

Moorland Landscapes in Switzerland

The Changing Significance of Near-natural Cultural Landscapes

In 1987 the „Rothenthurm initiative“ established the protection of moors and moorland landscapes. Since then, moorland landscapes of „particular beauty and national significance“ are the only landscape type that is constitutionally protected in Switzerland (Swiss Constitution, Art. 78).

The legal definition of a moorland landscape is „a near-natural landscape that is strongly characterised by moors“. Its moor-free sections are „closely interrelated with the moors in an ecological, visual, cultural or historical sense“ (Swiss Natural and Cultural Heritage Protection Act, Art. 23b § 1).

In the course of time, the relationship of humans with moorland landscapes has changed considerably. The variety of significances can be categorized in **material significances**, (esp. peat harvesting, agricultural use and use as settlement areas), **geo-ecological significances** (regulatory functions) and **non-material significances** (esp. aesthetic, leisure and recreation functions). These were of different meaning for humans due to different needs and personal attitudes. In the following, a choice of significances of moorland landscapes in Switzerland is presented:

Peat harvesting

The harvesting of peat for fuel production contributes to the destruction of bogs. Especially in times of socio-economic need and until the spread of mineral oil products in the 20th century, peat was an important alternative to wood and coal.



Peat scar in Mettelmoos in the Unesco Biosphere Entlebuch, Canton Luzern (Photograph: T. Hammer).

Pastures and litter meadows

The demand for land for pastures and litter meadows were the main economic drivers for the development of culturally formed moorland landscapes in Switzerland into the 19th century.

The contemporary state of technology led to the development of wide areas with fens and prevented existing fens from being destroyed.

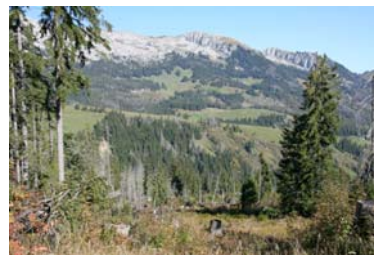
Nowadays a lot of fens are threatened by incipient scrub and forest encroachment as a result of under-use. Technological improvements like the adjustment of mowing machines to avoid producing scars on fens can help to preserve them.



Pasture meadows in the moorland landscape Glaubenberg, region Gross Entlen, Canton Luzern (Photograph: T. Hammer).



Litter meadows by Fuchseren in the Unesco Biosphere Entlebuch, Canton Luzern (Photograph: R. Meili)



Impression of the moorland landscape Habbkern-Sörenberg, Canton Luzern (Photograph: T. Hammer).



Typical pattern of settlement in the moorland landscape Habbkern-Sörenberg, Canton Luzern (Photograph: T. Hammer).



Hiking in the moorland landscape Habbkern-Sörenberg, Canton Luzern (Photograph: T. Hammer).



The 89 moorland landscapes of particular beauty and national significance. They are spread all over the country but most of them are in the region of the pre-Alps. (Source: www.ecogis.admin.ch; adapted by R. Tillmann.)

Aesthetic significance

The aesthetic significance of moorland landscapes becomes especially evident in aspects like the diversity of vegetation types, the change of colours – mostly in the fens – over the year and the manifold structured relief.

Settlement areas

Moorland landscapes are characterised by dispersed patterns of settlement, peripheral location and low agricultural productivity. They were included in extensive agriculture at a relatively late stage, often only in the context of economic need and population growth in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Recreation and leisure

The personal non-material enrichment based on sensual perception and aesthetic pleasure becomes more and more evident in the context of sporting activities and tourist uses. The significance of moorland landscapes for recreation and leisure has increased consistently in the recent decades.

Changing significances of the moorland landscapes for humans, the appreciation of the non-material significances and the identification of new significances reflect the changes that have occurred in the relationship of humans with nature.

Nowadays, moorland landscapes are perceived as ecologically, historically and aesthetically valuable near-natural cultural landscapes. The new and increasingly important non-material significances (aesthetic value, recreation and leisure) can contribute to the local social and economic value creation and have become central arguments for the protection and prevention of moorland landscapes.