



Tourism in protected areas: is co-operation possible?

When reading the articles for this issue of *eco.mont*, I realized that tourism in combination with protected areas (PAs) is the prevailing topic. Of course, the papers address various sub-themes regarding tourism, such as the motivations of mountain climbers' in the US North West (Burns, Chuprinko & Allen); spatial preference and its link to sustainable visitor management (an article from Norway by Selvaag, Aas & Gundersen), or the natural and social tourism potentials of Tunca Valley Natural Park in Turkey (an article by Glatz-Jorde, Jungmeier, Hradetzky & Berger). Further articles deal with the consequences of tourism on vascular plants in Lushan National Nature Reserve in China (Hui, Ceming, Wen, Xuan, Dahan & Qiang), and the problem of solid waste on trails in Tatra National Park, Poland (Religa & Adach). The geographical distribution of the case studies used for these articles indicates that the issue of tourism in PAs is a worldwide concern.

The concentration in this issue of articles related to the topic of tourism is not, however, particularly exceptional. A quick look at the issues of *eco.mont* to date revealed that tourism is the most prevalent topic in articles published in the journal (see the overview of article topics in the Editorial of *eco.mont* 10 (2)). We thus have evidence that science is addressing various aspects of tourism in PAs, such as sustainable tourism, economic benefits or impacts, and visitor management. However, one question missing in this discussion on PAs and tourism regards what role PAs are actually playing and will continue to play within tourism. PAs are part of the regional economy, and local populations often have high expectations regarding the economic benefits generated by PAs through tourism-related activities. But it is often unclear how and to what extent PAs themselves do and should contribute to tourist activities.

Recently, I collaborated in two events that discussed these topics. One was the final workshop of ALPARC's project *Destination Parks*; the other was a symposium on Tourism in Protected Areas, organized by the University of Lausanne in the Lavaux UNESCO World Heritage site.

The aim of *Destination Parks* was to find common ground on how to develop and promote a shared vision, strategy and implementation of sustainable forms of tourism in Alpine PAs. The workshop participants agreed that PAs themselves have to focus on their priority tasks: 1) nature protection; 2) environmental education, and 3) contribute to sustainable regional development. In following their objectives, PAs can develop their own tourism-related activities, but they should not function like tourism organisations.

The symposium on Tourism in Protected Areas was the perfect frame for further exploration of this discussion. Therefore, together with Thomas Scheurer, former coordinator of the Research Council of the Swiss National Park, I presented some preliminary thoughts on the role of PAs within the realm of tourism. We argue that the interface between tourism and PA management has to be strengthened, and forms of co-operation should be established between PAs and tourist destinations (as promoters of tourism offers), as well as between PAs and tourism service providers (such as hotels, transport companies and tour operators). PAs should concentrate on their priority aims and stand up for a clear division of tasks between PAs (reception of guests, offers to explore nature, education, services) and tourism (promotion and marketing, development of offers). Today, many tourist regions benefit greatly from the presence and activities of PAs. However, it is mainly the tourism promoters who benefit from the added value generated through tourism offers in PAs, and not the PA managements themselves.

Therefore, new pathways for the fruitful coexistence of both – tourism and PAs – should be explored. A vast range of forms of coexistence are possible, ranging from local tourist boards including advertising for PAs in their promotional materials, to partnerships between the two, or, conversely, moving towards the total autonomy of each. Furthermore, PAs could become tourism intrapreneurs, for example by creating a self-financing department with skills and services for *sustainable tourism* in their region / destination. Which form of coexistence to adopt and how exactly this can be achieved should be explored in further discussions between PA managers and tourism promoters.

As coordinator of Swiss Park Research, I would very much appreciate science taking up these preliminary thoughts on the future role of PAs within tourism, to address more profoundly the interfaces between PAs and tourism in order to clarify their possible forms of co-existence, as well as to support the development of new and efficient forms of co-operation.

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