

## **Valuing Nature. An investigation into the methods used for valuing ecosystem services in the Recharge.green Project**

### **ABSTRACT:**

Decision-making processes involving environmental issues often require assessing several conflicting factors. Apart from the ecological and conservation considerations, there is the need to adhere to international and regional policies and treaties, technical and logistical aspects, whilst also taking into account the views and opinions of local communities that may be affected. The ways in which these differing aspects are classified and ranked – and in this sense, valued – will impact on how environmental decisions are made. Since the 1960s there have been concerted efforts to assign value to environmental assets and the use of economic valuation for environmental assessment is increasingly being used as a means to make the value of nature and biodiversity visible in political realms. One environmental assessment framework that has gained importance on a global scale is the ecosystem services approach. This is an economic valuation approach in which ecosystems are divided into categories and valued in terms of ecosystem services – defined as benefits people obtain from the environment. However, valuing the environment through these economic and anthropocentric perspectives has raised debates regarding how to apply economic logic to environmental valuation as well as the implications regarding how the environment and issues pertaining to it are conceptualized and addressed. Given that valuation and the methods that measure and assign value are entirely socially constructed, understanding the methods (and the practices within them) for environmental valuation can shed light on the performativities involved as well as highlighting how nature is being enacted as a result. This thesis will investigate the methods and practices involved for valuing ecosystem services in the context of the empirical case study of the Recharge.green project, whose main goal was to facilitate decision-making processes regarding renewable energy expansion in the Alps.