



Institutionalisation of the RNP model abroad: Switzerland

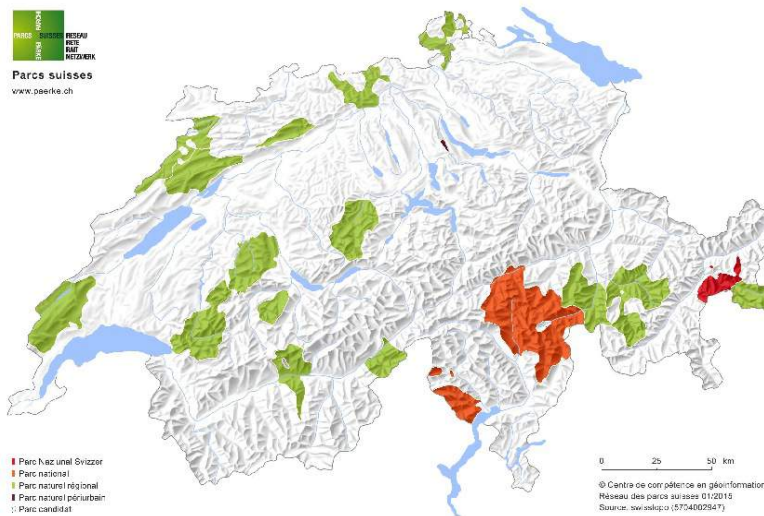


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Switzerland has a longstanding tradition of establishing Parks, given that the first National Park, the park situated in the Engadine, was established a hundred years ago. Two other Parks, the Adula Park and the National Park of Locarno, have applied to become national parks.

Switzerland has drawn on the French Regional Nature Parks model and to date has fourteen RNPs and one Suburban Nature Park.

These three categories of park are all parks of national importance.

The aim of the RNPs is to maintain and enhance their natural assets and promote the sustainable economic development of the region.

A further RNP (Schaffhouse) is currently being set up.

TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

The Swiss Confederation is a federal state made up of 26 cantons, which are in turn divided into communes, each of which has a cantonal capital.

ORIGIN

Since the end of the nineteen sixties Switzerland has demonstrated its resolve to support and encourage the establishment of nature parks on its territory. Consequently a federal law on nature and landscape protection (LPN) was adopted on 1 July 1966.

Regional nature parks already existed in numerous countries, including in countries neighbouring Switzerland (France, Germany, Italy and Austria). As this model presents interesting forms of governance, Switzerland carried out an analysis of the different approaches to the sustainable management of the territory aimed at preserving the environment. The fact that the French RNPs model takes a “from the bottom up” approach particularly interested Switzerland as it corresponds to the way in which its political system functions. The considerable success and the soundness of the French model are factors which have also contributed to Switzerland’s decision to adopt this model. As a result, a number of principles based on the French model have been adopted at local level, for example the drafting of charters and the incorporation of the parks in territorial spatial planning programmes.

Switzerland’s resolve to adopt a tool based on the French RNPs model led to the partial revision of the federal law of 1 July 1966 on nature and landscape protection (NLP) as well as the Ordinance of 7 November 2007 on parks of national importance (OParks). 14 RNP were subsequently established.

¹ Key: Green: RNP; Red: Swiss National Park; Orange: national parks; Dark red: Suburban Park.
http://www.paerke.ch/bilder/karten_aktuell/karte_schweizer_paerke_kategorien_status_fr.pdf

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

In 2007 Switzerland adopted a legal framework, which enabled the establishment of regional nature parks based on the French model.

ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS

The inclusion of parks of national importance in the 2007 law led to the emergence of further initiatives. Existing territorial projects (such as the Entlebuch biosphere in 2002) applied to become national parks. Other regions subsequently set up their own projects.

Regions (territories) **with an outstanding natural and cultural heritage** can, if the local inhabitants so wish become regional nature parks. The creation of a regional nature park is therefore a **regional initiative resulting from a democratic process given that the project is submitted to a referendum, which is one of the main features of the Swiss political system.**

The project is subsequently managed by the park (association status), which is set up by the communes. **The Cantons only become involved where la labellisation certification and requests for funding are concerned.**

- The first step in setting up a park consists in carrying out a **feasibility study and drawing up a management plan** with a detailed calendar for the establishment of the park. This document will serve as a basis for obtaining financial assistance from the Confederation.
- The establishment stage comprises the implementation of the measures provided for in the project and the **drafting of the Park Charter, which will be valid for at least 10 years.** It is on this basis that the RNP is certified as a “**Park**”; only one umbrella brand exists for all Swiss parks (national parks, regional nature parks and suburban park) and all parks are members of the Network of Swiss Parks. In the case of regional nature parks this stage can take up to four years to complete.
- It is the task of the **Federal Environment Office (OFEV)** to examine requests and **to certify a park as a “park of national importance”** provided the candidature meets all the conditions. Once the park has been certified, the operational stage begins during which all the necessary measures for achieving the objectives set out in the charter are implemented. A **four-year schedule** is drawn up and constitutes the basis for the allocation of financial assistance from the Confederation.

CHARTER

The Charter is **drawn up by the communes concerned** by the establishment of the park, in agreement with the canton and concerns the management and the **quality assurance** of the park. By means of the charter, the communes undertake to preserve the park’s natural and cultural assets, to enhance them and use them to foster the sustainable economic and social development of these territories.

The Charter includes the **park contract and management plan**; it is valid for 10 years and, if the results of this initial management stage are deemed positive by the population, who are again consulted in a referendum, it may commence a second ten-year stage on the basis of a revised and updated charter. In order to do so, the parks must, as the first time round, secure the approval of the OFEV.

The Charter stipulates the following points²:

- the conservation of the park’s natural, landscape and cultural assets;
- the measures for enhancing and developing the park;

² Chapter 26 Ordinance on parks of national importance:
<https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20071162/index.html>

- advice on the requirements that must be met by activities of the communes which have an impact on the organisation of the territory;
- the planning of the investment required for providing the staff, funding and infrastructure required for the park's management and quality assurance.

The park contract is signed by all of the communes concerned and governs the area covered by the park, the strategic objectives, the organisational resources and the financial commitments of the communes concerned by the park.

The management plan is the strategic management tool of the body responsible for the park. It serves in particular as the short and medium-term planning basis and for quality assurance.

LESSON LEARNED

The Charter is the tool by which the signatory communes commit themselves to the objectives, the strategy, and the organisational and financial resources to be implemented. It is valid for 10 years and its extension for a further 10 years is subject to its revision.

ACCEPTANCE BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL POPULATIONS

The reluctance of the local population has, on various occasions, prevented projects for the establishment of parks from being carried out. The reasons for this limited acceptance are fears of restrictions on productive activities and on the use of resources.

However, account should be taken of the fact that 13 RNPs were established within 7 years of the establishment of the first park; consequently, if one considers that in the philosophy of the Swiss Parks, the parks are above all the outcome of a collective process and in keeping with the aspirations of the local populations, it is easy to imagine that the parks have nevertheless a very high level of acceptance by the local populations and the local authorities.

LESSON TO BE DRAWN

The frequency with which RNPs have been set up since the enactment of the Ordinance of 7 November 2007 on parks of national importance reflects the acceptance of the model by local populations and governments.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework for the establishment of Regional Nature Parks comprises two laws:

- The **federal law of 1 July 1966 on nature and landscape protection** (LPN), RS 451
- **The Ordinance of 7 November 2007 on parks of national importance**, RS 451.36

Regional nature parks must provide **long-term financial and territorial guarantees**. Such guarantees are governed by Articles 25 and 27 respectively of the Ordinance on parks of national importance.

Article 25 of the Ordinance on parks of national importance³ stipulates that “the legal form, the organisation and financial resources of the body responsible for the park must guarantee the establishment, the management and the quality assurance of the park”. As a result Swiss RNPs have a **governing body** on which all the communes situated within the park are represented. This body is responsible for ensuring that both the local population and any companies or organisations in the region who might be interested are allowed to take an **active part**.

The guidelines for the planning, establishment and management of the parks stipulate that “the (financial and material) own resources to be provided by the regions in terms of the self-funding and exploitation of all funding possibilities must correspond to at least 20% of the global budget of

³ Chapter 26 Ordinance on parks of national importance:
<https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20071162/index.html>

the park"⁴. The Confederation also grants financial subsidies to the cantons for the establishment, management and quality assurance of parks, on the basis of an agreement on a programme between the Confederation and the canton for a four-year period. The cantons must send requests for financial assistance to the Federal Environment Office (OFEV) which since 2012 receives CHF10 million per year to provide financial assistance to all of the parks and for the preparation of new instruments supporting the parks. The funding limit is usually set at 50% but in practice the amounts allocated may be higher or much lower. The park can also send requests for financial assistance in respect of specific projects to other federal offices such as the ARE (Federal Office for territorial development) or the OFAG (Federal Office of Agriculture). Third parties (sponsors, NGOs, etc.) can also offer financial assistance.

Article 27 of the OParks stipulates that **the park must be included in the master plan** approved in accordance with the law of 1979 on the spatial planning of the territory. The article also stipulates that the authorities responsible for the spatial planning of the territory must, where appropriate, adjust the land-use plans. Once the RNP has been included in the Master Plan of the canton, the park's objectives become binding on the Canton and the Confederation. Three cantons have enacted further specific laws on this subject.

The OFEV, which is the federal department responsible for the environment, **is the executive authority** with regard to parks of national importance.

The Federation of Swiss Parks plays a role in **providing a network and representing and promoting parks** at national level, vis-à-vis **national institutions** (the OFEV, the parliament, and the cantons) and business enterprises, and at **international level**. It constitutes a platform for discussion and comparing problems and also provides support to parks in the form of specific expertise. The committee of the federation of parks is made up of the parks' directors. The federation is the only structure covering the three categories of parks that exist in Switzerland (Regional Nature Parks, National Park, and Suburban Park).

MAIN INCENTIVES AND OBSTACLES

On a number of occasions, the limited acceptance of the parks by the local population was an obstacle as it led to the abandonment of projects for the establishment of parks.

On the other hand, the fact that Switzerland has established **a legal framework and in particular financial instruments** for the establishment of parks has clearly been a major incentive for the sector.

Similarly, the **trends in globalisation** have had a strong impact in rural regions, in particular in the Alpine region. In this context, the RNPs concept offers prospects to these regions for enhancing their basically unchanged natural and cultural landscapes, as well as their products and sustainable tourism.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

The existence of a legal framework as well as financial instruments to support the establishment of Regional Nature Parks has fostered the emergence of a large number of parks.

OUTCOME OF THE PROCESS

Switzerland established a legal framework for the RNPs, in particular the Ordinance of 2007 on parks of national importance.

⁴ http://www.sib.admin.ch/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/UV-0802-F.pdf

Thirteen regional nature parks have been set up within seven years following the establishment of the 1st nature park. A project for the establishment of a further regional nature park is currently underway and others are in the pipeline.

CONCLUSIONS

The legal framework for RNPs in Switzerland comprises two main texts: the federal law of 1 July 1966 on nature and landscape protection and the ordinance of 7 November 2007 on parks of national importance.

The RNPs are one of three categories of parks of national importance in Switzerland with national parks and suburban nature parks.

The Swiss RNPs are the outcome of an examination of the situation and the desire of the local population. The establishment of an RNP is therefore a regional initiative and the outcome of the RNP as a “Park”. A body responsible for the park is then set up and most of the members of this governing body represent the different communes concerned. This body takes the strategic decisions concerning the Park.

An appropriate legal framework and financial arrangements have made such initiatives to be successful.

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