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Parks of the Future

**Protected Areas in Europe Challenging
Regional and Global Change**

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Foreword

In the debate on sustainable development during recent years, an experimental change of direction is becoming ever more marked. It is becoming more and more obvious that knowledge acquisition about complex processes of transformation towards sustainability can be best accelerated in so-called “real world laboratories” or “future labs”. Only in such experimental societal spaces can the interplay of environmental, technological and social dynamics be better understood. Protected areas can be regarded as such “future labs” from which the whole debate on sustainability can surely benefit.

That is why protected areas in Europe, such as national parks, regional nature parks or biosphere reserves, have gained increasing attention right across the continent. Protected areas are high on the agenda of the sustainability debate, not only due to their still growing number and the related noteworthy extent of the territory they cover. Even more than this, their significance is due to the progressive differentiation of functions attached to them. Thus parks in Europe today are above all multifunctional landscapes and therefore fulfill in an ideal manner the conditions that are required for their use as real-world laboratories.

However, together with their development as multifunctional landscapes, parks are also increasingly influenced by various processes of change at both regional and global level. Climate change and consequent problems, the accelerating loss of biodiversity and the conversion of the energy system required for the energy transition, just to mention three outstanding examples, are major processes of change that are of significant relevance for protected areas as a whole. In response, park authorities and their management bodies have to deal with these processes of change by developing suitable ways to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

Against this background, it becomes even clearer that parks are indeed regarded as “future labs” for societal transformation at large. In fact, it seems as if parks somehow provide a “protected area” outside the ordinary world, which permits a somewhat experimental encounter with the various challenges existing today. This is actually at the core of what the concept of the UNESCO biosphere reserve in particular is about, setting certain areas aside to be used as test-beds and models for sustainable development. Successful solutions created through such experiences should ideally be applied at a higher level later. In the meantime, protected areas of other types have started to adopt this approach as well and thereby confirm the opportunities that clearly arise with it.

This newly edited book provides an excellent overview of parks in Europe facing regional and global change today. Based on the expertise of a large number of experts from various disciplines, institutions and countries, insight is given from a rather wide range of viewpoints; this includes the conceptual as well as the practical implications of the subject. As the different chapters well illustrate, throughout Europe a great variety of experiences has been obtained so far, illustrating possibilities but also the shortcomings and, ultimately, the limitations of protected areas in tackling change. Thus particular attention is paid to the design of suitable political frameworks and the provision of appropriate tools to allow for successful change management.

Despite the fact that parks differ from one another and are embedded in different natural as well as socioeconomic environments, the authors of this book provide a very clear message: Protected areas, independent of their type, size, age or legal framework, will inevitably have to deal with change in the future, and to a far greater extent than has so far been the case. While they do indeed face the whole range of difficulties and threats naturally connected with change, parks can also be regarded as “spaces of hope”. Therefore, if societal transformation in the direction of sustainable development is to succeed in the end, parks, in the sense of experimental “future labs” as presented in this book, provide an essential tool for this!

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