

Generating Income in Protected Areas

Issues of Sustainable Tourism Development

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1. Fit for visitors - Developing a tourism strategy

Considerations about how to manage tourism are an essential part of the management of a protected area. As such a tourism strategy needs to be an integral part of the area's management plan. With a sound tourism strategy it will be possible to manage visitors in a way which is compatible with the park's protection needs and to develop both successful and sustainable tourism products.

Taking a strategic approach towards tourism also means to get actively involved and have a say in the development of the protected area's region by having a clear vision on which products can be offered to visitors and which can't.

One element of the strategy should be an inventory and analysis of the area which is developed in a consultancy process with the local stakeholders. The aim of the inventory is to create a record of reliable, comprehensive information and to provide:

- a basis for visitor management and tourism development
- a source for providing information to visitors and tour operators
- a reference for marketing material
- a reference for guides and tour organisers
- a reference for interpretation and tourist publications

Important aspects of developing a tourism strategy include the following aspects:

- setting up a steering group with regional key partners and a permanent working group
- involving local and regional partners by discussions, meetings, interviews and by setting up a permanent tourism forum
- compiling an analysis of
 - aspects of the natural heritage
 - aspects of the cultural heritage
 - protection needs
 - tourist infrastructure, sites, facilities
 - means of access
 - services and activities
 - number and type of accommodation facilities
 - restaurants, regional products and crafts
 - data on the visitors and tourism statistics of the area
 - tourism organisations in the area
 - the tourism market and trends
 - economic and environmental impacts
- identifying the
 - values and image of the park
 - environmental and tourism objectives,
 - future tourism products and activities
- Making the strategy a tool to work with. Since results and proposals are needed in short term, studies for the strategy should be concentrated to this purpose.
- The strategy should result in an action plan which meets the objectives and provides practical measures and projects for implementation.
- Revising the strategy regularly on the basis of up-dated information and the monitoring of tourism impacts.
- Publishing the strategy in good quality, distributing and discussing it in the region.

2. Contracts for Sustainable Products

In order to both motivate and to steer the development of sustainable tourism in protected areas the Federation of National and Nature Parks of Europe, EUROPARC has drawn up "The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas". It is based on five years of research and consultation amongst parks and relevant bodies. The purpose of the Charter is to encourage good practice by identifying those parks and protected areas which are meeting agreed requirements for the sustainable development and management of tourism.

Parks and protected areas who intend to be signatories of the Charter have to apply at EUROPARC and to meet set requirements which are then to be verified by external tourism experts. These requirements include:

- agreeing to the underlying Charters principles and criteria
- a permanent structure for working in partnership with others
- a strategy for sustainable tourism
- a set of actions which address identified sustainability issues

The Charter requires that the following key issues should be addressed in the strategic priorities and action programmes of the protected areas:

- to provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit
- to communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area
- to encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area
- to increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism
- to ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents
- to protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism
- to increase benefits from tourism to the local economy
- to monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts

The Charter thus helps the development of sustainable tourism products by giving a framework for a strategic approach.

3. Knowing your visitor - Key to successful products

- In order to create sustainable tourism products and to manage visitors effectively protected area managers need to be positive and responsive to their visitors' needs.
- Information and activities designed with visitors' needs and expectations in mind are more likely to be successful and to raise awareness of the park's aims.
- Defining the key groups of park visitors will lead to effective marketing and distribution which can be clearly addressed to particular target groups.
- The park needs to survey its visitors and collect and analyse visitor data. This can be done in cooperation with tourism organisations, local communities and universities.
- The most important needs of visitors to protected areas include:
 - to be close to nature
 - to experience and enjoy the park's special features
 - to choose their own programme
 - to experience authentic cultural heritage e.g. architecture, local food
 - to sleep and eat well
 - to get good information
 - to feel welcome

4. Creating sustainable tourism products

The essential “products” that many protected areas in Central and Eastern Europe offer visitors are:

- outstanding natural areas and rich biodiversity
- opportunities to explore and enjoy “wilderness”
- recreational activities: hiking, climbing, skiing, hunting, fishing,
- relaxation and recreation in a healthy, pollution-free environment,

In many protected landscapes there are likely still to be:

- traditional settlements and vernacular architecture
- farming, characteristic local produce
- historic and cultural sites
- arts, crafts and traditions

Special qualities - special products

There is much potential for promoting sustainable tourism activities in and around protected areas, but the necessary infrastructure is often undeveloped. Protected area managers have a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism, in supporting development of the infrastructure in their area, and exercising some control in marketing the special character of the park to key target groups. The following are needed:

- visitor services and infrastructure.
 - sign-posting
 - information centres
 - car-parks, campsites
 - rails, activities
 - accommodation, shops, cafes
 - waste management
 - security
 - public transport
- nature tourism opportunities
 - education, interpretation centres
 - trails, bird-watching, guided trails etc.
 - conservation activities
- cultural tourism opportunities
 - heritage trails, interpretation
 - historic sites, museums
 - events, festivals
 - local community
- co-operation with local people/communities to develop rural tourism businesses
 - activities, guide services
 - accommodation, local produce and crafts
 - training

Establishing products and “packaging” them for the protected area is part of the marketing process. The main key to their success is that they are prepared and marketed professionally. The role of the protected area in this context is very much to influence the tourism products by consultation and its tourism strategy. Whereas in some cases it can act as a provider of services and products like guided tours, packages, accommodation (huts for hikers) in many cases it won't have the staff and capacity of acting as a professional tourism organisation. It therefore has to get into a close partnership with those acting in tourism, in order that the products are marketed professionally.

What makes a sustainable product

The range of appropriate products should be clearly identified in the tourism strategy. An inventory is needed of the existing products offered, their quality and success, and the potential for future products should be identified, with resource needs.

Good appropriate products will:

- deal with the characteristic features of the natural and cultural heritage of the region
- respect sensitive places, be environmentally sound
- be carefully planned (places, access, numbers) and monitored
- benefit the region (income, protection and development of the heritage)
- offer good quality for the visitor
- aim to support local initiatives for building sustainable services.

5. 'Visitor pay back schemes'

Besides commercial products and compulsory tourist taxes, "Visitor Payback" schemes are a direct means of tapping tourist spending for specific local needs. The idea of encouraging visitors to make a voluntary contribution for conservation action in the areas they visit was tested in five case study areas in the Visitor Payback project (1996-7) as part of the EU Action Plan for Tourism. The range of approaches tested and reviewed included:

- Asking for a one-off donation
- Getting visitors to sponsor the park or a particular project
- Setting up a Friends scheme for visitors to join
- Adding a "conservation" supplement to package holidays/hotel/restaurant bills- as an "opt-in" or "opt-out" payment
- Merchandising
- Voluntary charge, for an event or access to a site
- Participation, volunteering to help with conservation projects

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, and much depends on the culture of particular areas, the type of visitors, and the nature of the visit. The conclusion from the project was that visitors are willing to pay for conservation in the places they visit. Whilst the amounts donated may be low, added together they make a significant contribution over time. The easier the system is to administer the better, the opt-out supplement is one of the most effective means, as few people decide *not* to make the contribution. Involving the tourist enterprises is critical: whilst there may be some resistance initially, the project demonstrated that those who did get involved responded very positively.

Keys to success in a visitor payback scheme are:

- have it run by a "worthy" organisation (e.g. an NGO or a voluntary organisation),
- a readily identifiable "good cause" to be the beneficiary
- link a request for donations to good interpretation e.g. of conservation issues when exploring a site
- support and involvement of tourist enterprises
- good publicity, on-site and in advance if possible
- a simple approach to visitors and an easy process for making payments
- efficient means of collecting money and giving it to beneficiaries
- a monitoring and feed back process

6. Loving them to Death? - Guidelines and Case Studies to Copy

The EUROPARC working group "Tourism" has set up a publication with guidelines and case studies for tourism development in protected areas in Europe. On the grounds of a working group consisting of participants from Central and Eastern Europe the publication was revised in 2001 and contains a new part with guidelines and case studies from Eastern European parks.

EUROPARC: Loving them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks. Grafenau 2001. contact: EUROPARC, Kröllstr. 5, 94475 Grafenau, email: office@europarc.org