

A Transnational History of Alpine National Parks: Introductory Remarks

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During the 20th century fourteen national parks were created in the Alps: one in Switzerland (Swiss National Park, established in 1914), four in Italy (Gran Paradiso, 1922; Stelvio, 1935; Dolomiti Bellunesi, 1991; Val Grande, 1992), one in Slovenia (Triglav, 1961), three in France (Vanoise, 1963; Ecrins, 1973; Mercantour, 1979), one in Germany (Berchtesgaden, 1978), and four in Austria (Hohe Tauern, 1981; Nockberge, 1987; Kalkalpen, 1991; Gesäuse, 2002).¹⁴ As can be deduced from this list the dates of establishment vary widely from country to country as well as within some of the countries, especially Italy. In her historiography of South Africa's Kruger National Park Jane Carruthers emphasizes the significance of time and space: "The creation of national parks – anywhere in the world – can only be understood in the context of the time and place in which this occurred."¹⁵ Place, however, is not an absolute but a relative category. One and the same place is part of various layers of space. In our case each Alpine national park is part of the transnational space of the Alps as well as of a national space. Furthermore, each park is embedded into a regional and local Alpine space.

Our approach is located on the national level. Ronald Würflinger investigates the idea of German-Austrian Alpine National Parks until 1945. Patrick Kupper explores the creation and propagation of the Swiss National Park as both a national and international endeavor. Wilko Graf von Hardenberg traces the history of Italian National Parks between preservation and fascist propaganda. Finally, Isabelle Mauz inspects the role of scientists in the creation and management of national parks in France since the 1960s.¹⁶ The contributions show that the national parks in the Alps served many purposes. They were sites for the preservation of scenic landscapes and wilderness, sanctuaries for threatened species, venues for scientific research, destinations for outdoor recreation and tourism, as well as locations of national imagery and nationalistic campaigns. While park politics were closely linked to the different national settings, the Alps have always provided a transnational space, allowing for the transfer of ideas, humans and also natural features across the national borders. Conflicts with local residents regarding access and use of the park areas were manifest in all countries, and so were struggles against large infrastructure projects like dams.

More research is needed to assess the impact of both the transnational connections and the national and local contexts of adoption and transformation on the development of the national parks throughout the Alps. In this respect, I like to suggest two topics for further investigations: First, it could be revealing to explore how the national significance of the Alps within each country's nation state building process affected the creation of national parks in the Alps. Second, it would be interesting to analyze in a comparative way how present differences between the national parks can be related to the dates of park establishments.

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¹⁴ Sometimes different dates of establishment are mentioned in the literature. The dates in the text are taken from the self-declarations of the parks.

¹⁵ Jane Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995), 47-8.

See the contributions in this volume. Of the Alpine countries Slovenia is missing. For a history of Triglav National Park see Carolin Firouzeh Roeder, *Protecting Nature, Preserving the Nation? The Triglav National Park and Slovene National Identity*, in: Gissibl, Bernhard, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper (ed.), *Civilizing Nature: Towards a Global History of National Parks*, (forthcoming).