

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PROTECTED AREAS – A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

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Abstract: In 2004, in the North-Eastern part of Slovenia the Nature Park Goričko was established. Prior to its establishment, the local inhabitants expressed a lot of fears concerning expected restrictions due to their area's protected status. Several measures were taken to show to the locals the positive parts of living in a nature park. An opinion poll was conducted in order to specify the fears and to check their attitudes towards the park. Five years after the nature park establishment, a shorter and slightly modified version of the same questionnaire was used to test the contentedness of the local population with their present living conditions. Its results showed that after six years of living in the park, the contentedness to live in a protected area, as well as the level of optimism of the local population has risen. What remains unchanged is the list of measures the interviewees consider crucial to encourage the development of entrepreneurship.

Key words: Goričko Nature Park, tourism development, ecology, entrepreneurship, agriculture, progress, restrictions

RAZVOJ TURIZMA V ZAŠČITENIH OBMOČJIH – BLAGOSLOV ALI PREKLETSTVO?

Povzetek: Leta 2004 je bil v SV Sloveniji ustanovljen Krajinski park Goričko. Pred ustanovitvijo je lokalno prebivalstvo izrazilo veliko zaskrbljenost zaradi pričakovanih številnih omejitev, ki jih prinaša razglasitev varovanega območja. Veliko ukrepov je bilo sprejetih, ki bi naj razblinili strahove matičnega prebivalstva in jih seznanili s pozitivnimi platmi življenja v krajinskem parku. Med prebivalstvom je bila izvedena anketa za namenom, da zazna obseg omenjenih strahov in mnenja in odnos Goričancev do ustanovitve parka. Pet let po ustanovitvi parka je bila anketa, tokrat v bolj strnjeni in skrajšani obliki, ponovljena, njen namen pa je bil ugotavljati zadovoljstvo lokalnega prebivalstva s sedanjim življenjem v parku. Rezultati so pokazali, da sta po petih letih zadovoljstvo z življenjem na območju krajinskega parka in stopnja optimizma med prebivalstvom narasli. Kar je ostalo nespremenjeno, je spisek ukrepov, ki jih smatrajo intervjuvanci za nujne za vzpodbujanje razvoja podjetništva.

Ključne besede:

Krajinski par Goričko, razvoj turizma, ekologija, podjetništvo, kmetijstvo, napredek, omejitve

1. Introduction: models and mainstreams in sustainable tourism development

“Bad news” about the environment, climate change, cultural destruction and other depressing revelations of the new millennium make the front pages of newspapers. Tourism as an ever expanding player has a responsibility to provide the most ecologically friendly face possible to the costumer and the destination. Dewar (2009) states, that whether or not “face” translates into substantial action is a matter still open to debate. Tourism is simultaneously portrayed, as Simpson (2006) quotes, as a destroyer of culture, undermining social norms and economy, degrading social structures, stripping communities of individuality; and at the same time as saviour of the poor and disadvantaged, providing opportunities and economic benefits, promoting social exchange and enhancing livelihoods. The author therefore examines and defines the concept of CBTI (community benefit tourism initiatives), setting a range of characteristics that contribute to creating the best possible scenario for a successful, sustainable and responsible CBTI. Several other concepts of sustainable destination management were elaborated in the last decade all around the world, many of them enjoying a lot of support (including financial means) from public authorities, which confirms the usefulness of Simpson's model. The question whether the plethora of different models is necessary can be answered with a clear yes. They are aimed at preserving the local culture and thus have to fit tightly to the local circumstances, which differ from destination to destination considerably. Anyway, we can consider as some kind common denominator of all the models the triple bottom line (economy, ecology, social welfare in the broadest sense of the word's meaning) – practically all modern models stick to them.

When talking about conserving the environment, we are usually focused predominately on preserving nature, thus into rural areas. Fecyt – Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology – analysed the rural tourist's profile (Leisure & Travel Week, 2009) and stated that (citing Royo-Vela) the historical-cultural wealth

of a place, the emotions it arouses, the cleanliness and tranquillity of the surroundings, the welcome given by the inhabitants of the village, its architectural harmony and degree to which this style has been maintained, its shops, its historical heritage and richness of its landscape, and the tourism-cultural management and complementary facilities and services provided are all key features within the model of tourism marketing.

Quite often we can face difficulties in distinguishing rural and agro-tourism; the first one is much wider and applies to everything that is offered in rural areas, including hunting, fishing, golf or wellness in rural manors, whereas agro- or agri-tourism are limited to tourism farms and their offer. Distinguishing between both of them is crucial as they attract crucially different kinds of tourists. A complex typology for defining agri-tourism was published recently by Philip et al (2009). What helps, are articles on motives for rural tourism and on rural tourist segmentation; Devasa et al (2009) define four main segments: 1) visitors looking for tranquillity, rest and contact with nature, 2) cultural visitors, 3) proximity-gastronomic and nature visitors, and 4) return tourists. This classification is broad enough to be used in any destination.

Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism are widely recognised as means of enhancing local development as well as protecting natural environment and traditional and cultural heritage in international resolutions (Alpine Convention, tourism protocol, 1991; Lisbon strategy, 2000; Quebec declaration on Ecotourism, 2002; The renewed European Tourism policy, 2006; Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism, 2007; etc.). Castellani and Sala (2009) studied therefore the possible ways of encouraging new ways of business, which would have several positive impacts, including increasing employment, through application of the "European charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas" (more info at <http://www.european-charter.org>) that represents a referential methodology for local development and a possibility to involve local stakeholders.

2. Case study: Nature Park Goričko in Slovenia

Three years prior to the EU Agenda (in 2003/2004), the directions described in the Agenda have already been used in practice during the process of establishing the Nature Park Goričko in the North-Eastern part of Slovenia. It forms a part of the trilateral nature park that connects three neighbouring countries and there nature parks: Goričko in Slovenia, Raab in Austria, and Őrség in Hungary.

A very strong conflict of interests was present in 2004 in Goričko, which formed a very negative-propaganda against the nature park foundation. The main arguments of the opposition were concerning only one of the triple bottom line issues: the economy. What people were concerned about were the main sources of earning the living in the region (agriculture, industry); as they expected restrictions after the nature park establishment, their comments were often highly emotionally loaded. We must explain that the population of this border region is demographically critical: much older than the average in Slovenia due to a permanent and decades-long depopulation process and, at the same time, less educated than the Slovene average. To clearly show the benefits of the nature park establishment, regarding several facets of living in Goričko, an awareness raising campaign was necessary. The Slovene Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning – being in charge of founding the nature park – launched a series of seminars (that were designed and coordinated by the author of this article). They have been offered primarily to local opinion makers (yet any other interested person was welcome to attend as well). The aim of this training was providing opinion makers with additional knowledge, which they could – and should – use when contacting the locals in order to help minimise the reluctance against the nature park foundation and to help reduce different kinds of fears among the local population, predominately the fear of being doomed to retardation after the park has been established.

2.1 Methodology

The group of experts doing the explanation work (in autumn/winter 2003 and winter/spring 2004, meaning the last phase prior to the foundation of the nature park) could define seven major fields of concern resulting from different kinds of fear or from lacking knowledge. All have been included into the seminars; these were:

1. Expected stagnation or downturn of agriculture due to expected restrictions for use of mineral fertilisers and synthetic pesticides (and thus losing competitiveness because of lesser crops);
2. Shrinking of industry due to expected restricted investment (e.g. into new roads, factories, etc.);
3. Expected stagnation or downturn of entrepreneurship because young people would even more intensively than before leave the region and search for work in cities;
4. Stagnation or only a light growth of tourism (a strongly underdeveloped region can't be perceived as inviting by tourists);
5. Willingness to cooperate and readiness to invest into the creation of a local brand that could be used for agriculture products, for tourism services, and for all kinds of products originating in this region that would meet the criteria of being environmental friendly;
6. Awareness raising concerning the heritage of the region and the need for its conservation, deriving from the fear of losing a lot of heritage artefacts because people deprived of their jobs (or not getting enough revenue

from their farms) would be ready to sell anything, including heritage items and even entire farms to anyone to get some money;

7. Loss of identity because of intense depopulation: fear that young people would, because of all the cited restrictions, even more intensively than prior to the park establishment leave the region due to very poor employment chances and settle in a city or region with more attractive conditions of living; consequently, there would not remain enough people willing to take care of the local traditions (e.g. folklore).

Additionally, a series of very positive press releases was launched, including a brochure that was spread to all households of the region in one month intervals. It reported on the progress concerning the park foundation and was spreading positive news from the seminars and bringing information on opportunities how to start an own business after the nature park has been founded.

After the park has been established in 2004, the above mentioned opinion poll was led among the local inhabitants by sending 2000 questionnaires to households in the region. Addresses were picked up from the regional telephone book (each 15th address). The response rate was, although there was a free envelope enclosed, only 12.5 %. Probably one of reasons for this low response rate was the fact that several houses are empty (the already heavy depopulation) and nobody has opened the post; a next possible reason was probably the demographic structure of the region: elderly people who live alone in their houses usually don't have a positive attitude to responding to questionnaires.

The questionnaire was testing the attitudes and opinions of the locals regarding the foundation of the nature park and its expected impact on their lives.

The results showed that several fears were present among the local population and that there was a correlation between the education levels of the interviewed persons, the intensity (or the number) of fears and the level of pessimism in their attitudes towards the future (lower the education - the more intense were the pessimism and fear). The question scopes were testing seven major fields of interest as described above.

Five years after the park has been officially launched (fall 2009), a shorter form of the first questionnaire was used to test a possible change in local inhabitants' perceptions and to find out, whether they see their former fears as legitimate, and whether living in the protected area has had more positive or more negative impacts on their lives. Due to the limited space, only results of the second opinion poll will be presented in this paper.

2.2 Results of the opinion poll between the local inhabitants in the Goričko region (fall 2009)

The questionnaire was structured as a series of 30 statements, reaching from very negative to very positive attitudes concerning each of the seven topics listed above. The interviewees were asked to mark a note on a 5-grade Likert scale, which met their opinion / attitude.

The demographic part of the questionnaire consisted of two multiple choice answers (profession and education), and one open question where the interviewees were asked to fill in their age.

Table 1: Attitudes and opinions of the Nature Park Goričko (NPG) population regarding the 7 indicated fields of concern six years after the NPG establishment

Q.	STATEMENTS	mean	std. dev.
1A	Founding of the NPG had negative impact on the farming sector because less artificial fertilisers and aggressive sparkling substances can be used and the crops are lesser.	2,60	1,44
2A	More eco-farms have been founded in the Goričko region due to the NP foundation.	3,12	1,45
3A	The foundation of the NPG had no impact on the farming sector.	3,23	1,71
4T	Due to the nature park foundation, new tourism and hospitality firms have been founded in the region.	3,45	1,50
5T	Due to the NPG foundation and its unspoiled nature, more and more tourists are coming to the region.	3,79	1,50
6T	The NPG foundation had no impact on tourism development in the region.	3,03	1,64
7E	In the Goričko region, the well-being of tourists should be reinforced through more different kinds of offer entrepreneurs, e.g. biker friendly hospitality firms and B&Bs, stores with specialised equipment for biking, hiking, equestrian equipment, souvenirs...	4,42	1,39
8E	Founding of the NPG had no impact to the entrepreneurship development in the region.	3,30	1,61
9E	More people would decide to start a business (become an entrepreneur) if a "list of challenges" was available, what could be started as a business in the Goričko region.	4,13	1,35
10E	Local population in Goričko is not deciding more often to start an own business because they are lacking the necessary knowledge and financial means.	3,84	1,28
11E	The entrepreneurs-beginners should have the possibility of free consulting (education,	4,45	1,23

	training) on how to succeed as entrepreneur in a certain branch.		
12E	Founding of the NPG has negative impact on the Goričko region, as due to restrictions neither new entrepreneurs nor industry are coming to the region.	3,14	1,47
13H	Local population in the Goričko region sells even for little money to the visitors anything, so their homes as heritage artefacts (like antique furniture).	4,18	1,63
14P	NPG brings a lot of restrictions for making business; therefore young people will continue moving away from the nature park territory.	3,37	1,52
15H	There are enough young people on the part territory who are actively involved in taking care of the heritage (folklore, choirs etc.) and traditions.	3,43	1,38
16P	NPG contributes to a bigger self-confidence of the local inhabitants; people are proud of being the Goričko residents, and they are ready, more than ever before, to take care and to protect their heritage.	3,67	1,66
17H	The foundation of the NPG has no impact on inhabitants' relation towards heritage.	3,32	1,36
18H	Old houses (low ceilings, little windows) in the Goričko region would have to be torn down; in place of them, new and modern small hotels and B&Bs would have to be erected.	1,58	0,97
19H	Tourists appreciate preserved heritage as a part of irreplaceable riches and part of major attractions of the place they are visiting. Rather than in hotels, the tourists prefer spending their holidays in smaller accommodations with less or even without stars, yet in a typically local style.	3,88	1,48
20H	The tourism offer of the Goričko region should be upgraded with crops, which are part of the regional traditions (like trellis-work and wine /juice from those grapes), local gastronomy (typical dishes and beverages) as well as items of old, traditional handicrafts.	4,45	1,35
21T	Visiting energy fields (alternative healing) can foster tourism development in the region.	3,69	1,40
22C	Entrepreneurs in the Goričko region would have to join and present their offer to other citizens of Slovenia cooperatively (at one spot, in one brochure etc.).	4,31	1,03
23C	Within the NPG there should be several spots (inns, shops, tourism farms, co-operatives etc.) where all crops and products from the region would have to be available for purchase so any tourist leaving the region would have the possibility of taking all items they got to know in Goričko, with them back home.	4,36	1,20
24M	It is more difficult to sell labelled crops (with a trade mark), products and services as those without a label because they are more expensive.	3,59	1,38
25M	Customers are willing to pay more for labelled items / services, because a mark gives them the certainty that they will be satisfied with the service.	4,06	1,34
26M	Due to the founding of the NPG, the region became known as a protected area, and therefore the confidence of costumers towards the crops deriving from this region is higher than to those of other regions. It is thus sensible to develop a mark that gives a clear provenience of goods and services from this region, because everything can thus be sold a bit more expensive.	4,05	1,38
27M	As an entrepreneur I am ready to contribute financial means for the development and management of a joint brand (Goričko, Prekmurje) and I am ready to use the brand consciously (maintaining the quality and thus the consumer trust into the brand).	4,75	2,68
28C	Co-operation of the same kind of supply, like farms' offer, handicrafts etc. would have been fostered and would assure a year-round supply with items from the Goričko region (apples, apple juice, apple acid, dried apples, souvenirs...).	4,33	1,08
29M	Co-operating of farmers and entrepreneurs from the Goričko region who would use the same label is indispensable as only their acting jointly can assure a permanent and sufficient supply on the one side and the necessary power for negotiations with supermarket chains.	4,32	1,22
30C	I am ready to enter such a co-operation and to contribute financial means for its operations.	4,12	2,68

A=agriculture; T= tourism; E= entrepreneurship H= heritage; P=population; C=co-operation; M=marketing

The only two statements that have received values below the average (less than 3) are marked grey in the table – and by both of them we can comment it is good so: the responses to question 1 show that the majority thinks that founding the nature park hasn't brought negative impacts to agriculture.

The lowest degree of agreement has been assigned to the statement that typical old (and after people have left the Goričko empty standing) countryside houses should be torn down and replaced by modern tourism

facilities (B&Bs etc.); this result has the lowest standard deviation, which means that the ratings on the 5-degree scale have not varied considerably.

The highest standard deviation has been measured by questions 27 and 30, both asking the interviewees whether or not they were ready to participate financially in the process of development and management of a regional brand; the readiness to do so was far beyond the average (4.75 and 4.12). This means that most of respondents were ready to participate and have rated the answers with high notes (e.g. 4 and 5), some of them have in the opposite decided for very low degrees of agreement (like 1 or 2).

The questions regarding the field of entrepreneurship shows that much more concern has to be dedicated to this theme from the part of the public sector. There obviously is a readiness to start an own business, yet the means to do so are lacking (reaching from financial means to knowledge gaps that could be filled by free training and consulting and helping potential new entrepreneurs with lists of opportunities what to do as entrepreneur in Goričko and handing them out a ready-to-go project fiche).

The foundation of NPG has obviously not had a lot of impact on awareness building concerning the region's heritage; the interviewees mean that like in the past, the locals are still ready to sell – even for little money – to the visitors any heritage item, including their houses.

A negative result shows the opinion that the depopulation is still lasting and that it would continue (young people would continue moving away from the NPG); the interviewed persons thus mean that NPG is not perceived as a value and as an opportunity by the young generation.

3. Conclusion: Tourism development in protected areas: yes or no?

Yes, no doubt – but it should be made in a correct way. Tourism flows will always interfere both with nature and ecology and economy of the region where it should be developed. It is therefore important to plan the development very carefully to prevent changing the cultural and the natural landscape in an extent causing them to lose either their authenticity or their status as protected nature – then exactly these are the sources of its attractiveness for many tourists. Any tourism development plan, especially in protected areas, should therefore be based in thorough analyses of a) the carrying capacity of the region, and of b) the adequate tourist segments, which each unique destination wants to attract. Consequently, the region in question has to enforce the motives that should attract the segments that will not only understand and respect but also actively help to maintain and preserve the local heritage. Several studies have been completed on this topic – some of them, which could be sourced in case of the NPG, are listed below.

Concerning possible motives for rural tourism, Park and Yoon (2009) stated that it was crucial to know the causative factors and influences by which tourists in rural areas are motivated to become included in various market segments. Their investigation in Korea has shown four distinct segments: family togetherness seeker, passive tourist, want-it-all seeker, and learning and excitement seeker.

Trying to understand leisure users, Cochrane (2006) has investigated tourists' behaviour in Indonesian Bomo Tengger Semeru National Park. He found out that Westerners (most visitors to the NPG) were influenced by historic-philosophical constructions of wilderness of a bio-centric derivation and demonstrated behaviour on a knowledge-seeking/active nexus, whereas Indonesians and other Asians shared more anthropocentric/recreational attitudes, tempered with collective societal values.

Which can prove to be important for the Goričko region, is the model of factors influencing consumption of local food and beverages in destinations (Kim et al, 2009). It consists of three categories:

- Motivational factors, i.e. exiting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, and physical environment;
- Demographic factors, i.e. gender, age and education;
- Physiological factors, i.e. food neophilia (seek and taste something new) and food neophobia (the extent to which consumers are reluctant to try novel foods such as food products, dishes, cuisines). Food neophobia, perceived as both behaviour and personality, was extensively used to predict the willingness to try unfamiliar and also some familiar foods (ibid, cited Pliner and Hobden 1992). The findings sustained the relationship between food neophobia and the choice of local food and beverages.

The NPG has a very good potential for offering everything all typically rural tourist segments we are mentioning in this paper (as they have been cited by different authors) are looking for. The stress on their offer could be on e.g. recreational (active tourists) and gastronomy tourism (including wine tourism).

Much more awareness-raising work should be done as it was in the past, predominately aimed at informing the youth. A large scale of governmental incentives should be launched with the aim to stop the depopulation process. The minimal public-side input could be performed as e.g. financing the elaboration of some project fiches for promising business foundations in the field of sustainable tourism that would be handed-out for free to interested (young) people.

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