



**Politecnico
di Torino**

NATURAL PARKS IN MOUNTAINOUS AREAS: CONNECTION BETWEEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN URBAN AND REGIONAL
PLANNING
“PLANNING FOR THE GLOBAL URBAN AGENDA”
A.Y. 2025/2026

GRADUATION SESSION, FEBRUARY 2026

**SUPERVISOR:
GIUDICE BENEDETTA**

**COSUPERVISOR:
COTELLA GIANCARLO**

**STUDENT:
AJUNGO GOMEZ ALFREDO
324320**

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ABSTRACT

The management of protected natural areas in mountainous environments faces complex challenges, as conservation objectives must be aligned with long-standing human presence, different territorial governance structures, and evolving socio-economic dynamics.

This thesis investigates how management strategies in national parks facilitate coexistence between local communities and ecosystems, and what ecological benefits emerge from these interactions.

Through a comparative analysis of Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and Sarek National Park in Sweden, the research analyzes how historical trajectories, governance frameworks, and cultural contexts shape contemporary conservation practices.

This thesis argues that conservation outcomes in mountainous national parks are shaped not only by ecological objectives alone but instead by the capacity of governance models to mediate social and territorial realities. While both case studies operate within shared international conservation frameworks, their management strategies differ significantly due to distinct institutional structures and historical contexts. The research concludes that coexistence between local communities and ecosystems is best achieved through adaptive, participatory governance, generating ecological benefits that extend beyond park boundaries and contribute to long-term territorial sustainability.



Photo Alfredo Ajungo

1. INTRODUCCION

1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

Protected areas have become a central instrument in global strategies to address biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and climate change (IUCN, 2008). National parks, in particular, have an important position due to their legal status, symbolic value, and role within international and national conservation policies (Dudley, 2008). In mountainous environments, their relevance is especially important, as these landscapes often combine high ecological value with fragile ecosystems and histories of human interaction with natural resources (Hammer et al., 2007). As a result, national parks in such contexts cannot be understood just by the ecological importance, but rather as complex socio-ecological territories shaped by historical land use, cultural practices, and evolving governance arrangements (West et al., 2008).

Early conservation approaches in the national parks were frequently based on exclusionary models, prioritizing strict protection and limiting human presence in order to safeguard ecological integrity (Nash, 2014). While effective in certain contexts, these approaches often were in conflict with social and territorial dimensions of conservation, particularly in regions where human activities have historically contributed to shaping ecological conditions (Mels, 1999). Over recent decades, international conservation discourse has increasingly shifted toward more integrated and people-oriented approaches, emphasizing the inclusion of local communities, indigenous knowledge, and a more adaptable and co-planned governance as key elements of long-term conservation success (Phillips, 2003).

This shift is particularly relevant in mountainous regions, where environmental processes and human practices are very present in the natural context.

Traditional land-use, seasonal mobility, and resource-based livelihoods have played an important role in maintaining landscape diversity and ecological resilience.

In consequence, national parks in these areas operate as living territories, where conservation objectives intersect with social organization, territorial identity, and governance across multiple scales (Hammer et al., 2007).

Within this evolving context, the role of governance and planning becomes central. National parks are not conceived and managed as isolated spaces, but instead play an important role in the broader territorial governance frameworks that include national policies, regional planning instruments, and local decision-making processes (Faludi, 2013). How these planning instruments and policy frameworks interact and how they shape management strategies in local realities has significant implications for both ecological outcomes and the well-being of local communities (Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023).

Having this background as a basis, this thesis positions itself within current debates on protected area governance by focusing on how management strategies in mountainous national parks address the challenge of coexistence between conservation objectives and local livelihoods. Rather than treating conservation and human presence as a relation of conflict, the thesis adopts the perspective that their relationship is mediated by governance structures, planning instruments, and institutional choices.

The overall objective of the thesis is therefore to analyze **how different management strategies in mountainous national parks facilitate coexistence between local communities and ecosystems, and what ecological benefits they generate.**

This objective is pursued through a comparative analysis of two emblematic European case studies: Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and Sarek National Park in Sweden.

These two parks represent contrasting yet complementary conservation traditions. Gran Paradiso National Park reflects a model rooted in inhabited and historically managed landscapes, characterized by complex multi-level governance and a strong integration of conservation with local development (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005). In contrast, Sarek National Park exemplifies an approach shaped by decentralization, extensive public access rights, and the recognition of indigenous Sámi land-use practices (Naturvårdsverket, 2008). Despite these differences, both parks operate within shared international conservation frameworks, making them particularly suitable for comparative analysis (IUCN, 2008).

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to work on the research objective, the thesis is guided by the following main research question:

How do management strategies of national parks in mountainous environments facilitate coexistence between local communities and ecosystems, and what ecological benefits do they generate?

To address this overarching question in a structured and analytical manner, it is articulated into three interrelated sub-questions:

1. **How are governance structures and planning instruments organized in mountainous national parks, and how do they shape management strategies?**

This question aims to clarify the institutional and planning frameworks within which conservation is implemented, with particular attention to the interaction between national, regional, and local levels of governance.

2. **How do these management strategies affect local communities in terms of land use, participation, and territorial practices?**

This question focuses on the social dimension of conservation, examining how local actors are involved in decision-making processes and how conservation policies interact with everyday practices and livelihoods.

3. **What ecological objectives and outcomes are associated with these management strategies, and how are they linked to governance choices?**

This question seeks to connect governance and planning approaches to their ecological implications, highlighting how different management models translate into specific conservation outcomes.

Together, these questions allow for a comprehensive analysis of national parks as socio-ecological systems, where governance, planning, and ecological processes are closely interconnected.

1.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research has a qualitative and comparative methodological approach aimed at understanding national parks as complex socio-ecological systems shaped by governance structures, planning instruments, and historical human–nature interactions. Given the exploratory and interpretative nature of the research questions, a qualitative design has been adopted, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of institutional arrangements, management strategies, and territorial dynamics that cannot be fully captured through quantitative indicators alone.

The study is structured around a comparative case-study methodology, focusing on Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and Sarek National Park in Sweden. The case studies approach helps the research for a better understanding of context-dependent processes and the interaction between institutions and policies with local practices. The selection of these two cases is purposeful rather than representative: both parks are located in mountainous environments and hold high ecological value, yet they differ significantly in terms of governance traditions, planning systems, and the role attributed to local and indigenous communities. This contrast allows the research to highlight how different institutional and planning frameworks shape conservation outcomes and community relations.

The methodological framework combines three complementary analytical dimensions.

First, a documentary and literature-based analysis is conducted to reconstruct the historical and institutional context of national park establishment and management in both countries. This includes the review of academic literature, international policy documents, and official publications from national and regional authorities. Particular attention is given to the evolution of conservation paradigms, the legal foundations of national parks, and the emergence of integrated and participatory approaches to protected area management.

Second, a qualitative analysis of governance and planning instruments is carried out, which involves examining national legislation, regional spatial planning frameworks, park-level and local management and planning documents. The analysis focuses on how competences are distributed across governance levels, how planning instruments interact vertically and horizontally, and how conservation objectives are translated into local realities.

Third, the research investigates the relationship between national parks and local communities, with particular emphasis on participation, land-use practices, and territorial interactions. This dimension explores how local actors and communities live in this particular context, how traditional and contemporary uses of natural resources shape the landscape and how they are regulated, and how conflicts between conservation and livelihoods are addressed. Rather than measuring social impacts quantitatively, the analysis adopts an interpretative perspective, focusing on the role of governance arrangements in shaping the conditions under which coexistence between communities and ecosystems is negotiated.

Lastly, a comparative analysis aligned with the research questions, in which instead of comparing the two parks as isolated cases, the study examines governance structures, planning instruments, and community interactions across both contexts, identifying similarities, differences, and underlying logics. This approach allows the research to move beyond descriptive comparison and to develop analytical insights into how different conservation models operate in the National Parks.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured to progress from a broader research context to a detailed comparative analysis of national park governance and planning in mountainous environments. The organization of the chapters reflects both the conceptual development of the research and the analytical steps to address the research questions.

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis first establishes the theoretical and conceptual background of protected areas and nature conservation. This section situates national parks within the broader global evolution of conservation paradigms, tracing the shift from exclusionary models of protection toward more integrated and people-centered approaches. Particular attention is given to the role of protected areas, where ecological sensitivity, historical land use, and long-standing human–nature interactions converge. This theoretical ground provides the conceptual dimension through which governance, planning instruments, and community relations are later analyzed.

The following chapters focus on the two case studies, Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and Sarek National Park in Sweden. Each case is introduced through its historical and institutional context, outlining the conditions under which the parks were established and the evolution of their management objectives. This contextualization is essential to understanding how contemporary governance and planning frameworks are shaped by national traditions, legal systems, and territorial cultures.

On this contextual basis, the thesis then examines the territorial governance structures that regulate national park management in both countries. This analysis explores the distribution of competences across national, regional, and local levels, highlighting how different governance arrangements influence decision-making processes, coordination mechanisms, and stakeholder participation. By comparing the Italian and Swedish systems, the chapter illustrates how conservation policies are translated into practice through different institutional configurations.

The following sections address the planning instruments associated with national parks, including spatial plans, management plans, and regulatory frameworks. The analysis emphasizes their interaction across scales and their role in mediating between conservation objectives and territorial development. This chapter highlights how planning tools operate as practical mechanisms through which governance principles are implemented in local realities. The role of local communities constitutes a central analytical dimension of the thesis. The chapter about the community explore how local populations interact with protected areas, focusing on participation mechanisms, land-use practices, and the negotiation of conservation constraints and opportunities. In the Swedish case, particular attention is paid to the role of Sámi communities and indigenous governance perspectives, while in the Italian context, the analysis highlights the integration of long-inhabited landscapes, traditional activities, and municipal actors within park governance.

The final comparative chapter brings together the insights from the previous sections to systematically assess similarities and differences between the two case studies. The comparison is conducted across three main thematic axes: the territorial governance and planning instruments, environmental protection and conservation strategies accomplished by the Park Plans, and community–nature interactions. Through this comparative synthesis, the chapter addresses the research questions directly, demonstrating how different governance and planning models shape conservation outcomes and social dynamics in mountainous national parks.

The thesis concludes by summarizing the main findings and reflecting on their broader implications for protected area governance and planning. It highlights the contribution of the research to ongoing debates on conservation in inhabited landscapes and outlines potential directions for future research, particularly in relation to comparative studies of governance models and adaptive planning approaches in protected areas.



Photo Alfredo Ajungo

2. DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH FIELD

This study's research field focuses on the intersection of environmental management, territorial governance, and socio-ecological interactions within protected mountain areas. It focuses on the relationship between nature conservation and the communities that inhabit, manage, and depend on these landscapes. This field explores how human activity, ecological protection, and institutional frameworks coexist and evolve together in territories where natural value and cultural heritage are deeply merged.

At its core, this area of research concerns understanding how societies define, preserve, and use their natural environments sustainably. Protected mountain regions, such as those in Italy and Sweden, exemplify complex socio-environmental systems in which ecological preservation, local economies, and cultural continuity must coexist within shared regulatory and management frameworks. There will be an examination of the mechanisms, instruments, and governance models that ensure a balanced coexistence between conservation and the development needs of local populations.

The work in this field needs an interdisciplinary approach. Concepts from ecology, geography, sociology, and political science are used to analyze how both environmental conditions and institutional structures shape management strategies. The framework considers the roles of global agreements (such as UNESCO's World Heritage Convention), European initiatives (such as the Natura 2000 Network), and national or regional management plans. These instruments establish the theoretical and operational bases that guide local practices toward sustainability, while also promoting the inclusion of traditional knowledge and participatory governance. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013)

In this context, sustainability is not treated just as a technical goal but as a process between human and natural systems. The research field examines how environmental policies translate into local action, and how communities interpret and adapt these frameworks to their realities. It considers how legal structures, land-use rights, and conservation practices interact to create both opportunities and constraints for people living within protected territories, and recognizes that the preservation of biodiversity cannot be separated from the preservation of cultural identity and traditional livelihoods. (West et al., 2006)

Additionally, this research engages with the evolving notion of "protected area management" itself. No longer seen as static spaces of exclusion, protected areas are increasingly understood as living landscapes, shaped by historical use, cultural significance, and ecological processes. (IUCN & WCPA, 2018) This conceptual shift underscores the importance of co-management and participatory models, in which local actors, such as the Sámi communities in Lapland and the mountain communities in the Italian Alps, become essential partners in maintaining ecological balance and social cohesion.

Ultimately, the definition of this research field reflects an attempt to integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions within a coherent theoretical framework. It addresses questions of governance, identity, sustainability, and adaptation in territories where human presence and natural processes are inseparably linked. Through a comparative analysis of management models and regulatory systems, the research seeks to deepen understanding of how conservation and development can be mutually reinforcing within Europe's mountain landscapes. (Mose, 2007)

2.1 WHY DO WE PROTECT NATURE?

Nature cannot be understood as a set of isolated green areas, but rather as an interconnected system of biological processes and cultural practices that support life on the planet. It provides habitat for thousands of animal, plant, and insect species, forming unique ecosystems that cannot be replicated elsewhere, while simultaneously supporting millions of people who live in, with, and from natural environments. Human societies rely on a wide range of ecosystem functions, from water provision to climate regulation, that support everyday life. In recent decades, this interdependence has become increasingly relevant, as nature-based solutions have been recognized as key responses to the climate crisis, particularly for their capacity to capture and store significant amounts of carbon (IUCN, 2013). Within this framework, in this context, biodiversity functions as a structural foundation for ecological resilience, human well-being, and economic stability. However, biodiversity is increasingly threatened by habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species, overexploitation, illegal wildlife trade, and climate change (IUCN, 2013).

In response to these pressures, nature protection has become an urgent priority for governments and civil society, requiring strengthened management and governance of natural areas. This urgency is reflected in the internationally agreed objective of protecting roughly one-third of the planet's terrestrial and marine environments by 2030, as established by the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD, 2022). Beyond international targets, protecting nature is increasingly recognized as essential to improving sustainable development outcomes, public health, and the overall quality of life for local populations (IUCN, 2013).

Human dependence on nature extends across multiple dimensions, including access to water, food, and other ecosystem services that support everyday life. These services function within highly interconnected ecological systems, where each component plays a critical role. Disruptions to any part of this network can trigger cascading effects, leading to irreversible ecological changes that ultimately affect not only natural systems but also human societies themselves (IUCN, 2013).

The protection and conservation of nature dates back a long time, but in the late 1890s, the concept of a National Park for conservation took place. Now in modern times, countries have signed and aligned their efforts to achieve the global standards for the protection of nature, globally one of the most important organizations in charge of everything related to the protection of nature is the IUCN that stand for International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, which have created standards as the IUCN Green List that is a global standard that recognizes protected areas that achieve the management effectiveness and governance, in other words, natural spaces that are managed efficiently, daily and in a participatory manner, that ensure the conservation of the ecosystems and the natural services they provide, as well as respect the right of local and indigenous communities. (Mose, 2007; IUCN & WCPA, 2018)

Currently, more than 600 areas across 60 countries are part of the Green List, covering 14 million hectares worldwide. These areas include National Parks, community reserves, and Ramsar sites. Biosphere reserves and World Heritage sites. (IUCN, 2024).



Figure 1. Abisko national park, Alfredo Ajungo

2.2 THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF NATIONAL PARKS

The institutionalization of nature protection through formally designated areas first developed in the United States, and contrary to environmental purposes, the protection of specific areas began with a desire to preserve landscapes and traditions regarded as emblematic of national identity. By the mid-nineteenth century, an increasing number of American writers and intellectuals emphasized the distinctiveness of the country's natural scenery as a source of cultural inspiration. In this spirit, Thomas Jefferson considered the picturesque setting of Harpers Ferry, at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, as evidence that the American environment would inspire future cultural achievements. (Runte, 2010)

This intellectual and social context was profoundly shaped by Romanticism, a movement that redefined humanity's relationship with nature. Romantic thinkers and artists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Frederic Edwin Church consider wilderness as a source of moral renewal and spiritual elevation. Nature was no longer seen as a hostile frontier to be conquered but as a space capable of nurturing national identity and individual reflection. The American landscape, especially its vast mountains, forests, and waterfalls, came to represent both, divine creation and democratic promise, an idea famously captured in the notion of "wilderness as the American cathedral." (Nash, 2014)

This intellectual and social context led the way for early conservation initiatives. A milestone in this process was the Yosemite Park Act of 1864. Responding to appeals from preservationists

seeking congressional protection for the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation granting 38,000 acres to the State of California “for public use, resort, and recreation” and declaring the lands “inalienable for all time” (Yosemite Valley Grant Act, 1864). This act represented the first central reservation of public land to be preserved for the benefit of the nation and is often described as the moment when “national parks were born”. (Runte, 2010)

The Yosemite model served as a template for the creation of Yellowstone in 1872. Legislation based on the Yosemite precedent dedicated more than two million acres of public domain “as a public park or ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” establishing a federal precedent for future reserves (Yellowstone National Park Act, 1872). By 1916, the United States had 37 national parks and monuments. Although responsibility for them rested with the Department of the Interior, administrative capacity was limited, leading to numerous management challenges, some requiring congressional action and others prompting intervention by the U.S. Army. (Sellars, 2009)

Since that time, the foundational idea of national parks as serving an essential public purpose has remained constant, even as the types of landscapes designated as parks have evolved with changing societal values. Today, the national park system reflects not only the preservation of landscapes of historical and cultural significance but also the transformation of Americans’ relationship with nature over time. (Runte, 2010)

2.3 TYPOLOGIES, CATEGORIES OF NATURE PROTECTION AND DEBATE

The global protected areas estate is the world’s largest planned land use (Chape et al., 2005 at Dudley, 2010), The establishment of protected areas represents the most extensive and recognizable form of land planning ever, present at a global scale. This big territorial network, often referred to as the global protected area estate, constitutes a system that reflects not only ecological priorities but also shifting political, social, and cultural paradigms concerning the human relationship with nature. Far from being a singular ideal, protected areas vary widely in their purpose, designation, governance, and management, reflecting diverse national contexts and conservation philosophies. (Dudley, 2008; Dudley, 2010)

A starting point is a definition of “protected area” adopted by the IUCN in 1994:

“Area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means” (IUCN, 1994).

According to the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, protected areas currently occupy more than 11% of the Earth’s terrestrial and marine surfaces, an important achievement considering that the majority of these designations have been established in the past five decades. This global network is characterized by substantial internal diversity. Some protected areas are defined as strict nature reserves, where human visitation is either prohibited or severely restricted to minimize anthropogenic disturbance,

while others fall under the category of protected landscapes, where long-standing human communities continue to shape and maintain ecological processes through traditional forms of land use. (Phillips, 2003; IUCN, 2024)

To systematize this variation, the IUCN developed the Protected Area Category System, a typology based on management objectives rather than on legal or administrative designations. This system recognizes that conservation outcomes depend not only on the existence of legal protection but also on the intentions and practices underlying management. Historically, the conceptualization of these categories emerged gradually. The origins of the modern protected area can be traced to 1866, with the creation of the Blue Mountains National Park in New South Wales, Australia. The effort to standardize terminology at an international level began only in 1933 with the International Conference for the Protection of Flora and Fauna in London. This meeting proposed a four-tier typology that includes national parks, strict nature reserves, fauna and flora reserves, and reserves with prohibitions on hunting and collecting. (Dudley, 2008)

The issue of an internationally recognized nomenclature came back in 1961, when the newly formed International Commission for National Parks, today known as the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), published the World List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves. In 1975, the IUCN initiated the development of a more systematic classification framework based on management objectives, which culminated in the publication of six distinct categories in 1994. These range from areas of strict preservation to those integrating sustainable resource use and human presence. (Dudley, 2008)

Over time, this framework has shifted from a descriptive tool to a normative reference used in policy and planning. Governments and international agencies now frequently employ the IUCN categories not only to classify protected areas but also to guide the formulation of legislation, environmental policy, and land-use strategies. The typology has evolved into a normative tool that reflects and shapes global conservation governance. (Day et al. 2019)

In this sense, the IUCN system does not merely provide a technical basis; it also embodies the underlying debate over what should be considered “protection.” It reveals tensions between exclusionary models of conservation, aimed at preserving wilderness through human absence, and more integrative approaches recognizing cultural landscapes and indigenous land-use practices as legitimate forms of stewardship. These conceptual and political dimensions situate the protected area not simply as a geographical entity but as a field of negotiation where ecological objectives, social values, and governance models intersect. (Dudley, 2008)

2.3.1 CATEGORIES OF PROTECTION AND CONCEPTUAL DEBATES

Within the IUCN framework, the classification of protected areas into six categories reflects an attempt to organize the global diversity of conservation approaches according to their management objectives rather than their legal status. Each category corresponds to a distinct philosophy of conservation, emphasizing different balances between protection, human activity, and sustainable use. (Dudley, 2008)

Category Ia, or Strict Nature Reserve, represents the most restrictive form of protection. These areas are set primarily to preserve biodiversity and, in some cases, unique geological or geomorphological features. Human visitation and use are strictly limited to ensure minimal disturbance. Category Ib, Wilderness Area, typically encompasses large, unmodified landscapes without permanent human habitation, protected to maintain their natural condition. Category II, National Park, focuses on conserving large-scale ecological processes and characteristic species while allowing for environmentally and culturally compatible recreation, education, and scientific activities. Category III, Natural Monument or Feature, protects specific natural landmarks, such as caves, ancient groves, or marine formations, valued for their singular natural or cultural significance. Category IV, Habitat or Species Management Area, prioritizes targeted conservation interventions, often requiring active human management to sustain particular species or ecosystems. Category V, Protected Landscape/Seascape, recognizes areas where the interaction between people and nature over time has created a distinct character with ecological, cultural, and scenic value. Finally, Category VI, Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, promotes the integration of biodiversity conservation with traditional and sustainable forms of resource use, allowing for low-impact, non-industrial economic activities that support local livelihoods. (Dudley, 2008; Day et al., 2019)

While this typology has proven to be an important tool for balanced conservation terminology and guiding management practices, it has also provoked considerable debate regarding its theoretical foundations and practical implications. One key controversy concerns what



Figure 2. National park and Natural reserve, Alfredo Ajungo

constitutes a protected area and whether all management approaches encompassed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature categories should indeed be regarded as such. The definitional evolution from the 1994 International Union for Conservation of Nature formulation, focused on the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, to the broader 2008 version, which emphasizes the long-term conservation of nature, its associated ecosystem services, and cultural values, reveals an ongoing conceptual shift. This change reflects a move from a strictly biological focus toward a more integrative understanding of nature conservation that acknowledges the interdependence between ecological processes and cultural meanings. (Dudley, 2008)

The central tension, however, persists in the idea of whether protected areas should be confined to spaces dedicated primarily to biodiversity preservation or should they also encompass territories where human use, spiritual values, and cultural traditions coexist with conservation objectives? For the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the guiding principle remains that areas can only be considered protected if nature conservation constitutes the primary management goal, though other values that may coexist and even hold equal importance for specific stakeholders. This position establishes a clear distinction between protected areas and other management models that are beneficial to conservation but not explicitly prioritized for it. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Dudley, 2008)

2.3.2 FROM THE OLD PARADIGM TOWARDS THE NEW PARADIGM IN PROTECTED AREAS

As protected areas multiplied worldwide throughout the twentieth century, the reasons for their creation and the approaches used to manage them became diverse. Despite this variation, for several decades a dominant conservation model shaped the establishment of national parks and reserves. This early framework, often referred to as the classic protectionist model, positioned nature as something to be preserved from human influence, and it became the foundation of much national legislation on protected area designation. (Phillips, 2003)

Until the mid-1960s, the global context in which protected areas were mainly created favored centralized, top-down decision-making. Many parks were declared under administrative structures that allowed limited space for local consultation, aligning well with the authoritarian style typical of colonial governance. Large tracts of land were designated as reserves or national parks with little consideration for the impacts on resident communities, who were frequently excluded or restricted from lands they had traditionally used. In contrast, tourists and recreational activities were generally welcomed, reflecting the prevailing belief that protected areas should serve external interests rather than local livelihoods. (Phillips, 2003)

Influenced by earlier frameworks such as the Western Hemisphere Convention, the 1968 African Convention on Nature and Natural Resources, which promoted the creation of protected areas from which local populations would be removed or heavily controlled, while activities like sport fishing and tourism were encouraged. The rights, knowledge, and cultural practices of Indigenous groups received minimal recognition, and before the 1970s, such considerations were rarely prioritised by governments. (Phillips, 2003)

The recommendations at the ten-year interval World Parks Congresses between 1962 and 2003 reveal how far ideas about protected areas changed in quite a short time. Many critical external events were responsible for moving the agenda of the World Parks Congresses over this period. At the international level, the most important were:

- The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm (which may be seen as signalling the end of a colonial period of conservation)
- The development around the same time of the biosphere reserve concept by UNESCO, with its idea of a core area for strict protection, surrounded by buffer and transitional zones, and its integration of conservation and development
- The publication of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980, which expressed new thinking on conservation and its relationship to development (IUCN, 1980)
- The adoption of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the 1992 UNCED, held in Rio de Janeiro. (Phillips, 2003)

The exclusionary conservation policies of the late twentieth century led to a profound shift in how protected areas were conceived and managed. The outcome is the emergence of what is now widely referred to as a “new paradigm for protected areas”, a conceptual framework that differs in almost every respect from the model that prevailed only a few decades ago. This transition was formally acknowledged by the IUCN, and gained significant international resonance during the V IUCN World Parks Congress held in Durban (2003), whose theme “Benefits Beyond Boundaries” symbolised a decisive move toward more socially inclusive conservation strategies. (Phillips, 2003; Peano, 2013)

As highlighted by Phillips (2003), the shift towards a new paradigm represents a fundamental reorientation of conservation practices. Rather than reproducing earlier protection assumptions and actions, contemporary approaches emphasize institutional reform, participatory governance, and long-term social integration.

“Putting this new paradigm into practice requires new, people-oriented protected area legislation, a restructuring of park management institutions, and a broader public and political re-education to build understanding of this contemporary conservation model” . (Phillips, 2003)

Variable	1960+	1980+	1990+
Perception of nature	Wilderness	Ecosystem; biodiversity; ecoregions	Culture in nature and nature in culture
Environmental values	Theocentric and Anthropocentric	Anthropocentric and Cosmocentric	Anthropocentric and cosmocentric
Diagnosis of Environmental problems	Overpopulation; Exceeding the land's carrying capacity	Poverty; Overpopulation	Power relations; North-South inequalities; what <i>counts</i> as a problem and to <i>whom</i> ?
Representations of Local people	People are the threat	People cannot be ignored; people are a resource	Align with rural people
Solutions and technologies	Exclusionary protected areas	Buffer zones, integrated conservation and development programs; sustainable use; and community-based conservation	Alternative protected areas; participatory natural resource management; human rights
Power relations	Alliances with elites	Technocratic alliances	Alliances with grassroots
Key influences	Colonial conservation; elitist interests	Sustainable development debate; growing concern for livelihoods	Democracy/human rights movement; participatory development; postmodern influence on natural and social sciences

Table 1. Summary of people—nature problematics in international conservation, 1960-1999 (Jeanrenaud, 2002)

This transition carries significant implications for the planning and management of protected areas. Inclusive planning increasingly prioritizes local participation, acknowledging the needs and expectations of resident communities. In some cases, it is the communities themselves who directly manage protected territories, often in collaboration with public and private partners and supported by diversified funding sources, not exclusively public. (Phillips, 2003) (Peano, 2013)

This re-interpretation places primary value on the perceptions and aspirations of local populations, in shaping territory, giving meaning to landscapes, and envisioning parks as tools for genuine social and economic development. Within this framework, local communities increasingly assume an active role in sustaining ecological integrity rather than being framed as external pressures. (Peano, 2013)

	As it was, protected areas were...	As it is becoming: protected areas are...
Objectives	Set aside for conservation; established mainly for spectacular wildlife and scenic protection; managed mainly for visitors and tourists; valued as wilderness; about protection.	Run also with social and economic objectives; often set up for scientific, economic, and cultural reasons; managed with local people more in mind; valued for the cultural importance of so-called wilderness; also about restoration and rehabilitation.
Governance	Run by the central government	Run by many partners
Local people	Planned and managed against people; managed without regard to local opinions	Run with, for, and in some cases by local people; Managed to meet the needs of local people.
Wilder context	Developed separately; managed as "islands."	Planned as part of national, regional, and international systems; developed as "networks" (strictly protected areas, buffered and linked by green corridors)
Perceptions	Viewed primarily as a national asset; viewed only as a national concern	Viewed also as a community asset; viewed also as an international concern
Management techniques	Managed reactively within a short timescale; managed in a technocratic way	Managed adaptively in a long-term perspective; managed with political considerations
Finance	Paid for by the taxpayer	Paid for from many sources
Management skills	Managed by scientists and natural resource experts; expert-led	Managed by multiskilled individuals; drawing on local knowledge

Table 2. *Contrasting paradigms: a summary of Tables 3 and 11 (Phillips, 2003)*

The main factors that have led to a new way of approaching conservation issues, natural resource management in general, and protected areas in particular, are linked to scientific advances, growing cultural and social awareness, the recognition of human rights, political developments, changes in management practices, technological progress, and economic forces. Scientific understanding has shown, for instance, that many protected areas are too small to function effectively and must be interconnected with surrounding territories or integrated into ecologically compatible landscapes to enable species to survive. It has also been revealed that human influence on environments once considered pristine has often been substantial. Cultural and social awareness has fostered greater respect for local communities and for traditional and Indigenous peoples, highlighting the true nature of their relationship with the environment and the value of many sustainable practices they have maintained over time. This awareness has

also prompted a re-evaluation of the wilderness concept, as many so-called wilderness areas are, in reality, Indigenous homelands. Developments in management practice have similarly influenced the governance of protected areas. In the late twentieth century, it became clear that building connections across professional and institutional boundaries is one of the most significant challenges facing governments and managers. For protected areas, this means linking internal management with surrounding landscapes and adopting multidisciplinary approaches. Economic forces, at both global and local scales, have also placed increasing pressure on conservation planning. As these pressures have intensified, economic theory has progressively entered the field of protected area management. Managers are now required to articulate the values and benefits of protected areas and to adopt more business-oriented strategies, including developing business plans. In many cases, this has involved generating revenue to supplement government funding. (Phillips, 2003. Peano,2013)

However, what do these “new paradigms” actually imply when translated into official frameworks? They indicate that Protected Areas, and National Parks in particular, can no longer be considered as spaces to conserve and contemplate. Instead, they are increasingly understood as places of living, working, and enjoyment, now more open to local communities and visitors (UNWTO, 2012). Within this perspective, the Park becomes a space for experimenting with new forms of hospitality and for enhancing natural and cultural heritage, with direct benefits for the local economy. (Phillips, 2003)

A Park remains a special institution, one that will continue to rely on public funding, but it is also required to integrate complementary private resources progressively. Several initiatives reflect this direction: from the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, to the Atlas of Typical Products of Italian Parks launched in 2002 by the Ministry of the Environment and Slow Food, in collaboration with Legambiente and Federparchi. Within this framework, planning and management need to embrace a more proactive and adaptive approach, centered on maintenance, restoration, and rehabilitation of natural and cultural assets, as well as on the economic valorization of activities carried out within Protected Areas. It is indeed an ambitious undertaking: to ensure the park functions effectively and retains its identity, a careful assessment of sustainability is essential, along with an innovative, dynamic management model that can evolve over time. (Peano,2013)

2.4 FROM GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS TO LOCAL REALITIES: GOVERNANCE, ZONING, AND INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES

Parallel to definitional debates, the issue of governance has emerged as one of the most critical dimensions of the protected area discourse. Historically, governance of protected areas has been dominated by state ownership and a centralized management structure, reflecting a top-down conservation paradigm. However, increasing recognition of indigenous and community rights has prompted a broader conceptualization of governance types. The IUCN now acknowledges multiple governance models, including areas managed by local communities, private entities, and indigenous peoples, provided that their management objectives align with the wide range of nature conservation goals. (IUCN, 2024; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013)

The formal inclusion of indigenous and community-conserved areas within the IUCN framework marked a significant conceptual shift, moving from exclusionary models of protection toward more participatory and pluralistic approaches. Debates persist within indigenous movements about whether these territories should be classified within existing IUCN categories or recognized through a separate designation. Proponents of a distinct category argue that indigenous protected areas represent unique socio-ecological systems deserving their own recognition. At the same time, opponents contend that such differentiation risks complicating classification systems and generating methodological inconsistencies. Despite these disagreements, a growing consensus highlights the potential of indigenous governance systems to contribute effectively to biodiversity conservation while sustaining traditional livelihoods and cultural identities. (IUCN, 2024; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013)

Another significant area of discussion involves zoning practices within protected areas, specifically, whether different zones within a single area may hold distinct International Union for Conservation of Nature categories. This issue, although technical, has substantial implications for countries with large or multi-use protected areas, such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia. The most recent IUCN guidelines suggest that zoning categories should be applied only if legally defined and permanent, ensuring clarity and avoiding fragmentation of conservation management. (Day et al., 2019)

Finally, the debate over scale and inclusion has drawn attention to the role of smaller reserves, such as isolated wetlands, forest fragments, or cultural landscapes, which often fall outside all IUCN classifications despite their ecological and heritage value. These sites raise questions about the acceptability of existing typologies and the need for flexible frameworks capable of encompassing the full range of conservation realities across the globe. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013).

Europe presents a particularly rich mosaic of protected-area systems, reflecting centuries of human interaction with the landscape. The Natura 2000 network, created under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, provides a supranational layer of conservation policy, aiming to ensure ecological connectivity across borders. However, implementation varies considerably among member states, depending on national priorities, administrative traditions, and local perceptions of nature. In southern European countries such as Italy, protected areas often overlap with long-inhabited regions where agriculture, pastoralism, and cultural heritage are deeply intertwined with the natural environment. The Italian system of national parks thus integrates environmental protection with socio-economic development, aligning with the concept of territorial governance. This model seeks to coordinate actors and policies across scales at the national, regional, and municipal levels to achieve sustainability that respects both ecological and human dimensions. Italian parks like Gran Paradiso or the Parco d'Abruzzo exemplify how governance is negotiated among ministries, park authorities, municipalities, and local communities. Here, the global discourse on biodiversity is translated into local projects of rural revitalization, sustainable tourism, and cultural preservation. (Ferranti et al., 2013)

In contrast, Sweden represents a Nordic interpretation of the same global conservation ideals. Swedish environmental policy is strongly influenced by the principles of decentralization and public access to nature (*Allemansrätten*). Territorial governance is less hierarchical and more collaborative, involving municipalities, county administrative boards, and national agencies

such as Naturvårdsverket. Swedish environmental governance operates through multi-level linkages and strong participation mechanisms. This allows for flexible adaptation of global and national goals to the ecological and social realities of each region. (Holmgren et al., 2016)

Recently, the inclusion of Sámi communities in the planning of national parks has reshaped conservation processes, integrating indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge. This approach embodies the shift from top-down regulation toward collaborative governance, emphasizing dialogue, cultural recognition, and shared responsibility. (Holmgren et al., 2016)

2.4.1 TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AS A BRIDGE

The concept of territorial governance provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how global frameworks are localized. Territorial governance refers to the coordination of decision-making processes across multiple administrative and spatial scales, ensuring coherence between environmental goals and local development needs. It involves not only governmental institutions but also communities, NGOs, and private actors who co-produce territorial policies.

In Italy, this coordination is often challenged by administrative fragmentation and overlapping jurisdictions, yet it also allows for creative local initiatives and strong place-based identities. In Sweden, governance tends to be more integrated, with clearer distribution of responsibilities and established channels for citizen participation. Both systems demonstrate that effective conservation depends not merely on adopting international frameworks but on aligning them with local governance cultures and social expectations. (Hovik et al. 2010)

Comparing these two national contexts reveals the importance of multi-level governance and the ideal of conservation in local cultures. Italy's model highlights the role of cultural landscapes and the negotiation between protection and economic activity; meanwhile, Sweden illustrates the power of participatory governance and decentralization. Together, they illustrate how global frameworks are not merely implemented but also reinterpreted within local histories and institutions, a dynamic process that gives each park its unique identity as both an ecological and a social space. (Ferranti et al., 2013; Holmgren et al., 2016)

2.5 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CASE STUDIES

The selection of case studies represents a central methodological step in addressing the research questions of this study. By focusing on two national parks, the research investigates how conservation policies, governance arrangements, and local communities interact within different contexts. The comparative case study approach enables a deep analysis of how global conservation objectives are translated into territorial practices, and how these processes shape the relationship between people and protected landscapes.

The comparison between Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy and Sarek National Park in Sweden tends to respond directly to the research questions.

- How international and national conservation policies are implemented at the local level
- How governance structures mediate the relationship between institutions and territory
- How local and indigenous communities are involved in the management of protected areas.

These two cases represent contrasting but complementary European traditions of nature protection, showing a solid framework for examining these questions across different institutional and cultural settings.

Gran Paradiso reflects a context in which the research explores how conservation policies are adapted through multi-level governance systems and how community participation is institutionalized within park management. Sarek, by contrast, the study examines how governance is shaped by co-management arrangements and how indigenous rights and knowledge systems are integrated into conservation frameworks.

Across both case studies, the analysis is structured around three interconnected dimensions that correspond directly to the research questions. First, it assesses policy frameworks, focusing on the influence of international conventions and national legislation on park objectives and regulatory instruments. Second, it examines governance mechanisms, analyzing institutional roles, decision-making processes, and coordination across administrative levels. Third, it investigates community engagement, evaluating how local and indigenous actors participate in management, negotiate conservation constraints, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of protected areas.

By aligning the comparative analysis with these research questions, the study demonstrates that protected area governance is not a universal or technical formula, but a context-dependent process shaped by territorial histories, social structures, and cultural values. The comparison between Gran Paradiso and Sarek will provide critical insights into how different governance models negotiate the balance between conservation, community participation, and territorial sustainability within contemporary European protected areas.



NATIONAL PARKS IN ITALY

-  Gran Paradiso Park
-  National Parks



Figure 3. National parks in Italy, Alfredo Ajungo

2.5.1 NATIONAL PARKS IN ITALY: CONTEXT AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Italy's system of national parks represents a long-standing interaction between nature and culture. The establishment of Gran Paradiso National Park in 1922 marked the beginning of modern conservation in the country, setting the foundation for a network that now includes 25 national parks covering approximately 5% of the national territory. These parks operate within a broader mosaic of regional and marine protected areas, reflecting the Italian commitment to an integrated approach to landscape management. (Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica)

The legal and institutional basis for Italian conservation conceptualizes national parks as areas of exceptional ecological and cultural importance, managed for both preservation and the promotion of sustainable local development. (Law No. 394/1991) Within this framework, nature is not conceived as separate from human activity but as the product of a long historical interaction between ecological processes and cultural practices. Many Italian parks, therefore, encompass settlements, agricultural land, and traditional resource-use zones, requiring governance models that recognize environmental protection with the maintenance of local livelihoods. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Governance in Italian national parks is multi-layered and participatory, involving park authorities, regional administrations, municipalities, and civil society organizations. This complex network reflects the broader notion of territorial governance, in which conservation outcomes depend on coordination across scales and on the inclusion of local actors in decision-making. The Italian approach thus represents a shift from a protectionist paradigm toward one of negotiated coexistence between conservation and community development. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005; Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023).

2.5.2 THE CASE OF GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK

Located in northwestern Italy, between the regions of Piedmont and the Aosta Valley, Gran Paradiso National Park covers approximately 71,000 hectares of alpine landscapes. Originally established to protect the Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), it has evolved into a symbol of Italian conservation and an experimental site for participatory management. Its diverse ecosystems, ranging from glaciers and alpine meadows to larch forests, interact with small villages and pastoral systems that have persisted for centuries. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005)

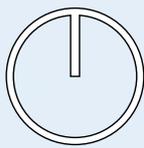
The park's management authority operates through collaborative structures involving local governments, community representatives, and scientific institutions. Advisory councils and co-planning processes ensure that decisions reflect both ecological priorities and socio-economic realities. Gran Paradiso stands as a paradigmatic example of how conservation and cultural continuity can coexist within a single governance framework. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005). Its historical evolution from a royal hunting reserve to a participatory conservation landscape represents the Italian vision of national parks as living territories, where ecological integrity is maintained alongside human presence and traditional practices. This makes Gran Paradiso particularly relevant for examining the integration of ecological and social dimensions in protected area governance. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, 2005)



NATIONAL PARKS IN SWEDEN

 Sarek National Park

 National Parks



0 100 200 km



Figure 4. National parks in Sweden, Alfredo Ajungo

2.5.3 NATIONAL PARKS IN SWEDEN: CONTEXT AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Sweden's national parks system is among the oldest and most extensive in Europe. The establishment of the first nine parks in 1909 positioned Sweden as a pioneer of legal nature protection. Today, the country's 30 national parks cover approximately 7,000 km² and are complemented by thousands of nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites. The Swedish model reflects a governance philosophy rooted in decentralization, public responsibility, and the right of public access in nature. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

National policy is coordinated by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), while implementation and monitoring are carried out by the County Administrative Boards (Länsstyrelserna). This multi-level system ensures that conservation objectives are adapted to regional ecological and cultural conditions. A defining principle of Swedish environmental governance is the right of public access (Allemansrätten), which guarantees all citizens the freedom to enjoy and traverse the landscape, provided it is done responsibly. This right reflects a deep cultural understanding of nature as a shared space rather than an exclusive or restricted domain. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In the northern regions, several parks overlap with territories traditionally used by the Sámi people for reindeer herding. Here, conservation intersects with indigenous rights, creating a complex governance landscape that integrates ecological management with cultural self-determination. Sweden's commitment to co-management and the inclusion of Sámi traditional knowledge has become an internationally recognized example of adaptive and inclusive conservation governance. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

2.5.4 THE CASE OF SAREK NATIONAL PARK

Sarek National Park, established in 1909, is one of Sweden's earliest and most emblematic protected areas. Located in Norrbotten County within the Lapponia World Heritage Area, it spans roughly 1,970 km² of alpine terrain, characterized by steep valleys, glaciers, and vast wilderness. Frequently described as "Europe's last wilderness," Sarek is simultaneously a cultural landscape, shaped and sustained by Sámi reindeer herding practices over generations. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Sarek's governance structure reflects Sweden's model of decentralized and participatory management. It is administered by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten under the coordination of Naturvårdsverket, in collaboration with the Lapponia Management Board (Laponiatjuottjudus), a body composed of Sámi villages and local municipalities. This co-management framework embodies a dialogic approach to conservation, where ecological protection, cultural values, and indigenous livelihoods are negotiated as interdependent dimensions of sustainability. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

The selection of Sarek as a case study is justified by its dual significance: it represents both one of Europe's earliest experiments in large-scale wilderness preservation and a contemporary model of indigenous-inclusive governance. Its contrast with Gran Paradiso, particularly regarding human presence, management structures, and cultural relationships with nature, provides valuable insight into the diversity of European approaches to conservation and territorial governance.



Photo Parco Gran Paradiso, 1957

3. CASE STUDY 1 PARCO DEL GRAN PARADISO

3.1 THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GRAN PARADISO PARK

On 21 September 1821, Thaon di Revel brought from Turin the documents establishing a kingdom ban on hunting Alpine ibex (stambecco). The decree stated that “the advancement of the natural sciences, and zoology in particular, requires the conservation of animals through the adoption of measures, as their reduced numbers put them at risk of extinction.” (Oberto)

King Vittorio Emanuele II decided to address this situation by creating royal hunting reserves, where the natural environment would be protected under the supervision of park guards. Between 1850 and 1854, efforts were made to persuade municipalities to extend the hunting ban, culminating in an agreement. As a result, hunting in these areas was reserved exclusively for the king and the people who served him. (Oberto)

Although hunting Alpine ibex (stambecco) was formally prohibited, the regulation did not apply to the king himself, who was above the law. Despite these actions, the conservation of the species remained ineffective, as the king’s hunts claimed large numbers of animals each year, sometimes as many as 250. (Oberto)

After Vittorio Emanuele II’s death, King Umberto I continued the tradition. However, the royal hunts became less frequent, and under King Vittorio Emanuele III, they ended completely, with the last royal hunt taking place in August 1913. On 2 September 1919, King Vittorio Emanuele III donated 2,200 hectares of the former hunting reserve to the state in anticipation of the possible establishment of a national park in the Gran Paradiso massif and the Graian Alps. The park would be dedicated to the conservation of Alpine flora and fauna and to preserving the last surviving populations of Alpine ibex in Europe. (Oberto)(Commissione reale del Parco)

The idea of creating a national park in Italy was not entirely new. Various associations, among them Pro Mentibus and the Touring Club, had already promoted the concept, though they encountered significant obstacles in expanding and consolidating the idea among the public. The donation made by King Vittorio Emanuele III was a pivotal step, marking the transition from just proposals to concrete action. (Oberto)

On 8 October 1919 and again on 5 February 1920, the Ministry of Agriculture established a commission to study the creation of national parks. The initiative soon faced some problems because the government claimed a lack of financial capacity to undertake new commitments. It was not until 3 December 1922, with the royal signature of Vittorio Emanuele III, that the Gran Paradiso National Park was formally created. This was later consolidated through legislative adjustments enacted on 17 April 1925. (Oberto)(Berlanda et al.)

The function of the park was listed in the 1st article: “to conserve the fauna and flora and preserve the special geological formations and the beauty of the landscape, “ which were

declared Parco Nazionale, the lands from the actual hunting reserve of the Gran Paradiso. The park was 652 sq km, with a perimeter of 150 km. (Oberto)

While the Park was initially composed of existing reserves, buildings, and hunting tracks, plans were soon developed to expand its boundaries to the upper Valle Soana, upper Valle dell'Orco, and parts of the Valli di Rhêmes and Champorcher. (Commissione reale del Parco)

The establishment of the Park also required negotiating with local communities within its new boundaries. To secure their support, the government and the Park administration promised immediate and tangible benefits, the construction of roads in the Valle dell'Orco and Soana, and another in Valsavarenche. This arrangement involved both the state and the Province of Turin: the province was responsible for road maintenance, while the state financed the construction itself. (Commissione reale del Parco)

Initially, the administration of the Park fell under the jurisdiction of the Forest Inspector within the Ministry of Agriculture. Also, a royal commission for the Parco del Gran Paradiso was composed of technicians and experts tasked with making proposals and establishing norms to improve the park's conservation and management. (Oberto)

The commission combined a technical and scientific function, and a limited administrative function. The commission was soon constrained by the authoritarian tendencies of the Fascist regime, which favored centralized power. (Oberto)

In 1933, the royal commission was dissolved, and the administration of the Park was transferred to the State Agency for Public Forests (Azienda di Stato per le Foreste Demaniali). In its place, a new body was created with only a consultative role, primarily responsible for providing scientific recommendations. This concentration of power within the Fascist state's bureaucratic and administrative apparatus proved to be a great danger to the Park. Many urgent measures were unimplemented, particularly during the war years, when Park's activities and the institutional framework ended up collapsed. (Oberto)

By the end of the war, the Alpine ibex (stambecco) (the logo species of the Park) was in critical danger, with fewer than 400 individuals. Conservation efforts faced significant obstacles, not only because hunting remained prohibited, but also because the royal presence in the area had ended. This loss of royal influence, once an important socio-economic factor for the valleys, demands local support for conservation measures. (Commissione reale del Parco)

After the war, new boundaries defined the Park's limits. These, however, generated mixed reactions. On the one hand, conservationists were disappointed that the protected area was not expanded as expected; on the other hand, residents often criticized the accuracy of the boundaries and refused to accept new restrictions on hunting and fishing in additional zones. Another important factor was the shortage of Park personnel, which decreased the efforts to defend the newly established boundaries and to implement the Park's regulations effectively. (Berlanda et al.)

Multiple factors undermined the adequate protection of the Park's fauna and flora. Military operations, the Park's proximity to national borders, and the construction of hydroelectric plant projects approved even before the formal establishment of the Gran Paradiso National Park created a high level of human activity on both sides of the valleys, endangering the Park's conservation objectives. (Oberto)

With the outbreak of a new war, these difficulties intensified. The Park's mission of safeguarding nature remained unchanged. Through considerable effort, Park staff, state personnel, and several former royal guards organized a provisional corps of volunteer rangers. This group, composed of highly skilled and deeply committed individuals, took on the task of patrolling and protecting the Park without pay and, despite significant risks, began their mission. Their dedication was fundamental in maintaining at least a basic level of protection during this turbulent period. (Oberto)

A distinctive feature of this provisional corps group was the inclusion of local inhabitants. Their intimate knowledge of the terrain, including mountain routes, avalanche-prone areas, the habitats of rare flora, the local dialects, and, mainly, the behavior of wildlife, was indispensable for effective surveillance and enforcement inside the Park. Faced with limited resources, the administration had little choice but to enlist landowners from the protected areas as auxiliary personnel. Additional support was provided by the Province of Turin, which dispatched some rangers from the thermoelectric plant in the Valle dell'Orco to assist in safeguarding the Park. (Oberto)



Figure 5. Guardiaparco con stambecco, Dario de Siena

Despite the efforts, the number of personnel assigned to protect the Park remained insufficient. The goal was to have at least one ranger for every thousand hectares. Even with a smaller staff making considerable personal sacrifices, the Park gradually achieved its objectives. This incremental progress represented a significant victory for the park.

By the end of the war, and even before the Italian Constitution was approved, a decisive step toward institutional consolidation was taken. (Oberto)

On 5 August 1947, the Ente Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso was established, granting the Park formal administrative and managerial autonomy. The new entity consisted of a president, elected by the Administrative Council, and a 13-member council: four by the Ministry of Agriculture, one by the Ministry of Public Instruction, four by the Region of Valle d'Aosta, and four by the Province of Turin. This governance structure gave the Park administrative and financial control over its own affairs, marking the beginning of a new era of autonomy and institutional stability. (Oberto)(Berlanda et al.)

About regulatory powers, Article 5 of the 1947 decree grants the Board of Directors the authority to establish provisions in three distinct areas: the organization, conservation, and administration of the Park; second, the regulation of personnel; and the protection of fauna and flora, geological formations, and the aesthetic and scenic value of the landscape. In practice, successive Boards of Directors have limited their regulatory activity almost exclusively to personnel matters, most recently drafting a regulation that has remained pending ministerial approval for several years. No specific measures have been adopted concerning the "organization, conservation, and administration of the Park." This omission reflects the prevailing assumption among successive Boards that the statutory provisions in force were sufficient to ensure the Authority's effective operation without additional regulations. (Berlanda et al.)

This situation makes evident a structural limitation in the Park's governance: while extensive regulatory powers are formally conferred, the lack of fully developed regulations has constrained the Park Authority's capacity to implement proactive and adaptive management strategies. Consequently, the Authority has faced difficulties in pursuing robust conservation policies while simultaneously addressing the social and economic interests of local communities residing within the Park boundaries. The gap between the formal allocation of powers and their practical implementation emerges as a critical factor in understanding the ongoing challenges of managing one of Europe's most significant protected areas. (Berlanda et al.)

At the same time, the emergence of tourism as a social phenomenon became increasingly evident to the Park administration. In response, the state mandated that the Park begin formulating regulations for tourism development within its territory, in collaboration with regional authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture. This directive introduced new responsibilities and challenges for the Park, requiring coordination with multiple administrations and the pursuit of additional objectives. (Berlanda et al.)

When addressing this challenge, the Park administration took inspiration from the conceptualization of a National Park as a "living school." In applying this notion to tourism, the administration addresses visitor activity not as an intrusive action, but as a disciplined and educational engagement, one that respects the Park's guidelines, prohibited activities, and restricted areas. The "living school" model promoted a form of qualified tourism, attracting visitors who are passionate about and respectful of nature. These visitors would be guided by Park personnel, who would provide interpretive tours to enhance understanding and

appreciation of the Park's environment. From this vision, a structured program for educational and guided tourism began to take shape, reflecting a deliberate integration of conservation, education, and visitor experience. (Berlanda et al.)

The undersigned, along with all current councilors, was appointed to the Park's Board of Directors by the Provincial Council of Torino in 1966. During these early years, the Council's attention was primarily directed toward resolving immediate operational issues rather than implementing a medium-term strategic program. This period also witnessed the near-simultaneous replacement of the Director and Deputy Director due to age limits, with two new managers appointed only in the summer of 1970, following a rigorous national selection process. (Berlanda et al.)

Despite the establishment of various study committees within the Council focused on scientific matters, boundary delineation, regulatory issues, and relations with the Vanoise National Park, it became increasingly apparent that only a specialized commission, designated as the "Park Restructuring Committee," could address these challenges comprehensively. This committee comprised two councilors, Parenti and Pavan (the latter later replaced by the undersigned), two representatives of the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta (Chabod and Guichardaz), and two representatives of the Province of Turin (Ceriana and Penati). The committee's work was ongoing and was projected to continue well into the spring of 1972. (Berlanda et al.)

The commission encountered broader external challenges, where external actors often favored decision-making for their own production benefit rather than contributing constructively to the formulation of coherent plans and programs. As noted by Surveyor Milanese, Councilor for Tourism, Urban Planning, Antiquities, and Fine Arts of the Valle d'Aosta Region, the Regional Administration and municipal authorities frequently resisted initiatives aimed at structured urban planning and programmatic interventions, on urban planning in Valle d'Aosta. Milanese emphasized that it was necessary to mitigate these resistances patiently, identify the causes of delays, and support any efforts toward systematic planning and governance. (Berlanda et al.)

The issue of Park boundaries, a topic that has generated significant debate, cannot be overlooked when considering urban planning and regulatory frameworks. In addition to referencing the scholarly contributions of Prof. Videsott, it is instructive to note a parliamentary question from 1967 and the subsequent establishment of a special commission by the Administrative Council. Unfortunately, after only a few meetings during the winter of 1967–1968, the commission's work was suspended entirely, and the necessary steps were not taken to reach even a preliminary agreement regarding wildlife protection and the expansion of the connection between the French Vanoise National Park and Gran Paradiso National Park. (Berlanda et al.)

3.2 FROM HISTORICAL FORMATION TO TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

The historical trajectory of the Gran Paradiso National Park shows that its establishment was neither linear nor purely conservation-driven. Instead, it evolved through a sequence of political decisions, institutional experiments, and socio-territorial negotiations that gradually transformed a royal hunting reserve into a national public institution dedicated to nature protection.

Throughout its early decades, the Park's history was marked by strong centralization and limited institutional autonomy. The transition from royal management to state administration, followed by the constraints imposed during the Fascist period, exposed significant weaknesses in governance capacity, regulatory effectiveness, and long-term planning. These limitations became particularly evident during periods of crisis, such as the war years, when conservation efforts depended mainly on the commitment of local actors and informal institutional arrangements rather than on stable administrative structures. (Oberto; Berlanda et al.)

The post-war period represents an important point in this historical evolution. The establishment of the Ente Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso in 1947 marked the beginning of a new phase characterized by administrative autonomy, formalized governance structures, and a precise distribution of responsibilities among national, regional, and provincial actors. At the same time, this phase also presents structural challenges, including the gap between formal regulatory powers and their practical implementation, tensions with local communities over boundaries and restrictions, and the growing pressure from emerging socio-economic dynamics, such as tourism and infrastructure development. (Oberto; Berlanda et al.)

It is within this evolving institutional context that planning instruments, most notably the Park Plans, begin to acquire increasing relevance. Although still fragmented and unevenly applied in the early phases, these instruments represent an attempt to translate conservation principles into spatial, regulatory, and management frameworks capable of coordinating multiple objectives and actors. They make a shift toward a more structured form of territorial governance. However, the development, content, and operational role of Park Plans constitute a distinct phase in the Park's evolution and will be examined in detail in later chapters of this thesis. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In conclusion, the history of the Gran Paradiso National Park illustrates how protected areas are the product of long-term institutional construction rather than fixed conservation models. This chapter has shown that the foundations of contemporary governance were laid through historical processes marked by centralization, crisis, adaptation, and gradual institutional learning. Building on this historical background, the following chapter moves from how the Park was formed to how it is governed today, situating Gran Paradiso within the broader framework of Italy's multi-level territorial governance system. (Oberto; Berlanda et al.; Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.3 TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN ITALY

3.3.1 THE EVOLUTION OF ITALY'S MULTILEVEL TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Italy's model of territorial governance has evolved through successive institutional reforms, a process strongly shaped by regional diversity, administrative traditions, and constitutional change that have progressively altered the balance of territorial authority. Italy's governance model is decentralized, a characteristic that was significantly reinforced by the 2001 reform of Title V of the Constitution. Through this reform, regions (Regioni) were assigned a broader range of legislative and administrative powers, particularly in fields such as spatial planning

and environmental governance, with indirect implications for socio-economic development.

Today, Italy operates a multi-layered system in which national, regional, and local actors share authority over land use, landscape management, and environmental protection, resulting in a governance structure characterized by negotiated responsibilities. While broad strategic orientations and environmental objectives are set at the national level, their practical implementation is largely shaped by regional and municipal planning decisions. (Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015)

This decentralization is also accompanied by fragmentation. Competences frequently overlap, requiring constant negotiation among institutions. As Janin Rivolin (2010) and Cotella & Janin Rivolin (2015) write, Italian territorial governance has been described as involving a wide constellation of actors operating across multiple institutional levels, where policy coherence emerges primarily through coordination, cooperation, and shared interpretations rather than through strict hierarchical control.

3.3.2 POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND INSTRUMENTS

Italian territorial governance operates within an elaborate and evolving structure of legal norms, planning instruments, and strategic policy frameworks that regulate spatial development, landscape protection, and environmental management. Far from being static, this system is continuously changing in response to European directives, international environmental commitments, and internal administrative reforms. As a result, in this context, territorial governance in Italy functions as a dynamic and multi-level arrangement, where institutional competences and policy instruments are subject to periodic revision. (Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015; Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023). One of the defining characteristics of the Italian approach lies in the way urban planning, landscape conservation, and environmental policy are brought together within a shared conceptual and operational framework commonly referred to as government of the territory (*governo del territorio*). This perspective reflects a long-standing planning culture in which the physical, ecological, and cultural dimensions of land are conceived as inseparable and mutually constitutive (Faludi, 2012). The Italian system does not treat landscape merely as aesthetic heritage or environmental resource, but as an organizing principle shaping the entire territorial governance framework. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Legal and Institutional Framework

The legal framework underpinning Italian territorial governance originates in Law 1150/1942, which introduced the first comprehensive national regulation of urban planning and land use. Although conceived in a very different socio-political era, its core principles, rational organization of space, hierarchical planning instruments, and public control over land development, still support the contemporary system.

A major turning point occurred with the constitutional reform of Title V (2001), which substantially altered this framework through the redistribution of legislative competencies. Regions (*Regioni*) acquired primary responsibility for spatial and landscape planning, while the State retained

authority over fundamental principles, environmental standards, and the protection of cultural and natural heritage. This reconfiguration contributed to the consolidation of a multi-level governance model in which:

At the national level, responsibilities are exercised through ministries such as the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE) and the Ministry of Culture (MiC), which define overarching principles, minimum standards, and sectoral policies related to biodiversity, climate, and heritage protection. (Reform of Title V, 2001)

At the regional level, legislative power governs territorial affairs, producing regional planning laws and strategic frameworks that define spatial structures, landscape policies, infrastructure priorities, and regional development strategies. (Reform of Title V, 2001)

At the municipal level, through Piani Regolatori Generali and their updated versions (Piani Urbanistici Comunali), regional guidelines are translated into local land-use regulations, zoning schemes, and development controls. (Reform of Title V, 2001)

Governance in Italy is characterized by a decentralized structure in which responsibilities are distributed across state, regional, and municipal levels, creating interdependencies among planning authorities. Regions and municipalities enjoy significant autonomy in designing spatial policies, yet these must align with national principles and European directives. Consequently, territorial governance in Italy functions as a continuous process of coordination, formalized through regulatory instruments and informal through inter-institutional negotiation. (Reform of Title V, 2001)

Within this institutional structure, landscape is addressed not only as an object of protection but also as a structuring category that integrates environmental, cultural, and spatial considerations. The integration between the Code of cultural and landscape goods (Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio), regional landscape plans, and environmental regulations exemplifies this union. Thus, the legal and institutional framework articulates a governance model where ecological sustainability, cultural heritage, and spatial planning become mutually reinforcing dimensions of territorial policy. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.3.3 HIERARCHY OF PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

Italian territorial governance is structured around a hierarchy of interconnected planning instruments, each associated with a specific territorial scale:

National

National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS)

Aligns territorial policies with the UN 2030 Agenda and EU Green Deal objectives.

Regional

Regional Territorial Plan (Piano Territoriale Regionale - PTR)

Regional Landscape Plan (Piano Paesaggistico REgionale – PPR)

Defines strategic guidelines for land use, environmental protection, infrastructure, and socio-economic development.

Provincial/Metropolitan

Provincial Territorial Coordination Plan (PTCP)

Coordinates regional and municipal plans; focuses on landscape, infrastructure, and environmental systems.

Municipal

Municipal Urban Plan (Piano Regolatore Generale - PRG)

Establishes local zoning, building rules, and land-use regulations.

Special Plans

Park Plans, Basin Plans, Landscape Plans

Instruments with thematic or sectoral focus (biodiversity, hydrology, heritage, etc.).

This multi-layered system is also described as “polycentric governance”, since multiple institutions share competencies that overlap in both space and subject matter. Coordination among them requires formal mechanisms, inter-institutional coordination meetings, and informal negotiation processes. (Reform of Title V, 2001)

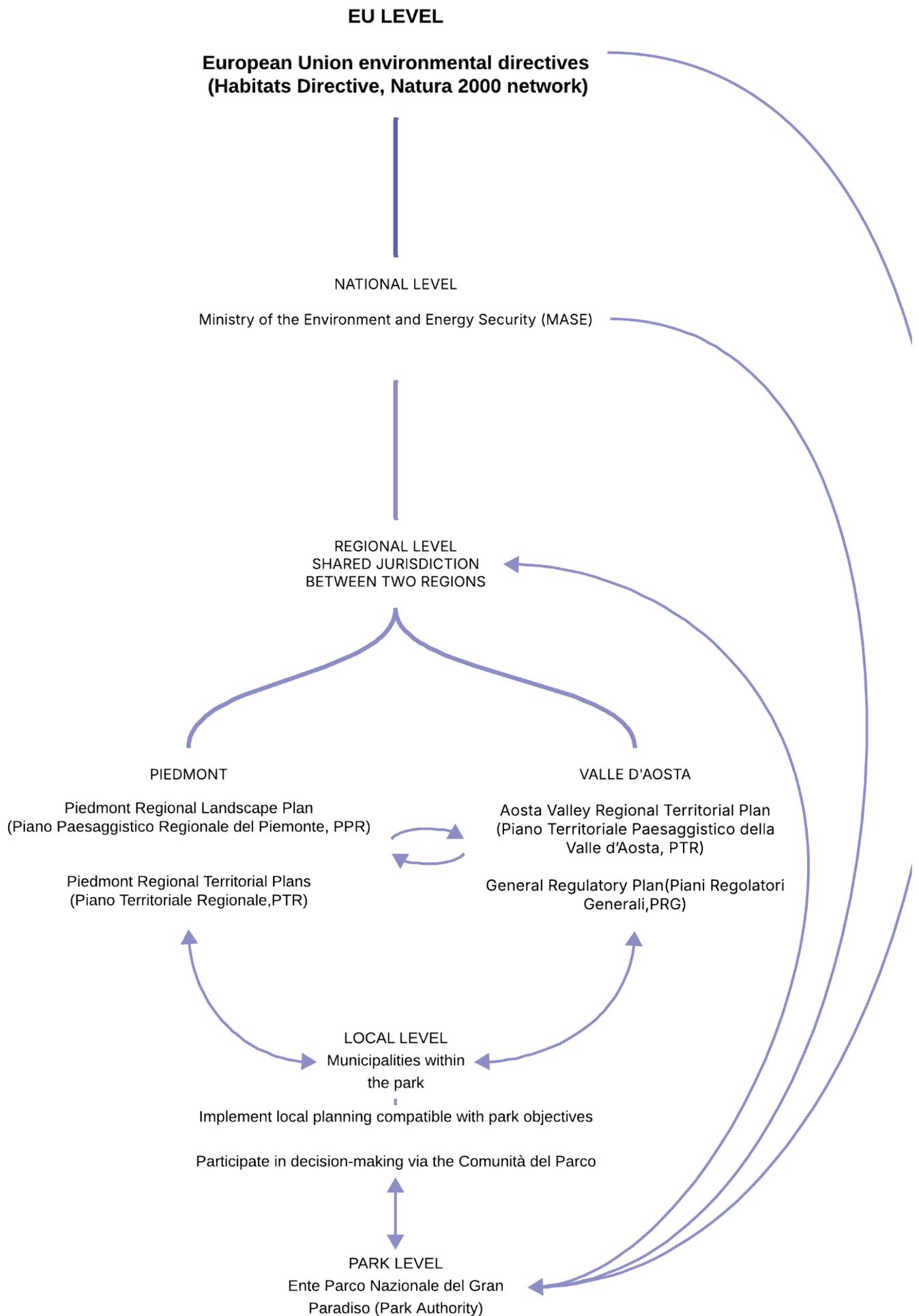


Figure 6. Planning instruments in Italy, Alfredo Ajungo

3.3.4 LANDSCAPE AS A CENTRAL POLICY DIMENSION

Landscape occupies a particularly prominent and distinctive position within the Italian governance framework, shaping both planning practices and institutional arrangements. The European Landscape Convention, signed in Florence in 2000, significantly reinforced Italy's long-standing commitment to integrating landscape values into everyday planning practice.

In line with this approach, the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code (Legislative Decree 42/2004) introduced a binding requirement for Regions to prepare Regional Landscape Plans (Piani Paesaggistici Regionali – PPR). These plans are developed jointly by Regional governments and the Ministry of Culture, reflecting a cooperative model in which landscape is integrated into decision-making processes and used to orient territorial transformations rather than being addressed as an isolated component. (Legislative Decree 42/2004)

Regional Landscape Plans define protected zones, scenic and ecological corridors, cultural-landscape assets, and criteria for compatible land uses. Because these areas often overlap with national or regional parks, the Regional Landscape Plans create a strong institutional bridge between landscape conservation and nature protection. This integrated approach is often cited as a feature that sets Italy apart from several European systems, where urban planning, landscape policy, and environmental regulation are more frequently addressed through separate institutional domains. (Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023)

Over the past two decades, Italy's territorial governance has become increasingly aligned with European environmental legislation and global sustainability frameworks. Several key EU directives play a decisive role:

- Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), which supports the Natura 2000 ecological network.
- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which prioritizes landscape connectivity and ecosystem restoration.

At the national level, these directives are operationalized through strategic documents such as the National Biodiversity Strategy (2020–2030) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS), both coordinated by MASE. These frameworks promote an integrated approach that links ecological protection, rural development, innovation, and social sustainability, consistent with the European Green Deal and broader Agenda 2030 commitments.

As a result, territorial governance increasingly operates across multiple policy sectors, extending beyond traditional spatial planning to include climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable mobility, and biodiversity conservation, in which climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable mobility, and biodiversity conservation are negotiated within a shared territorial perspective (Faludi, 2012).

In parallel with formal regulatory instruments, Italian governance has increasingly incorporated what the literature describes as “soft” planning mechanisms, referring to flexible and non-binding arrangements aimed at fostering innovation, cross-regional cooperation, and participatory

processes. These include territorial pacts, urban regeneration agreements, and coordinated landscape strategies.(Janin Rivolin, 2010).

Soft planning complements statutory tools by enabling adaptive, experimental, and collaborative forms of governance (Janin Rivolin, 2010). This approach is particularly evident in protected areas, where Park Plans serve not only as regulatory instruments but also as platforms for dialogue among municipalities, agricultural actors, conservation bodies, and tourism stakeholders. In these contexts, soft planning helps to manage complex socio-ecological landscapes through shared responsibility. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.3.5 TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AND PROTECTED AREAS

In the field of nature conservation, Italy has developed a distinctive model of nature conservation commonly referred to in the literature as the “Italian system of inhabited parks.” The Framework Law on Protected Areas (Law 394/1991) institutionalizes national parks not only as ecological sanctuaries but also as socio-cultural landscapes where traditional activities and community involvement play a central role.

The governance structure of national parks is based on the Park Authority (Ente Parco), an autonomous public institution responsible for coordinating conservation, land-use planning, and local development within park boundaries. The key planning instrument is the Park Plan (Piano del Parco), which serves both as a spatial plan (zoning, land-use regulations, mobility, environmental infrastructure) and as a socio-economic strategy (tourism, pastoralism, cultural heritage, education). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Within this framework, protected areas become operational spaces where territorial governance principles and national environmental objectives are implemented through negotiation with regional authorities, municipalities, residents, and economic actors. Governance emerges from continuous dialogue rather than top-down imposition, aligning Italy with broader European trends toward participatory and multi-level environmental governance (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023).

Within the broader Italian framework, protected areas serve as a crucial link where the principles of territorial governance are tested and articulated. National parks in particular bring together spatial regulation, landscape protection, and community participation under a unified vision of sustainable development. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

According to the Law on Protected Areas (Law 394/1991), a national park is legally defined as a “territory containing one or more ecosystems of national or international importance, whose conservation requires State intervention and management compatible with human presence.” Parks are conceived not as isolated sanctuaries but as living landscapes where ecological conservation, traditional livelihoods, and local economies coexist. Governance depends on ongoing negotiation among institutions, residents, and resource users (Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023).

Each National Park is managed by a Park Authority (Ente Parco), a public body operating under the supervision of the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE). Its institutional structure reflects Italy's broader multi-level governance approach and includes:

- A President, appointed by the Ministry;
- A Board of Directors, with representatives from regional and municipal administrations;
- A Scientific Committee, responsible for supporting ecological and management decisions;
- A Community Council (Comunità del Parco), composed of local mayors and socio-economic stakeholders.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

This structure ensures that national priorities, as biodiversity protection, landscape conservation, and sustainable development, are balanced with local interests such as rural livelihoods, tourism, and cultural heritage. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In practice, national parks function as negotiated governance systems, where decision-making emerges from a continuous dialogue between central institutions and territorial communities (Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015).

The Park Plan (Piano del Parco) as an Instrument of Integrated Governance

At the operational level, the principles of territorial governance are translated into action through the Park Plan (Piano del Parco), the main planning and regulatory instrument defined by Law 394/1991. According to Article 12, the plan must specify:

- The park's zoning system (strict protection, buffer areas, agro-pastoral or tourism-compatible zones);
- Land use and building regulations;
- Management guidelines for natural and cultural resources;
- Strategies for sustainable development, environmental education, and visitor management.

Once approved, the Park Plan becomes legally binding, replacing or integrating regional and municipal plans within the park's boundaries. This is one of the few contexts in the Italian planning system where environmental and landscape priorities hold clear legal precedence over local zoning decisions (Janin Rivolin, 2010).

3.3.6 GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK: A CASE OF CROSS REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Gran Paradiso National Park illustrates how cross-regional governance emerges through the interaction of multiple institutional actors. Today, with its 71,000 hectares spanning two

regions, Piedmont and Aosta Valley, and five municipalities, the park offers an ideal laboratory for understanding how multi-level governance operates within complex socio-ecological landscapes. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The park's trans-regional configuration creates a dense layer of institutional structures. Each region possesses its own legislative and planning frameworks, notably the Regional Territorial Plans (PTR) and Regional Landscape Plans (PPR), and enjoys a high degree of autonomy in land-use planning and cultural-heritage management under the 2001 constitutional reform (Title V). This arrangement reflects a polycentric governance model, where authority is distributed across multiple nodes rather than concentrated in a single institution. Effective park management, therefore, requires an ongoing mediation of regulatory frameworks, development expectations, and territorial identities, a process that lies at the heart of Italy's negotiated territorial governance (Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023).

The key instrument that operationalizes this cross-regional governance system is the Park Plan (Piano del Parco). As a binding planning document, it integrates conservation priorities, land-use regulations, tourism strategies, and socio-economic development objectives. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Park Plan explicitly acknowledges the park's trans-regional nature and establishes coordination mechanisms to ensure coherence across planning hierarchies. Its alignment with both:

- The Piedmont Regional Landscape Plan, focusing on ecological connectivity and sustainable rural development
- The Aosta Valley Regional Territorial/Landscape Plan, emphasizing cultural heritage, Alpine identity, and community-based sustainability

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

This alignment is not merely formal. It involves continuous dialogue through consultation committees, service conferences (*conferenze dei servizi*), and joint technical working groups. These mechanisms reveal the interplay between formal statutory authority and informal negotiation, a characteristic feature of Italy's adaptive and relational approach to planning (Janin Rivolin, 2010).

The Gran Paradiso case also demonstrates that territorial governance is not only an administrative task, but a cultural and political one. Although Piedmont and the Aosta Valley share an Alpine environment, they differ substantially in:

- Political cultures (e.g., the special-statute autonomy of Aosta Valley);
- Economic orientations (Piedmont's stronger industrial-agricultural system versus Aosta Valley's tourism-based and heritage-oriented economy).

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

As a result, conservation strategies must be negotiated within a broader perspective of territorial identities. The Park Authority facilitates this through:

- joint regional working groups harmonizing planning rules;
- agreements with agricultural cooperatives to support traditional grazing;
- participatory forums involving residents, researchers, and tourism operators.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

These mechanisms reflect a shift from government to governance, a model based on collaboration, mutual learning, and shared responsibility (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013).

3.3.7 PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

The experience of Gran Paradiso illustrates how the governance of national parks in Italy goes beyond a purely regulatory dimension. Local communities are represented through the Community Council and through consultative bodies that contribute to decisions on management, tourism, and rural development. These participatory mechanisms contribute to aligning conservation objectives with the economic and cultural needs of mountain communities, including sustainable agriculture, ecotourism, and the safeguarding of local traditions. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Gran Paradiso National Park shows that territorial governance extends beyond the coordination of institutional competences; it can be understood as a relational process influenced by negotiation, adaptation, and mutual learning. In this context, the park's participatory mechanisms, including the Park community, thematic consultation forums, and co-management agreements with municipalities and local associations, become key mediating spaces. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

These instruments translate regulatory objectives into locally grounded strategies, enabling residents, farmers, tourism operators, and municipalities to help shape conservation priorities and development trajectories. In doing so, they shift governance away from a purely top-down administrative approach toward a shared system of stewardship closely linked to territorial identity. (Bianchi & Richiedei, 2023)

Gran Paradiso thus functions as an interface between national and regional policy ambitions, such as ecological connectivity, landscape protection, or cultural heritage valorization, and the social, cultural, and economic practices of the communities living within the protected area. This multi-level interaction demonstrates that the effectiveness of territorial governance depends not only on institutional design, but also on the ability of governance frameworks to incorporate local knowledge, adapt to community needs, and respond to evolving socio-ecological conditions. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.3.8 GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Despite its achievements, the cross-regional model faces several persistent challenges:

- fragmentation of competences across multiple authorities;
- asymmetries between regional planning regulations;
- financial dependence on national and EU programmes;
- increasing climate-related pressures on alpine ecosystems.

To respond, the Park Authority has developed a series of adaptive governance strategies, such as:

- joint climate observatories with regional universities;
- participation in EU Interreg projects (e.g., AlpES, Econnect) promoting ecological connectivity;
- cross-border cooperation with French and Swiss parks, forming a networked governance regime that transcends administrative limits.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

These developments exemplify the Europeanization of territorial governance, in which local and regional systems progressively align with EU frameworks that emphasize landscape connectivity, resilience, and stakeholder participation (Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2015).

3.4 PARK PLAN FOR PARCO GRAN PARADISO

The actual plan for the Gran Paradiso Park was first established in 2005, with the delivery of all the documents that made up the plan, but the preliminary work for drafting the plan began many years later.

Between 1996 and 1998, the park authority prepared “Preliminary Studies for the Plan,” published in 2000 and updated in 2003, which constitute the analytical framework of the plan. In 2001, the board of directors approved a policy document entitled Criteria for the drafting of planning instruments, which constitutes the programmatic framework to which the three instruments must refer. - In 2003, the Park Authority requested a group of professionals led by architect Federica Thomasset to draft the three management instruments: the Park Plan, the Regulations, and the Multi-year economic and social plan (Piano pluriennale economico e sociale) (PPES). In November 2004, the Park Community approved the preliminary document and the framework for the three instruments, drafted by the professionals. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In 2005, the same preliminary documents were approved by the park authority’s board of directors (June 7, 2005).

In November 2005, the professionals in charge delivered the final technical documents for the PP, the PPES, and the Regulations. The executive council gives the documents to the Park Authority's Planning Council Commission and to the two competent Regions (Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta) to initiate consultations and gather comments before final approval by the authority. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Two key elements for the approval of the Plan emerged from the initial consultations: on one hand, the request by the communities to modify the boundaries of the Park and, on the other, the request by the Regions to integrate the PP with the Management Plan for the SCI and SPA, coinciding with the Park itself. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In 2007, in agreement with the relevant regional technical offices, a document was prepared to integrate the Sites of Communal Interest (SIC) and the Specific Protected Area (SPA) Management Plan into the PP, as well as the Environmental Compatibility Report requested by the Piedmont Region. In December 2007, the Park Authority's Planning Commission proposed changes to the zoning and the Notes of Agreement of the technical proposal, which the Board of Directors approved. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In 2009, the Park Community gave a positive opinion on the changes made to the technical proposal for the Plan. In July 2009, the Park Community adopted the multi-year economic and social plan. In 2009, the proposed change to the park boundary was approved by Presidential Decree on May 27, 2009, and published in the Official Gazette no. 235 on October 9, 2009. In November 2009, the Park Community gave a favorable opinion on the new zoning of the new perimeter of the Gran Paradiso National Park. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In 2013, the Board of Directors (DC no. 37 of November 29, 2013) approved the incorporation of some preliminary observations made by the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The park plan reflects the park's decision, facing some problems that may be considered unresolved or that could be addressed more effectively. In this sense, the park plan tries to define more organically the technical proposals, facing some bullet points for the development of the park in particular, the efforts go to some specific topics like:

1. How to insert and integrate the plan in the legislative and planning context of the two different regions in which the park is located, trying to have a unified management of the territory.
2. Which instruments have to act for the correct application of the Multi-Year Economic and Social Plan, and how to manage a possible organization between the different actors, like the two regions, the Turin province, the community inside the park, the mountainous community, and the Ministry of the Environment and Care of the Territory.
3. The homogeneity between the inner and external areas, the territorial governance and planning instruments of both regions.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Park Plan (PP) proposal was developed with the connection between a cognitive-evaluative, strategic, and normative scheme in mind. In this sense, three main documents were drafted, in which the technical proposal was inserted:

- a) Illustrative relationship: that contains the synthesis of the cognitive and interpretative scheme, the results of the participatory process for the selection of the park plan, the strategic scheme for the areas inside and outside the Parco del Gran Paradiso, the regulation scheme in which all the normative is specificized for the different interest points in the park, and finally the attached documents of the Management Plan for the Sites of Communitary Interest and the Zones of Special Protection (ZPS).
- b) The mapping of the area of the Gran Paradiso is composed of:
 - 1. Territorial mapping, on a scale of 1:50,000, which contains the principal ecological, functional, social, and cultural connections with the outside context.
 - 2. Directive plan, in a scale of 1:20,000, with the general organization of the territory, the different uses of the territory, the accessibility, and the services of the park.
- c) Technical Norms, done directly for the actors that have the power in the act of planning, programming, and regulation in the territory of the Gran Paradiso Park.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP, through the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive features of the Park's territory, landscape, and environment, aims to protect not only natural and environmental values but also historical, cultural, anthropological, and traditional heritage. At the same time, it promotes the social and economic development of local communities. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP acts as a strategic reference framework to guide and coordinate the actions of the various actors operating within the Park's territory, strengthening synergies while respecting institutional autonomy. It integrates principles of public participation, socio-economic and environmental dynamics, and the consideration of long-term effects of proposed actions. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP establishes a systematic regulation of permitted uses, activities, and interventions, conservation, recovery, enhancement, and transformation in the protected area. Its purpose is to preserve environmental resources and improve the overall quality of the territory. It also provides a framework of knowledge and assessment for the territorial information system and for decision-making processes affecting the quality and accessibility of protected sites, landscapes, and resources. In addition, the Plan introduces monitoring measures to guide activities and prevent damage to these areas. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The implementation of the PP involves the collaboration of all public and private stakeholders operating within the Park's territory. Execution of the Plan follows the indications and provisions set in its official cartography, as specified by municipal urban planning tools. The supporting documents of the Park Plan also provide interpretative guidance whenever necessary. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP is implemented through three main instruments, as specified in Title IV:

- a) the Park's multi-year Management Plan;
- b) the Implementing Project-Programs;
- c) the Strategic Projects.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The multi-year Management Plan identifies, in connection with PPES, the actions to be taken within its time horizon, the actors responsible for them, and the resources and methods of intervention. The Implementing Project-Programs address themes or sectors requiring more detailed operational specifications, exploring the potential uses of resources, environmental compatibility, and alignment within specific areas identified by the PP. Finally, the Strategic Projects, coordinated with the PPES, promote the strategic axes of the PP to maximize resource enhancement and address critical issues. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Park prioritizes the conservation and enhancement of its forest heritage, focusing on the stability of forest ecosystems and habitats of Community interest. Management of wooded areas follows regional legislation and the principles of sustainable development, with particular attention to biodiversity and the ecological and social functions of forests. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP identifies areas of high floristic and vegetational value due to their rarity, vulnerability, or unique characteristics. In these areas, and in other sites of significant botanical importance, the Park Authority promotes different forms of protection and enhancement for conservation, scientific research, education, and public enjoyment. These measures include monitoring systems, as well as integrating significant sites into cultural and educational tourism routes. The Park Authority safeguards traditional agricultural practices that conserve agroecosystem resources, recover heritage crops and breeds, maintain biodiversity, protect the agricultural landscape, and preserve local cultural identities. Sustainable development of agriculture and livestock farming is promoted through incentives for traditional methods and techniques, ensuring compatibility with conservation objectives. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP recognizes alpine pastures as both productive systems and integral components of the historical and cultural heritage, valuable to the identity of local communities. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Park identifies the system of paths and royal hunting roads as part of the historic settlement fabric, based on regional registers from Valle d'Aosta and Piedmont. Municipal plans (PRGC) define the specific routes and regulations for conservation, restoration, and redevelopment. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP designates areas for environmental restoration, where the Park Authority collaborates with municipalities and landowners to implement projects for redevelopment, recovery, and the rebalancing of altered ecosystems. These interventions integrate degraded areas into the broader territorial context, eliminate disturbances to wildlife (the creation of protected passages), and promote the restoration of natural habitats.

The PP identifies key infrastructure works to improve accessibility. Local urban planning instruments define their location, taking into account hydrogeological risk studies. Projects include upgrading access roads, removing critical points, improving safety, and establishing small parking areas designed to minimize impact. These serve as interchange hubs from which pedestrian routes depart. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The PP promotes sustainable tourism aligned with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. It encourages diversification of services, appropriate forms of use, and a balanced spatial and temporal distribution of visitor flows to strengthen local socio-economic conditions. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In agreement with local communities, the Park Authority also promotes, through direct and indirect actions, initiatives that improve the visitor experience and promote sustainable tourism development within the Park. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.4.1 METHODOLOGY IN THE PLAN

The territory of the Parco Gran Paradiso is inside a territory already planned, in a local way, on a provincial scale, and finally on a regional scale, so in this sense the Plan of the park has to take into account these actions, so it does not interfere with the system that is already in use. In addition, the park's territory has very uneven development, which requires more effective enhancement policies than those implemented to date, also for more effective conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The territory covered by the Gran Paradiso Park has the characteristics of a "cultural landscape" of great value but with some serious problems, which can be addressed with policies that are active in the economic, social, and cultural dynamics. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The Park Authority's duties should not be limited only to the "governance" functions that the park can carry out autonomously under its institutional powers. It must also include the recommendations of the World Conservation Union; these roles go beyond traditional regulatory measures to understand the strategic direction and ongoing assessment of projects and initiatives. With the essential support of the Park Community and in collaboration with other stakeholders, the Park Authority can help define objectives, possible scenarios, and "guiding visions," all based on a deep understanding of the issues, the actors involved, and the interests at stake. In this context, both the PP and the PPES have a responsibility to justify the choices they propose clearly and to provide evaluation ideas from consultation processes. In essence, the PP mission spans three main areas:

- Developing knowledge, assessment, and reasoning to support decisions;
- Setting objectives, strategic guidelines, scenarios, and guiding visions;
- Establishing policies and regulatory measures.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.4.2 DEFINITION FOR THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

It is important to highlight the significant change in the park's management issues over the last 30-40 years compared to those of its early days, around 100 years ago. This change, determined by a complex set of factors largely unrelated to local reality, can be traced to a dual axis: conservation/use. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Tourism intrinsically connects the challenges of conservation, maintenance, and land stewardship with the challenges of using its resources. As demonstrated by the experience of many European mountain parks, tourism is often the only factor capable of activating "use economies" that can finance maintenance expenses while providing employment, income, and improved living conditions for local populations, especially younger generations. However, if managed in ways that tourism can undermine the quality, viability, and even social accessibility of natural, cultural, and landscape assets. Within this potentially conflicting scenario, the goals set out in the Guidelines for enhancing tourism and forms of park use, whether recreational, educational, cultural, or sporting, as well as accessibility, mobility, transport, lodging, and hospitality, must be interpreted. It is crucial to underline that resolving tensions between conservation priorities and tourism development aspirations cannot depend primarily on restrictions and

protective rules. This is partly because of the need to consider the uneven social and temporal distribution of costs and benefits, advantages, and disadvantages. In practice, those who bear the burdens imposed by conservation measures are often not the same as those who gain the most significant rewards; moreover, the positive impacts of environmentally responsible tourism may unfold over timescales longer than those within which local communities expect their immediate needs to be addressed. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.4.3 TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

The studies conducted for the PP have shown the exosystemic and landscape continuity between the area of the Park and the Territories in the valleys that host the Park, in this sense one of the attached documents of the PP is about the territorial context in which the focused is to make evident some of the problematics that cares about the connection between the park and the external parts that interact with it. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Specific decisions concerning the external boundaries of the park are the responsibility of other institutional stakeholders, in the first place, the Regions. That is why this specific document focuses on some main goals, like:

1. How to ensure uniformity of regulations, especially urban planning regulations, between areas outside and inside the park that are similar in nature, also in the sense of the protection and obligations under the new Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape.
2. How to respond to the requirements of the Management Plan for Sites of Community Interest (SCI) and, where appropriate, extend the management rules laid down in the Community Directive to external Sites of Community Interest and Special Protection Areas (SPA).
3. How to involve entities operating outside the Park in sustainable development strategies affecting the Park and its socio-territorial context.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

It is evident that the PP cannot ignore the need to integrate the Park with its surrounding context and to put forward proposals accordingly. Although the success of these proposals depends on the agreement of the other institutional stakeholders involved, they can open the way to alternative solutions, even though they represent a key factor for implementing co-planning processes, which are also emerging within the Italian legal framework and are firmly rooted in international experiences of “compact planning” and inter-institutional agreements. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005). This issue becomes even more complex when considering the differences in planning instruments between the two regions. In the Aosta Valley, the Territorial Landscape Plan (Piano Territoriale Paesistico) (PTP) provides guidelines and regulatory provisions that largely align with the scope and competences of the PP, apart from certain aspects related to natural resource management. By contrast, in the Piedmont valleys, the Territorial Coordination Plan (Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento) and the Territorial Regional Plan (Piano Territoriale Regionale), both currently under revision, and the Regional Landscape Plan (Piano Paesistico Regionale) (PPR), currently under review, offer frameworks whose details are not directly comparable to the scale of the Park Plan.

The essential way to integrate the Park into its territorial, social, and environmental context lies in strategic planning. The coordination of actions and management policies affecting the Park territory should be defined. These guidelines must be clear to secure the necessary consensus and flexible enough to allow inter-institutional dialogue, review, and the adjustment of decisions by the different stakeholders. They should not be limited to the protected area boundaries or to the Park Authority jurisdiction. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The analyses conducted and shown in the PP, more specifically in the document titled Environmental compatibility, show that the natural environment of the Gran Paradiso National Park and its valuable resources remain in an excellent state of conservation. The development of wildlife over the last fifty years demonstrates the absence of critical factors threatening either the survival of species or the overall functioning of the ecosystem. On the contrary, the level of ecological complexity has reached its highest potential, considering the extreme environmental conditions of the area and the lack of intensive exploitation for more than seventy years. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The current plan does not seek to revolutionize existing practices but rather to make better and strengthen regulations, methods of use, and management practices already in force, either derived from previous plans or resulting from the ongoing work of the Park Authority.

The most significant effects of the new Plan lie in improving the relationship between the Park Authority and local communities. This is to be achieved through the sharing of rules, the simplification of authorization procedures, and the implementation of co-planning mechanisms that also look at the surrounding territories of the Park's boundaries (as outlined in the "Integration of the Park into the Context" document and the PPES). Together, the Management Plan and the PPES outline a set of initiatives to support local activities, particularly those related to management and conservation, to counter the progressive depopulation of the valleys. This integrated approach aims to combine environmental protection with sustainable tourism development and improved service quality for residents, thereby fulfilling the Park's general strategic objectives. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In this framework, the comparison with the 1983 Plan Outline highlights both continuity and innovation in the approach to territorial management. The earlier outline proposed dividing the Park into five main zones: Zone A, the "integral reserve"; Zone B, the "general reserve"; Zone C, designated for protection and development aligned with Park objectives; Zone D, "controlled development" areas; and Zone E, "external influence" zones, which were themselves divided into sub-zones. While the Project of Zoning specified in detail the activities and uses permitted within each category, the new Draft Plan adopts a more flexible approach, emphasizing general management guidelines rather than exhaustive prescriptions. One notable difference lies in the classification of agricultural areas: the Project of Zoning separated agricultural zones from residential and recreational areas, and the Draft Plan integrates agricultural land into Zone D, alongside historic and newly developed urbanized areas. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005; Parco Gran Paradiso, 1983)

The PP zoning system is designed to balance conservation objectives with the sustainable use of the territory.

At its core, Zone A serves as the central area of maximum protection, encompassing alpine grasslands, glaciers, and forests that have mainly remained unmanaged for decades. This zone is maintained under natural dynamics, allowing only strictly regulated hiking and mountaineering with minimal, pre-defined infrastructure. It covers 38,850 hectares, representing 54.67% of the Park's total area. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Surrounding this core are Zones B1 and B2, conceived as oriented reserves and pasture-oriented reserves, respectively. Zone B1 includes forests and lightly used alpine grasslands acting as buffer areas, where traditional uses and restoration of existing structures are permitted (23,921 hectares; 33.66% of the Park). Zone B2 includes mountain pastures suitable for improvement or compatible tourist activities, under grazing plans and prior environmental assessments (6,321 hectares; 8.9% of the Park). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Zone C is defined as an agricultural protection area, consisting of valley-floor grasslands and abandoned lands recoverable for agriculture and for enhancing local products. Only agricultural uses and non-construction activities for public enjoyment are allowed (1,769 hectares; 2.49% of the Park). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Finally, Zone D covers areas of economic and social promotion, including urbanized or urbanizable lands and infrastructure systems identified in municipal plans. Within it, sub-zone D1 highlights places of historical and cultural interest (199 hectares in total; 0.28% of the Park). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

This zoning framework represents an integrated management model that combines strict conservation with traditional land uses and sustainable local development, reinforcing the connection between the Park, its communities, and the surrounding territory. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

From an ecological point of view, the valleys of the Gran Paradiso Parks have a well-known environmental continuity, a territory with very high natural values, and even differences from one side of the valley to the other. The park plan has a line guide that follows a structured phase.

1. Starting by consulting the data of the Natura 2000 site, the motivations that have brought the proposal and designation of the site itself, with the refinement of the presence of priority habitats or species.
2. The recognition and individualization of the territory of the habitat available for each species, which motivates the proposal of the site.
3. Analysis of the conservation status and quality of the site, using a specific system of indicators capable of providing information on aspects considered critical/significant for the conservation of habitats and/or species that motivated the proposal/designation of the site:
4. identification of the current or potential impact of existing or planned land uses;
5. development of management strategies and specific actions to be taken: specifying general and detailed management objectives and any conflicting objectives; priorities for action, based on assessments that respect the specific institutional purposes of the site and take into account the associated costs and time required for implementation.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

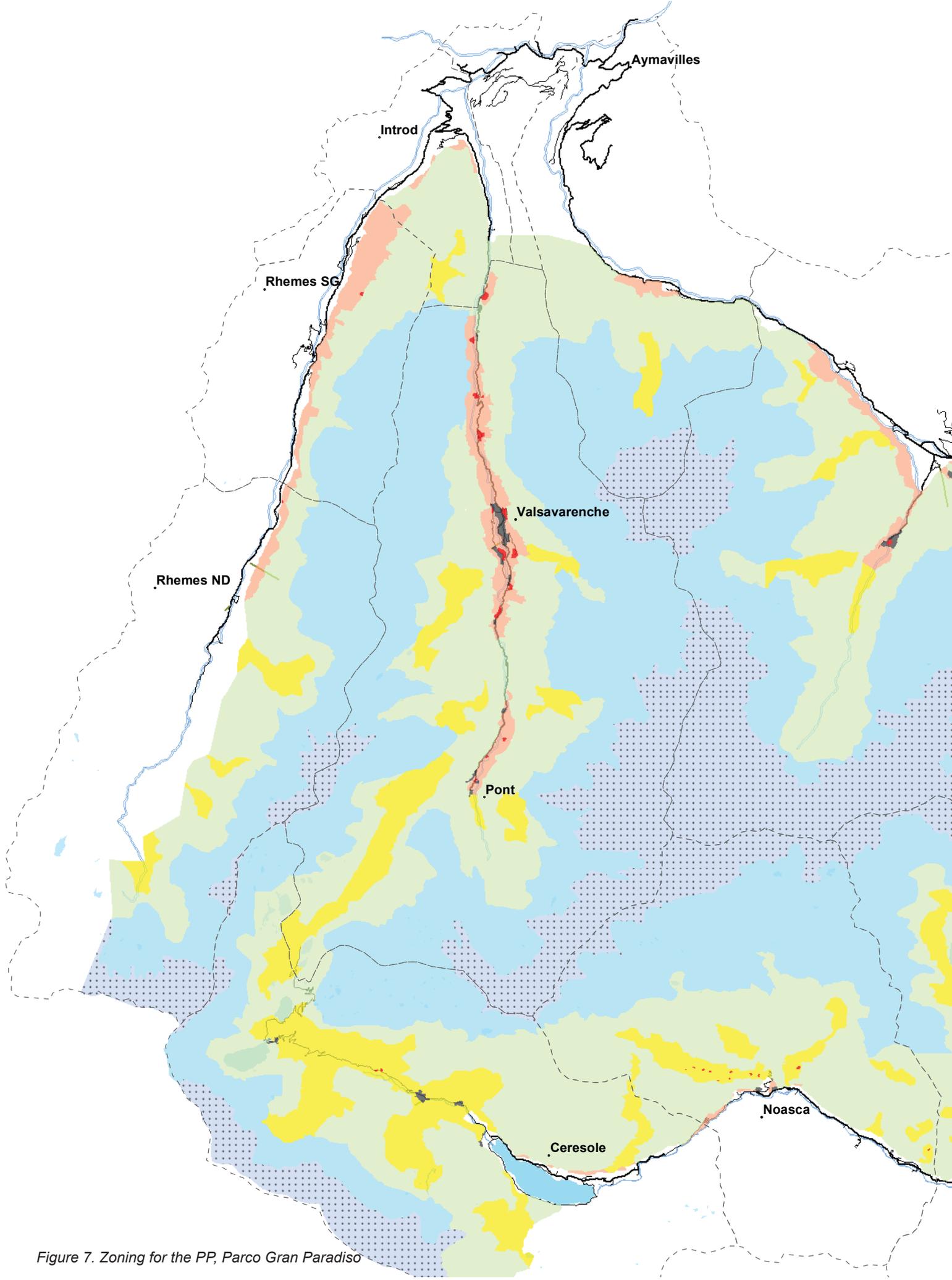
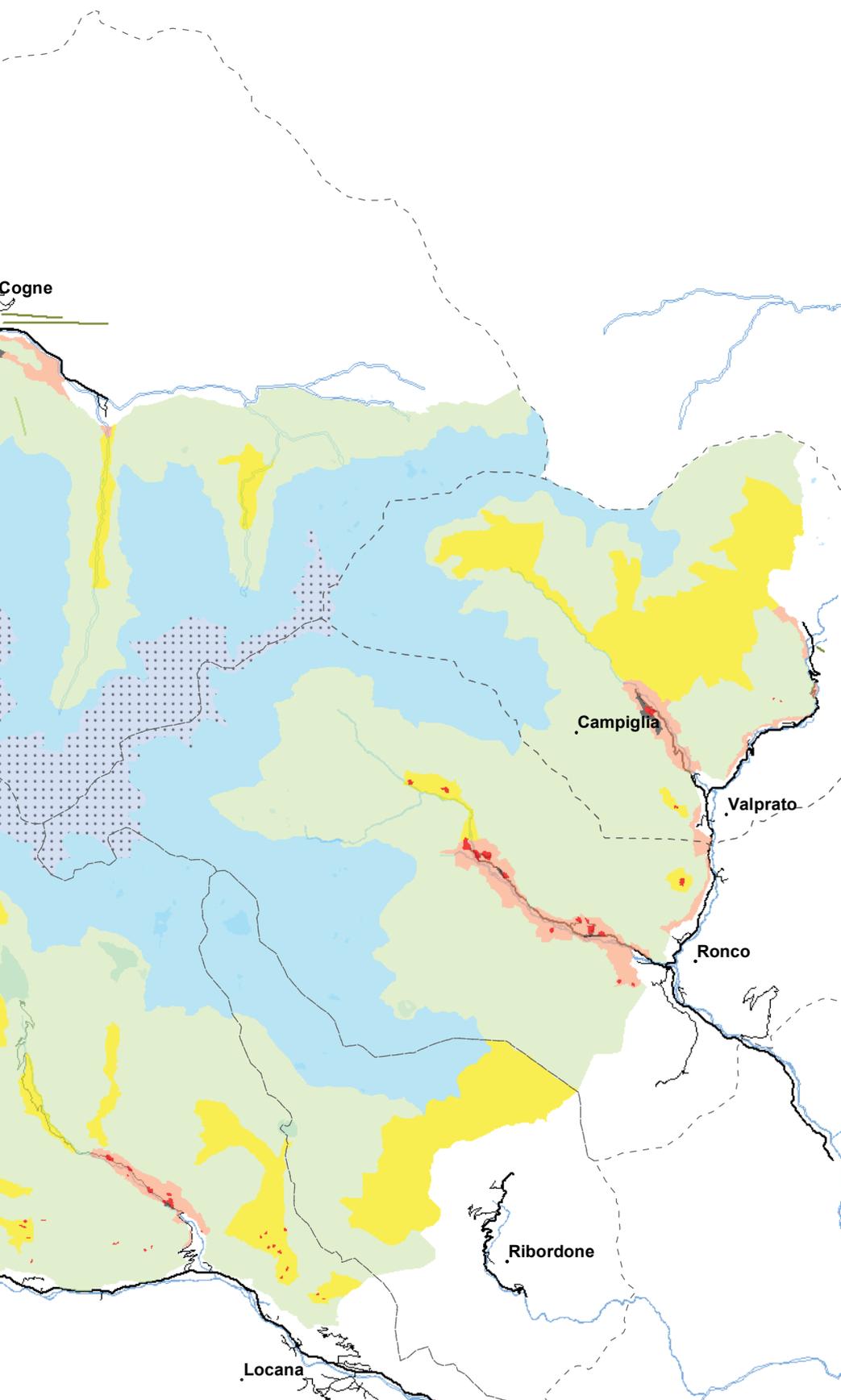


Figure 7. Zoning for the PP, Parco Gran Paradiso



- zone A : riserve integrali
-  A1: sistema d'alta montagna
-  A2: sistema delle aree naturali
-  zone B1 : riserve generali orientate
-  zone B2 : riserve generali orientate al pascolo
-  zone C : aree agricole di protezione
-  zone D : aree di promozione economica e sociale
-  zone D1: agglomerati storici

Zone a diverso grado di protezione

3.4.4 STRATEGIC PROJECTS

Beginning in September 2003, the Park Authority initiated an extensive participatory process involving representatives of the Park Community. Through consultation, data collection, and analysis, the Authority identified key strengths and weaknesses within the territory. These findings provided the basis for five strategic projects aimed at fostering the economic and social development of the Park Community. While each project is independent, its effectiveness is maximized through coordinated implementation, especially when integrated with regional development strategies. Together, these initiatives represent a significant opportunity to trigger a self-sustaining development process in the Park area. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

All of the strategic projects share several cross-cutting actions:

- The implementation of participatory processes to disseminate good practices in sustainable management;
- Alignment with the guidelines of the Alpine Convention Protocols;
- Coordination and stimulation of local initiatives;
- Participation of relevant institutions, including the Regions, the Province of Turin, Mountain Communities, trade associations, the Park Authority, and the Park Community;
- Promotion of dialogue and collaboration among local operators and institutions;
- Identification and testing of pilot projects;
- Strengthening the Park's identity;
- Monitoring and control of project effects and implementation.

(Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

A key objective of these projects is to consolidate the "Park system" as a recognizable image of quality and wilderness, both nationally and internationally. This branding aims to attract internal and external investment while facilitating partnerships and exchanges with other protected areas and Alpine institutions. The Park itself serves as a natural laboratory, providing unique conditions for the long-term study of ecosystem dynamics, including fauna, flora, genetics, and the effects of climate change. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In parallel, one of the projects addresses the demographic challenges facing the Park's communities, particularly depopulation and aging. The proposed interventions aim to strengthen the sense of belonging among residents and emigrants, improve living conditions, and expand essential services for families and individuals currently underserved. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The construction and activation of an integrated monitoring system are also cornerstones of the strategic projects. This system will be developed in collaboration with regional, national, EU, and international scientific institutions, fostering the exchange of information and techniques while promoting research activities. Beyond its scientific function, the monitoring system will play an essential role in communicating environmental data and insights to citizens, researchers, and educational partners. Regular meetings between the Park Authority, universities, and other scientific bodies will support the production of data and educational materials of lasting value. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Within the Park's strategic vision, a set of operational projects has been identified to translate the general objectives of sustainability, conservation, and community development into

concrete action. These projects, while autonomous, are designed to be mutually reinforcing and to promote a balanced integration of environmental protection with socio-economic growth. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Doing Business

This project is designed to strengthen the network of businesses active in the Park's territory, particularly in accommodation, tourism, and agricultural and pastoral activities. Its purpose is to improve the quality, skills, and innovation of local operators, as well as their capacity for association, integration, and networking. By supporting widespread project planning, the initiative seeks to:

1. Orient local initiatives towards qualification, integration, and environmental sustainability;
2. Coordinate them to avoid overlaps and underuse of resources;
3. Promote networking among operators and the diversification of services. Technical assistance, training, and promotional activities will prioritize innovative projects characterized by high quality and integration.

Creating Quality

This project aims to systematically guide all economic and social activities in the Park territory toward the objectives defined in the PP and the PPES. It promotes the territory as a coherent whole, ensuring quality in every segment, natural resources, infrastructure, services, and human capital, for both external users (visitors, researchers, investors) and internal users (residents and operators). Objectives include:

- Promoting local entrepreneurship and good practices;
- Enhancing the value of local natural, cultural, gastronomic, and craft resources;
- Differentiating the Park's offer from other areas to attract diverse visitor profiles;
- Encouraging environmental policies to protect the territory;
- Fostering ongoing participation from local operators and citizens, strengthening partnerships and a culture of hospitality;
- Consolidating local identity.

A voluntary quality system will provide economic and social operators with benefits such as promotion, support, and economies of scale, thereby aligning human activities with the overarching goals of conservation, cultural enhancement, and identity building.

Promoting the Territory

This project focuses on enhancing the competitiveness of the "Park system" relative to other protected areas and neighboring regions. By attracting new investments and supporting existing activities, the initiative seeks to foster sustainable economic development compatible with environmental protection. Key actions include strengthening the unified image of the Park, particularly its wilderness, and leveraging its productive capacity, innovative potential, natural and cultural assets, and the socio-economic fabric of local communities. In doing so, it aims to generate employment, counter depopulation, and improve residents' quality of life.

A Territory for Research

Recognizing the Park as a living laboratory, this project seeks to establish a center of excellence for scientific research on mountain ecology, with particular reference to the western Alps. Specific objectives include:

- providing the Park Authority with scientific data for optimal resource management;
- serving as a reference hub for the national and international scientific community studying alpine ecology;
- developing an ecosystem-based approach to managing mountain environments;
- offering a platform for university research and advanced training in alpine ecology.

Building Community

This project addresses demographic challenges by curbing depopulation and strengthening local communities' social fabric. It proposes improving living conditions, expanding services for families and individuals, and reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging within local communities and the Park itself. It also includes measures to involve emigrants and maintain ties with their new places of residence, fostering a broader and more resilient Park Community.

3.5 LOCAL COMMUNITY INTERACTING WITH GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK

The local community represents a fundamental dimension of territorial governance in the Gran Paradiso National Park. Demographic shifts, economic restructuring, and the gradual transformation of traditional settlement systems all shape not only the everyday life of the inhabitants but also the governance capacities and long-term developmental trajectories of the protected area. Drawing on ISTAT data and the Piano del Parco, a complex picture emerges in which depopulation, ageing, economic tertiarization, and cultural transformation intersect across the two regional sides of the park. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)



Figure 8. Touristic activities, Alfredo Ajungo

8,400 people live in the 13 municipalities of the Park, 6 in Piedmont (Ceresole Reale 153, Locana 1,309, Noasca 106; Ribordone 52; Ronco Canavese 315; Valprato Soana 96) and 7 in Valle d'Aosta (Aymavilles, 2098; Cogne 1312; Introd 648; Rhêmes-Saint-Georges 163; Rhêmes-Notre-Dame 79; Villeneuve 1268; Valsavarenche 161). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

However, only 300 people live within the park's boundaries. The park's territory, and therefore also the areas affected by the individual municipalities, is divided according to the degree of protection (strict nature reserve, general nature reserve, protected areas, and areas of economic and social promotion) provided for by the framework law on protected areas. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2025; Bilancio demografico della regione Valle d'Aosta: dettaglio per comuni, 2023; Popolazione residente al 31.12.2023 dati definitivi censimento continuo 2023, Regione Piemonte, 2023)

3.5.1 DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The demographic data have been taken from the Census of population and the ISTAT. With this data, we can observe an interesting phenomenon: a demographic dynamic characterized by a clear decrease in the resident population in the Piedmont valleys and the Aosta Valleys, further compounded by a pronounced aging of the Park's population.

In general, the most populated side today is the Aosta Valley side: in fact, 65.72% of the Park Community's population lives there. The depopulation of the Piedmont side is mainly attributable to the Soana Valley (-45.42%), while the repopulation of the Aosta Valley side is solely due to the demographic increase in the municipalities of the lower valley (+30.7%), which is in contrast to what is happening in the valleys on the Aosta Valley side. It is important to note that Cogne, together with Rhemes Notre Dame, has seen a trend towards repopulation over the last decade (+2.01% and +16.30% respectively), as highlighted by the most recent demographic figures (1999-2002). This phenomenon should not be overlooked, as it is a sign of recovery in the socio-economic context; it must therefore be supported with appropriate measures that involve the entire Park Community. (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, Piano del Parco, Relazione Illustrativa, 2019) (Bilancio demografico della regione Valle d'Aosta: dettaglio per comuni, 2023; Popolazione residente al 31.12.2023 dati definitivi censimento continuo 2023, Regione Piemonte, 2023)

Evolutione della popolazione dal 1971 al 2001

Fonte: Censimenti della popolazione ISTAT 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001

	1971	1981	1991	2001	var 71-01	var 71-01
Espace Gran Paradis	19.567	18.301	17.889	18.140	-7,29%	1.40%
Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso	9.232	8.439	8.305	8.278	-10,33%	-0.33%
Versante Valdostano	4.963	4.835	5.117	5.440	9,61%	6.31%
Valle di Cogne	1.687	1.486	1.440	1.469	-12,92%	2.01%
Valle di Rhemes	352	312	294	293	-16,76%	-0.34%
Valle di Valsavarenche	256	204	198	191	-25,39%	-3.54%
Bassa valle	2.668	2.833	3.185	3.487	30,70%	9.48%
Versante Piemontese	4.269	3.604	3.188	2.838	-33,52%	-10.98%
Valle dell'Orco	3.287	2.874	2.535	2302	-29,97%	-9.19%
Valle Soana	982	730	653	536	-45,42%	-17.92%

Table 3 Evolution of the population, PNGP

Some important factors from a social and economic perspective have been studied in the Park: the distribution of the population by age group and the aging trend of the Park's population, which is confirmed on both sides, particularly on the Piedmont side.

This demographic trend towards ageing is mainly due to younger people and families leaving the area in search of better job opportunities, education, and social services. Regarding the aging factor, there is a disparity between the two sides of the park. In the Aosta Valley, the percentage of elderly people (18.58%) is much lower than on the Piedmont side (31.36%), suggesting the latter is younger and potentially more dynamic. Analyzing the data for the valley, it can be seen that the Soana Valley has the highest percentage of elderly people (about 37% of the resident population). In contrast, the municipalities in the lower valley (Villeneuve, Aymaville, Introd) have the lowest percentage of elderly people (16.09% of the resident population). (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso, Piano del Parco, Relazione Illustrativa, 2019)

3.5.2 THE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

The historical settlement system of the Gran Paradiso area, traditionally organized along the lower sections of the valleys, has played a crucial role in shaping land use and supporting agro-pastoral practices. Over the course of the twentieth century, economic transformations changed this fabric. The closure of the Cogne mines, the decline of local manufacturing, and the growing attraction of urban industrial centres accelerated a process of depopulation and marginalization. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

As agriculture and pastoralism weakened, entire clusters of traditional settlements were abandoned, particularly in the Canavese valleys. The Piano del Parco identifies 220 historic clusters (171 in Piedmont and 51 in the Aosta Valley), connected by an extensive network of trails and linked to the system of mountain pastures. This heritage—of high historical, architectural, and landscape value—is today caught between two contrasting dynamics: abandonment on the one hand, and transformative pressures on the other, driven by new development models that at times introduce forms, materials, and typologies disconnected from Alpine traditions. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.5.3 THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The economic context of the Park Community is characterized by a demand for labor that is rather toward the service sector, which is also confirmed by the distribution of employees by sector of activity in the Province and Region. It is clear that the importance of the various sectors reflects the productive structure based on the tertiarization of the economy; the agricultural sector, on the other hand, makes a very modest contribution to the formation of added value in the Park. This data is even more alarming when considering the primary sector's importance in protecting and preserving the territory, as well as in providing employment opportunities for the mountain population. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The composition of the non-agricultural business fabric of the Park Community also shows a strong focus on the 'other services' sector; in fact, 43.86% of businesses in the Park operate in

the other services sector, while the industrial sector accounts for only 18.68% of businesses. Both sides of the Park reflect this specialization of businesses in the service sector. Another very important fact is that, when analyzing the number of businesses, there is a clear concentration of businesses in the Park on the Aosta Valley side, where 74% of the total number of businesses in the Park are located, as well as 96%, 69%, and 65% of those operating in the industrial, other services, and commercial sectors, respectively. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The business fabric is greatly affected by the location, which is mainly in high-altitude areas, far from main transport routes and service centers. This location and the lack of infrastructure to support the production system make it more challenging to start new businesses and, in particular, to maintain efficient businesses in the area, given the high operating costs that inevitably affect production costs and, therefore, the competitiveness of businesses. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

3.5.4 TOURISTIC ACTIVITY

Tourism is one of the park's central economic pillars, primarily through accommodation services. Hotels constitute the predominant lodging type and are highly concentrated in Cogne and, to a lesser extent, in Ceresole Reale. However, despite this presence, occupancy rates remain low during the winter months, revealing a marked seasonality that directly affects employment stability and the socio-economic fabric of the local communities. The summer season, by contrast, brings an apparent surge in visitor numbers, reinforcing the perception of a territory that lives intensely only a few months per year. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The provision of agritourism facilities is relatively scarce, given the growing demand and the area's potential. Most agritourism structures in the Park currently offer mainly hospitality services. In contrast, the provision of a diversified range of services is less evident (such as educational services, or those that promote typical products, or demonstrations of ancient trades or artisan activities). (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Local products, which differ between the two sides, are promoted through exhibitions and fairs organized separately on the Piedmont and Aosta Valley sides; similarly, wine and food (enogastronomic) products are promoted and commercialized, also separately. The "Atlas of Typical Products of the Parks" by Slow Food has surveyed the main local productions, revealing that the Aosta Valley side offers a greater variety of products and in significant quantities; in particular, wine and Fontina cheese constitute two important productions in terms of quality (certified) and quantity. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

On the other side there is a trend in the Piedmont side of the Park, of the decline of some of the most characteristic crafts such as the glassmaker, the knife-grinder, and the chimney sweep in the Orco valley, which have mostly disappeared but which, in the collective imagination, continue to be representative figures of the history and social conditions of the local populations. While this is affecting the economic fabric for historical reasons and appears difficult to reverse, an investigation by the Regional Craftsmanship Observatory shows growing interest among young people in artisan activities. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Summing up the efforts on the Piedmontese side of the Park, there are events and exhibitions promoting local craftsmanship: for example, the annual craft fair in June held in Pont Canavese, the Festa dei Magnin in Alpette, the craft exhibition, and the lumberjack festival in Frassinetto. But there are also transnational events and exhibitions, such as the “Festival des Metiers de montagne” (Festival of Mountain Trades), a traveling event founded by French institutions related to the mountains and organized in partnership with European countries. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In a sense, addressing the requests highlighted in the Piedmontese Observatory survey, the attempt to recover and enhance the ancient places where traditional crafts were carried out can be interpreted as a policy intervention. Other traditional crafts need to be enhanced, such as iron and wood working (Sparone, Noasca, and Ceresole), wicker weaving, felt footwear, Pont ceramics, the processing of wood, wrought iron, textiles (the draps of Valgrisenche and the dentelles of Cogne), and pottery (poterie). The enhancement of artisan activities can count on numerous incentives that the PPES (Park Plan for Economic and Social Development) will need to take into consideration. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)



Figure 9. Tourism campaign, Parco Gran Paradiso

3.5.5 AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The activities of the agricultural and livestock sector (agricolo-zootecnico), on both sides of the Park, assume substantial importance for safeguarding the territory, maintaining the traditional landscape, and keeping the population in disadvantaged mountain areas. This sector, perhaps more than others, is affected by policies and guidelines coming from different levels, regional, national, and European, concerning both environmental and agricultural matters. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Despite the orographic characteristics of the area, which negatively impact land usability for agricultural purposes and condition the competitiveness of the products, the agricultural sector, predominantly composed of farming, carries greater weight than at the provincial and regional levels.

Agricultural holdings are primarily located on the Aosta Valley side, where over 449 farms operate out of a total of 544 agricultural holdings in the Park. In comparison, only the remaining 95 farms operate on the Piedmontese side. However, this comparison is affected by the different definition of an agricultural holding used by the two Regions. There is a sharp decrease in the number of workers in the agricultural sector, mainly due to the aging of farmers and the lack of generational turnover, along with a low propensity to introduce process and product innovations, as well as inadequate processes for enhancing and commercializing agricultural and agri-food products. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005)

The majority of mountain pastures (alpeggi) are not active, and those that are active are partly underutilized. In summary, the agricultural sector within the Park is characterized by the presence of limited productions of high qualitative value, which, however, are not adequately enhanced due to both structural difficulties and specific socio-demographic conditions.



Photo Alfredo Ajungo

4. CASE STUDY 2 SAREK NATIONAL PARK

4.1 THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SAREK NATIONAL PARK

The idea of the national parks was first brought out by a Swedish explorer, named Nordenskjöld, who proposed the idea of the creation of national parks in the Nordic countries.

This idea arrived with the understanding of conserving the virgin wilderness of the Nordic countries for future generations. The non-human world was threatened because this existing condition for the industrialization of Sweden, a lot of resources for the economy, and the increasing production for agriculture, forestry, and mining, started to become a concern because of the quick transformation that they can lead to the non-human environment. (Mels, 1999)

Nordenskjöld, being conscious of the future changes that the wilderness will be facing, expresses their intentions in the phrase:

“Day by day, nature all around us is increasingly affected by the great inventions of the past century. The most peripheral countryside will soon be crossed by railroads and telegraphs.” (Nordenskiöld, 1880 in Mels, 1999)

They were exposed to different ideas to support these actions, such as giving a real image of the homeland as it was in the old days, when the farming lands were still small, and the woods were untouched by deforestation.

For Nordenskjöld, the mobilization of modern science and technology in the countryside reached a critical limit, which demanded a political response for the remaining wilderness areas.

However, this idea from Nordenskjöld was not very well accepted, some years passed with any changes in the perception of the conservation of nature, until 1904 when a German professor named Hugo Conwentz give a crucial conference to the Swedish Anthropology and Geography Society, in which one of the important topics was about the “risks that endanger the natural landscape and the ways to protect them” (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

The reforestation legislation confirmed the importance of a more scientific approach to forest management to act against the overexploitation of the increasingly private non-human world. At the same time, the idea of outdoor recreation came to support the ideology of national identity and Swedishness. (Mels, 1999)

A few months after this conference, Professor Conwentz, many people started to feel inspired by these new ideas about conservation. In a special case, this conference was relevant to Karl Starbäk, a member of the Riksdag (Parliament of Sweden), who presented a request to the second chamber of the Riksdag, not only asking but demanding protection measures for the nature and the natural monuments of the country. This request took on a lot of importance in the Riksdag. Later, it was approved by unanimous consent in both chambers of the Riksdag. (Mels, 1999; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

With these new changes, the government has new tasks, and it was when they asked for an extensive study to the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, which at the time was considered the expert in the topic of interest, that the academy created a committee for the conservation of nature. The main task of this committee was to research this new topic. During the first approach to his work, the committee for natural conservation began contacting scientists, farm owners, and farmers across the country, with the objective of proposing possible sites for future national parks. The committee processed all the gathered information and then presented it to the government. All the efforts keep their presence for some years, but with less importance, until the government decides to act. (Naturvårdsverket, 2009; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

The Ministry of Agriculture designated a group of experts, who also prepared a report on food security, and these experts also supported the creation of national parks. This report was pretty much the same as one done by the natural conservation committee. Taking this into account, the government proposed a new law project, which the Riksdag later approved. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

The conservation project was motivated by two fundamental ideas, expressed in different goals: one referred to as an “idealistic” goal and the other a “scientific” goal, both grounded in concern for deforestation, the draining of wetlands, and the disappearance of species and habitats. This project was supported by three main arguments: to secure the availability of natural historical records for scientists; to advance rational forest management; and to support educational purposes. The idealistic goal goes more to protecting the non-human world for the aesthetic of the landscape and the sensation of nationalism experienced in outdoor recreation and tourism. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

During the initial approach to the naming of these areas, the first idea was to follow the example of the United States and name them National Parks. However, some institutions inside the Swedish government want to name it instead the Natural Park. However, the government considers that designating a National Park better illustrates the primary goal of protecting these places: serving as national patrimony for the people. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989). Swedish parks were conceived differently from the American parks; they have a more dominant focus on scientific exploration and resource extraction. The intention was to offer this feeling of the non-human landscape, while maintaining enough distance from the interests of capitalist modernity. During the first years of the parks’ creation, the relationship between the parks and the growing tourism began to cause some problems. The American parks already had a long tradition of hosting tourism. However, this idea can be contradictory to protecting the wilderness, and the idea of tourism in the wilderness also began to influence national park policies in Sweden. (Mels, 1999; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

The idea of the non-human world within tourism and conservation policies is starting to affect one another, and, with the term non-human, I refer to the world separated from the human one. (Mels, 1999)

The rise of nature conservation and preservation at the beginning of the twentieth century, combined with the tourism movement and this artistic turn to the Swedish landscape, led to an increasingly pronounced expression of national romantic ideology. The early idea of tourism, engaging mainly the elites interested in science, confirmed this romantic view, through the STA yearbooks (STA or Swedish Tourist Association, emerge in the late nineteenth century with the Swedish nature conservation movement, with a special interest in the non-human world, promoting nature conservation and nature-based tourism), the intentions of the STA can be well recognized in the yearbooks, with a high interest in making this remote parts more accessible to the general public, reporting regularly some accessibility investments made in the wilderness, including overnight cottages and trails for this tourist commodification. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

This national parks would have a dual character in some way, thought not only for the science in the nature, but also this characteristic of outstanding touristic wilderness area, but always trying to keep this idea of maintain the wilderness, promoting the unharmed pass of the human, later many of all this places that were designated National Parks were widely explored and shown in the STA yearbooks. It is important to note that this year's yearbooks did not discuss conservation issues much, focusing mainly on promoting tourism in the new areas designated as National Parks. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

It was 1909, and Sweden had recently approved two new laws for the conservation of nature: one for the protection of natural monuments, and the other for national parks. With this last law came the creation of the first national parks in Sweden, and not only because they were the first in all of Europe. The national parks were: Abisko, Stora Sjöfallet, Sarek, Pieljekaise, Sanfjället, Hamra, Garp-hyttan, Ängsö, and a part of Sandön. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Hamberg, A., 1922, Sarek och dess fjällvärld (Sarek and its mountain world) in STA Yearbook)

The lack of clarity in the legislation leads to a very unequal selection of the national parks, which vary in many aspects, as in particular the size and other more specific characteristics, some of them cataloged as among the best in Europe, and others that today will not have the characteristics to be taken into account. This same story is repeated: some took after the eleven parks that were added without specific planning until 1986. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

The 1909 National Parks Legislation designated 14 national parks in total, until this law was changed. However, this law lack of many important factors and specifications, for example this law did not specify the reason behind the designation on an area or not the goal followed in this area, the law mainly focused in point what would mean the designation of an area as a National Park in terms of protection and conservation and authorized the government to set reglamentation and normatives for each park according to the special characteristics of each one of the areas, all of these useful for the administration and management. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

That is how in the law proposal No. 102 from the Riksdag, proposing a law about the protection of the natural monuments, a law about the national parks and a law that modifies the ordinance of the law from the 14th of April of 1866, that is about the transfer of the land rights of the public directly to the crown, after some debate the 17th of March the state council, the supreme court and the king approve to propose to the Riksdag to adopt the proposals for the new law. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

Some of the norms in the 1909 legislation are the following:

-When a zone owned by the crown that has been designated as a National Park, it will be forbidden:

-Destroy or damage natural aspects of objects, as processing mineral deposits or mining.

-Cut or damage trees that are still growing, take plants or parts of trees that are not berries, and that are used immediately (eat them)

-Hunting, capturing, or killing animals intentionally of any kind, with the exception when it is for defending from an attack on a person or on property,

-Transporting animals, damaging or taking eggs from the nest is forbidden.

-Bringing dogs

-Put signals or other disrupting objects with a publicity purpose.

- All the norms in the first article are not a restriction for the grazing, hunting, and fishing that are given to the Lappish inhabitants, except for bear hunting; for the Lappish inhabitants, it is not forbidden to have dogs for protecting their reindeer.

-For any of the national parks, the king can, by a special decree, change the exceptions listed in the first article, all the ones that need to be changed for the preservation of the park against danger, for scientific research, to facilitate travel to these areas, and to provide hosting for the travelers.

Resuming everything that has been discussed during the session of the Proposal for the law No. 102, the project for the law that the expert has done contains not only dispositions in the penal sense, but also some administrative norms that also have an indirect penal meaning, this because they establish some exceptions to the dispositions in which not following them can be punished.

Even if all these administrative regulations can be very accurate in many senses, they have to be adapted to the specific nature and situation of each park in particular, and they can be modified in an easy way without too much effort when it is necessary. (Raksdag, 1909)

Over the following decades, the situation regarding conservation and national parks remained relatively calm. From 1910 to 1930, five new national parks were added to the Swedish system. The STA yearbooks continue to showcase the incredible beauty of Swedish nature, and the task of conveying this nature was assigned to scientists, who were responsible for interpreting nature and the non-human world to the general audience. The figure of the scientist plays a central role in many situations, as in the selection of the national parks, and this important job was represented throughout the yearbooks. In the case of Sarek, the STA dedicated an article in 1922 to the geographer and mineralogist Alex Hamberg, thereby making evident its efforts to designate spaces for tourism. (Zachrisson, 2009; Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

With a different focus than in previous decades, the STA framed itself as a proponent of nature conservation and positioned itself and its actions as a driving force for achieving it in Sweden. The Yearbooks became a fundamental tool for the divulgation of information to the society, in terms of the conservation and its relation with tourism, making evident that the national parks were the most significant conservation feature of the time and making evident the connection between the touristic movement and the nature conservation, as they argue that one depends on the other, they make the affirmation that one of the most patriotic and most significant tasks for the STA was to open this path into the nature and its outdoor life and attractions, since this was the fundamental rationale for the nature conservation. (Zachrisson, 2009)

As the STA began to emphasize active participation and discussion in the conservation idea, travel for leisure rather than for scientific purposes became more noticeable. The STA prints the concept of making tourism a bridge between humans and the non-human world, a practice they believe will continue to promote nature conservation.

However, not everything can go as smoothly as it did. Some difficulties started to come out, the Swedish Society for the conservation of Nature and the STA start to question the locations of the parks, due to the extreme remoteness of these ones, all these disagreements take place while the accessibility arguments were increasing and suddenly with this discussion a report came out, in which they criticized how accessibility arguments had been promulgated in the selection of the parks, such as the example of Abisko National Park. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

Their problem more specifically was because certain types of tourists and with them some commercial development and activities risked with this idea of wilderness. As they express: "We cannot and should not demand splendid isolation of the national parks, considering that it is Sweden's most scenic area, and it should be open to everyone who appreciates the wilderness life, it will be painful if this area would lose the essence of its wilderness atmosphere due to massive invasion of the ordinary tourist crowd". It was a considerable incongruence of interest between the people involved, because some people ask for this increasing accessibility to the parks but with benefit for only a particular type of visitors, not for the normal, ordinary tourists that will damage this non-human world, when at the same time the STA stands for making the parks more accessible, to share it with every nature lover. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

An interesting presence in the northern national parks is the Sámi, whose presence, compared to that of tourists and reindeer herding, was not considered a threat to the wilderness ideal. However, the interaction with the Sámi in the planning process is one of leaving the Sámi without a voice or decision in policymaking and decision-making for areas designated as national parks, because Sámi people were considered primitive objects, as part of the long history of Sámi repression in Sweden. (Andersson, 2017)

Further contradictions emerge, as invasive species altered environments, predators threatened the Sámi reindeer economy, and incidents of industrial pollution called for new regulations for the natural wilderness. Another big challenge was posed by mining and hydropower development, because after a revision of the National Parks Act, the government began allowing “particular interest” to take precedence over park status, opening the possibility of mining. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

In the following decades, the discussion on urban and regional planning in Sweden, and the rise of municipal leisure planning (*fritidsplanering*) in the 60s and 70s, confirmed the reorientation of the wild to an ambitious policy concerning outdoor recreation and public health in urbanized society. With rapid urbanization and the construction of new residential spaces, frame the National Parks as important for public outdoor leisure and as a valuable contribution to securing open access to spaces for outdoor recreation. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)



Figure 10. fjällfotograf, Tore Abrahamsson

A new idea emerged: the concept of scientific conservation of the past had now changed to an ideal of preserving natural areas to provide public opportunities for recreation and to avoid the harmful effects of urban industrial waste. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

After several decades of low attention to national parks, natural conservation, and tourism, questions reappeared in the 1980s, and articles about nature conservation and national parks abounded. Many critics were against the tourism practice, because it shows that tourism could have a negative impact on natural areas. The case against cars marks a greening of national park tourism, as it shows a certain degree of elitism, reserving access to some hikers. Added to the accessibility question was the debate over entrance fees to generate revenue for nature conservation, but this idea of charging entry fees confirmed the touristic quality of the non-human world, reinvented as a tourist commodity. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

4.1.1 TRANSITION TO NEW PARK PLAN

The historical development of Sarek National Park reflects the consolidation of a Nordic conservation paradigm grounded in the protection of perceived wilderness, scientific authority, and national romantic ideals (Mels, 1999; Naturvårdsverket, 1989). From its designation in 1909 as part of Europe's first national parks, Sarek was shaped by a vision of nature largely separated from human intervention, where preservation, scientific exploration, and controlled access prevailed over considerations of permanent settlement or local governance. At the same time, this path reveals persistent tensions between conservation and tourism, accessibility and wilderness ideals, as well as the exclusion of Sámi communities from planning and decision-making processes (Zachrisson, 2009)

Throughout the twentieth century, shifts in conservation philosophy, from a scientific and conservationist approach toward broader concerns related to recreation, public health, and environmental protection, gradually expanded the social and political dimensions of national parks (Naturvårdsverket, 2008). However, these changes did not immediately yield coherent governance frameworks capable of addressing competing land uses, indigenous rights, or the increasing pressures from mining, hydropower development, and tourism (Naturvårdsverket, 1989). The lack of clearly articulated objectives and adaptive regulatory instruments left park management largely dependent on centralized state priorities rather than territorially negotiated arrangements.

This historical background is essential for understanding contemporary governance dynamics in Sweden's protected areas. It demonstrates how early legal frameworks, administrative practices, and conservation ideologies continue to shape present institutional configurations. The following chapter, therefore, shifts the focus from historical formation to the territorial governance system, examining how Sweden's decentralized and multi-level governance structure influences the management of national parks today (Sandström, 2006). The specific planning instruments and management strategies applied within this framework will be analyzed in later sections of the thesis.

4.2 TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Sweden's territorial governance system is organized around a decentralized and multi-level structure, articulated across three constitutionally recognized levels of government, national, regional, and local; complemented by specific arrangements related to European Union governance and the representation of the indigenous Sámi people. This arrangement reflects Sweden's broader administrative tradition, which emphasizes subsidiarity, transparency, and a high degree of local autonomy. (Hedlund, 2017)

At the national level, legislative power rests with the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), while the Government Offices (Regeringskansliet) and approximately 400 central agencies are responsible for policy implementation and public administration. Among these, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket) plays a central role in environmental and landscape governance. It coordinates the establishment and management of national parks, oversees environmental monitoring, and ensures alignment between national environmental goals and European directives such as the EU Habitats Directive.

At the regional level, Sweden is divided into 21 counties (län), each managed by a County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelse), which represents the national government, and a Regional Council (Regionfullmäktige), which represents the elected political assembly. The County Administrative Boards hold extensive responsibilities for spatial planning, environmental protection, and coordination of protected areas, often serving as intermediaries between national agencies and local municipalities (Bjärstig & Sandström, 2017).

At the local level, there are 290 municipalities (kommuner), each governed by an elected municipal council responsible for local planning, infrastructure, and service delivery. Municipalities enjoy substantial planning autonomy under the Planning and Building Act (PBL 2010:900), which grants them authority over land use and development within their territories. This local planning monopoly represents one of the defining features of Swedish territorial governance and is commonly associated with its strong bottom-up planning tradition. (Fredriksson & Smas, 2013)

This structure applies uniformly across Sweden, with the notable exception of Lapland and Sápmi, where specific governance arrangements recognize the role of the Sámi Parliament and reindeer herding communities. These institutions introduce an additional layer of decision-making in matters concerning land use, resource management, and cultural heritage, reflecting the integration of indigenous governance within the broader Swedish administrative framework.

4.2.1 HIERARCHY OF PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

- **EU LEVEL:** European Union environmental directives (Habitats Directive, Natura 2000 network)

- **NATIONAL LEVEL:** Government of Sweden, Ministry of Climate and Enterprise
 - Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA/Naturvårdsverket)
 - Develops national park policy
 - Approves management plans

- **REGIONAL LEVEL:** County Administrative Board
 - Implements SEPA directives
 - Supervises management of Sarek and other parks
 - Coordinates with municipalities and Sámi communities

- **CO-MANAGEMENT LEVEL:** Laponiatjuottjudus (Laponia Management Board)
 - Sámi villages (samebyar), municipalities,
 - the County Board, and SEPA representatives
 - Responsible for the collective management of the Laponia World Heritage Area

- **LOCAL / INDIGENOUS LEVEL:** Sámi Communities (Samebyar)

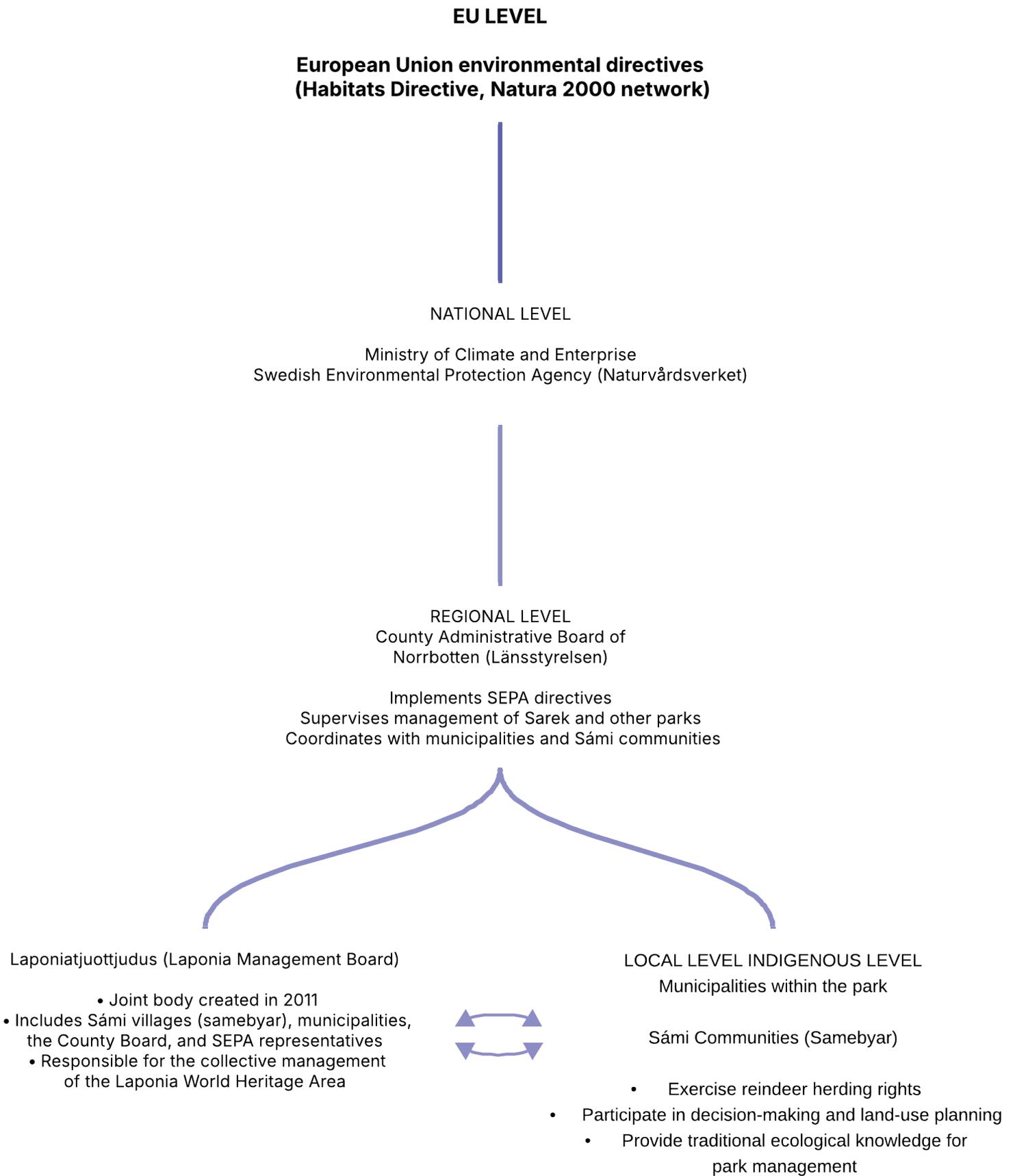


Figure 11. Planning instruments in Sweden, Alfredo Ajungo

4.2.2 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Sweden's territorial governance is supported by a coherent legal and policy framework that brings together environmental protection, spatial planning, and regional development. The system's strength lies in its capacity to link long-term sustainability objectives with everyday administrative practices. (Hysing, 2010).

The main legal instruments include:

- The Environmental Code (Miljöbalken, 1998:808) is a comprehensive framework law that consolidates environmental legislation into a single code. It establishes the principles of sustainable management of natural resources and provides the legal foundation for the designation and management of national parks, nature reserves, and cultural landscapes.
- The Planning and Building Act (PBL 2010:900), the key legislative instrument for spatial planning and land-use regulation, emphasizes coherence between environmental and urban policies.
- The National Environmental Quality Objectives (Miljömål) are sixteen long-term sustainability goals guiding all levels of government toward the preservation of biodiversity, climate adaptation, and the sustainable use of natural resources.
- The Regional Development Strategies (RUS) are strategic frameworks prepared by each county to align regional development priorities with national sustainability and cohesion goals.

Taken together, these instruments contribute to a system in which national objectives are pursued through regional coordination and local planning instruments, ensuring that environmental protection is embedded within territorial governance at every level (Hysing, 2010).

4.2.3 GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED AREAS AND NATIONAL PARKS

Sweden's model for the management of protected areas shows a balanced integration of ecological protection, scientific research, and public access. National parks are established by the national government, based on proposals from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, and are managed in cooperation with the relevant County Administrative Boards. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Unlike in Italy, where each park is administered by an autonomous Park Authority, in Sweden, the management responsibility rests with the County Administrative Board of the county in which the park is located. This arrangement creates a direct institutional linkage between regional administration and protected area management, ensuring consistency between conservation strategies and broader regional development objectives (Zachrisson, 2009).

Each national park operates under a Management Plan (*Skötselplan*), developed by the County Administrative Board and approved by the Swedish EPA. The plan defines zoning, conservation measures, and visitor management rules, and it is periodically revised to ensure alignment with the Environmental Code and the National Environmental Quality Objectives. These plans are subject to a public consultation process involving municipalities, landowners, NGOs, and, in the northern regions, Sámi reindeer herding communities.

This framework reflects what is commonly described as Sweden's co-management principle, whereby state institutions and local actors share responsibility for natural resource conservation. The system promotes transparency, continuous learning, and legitimacy in governance (Sandström et al., 2015).

Indigenous Governance: The Sámi Dimension

A defining feature of territorial governance in northern Sweden is the formal recognition of Sámi governance institutions. The Sámi Parliament (*Sametinget*), established in 1993, functions both as a representative assembly for the Sámi people and as a governmental authority under the Ministry of Culture. It performs advisory and administrative roles concerning reindeer husbandry, cultural heritage, and land-use policy within Sápmi, the Sámi homeland located in the northernmost regions of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. (Allard, 2018)

Within this framework, reindeer herding communities (*samebyar*) hold legally recognized land-use rights, granting them a formal position in decision-making processes regarding natural resource management and the governance of protected areas. In regions such as Lapland, home to Sarek, Stora Sjöfallet, and Padjelanta National Parks, Sámi communities act as co-managers, contributing traditional ecological knowledge and participating in negotiations over access, conservation measures, and tourism regulation. (Allard, 2018)

This co-management approach represents a distinctive form of territorial governance in which indigenous self-determination intersects with state environmental policy, an increasingly influential model for equitable and sustainable conservation. (Klocker Larsen, Raitio, 2022)

Governance in the Context of Lapland and Sámi Co-Management

The governance of Sarek exemplifies Sweden's multi-level and decentralized territorial governance system. Formally, the park is owned by the Swedish State and administered by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (*Länsstyrelsen i Norrbottens län*) under the supervision of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (*Naturvårdsverket*).

The County Administrative Board is responsible for:

- Implementing national environmental policy within the park;
- Coordinating and updating the management plan (*Skötselplan*);
- Supervising visitor regulations and biodiversity monitoring;

- Facilitating dialogue with municipalities and Sámi communities.

Sarek does not have a dedicated park authority. Instead, its management is embedded within regional administration, ensuring coherence between environmental objectives and regional development strategies. This administrative integration, rather than institutional separation, illustrates a core principle of Swedish governance: coordination, transparency, and trust between government levels (Sandström et al., 2015; Hysing, 2010).

Since 1996, Sarek has been part of the Lapponia World Heritage Area, together with Padjelanta, Stora Sjöfallet, and Muddus National Parks, as well as several Sámi villages (*samebyar*). The UNESCO inscription marked a turning point in governance, requiring Sweden to establish a management system that reflected both natural and cultural values.

In 2011, the Lapponia Management Board (Laponiatjuottjudus) was created, a pioneering co-management institution composed of representatives from Sámi communities, local municipalities, the County Administrative Board, and national agencies. Laponiatjuottjudus coordinates the management of all Lapponia parks, ensuring that:

- Sámi knowledge and land-use practices inform conservation decisions;
- Reindeer herding continues within park boundaries as a legitimate and sustainable activity;
- Landscape management integrates ecological and cultural priorities.

This model represents one of Europe's most advanced forms of indigenous co-management, in which decision-making power is genuinely shared rather than merely consultative (Klocker Larsen, Raitio, 2022; Stjernström, O., Pashkevich, A., & Avango, D., 2020).

Governance Instruments: The Management Plan and Co-Management Agreements

Sarek's management framework is articulated through the Skötselplan för Sarek Nationalpark, developed collaboratively under the guidance of Laponiatjuottjudus. The plan delineates three principal zones:

- Strict Nature Zones, where human activity is minimal and guided by ecological objectives;
- Traditional Use Zones, where Sámi reindeer herding is recognized as a core element of the landscape's identity;
- Visitor Zones, where tourism and research activities are permitted under controlled conditions.

These zones embody the Swedish principle of adaptive management, in which conservation and cultural use are balanced through continuous negotiation rather than rigid separation (Stjernström, O., Pashkevich, A., & Avango, D., 2020).

Moreover, formal co-management agreements between Sámi communities and the County Administrative Board regulate seasonal grazing, migration routes, and herd movements. Through these mechanisms, governance in Sarek operates as a system of deep dialogue, in which decisions emerge from interconnected processes of negotiation and mutual learning among actors with distinct knowledge systems and values. (Laponia, 2012)

Sarek's designation as an IUCN Category II Protected Area introduces an inherent tension between strict ecological protection and the recognition of indigenous land rights. While the Environmental Code prioritizes the preservation of natural conditions, Sámi reindeer herding remains an active and legitimate land use protected under Swedish and international law. (Laponia, 2012)

Historically, conservation policy in Lapland tended to marginalize traditional practices, considering them incompatible with environmental objectives. Over time, however, reforms in law and governance have redefined Sámi cultural landscapes as integral to northern ecosystems (Rasmus Kløcker Larsen & Kaisa Raitio, 2022).

Today, Sarek's management reflects an inclusive conservation paradigm, aligned with international frameworks such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007). This paradigm acknowledges that the preservation of biodiversity in Arctic and sub-Arctic environments is inseparable from sustaining the traditional ecological knowledge and land-use systems of the Sámi people. (Stjernström, O., Pashkevich, A., & Avango, D., 2020)

4.2.4 GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Despite its achievements, Sarek's governance model faces persistent challenges, including:

- Jurisdictional complexity, with responsibilities shared across multiple administrative and indigenous institutions;
- Climate change, affecting reindeer pastures, migration routes, and hydrological regimes;
- Tourism pressures, which, though limited, require careful management to prevent ecological degradation;

Addressing these issues requires a sustained commitment to adaptive co-management and collaborative learning. Recent studies emphasize the need for long-term institutional stability, capacity-sharing, and trust-building to maintain effective governance amid changing environmental and social conditions (Rasmus Kløcker Larsen & Kaisa Raitio, 2022).

Sarek National Park is frequently cited as an example of polycentric and intercultural governance, a structure in which multiple institutions, jurisdictions, and knowledge systems interact to manage a shared landscape. The combination of state environmental agencies, regional administrations, and Sámi governance bodies forms a networked, place-based governance framework capable of adapting to both ecological and cultural dynamics. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989; Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Laponia, 2012)

This case illustrates how territorial governance cannot be understood as a fixed institutional design, but rather as a dynamic relationship between policy, place, and people. Sarek stands as a paradigmatic example of how protected areas can function as spaces of negotiation between global conservation agendas and local ways of life, a tension and synthesis that lies at the core of this research. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989; Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Laponia, 2012)

4.2.5 SWEDEN TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE MODEL

The Swedish model of territorial governance demonstrates how decentralization, legal coherence, and stakeholder participation can coexist within a unified national framework. Compared to Italy, Sweden's governance relies less on separate park authorities and more on administrative integration through its county boards and sectoral agencies. This arrangement results in a system that is institutionally efficient yet responsive to local and cultural dimensions, particularly in northern regions where Sámi rights and traditional livelihoods are integral to the landscape's identity. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In this sense, the governance of protected areas in Sweden reflects broader Nordic governance traditions, often associated with consensus-building, long-term stewardship, and continuous negotiation between human use and ecological integrity. The case of Sarek National Park exemplifies these dynamics: a landscape shaped by both strict conservation measures and indigenous land rights, where the tensions and synergies between state policy and local autonomy become central to understanding the evolving forms of territorial governance in northern Europe. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Laponia, 2012)

4.3 NATIONAL PARKS PLAN FOR SWEDEN

4.3.1 NATIONALPARKSPLAN 1989

The developments in state policy-making, which added these concerns about tourism, led to a plan that seeks to address all these concerns. This expression became the National Park Plan of 1989. This long-term strategic plan called for a fairly expansive reconsideration of the national parks system, supported by a significant increase in state funding. With this support ten new national parks were integrated to the system, most of which were in the southern part of the country, something new, due to the majority part of the parks were located in the northern most part of the country, and this decision of create parks in the south part of the country was taken because of the latest discussions about the greenspace accessibility debate in the Swedish planning. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

During planning for new national parks and discussions about existing parks, the question often arises: What requirements must designated areas meet to be considered national parks? Taking this into account, some research begins by conceptualizing national parks within the Swedish framework and identifies the key considerations for selecting new areas. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

The principal criteria were based entirely on the actual legislation. However, there were also some extensions to the legislation for special cases where it was not detailed enough for selection in future areas. (Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

These are some of the criteria that the Conservation Agency set for the selection and justification for the National Parks:

- There should be areas that have certain types of unique and representative Swedish landscapes. The landscape type should be defined in general terms based on the large-scale morphology and the nature present in the area, given the location within the country.
- The area should be constituted by natural landscapes or mostly natural landscapes, with not so much human intervention. The nucleus of the park and the central part should be composed of natural habitats considered native to the place
- It can have traces of cultural influence in farming lands.
- It should have land morphology and natural environments that are considered important and special, which have a highly scientific value, taking into account that each park will also be considered as a tourist attraction.
- It should have a minimum size that can vary depending on the specific morphology; there are some more requirements for the bigger-scale parks than the smaller ones. Usually, the park should be at least 1000 ha. However, for the specific case of mountainous areas, it should be at least 25,000 ha.
- The selection should be conducted all around the country, and it should be focused on the kind of landscape that is still not present in the other national parks. This point has some limitations: landscapes with significant cultural influence may be added to other criteria, leading to their not being taken into account.
- It should be used in a proper way for outdoor recreation, at the same time, for natural research and investigation.
- In case of risk or conflict of interest between conservation and recreation, a zonification with special disposition should be conducted to cover both interests.

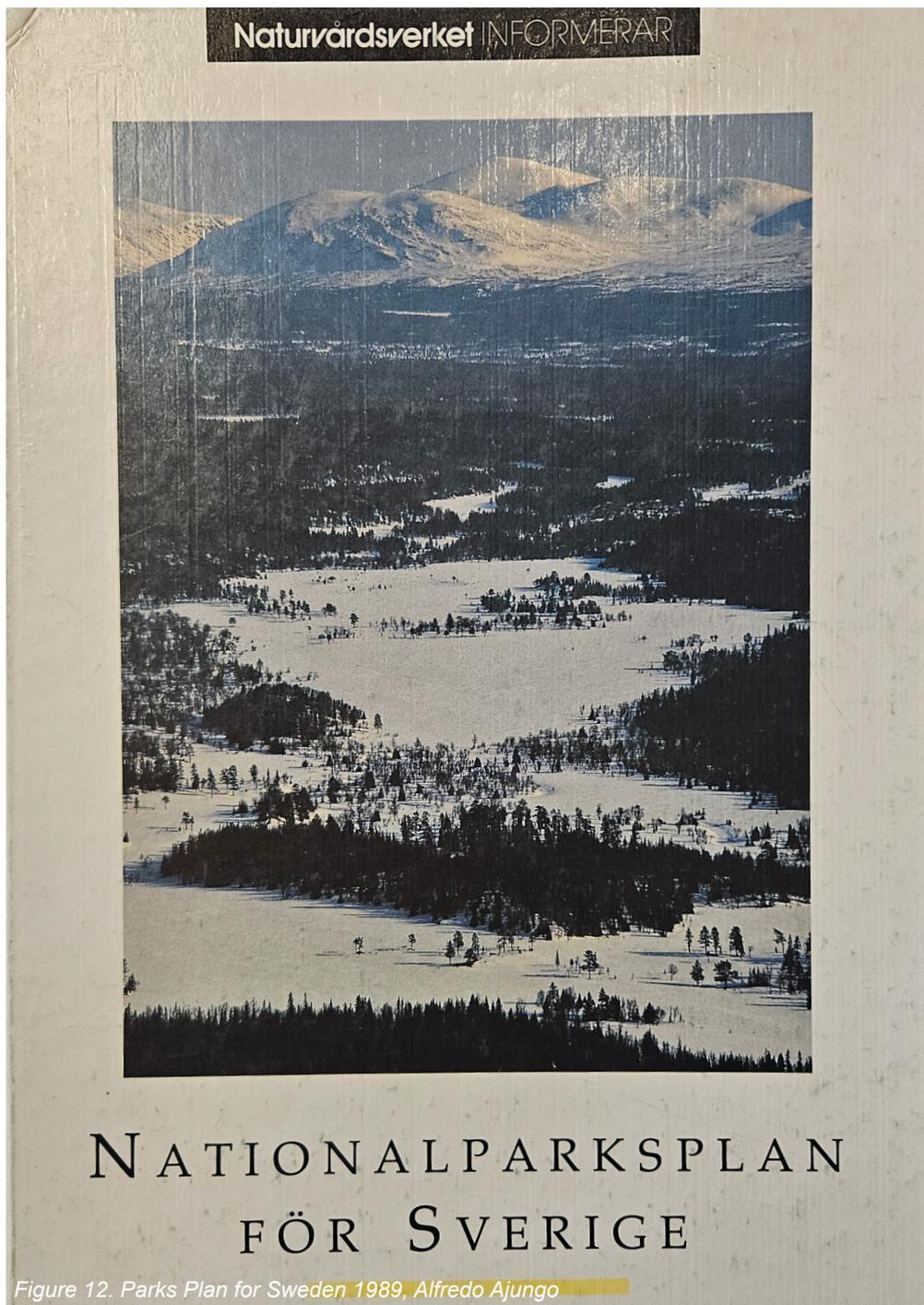
(Naturvårdsverket, 1989)

With this re construction of a new long term plan for the National parks we can read for the first time the concept of zonification, that in this specific case work when two or more interest have present in the same area inside a park, making this zonification is an effort for keeping this interest untouched, setting specific zones for specific uses and giving also specific norms and rules for the transition between this new areas inside a big area. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013)

With the establishment of this new long-term plan for National Parks, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency also set new objectives, with new focuses and guidelines within a broader

framework as first task was to review all the existing parks to check if they aligned to the new plan in the special conditions, if they still be considered as National Parks and to select which of them would be part of a national network of National Parks, making this selection of the places first with a Swedish perspective and then with nordic, european and international aspects.(Naturvårdsverket,1989)

This moment is of great importance because the frame in which the parks were conceived and grew in all the years in Sweden, changed to a bigger international frame in which international recommendations started to be exposed all around the world. Many countries started to adopt many of these recommendations in the planning process and management of the natural conservation of their own countries. (Naturvårdsverket, 2009)



Having into account the historical importance that some parks have gained and with the new legislation to the long term plan, the criteria for the continuity of the old parks was established not as high as the criteria for the proposed parks, certain parks continue to be considered as parks even if they do not have all the new criteria set for the new parks in the long term plan. In addition, for the planning of the Parks, it was proposed to divide them into geographical regions, which, in general, were characterized by very evident and recognizable landscape features. For example, the mountainous area was divided into a high mountain region, a mid mountain region, and an arctic region. (Naturvårdsverket,1989)

This division into regions has led to clearer, more uniform descriptions, helping better to understand these new areas for the National Parks.

After all this division and catalog work for the implementation of the new long-term plan, the Agency arrived at a base list for the national parks, in which some mountainous areas, woods, and some archipelagos, which were relevant in a natural way, and that have relevant importance for the nation, were added to the existing parks for further investigation. (Naturvårdsverket,1989)

The final result of this preliminary list was:

- Establish 20 new National Parks
- 4 of the existing parks need to be transformed and integrated into new, bigger parks
- 3 of the existing parks are proposed to be enlarged
- 4 of the existing parks were proposed to be cancelled totally or partially.

With all these changes being made in the long-term plan, the specific case for Sarek National Park in the new planning and management increases, as this park is one of the parks that would absorb areas from parks that were about to be cancelled. (Naturvårdsverket,1989)

4.3.2 NATIONALPARKSPLAN FOR SVERIGE 2008

With this new century also new ideas came together in the territorial ordenance and policy making in Sweden, a more touristic oriented idealization of the National Parks was developed in the government, with the name of “A comprehensive Nature Conservation Policy”, which came with the recommendation of a revision of the park plan established back in the 1989, and then eventually leading to the formulation and adoption of the “Long term National Park Plan for Sweden in 2008. This new plan offers some similar insights on continuing the accessibility focus from the 80s, with a clear vision to expand the park system with new locations and expand several existing national parks. (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), 2008)

The starting points for this new long-term plan are the dispositions of the Swedish environmental code, the new international criteria, and the implementation of a nationwide network of national parks.

This new long-term plan of 2008 is very similar to the previous one from 1989, in which many of the places described in the earlier plan remain the same, with the addition of proposals for 13 new national parks, which today are mainly natural reserves. In addition, the plan proposes the extension of 7 parks. The proposals cover about 1,200,00 hectares, and all proposals are completed. Sweden will increase the number of national parks from 40 to 50, and the national land from 15% to 35%. This will mean a better distribution of national parks and a new, more representative representation of the most important Swedish landscapes. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In the presentation of this new plan, the environmental agency points out the new concept of the National Park in the Swedish context, which is:

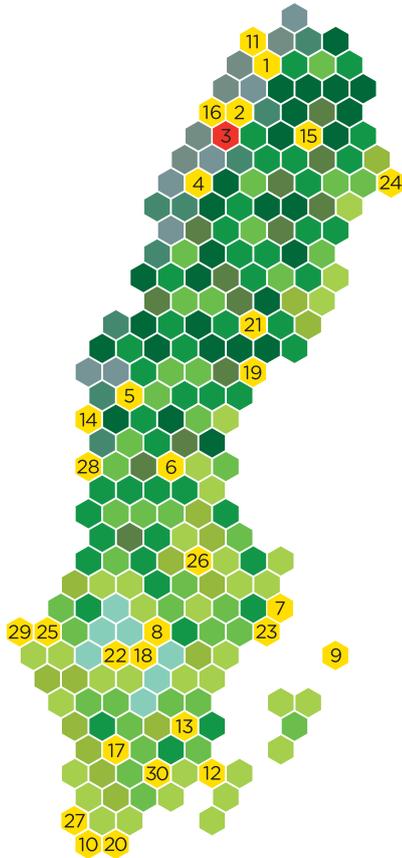
National Parks are an important way for conservation and protection for future preservation works. Now they have taken on great international importance, which usually work as tourist attractions, giving a good impact on the tourism industry and on the rural development". (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In this new work, one of the main goals that was established was to give more promotion to the areas around the national parks, to promote the development of the local communities as a tourist destination, all of this done under the international criteria established by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). Another part of this new work was the update of the 1989 natural inventory, which now describes in greater detail the National parks, the motivations behind the creation of each park, and some of the benefits for local communities, providing more precise boundaries and historical background to understand better. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

This update was conducted by the Swedish Agency for Environmental Protection, under the guidance of Rolf Löfgren, director of the Agency, which works in this team with the different council administrations, the Swedish Society for the Natural Conservation, and the World Wildlife Fund. In addition, this plan has a more specific order for prioritizing actions, in which two factors determine greater importance for certain cases than others: one is the threat posed by the natural area, and the other is local and regional expectations for the development of the area. The position of the Swedish Agency for Environmental Protection was to give priority to zones that have already experienced threats and negative impacts, mostly areas with natural forests threatened by forestry. However, this does not work only for the Agency, because in some cases municipalities and associations have requested the Agency's intervention, creating in this way different groups of cooperation for the development and planning of future proposals for National Parks. This is not a quick job, for example, as the 8 National Parks now constituted as Parks had preliminary projects started almost at the same time at the beginning of the 90s. However, each of them took a different amount of time to finish, with Björnlandet National Park being the first in 1991 and Fulufjället the last in 2002. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)



NATIONAL PARKS OF SWEDEN



1. ABISKO An easily accessible mountain valley with unusually rich flora.
2. STORA SJÖFALLET / STUOR MUORKKE Impressive peaks, glaciers and ancient pine woodlands.
3. SAREK Magnificent, demanding wilderness in a unique mountainous landscape.
4. PIELJEKAISE Expansive, pristine woodlands of mountain birch.
5. SONFJÄLLET A low mountain with natural woodland and plenty of bears.
6. HAMRA A rare complex of natural woodland, wetland and watercourses.
7. ÄNGSÖ Genuine agricultural landscape with grazing animals and haymaking.
8. GARPHYTTAN This old agricultural landscape is a sanctuary for many songbirds.
9. GOTSKA SANDÖN Unique, beautiful island with miles of sandy beaches.
10. DALBY SÖDERSKOG Leafy woodland on the plains of Skåne.
11. VADVETJÄKKA Sweden's northernmost national park is a mountain with deep caves.
12. BLÅ JUNGFRUN An island of legends, with smooth rocks, deciduous trees and beautiful views.

13. NORRA KVILL One of the few old growth type woodlands in southern Sweden.
14. TÖFSINGDALEN Valley with ancient pine woodlands, rich in boulders and rushing waters.
15. MUDDUS / MUTTOS The land of vast wetlands and old growth woodlands.
16. PADJELANTA / BADJELÄNNDA Rolling mountain heaths and big lakes, far from the nearest road.
17. STORE MOSSE The largest wetland area in Sweden south of Lapland.
18. TIVEDEN A wooded landscape with a sense of wilderness.
19. SKULESKOGEN Coast with magnificent views and the world's highest isostatic lift.
20. STENSHUVUD Coastal hills, broadleaved woodlands, inviting heathlands and beaches.
21. BJÖRNLANDET Mountains, cliffs and woodlands with traces of old woodland fires.
22. DJURÖ Archipelago in western Europe's biggest inland sea.
23. TYRESTA Pristine woodland just south of Stockholm.
24. HAPARANDA SKÄRGÅRD Archipelago with sandy beaches and shallow waters.
25. TRESTICKLAN Roadless wilderness with expansive views from pine-covered ridges.
26. FÄRNEBOFJÄRDEN A mosaic of broadleaved woodlands and water in Nedre Dalälven.
27. SÖDERÅSEN Deciduous woodland, scree slopes, running water and a rich flora and fauna.
28. FULUFJÄLLET By Sweden's highest waterfall, old growth woodland meets mountainside that is white with lichen.
29. KOSTERHAVET Species-rich area of sea and archipelago with Sweden's only coral reef.
30. ÅSNEN Archipelago with hundreds of islands and old beech- and pineforests.

LAPONIA

www.laponia.nu | info@laponia.nu
Telephone: 0046 (0)971-555 00

Laponiatjuottjudus
Kvarnbogatan 11
962 32 Jåhkåmåhkke/Jokkmokk
Sweden

Figure 13. Sarek National Park, Naturvårdsverket, 2008

Part of this revision and readaptation for the new long-term plan includes revisions to the criteria for the new projects for the National Parks, where the majority of the criteria coincide with the international criteria, which are more detailed, but for practical application in Sweden, some specifications to the criteria have been made.

Here are some of the criteria specified in the long-term plan of 2008:

- The parks have to be represented by unique Swedish landscapes
- The landscapes are described by the big-scale composition and the different habitats within these landscapes, in addition to the location in the country
- It needs to have a minimum size in function of the geological composition, the minimum number is 1000 ha.
- Give priority to the landscapes not yet represented in the other national parks
- Each park has to be a tourist attraction
- It has to be composed of four main elements: recreation, the study of natural elements, research, and tourism. In case of conflict between protection and land use, the conflict must be resolved through zoning with special dispositions that address the differences of interest.

(Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Another important part of this new plan was to differentiate the different protected areas and give a difference between these so there will be a better understanding of why some are given the title of National Parks. Others are just Natural Reserves; for example, in Tyresta National Park, the park has boundaries with a national reserve, but they are two different forms of protected areas, and there is a motive for this. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Swedish Environmental Code, 1998)

The most significant way of natural protection in Sweden is in the form of natural reserves, and in a way that the natural reserves are used to protect more types of nature, which is the biggest way of protection. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In a legislative term, we can define both ways of protection in the following way:

The biggest difference is the size, because the National Parks have a minimum size and for the natural reserve didn't have any minimum size they only have a determined boundary for the natural monuments, then in terms of the observation the National Parks have to protect a defined type of landscapes and nature, and in the other part the natural reserves can be

all kind of nature that is considered important in a natural way or in terms of the importance for the recreation, the national parks have to be non altered landscapes and the natural reserves can be used for the preservation and the restoration of nature, the National Parks can be only set in State land while the natural reserves didn't have this specific requirement, in the sense of the management, the Riksdag is the one that decide for the National Parks, while the administration of the county or the municipality decide for the natural reserves, we can finish differentiation saying that in the legislation and with the story there is a ideal of nationality regarding the National Parks, the parks are clearly more conceived as patrimony for the nation and future generations, and the influence of the people is represented by the government and the Riksdag, that have control and the decision making regarding the National Parks, the parks have a focus in the selection for the quality of the nature. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Once we have this differentiation between the different forms of protection we can go deeper into the different motivation behind the planning and conception of the National Parks, this motives goes from ethical and moral to purely economical motivation, in other instance that is supposed to be the main element we have the motives for the conservation of nature that is related to the long term sustainability. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

We can define long-term sustainability as the work and efforts to preserve the current generation and future ones, and to ensure economic, social, and ecological conditions for healthy growth. However, this sustainable growth must satisfy the necessities of the present without damaging the opportunities for future generations. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

One major work in planning with ethical value is the creation of a network of National Parks, which has contributed to the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources, and has helped international sustainability by creating connections between them rather than leaving them isolated. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Despite of the motivations behind of the parks in the plan the authority also make evident the limitations that they have been facing in all this years, because now the work is not only for the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, because now is also involved the different administration for the county, which together have the task to evaluate is the areas have the conditions for the changes that came with the creation of a park, as the increasing of the flow of visitants. Another significant limitation is in fact for the land, despite the majority of the lands affected for the projects in the plan for the National Parks are state property, they are also some private lands in different zones in which some planning have been done, but the discussion and negotiations about the acquiring of the private land have been a task difficult to accomplish, and this take relevant importance because in Sweden the National Parks can be only settled in land owned by the state. This matter, in addition to the local feeling of belonging, has been a factor in the order of implementation of the newest projects for the National Parks. Other problem related to the land is that the purposes for the delimitation and the boundaries of the areas are not compressible in the whole sense, because the more detailed delimitation of the different zones is studied and conducted in a more precise way when the works for the new parks have been started, so this leave a big gap of missing information because from the proposal and the final project many changes are made and this lead to misunderstanding mainly in the land use part of the planning. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

4.3.3 LAPONIA, REGULATIONS AND MAINTENANCE PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL PARKS

The Laponia World Heritage Area, situated in northern Sweden, represents one of the most extensive and intact natural and cultural landscapes in Europe. Its management plan is founded on a set of values developed collaboratively by Sámi village organizations through the association Mijá Ednam, the municipalities of Jokkmokk and Gällivare, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Adopted in June 2006, these values recognize Laponia as an integrated whole where the relationship between people and their environment is central. The Sámi culture continues to live through reindeer husbandry and new forms of Sámi entrepreneurship, aligned with the natural and cultural values that justified its inscription as a World Heritage Site. (Laponia, 2012)

Laponia meets multiple UNESCO World Heritage criteria as both a cultural and natural property. It contains outstanding examples of geological processes and landforms, significant ecological and biological processes, areas of exceptional natural beauty, and a unique cultural tradition. It is also an outstanding example of traditional land use and human–environment interaction, especially in the face of change. This designation makes evident the need for a management approach that balances the conservation of natural values with the safeguarding of indigenous culture. (Laponia, 2012)

The Management Plan is organized into four parts:

1. New management framework
2. A comprehensive description of Laponia's values
3. The current protection system
4. A maintenance plans for the national parks and nature reserves.

(Laponia, 2012)

From its establishment until 2005, various attempts were made to create a new management system, but consensus emerged only in 2005, leading to the “Laponia Process.” This process emphasized collaborative governance and sought to integrate traditional knowledge with administrative frameworks ((Laponia, 2012), making some key aspects:

- Decision-making by consensus through the council (rádedibme)
- Viewing nature and culture as an inseparable landscape
- Recognizing local knowledge and experience as indispensable

- Incorporating changing perspectives on culture and history
- Grounding norms and policies in traditional knowledge systems
- Valuing language as a pillar of cultural continuity
- Sustainability Framework

Laponia's management is guided by the principle of long-term sustainability, balancing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Environmental sustainability involves conserving land and water, maintaining ecosystem productivity, and minimizing impacts on nature, cultural heritage, and human health. Social sustainability emphasizes a stable and dynamic society that meets people's needs while fostering cultural identity. Economic sustainability seeks to support local livelihoods and maintain viable communities in the region. (Laponia, 2012)

To reconcile conservation with use, three categories of control instruments are employed:

- Regulations, which clarify permitted and prohibited activities for users and visitors;
- Economy, determining the ambition and scope of management activities, and based on the state's responsibility for protection and accessibility.
- Information and education, enabling conscious choices by users and visitors, thereby maintaining the values underlying World Heritage status. (Laponia, 2012)

To secure and develop Laponia's natural and cultural values, a comprehensive Maintenance Plan guides operational work. This plan specifies the management organization objectives across different maintenance areas and public administration within the World Heritage. Maintenance includes trails, facilities, cultural environments, and visitor information, as well as collaboration on zoning, buffer zones, and reindeer husbandry. Local participation is prioritized by drawing on community expertise. (Laponia, 2012)

The Maintenance Plan consists of five sections:

- Tools and methods
- The natural landscape
- Historical heritage arising from past land use

- Living Sámi culture and the reindeer industry
- Infrastructure for residents, land users, and visitors.

4.3.4 ZONING AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

Zoning divides the World Heritage into areas with differentiated management objectives. It preserves World Heritage values while enabling sustainable use. Goals include:

- Directing visitor and tourist activities to minimize disturbance to reindeer husbandry and sensitive ecosystems;
- Protecting areas of high natural or cultural value from overuse;
- Setting requirements for enterprises seeking permits or exemptions;
- Identifying preferred routes for visitors to reduce wear and disturbance.

Zoning is based on three themes: areas critical for reindeer access; areas of strategic importance for tourism; and areas of particularly high natural and cultural value. (Laponia, 2012)

Visitor Management and Monitoring

Visitor numbers are regularly monitored using counters, guest books, and surveys. These studies capture visitor experiences and inform adaptive management. Guidance from the Swedish Environmental Agency and the ETOUR surveys support these efforts. Monitoring also creates dialogue with local entrepreneurs and fosters transparency about tourism's impacts. (Laponia, 2012)

4.4 LOCAL COMMUNITIES INTERACTING WITH SAREK PARK

Human presence has always left marks on the land, material traces in the terrain, and immaterial traces in memory, identity, and cultural meaning. In the northern Scandinavian mountains, these dimensions are evident: the physical landscape reveals past land uses, while the mental landscape persists in perceptions, memories, and associations through which people understand their surroundings. Laponia, and Sarek at its core, is not a pure wilderness in the whole sense, but a deeply humanized terrain shaped by generations of interaction between people and place. (Laponia, 2012)

For many decades, authors' narratives in Sweden described the northern mountain region as an empty or uninhabited wilderness. This perception persisted even as large-scale industrial projects, as railroads, mining, and hydropower development, have left significant transformations on the land. In particular, the presence of the Sámi people did not significantly

challenge this wilderness narrative in the national imagination. Their extensive land-use systems, built on mobility, seasonal flow, and ecological interventions, were often invisible, reinforcing a perception of untouched nature that later became foundational in the creation of national parks and nature reserves. (Laponia, 2012;Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008)

Sarek National Park lies within the administrative territory of Jokkmokk Municipality, in Norrbotten County, northern Sweden. Jokkmokk is emblematic of the broader geography of Swedish Lapland, yet it is inhabited by a tiny population. According to Statistics Sweden’s census of population conducted in 2024, the municipality has 4,701 inhabitants. With population densities in many parts approaching one person per square kilometre, Jokkmokk stands as one of the most sparsely populated regions in the country. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

4.4.1 THE SAMI PEOPLE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Yet Sarek bases in the heart of Sápmi, the traditional homeland of the Sámi people, and its landscapes cannot be separated from the cultural practices, livelihood systems, and territorial relations of the indigenous communities who continue to use and manage the land. Far from being untouched, the region is a living cultural landscape shaped by centuries of reindeer herding, migration routes, grazing ecologies, and knowledge traditions intimately tied to the land. The governance of Sarek is inseparable from Sámi territorial rights, the functioning of the samebyar (reindeer herding communities), and the broader institutional structure that includes the Sámi Parliament and Swedish state authorities. (United Nations, 2011;Swedish National Heritage Board, 2002)

Today, the Laponia World Heritage site and its surrounding territories reflect this layered history of land use, from subsistence livelihoods to industrial exploitation. The intimate relationship between the Sámi and the land coexists with historical episodes of extraction, infrastructure development, and the more recent growth of nature-based tourism. These overlapping histories reveal that the landscape is neither purely cultural nor purely natural, but the product of ongoing interactions between humans, ecological processes, and institutional frameworks. (Laponia, 2012)

Sámi village organization	No. of members (approx.)	Max. reindeer allowed	No. of companies
Sirges (Si)	385	15 500	96
Tuorpon (Tu)	105	9 000	59
Unna tjerusj (UT)	130	8 000	50
Jåhkågasska tjiellde (Jå)	100	4 500	45
Gällivare skogssameby (Gä)	135	7 000	39
Baste čearru (BČ)	100	7 000	30
Luokta-Mávas (LM)	135	10 000	27
Udtja (Ud)	50	2 800	14
Slakka (Sl)	10	1 000	2

Table 4: Sami village organization, Laponia management plan 2012

Nine Sámi village organizations are active within the Laponian area, each engaging with the landscape to different degrees. These include the mountain Sámi villages: Luokta-Mávas, Tuorpon, Jáhkågaska tjiellde, Sirges, Unna Tjerusj, and Baste Čearru, and the forest Sámi villages: Udtja, Slakka, and Gällivare skogssameby. While all are governed as economic associations responsible for managing reindeer herding activities, their roles extend far beyond economic coordination. Each village constitutes a territorial and social collective, organizing seasonal movements and maintaining shared cultural practices tied to specific grazing grounds and migration routes. (Laponia, 2012)

In the specific case of Sarek Park, 3 Sámi villages are located within its boundaries: Sirges, Jáhkågaska tjiellde and toupons, all of which conduct all their village activities within the Park.

In this sense, Sarek and the broader Laponia region exemplify how landscapes are understood today as both protected areas and lived spaces, shaped by long-term human–environment relations and governed through complex negotiations among cultural identity, territorial rights, and conservation policy. The Sámi presence is not a remnant of the past but an active and essential component of how Sarek is inhabited, governed, and imagined today. (Laponia, 2012)

4.4.2 THE LIVING SAMI CULTURE AND REINDEER INDUSTRY

The human shaping of the Laponian landscape did not end with early hunting cultures. At some point during the first millennium, Sámi communities began to keep domestic reindeer, marking a significant transformation in their relationship with the land. Over time, reindeer husbandry became the principal livelihood of the Sámi and one of the defining features of Sámi cultural identity. Today, however, the Sámi community is undergoing an extensive structural transformation. Social and economic shifts, combined with technological change and new regulatory pressures, are reshaping patterns of life. As a result, many places of deep cultural significance, as migration routes, old gathering sites, or seasonal settlements, are at risk of being forgotten or losing their meaning. The Sámi cultural landscape thus contains values that extend beyond material remains; it holds memories, practices, and relationships that cannot be fully captured by visible traces alone. (Laponia, 2012; Allard 2011)

Reindeer husbandry remains the dominant land-use industry in Laponia and is central to the cultural, social, and economic life of the Sámi villages (samebyar) that operate there. For reindeer herders, the land is more than territory: it represents home, history, workplace, and savings account. This relationship underlines the depth of Sámi territorial identity and the extent to which cultural survival depends on access to grazing lands. (Laponia, 2012)

Historically, Sámi livelihoods were structured around a mixed economy, in which reindeer husbandry was complemented by hunting, fishing, and small-scale activities. While reindeer herding remains the backbone of village activities, it is increasingly common that one or more members of the family secure complementary income through employment outside the primary sector. This diversification reflects both economic necessity and wider societal changes. However, it does not diminish the centrality of reindeer husbandry as the foundational cultural and economic pillar of the Sámi communities in Laponia. (Eira, et al. 2023; Laponia, 2012)

The legal framework for these village organizations is defined primarily by the Reindeer Husbandry Act of 1971, which regulates the structure, responsibilities, and grazing rights of the samebyar. Each village encompasses extensive grazing territories, with mountain Sámi villages typically spanning between 50 and 200 kilometers from summer pastures in the west to winter grazing areas in the east. By contrast, the forest Sámi villages are more spatially concentrated, reflecting different ecological conditions and herding traditions. (Laponia, 2012)

The size and composition of the Sámi village organizations vary considerably, with Sirges being the largest. In 2008, more than 360 reindeer enterprises operated within the nine villages, relying on Laponia's land and water resources to varying extents. Reindeer numbers also change over long cycles, influenced by climatic conditions, grazing quality, disease, and predator pressure. In 2009, the maximum permitted number of reindeer across the mountain Sámi villages was 54,000, compared to 10,800 for the forest villages. (Laponia, 2012)

These dynamics show a livelihood system that is deeply rooted and continuously evolving. Reindeer husbandry is not simply an economic activity; it is a governance system, a cultural institution, and a landscape practice that structures relationships between people, animals, and territory. As such, it remains at the core of the Laponian cultural landscape and is inseparable from contemporary debates on local participation, territorial rights, and the co-management of protected areas. (Laponia, 2012; Torp, 2013)

Reindeer husbandry is today recognized as a land-based industry comparable to other primary sectors, intended to provide individual reindeer entrepreneurs with a stable income that can sustain their households. As with any other industry, the contemporary reindeer economy faces



Figure 14. fjällfotograf, Tore Abrahamsson

significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure its long-term viability and capacity to generate economic surplus. In fact, within the municipalities that form Lapponia, reindeer husbandry now creates more employment opportunities than the forestry sector, highlighting its continued relevance for regional development. (Torp, 2013)

Given this reality, a shift in how reindeer husbandry is understood, from outside and within the Sámi community, is increasingly necessary. Externally, the acknowledgment that reindeer husbandry constitutes a substantial and sustainable industry with clear economic contributions must be taken more seriously in land-use planning and decision-making. This is particularly critical in contexts such as forestry operations, mineral exploration, and mining projects, where interests often put pressure on grazing areas. A more accurate recognition of the industry's socioeconomic value would allow for better-informed assessments of potential impacts and support more equitable negotiations over land use. (Lapponia, 2012)

Internally, within the Sámi community itself, there is also a need to reinforce the understanding that reindeer husbandry functions as a modern industry, not solely as a cultural activity, even though the cultural dimension remains inseparable from it. Strengthening the economic foundations of the sector requires advancements in both production methods and value-added processing. Developing these aspects can help secure the economic resilience of Sámi reindeer enterprises and support the broader transition occurring within Sámi society. Despite quick social and structural change, reindeer husbandry continues to serve as the backbone of Sámi village life, and adapting the industry to contemporary demands is essential for maintaining both livelihoods and cultural continuity. (Lapponia, 2012; Widmark, 2009)

4.4.3 SAMI SETTLEMENTS

The Sámi village organizations maintain a network of small reindeer-herder cabins strategically located across the landscape. These houses are used collectively and serve as temporary bases for herders during periods of intensive work, such as gathering and managing the reindeer. Their use is particularly higher during the summer, when members of the mountain Sámi villages describe themselves as “moving up to the mountains,” reflecting the seasonal flow that continues to structure reindeer-herding activities. (Lapponia, 2012)

These seasonal settlements hold considerable social significance for reindeer-herding Sámi. The weeks following the calf-marking period are characterized not only by physically demanding tasks but also by social interaction, as many members of the Sámi village gather in the same area. Alongside calf marking, there is typically time for subsistence activities such as fishing, as well as sideline activities including the production of handicrafts. These goods are sold both locally and through intermediaries, illustrating the mixture of traditional subsistence practices and contemporary economic strategies that shape Sámi livelihoods.. (Lapponia, 2012; Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008)

The settlements also attract many visitors. Their proximity to tourist trails brings hikers and travelers into contact with Sámi herders, while their role as gathering points for extended families reinforces social networks that extend beyond the immediate work of herding. Housing arrangements vary among families: some maintain only one additional seasonal house besides

their permanent home, while others use several specific dwellings for spring, autumn, and winter. During the transitional seasons, however, it is less common for entire families to reside in the settlements, as children typically attend school in nearby towns

Many contemporary Sámi settlements also contain visible traces of earlier habitation. Their long and continuous use is reflected in the presence of diverse structures, small cabins, huts, boathouses, storerooms, and other traditional constructions, each contributing to the cultural and historical value of the site. Although every settlement is shaped by its particular history and natural environment, the traditional layout generally included a “bovall,” or meadow, with buildings or their remains, and occasionally one or more reindeer enclosures. (Laponia, 2012)

Between 1998 and 2001, the Swedish National Heritage Board carried out a major initiative dedicated to safeguarding Sámi cultural heritage. This effort involved the restoration and documentation of numerous buildings, the implementation of several research and information projects, and the establishment of a specialized counseling and advisory service at Ájtte, the Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum. Together, these measures look to preserve the material and immaterial heritage embedded in Sámi settlements, recognizing their central role in both cultural continuity and the contemporary practice of reindeer husbandry. (Laponia, 2012WW)

Samebyar



Figure 15. Sámi villages (Samebyar) by Anders Sunesson. 2017

4.4.4 THE TOURISM LANDSCAPE

Laponia's designation as a World Heritage site shapes a visitor profile that is broader than of a typical nature reserve or cultural monument. While the inscription recognizes both natural and cultural values, visitor motivations have increasingly shifted toward forms of adventure tourism, eco-tourism, and, above all, authentic encounters with Sámi culture, whose communities remain the principal traditional users of the area. The World Heritage designation, together with the national parks inserted within Laponia, provides local tourism operators with an internationally recognized framework that enhances visibility while reinforcing the importance of conservation-oriented practices. As a result, Laponia attracts a diverse range of visitors seeking immersive experiences in remote and largely unmodified landscapes (Laponia, 2012).

Within this context, Sarek National Park occupies a particular position. Unlike other more accessible parks, Sarek lacks permanent infrastructure and marked trails, reinforcing its image as a wilderness landscape. Tourism activities therefore tend to focus on long-distance trekking, mountaineering, and self-guided exploration, appealing primarily to experienced visitors. One of the most emblematic routes in the wider region is the Kungsleden (the King's Trail), which, while not crossing the core of Sarek, plays a significant role in structuring tourism flows toward the area. This trail connects several parts of the Swedish mountain region and promotes a form of low-impact tourism supported by the Swedish Tourist Association (STF), which manages mountain huts and shelters that provide basic accommodation and services for hikers. Through this network, tourism contributes to regional accessibility while maintaining a strong emphasis on simplicity, environmental responsibility, and respect for natural conditions.

The lifting of earlier restrictions on commercial activities within national parks has further expanded opportunities for sustainable tourism, enabling inhabitants of Laponia and surrounding communities to develop livelihoods that are compatible with conservation priorities (Laponia, 2012). This shift reflects a broader policy goal: to support tourism initiatives that are ecologically, socially, culturally, and economically sustainable, while safeguarding the values for which Laponia was inscribed as a World Heritage site. Tourism-related activities extend beyond reindeer husbandry, contributing to local employment, seasonal income, and the diversification of rural economies.

From the Sámi perspective, tourism also represents a means of cultural transmission and visibility. In recent years, Sámi communities have increasingly developed activities that allow visitors to engage with traditional knowledge, practices, and ways of life. These initiatives may include guided experiences focused on reindeer herding, participation in seasonal activities, or educational encounters that introduce visitors to Sámi history, cosmology, and relationships with the land. Such experiences are typically designed and led by Sámi actors themselves, reinforcing cultural autonomy while fostering mutual understanding between visitors and local communities.

However, the relationship between tourism and Sámi livelihoods remains complex. Reindeer herding continues to be a foundational pillar of Sámi culture, identity, and land use, even as fewer community members are able to practice it full-time. Tourism initiatives are therefore often framed not as substitutes, but as complementary activities that support the continuity of traditional practices within a changing economic context. From a governance perspective, the World Heritage status is also expected to enhance the quality of life for municipalities and residents by strengthening territorial identity and reinforcing a sense of pride and belonging. A well-informed and engaged local population is regarded as essential for the long-term preservation of Laponia's natural and cultural heritage (Laponia, 2012).

At the same time, Sámi representatives emphasize that the borders of Laponia remain largely administrative constructs. For Sámi village organizations whose livelihoods depend on extensive grazing lands, the World Heritage area constitutes only a portion of the territory required for reindeer husbandry. Seasonal migrations and herd management rely on pastures located both inside and outside the protected area. Without this broader territorial continuity, reindeer husbandry within Laponia would not be viable. Consequently, the World Heritage site cannot be meaningfully separated from the wider ecological, cultural, and economic landscape on which Sámi life depends. Laponia is therefore understood not as an isolated protected space, but as one component of a larger living territory that supports both survival and future development (Laponia, 2012; Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008).



Figure 16. Naturum Laponia, Laponia

GUEST OF THE LAND

Sarek is the most inaccessible area in Lapponia, but well worth the effort once you get there. Make tours within an area or go on week-long journeys. Here are some of the highlights.



Photo: Mikael Svensson Johnner

1 RÁHPAÄNO SUORGUDAHKA/THE LÁJTÁVRRE DELTA

Once you arrive at the delta, it is quite breathtaking. The greenish-blue shimmering water meanders below the 600 m cliffs of the mountains Tjahkelij and Skierffe. This is the emblem of Sarek and the gateway into Ráhpavuobme, the Rapa Valley, even though strictly speaking the delta outflow lies outside Sarek National Park.



Photo: Göran Wallin

2 HAMBERG CABINS

At the beginning of the 20th century, the scientist Axel Hamberg built five red cabins in Sarek for research purposes. Four of them remain and one stands near the summit of Bårddetjåhkkå at over 2,000 m altitude. They represent a fascinating cultural heritage, and are still used by researchers.



Photo: Anders Westergren

3 SAREKTJÁHKKÅ

Sarektjåhkkå is among Sweden's highest summits and forms a wall between the valleys Guhkesvágge and Ruohtesvágge.



Photo: Carl-Johan Utisi

4 GUOHPERVÁGGE

The summer-green valley of Guohpervágge is much frequented as reindeer forage land, stretching from the upper parts of Ráhpavuobme to the boundary with Padjelanta/Badjelánnda National Park.



Photo: Peter Rosén

SACRED PLACES

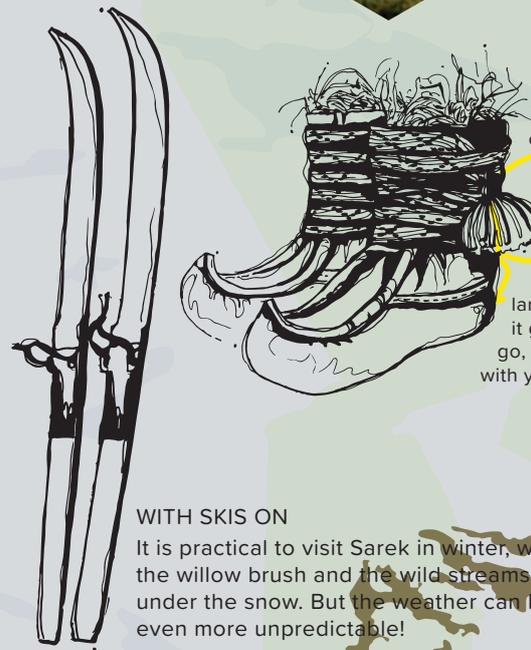
Very special mountains and notable places are in many cases held sacred. Both at Skierffe and Nammásj there are a number of places where mankind and the gods would meet.

For a few intensive summer weeks the calf-marking sites bustle with life. Today, drones among other things are used in rounding up the reindeer.



Photo: Carl-Johan Utisi

Padjelanta/Badjelánnda nationalpark



TJÁTJEJA
This land has been carefully trodden for thousands of years, so carefully that people mistake it for wilderness. We ask that you continue the tradition. Respect the land and thank it for what it gives. And when you go, take all traces of you with you.

WITH SKIS ON

It is practical to visit Sarek in winter, when the willow brush and the wild streams lie under the snow. But the weather can be even more unpredictable!



Photo: Peter Rosén

The bear has the soul of a human and the strength of nine, wrote the Sámi author Johan Turi. The powerful animal thrives here. On the site that is known as Predator Square, traces of bear, lynx, wolverine and wolf have been seen all in the same day.

Figure 17. Sarek National Park, Naturvårdsverket, 2008



Photo: Gilles San Martin



The Nordic Mountain Grasshopper *melanoplus frigidus* lives on mountain moors and has adapted its reproduction to a short summer. The bright colours are a way to appear poisonous and unappetizing to its hungry enemies

Photo: Jan-Erik Nilsson



Áhpár Mountain takes its name from the frightening old stories about children who haunt because they have not been given a name.

photo: Jörgen Wiklund



In Finnish, the Bluethroat is known as "satakielinen" – speaker of a hundred languages. In Sámi it is sometimes called "biellučizas", or reindeer-bell bird. It populates Sarek's birch forests in summer, filling them with its intensive warbling.



BIG SHOVELS
The birch-forested valleys of Sarek are rich in moose. There are particularly large moose here, which are sometimes called Sarek moose, where the bulls can weigh up to 800 kg and grow shovel-shaped horns almost 2 metres in size.

photo: Lapontiatuottuodus



A RIOT OF GREENERY
In summer, Ráhpavuoame resembles a jungle. Northern Wolf's Bane is found on the pastures together with Melancholy Thistle and Wood Crane's-Bill. Bumblebees hum and the willow brush reaches above your head. The valley teems with life during the short, light summer months.

Illustrations/map: Lisa Wallin

5. COMPARISON OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE FRAMEWORKS, GOVERNANCE AND PROTECTION IN THE CASES OF STUDY

This chapter develops a comparative analysis of the two selected case studies, Gran Paradiso National Park and Sarek National Park. The comparison will be based on the theoretical and contextual frameworks developed in the previous chapters, in which the protected areas were examined through environmental, social, and governance perspectives. Instead of considering the parks as isolated cases, the analysis frames them within different national, cultural, and institutional approaches to nature conservation in Europe.

The comparative analysis is organized around three thematic dimensions identified as central during the research process. First, it addresses environmental protection and nature conservation, focusing on how ecological values, biodiversity preservation, and landscape protection are conceptualized and implemented in each park. This includes consideration of conservation objectives, management priorities, and the relationship between protection and human use. Second, the chapter examines local communities and human–nature interaction, exploring how historical presence, cultural practices, and everyday livelihoods shape the character of each protected area. Attention is given to the roles of traditional knowledge and tourism, and to how human activities are integrated, restricted, or negotiated within conservation frameworks. Third, the analysis focuses on territorial governance, comparing institutional arrangements, decision-making processes, and the distribution of responsibilities among actors operating at different scales.

By applying the same analytical structure to both case studies, the chapter aims to highlight similarities and differences in how conservation ideas are translated into practice. The comparison aims to reveal how broader international principles of protected-area management are interpreted through distinct national governance cultures, legal frameworks, and socio environmental contexts. The chapter emphasizes that protected areas are not only ecological spaces but also socially constructed territories, shaped by historical trajectories, cultural values, and political choices.

Ultimately, this comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of how environmental protection, community involvement, and governance interact in different mountain landscapes, providing a basis for assessing the strengths and limitations of each model and contributing to the broader discussion on how conservation and human presence can coexist within protected territories.

5.1 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN ITALY AND SWEDEN

The territorial governance of national parks in Italy and Sweden reflects two distinct governance cultures shaped by different traditions, legal frameworks, and historical relationships between nature and society. Despite these differences, both systems operate within shared global and European conservation frameworks and aim at similar objectives, particularly the long-term protection of natural heritage and the integration of conservation with social considerations (Lockwood, 2010). A comparative analysis will highlight both differences and similarities in how governance structures function across scales and how they mediate the relationship between protected areas and local communities.

At a general level, both Italy and Sweden operate within international conservation principles promoted by organizations such as the IUCN, and, as members of the European Union, these two countries are influenced by EU environmental directives, including the Natura 2000 framework (IUCN, 2008; European Commission, 2018). In both national contexts, parks are formally designated protected areas with clearly defined conservation objectives, governed through institutional arrangements that involve national, regional, and local authorities.

A further point of convergence between the two cases concerns the growing role attributed to participatory forms of governance. In both cases, contemporary park management has moved away from purely top-down models toward more inclusive approaches that acknowledge the role of local actors (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013). Municipalities, local communities, and civil society organizations are progressively more involved in consultation processes, planning instruments, and park-related development initiatives. This reflects a shared understanding that conservation effectiveness is closely linked to social legitimacy and territorial cohesion.

Despite these common foundations, the two systems differ significantly in their institutional organization. Italy's territorial governance displays a high degree of administrative complexity, as decision-making responsibilities are dispersed across multiple institutional levels and authorities (Bianchi, 2023). In the case of Gran Paradiso, this complexity is further intensified by its cross-regional character, requiring coordination between Piedmont and the Aosta Valley. While this multi-layered system allows strong place-based policies and local adaptation, it often results in overlapping competencies, long negotiation processes, and institutional inefficiencies.

In contrast, Sweden adopts a governance model characterized by stronger institutional integration and more clearly delineated responsibilities across governance levels. Coordination between national agencies, such as the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, county administrative boards, and municipalities, enables relatively efficient implementation of national conservation goals at the regional level (Naturvårdsverket, 2008). This reflects a governance culture grounded in both decentralization and administrative coherence.

Another major point of difference concerns the role of local and indigenous communities. In Italy, local populations are deeply rooted within national park territories through long-established agricultural, pastoral, and touristic practices. (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

Governance mechanisms, therefore, focus on negotiating land-use compatibility, economic development, and conservation objectives within inhabited cultural landscapes. Participation tends to occur through municipal representation, local agreements, and park-led development strategies rather than through formalized co-management arrangements (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In Sweden, particularly in northern regions such as Sarek, governance must account for the rights and presence of the Sámi people. The involvement of indigenous actors, including the Sámi Parliament, introduces an additional governance layer that is largely absent in the Italian case. Although Sámi participation was historically limited, contemporary governance increasingly recognizes indigenous land-use practices, traditional ecological knowledge, and cultural rights, aligning with international norms on indigenous participation in conservation (Borrini, 2013)

In terms of planning instruments, Italy relies heavily on park management plans that function as comprehensive territorial tools regulating land use, zoning, and development activities (Gran Paradiso, 2005) These plans integrate conservation objectives with socio-economic strategies and reflect the concept of territorial governance as a negotiated and place-based process.

Sweden, by contrast, employs strategic national park plans and policy frameworks that emphasize network coherence, landscape representativeness, and accessibility (Naturvårdsverket, 2008). County administrative boards play a central role in translating these strategic objectives into operational management, supported by standardized guidelines and strong administrative capacity.

In summary, both Italy and Sweden operate within multi-level governance systems that seek to balance environmental protection with social considerations, consistent with contemporary guidelines of environmental protection and governance. However, Italy's model emphasizes negotiation within complex, historically inhabited landscapes and relies on dense institutional interaction across scales. Sweden's approach prioritizes administrative decentralization and coordinated implementation while increasingly incorporating indigenous governance structures. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Gran Paradiso 2005)

These similarities and differences provide the analytical foundation for the comparative table that follows, which synthesizes governance structures, decision-making, community involvement, and planning instruments in both national contexts, to illustrate how territorial governance shapes conservation in Gran Paradiso and Sarek, and how different governance cultures reinterpret shared global conservation principles within specific territorial contexts.

Dimension	Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy)	Sarek National Park (Sweden)
Governance model	Multi-level, fragmented, negotiation-based territorial governance	Multi-level, integrated, decentralized governance
Main managing authority	National Park Authority under the Ministry of Environment	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
Regional level	Strong role of Regions (Piedmont & Aosta Valley) with overlapping competencies	County Administrative Boards act as key intermediaries.
Local level involvement	Municipalities embedded within park territory; strong local presence	Municipalities are involved mainly through consultation and planning
Indigenous governance	No formal indigenous governance structures	The Sámi Parliament and the Sámi communities are involved in planning
Community-park relationship	Long-established settlements; cultural landscapes shaped by agro-pastoral practices	Sparse settlements; traditional reindeer herding and seasonal use
Planning instruments	Park Plan (Piano del Parco), zoning, Park Development Plans (PPES)	National Park Plans, management guidelines, zoning
Decision-making style	Negotiated, place-based, and often slow due to institutional complexity	Coordinated, administratively efficient, procedurally clear
Role of participation	Mainly through municipalities and local stakeholders	Formalized participation and consultation mechanisms
Tourism governance	Integrated with local economic development strategies	Managed as part of the national accessibility and recreation policy
Conservation philosophy	Cultural landscape conservation and coexistence	Wilderness preservation with controlled human use
Main governance challenge	Institutional fragmentation and cross-regional coordination	Balancing wilderness ideals with indigenous rights and tourism

Table 5 Comparison in governance between Italy and Sweden, Alfredo Ajungo

5.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PLANNING INSTRUMENTS IN GRAN PARADISO AND SAREK

While territorial governance defines the institutional configuration of protected areas, planning instruments determine how conservation objectives are translated into spatial rules, management practices, and development guidelines. In this sense, the comparison between Gran Paradiso National Park and Sarek National Park highlights two distinct planning traditions embedded within broader European conservation frameworks. These differences do not reflect differences in conservation goals but rather contrasting approaches to spatial regulation, land-use control, and the role of planning within protected areas. (IUCN, 2008; European Commission, 2018)

In Gran Paradiso, planning instruments operate as legally binding spatial tools. The Piano del Parco functions as a statutory planning instrument with regulatory authority over municipal land use plans, reflecting the Italian planning tradition in which protected areas are integrated into the formal territorial planning system (Italian Law No. 394/1991). The plan establishes zoning, land use prescriptions, and development constraints, ensuring coherence between conservation objectives and local planning frameworks. This regulatory structure is complemented by the Piano Pluriennale Economico e Sociale (PPES), which introduces socio-economic development strategies aligned with conservation goals. (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In contrast, Sarek National Park is governed through management-oriented planning instruments rather than formal land-use plans. The park management plan, developed under the Swedish Environmental Code, defines conservation objectives, access rules, and management principles but does not function as a spatial planning instrument in the strict sense. Planning here is primarily normative and strategic, focused on preservation rather than territorial organization. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

A major point of difference lies in the degree of spatial planning of planning instruments. Gran Paradiso has more detailed zoning schemes that distinguish between areas of strict protection, controlled use, and zones permitting traditional activities. This zoning logic reflects the IUCN's recognition of protected areas as socially embedded landscapes, particularly within long inhabited European contexts. Spatial differentiation allows planning instruments to mediate between ecological protection and ongoing human activities such as pastoralism, tourism, and settlement. (IUCN, 2008; Naturvårdsverket, 2008; Gran Paradiso, 2005)

By contrast, zoning in Sarek is minimal. The park is primarily treated as a continuous wilderness area subject to regulatory principles. Where differentiation exists, it is primarily functional rather than cartographic, especially concerning Sámi reindeer herding rights recognized under national legislation and international indigenous rights frameworks. This approach aligns with the park's designation as a reference landscape for large-scale ecological processes. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008; IUCN, 2008)

Planning instruments in Gran Paradiso explicitly integrate territorial development objectives. The PPES links conservation with rural development, sustainable tourism, and local economic initiatives, reflecting the EU's broader territorial cohesion and Natura 2000 policy framework. Planning thus becomes a proactive instrument for shaping future land use rather than merely restricting activities. (European Commission, 2018).

In Sarek, considerations about development are excluded mainly from park planning instruments. The management plan does not promote tourism growth or economic development within the park boundaries, instead prioritizing ecological integrity and non-intervention. Socio-economic development is addressed through municipal and regional planning instruments external to the park, or in this specific case, the Lapand Management Plan, reinforcing a clear functional separation between conservation planning and territorial development. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008).

Both planning systems recognize cultural dimensions, though through different mechanisms. In Gran Paradiso, cultural landscapes and traditional practices are incorporated into planning instruments through zoning regulations and specific land-use provisions. Cultural heritage is spatially codified, influencing permissible activities and development patterns within the park. (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In Sarek, Sámi land use, particularly reindeer herding, is acknowledged as a foundational element of park management. However, this integration primarily operates through rights-based recognition and negotiated practices rather than through spatial planning instruments. Cultural inclusion is based on governance and management processes rather than expressed through zoning maps. (Naturvårdsverket, 2008).

The comparison demonstrates that planning instruments in Gran Paradiso function as territorial structuring tools, organizing space, regulating land use, and integrating conservation with development objectives in line with European planning traditions. In contrast, planning instruments in Sarek act as protective and normative frameworks, prioritizing restraint, wilderness preservation, and indigenous land-use continuity over spatial organization (IUCN, 2008; Naturvårdsverket, 2008).

These differences reflect distinct planning rationalities rather than divergent conservation ambitions. Italy employs planning to manage coexistence between nature and society, while Sweden uses planning to maintain ecological integrity through limited intervention. This contrast reinforces the argument that protected-area planning instruments are deeply shaped by national planning cultures and territorial histories, even when operating under shared international conservation frameworks.

Analytical Dimension	Gran Paradiso National Park (Italy)	Sarek National Park (Sweden)
Primary planning instrument	<i>Piano del Parco</i> (Park Plan) and <i>Piano Pluriennale Economico e Sociale</i> (PPES)	National Park Management Plan
Position within multi-level governance	Set within national, regional, and municipal planning systems	Parallel to, but institutionally separate from, municipal and regional planning
Regulatory character	Strongly regulatory and prescriptive	Strategic and guiding rather than prescriptive
Spatial planning function	Explicit spatial planning instrument	Non-spatial management instrument
Zoning logic	Formal zoning system regulating land use and activities	Functional differentiation
Relationship with territorial development	Conservation integrated with local development and economic planning	Development addressed outside the park through municipal and regional plans
Integration of local communities	Formal inclusion through land-use regulation, traditional activity zones, and PPES	Recognition of Sámi land use through negotiated rights and co-management practices
Role of cultural landscapes	Cultural landscapes are recognized as part of conservation objectives	Landscape understood primarily as wilderness shaped by traditional use
Planning scale	Park plan interacts vertically with regional (Piedmont and Aosta Valley) and local plans.	Park plan operates mainly at the national and regional administrative levels.
Flexibility and adaptability	Limited flexibility due to legal and procedural constraints	High adaptability through periodic revision and management discretion
Alignment with international frameworks	Reflects integrative conservation consistent with IUCN Categories	Reflects wilderness conservation consistent with IUCN Category
Planning philosophy	Planning as a tool for regulating coexistence between nature and society	Planning as a tool for safeguarding ecological processes through minimal intervention

Table 6 Difference in planning between Italy and Sweden, Alfredo Ajungo

5.3 EFFECTS OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING INSTRUMENTS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES:

The comparison between Gran Paradiso National Park and Sarek National Park shows how different territorial governance models and planning instruments produce distinct social outcomes for local communities, despite operating under shared international conservation frameworks. In both cases, governance and planning do not merely regulate land and nature; they actively shape social relations, livelihoods, and the degree of local agency within protected areas.

In the Italian case, the territorial governance framework is characterized by strong institutional integration across national, regional, and local levels. The *Piano del Parco* and the *Piano Pluriennale Economico e Sociale* function as regulatory instruments that directly affect everyday practices within the park territory. Local communities are active in planning processes through municipal representation, consultation mechanisms, and the integration of traditional activities into zoning regulations. As a result, residents experience conservation as a negotiated process, in which restrictions are balanced by development opportunities such as sustainable tourism, agro-pastoral activities, and cultural valorization. (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

However, this integration also generates complexity and occasional conflict, as overlapping regulations and administrative fragmentation may constrain local initiative and slow decision making. (Gran Paradiso, 2005)

In contrast, the Swedish governance model emphasizes decentralization, adaptive management, and a clear separation between conservation planning and territorial development. In Sarek National Park, for local communities, particularly Sámi reindeer herding groups, this results in a governance arrangement in which everyday land-use practices are recognized through rights based frameworks rather than through spatial zoning or development oriented planning. While this model limits opportunities for economic diversification linked to tourism within the park, it offers greater autonomy and continuity for traditional livelihoods by minimizing regulatory intervention. (Laponia, 2012; Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

The comparison shows that Italian planning instruments tend to produce a form of institutional inclusion, integrating communities into conservation through formal planning and economic strategies. In contrast, Swedish instruments foster functional coexistence, allowing traditional practices to continue with limited institutional mediation. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005; Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

In Italy, communities are active stakeholders within a structured governance framework, whereas in Sweden they are positioned as right holders operating alongside conservation objectives. Both approaches present trade-offs: the Italian model enhances socio economic integration but increases regulatory density. In contrast, the Swedish model preserves autonomy and ecological continuity but restricts local development options within protected areas. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005; Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

Ultimately, the observed effects of governance and planning instruments on local communities can be traced back to broader cultural interpretations of conservation. In Gran Paradiso, nature is understood as a lived and productive landscape shaped through long term human presence. In Sarek, nature is conceptualized as wilderness maintained through restraint and minimal intervention. These contrasting visions shape not only environmental outcomes but also the social experiences of those who inhabit and depend on protected mountain landscapes. (Parco Gran Paradiso, 2005; Naturvårdsverket, 2008)

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 GENERAL CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH

This thesis has examined a set of interrelated dimensions that, while analytically different, are deeply interconnected in practice. By focusing on protected areas in mountainous environments, the research has demonstrated that ecological conservation, territorial governance, and local communities, together, form an integrated system in which each component influences and depends on the others.

As a result, the functioning and effectiveness of protected areas cannot be understood through a single analytical lens, but rather through a multidimensional and relational perspective.

The research has been developed through a historical analysis, policy and governance review, and the examination of planning instruments and community interactions. Letting the thesis explore how different conservation trajectories and governance structures shape contemporary management strategies. This approach has allowed for an in-depth understanding of how global conservation principles are translated into locally specific practices.

The main results of the research indicate that contemporary conservation in mountainous environments is characterized by a convergence of shared international principles, such as those promoted by international conservation frameworks, while maintaining strong contextual differentiation.

Although common objectives related to biodiversity protection, ecosystem resilience, and sustainability are strongly shared, their implementation remains highly dependent on historical legacies, institutional arrangements, and special territorial conditions.

The comparative analysis highlights that coexistence between conservation objectives and local communities is not an automatic outcome, but the result of negotiated, adaptive, and different governance processes carried since a long time, even before the creation of the parks. Despite these contributions, the research also presents several limitations. The study relies primarily on secondary sources and official documents, which may present a limitation in access to certain data. Differences in data availability and institutional transparency between Italy and Sweden have also influenced the depth of comparison in certain areas. However, the focus on two case studies, while allowing for in-depth analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings to other mountainous or non-European contexts.

Future research could build upon this study by moving from a document-based and analytical approach toward an empirical, field-based investigation. A natural next step would be to conduct in-depth fieldwork within the selected parks, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or participatory observation with local residents, park authorities, and other stakeholders. Such an approach would allow for a more in-depth understanding of how conservation policies and management strategies are perceived by local communities, the degree of social acceptance they generate, and how they concretely affect everyday life, livelihoods, and territorial identities. This would help bridge the gap between formal governance frameworks and lived experiences on the ground.

In a broader perspective, this research could evolve into a more extensive comparative study that goes beyond European contexts and long-established conservation traditions. Including

protected areas from regions with shorter conservation histories, different socio-economic conditions, or distinct governance cultures that would allow for a deeper examination of how institutional maturity, historical importance, and cultural embeddedness influence conservation outcomes. Comparing long-standing national parks with more recently established protected areas could provide valuable insights into whether the longevity of conservation traditions contributes to more effective conservation policies and coexistence between ecosystems and local communities, or whether alternative governance models can achieve similar results under different conditions.

Finally, future studies could integrate perspectives to assess how conservation strategies and governance arrangements evolve over time, particularly in response to environmental change, socio-economic transformation, and shifting policy priorities. Such research would further contribute to understanding protected areas not as static entities, but as dynamic territorial systems shaped by continuous negotiation between ecological, institutional, and social dimensions.

6.2 TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN PROTECTED AREAS: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM ITALY AND SWEDEN

Territorial governance plays an important role in how protected areas are planned, managed, and experienced, particularly in mountainous environments where ecological sensitivity, spatial constraints, and long-standing human presence intersect. Governance structures are not merely administrative arrangements, but complex systems of institutions, competences, and decision-making processes that directly influence conservation outcomes and community relations. The comparison between Italy and Sweden highlights how different governance configurations rooted in distinct historical, political, and institutional traditions have led to differentiated management approaches that are neither inherently successful nor flawed, but rather adapted to their specific territorial contexts.

In the Italian case, territorial governance is characterized by a multilayered and predominantly top-down structure. National parks operate within a dense institutional framework where responsibilities are distributed across national, regional, and local levels, often involving overlapping competencies and formalized planning instruments. This hierarchical structure reflects Italy's broader administrative tradition, in which strategic objectives and regulatory frameworks are largely defined at higher institutional levels and subsequently implemented at the territorial scale. In the context of Gran Paradiso National Park, this governance complexity is further intensified by the park's location across two regions, requiring continuous coordination between different regional authorities and planning systems.

While this top-down configuration can generate rigidity and slower decision-making processes, it also provides a strong regulatory framework that ensures continuity and long-term protection objectives. The Italian model emphasizes formal planning instruments, binding regulations, and institutional oversight, which can be particularly effective in contexts where human activities are deeply embedded within protected landscapes. Rather than representing a governance weakness, this structure reflects an attempt to balance conservation goals with long established territorial practices through institutional control and negotiated planning.

By contrast, the Swedish governance model reflects a more horizontal and decentralized approach. Although national authorities provide overarching conservation objectives and strategic guidelines, substantial decision-making power is delegated to regional and local

levels. This structure allows management strategies to be developed closer to the specific territorial and ecological conditions of each park, promoting adaptive and context governance. In mountainous regions such as those encompassing Sarek National Park, this decentralized framework facilitates flexible responses to environmental challenges and local needs.

An additional and distinctive governance layer in Sweden is the formal recognition of indigenous Sámi institutions, particularly the Sámi Parliament, which plays a key role in land-use planning and resource management within Sámi territories. This inclusion reflects a governance model that explicitly acknowledges cultural landscapes and traditional livelihoods as integral components of conservation. Rather than separating nature from society, Swedish territorial governance in these contexts operates through negotiated coexistence, where conservation objectives are pursued alongside the protection of indigenous rights and practices.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that these different governance models have produced divergent yet functional outcomes. The Italian and Swedish cases do not suggest the existence of an optimal or universal governance formula. Instead, they illustrate how governance arrangements evolve in response to historical trajectories, institutional capacities, and territorial specificities. What emerges is not a separation between effective and ineffective systems, but a spectrum of governance configurations shaped by place-based conditions.

Crucially, it is important to reinforce the idea that territorial governance in protected areas functions as a dynamic and interdependent system. Governance structures, conservation frameworks, management plans, and local communities are deeply interconnected components. A change in one element, such as policy priorities, institutional competencies, or community expectations, inevitably affects the others, requiring continuous adjustment and recalibration. When these adaptations fail to occur, the complexity of institutional layers and public policies can delay effective management and generate tensions between actors.

For this reason, territorial governance should be understood as an evolving process rather than a fixed institutional design. In mountainous protected areas, where ecological and social systems are particularly sensitive to change, governance frameworks must remain flexible and responsive. The absence of a universal model does not represent a limitation, but rather highlights the importance of adaptive governance capable of integrating ecological objectives, territorial realities, and social dynamics over time. Only through such continuous evolution is it possible to protect areas effectively and reach their conservation goals while maintaining legitimacy and functionality within their broader territorial context.

6.3 CONSERVATION FRAMEWORKS AND PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

The analysis of conservation frameworks and park management plans has demonstrated that protected area governance operates through a vertically and horizontally articulated system, in which objectives and principles are progressively translated across multiple scales. International conservation frameworks establish goals and shared principles that are subsequently interpreted and adapted at national, regional, and local levels. This structure aims to ensure coherence between global conservation and implementation, while allowing sufficient flexibility to address the specific ecological, social, and territorial conditions of each protected area.

As shown throughout the thesis, management plans represent the key instruments through which these frameworks become operational at the park level. However, the emergence of such plans occurred significantly later than the establishment of many national parks. Early conservation efforts relied primarily on regulatory approaches that defined permitted and

prohibited activities, often assuming that protection could be achieved through static rules alone. Over time, it became evident that this approach was not enough to address the complexity of protected landscapes, characterized by ecological sensitivity, historical land use, and ongoing human interaction.

The gradual development of park-specific management plans reflects an increasing awareness that each protected area requires specific objectives, strategies, and instruments. Effective conservation cannot rely only on general regulations, but must be based on detailed studies that consider ecological processes, social dynamics, economic activities, and spatial relationships. As highlighted in this research, conservation outcomes depend on the interaction between multiple components, meaning that isolated measures are unlikely to achieve long-term effectiveness unless they are coordinated within a broader strategic framework.

Early generations of management plans, although innovative for their time, were strongly influenced by a conservation ideology that prioritized the natural environment as a separate entity. These plans often forget the functional connections between protected areas and their surrounding territories, as well as the continued presence of human communities whose livelihoods and cultural practices remained closely linked to the landscape. It is within this period that zoning emerged as a central planning instrument, allowing parks to differentiate areas according to varying conservation objectives and levels of protection. While zoning represented a significant advance by recognizing territorial diversity within parks, its application varied considerably across cases, reflecting the unique ecological and social characteristics of each site.

These planning approaches remained stable for some decades. However, shifts in conservation discourse, combined with social debate, lead to a transition toward a new paradigm for protected areas. This paradigm challenges exclusionary models of conservation and recognizes that many landscapes of high ecological value have been historically shaped and maintained through human practices. As a result, contemporary conservation increasingly emphasizes the inclusion of local communities as active partners in planning and management processes. This ideological shift has had direct implications for management plans, requiring their revision and adaptation to incorporate participatory governance, socio-economic development objectives, and integrated territorial approaches. Initiatives aimed at supporting local economies, such as community-based projects and forms of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, have become central components of contemporary park strategies. These initiatives illustrate how conservation and development are no longer framed as opposing goals, but as interdependent processes that must be addressed together.

At the same time, the revision of management plans has been neither linear nor uniform. New planning approaches must navigate complex governance structures and align with multiple institutional layers, each with its own competencies and priorities. This complexity has reinforced the importance of monitoring as a core management tool. Continuous evaluation allows authorities to assess whether conservation measures are achieving their intended objectives and to identify areas requiring adjustment. Monitoring thus enables management plans to function as adaptive instruments rather than static documents, supporting iterative learning and policy refinement.

6.4 LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND COEXISTENCE

Throughout this research, the analysis has consistently shown that local communities have always played a fundamental role in shaping mountainous landscapes and their ecological conditions. Many of the environments now designated as protected areas are not untouched natural systems, but rather the result of long-term interactions between human practices and natural processes. Traditional livelihoods, land-use systems, and local forms of environmental stewardship have contributed not only to shaping these landscapes, but also to their preservation over time.

The findings of this thesis indicate a clear shift in how local communities are perceived within contemporary conservation frameworks. Increasingly, communities are no longer treated solely as constraints to conservation, but as key actors whose knowledge, practices, and participation are essential to achieving long-term ecological goals. This change is reflected in the growing emphasis on co-planning initiatives, participatory governance mechanisms, and collaborative management approaches involving multiple stakeholders. Such developments demonstrate a broader transformation in conservation thinking, where the protection of nature is understood as inseparable from the social, cultural, and territorial contexts that surround protected areas. In the case of Gran Paradiso National Park, the role of local communities is closely linked to historical patterns of settlement, agriculture, and pastoralism. For generations, the population inhabiting the park and its surrounding areas has relied primarily on farming and livestock grazing, with limited diversification into other economic sectors due to the geographical constraints, terrain characteristics, and relative isolation of many villages. These structural conditions have contributed over time to processes of depopulation, as younger generations often leave in search of broader economic opportunities.

Within this context, contemporary conservation strategies and development-oriented projects aim to mitigate depopulation by strengthening the connection between local livelihoods and park-related opportunities. Initiatives linked to sustainable tourism, environmental education, and the valorization of cultural and natural heritage seek to encourage residents to remain in the territory while contributing to its broader social and economic vitality. Coexistence in Gran Paradiso therefore emerges as a negotiated process, where conservation objectives are aligned with efforts to sustain local communities and reinforce their role as custodians of the landscape.

In Sarek National Park, the relationship between conservation and local communities is shaped by a different historical and institutional framework. Here, the focus lies primarily on the Sámi people, whose traditional livelihoods, particularly reindeer herding, have long structured land use across northern Sweden. The formal recognition of indigenous rights and the establishment of the Sámi Parliament represent a significant shift in governance, transforming both the perception of Sámi communities and their capacity to influence decision-making processes related to land use and conservation.

While reindeer herding remains a central element of Sámi cultural identity, this research shows that many Sámi individuals have gradually moved away from full-time pastoral livelihoods. Nevertheless, contemporary conservation and governance frameworks actively promote the continuation of these traditional practices as integral components of a cultural landscape. Through institutionalized participation channels, Sámi communities are able to engage directly with planning processes, contribute traditional ecological knowledge, and articulate their needs in relation to environmental change, economic pressures, and territorial development.

Taken together, the two case studies demonstrate that coexistence between local communities and protected areas is not a static condition, but a dynamic and evolving process. It depends on governance structures, historical legacies, and the capacity of institutions to adapt conservation

strategies to changing social realities. Whether through development-oriented initiatives in inhabited landscapes such as Gran Paradiso, or through rights-based and culturally grounded governance models in Sarek, the inclusion of local communities emerges as a fundamental prerequisite for resilient and effective conservation.

Ultimately, this thesis reinforces the conclusion that local communities are not peripheral to conservation outcomes, but central to them. Their continued involvement, recognition, and adaptation are essential to maintaining the delicate balance between ecological protection and social sustainability in mountainous national parks.

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