

## **Societal research perspectives on protected areas in Europe: priorities for future research<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Keywords**

Large protected areas, paradigm change, societal challenges, conceptualization of research

### **Abstract**

Large protected areas across Europe have experienced a far reaching change of paradigm over recent years. This has been widely discussed and recognized of crucial importance. Accordingly managed large protected areas today are faced with a multitude of tasks many of which go well beyond conservation and landscape protection, especially societal demands for regional development and an active role of protected areas in shaping the future of their regions. As a result, protected areas research actually needs to focus much more on the involvement of protected areas in regional development and the societal challenges that are connected with the new demands arising.

Drawing on the results of a European expert workshop held in cooperation with ALPARC and ISCAR in St. Pierre de Chartreuse, France in October 2011, the author is going to reflect on the current state of research, point out some obvious research gaps and neglected issues, and, finally, present six priority areas that have been identified for future societal research on protected areas: first, the material and immaterial benefits of protected areas; second, tourism and recreation; third, innovations in regional economy geared towards conservation and landscape protection goals; fourth, images and regional identities; fifth, handling regional and global change; and sixth, participation and governance.

The research areas listed above give clear indication for the far-reaching consequences the paradigm change holds out for conceptualizing protected areas research. What is especially required for future research is a stronger orientation on interdisciplinarity, more comparative analyses on European scale, and greater involvement of researchers in transdisciplinary networks at the interface of research and practice to provide “products” that can be used by protected areas management.

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