

Protected areas as sustainable tourism destinations

OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS

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How can tourism work for conservation?

- Sustaining the conservation economy (income, business development in protected area)
- By playing a role in sustainable development of the area: integrated approach is needed



Tourism is a buzz word in many conservation strategies and in rural development plans

- Yet the role of tourism is too often not defined...
- If we want tourism to deliver it has to be planned and managed like any other activity...
- Uncontrolled tourism development is a threat: non intervention is not an option!



A definition often overlooked:

What is a tourist? A person travelling, spending at least one overnight stay. (In general for leisure/ pleasure, but can also involve business tourism, health tourism etc., but excludes visiting friends and relatives)

What is a visitor? Anyone who visits a site/ protected area



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Visitor management

- Visitor management caters for all visitors (including tourists) and is very often a legal/ "social" obligation (including education)
- Cost/ benefit analysis is rarely made
- Visitor management is the domain of protected area management



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Important implications of tourism definition

- Tourism involves much higher spending than visitation (accommodation, activities, food and beverage, transportation, merchandising)
- Tourism is considered to be an economic phenomenon and generates expectations...
- Tourism development is outside PA borders and is not in control of management
- Tourism involves communities and stakeholders
- Tourism is “alien“ to protected area management
- Tourism development requires expert knowledge



But:

- Both tourism and visitation have potential positive and negative impacts: they form two sides of a continuum (So, visitor management can involve maximizing economic benefits; tourism can have a social dimension...)
- Sustainability is key: maximizing positive impacts, minimizing negative impacts)
- Tourism and visitation strategies should be integrated in management plans



What is a destination?

The destination is the product that the tourists identify with when they organize their holiday
(NEST)

definition of a tourism destination depends on the tourism markets targeted!



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Destination perspective is the core of tourism marketing and of product development

For regional target groups a village can be a destination, for national markets a region can be, but for international/intercontinental markets it can be a country or a continent...



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Can a protected area be a destination?

Even the most famous National Parks are seldom a “stand alone” destination: they are landmarks...



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Destinations:

- **Primary destination:** “a reason to travel”: a complete and competitive tourism product, competitive on desired tourist markets by itself/ “stand alone destination”
- **Secondary destination:** is a reason to travel within a bigger destination
- **Attraction:** A place that attracts visitors: “ a reason to visit” (element of a destination)

Compare to Michelin stars:

- * = Worth seeing/ interesting
- ** = Worth a detour
- *** = Worth a journey



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There is nothing wrong with not being a primary destination!!!

It saves a lot of frustration and desperate marketing...

It just means that you have either to:

1. link up with a wider environment to create a primary destination
2. Or just decide that tourism is not your future...



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Why a destination perspective?

1. It is **demand** oriented
2. It is about **strategies**
3. It is about sustainable **development** of rural and protected areas...

Only in this way tourism will meet the high expectations that it raises in many regions..



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From a demand perspective Eco (& Rural) Tourism destinations:

- Compete with ever growing number of destinations at European/ intercontinental level
- Compete with each other
- Do not have a very high tourism profile
- Are more a “could be” than a “must see”
- Need additional products, services (interpretation, activities!) and infrastructure to become attractive



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WHAT MAKES A NATURAL DESTINATION UNIQUE?

- Variety in traditional landscapes and land use
- Natural and cultural heritage
- Unspoiled villages and (small) towns
- Variety in traditional life styles
- Local hospitality and local products
- & EXPERIENCES BASED ON THOSE RESOURCES



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Tourism challenges for protected areas on Sava River

- Limited public and political support: visitation and tourism needed
- Hidden treasures, unknown to the world...
- Limited international demand: image problem
- Limited domestic demand; volatile due to crisis, social exclusion
- Nature/ Eco-tourism is not very popular (nature as background for social activities)
- Uncontrolled tourism development/ illegal activities
- Rural crisis makes sustainable livelihoods a major challenge: tourism at any price; expectations are high and not always realistic...



Common solutions???

- 1+1=3!!!
- SAVA as a common tourism brand?
- If so, the brand has to be loaded: what is the SAVA EXPERIENCE?
- SAVA is EMOTION, PASSION.....
- Sava is a living storyline that links the different areas and enables tourists to read the natural and cultural landscape
- How can joint tourism products and infrastructure be developed?
- Joined marketing and promotion



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How can we make a collier out of this collection of pearls...

- No replication of experiences: wetlands get boring after some days... Every day a discovery...
- Activity based: the road is the experience: itineraries for cycling (Danube in Austria); hiking(Camino de Santiago), horse riding, kayaking or a combination....
- A common message is needed: as a tourist you become a friend of Sava and you contribute to its conservation and to local livelihoods. Walk the talk...
- Special interest groups:
 - hard core eco-tourists like bird watchers
 - ethnological/ cultural diversity
 - History: Friedensweg
- Storylines and themes need to be defined and developed

