

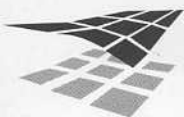
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MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL PARKS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES. CASE STUDIES: THE STATE NATIONAL PARK PRIELBRUSIE (RUSSIA) AND THE TATRA NATIONAL PARK (SLOVAKIA)

The paper focuses on some aspects of effective management and criteria for sustainable tourism in national parks. Two case studies: the State National Park Prielbrusie (Caucasus Mountains, Russia) and the Tatra National Park (Western Carpathians, Slovakia) management are analysed in the context of social transformation processes. In both national parks the impacts of the transformation processes to the effectiveness of management are evaluated and strategic recommendations for improving management effectiveness are proposed. The paper was elaborated in the frame of the Slovak – Russian Science and Technology Cooperation project SK-RU-0008-07: "Integrating landscape ecology methods into research of sustainable management of mountainous regions (LE-MOUNTAIN).

Introduction

During the 1970s, carrying capacity was advanced as a technique for managing tourism in sensitive environments (e.g. Eagles et al., 2002, Hrnčiarová et al., 1997). This encouraged managers to try to solve visitor use problems merely by setting limits to numbers based upon a pre-determined level, derived from ecological, social and other analyses. However, this approach has serious limitations. It is basically a restrictive concept, founded on limits and constraints. As a result it can be seen as working against protected area objectives designed to encourage appropriate visitor enjoyment and valuation of the resource. On the basis of the European models of good practices in protected areas Synge (2004) identified four main aspects of management:

- 1) **Zoning system:** within larger protected areas it is possible to pursue various management objectives in different parts of the area and reconcile potential conflicts through the use of zones. Zoning system is a possible way how to solve conflicts between environmentalists and developers.
- 2) **Visitor management:** the challenge for management is to ensure that the natural and cultural qualities of the area are safeguarded and that the enjoyment of visitors is achieved. Visitor management is how the park manager seeks to maximize the benefits and minimize the harm. Visitors are best controlled by soft means rather than hard. A crucial part of the park management is the ranger service.
- 3) **Monitoring system:** establishing and maintaining monitoring systems of the key features of protected areas is an intrinsic part of management. Without monitoring it is difficult to know whether the aims of the protected area are being achieved in practice.

- 4) **Collaborative management:** an important challenge for protected area management is to ensure that local communities and other local interests are also engaged. A key way of participation is allowing and encouraging people to take action directly.

The entrance information centres, so called gateways or service centres, are considered as a very appropriate tool for regulation of movement, concentration and also behaviour of visitors in national parks and other protected areas.

To attract visitors, it is important that a gateway is strategically located (e.g. at the border of the area) and that the facilities and activities offered at a gateway meet visitor demands. The gateway concept is not new and is widely used in North American national parks as a very useful means of visitor management. By Beunen et al. (2008) the context in which the concept is used in North America differs from the context in Europe.

Most national parks and protected areas in North America, where nature conservation and recreation are the primary function, have a limited number of entry points. In Europe, these areas have many entrances and many roads that lead through the areas for both visitors and for people who live or work in these areas. By the authors especially in Western Europe, national parks and protected areas are "living landscapes" with multiple uses. These areas often include not only tourism facilities but also residential buildings, farms, and many roads.

There are several practical and research projects and studies which are aimed on proactive tools supporting the effective management. By Hocking et al. (2000) the term management effectiveness includes three main components:



- a) design issues relating to both individual sites and to protected area systems;
- b) appropriateness of management systems and processes, and
- c) delivery of protected area objectives. By the authors design failures can, for example, lead to problems of protected areas that are too small to be effective, to fragmentation and isolation, to protecting disproportionate amounts of one habitat at the expense of others and to failure to leave room for adaptation to environmental change.

Management successes are particularly important in terms of communicating lessons learned. A well designed protected area with plenty of trained and dedicated staff will still not be achieving its objectives if, for example, poachers are depleting species or air pollution is damaging sensitive plants and animals. What is effective legislation in one country may be entirely inappropriate in another with different legal and social systems. Similarly, it is only possible to assess the adequacy of resourcing for management in the context of some estimation of management needs (Hocking et al., 2000).

As the IUCN Guidelines on Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas state, "Protected areas need tourism, and tourism needs protected areas". Tourism provides recreation, which is a stated objective of most protected areas, and is the opportunity for enlightened environmental education, the results of which will win allies for conservation in general. It creates jobs and generates income for the local economy, and makes peripheral regions less isolated, opening up their residents to new influences and cultures but also encouraging an intense valuation of the local culture and natural assets (Eagles et al., 2002).

One of the aims of effective management in protected areas is to fulfil demands and criteria for sustainable tourism. Works of authors Gebhard et al. (2007, 2009) are devoted to this issue. There were projects with the aim to define criteria for sustainable tourism in selected European biosphere reserve. Good example is the project "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity through Sound Tourism Development in Biosphere Reserves in Central and Eastern Europe", which has the aim to strengthen protection of globally significant mountain ecosystems in selected Biosphere Reserves (Gebhard et al., 2007, 2009). By Gebhard et al. (2007, 2009) sustainable tourism development can be a driving force for good governance which then contributes to the improvement of living conditions through a sound utilisation of public funds. The authors determined these clusters of criteria to mirror the answers to the question of sustainable tourism:

- Communities' well-being (income and revenues, employment, strengthening of the local economy and long term economic viability, improving of living conditions, participation in decision-

making and local control, satisfaction with tourism, strengthening of social and cultural patterns)

- Protection of the natural and cultural environment (sustainable use of natural and cultural resources, protection of natural heritage, protection of cultural heritage, enhancement of environmental awareness)
- Product quality and tourist satisfaction (quality of services and experience, tourists' satisfaction, tourism product quality and economic viability, communication of sustainability towards the tourists, cultural exchange as a driving force for peace)
- Management and monitoring (management and monitoring planning, carrying capacity).

Characteristics of case study areas

The State National Park Prielbrusie (NP Prielbrusie) is located within the highest area of the Caucasus Mountains in the boundary of Russia with Georgia. Similarly the territory of the Tatra National Park (TANAP) occupies the highest part of the Carpathian Mountains in the boundary with Poland (fig. 1). These national parks were chosen as case studies with great potential of natural values, natural disasters and heavy tourism and recreational load. In both national parks numbers of visitors exceed the carrying capacity, especially above timberline.

The State National Park Prielbrusie (Russia)

The Central Caucasus can be characterised as a region with contradiction of unique natural landscapes and heavy anthropogenic impact. The typical economic activity of indigenous population is pasturing and cattle rising being the only sources of profit. Present-day increase of private live-stock causes irreversible changes of landscape resulting in erosion and loss of productivity. NP Prielbrusie is administratively positioned in the upper parts of Elbrus and Zolskiy regions of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic (central part of the Great Caucasus) and is located in the boundary with Karachaevo-Cherkessia Republic (Russia) and Georgia (fig. 1). It occupies the upper parts of the Baksan and the Malka river basins, which have sources at the margins of the Elbrus glaciers.

In this region mountain ridges are higher than 3000-3500 m a.s.l., valleys are deeply dissected. Slopes are steep and rocky and have palaeoglacial and modern glacial landforms. The volcanic relief represents the system of lava flows (the longest near 23 km) and plates of different age with two cone summits of Elbrus (5642 m.a.s.l. and 5621 m.a.s.l.). The lake-depression relief type is typical for some districts in the Malka valley. Tectonic movements and exogenic processes are active, and tremendous amounts of sediment – glacial, colluvial, proluvial and others – are present (Baume, Marcinek, 1998). The territory with modern glaciers occupies 155.5 km² (15.3% of the Park).

