

WILDERNESS AREAS: IMAGES, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE PUBLIC

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Abstract

The rewilding of landscapes is an important landscape change in Switzerland and is intensively discussed as the need for agricultural and forest lands is decreasing. To make sure that decisions concerning the future landscape management are supported by the public it is crucial to take the public opinion into account. Therefore the present study assesses the public attitudes towards nature and "rewilding" processes, the public perceptions of wilderness areas and the expectations of the public concerning future wilderness areas.

The main research questions answered are:

- How does the Swiss population define wilderness?
- Which attitudes do people have towards nature and wilderness?
- How should wilderness areas be designed and regulated in order to meet the expectations of the public?

In order to answer the research questions we sent a standardised questionnaire to 4000 randomly selected households throughout Switzerland.

The questionnaire survey indicated that there is a discrepancy between the populations' general definition of wilderness and the ideal image of wilderness areas.

A cluster analysis led to a typology with four different types of man-nature relationship (nature lovers, nature sympathisers, nature-connected users and nature controllers), each characterising a particular attitude towards nature. These human-nature relationship types differ in their attitudes towards rewilding as well, allowing a rough classification of the sample into wilderness opponents (51.1%) and wilderness proponents (49.9%). However there are some commonalities concerning their opinion concerning the rules that should apply in future wilderness areas (e.g. mandatory use of leashes for dogs) and the favoured elements (e.g. benches, parking lots) in wilderness areas.

We see the commonalities between wilderness opponents and wilderness proponents concerning the rules in wilderness areas and the elements as an ideal starting point for a successful participatory process. Based on the findings we discuss the implications for selecting and designing new wilderness areas in Switzerland.

Key Words

landscape change, attitude, Alpine region