

A Fantasy of Pastoral Diversity

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Abstract

Any theoretical or physical framework that attempts to separate nature and society into distinct realms paralyses the ecological movement for the on-going crisis (Loftus, 2012). Landscapes of production have played an important role in maintaining the equilibrium which over the industrial revolution has been drastically altered. What role do designers play in such landscapes of high ecological value that are being extracted for human production? In an attempt to generate a discussion around these landscapes the project focuses on the pre-alpine cultural and agrarian landscape and its lack of diversity and inefficient land use in the mismanaged pastures. It debates about how designers, urban planners and geographers can approach natural and cultural territories to address these vulnerabilities through design. The project aims to discuss animal farming in prealpine geography through the prism of ecology, economy, and social engagement and the potential of design thinking to transform a (mono)cultural landscape to a polymorphous socio-ecological landscape.

Flattening of a cultural landscape: Lack of Social, economic and ecological diversity

Social: Due to the large-scale intensification of farming, small cooperatives have become more isolated. Despite attempts at forming small cooperatives for selling the produce, when seen at a bigger scale they still operate independently.

Economic: The landscape of the Zurich prealps are highly managed and regulated through government subsidies. State payments play a singularly significant role in supporting farming in the prealps forming a lifeline for the farmers today who often rely 100% on this income.

Ecological: Landuse change in Switzerland indicates that arable land is rapidly decreasing while the areas under urbanisation and forestry are increasing. The monocultural landuse of the Zurich prealps has severely impacted its ecological diversity.

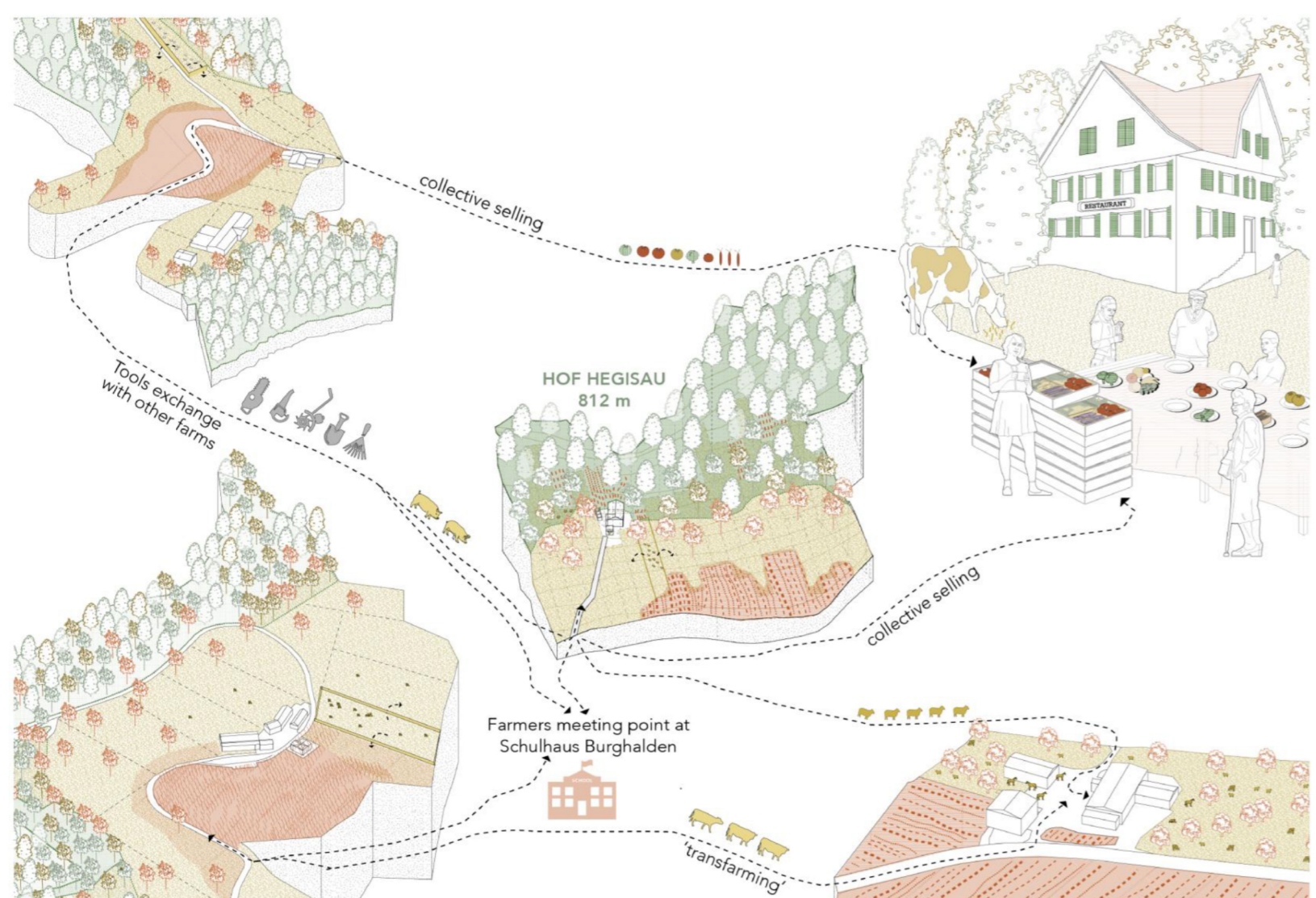


Figure 1: Four farms and one restaurant work in a network of cooperation. The farms share tools, knowledge and expertise amongst each other and the restaurant becomes a direct link between the producer and the consumer.

Learning from pioneering practices

Despite the extreme flattening of the territory, a closer look at emergent practices on the ground reveals pioneers who are attempting to unflatten these monocultures. Our proposal is inspired from these pioneering practices who produce their own fodder in the highest altitude. In a heavy dairy and meat industry landscape some focus on animal welfare, education and vegetable production, gradually transitioning/shifting towards ethical farming practices while some consolidate their communities forming small selling networks.

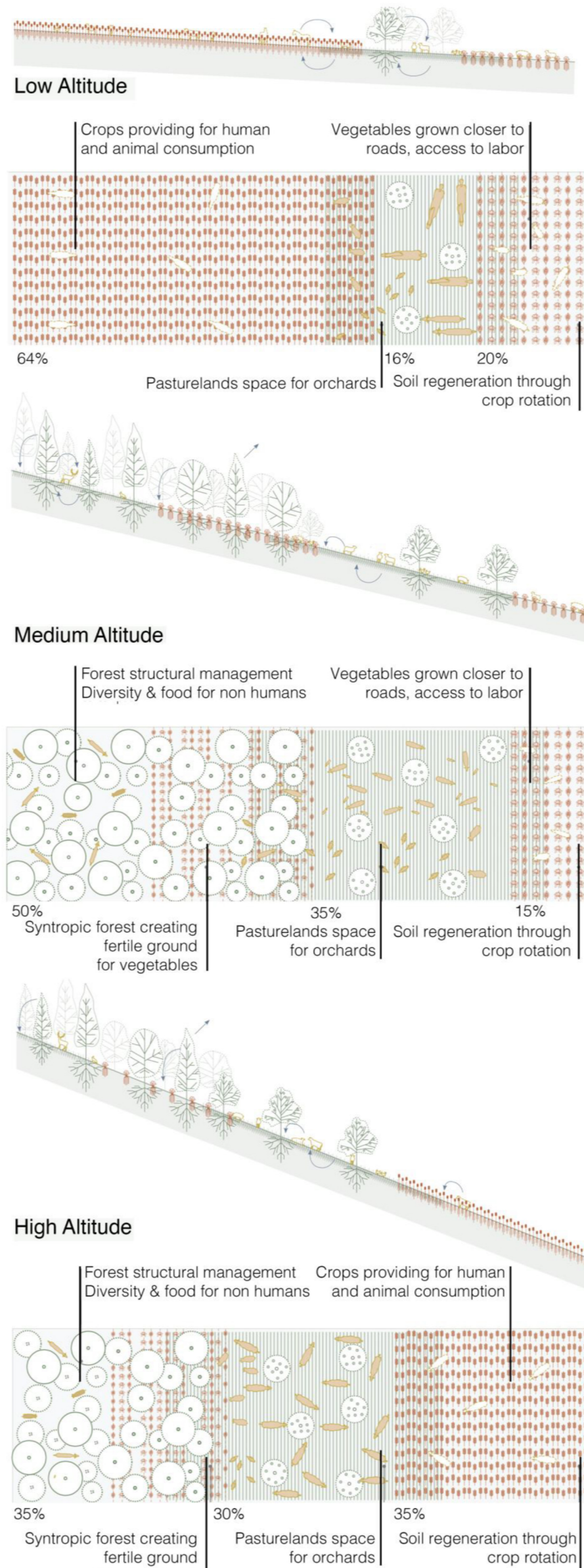


Figure 2: Proposed landuse at three altitudes.

Forming Cooperatives

The proposal reacts to the altitudinal specificities and proposes diversification of farms according to the possibilities presented by altitudes (Fig. 2). Farms have to work in cooperation across heights and scales by exchanging knowledge, tools, expertise, and produce across altitudes. Farming in the pre alps takes a cooperative and collaborative form (Fig.1). Networks of social interactions operating at various scales consolidate various farming communities.

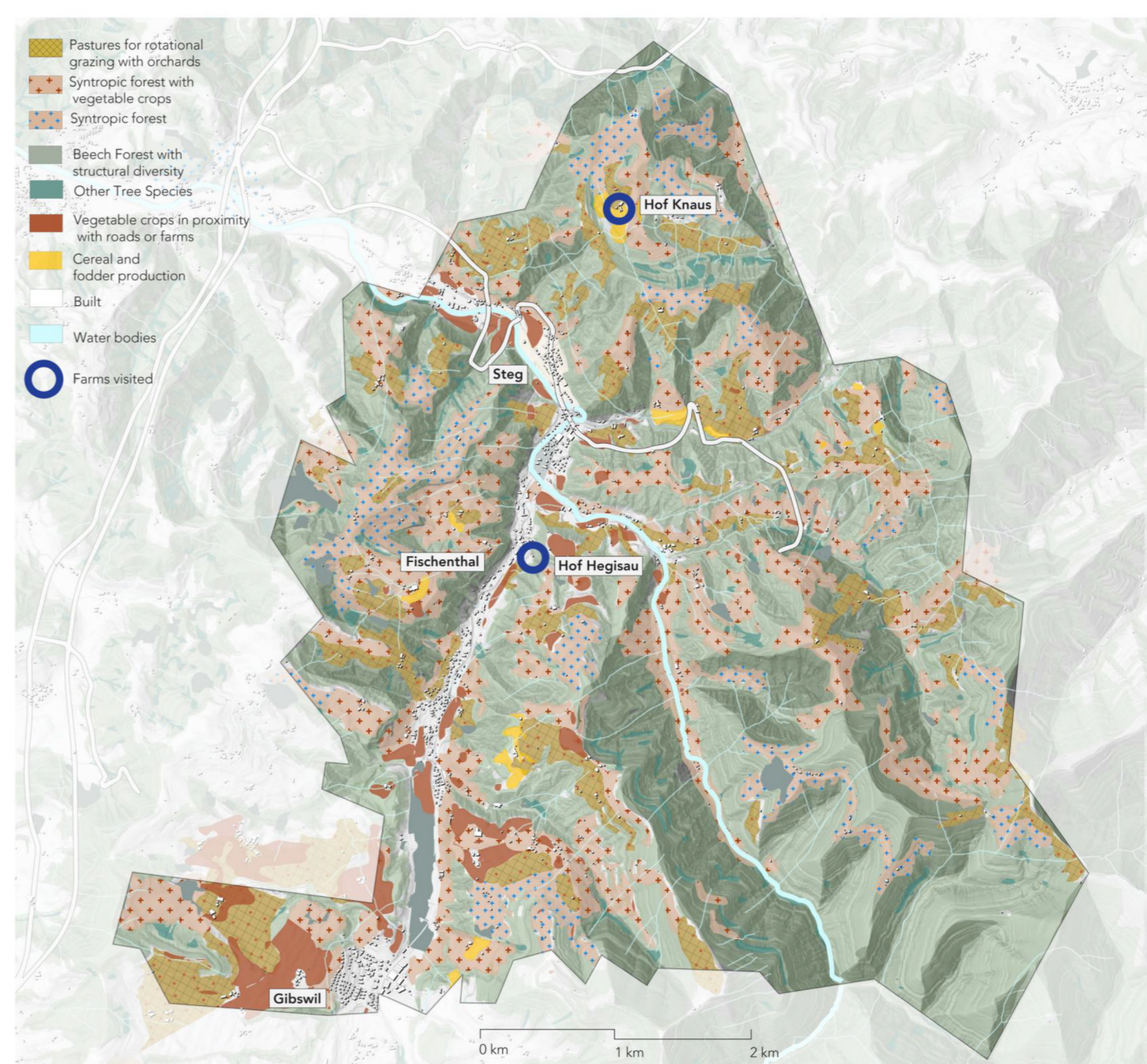


Figure 3: Proposed Territorial Transformation, Commune Fischenthal, Canton Zurich.

Reassembling the swiss pastoral

The structural diversity of the existing forest close to the farms is enhanced, leading to increased soil fertility and the accession of diverse species. At the same time, the development of syntropic forest between the edge of the existing forest and the arable land would result in an increase in soil fertility and vegetable production. The pastures would be managed with rotational grazing and would host orchards (Fig. 3,4).



Figure 4: Reassembled pasturelands at 800 metres (medium altitude).

Conclusion

The new cultural landscape will be defined as a polymorphous ecological, economic and social topography. This change addresses the disconnection between 'human and their local natural cycles' by reducing emissions involved in animal production beyond Switzerland.