

## Monitoring system of tourism based on the concept of carrying capacity – the case of the regional natural park Pfyn-Finges (Switzerland)

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For a few years, one has attended in Switzerland a multiplication of projects aiming at the creation of regional natural parks. This evolution is relevant to the fact that the persons in charge for tourism in Switzerland became increasingly aware of the importance of nature tourism. If these initiatives offer the opportunity to improve the economic situation of outlying regions, tourist exploitation of ecologically sensitive areas does not go however without raising any problems either on economic, environmental or social matters. The concept of tourist carrying capacity is often presented as a useful approach to determine which intensity of tourist exploitation a given territory can support. This concept is frequently subdivided into four categories:

- economic capacity
- physical capacity
- social capacity
- perceptive capacity

Until now, however, we still miss an operationalisation of this concept. This would offer an effective instrument for the management of tourism in parks and protected areas.

In this context, we sought to make the concept of tourist carrying capacity operational by defining a set of indicators that allow measuring the four types of carrying capacity mentioned above. Those indicators should form a monitoring system for a sustainable management of tourism in the regional natural parks. In this case, the monitoring system was elaborated in collaboration with the administration of the regional natural park of Pfyn-Finges in the canton of Valais. This administration had already worked out a tourist development concept based on a clear typology of visitor's flows (hikers, mountain bikers, riders or drivers). This collaboration made it possible to determine which were the exact needs of the park's managers regarding the monitoring of tourism and thus, to choose the indicators wisely.