

Increasing Research Interest in Protected Areas in Switzerland

S. Bürgi & A. Wallner

Swiss Park Research, Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

Swiss Park Research maintains a database of research projects related to all parks of national importance in Switzerland. An evaluation of the more than 1000 projects in the database according to disciplines, project types and topics revealed a very high level of research activities for the fields of biology and environmental sciences. However, social sciences too are important scientific actors in Swiss parks, gaining ground especially in connection with the creation of new park categories. Still, the efforts addressing research and its documentation differ among the observed protected areas.

Keywords

Research, protected areas, Switzerland, evaluation, database

Introduction

Since the implementation of a new legislation enabling the creation of parks of national importance in Switzerland in 2007 a total of 15 new parks have been established and three regions are candidates for the park label. Hence, together with the already in 1914 created Swiss National Park (IUCN category 1a) and three UNESCO World Heritages, the country today encompasses 22 parks. This boom of protected areas of different categories presents a unique research opportunity to observe developments and impacts of such labels on the certificated regions. Furthermore, park managements gain important information about their areas and also profit from scientific results relevant for more than one park.

As coordinating office, Swiss Park Research is mandated by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) to document and evaluate research related to parks of national importance. In close consultation with park managements and researchers the office maintains a database of scientific projects associated to these protected areas. After a first evaluation in 2011 the project database has been analysed again in 2016, revealing an increase of research interest on protected areas.

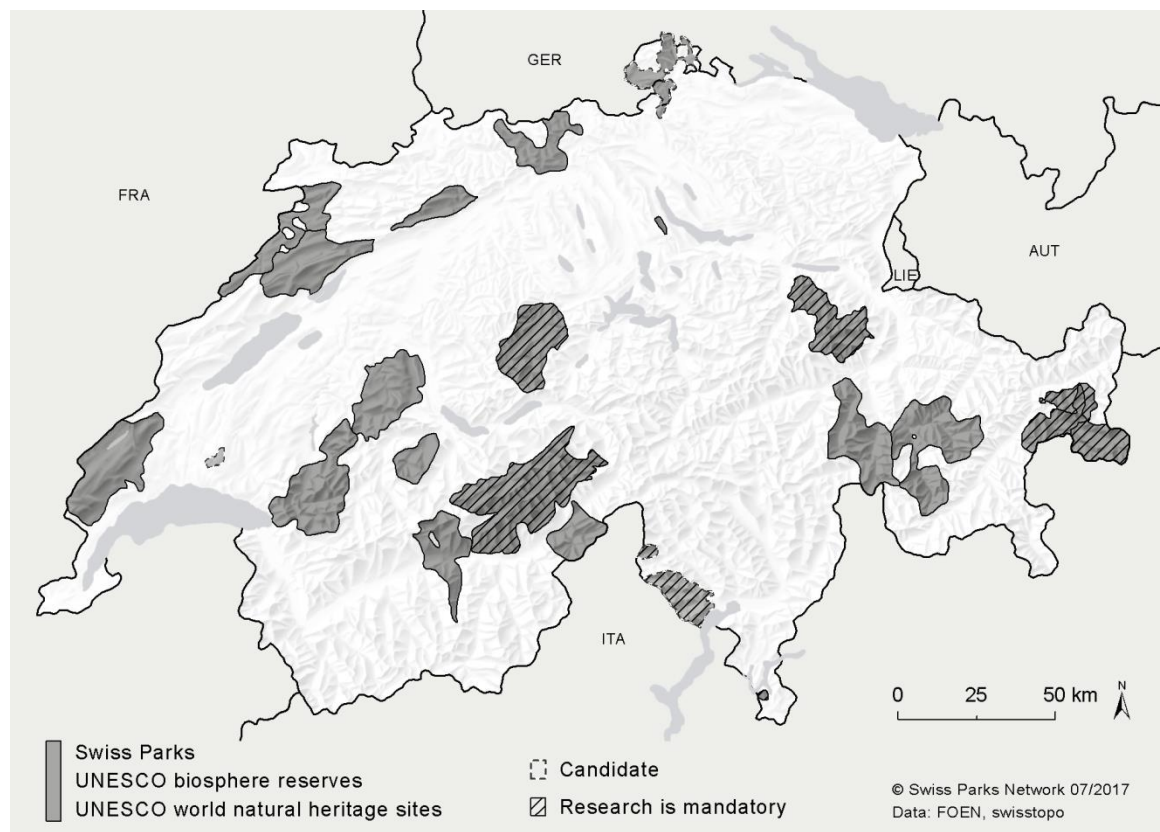


Figure 1: Current situation of Parks in Switzerland

Mostly Ecology & Biodiversity but also Social Sciences

The analysis of the research projects carried out in Swiss parks revealed that the natural sciences are very strongly represented with a total of 67% of all projects. Especially the share of the field of biology with 41% is noticeable. The second most represented discipline are environmental sciences. For biologists and environmental scientists, parks offer a great opportunity for investigating species, biodiversity and environmental questions. Their research does generally not concern the parks themselves but profits from the services and conditions that protected areas provide.

Parks as institutions and their socio-cultural context are an emerging research topic in the social sciences and the humanities. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the process of establishing and governing protected areas, as well the social processes among local communities with respect to the implementation of a new park. For this purpose, the Swiss system offers an especially interesting environment, as the Swiss park legislation follows a bottom up approach, where every new park has to be initiated by local associations.

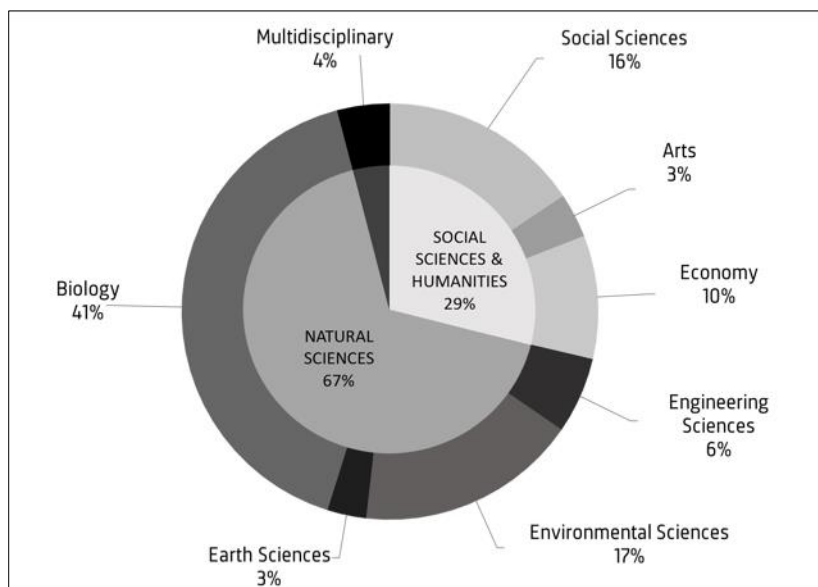


Figure 2: Disciplines of research projects in Swiss Parks

Parks Very Popular for Academic Projects

Concerning the types of research projects, studies realized in context of academic education are very strongly represented amounting a total of 55%. This shows that parks offer a very beneficial environment for students. Up to now there have been only few management-oriented and long-term projects going on in Swiss parks. Such projects are important for impact monitoring. For the future, it would be desirable that park managements initiate more such projects in order to improve impact assessment.

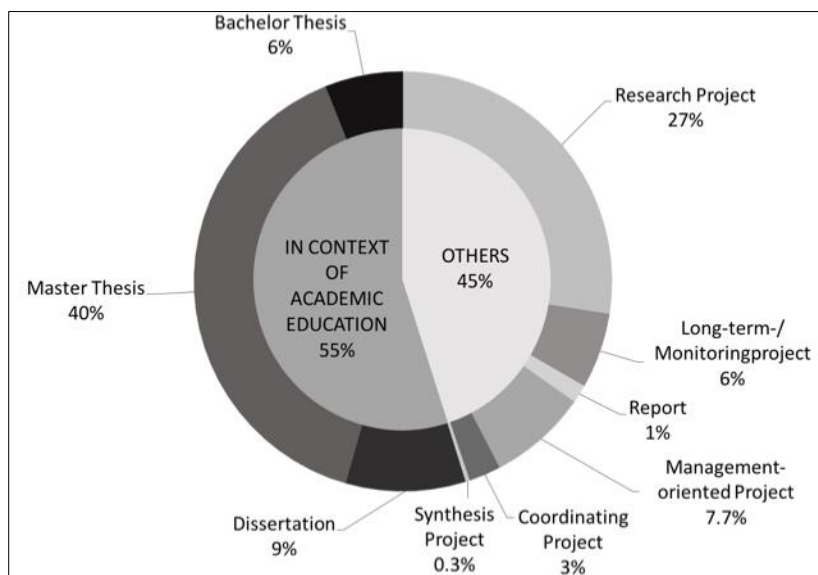


Figure 3: Types of research projects in Swiss Parks

Conclusion and Outlook

After seven years, the project database led by Swiss Park Research offers a broad source of information on research in Swiss Parks of national importance. The here presented data have to be interpreted against the different individual backgrounds of the parks. According to the legislation, research is only mandatory for national parks as well as biosphere reserves. So far this is true for only four parks and the three World Heritage Sites. Therefore, for many other parks research has not been a priority in the first implementation phase. Hence the completeness of recorded projects differs among the parks.

To increase networking between scientists and parks in the future, Swiss Park Research depends on the cooperation of all involved actors. Only in this way a fruitful exchange of the park management's demands for research on the one hand and scientific outputs on the other can be achieved.

References

BÜRGI, S. & A. WALLNER 2017. Steigendes Forschungsinteresse an Pärken. Forschungsprojekt-Datenbank Parkforschung Schweiz - Auswertung 2016. Koordination Parkforschung Schweiz, Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz.

Contact

Sonja Bürgi
sonja.buergi@scnat.ch
House of Academies
Laupenstrasse 7
P.O. Box
CH-3001 Bern
Switzerland

