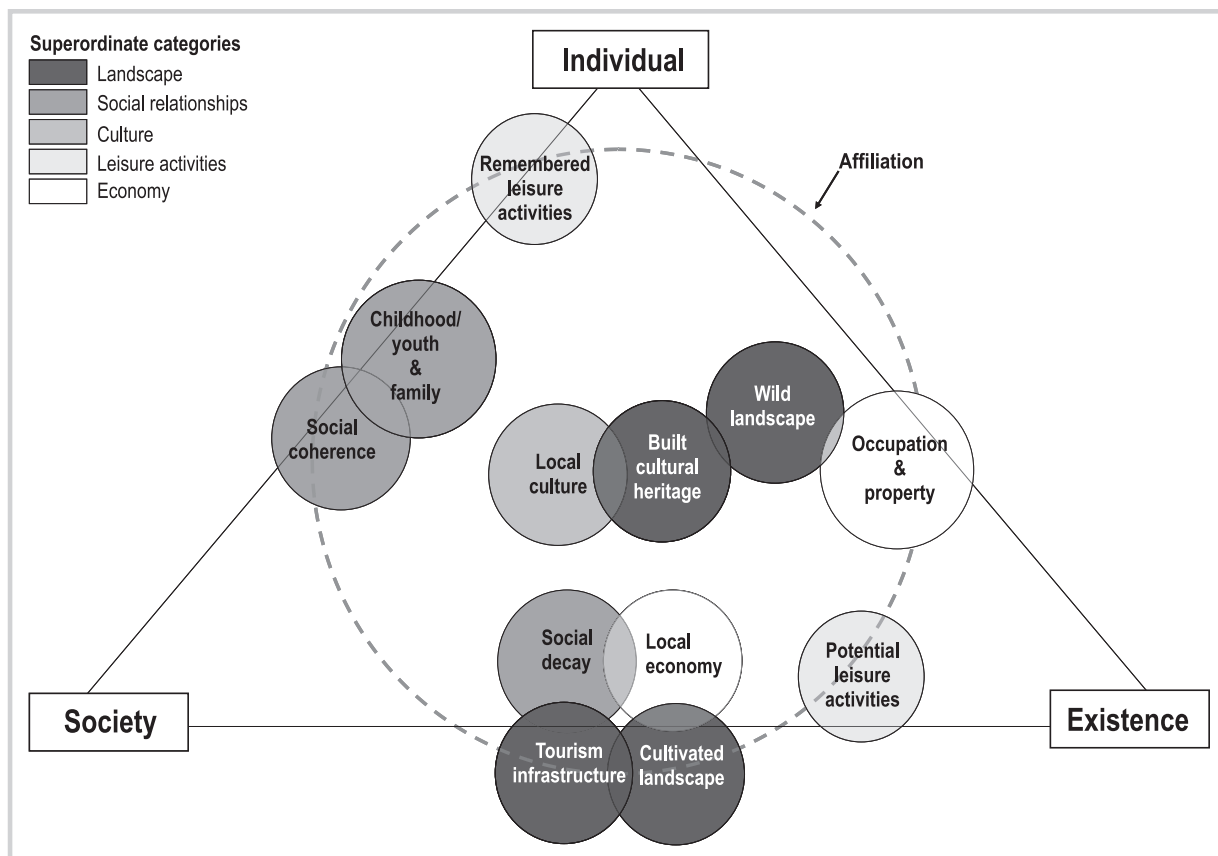
gories according to the extent to which they are associated with individual, social or existential meanings (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

We further grouped the key categories and subsumed them under superordinate categories, as can be seen by the different gray levels (landscape, social relationships, culture, leisure activities, economy, and affiliation). The single key categories are discussed below in the context of the respective superordinate category. In doing so, even if we speak generally about "the locals" and "the tourists," we are well aware of the fact that such a division is a purposive construct and that reality is more heterogeneous.

Categories relevant to sense of place
Landscape
The local landscape is significant for both groups' sense of place. This category encompasses the key superordinate categories of **wild landscape**, **cultivated landscape**, **built cultural heritage**, and **tourism infrastructure**.

Both locals and tourists characterized the local landscape as very "special" because it is "still pristine." However, certain landscape features—predominantly new infrastructure such as buildings—were also repeatedly criticized as disturbing and inappropriate.

Locals find it important that parts of their landscape are still being cultivated, partly traditionally, by farmers and foresters and not yet spoiled as a landscape

by tourism. A long-established local (aged 43) said: "Our location is the best in the whole valley. It is still unspoiled and we have lots of sun and great views from this elevated plain!" Thus in the model, the **cultivated landscape** stands equally for the society as well as its existence. The key category **wild landscape** lies close to the individual–existence axis, with comparably individual (self-realization) and existential (attraction for tourism), and to a lesser extent societal meaning (pride in successful nature protection). **Tourism infrastructure** is located along the society-existence axis, because for locals, it expresses an "awakening" of their society and represents an indispensable means of existence. Finally, the **built cultural heritage** stands for their own and their communities' history. The advantage is that it can be commercialized. Accordingly, it lies rather in the middle of the figure, encompassing individual, social, and existential aspects.

In contrast, the tourists predominantly perceived the landscape's character as more wild and "untouched," although with numerous possibilities for recreation and adventure. Tourists are also partly aware of the fact that the landscape is the result of an agricultural tradition specific to the local society. They see this expressed, for example, in the presence of cottages for summer farming at higher altitudes, or the existence of terraced fields. Therefore, for them, the local landscape is on the one hand highly individual (**wild landscape**),

FIGURE 3 Key categories relevant to tourists' sense of place. The different shades of gray indicate affiliation with different superordinate categories, while the different sizes indicate frequency of mention by interviewees.
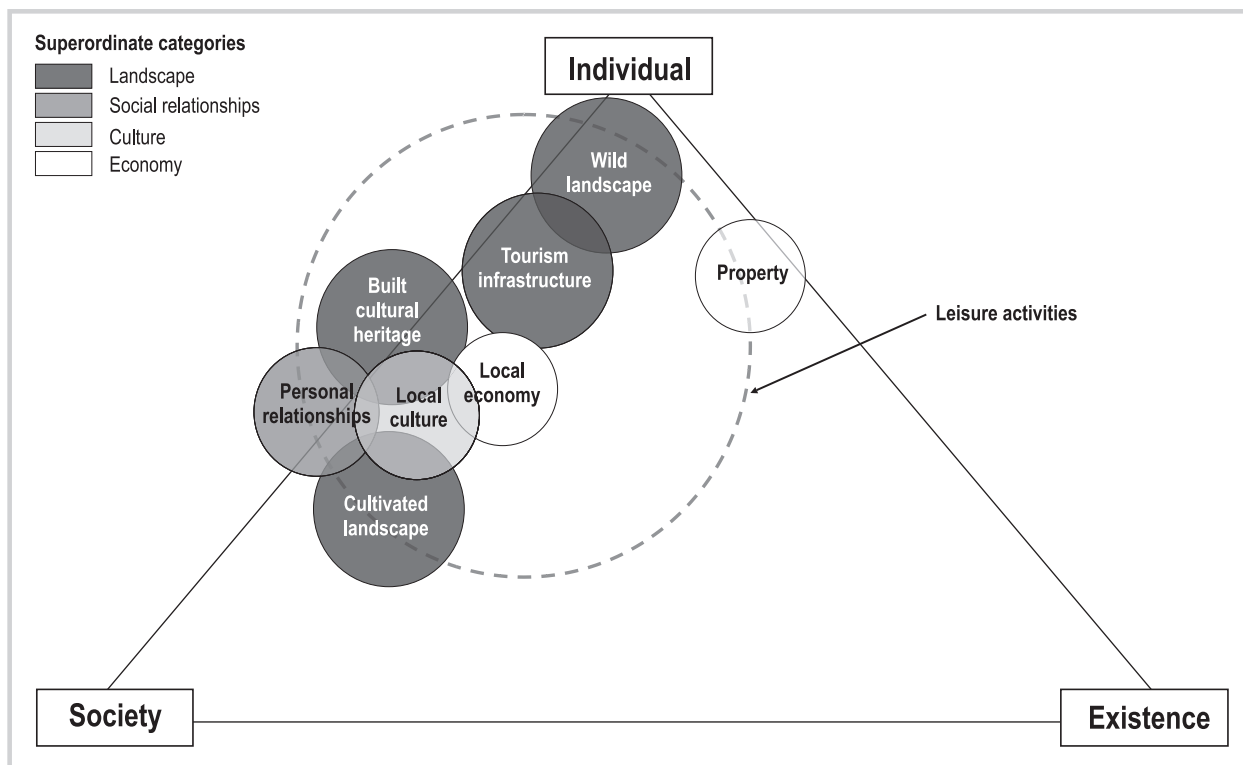
while on the other hand it represents the local society and its husbandry tradition (**cultivated landscape**).

Tourists especially appreciate the built cultural heritage as testimony to the distinctive history of the place and as a marker of its inhabitants' own culture—which they actually "consume" by being in the place. It also represents part of the national cultural heritage and reminds them of their own roots as Swiss nationals. A vacation homeowner (aged 63) said she likes the place because she is a "rather nostalgic person" and "always looking for the ancient, idyllic, conserved, and beautiful." Thus, in the case of the tourists, the key category **built cultural heritage** has an equally individual (personal origin) and societal (local preservation of tradition) character and lies in the middle of the society–individual axis. Furthermore, tourists appreciate the existing infrastructure, which they primarily find very convenient for their individual leisure activities, but also see as representing a local society that is economically innovative. Consequently, the meaning of **tourism infrastructure** is primarily individual and slightly societal.

Social relationships
Social relationships are relevant to the sense of place of both locals and tourists. In the case of the locals they consist of the key categories **social coherence**, **social decay**, and **childhood/youth and family**, while in the case of the tourists the key category is **personal relationships**.

The locals' views of their society are very inconsistent. On the one hand they emphasize that "coherence" is a prominent characteristic of their community. They

regard it as a positive behavioral norm typical for the place. The major symbols of this coherence are local associations and clubs, where most of them actively participate. On the other hand some—especially newcomers—feel excluded and also socially "controlled" by those community members who stick together. Thus, the key category **social coherence** has both societal and individual meaning.

At the same time locals view the society as somehow decaying: particularly younger and enterprising people criticized the passive attitude of the society regarding economic innovations. Many interviewees complained about the absence of a shared objective regarding local landscape development. Also, people have an existential fear that their place is threatened by extinction because mainly young people and families are moving away. Therefore, the key category **social decay** lies in the middle of the society–existence axis.

Childhood memories, family members, and friends have high significance for locals. Experiences related to agriculture are prominent: "I remember exactly the places where we used to work on the fields as adolescents. There were so many flowers! And our mother used to bring us delicious cakes during the breaks," a long-established local woman (aged 65) recalled about the past. In Figure 2 **childhood/youth and family** consequently lies close to the middle of the individual–society axis.

The tourists mostly spoke of places in connection with their personal relationships. These encompassed relations with family members—especially children—or

FIGURE 4 Construction in a traditional style, typical of Alvaneu. (Photo by S. Kianicka)

friends and their common experiences of place. Furthermore, tourists seemed to be particularly satisfied if they got to know local people and especially proud if they established friendly relationships with them. Therefore, the key category **personal relationships** likewise encompasses individual and social aspects.

Culture
The **local culture**—be it material or immaterial—was repeatedly mentioned as a significant feature of the place by tourists and locals alike, even if to a lesser extent than the landscape and social relationships.

The locals are conscious of their perceived unique cultural traits, which they primarily see represented in their built heritage, language, domestic economy, religion, and traditions. For the locals, "culture" refers to their "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*) as a whole, and is an integral part of their individual and societal daily life. Thus, in their case **local culture** also has societal, individual, and existential aspects.

In the eyes of the tourists the markers of the local material culture are primarily elements of built cultural heritage and a typically local construction style (Figure 4). But it is not their own culture and it is only

a part of what they understand by "culture" embodied in this place. They repeatedly stated that they could not live in the place, because "culture is missing" there, by which they meant cultural institutions such as theater, concerts, and museums. Still, local cultural traits are seen as a part of their own culture, insofar as they stand for original and authentic Swiss culture, particularly its agricultural traditions. Therefore, in the case of the tourists, **local culture** lies in the middle of the individual–society axis.

Economy
Economic considerations are represented by the key categories **occupation and property** and **local economy**.

Locals are mostly proud that their place is slowly beginning to "flourish." They welcome soft tourism and are aware of the hidden potential of their place. But they also expressed existential fears in view of the uncertain future and dependence on patterns of "outside" activity, referring to the national politics and economy. This is why the key category **local economy** lies in the middle of the society–existence axis.

Locals also emphasized their property, as Alpine summer farms (*Maiensässe*), hunting cottages, houses, or the flats where they live or which they rent out. On the other hand they mentioned jobs that they had or still have. Therefore, the key category **occupation and property** lies between the existence and individual poles.

Tourists only mentioned economic aspects as a justification for unsightly landscape elements. "Well, the golf course doesn't mean anything to me. But it is certainly good for the valley, it attracts people!" a vacation homeowner (aged 60) stated (Figure 5). The tourists are well aware of the economic dependence of the local society on tourism. They also hope that agriculture, as a traditional economic base, will not completely disappear in the future, because the farmers are the ones who keep the landscape cultivated. Thus in the case of the tourists, the key category **local economy** is something strongly societal and individual. Second-home owners also attached great importance to their local home both as a hideaway and as a financial investment. Hence, **property** is individual and somewhat existential for them.

Leisure activities
For tourists, leisure activities constitute the principal reason for their visit. In their case, the meaningful place aspects all depend on and revolve around **potential and remembered leisure activities**. Therefore, this key category encompasses all the other key categories and tends toward the individual pole.

Potential leisure activities are a feature inherent in the locals' landscape and part of their means of existence. Thus, this key category lies close to the existence

pole. Some informants nevertheless described how some places became meaningful for them due to personal leisure activities. In their case, the key category **remembered leisure activities** lies close to the individual pole.

Affiliation
For the locals the feeling of **affiliation** is omnipresent. It is not clearly tied to any particular feature of the place, but is a somewhat abstract feeling for the place as a whole, a general feeling of familiarity, security, and safety. On the other hand there is also a feeling of bondage and not being able to leave. This key category comprises all other key categories.

Additionally, the aspects relevant for locals' and tourists' sense of place can be recapitulated according to their level of significance (Table 3).

Discussion and conclusion

This case study shows that both locals and tourists possess a similarly differentiated sense of place regarding the village of Alvaneu. Members of both groups willingly, and usually quite emotionally, talked about their personal relation to the place. Interestingly, the key categories identified as relevant for sense of place are also much the same for both locals and tourists. However, the distribution and significance of the key categories in the models vary considerably between the 2 groups.

Locals' sense of place is primarily shaped by aspects in everyday life: occupation, property, and, most important, social relationships, which together form their affiliation. Furthermore, their sense of place is strongly associated with memories of childhood and youth.

TABLE 3 Levels of significance for key categories of locals' and tourists' sense of place: 1 = highest, 4 = lowest significance.

Level of significance	Residents		Tourists	
1	Affiliation		Wild landscape Cultivated landscape Built cultural heritage Tourism infrastructure	Leisure activities
	Occupation and property	Childhood/ youth and family Social coherence Social decay		
2	Cultivated landscape Wild landscape Tourism infrastructure Built cultural heritage		Personal relationships	
3	Local culture	Local economy	Local culture	
4	Potential leisure activities Remembered leisure activities		Local economy	Property

In the case of the tourists, sense of place is above all shaped by the esthetics and characteristics of the place, which they experience in the context of leisure activities. Hence, the activities through which places are experienced have the biggest impact on people's sense of place. Thus, while the sense of place of locals is mostly associated with society and existence, individual aspects matter above all to the tourists.

Furthermore, the 3-pole model reveals that even the same place characteristics were more closely associated with existential and societal meanings by the locals and with individual meanings by the tourists. This is especially true for the landscape categories. In particular, they show fundamental differences between the locals' and tourists' understandings of landscape: for locals landscape is predominantly social and existential; for tourists, it is mainly individual.

For the locals it is important that the landscape of their place be clearly distinguished from those of other tourist resorts in the region which, according to them, have "destroyed" their landscapes with infrastructure-oriented tourism. On the other hand, they do not want a landscape where development stagnates and makes them "live in an open-air museum." Hence, they endorse tourism development, but not at nature's expense. They want a "soft" tourism which does not destroy the typical characteristics of the local landscape.

To the tourists, the intact landscape gives a feeling of "being away from home." They are looking for nostalgia and authenticity, a "safe and sound world." Since they do not want the place's landscape to lose these distinctive qualities, they regard any economic development very critically, as it could impair what they perceive as the "authentic character" of the landscape.

Thus, while the locals desire appropriate economic development of their place, the tourists prefer conservation of their hideaway as it is. This reveals a central dynamic of mutual construction of the place by locals and tourists: due to their dependence on tourism, the locals are forced to integrate the ideas and needs of tourists into their vision of appropriate local development, in particular the need for an authentic landscape. They also stage and market these local characteristics, which comply with the tourists' ideals of an Alpine place. Consequently, the tourists perceive exactly those features of the place as "typical" or "authentic" that have been staged as such by the locals for the purpose of economic development—and are opposed to further development.

Conclusions

From these findings we draw the following main conclusion regarding our initially formulated hypothesis: variations in the evaluation of landscape development between residents and non-residents can be ascribed to their distinct sense of place, which is in turn due to the different meanings they attribute to the same place characteristics. Thus, the distinct residential status of locals and tourists does not necessarily result in a different depth of sense of place, as Hay (1998) postulates. Our findings rather indicate that while the strength and manifoldness of the sense of place of these 2 groups is comparable, it is the place meanings shaping their sense of place that differ vitally. Furthermore, we found that basically the same local landscape characteristics contribute to both locals' and tourists' sense of place. Thus, our findings also support the assertion of Stedman (2003) that physical environmental features matter a great deal to constructed place meanings.

Even if the conclusions drawn from this study are based on research in one particular study area, they may be transferred to other Alpine places with similar geographic and socioeconomic characteristics. These

primarily encompass the decline of agriculture and the emergence of nature-oriented tourism as an important new economic sector and a cultivated landscape that still includes elements of the traditional cultural landscape.

Thus, striking a balance between appropriate economic development desired by the locals and the preservation of the cultural characteristics and authenticity sought by tourists is the challenge for sustainable landscape development that aims to meet the needs and aims of both groups. To reach this goal, more research is needed. According to our findings, in particular, a better understanding of tourists' nostalgic search for vestiges of the past might help in finding better solutions. Addressing questions such as: "What is the motivation for this search? How significant is it in the context of their demands on recreation and restoration?" would be very relevant and fruitful.

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