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
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
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!
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...
Can a protected area be a destination?

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