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- 1 On a ridge in an alpine pine forest a gap in the tree line allows the observer to catch a glimpse of a sunlit forested valley. The trees provide shade from the midday sun, the scent of the pines is almost palpable and there are no visible traces of human interference into nature... if there would not be the sign on the tree telling the wayfarer that he or she happens to be at the border of a national park.



- 2 The sign changes everything. The first glance through the branches reveals a view on a forested mountain that is not even very spectacular for most of the valley is hidden. The second glance however, is not set anymore on a nondescript valley but on a national park, and in this case on *the* national park since Switzerland so far has only one conservation area with this label. The gaze that moves over that forested area is now charged with awareness, assumptions, hopes, and also uncertainties: «This landscape has been protected for almost hundred years!», «Will I see deer, ibex, and rare birds?», or «People are not allowed to leave the trails in the park, where can I have my pick-nick?»
- 3 The means and modes of appropriation of this space beyond the sign are not the same as where the photographer stood. The rules and regulations that have been put into place are complex and embedded into a network of institutions. The law¹ says that the park's resources may not be used by way of extraction (i.e. hunting, fishing, logging, shepherding, collecting plants), that dogs are not allowed, that children below 15 must be accompanied by adults, and that it is not allowed to make fire. At the same time the label «national park» that is internationally acknowledged by the IUCN² and UNESCO³ warrants a natural environment that attracts tourists. Therefore, the sign at the same

time signals that there are strict rules of use in place (they are extensively explained at the park entrances a few paces beside the sign) and that this region is a unique place to visit. The label attracts 150'000 visitors that enter the park per year.⁴

- 4 The little sign that is nailed to an ailing tree gives us an insight into the complexity of landscape perception, regionalizations, and institutions that are in one way or another entangled with this special place. Of course a person's interpretation of this sign is highly dependent on his or her background, his perception and her knowledge. For the unknowing the sign may be a mere visual nuisance that ruins a photograph, the knowing may see an area that is at the same time a unique place and a part of a global network of national parks.
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NOTES

1. Verordnung über den Schutz des Schweizerischen Nationalparks (Nationalparkordnung) 498.200, http://www.nationalpark.ch/tasks/sites/de/assets/File/D_Nationalparkordnung.pdf
2. International Union for the Conservation of Nature, <http://www.iucn.org/knowledge/tools/databases/>
3. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, <http://www.unesco.org>
4. Parc Naziunal Svizzer