

## Between distance and proximity: nature parks and the city in Switzerland

Joëlle Salomon Cavin

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/articulo/3283>  
ISSN: 1661-4941

**Publisher**

Articulo - Revue de sciences humaines asbl

Brought to you by Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire Lausanne



**Electronic reference**

Joëlle Salomon Cavin, « Between distance and proximity: nature parks and the city in Switzerland », *Articulo - Journal of Urban Research* [Online], 16 | 2017, Online since 30 November 2017, connection on 01 March 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/articulo/3283>

---

This text was automatically generated on 1 March 2018.

Creative Commons 3.0 – by-nc-nd, except for those images whose rights are reserved.

---

# Between distance and proximity: nature parks and the city in Switzerland

Joëlle Salomon Cavin

---

*I am indebted to the two reviewers and to the editor for their thorough examination of the manuscript. I am extremely grateful to my colleague Dr. Verena Schaeffer-Veenstra for providing help in translating documents and interviews when in German.*

## Introduction

- 1 The umbrella organization for parks in Switzerland has recently spread an advertising slogan “*Les parcs suisses à deux pas de chez vous*” (“The Swiss Parks, just a short step away”) (Fig. 1). This campaign is remarkable in that it highlights two key elements dealing with cities and protected areas in the Swiss context. The first key element is proximity. Switzerland is a small country (at slightly more than 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>, its area is equivalent to the Rhône-Alpes region in France) and natural areas of one kind or another are never more removed than a few tens of kilometres from a town or city. The second key element is separation; the image used in the advertisement shows a man and a little girl who are looking at a wild landscape with rocky cliffs from an urban vantage point. The man is able to raise the urban ‘curtain-wall’ for discovering what lies behind. The meaning of this image is ambiguous: nature is both very close *and* external. Proximity and separation as key concepts linking cities and protected areas go hand in hand in Switzerland – there maybe be more than elsewhere.

Figure 1 – The Swiss parks: nearby and separate



[HTTP://WWW.PARCS-SUISSES.CH](http://www.parc-suisse.ch)

- 2 Here we deal with this dual reading, proximity and separation, with Switzerland as a particularly telling case-study. But this approach also offers a frame for interpreting other national contexts, in which the division between city and nature, enshrined in the definition of the parks, may be out of kilter with a materiality in which cities and parks are increasingly close. This conceptual distance associated with a spatial proximity undoubtedly illustrates major trends in the development of protected urban areas in the world (Bruno and Lézy 2012, Landy and Laslaz 2012). This article examines this trend in the Swiss context.
- 3 The first part of the article – “So far away” – details the ‘*a-urban*’ conception of nature between wilderness and rural nature in the nature parks in Switzerland and describes the context of the decision not to establish urban nature parks. The second part – “So close” – relativizes this conclusion by demonstrating the existence of remarkably close links between cities and nature parks in Switzerland and highlighting the emergence of new types of protected spaces that deviate from the official parks policy. The last part first discusses the continuity of the ‘conceptual’ distancing between nature and the city in nature park policy and then the role of Agglomeration Parks as credible alternative for anthropogenic nature in urban region.
- 4 The data used in the article were collected from 3 main sources. The first source is based on discussions within a think tank established in 2010 by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment in order to set up the definition of a new category of Urban Nature Parks in Switzerland. Views of protagonists were recorded during two meetings of this group in July and September 2010, and completed with unpublished reports of this think tank. The sources were collected when I was a participant observer at these meetings. The group was composed of 22 members (the majority had a background in ecology or biology) representative of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, Cantonal Environmental Services, the Swiss Nature Parks and Swiss organizations for the protection of nature. I was invited as an academic interested in city-nature relationships in Switzerland. The second source of data comes from the analysis of published documents dealing with the nature parks in Switzerland, i.e. texts about the history of the parks, legal texts and explanatory messages (open access publications and working documents available through open access or provided by our interviewees). The last source are semi-directive

interviews carried out by the author, a German speaker colleague and a Master student currently working on the governance of Nature Discovery Park (Gilliéron 2017). These interviews were carried out with various actors involved in Nature Parks Policy, in Nature Discovery Parks and Agglomeration Parks projects between 2010 and 2016.

## So far away...

- 5 In this section, I discuss the conceptions of nature and relationship with the city behind the definition of nature parks. This part is an updated version of a reflection conducted in previous works on anti-urban prejudice in conservation biology (Salomon Cavin 2013) and on the potential of philosophical concepts to exceed the city nature dichotomy in the definition of nature parks (Hess and Salomon Cavin 2015).
- 6 Four types of nature parks currently exist in Switzerland: the Swiss National Park, which was established in 1914, plus three categories of parks of national importance whose statuses were created in 2006: the National Parks, the Regional Nature Parks and the Nature Discovery Parks (*Parcs naturels péri-urbains*). So far, no National Park has been created. A national park project straddling the cantons of Grisons and Ticino was rejected by the population of the majority of the municipalities concerned in November 2016. Another project nearby the city of Locarno also in the canton of Ticino remains in discussion. Only a single Nature Discovery Park have been created since 2006 and another remains in project nearby Lausanne. In the meantime, 14 Regional Nature Parks were established (for localisation see fig. 2).

## The Swiss National Park

- 7 The Swiss National Park was established in 1914. Following the creation of the Yellowstone (1872) and Yosemite (1890) parks in the USA, Switzerland was the second European country to establish a protected area of this kind after Sweden (1909) (Mels 2002). The Swiss National Park is located in the eastern part of the country in a vast natural area in the canton of Graubünden (Fig.2). As specified by the contract established between the federal authorities and a municipality in which the park is located “*all of the animals and plants included in this territory shall be completely removed from all human influence*” (translations by the author) (quoted by Hainard 1974: 30). This ‘a-human’ conception appears to be very similar *a priori* to the wilderness ideal behind the North American national parks (Nash 2001) and to an “*ahistorical pure ecosystem*” described by Mels in his study of the Swedish National Park (Mels 2002). Owen (2009) stresses that the US national parks were conceived “*as an increasingly necessary corrective to urban life, and national parks were treated in large measure as sanctuaries to urban depravity*”. However, in contrast to the thinking behind the North American national parks, the promoters of the Swiss National Park appear to have been more interested in the heritage and scientific value of the typical Alpine landscape than in the natural spectacle it provided (Kupper 2014). Moreover, the approach adopted by the promoters of the Swiss National Park tends to differ from that adopted for the American parks in terms of protection provided: “*Thanks to the construction of numerous roads and comfortable hotels, the national parks of the USA are largely open to the public. [...]. It is a completely different story here [i.e. in Switzerland]! The National Park is, of course, open to everyone but it is not supposed to be a place of entertainment on any account and the visitor will admire nature that is completely unspoiled by civilization in*

every corner of it” (Director of the Swiss League for the Protection of Nature around 1906, quoted by (Hainard 1974: 20)

- 8 The legislation that deals specifically with the Swiss National Park was not enacted until 1980 and confirms this conception of nature. The park is explicitly conceived in the Act as a sanctuary for unspoiled nature: “*The Swiss National Park (...) is a reserve where nature is protected against any human intrusions and in particular where all flora and fauna is allowed to develop naturally. [...]*” (LParcNat, 1980).

## Nature in the parks of national importance

- 9 The exclusion of human beings as intruders into nature was indelibly associated with the historical definition of the Swiss National Park. This assumption was questioned, however, in the partial revision of the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage in 2006 (LPN 2006). This act created two new types of parks and extended the definition of the national park category. The main change concerned the relationship between nature and human activities. Indeed, the act specifies that the three types of park must “*harmoniously balance the conservation of natural environments and landscapes*” with “*regional development*” (Message du Conseil Fédéral 2005: 2022). From then on, human activities were tolerated in all of the park types. Thus, the objectives assigned to the parks concerned not only “*positive effects on nature and the landscape*” but also “*the maintenance and creation of employment*” (Message du Conseil fédéral 2005:2023).

### 10 *The Swiss National Park*

- 11 Under the new act, the National Park category retained the historical characteristics of the Swiss National Park with a core zone in which “*nature is allowed to develop freely and to which the general public has only limited access*” (LPN. 2006). As opposed to this, certain activities were henceforth authorized in a buffer zone. The Swiss National Park differs from the National Park in that it consists solely of a core zone (Fig. 3).

### 12 *The Regional Nature Park*

- 13 The Regional Nature Park (*Parc naturel régional*) is the most extreme illustration of this updated conception of the man-nature relationship because human activities should contribute to maintaining the natural qualities of this type of park. Moreover, the habitat, human population and its activities are fully integrated into its definition. The Regional Nature Parks constitute “*remarkable rural spaces and are inhabited by humans*” (Message du Conseil fédéral 2005: 2032). The designation Regional Nature Park refers to the international nomenclature and corresponds to category V of the guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for protected areas (Dudley 2008: 25-26). Hence it is an extensively anthropogenic space in a rural setting. With the Regional Nature Park, rural nature was included in the definition of nature worthy of protection in the context of nature parks policy.

### 14 *The Nature Discovery Park*

- 15 Whereas the National Park and Regional Nature Park correspond to concepts of parks that are very familiar at international level, the Nature Discovery Park (*Parc naturel périurbain*) is a uniquely Swiss invention. The purpose of this category of park is to protect outstanding natural areas on the periphery of towns and cities. The Nature Discovery Parks are lowland areas within or in the immediate vicinity of developed urban areas (Galland 2010). These parks are conceived as territories in which the public can make “

*contact with nature*”, a place of relaxation and “*environmental awareness*”. The accessibility of these parks for citizens is an important criterion. They should be located at an altitude that is comparable with that of nearby urban areas and be easy to reach by public transport (Message du Conseil Fédéral 2005: 2033). The Nature Discovery Park is characterized by a core zone which is surrounded by a “*transition zone*”. The core zone must be at least 4 km<sup>2</sup> in area. As is the case in the National Park, no regular human activity or intervention is allowed in the core zone.

- 16 This restrictive definition of the core zone drastically reduces the number of potential areas that can be placed under such protection because it excludes areas whose long-term survival is dependent on human intervention. Wetlands, mires and dry meadows, which require maintenance to survive, cannot be considered for this categorization. Forests are the only possible candidates and not all forests are eligible: oak forests, for example, require maintenance. Up to now it has only been possible to establish one park of this type in Switzerland: the Sihlwald Park (2011) in the Zurich region (Fig.2). It has been estimated that it took 20 years of changes of human habits to attain the required conditions in the core zone in the Sihlwald Park. Activities previously carried out in the area, for example hunting and mushroom picking, were gradually banned. Such restrictions ultimately led to the failure of a project for the establishment of a nature discovery park nearby the city of Neuchâtel.

## The failed Urban Nature Park

- 17 Nature in the nature parks always appears as something separated from towns and cities. This observation is confirmed by the analysis of the debate (2010) surrounding the possibility of introducing a category of nature park into the legislation. This question originated in a request from the canton of Aargau (North Switzerland) (Fig.2), which had been planning for several years to submit an application for the Wasserschloss region at the confluence of the rivers Aar, Reuss and Limmat to be designated as a park of national importance. The Aargau authorities were seeking, on the one hand, to preserve the areas along the rivers that were still intact by controlling the extension of urban development, and to promote leisure and nature discovery activities, among others. It is important to note that the primary goal of the promoters was not the protection of valuable natural ecosystems, which were already protected, but the preservation of a large area from urbanization. Following the establishment of preliminary contact with the federal authorities, it was planned to include this site in the nature discovery park category. However, when the data about the region were assessed on the basis of the legal criteria, such as the structure of the natural habitats and land-use by human activities, it became clear that the Wasserschloss could not be included in the category of Nature Discovery Parks. It was not possible, for example, to locate a homogenous core zone with a minimum total area of 4 km<sup>2</sup> as fishing was authorized throughout the entire area based on very long-established rights. The area was also used extensively for leisure activities and for military exercises. Nevertheless, in the view of the federal authority, there was an obvious interest in providing long-term protection to this unique area which fulfilled an important educational and nature discovery function (Galland 2010).
- 18 The establishment of a Wasserschloss Urban Nature Park would have represented a significant example of the placing under protection of a valuable natural environment or “*precious habitats*” (OFEV 2010), within an urbanized area. However, the project for the



establishment of this new category was cut short. The working group's discussions culminated in the conclusion that it would not be possible to create a new category of park. The vast majority of the participants did not want to extend, and thereby risk undermining, the criteria for the definition of parks of national importance. The canton of Aargau was ultimately invited to avail of urban planning instruments instead. Thus, the outcome of the discussion was that the solution for the protection of natural areas in towns and cities lies in the area of spatial planning and urban policy (mainly cantonal and local policy fields in Switzerland) and not in that of environmental protection field (federal policy in Switzerland). In its conclusion (Galland 2010), the working group on Nature Urban Park pointed out the "Agglomeration Park" as a possible alternative and already existing solution for the protection of remarkable natural urbanized areas as such as Wasserschlosch.

- 19 This refusal to create the category of urban nature park in Switzerland in 2012 bears easy comparison with the rejection of the introduction of a similar category into the law by the French Senate in 2006. Following approval by the French National Assembly in 2005, the senators finally rejected the amendment in 2006. The argument in support of this decision resides, in particular, in the confusion initiated by this new category within a law based on the protection of 'natural' or 'rural' nature: "*Effectively, with a common 'nature park' designation there is a considerable risk of rendering the objective of conserving the natural and rural character of territories classified as parks in France unreadable*" (Clarimont and Leichnig 2014). The text of deliberations of the ad-hoc commission highlights the paradox inherent in this new park title, which "*plays with the concept of nature and urbanity simultaneously*" as though both terms were irreconcilable. However, the importance and interest of urban natural areas as "*highly managed nature incorporating an unsuspected richness, particularly in terms of bird life*" was stressed. In the end, the existing urban planning tools (*Schéma de cohérence territoriale*, SCOT and *Plan local d'urbanisme*, PLU) were identified as suitable means of protecting such areas. Hence the conclusion in both Switzerland and France is that the protection of natural urban areas is the responsibility of spatial planning and not nature conservation policy as for 'wild' or rural natural areas. The latter are more highly valued in comparison than natural urban areas. However, there was also a major difference between both countries based on their own definitions of urban nature park. In the case of France the new park would have been related to the Regional Nature Park, i.e. a protected area with a recreational purpose and maintenance of economic activities (Clarimont and Leichnig 2014), while in the Swiss case the focus was on a more limited conception of the Nature Discovery Park.

## So near?

- 20 In sum, the new definition of parks of national importance in 2006 exemplifies the reconciliation of nature parks with human activities. It is particularly obvious in the case of the Regional Nature Park but was also the key point in the discussion of buffer zone of National Park. Beyond, it also illustrates the integration of peri-urban natural areas within the framework of the federal park policy with establishing the Nature Discovery Park. However, the concept of nature in nature parks definition remains far removed from the kind of nature that characterizes urbanised natural areas. Can this conceptual distance between nature valued in the nature park policy and the urbanized nature be relativized? In that section, I highlight first the material proximity that is both

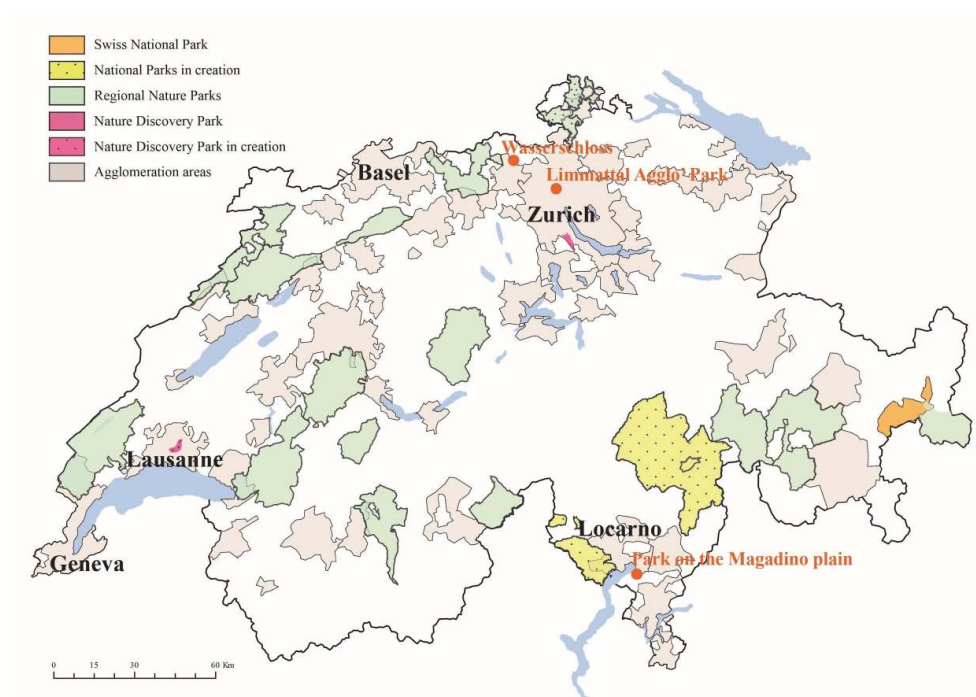
geographical and functional between towns and cities and nature parks. Then I study in detail the case of the Agglomeration Parks since it was evoked as an alternative to the nature parks for protecting large anthropized natural areas near towns and cities

## Nature parks 'close' to towns and cities

- 21 A remarkable characteristic of Swiss towns and cities is that they are very close to natural areas, and reciprocally. This situation is related to the small size of the country and the relatively small size of the urban regions themselves (7.5 percent of the territory is occupied by built-up areas and the remaining 92.5 percent by forests, fields, lakes and mountains (OFS 2015)). The Swiss Cities are concentrated mostly in the West and North parts of the country along the "Swiss Plateau" where they form a dense urban network, in the middle of a natural and agricultural patchwork (Fig. 2).
- 22 This observation, i.e. the smallness of the country which goes hand in hand with the very close proximity between built-up and non-built-up areas, is not new. Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw Switzerland as a big city with gardens in it: "*Switzerland is like a big city divided into 13 neighbourhoods [the number of cantons at the time], some in valleys, others on hillsides, others on mountains [...]; Some neighbourhoods are more densely populated than others but they are all sufficiently populated for one to be always in the city (...)*" (1763 (1959) : 199). Some authors recently revisited this idea of Switzerland as a city which they referred to as *Métropole Suisse* (Bassand 2004) and *Hyperville* (Corboz 2000). For Michel Bassand one of the major characteristics of this metropolis is that it is 'green' and that it is largely occupied by rural regions. These green spaces are very present and 'camouflage' the proximity and connections with the built environment.
- 23 Figure 2 shows the localisation of nature parks and agglomerations in Switzerland. As asserted in the advertising poster (Fig. 1), the nature Parks in Switzerland are really "just a short step away" from cities. The limits of almost all nature parks, except the Swiss National Park, line the border of, or are even inclusive in urban areas. For instance, the Locarnese National Park, the establishment of which is currently being discussed in the Canton of Ticino, will be extremely close to the city of Locarno. The Nature Discovery Park of Sihlwald located at 15 kilometres from the centre of Zurich is even located entirely inside the urban area. The potential Nature Discovery Park of Jorat, currently in project, will be partially situated in institutional territory of the city of Lausanne. In other national contexts, these types of parks located very close to cities could be defined as urban nature/national parks.



Figure 2 – Localisation of nature parks and urban areas in Switzerland



CARTOGRAPHY: J. SALOMON CAVIN AND C. MUMENTHALER

- 24 It should be noted that, apart from the nature parks, a huge number of areas in Switzerland benefit from nature conservation measures. Federal and cantonal legal tools enable the protection of natural spaces throughout Switzerland. Their total area represents over one quarter (27%) of the national territory. However the protection of nature and landscape is a priority for only 5% of the territory (Christine Fehr et al. 2006). Some of these protected areas are located close to or within towns and cities. Geneva bay (*la Rade de Genève*), for example, is included in the Federal Inventory of Landscapes and Natural Monuments of National Importance. Unlike the nature parks, these protected spaces are often very small in size and do not exceed 10 hectares. In a very urbanized canton like Geneva, many of these reserves are located close to largely urbanized areas. In Switzerland, this geographical proximity combined with a particularly dense network of public roads means that 'nature' is always easy reach from the towns and cities. For example, residents of Geneva can travel by bus from the centre of the city to a protected natural area within 15 minutes.
- 25 Added to this geographical proximity is a functional or relational proximity, i.e. the way in which the parks are integrated into the working of the urban regions and, following examples of parks in emerging countries, into urban marketing (Bruno 2012). The iconic role of protected natural spaces in the construction of the image of cities, which the author identifies as a key characteristic of emerging parks, is particularly evident in Switzerland as the cities wholeheartedly play the 'green cities' card. The city of Zurich is owner of the forest within which it took the initiative to create the Nature Discovery Park. The proximity of the core zone of the park, a wild nature space, to the city of Zurich is used by the local authorities to stress the city's close relationship with nature. The same phenomenon can be observed in Lausanne where the local authorities have initiated the project for the establishment of a Nature Discovery Park. The commune is the owner

of a significant area of the future park. Its designation in the form of a nature park of national importance would appear to represent added value for the green image of the city of Lausanne. Finally, a considerable number of Swiss nature parks are financially supported by the cities. This participation would constitute the cities' right of access to the parks.

### Agglomeration Parks, tool for the conservation of urbanized nature?

- 26 Following the federal authorities' advice, the canton of Aargau planned to create an Agglomeration Park for the Wasserschloss area. Actually, five parks of this type have been planned by the cantonal authorities. The Agglomeration Park is explicitly presented as a complementary instrument to the parks of national importance (Kanton Aargau, 2011).
- 27 Several examples of such parks exist at present in the country. The Limmattal Agglo' Park in the Limmat Valley near Zurich, the Piano Di Magadino park in the agricultural and marshy plain between Locarno and Bellinzona in the canton of Ticino (for localisation see fig. 2). And many other parks as such of Wasserschloss or in the Lausanne region are in project.
- 28 The Limmattal Agglo' Park is a project initiated in 2007. It runs for 20 km along the course of the river Limmat between the cities of Baden and Zurich. It is a landscape and nature management project which operates at intercommunal and intercantonal level: the cantons of Aargau and Zurich joined forces with two regional planning groups (Baden Region and *Zürcher Planungsgruppe Limmattal*) and the city of Zurich and with 17 other communes and towns/cities for the process. The park contains protected natural areas, agricultural areas and leisure areas. The main objectives of the Park are first to secure the peri-urban open spaces and an outstanding landscape from urbanization and, to coordinate and promote its diverse functions. This park is identified as a "*space of compensation*" for citizen close to a dense urbanized area of 200 000 inhabitants (Rohde 2011).
- 29 The park on the Magadino plain was initiated in 2005. It covers an area of 2,300 hectares. It encompasses a protected natural area, a large agricultural area and a wide range of other activities, in particular industrial ones. The management and protection of this vast space was the subject of lively debate. The challenge was to reconcile the protection of the agricultural and natural areas, the demands from transport and traffic circles (road linking the Locarno area and the A2 motorway, the extension of Locarno cantonal airport, the link with the new cross-Alpine railway line) and those from actors of other activities located in the plain (industries, commercial enterprises and a new waste incineration plant). In this case also, it was based on a local initiative involving the communes of the plain and the cantonal authority (ODT, OFL 2014: 42).
- 30 Around the city of Lausanne, several Agglomeration Parks are planned in the Regional Master Plan, also elaborated by communes and the cantonal authority. They are defined as "*multifunctional spaces that blend leisure functions, food production and biodiversity*" (PALM, 2012: 89). Those parks contain built and equipment areas.
- 31 As a general rule these Agglomeration Parks are located on the immediate periphery of towns and cities, and contain remarkable natural areas, in which human activity is very prominent. The objectives associated to these parks aim at organizing the multiple

activities carried out inside these parks in a coherent and consistent manner. At first sight, those parks are very similar to the urban nature parks created in France, like the Strasbourg urban nature park which is located in the Koenigshoffen neighbourhood of the city, and the Pau nature park along the Gave river (Clarimont & Leichnig 2014). Actually, despite the rejection of the legal establishment of the Urban Nature Park category, several local authorities established urban parks with this designation.

- 32 On regulatory level, the protective measures established in these different cases are based on an agreement between different public authorities, but there is no specific legislative basis for these instruments. These regulations are part of the cantons' spatial planning policy. Funding of these parks is much diversified and originates from sources related to municipal or cantonal spatial planning and policy (regional level) and to federal (national) level but not to environment policy. Both parks in Zurich and Magadino have received financial support for their creation from the Swiss federal authorities in the context of its spatial planning policy.
- 33 Those park are quoted as good examples of management of "periurban open spaces" in documents originating from the federal spatial planning policy dedicated to urbanized region: the Agglomerations Policy. The main objectives of this policy concern the coordination of transports and urbanization in the urban region. The protection of landscapes and nature is not a central goal of this policy, whose funding concern mainly transports. However, it has allowed to sustain the projects of Limmatal and Magadino via special funding, and to stimulate a reflexion on "open spaces in urban region" (ODT, OFL 2014). Among numerous objectives related to recreation, leisure, protection of agricultural areas, one can find the protection of fauna and Flora.
- 34 The issue of the regulatory status of the agglomeration parks has been discussed in 2012 in the legislative chamber following the request of a deputy from the Green Party (Leuenberger). The main concern was the creation of a specific tool, at the federal level for the preservation of non-built areas in urban regions. The response of federal authorities was that no specific means were available at federal level and that this type of areas was under local and cantonal responsibility. Thus the Agglomeration Parks have missed the opportunity to be legally defined.

## Discussion

- 35 Here I discuss first the evolution of the conception of the urban - nature relationship through the nature park policy and second the relevance of considering the Agglomeration Park as a serious alternative to this policy for urbanized nature.

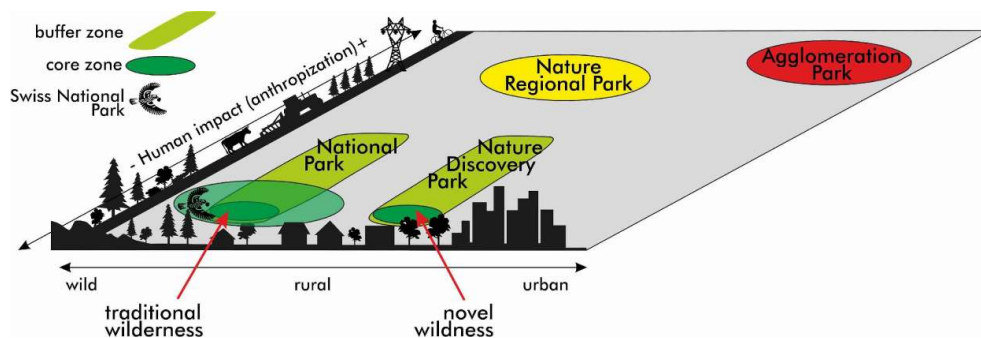
### Toward an urbanization of nature in the nature park policy?

- 36 With the creation of the Parks of national importance in 2006, anthropogenic nature was introduced into the Swiss nature parks policy. As a result the parks have moved geographically closer to towns and cities. This is obvious in the case of the Nature Discovery Parks which are located by definition in close proximity to towns and cities. However the question arises as to whether the nature found in the nature discovery park really corresponds to the inclusion of urbanised nature in the definition of the nature parks. This is far from certain. Unlike the regional nature park, in which human activities

are completely integrated and developed, in the Nature Discovery Park 'wild nature' is re-established through the exclusion of human activities in the core zone. According to the Kowarik's categories (2013), this *rewilded* nature equals to *novel wildness* which should be distinguished from the *traditional wilderness* (Fig. 3). The creation of the core zone within the nature discovery park requires that a natural site, which is completely integrated into the surrounding urban functions, farmed or simply maintained, be transformed into wildness. This re-wilding of an 'artificial' nature is the subject of criticism, particularly by forestry professionals, who reveal that in the case of Zurich the forest was planted and does not correspond to the original species found on the site (Gillieron, 2017).

- 37 It is important to highlight the different treatment of nature in the Regional Nature Parks and Nature Discovery Parks. Nature in the Nature Discovery Parks must be rewilded, however in the Regional Nature Parks it must be conserved in its existing state. Hence, it may be noted here that agricultural landscapes are assessed as being closer to a form of nature that is more worthy of protection than urban landscapes. Compared to the city, the country is presumed as being the place where nature is still at its most authentic (Hess, Salomon Cavin 2015).
- 38 The figure 3 summarizes the conception of nature in the nature park policy in Switzerland focusing on localisation and anthropization. The Swiss National Park which consists solely in a core zone is situated far from the city and is supposed to be the less impacted by human. With its buffer zone the National Park, category created in 2006, integrated anthropization. The Nature Regional Park is by definition anthropogenic and always situated in the rural area. The Nature Discovery Park is situated in the peripheral part of an urban region – but the condition to its creation is a core zone that consists in a "rewilded" nature. As a consequence a nature park dedicated for anthropogenic nature in an urban region is missing.

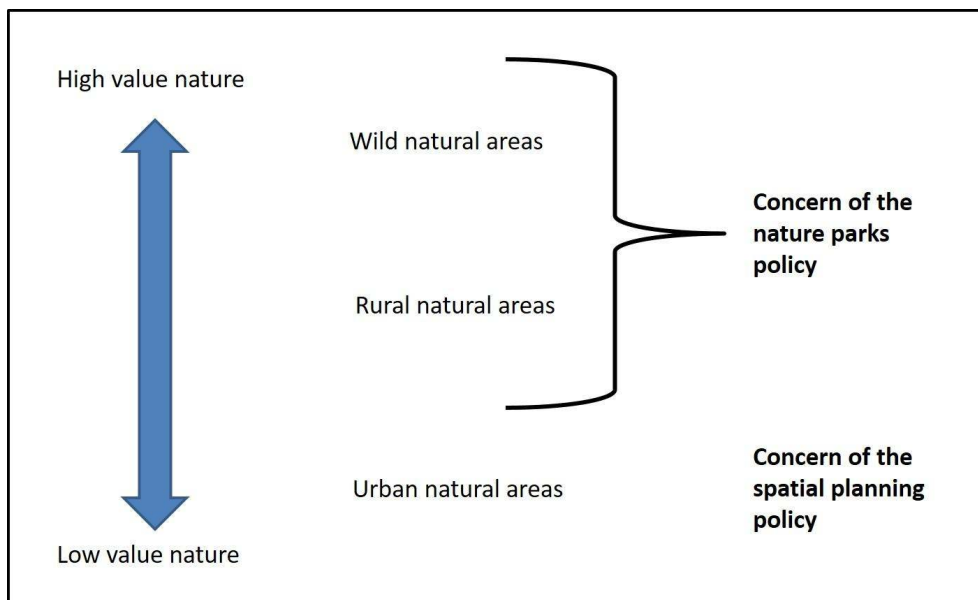
**Fig 3 – localisation versus anthropization of the different kinds of Swiss nature parks**



ARTWORK : L. CAVIN

- 39 Thus it is possible to identify an implicit hierarchy (Salomon Cavin 2013) in nature park policy in Switzerland: wild nature is the best nature (Swiss National Park, National Park); if it is not wild or rewilded (Nature Discovery Park), the best nature is rural (Nature Regional Park); if it is not wild or rural, its conservation is less important and does not constitute an object of federal nature parks policy; it is then an object for the spatial planning policy.

Figure 4 – Hierarchy in the conceptions of nature and consequences in terms of public policy



AUTHOR 2013

### The Agglomeration Parks: an alternative to nature parks?

- 40 The Agglomeration Parks have been identified as an alternative solution during the debate on urban nature parks. As illustrated in the figure 3, the Agglomeration Park could be indeed defined as the missing tool for the protection of urban anthropized natural areas. But is it credible alternative to nature parks?
- 41 The Agglomeration Parks can be considered as alternative in the sense that they are conceived in the purpose of ensuring the conservation of open highly urbanized non built areas at the outskirts of cities. The conservation of nature and of outstanding landscapes is clearly one purpose of those parks. In the cases of the park of Magadino or Wasserschloss project, the aim is to secure large open spaces around areas that are already protected.
- 42 The nature of the Agglomeration Parks is very different from the wild or re-wilded nature of the National Park and the Nature Discovery Park. It is a largely anthropized and urbanized nature. Given that it is also less rural, it is closer to the nature of the Regional Nature Park: it is an anthropogenic, maintained, inhabited and visited nature. Finally, these parks might be close to the urban version of the Regional Nature Parks but with a weak regulatory basis. With their assumed urban nature, these parks are a good illustration of the reconciliation between protected areas and urban areas identified in other national contexts (Landy and Laslaz 2012).
- 43 However, they are far from being an effective alternative if we consider first their main goal which is clearly to secure large open spaces at the outskirts of cities from urbanization. Areas with natural interest might often - if not always - be part of it but they are not the only targets. as currently implemented, they concern "all areas not covered by buildings" (ODT, OFL 2014 : 4) which mean all types of non-built areas and none solely exceptional ecosystems and landscapes. The general goal is to enhance the quality

of life of citizen and to offer a compensation to the urban density not to protect nature against human activity.

- 44 The more obvious weakness concern the legal status: compare to the very normative nature park policy, there is no legal definition. As the nature urban parks created in France, (Clarimont and Leichnig 2014), the agglomeration parks can correspond to very different types of open spaces.

## Conclusion

- 45 Numerous urban nature parks were created since the 2000s in different parts of the world (Bruno and Lézy 2012). According to the IUCN, there are around 90 urban national parks in the world (Trzyna 2014). As shown here, such parks do not exist officially in Switzerland and their establishment would appear to be a matter of uncertainty. The creation of national urban parks as exist elsewhere in the world, for example in Finland, Sweden and the USA, is clearly inconceivable in Switzerland as the conception of the nature of national parks seems far removed from the urban anthropized nature.
- 46 The possibility of creating a new category of park, the urban nature park, was discussed in 2010 at federal level, however the debate eventually concluded without any further developments. This decision is illustrative of the current difficulties facing nature and wildlife managers in dealing with the protection of natural areas located in urban settings. The nature in the Swiss nature parks is by definition very far removed from the city and the type of nature that can be found there. Despite the progressive integration of human activities into the conception of nature parks in Switzerland, urbanized nature remains a milieu that is excluded from the conception of nature parks. The decision not to establish a new official category of nature parks – the urban nature parks – demonstrates the pervasiveness of an anti-urban bias (Salomon Cavin 2013). Only wild or rewilded nature and rural nature are considered as worthy of protection by Switzerland's nature parks policy. Those represent a very tiny part of the nature that can be found in urban regions.
- 47 This conceptual distance does not stand in the way of a material proximity between nature parks. The parks are geographically close to the towns and cities and have close functional relationships with them. Cities and nature parks form close and interconnected territories. If there were a desire to push this characteristic – as the promoters of the Greater London National Park City are doing (Raven-Ellison 2015) – could Switzerland itself not be imagined as an urban nature park? An urban territory with diverse range of protected areas? Rousseau would have appreciated.
- 48 This connectivity has obvious limitations. If the nature parks are very close to cities and more and more integrated in their governance, part of urban nature remains excluded as illustrated by the Wasserschloss area. To value and protect this interesting-but-less-valued nature, Agglomeration Parks have been created outside the framework of the official regulation of nature parks constituting an alternative to the national strategies. Thus, the case of Switzerland shows the recent emergence of new forms of management adapted to hybrid situations, allowing at the same time integrating large urban expectations and actual protection settings also partly artificialized.
- 49 Are the Agglomeration Parks a serious alternative to the policy parks in urbanized areas? It is maybe a bit too soon to answer as the projects are not yet implemented or remain in



construction. However, one can note that the general frame is substantially different. The nature parks are part of a federal policy with a strong legal status and a dedicated funding, whose first goal is the protection of exceptional natures and landscapes. The agglomeration parks are part of the spatial policy shared between several institutional scales with no legal status, no funding and which concern a large spectrum of spaces gathered under the banner of “open spaces”.

- 50 As a conclusion, I point out that two contradictory processes currently exist in Switzerland: on the one hand, the conceptual devaluation of the urbanized nature, which guides conservatory measures on the separation between nature and city and on the other hand, the material valorisation of protected nature close to cities that promote the *de facto* integration of protected natural areas into urban governance. At the heart of this contradiction is the discrepancy between a naturalistic imagination based on an implicit hierarchy of the values of nature and a materiality henceforth characterized by the increasing interweaving of anthropogenic spaces and those of nature.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bassand M. 2004. *La métropolisation de la Suisse*. Lausanne, Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.
- Bruno L. 2012. Y-a-t-il une place pour la nature en ville, in Bruno L. Lézy E (ed.) *BiodiverCités. Les aires protégées urbaines, des laboratoires grandeur nature*. Paris, Tierces Natures : 251-283.
- Bruno L, Lézy E. (eds) 2012. *BiodiverCités. Les aires protégées urbaines, des laboratoires grandeur nature*. Paris, Le Manuscrit.
- Clarimont S, Leichnig K. 2014. Le parc naturel urbain. Figure paradoxale du projet urbain ou synecdoque de la « ville-nature » ?, in Santini C (dir.), *Formes et modèles de la nature urbaine (XIXe et XX siècles)*. Edition électronique Editopics : Chap.5.
- Corboz A. (2000). La Suisse comme hyperville. *Le visiteur* 6 : 112-129.
- Dudley N. 2008. *Lignes directrices pour l'application des catégories de gestion des aires protégées*, Gland, UICN.
- Fehr C, Tester U, Sieber O, Hindenlang K. 2006. *Quelles aires protégées pour la Suisse?* Bâle, ProNatura.
- Galland P. 2010. *Nouvelle catégorie de parc. Rapport du groupe de travail*. Berne, Office fédéral de l'Environnement, unpublished).
- Gillieron L. 2017. *Les aires protégées urbaines, enjeux et acteurs. L'exemple du projet de parc naturel périurbain du Jorat*. Lausanne, University of Lausanne, unpublished master thesis.
- Hainard R. 1974. *Les réserves naturelles de Suisse*. Neuchâtel, EdAvanti.
- Hess G, Salomon Cavin J. 2015. Le Parc naturel urbain en Suisse : une utopie ? Approche philosophique pour dépasser l'opposition ville/nature. *Vertigo - la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement*, 15 : 1, <http://vertigo.revues.org/15874> (Retrieved June 6, 2016).



Kanton Aargau 2011 *Richtplan, Landschaft, L 2.1*, [https://www.ag.ch/media/kanton\\_aargau/bvu/dokumente\\_2/raumentwicklung/richtplanung\\_1/richtplantext\\_1/L21.pdf](https://www.ag.ch/media/kanton_aargau/bvu/dokumente_2/raumentwicklung/richtplanung_1/richtplantext_1/L21.pdf) (retrieved nov 10, 2017)

Kowarik I. 2013. Cities and Wilderness. A New Perspective. *International Journal of Wilderness* 19 (3): 31-36.

Kupper P. 2014. *Creating wilderness: a transnational history of the Swiss National Park*. New York, Berghahn Books.

Landy F, Laslaz L. 2012. Ville et espace naturel protégé : le pas de deux, in Bruno L, Lézy E (ed.) *BiodiverCités. Les aires protégées urbaines, des laboratoires grandeur nature*. Paris, Tierces Natures : 379-406.

Leuenberger U. 2012. *Préservation des espaces non construits*. Interpellation au Conseil National,; <https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?Affairid=20123763> (Retrieved March 21, 2017).

LParcNat, Loi fédérale sur le Parc national suisse dans le canton des Grisons du 19 décembre 1980,; <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19800379/index.html> (retrieved July 6, 2016).

LPN, Loi fédérale sur la protection de la nature et du paysage (LPN) du 1er juillet 1966, version révisée du 6 octobre 2006, <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19660144/index.html> (Retrieved July 6, 2016).

Mels T. 2002. Nature, home, and scenery: the official spatialities of Swedish national parks. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20(2): 135 - 154.

Message du Conseil Fédéral concernant la révision partielle de la loi fédérale sur la protection de la nature et du paysage (LPN) du 23 février 2005.

Nash R.F. 2001. *Wilderness and the American mind*. 4th ed., New Haven [etc.]: Yale University Press.

ODT, OFL, 2014. *Les espaces ouverts dans les agglomérations*. Office fédéral du développement territorial, office fédéral du logement. Berne.

OFEV, 2010. *Parcs: création d'une 4e catégorie à l'étude*. Berne, Office fédéral de l'environnement, unpublished.

OFS, 2015. *Utilisation du sol en Suisse. Exploitation et analyse*. Neuchâtel, Office fédéral de la statistique.

Owen D. 2009. *Green metropolis: why living smaller, living closer, and driving less are keys to sustainability*. New York: Riverhead Books.

PALM, Projet d'agglomération Lausanne-Morges. 2012. *Projet d'agglomération Lausanne-Morges de 2ème génération révisé*, Volume A, [http://www.lausanne-morges.ch/files/docs\\_palm2012/PALM2012\\_A1\\_Rapport.pdf](http://www.lausanne-morges.ch/files/docs_palm2012/PALM2012_A1_Rapport.pdf) (Retrieved Nov 11, 2017)..

Raven Ellison D. 2015. Greater London National Park City Green Paper. available at: <http://www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/GreaterLondonNationalParkCityGreenPaperFinal.pdf> (retrieved march 21, 2017).

Rohde, S., 2011. Grünraum in Stadtnähe. *TEC21* 26 : 31–35.

Rousseau J-J. 1763 (1959). Lettre au Maréchal de Luxembourg du 20 janvier 1763, in Raymond M., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Lettres, présentation, choix et notes*. Lausanne, La Guilde du Livre.

Salomon Cavin J. 2013. Beyond prejudice: Conservation in the City. A case study from Switzerland. *Biological Conservation* 166 : 84 - 89.

Sénat 2006. *Projet de loi relatif aux parcs nationaux et aux parcs naturels marins 18 janvier 2006*, <http://www.senat.fr/rap/l05-159/l05-1594.html> (Retrieved August 5, 2015).

Trzyna T. 2014. *Urban Protected Areas - Profiles and best practice guidelines*. Gland, IUCN, <http://www.iucn.org/content/urban-protected-areas-profiles-and-best-practice-guidelines> (Retrieved June 6, 2016).

## ABSTRACTS

Urban Nature Parks do not exist in Switzerland. A debate regarding their establishment in 2010 petered out. This failure exemplifies a representation of nature in the Swiss parks system, which should stand very far removed from the city. Since the establishment of Parks of National Importance in 2006, human activity has been tolerated under the condition that it is considered rural. Because it is neither wild, with the exception of a few rewilded forests, nor rural, urban nature has no place in this policy. However, the ‘a-urban’ conception of the parks policy in Switzerland does not preclude the existence of close links between cities and nature parks for obvious reasons of spatial and functional proximity. Hence, although the nature parks should be far removed from the cities by definition, they are very close to them by reality. Furthermore, this paradoxical situation is accompanied by the emergence of local solutions, outside the framework of the official regulation of nature parks, for ensuring the conservation of open highly urbanized non-built areas at the outskirts of cities. However those Agglomeration Parks are far from constituting an equivalent alternative to the national strategy with no legal status, an absence of dedicated funding and their very large target gathered under the banner of “open spaces”.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** nature parks, Switzerland, wild nature, rural nature, anthropogenic urban nature, agglomeration parks

## AUTHOR

### JOËLLE SALOMON CAVIN

Dr. Joëlle Salomon Cavin, Senior Lecturer in Urban Geography, specializes in the study of relationships between the city and country and the city and nature from the point of view of geographical imaginations and territorial practices. Her research studies revolve around three major topics: the origins and consequences of anti-urbanism, the relationship of nature conservationists with the city and urban agriculture. Institute of Geography and Sustainability, University of Lausanne, Geopolis, CH 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland. Email: [joelle.salomoncavin@unil.ch](mailto:joelle.salomoncavin@unil.ch)