

Parks as an instrument for sustainable regional development A study in the intersection of tourism research, cultural studies and aesthetics

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Summary

Natural parks are multidimensional and multifunctional structures. They generally do have an exemplary status with regard to a sustainable organization of the human / nature relationship: as a space for the protection of nature and landscape as well as for cultural heritage and identities, recreation, education, research and regional development they allow for concrete experiences in these different domains. However, at the same time, they can be regarded as experimental arrangements to fathom the manifold constellations of human perception and behaviour in the triangle of men, landscape and nature.

Especially controversies about the creation of new parks tend to trigger general discussions on regional identity and development issues and lead to their politicization. Hence, it is of special importance for any new creation of natural parks to find out how this politicization can be fruitful in the process of negotiating the different claims, interests and necessities of men, landscape, and nature and to identify suitable concepts and strategies to establish parks as a medium to discuss ideas of sustainability. To lead these discussions successfully, it is essential to clarify and respect the diverse underlying ideas of 'landscape' or 'nature' with their different semantic and aesthetic layers and to embed them in their actual cultural contexts.

Concepts of nature and landscape can be seen as a projection area for the creation of individual and collective identities. As a consequence, they influence visions concerning the organisation of public domains including measurements to protect and use the natural environment as well as cultural heritages. In this respect natural parks – as dispositifs to structure space – always reflect specific ideas of how human society should be organised and look like. They are, therefore, suitable to question and negotiate underlying norms and values. Usually, the heterogeneity of ideas and interests of the involved actors becomes visible in the course of such negotiating processes.

In the light of these considerations I will present the actual research project 'Parks as an instrument for sustainable regional development. A study in the intersection of tourism research, cultural studies and aesthetics.' The project combines humanities, social, and cultural sciences in the fields of research, public discourse and political as well as cultural mediation. On the basis of a comparative analysis of existing approaches to realise different forms of protection areas (natural parks, national parks, biosphere reserves) the project aims at the development of a new understanding of parks as a dispositif to mediate discourses of sustainability. Furthermore, the research project is part of an actual effort to establish the new transnational natural park Rätikon. In this framework, the project aims at the documentation and analysis of the implementation process and should at the same time contribute to its success. We hope to generate new insights in the processes of park developments especially in mountain areas as well as a methodical approach for transdisciplinary park research.

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