

## Colloquium for Economic, Social, Environmental and Climate History

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CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH

### GUEST TALK

Lucas Müller, University of Geneva, Switzerland

VENUE: Room F 012, Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36

TIME: 19.05.2026, 18:15-19:30

## Dangerous Mountains and Democratic Politics: Avalanches, Land-Use, and Experts in Twentieth-Century Switzerland

This talk traces the emergence of the hazard map to economic, political, and epistemic conflicts in mid-twentieth century Switzerland. During the postwar boom, locals sold more and more land for the construction of tourist accommodations in the Alps. Some of this land was located in areas of known avalanche danger. The federal government sought ways to limit subsidies for expensive protective work against avalanches in such areas, but construction permits were municipalities' responsibility, and avalanche danger was often uncertain. In response to these conflicts, snow scientists created hazard maps not to protect from avalanches but to justify *unprotection* - that is zoning. The hazard map, born out of a political compromise, would become a naturalized tool of risk governance around the globe.

Participation via Zoom:

<https://unibe-ch.zoom.us/j/68816791174?pwd=k5wZ0ti0eJFVvASJ1Le6ON1zC7968J.1>

Deposit of the most deadly avalanche of the twentieth century in Switzerland on 24 February 1970 in Reckingen, Valais. Source: Eidgenössische Forschungsanstalt WSL, Bildarchiv / SLF\_D\_A0258\_D\_pos



**Dr. Lucas Müller** is a senior research associate at the University of Geneva. He directs the SNSF-Ambizione Project "Avalanches: Making and Exporting Swiss Snow Science 1867-1994" in the Department of Geography and Environment. His work examines the economic, political, and epistemic

conflicts that emerged as states sought to bring "nature" into the realm of governance in the nineteenth and twentieth century. He holds a PhD in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

