

What do we know about the socio-ecological impacts of the world's protected areas? A systematic review of the scientific literature

In the socio-ecological crisis of the modern era, environmental conservation discourses and practices are gaining momentum, and they are becoming always more relevant the safeguard of the world's biodiversity and ecosystems. Throughout the last century, a series of mechanisms for the safeguard of ecosystems and territories (like international conventions, policies, establishment of governance bodies and institution of protection areas) have been put into place at various levels and scales. As a result, approximately 15% of the world's terrestrial surface and inland waters hold a protection status, and the aim is to higher the extension of protected areas in the years to come. During the last decades the conservation discourses have evolved so to include the achievement of sustainable human development as the goal of intergovernmental organizations dedicated to conservation practices, like the IUCN, the UNEP or UNESCO.

However, harmony in socio-ecosystems is not so easy to achieve. In the current context of climate change, biodiversity and global health crises, navigating uncertainty and shocks in a resilient and inclusive way has become mandatory. Critical scholars have empirically shown how tensions between human development drivers and nature conservation goals eventually lead to unsustainable practices or outcomes. On the other hand, successful cases of synergies between conservation and development objectives also echo in and outside academia, as testimonies that humans can live in the biosphere minimizing its harm. In other words, while it is worth searching for solutions to the socio-ecological crisis in the conservation arena, it is important to understand and acknowledge how have we been performing nature protection and conservation so far.

The proposed research aims to understand what have been the social and ecological impacts of assigning a protection status to different areas of the world through the performance of a systematic review of the scientific literature. Particular focus will be put on what dimensions have been included in the existing assessments, and how have they been measured; leveraging on a historical-geographical perspective.

The researcher will publish the study on a scientific journal.

If you are interested in this project or have any question, please do not hesitate to reach Roser Maneja (roser.maneja@uab.cat) and Antonio Bontempi (antonio.bontempi@uab.cat).