

Editorial by Michael Vogel



Dear reader,

it sounds so simple: The central object of any protected area work is protecting nature. The natural processes take priority over humans – to varying degrees, depending on the protection category.

And yet it is quite complex: The large protected areas (LPAs) in the Alps are subject to repeated paradigm changes which trigger changes in PA management. Let us look back over the last 50 years: In this half-century alone, perceptions of the aims and management of PAs has changed noticeably: While (L)PAs like national parks used to be dedicated exclusively to conservation, today social and economic factors have come to play a significant role. LPAs used to be managed as *islands* (at first maybe of necessity) – these days they are not only part of national, regional and international networks but also often embedded in regional development contexts.

This change is the result of societal and political factors, and there is no end in sight. Rather, the future is likely to hold a steady stream of new challenges to be faced by PAs. Alpine LPAs, as protected areas and as administrative facilities, thus operate in a societal space where they take on many functions, as:

- international PAs and centres of biodiversity
- interfaces of culture and nature
- research facilities and research areas
- service providers
- triggers and bearers of sustainable regional development
- places of environmental education and PR
- important regional economic factors
- home, habitat and livelihood of humans

For the PA management to come anywhere near to fulfilling these functions, it urgently needs support from research. This themed special issue of *eco.mont* assists in this task by focusing on socio-economic issues around LPAs in the Alps.

The articles by different authors and scientists take up many facets of this broad theme. They look at the impact of population developments on protected areas and of flows into and out of PAs from and into their surrounding areas. The historical evolvement of an area deserves as much attention as the formulation of quality standards, which allow self-assessment and external evaluation of the coexistence of nature-adapted tourism and conservation. What are the conflicts of use between or in neighbouring areas, which, starting from similar initial conditions, have developed in opposing directions: one towards conservation and the other towards intensive land use. What is the situation in terms of political and administrative stipulations for the management on participation, and are these stipulation always suitable for achieving societal acceptance? In LPAs occasionally a situation arises where, despite homogenous legal requirements, different parts of the total area develop differently. What can a PA management do to establish consistent legal requirements and achieve successful outcomes for participation processes? The age composition of our population is changing. How does this translate into visitors and their activities in a PA?

Here I have only picked out a few issues from this comprehensive theme. The current special issue of *eco.mont* is a real treasure trove and tool box for PA managers. Here you will find essential components of modern PA management, based on solid science and presented clearly, including effects and conclusions.

For nature and society to really benefit from new insights and research findings, these results must be implemented and introduced into the specific management of your individual PA. This is a big challenge, especially given the various local circumstances, the managements' own evolvement and culture. Plenty for us PA managers to do – let's get cracking!

It is my hope and desire that every reader will draw plenty of benefit from reading this special issue of *eco.mont*. My thanks go to all contributing scientists, together with an appeal to support PA managements in all the PA functions listed above.

Dr. Michael Vogel

Director Berchtesgaden National Park

President of ALPARC – the Network of Alpine Protected Areas

Related projects according to the **European Mountain Pool**

At the editorial office of eco.mont, we maintain the **European Mountain Pool** on research in European protected mountain areas. http://4dweb.proclim.ch/4dcgi/ProtAreas/en/BuildSearch_ProtArea

eco.mont – Volume 9, special issue, January 2017

Nature-based tourism and nature protection: quality standards for travelling in protected areas in the Alps
by Dominik Siegrist & Lea Ketterer Bonnelame

New governance of protected areas: regional nature parks in Switzerland by Marco Pütz, Lena Gubler & Yasmine Willi

The Austrian Biosphere Reserves in the light of changing MAB strategies by Günter Köck & Arne Arnberger

Related projects in the **European Mountain Pool**

Frieder Voll: A systemic perspective on sustainable governance of protected areas. CH-5393

Urs Wiesmann: World Natural Heritage and Sustainable Regional Development. CH-4378

Katharina Conradin: Does World Natural Heritage status trigger sustainable regional development efforts? CH-5379

Frieder Voll: A systemic perspective on sustainable governance of protected areas. CH-5393

Brigitta Erschbamer: Ongoing changes at the long-term monitoring sites of Gurgler Kamm Biosphere Reserve, Tyrol, Austria. CH-5392

Michael Jungmeier: Integrated Monitoring for the Carinthian part of the Biosphere Reserve Salzburger Lungau & Kärntner Nockberge. CH-5404

Renate Eder: Einstellung der lokalen Bevölkerung zum Biosphärenpark Wienerwald. CH-5049