

Sacrificing the Alpine landscape for climate goals: The case of large-scale solar projects in the Swiss Alps

Basil Viret

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This paper explores the ethical and legal dimensions of large-scale solar installations in the Swiss Alps, examining the delicate balance between environmental protection and the need for renewable energy. While Swiss environmental legislation allows for the modification of protected areas for solar projects, ethical concerns arise over the sacrifice of pristine alpine landscapes. With renewable energy classified as of national importance and recent legislative revisions emphasising accelerated project implementation, Switzerland faces a profound ethical dilemma. This study argues that environmental sacrifices can be justified under certain conditions by applying the ability-to-pay principle, Rawls's theory of justice and the philosophy of long-termism. This analysis highlights Switzerland's duty to future generations, the benefits of the majority, and its financial and technological capabilities. It also highlights the need to increase renewable energy production to meet growing demand and reduce dependence on non-renewable and imported energy. The thesis also highlights the importance of democratic processes in the legitimisation of such projects, as demonstrated by the Swiss referendums in support of renewable energy initiatives. Ultimately, this paper argues for a balanced approach that integrates ethical considerations, legal obligations and practical necessities to achieve Switzerland's ambitious climate goals while minimising adverse impacts on local communities and ecosystems.

Supervisor: Professor Ivo Wallimann-Helmer
Co-Supervisor: Professor Mathias Kaufmann