

A scenic landscape featuring a dirt path that winds through tall, golden-brown grasses. In the background, a dense forest of evergreen trees is visible under a soft, hazy sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and casting long shadows. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Towards Sustainable Tourism Practices in National Parks

*Exploring lessons learned from
diverse European approaches*

Channah Smith-Barneveld, Arjaan Pellis, Roel During and Machiel Lamers

Introduction	Reading Guide	Overview best practices	Relationships between best practices and generic lessons						
5	7	12	14						
Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke Switzerland	Fulufjället National Park Sweden	Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera Spain	Hoge Kempen National Park Belgium	Hohe Tauern National Park Austria	Nuukio National Park Finland	Oulanka National Park Finland			
16	23	28	35	40	47	50			
Parc National de Forêts France	Peneda Geres National Park Portugal	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds United Kingdom	Sociale media monitoring Germay	Thingvellir National Park Iceland	Thy National Park Denmark	Triglav National Park Slovenia	Yorkshire Dales National Park United Kingdom		
57	62	69	74	79	84	91	96		
						Accountability	Colophon & Disclaimer		
						102	103		

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of best practices

● National park as best practice

● National initiative/cooperation as best practice



Introduction

In this guide we aim to explore how tourism can become organized in sustainable ways by looking into best practices found across Europe. In these practices tourism is typically embraced as a positive contributor to national park objectives. This at times stands in stark contrast with Dutch experiences with tourism and recreation as these are usually seen as a necessary evil in the context of Dutch nature reserves. The high volume of visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic is just a foretaste of what's to come, with recreational pressure expected to continue to rise. Local interest groups are opposed to this, and within national parks this pressure is often considered unacceptable. Many nature managers agree that a large portion of nature must be better protected against the arrival of all these visitors.

However, rather than limiting visitor numbers, national parks want to focus on broadening and scaling up in the direction of the National Parks New Style (NP+). The goals of this style are: for national and international visitors to appreciate Dutch natural beauty, for the quality of nature to be improved, and for local communities to be given the opportunity to be more connected with nature. The new national parks would primarily embody iconic natural spaces that have national and international appeal for this generation and those to come.

The branding of the National Park New Style focuses on the distinctiveness of the park in question. Each park and landscape has its own character, which includes aspects of history, landscape, culture and society. Tourism and recreation also play a role in this. Choices have been made in the past regarding visitor centres, information boards with rules, the construction of paths, parking spaces, et cetera. But those choices are under pressure in view of changing developments in the recreational landscape and the desire to scale up to the new style.

In addition to scaling up, there is currently a lot of talk about spreading visitors (or recreational zoning) in order to reduce the pressure on nature. However, when we distribute visitors and make zones, we not only confirm that recreation is a problem, we also spread the problem to other recreational landscapes. The question is whether this will prove to be a good strategy in the long run, or whether it is a symptomatic treatment. In this guide, we argue that spreading the problem isn't necessarily the solution. By better embracing tourism and recreation within Dutch nature reserves, we can envision a range of alternative approaches. Such alternatives have been selected by the authors of this guide after examining numerous recreational and management practices in and around several European national parks.

Some of these practices are more than a century old, while others have emerged more recently. There are many ways in which tourism and recreation can become more sustainable, but – as many of the best practices in this guide show – these sustainable ways are highly contextual. Tourism and nature, as well as society at large, are in constant development. In addition, there is never one best practice, but rather many that we can recognize, either in full or in part, as inspiration to do things differently. This may also require letting go of essentialist views on nature and allowing decisions about natural spaces to be made by more parties than nature parks alone. Residents and other stakeholders must be allowed to participate in decisions about how nature

can become stronger, thus leading to their connection with nature becoming greater.

Reading guide

In this guide we discuss 15 tourism management practices in the context of different national parks or national initiatives. Each park or initiative has its own history and insights that park managers are happy to share with colleagues elsewhere in Europe. It is up to the reader to determine which insights are appealing and whether these can be applied in his or her own park context. To support you, we briefly discuss below a series of general insights that we have gained from various best practices. We also provide a table that shows in which chapter further details are elaborated in the context of various best practices in Europe. Finally, we provide a short methodological justification explaining the process in which these best practices were obtained.

INSIGHT 1

Infrastructure: more or less?

The infrastructure in national parks evolves as the expected number of visitors increases, enabling the park to cope with the growth. It is often decided to expand the infrastructure: more and wider paths for pedestrians and cyclists, more parking locations, wider access roads, etc. The result is that visitors are found in a larger area of the park. In this guide, we show a series of examples that demonstrate that less or no infrastructure can actually lead to better management of tourism and/or nature in national parks.

Along with this, a choice can be made to develop strong infrastructure in places where visitors - from an ecological perspective - are welcome in the park. Where there are excellent infrastructure and extra facilities, visitors will gain the most important experiences. By providing the infrastructure in a limited number of places, there can be a certain degree of control on visitor flows without detracting from the experience of most visitors. Recreational activity - as it often turns out - does not always have a neg-

ative effect on nature. The harmful impact is often in the run-up to an area (access roads, overcrowded parking locations).

INSIGHT 2

Outward or inward visitor management?

New style national parks can go one step further with the question of whether more or less infrastructure is needed in or around a national park. To deal with recreational pressure, parks can also use a completely different design principle, namely that of outward visitor management. This can be done by focusing more on the region and seeing it as a part of the nature destination. For example, visitor centres do not necessarily have to be placed in the middle of a national park, but rather could be placed outside it. This not only unburdens the ecological heart of the park, it also offers opportunities to further enhance nature over time. Such off-site visitor centres give visitors the feeling that they are, or have been, in the national park. Furthermore, outward visitor centres are a way of making logical connections to the local culture and economy, which is a lot trickier in the case of more inward visitor centres located in the middle of nature (often the way it is done now). By looking beyond the traditional borders of the national park and unburdening the core of the natural areas, parks offer opportunities for regional collaborations with local municipalities and entrepreneurs.

Less infrastructure in the core can also be a means of giving nature more space. This can be done, for example, by not constructing extra parking spaces and by placing large infrastructure only around strategic reception gates. This requires detailed forethought because you need to tackle a broader mobility problem in the current context. Discouraging car traffic is an important consideration here, but then you have to offer good alternatives to still receive visitors. Public transport options could receive more attention and offer alternative experiences. For example, you can replace the annoyances on current access roads with thematic public transport options where the experience starts



before you arrive at the park. Much of the park infrastructure is now mainly built around parking locations. If you replace these to a certain extent with public transport options/routes around the national park (for example near the new reception gates), you can strategically develop recreational facilities and remove old routes to offer more space to nature.

INSIGHT 3

People as a productive part of the ecosystem

Instead of seeing nature purely as an ecosystem service for the benefit of people, European examples have often shown that it can be seen the other way around. For example, recreation and voluntary work can be used to contribute to nature. Nature is then not so much a destination where we go to briefly experience something (and purely consume), but also a place to which we contribute productively, where we leave something behind, return to, and see it as part of our daily life. If we start taking visitors more seriously in this way, we can start thinking differently about how we want to shape nature together with them (not just for them). In time, we could even say goodbye to the term 'visitors' because that term implies that people are temporarily visiting, while the goal is to make the connection stronger and more lasting.

An important part is that - in the absence of a better term for the time being - 'visitors' gain a sense of responsibility by experiencing that their contribution, in time, money and effort, can make a difference. Although tourism and recreation proceeds are often insufficient to cover the costs of nature development and maintenance, they can certainly make an important contribution, and that should be made more visible. Often visitors feel the need to not only visit places, but also to leave or take something with them that generates meaning. This could be used, for example, by taking past-tense, place-specific texts ('I was here') and transforming them into texts in the present ('I contribute/connect/belong here').

INSIGHT 4

Giving local residents and entrepreneurs a voice and communicating with them

Decisions should not only be made by park management but in consultation and cooperation with the environment. This is only possible if park management is aware of what is going on in that environment, and vice versa. Regular mutual communication can help to turn difficult and long-lasting conflicts into a more continuous dialogue, temper high expectations or frustrations and share ideas and plans. It is also good for residents to know where they can go if they want to share something and take responsibility together in an area. Sometimes this even leads to a community decision to give an area a protected status because the community itself sees it as appropriate.

An often mentioned symbolic means of promoting this communication is coffee. Personal contact through a cup of coffee has positively influenced the relationship with the environment in several national parks. This would also fit nicely within the Dutch coffee culture. However, it is sometimes said that the Dutch are especially good at poldering and discussing, but that little joint action is taken through such discussions. The intended goal of this communication is to give local residents and organizations more responsibility for some of the activities that are organized in and around the park. This requires structural funding and local leadership. Drinking coffee is a first symbolic step on the road to inclusive decision making and communication.

Often in the first phases of recreational and tourist developments, we see the importance of sitting down with residents. It is precisely at the kitchen table that ideas and frustrations are shared and can be used to further formalize activities and zoning. It is important in getting residents on board that there is open communication and that expectations are not made too great (e.g. that tourism will create many jobs in the region). Such expectations can later be used against the park. In addition, it is

advisable to maintain continuity in the mutual sharing of ideas and to step up further developments around tourism. This is something that is strongly encouraged in the *Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism*.

In practice, this not only leads to drinking cups of coffee, but also to the direct involvement of residents who want to commit themselves to their natural surroundings. Forums are also often used where ideas are regularly exchanged with many types of stakeholders, sometimes even in ways where many layers of society as well as political levels (up to the minister) connect in a continual dialogue.

INSIGHT 5

Sustainable development requires heroes (stories)

Sustainable development does not happen automatically, certainly not if many parties have to participate, each of whom has their own ideas about what the problems and possible solutions are in the region. In many examples we see that local leaders with a vision are needed who dare to think and act differently. They must be able to convince bystanders with a bold vision to get everyone on board. In addition, such visionaries also need a network in the region to be able to take steps together. The long duration of dialogue and joint trajectory require endurance and a long-term vision. In some examples, it has taken up to ten years to get everyone on board to start formalizing a new national park and related tourist zoning and activities.

In the development of a vision for the future, great value is attached to the local context in which parks and tourism can form a unique character. You would prefer to have that character in line with the regional culture and history. It therefore does not seem logical to simply develop an island of nature that perhaps presents a certain aspect of functional nature, but which is otherwise separate from age-old customs where people have lived in one way or another from and with that nature. For example, people are prepared to look at less intensive forest clearing if

other alternatives become available. This requires a strong vision that can support the interests of multiple parties, and that also refers to what is going on in the socio-cultural context of the new national park. Ultimately, it is important that the parties involved are able to bond well with a story about tourism and recreation that is mutually beneficial and a coherent branding of a unique region.

INSIGHT 6

Nature education and meaningful interactions in nature

What is often forgotten is that an important contribution of sustainable tourism is the nature experiences that visitors take home. In order to add a sense of awareness to this experience, educational elements are often applied in national parks. For example, the importance of the national park and nature (conservation) can be told in a playful way. That in itself is nothing new. Still, it is nice to see how nature education is being worked on in different ways abroad, sometimes even being elevated to the core of the national park.

Examples of this are the development of national park schools where residents, entrepreneurs and outsiders can follow long-term courses. There is also the permanent employment of park rangers who are available at fixed times for the public to tell about nature. This second example is not always present. Forest and nature managers are often busy with management, and not necessarily in interaction with visitors. Instead, they depend on volunteers who play such a role on a temporary basis. But in order to make the right information available, volunteers need to be properly trained. An additional risk is that volunteers will disappear over time and knowledge will be lost.

Educating visitors can yield a lot. Visitors can even temporarily become volunteers if a park facilitates this well. With time and extra hands, a meaningful contribution to the management of the area can be made in parks where there may not be sufficient

resources. By making an active contribution (see also earlier insight 3), visitors not only learn about the region and nature, they also create a deeper connection with the park, which often leads to repeat visitors.

Finally, in Dutch parks, nature education is already being used in various ways, but little is known about the exact effects of these different approaches. More collaboration and research in this area could be fruitful.

INSIGHT 7

Collaboration pays off

It may sound obvious, but you really don't have to figure it all out on your own! By collaborating with other national parks, lessons can be learned from mistakes, but also from success stories. By having regular contact, initiatives that have proved successful can be borrowed elsewhere. That is, in principle, the whole essence of this best practice initiative. It can save both time and money. This can also be achieved by working with umbrella regional or national organizations so that individual initiatives can be launched more efficiently and effectively. Nature education is an example of such an initiative, but you can also think of: collaborations between disciplines within a nature destination, collaborations between parks when it comes to structural monitoring of visitors (for mutual comparison but also in the cost savings involved), or atypical collaborations between sectors. An example of the latter is the financing of a piece of nature by a tourist initiative elsewhere. For example, you could make a link between profits from cultural institutions in the city and developments in nature outside that city. Visitors could even see concretely how their visitor card makes a direct contribution to developments elsewhere. That may lead not only to a good feeling, but also concrete visits to those developments in the long term (provided that infrastructure is made for this and that this is desirable.)

Finally, all discussions with Dutch and foreign park representatives have shown that there is a universal need for knowledge exchange. Within the Netherlands there is a clear demand for more exchange on how recreation developments can be dealt with. Also abroad, people would like to learn from other parks what works and what does not work and to stay informed of developments. Many of the problems and solutions are context specific, but other developments overlap with what is happening elsewhere in a similar way. For example, over-tourism - or the fear of it - is certainly not something that only occurs in the Netherlands. However, it is not an issue everywhere. By comparing related problems and solutions in different European regions, we can continue to learn from different practices. Long-term collaborations can help to give structure to reflections and lessons in the future.

Reading Guide

The following tables provide a brief overview of the content (Table 1) and its relationship to general insights (Table 2) as described above. Chapter numbers as well as page numbers are provided for reference, and links are included so that you, the reader, can access the information in order to learn more about a practice right away. Each chapter briefly introduces: exemplary practices in a relevant context, the recreational and tourism challenges that exist or have played out, the strategies used and the outcomes that have arisen from them. In doing so, we discuss both successes and further challenges, within which strategies will continue to evolve in the future.

Table 1: Short descriptions of best practices

Chapter & Best Practice	Short description	
Netzwerks Schweizer Pärke Switzerland	Visitors can become business visitors. They come to a NP not so much for business activity, but to offer a potentially interesting contribution to a park and perform quality work for themselves and for the park. For the companies involved, such an initiative contributes to socially and ecologically responsible entrepreneurship. This is a potential win-win-win for companies, employees and affiliated nature parks.	16
Fulufjället National Park Sweden	To give local residents the opportunity to express frustrations and questions, <i>Fika</i> (coffee) moments are regularly organized with the park management. Here is seen the importance of working collectively with enterprising residents to strengthen tourism within a network.	23
Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera Spain	The income from visiting the Gaudi House in Barcelona is used to connect and maintain various natural areas in the region.	28
Hoge Kempen National Park Belgium	A transition from inward to outward organization of park and visitors. The focus should not only be on the national park, but on the region as a destination. In this way, crowding issues are dispersed over a larger area and not in the core of the park where nature is vulnerable.	35
Hohe Tauern National Park Austria	Full-time rangers are hired to be in the park and share information about the wildlife with visitors. In addition, high quality education programs and schools have been set up.	40
Nuuksio National Park Finland	Use of artificial intelligence and parking information to make (potential) visitors aware of the crowds that are there at that moment. It is actually a form of self-monitoring because by sharing live camera images, visitors become aware of their own behavior and the pressure it can cause.	47
Oulanka National Park Finland	Infrastructure is limited as much as possible in many areas of the park so that visitors are automatically directed to a specific area. In order to spread visitors further, away from the natural areas which are fragile, the park is in close contact with other nature reserves in the region in order to draw visitors there too.	50
Parc National de Forêts France	A new national park that, despite much resistance, has convinced the vast majority of the population to join this new initiative that calls itself an example of sustainable tourism.	57

Peneda Geres National Park Portugal	In order to promote contact between visitors and local residents and entrepreneurs, a long walking route has been set up on which walkers are encouraged to discover not only nature but also the culture that can be found in the villages.	62
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds United Kingdom	Visitor monitoring is streamlined by a nationally operating foundation. It is cost effective and specialized, including the deployment of satellites to provide coverage wherever desired. There are also interdepartmental collaborations in which different observations are linked and decisions can be made about visitor management.	69
Sociale media monitoring Germany	It is increasingly possible to gather visitor information via social media by analyzing photos and geo-data. This seems useful for remote areas and could be cost effective compared to expensive installations or time-consuming personal observations in parks. This technological approach offers prospects for the future, but is currently limited due to many assumptions made by researchers about what a photo taker was experiencing while taking/sharing a picture next to the fact that selected posts do not necessarily represent the full spectrum of visitors.	74
Thingvellir National Park Iceland	Instead of allowing visitors to explore the entire park, they ensure that the infrastructure can adequately support nature in places where visitor numbers are highest.	79
Thy National Park Denmark	Courses are given here to give volunteers knowledge about the park and a sense of pride. A <i>National Park School</i> has also been set up, a concept that is shared with other Danish national parks.	84
Triglav National Park Slovenia	Making local stakeholders accountable for regional park activities has created a stronger sense of ownership and enhanced collaboration.	91
Yorkshire Dales National Park United Kingdom	A visitor payback scheme has been set up to maintain the most frequently used hiking trails. To make this project more personal, a ranger has been appointed to make visible to visitors what maintenance is being done on the trails and to encourage them to contribute financially.	96

Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke

Corporate responsible volunteering in Swiss parks

Switzerland has one national park, the *Schweizerischer National Park*, which has not (yet) joined this corporate volunteer initiative. Next to this national park, there are 3 other categories of Swiss parks (see further [here](#)). Regional nature parks is one such category in which associated parks participate in a so-called Corporate Volunteering Program. In the regional nature parks the focus is more on finding a balance between supporting nature conservation and the regional economy.

INFORMATION

COMPOSITION Ten of the nineteen (national) parks in Switzerland have joined the Swiss Parks Network corporate volunteering initiative: Parc Jura Vaudois, Parc Régional Chasseral, Naturpark Gantrisch, Naturpark Diemtigtal, Naturpark Pfyn-Finges, Jurapark Aargau, Naturpark Schaffhausen, Naturpark Beverin, Parc Ela and Biosfera Val Müstair. INITIATIVE ESTABLISHED IN 2013 NUMBER OF CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS IN 2019 1,173



Background of national parks and volunteer work in Switzerland

Roughly a third of the Swiss population above the age of 15 is involved in volunteering. On average, the Swiss spend half a day a week on volunteer work. This volunteer work is mainly done at sports associations and cultural institutions. Another volunteer function, in mountain areas, is the protection of the forests against avalanches and natural disasters which is typically done by local communities themselves. In the 19th century it became common practice for any Swiss who wanted to make something of themselves to take on a volunteer role. This expectation continues today, as a relatively large part of the population is committed to society in this way.

The opportunity

The Swiss Parks Network (Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke) is the umbrella organization for all parks in the country and was founded in the year 2007. In 2013, the Swiss Parks Network established the Corporate Volunteering program, which ten regional nature parks have joined since then. The network assists the parks in linking them to a company, offering opportunities for both the companies and the parks. There is a great demand from the parks for extra hands that can help with all the maintenance that needs to be done. Before this initiative with corporate volunteers was set up, many tasks in the parks were taken up by local volunteers whenever possible. However, recruiting these volunteers took a lot of time and the park had to pay for the costs incurred on volunteer days (meals and materials). In addition, the parks struggled with coordinating these volunteer days.

At the same time, there had been a growing demand from companies to be able to do something for their employees while simultaneously contributing to the parks. However, at that time there was not a point of contact through which these companies could coordinate with the parks.

This led to the corporate volunteering program being established in 2013, with an employee of the *Swiss Parks Network* acting as an intermediary between the parks and the companies. Since then, volunteer days have been organized for employees of large companies which strive to contribute to environmental sustainability and to involve their employees in this initiative. With more and more companies setting up sustainability goals, this program has proven to be a great opportunity.



Pruning volunteers (photo: Aline Oertli)

The approach

The *Swiss Parks Network* is a non-profit organisation. The corporate volunteering initiative has been set up in such a way that it is self-financed. The involved parks pay an annual fee to the *Swiss Parks Network* for the services they provide, namely to bring the parks and companies into contact with each other. The companies then pay for the costs incurred on the volunteer days, including transport, meals and other materials needed for the tasks done that day. This comes down to approximately €105 per person for a group of 30.

It is mainly large Swiss companies that indicate they would like to have their employees help out in a park. Such large companies often have the goal, as part of their CSR strategy, to let their employees participate in activities that contribute to society or nature, and at the same time facilitate team building and personal development.

After a company has indicated that they would like to participate in a volunteer day or days at one of the parks, a date is chosen together with the park. This is done with a *Swiss Parks Network* employee, who is referred to as the 'coordination unit'. This 'coordination unit' is the point of contact for both the companies and the parks throughout the entire process. After settling on a date, a standard contract is set up. The company organizes the communication about these events with their employees. The program, photos and texts for this communication are supplied by the 'coordination unit' to ensure consistency and high quality. One month before the event, the final details and full program are gone through with both the involved company and the park. Another goal of this initiative is to support the local economy surrounding the park. To achieve this, the volunteer days are always organized together with local entrepreneurs. For example, the meals served are prepared by local entrepreneurs and made with regional products. When employees of a company come to the park for two consecutive days to do volunteer work, the *Swiss*

Highlights

In Switzerland corporate volunteering in natural parks is included as a form of corporate social responsibility (CSR). When companies offer their employees a meaningful activity in nature, various natural parks are able to use the extra hands to help sustain their park.

Collaboration with companies offers an interesting solution to tackle the problem of the aging of volunteers in parks. With this approach, extra manpower can be gained with limited financial input needed from the parks involved. Results in Switzerland have shown that volunteers go home with more knowledge about the park they supported. These visitors furthermore come back to visit the park – or other parks in the network – with increased knowledge about nature conservation.

Parks Network recommends that they stay in small guesthouses and bed & breakfasts.

A volunteer day consists of a short presentation about the park and the task that will be done that day. These tasks vary per season and park. Examples include maintaining paths, building fences or walls, building and maintaining ponds, working in vineyards and building shelters for animals. For every 10 volunteers, there is an employee of the park who has been appointed to assist with the tasks that are carried out that day.

At the end of the volunteer day, all employees that participated are asked to fill in a questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on the extent to which their knowledge about nature and insight into the importance of nature conservation was increased through the voluntary work they did. The employees are also asked about their general impression regarding the program



and overall organisation of the day. These responses are collected and analysed by the *Swiss Parks Network* at the end of the year. In addition to analysing the questionnaire responses, the *Swiss Parks Network* also schedules a moment of evaluation with all the parks that received corporate volunteers that year. This evaluation focuses on how the parks experienced the volunteer days that year and what they think could be improved.

Results

In Switzerland, this way of recruiting volunteers has proven to be a great success, and the number of companies that join in on the initiative is growing every year. In 2019, 62 volunteer days were organised with a total of 1,173 employees from 13 different companies. In total, the volunteers spent 6,847 hours on nature and landscape maintenance during that year. The number of corporate volunteers has increased annually since the establishment of this programme, until 2020 when many of the planned volunteer days had to be cancelled due to Corona. Corona has put the financing of the corporate volunteering programme under pressure because the fee that companies usually pay to be a part of this programme has not been paid during the pandemic. There are a number of companies that have been involved for several years. Such long-term collaborations are highly appreciated by the involved parks since this continued involvement gives them a better idea of how many volunteers they can count on.

In the evaluation at the end of 2019, 95.3% of volunteers indicated that they had gained more ecological awareness through the volunteer days. In addition, 98.2% of the volunteers indicated that they had gained a better understanding of the park's goals, and 97.7% planned to return for a visit to the park. For 48% of the volunteers, this was their first visit to the park.

< Corporate volunteers (photo: Tony Oertli)

References

- www.europarc.org/case-studies/corporate-volunteering-in-swiss-parks
- www.parks.swiss/en/discover_the_parks/especially_for/corporate_volunteering.php
- www.parks.swiss/ressourcen/pdf_dokumente/04_paecke_entdecken/coporate_volunteering/2018_das_wichtigste_in_kuerze_en.pdf
- www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-remain-a-nation-of-volunteers/31726854



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Elisa Strecke (coordinator of corporate volunteering, *Swiss Parks Network*).

Email: volunteering@parks.swiss

INFORMATION

NAME Fulufjället National Park
LOCATION Halfway up Sweden, on the west side and bordering Norway
ESTABLISHED IN 2002 SIZE 38.500 hectare
NUMBER OF VISITORS IN 2020 83.690
LANDSCAPE Njupesjär Waterfall (highest waterfall in Sweden)
TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking (both shorter and longer hikes, on which visitors sleep in cabins or their own tent), fishing (in both summer and winter), snowshoeing, bird watching, nature photographing, dog sledding



Fulufjället National Park

The importance of Fika

Fulufjället National Park is a nearly untouched nature reserve and offers numerous recreational activities in both summer and winter. The park has, for instance, 140 km of marked hiking trails along with a number of huts where hikers can spend the night. More challenging walks can be taken by going off the well-known trails, and if huts are occupied one can set up a tent nearby these huts. Roughly 50% of the visitors are international, mainly from Germany and the Netherlands with a recent uptake of visitors from Belgium and France.

< *Njupesjär, de hoogste waterval van Zweden*



Fika with national park partners

Park background

Similar to other national parks in Sweden, there are no people living in the park itself. This gives the impression that the park is situated in a relatively remote and unpopulated region. However, around the park there are several villages where people engage in various economic activities, some of which relate to tourism in the park. Whereas paid tourism activities take place outside the park, there is a free national park visitor centre inside the park. Such centres are called *Naturum* in Sweden, and are located close to a protected nature area. When establishing a *Naturum* in a national park, permission has to be requested from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Swedish EPA provides guidelines on what a *Naturum* should look like. A *Naturum* is supposed to provide activities that help visitors to *understand and discover nature*. Fulufjället's *Naturum* facilitates this through guided tours and exhibitions as well as through the staff present at the visitor centre. It is important for staff to have extensive knowledge of the park.

The Swedish EPA has set itself the goal that the national parks in Sweden should offer the most popular nature experiences in Europe. They hope to achieve this by being world leaders in *nature interpretation*: guiding people in nature and help them experience and explore. To achieve this, the three words that are central for the *Naturum* are: welcoming, inspiring and accessible. The three terms that inspire the work of the national park are: experiences in nature, quality and knowledge. This means that the activities offered in the park should be of high quality, providing different ways to enjoy nature, and the staff should be seen as the 'Wikipedias' of the park with plenty of knowledge to share.

Although *Fulufjället* staff emphasizes nature interpretation and experiences to visitors inside the national park, they have also repeatedly emphasized the importance of the park to nearby residents who have not always been supportive.

The opportunity

In 1989 it was decided that the area of *Fulufjället* would be turned into a national park. However, this led to a great amount of criticism from the people living around the mountain. Their main frustration was that the area, where they used to go for hunting, fishing and driving around with their snowmobiles, would be taken away from them. This meant that the process of officially establishing the national park took a long time. Between 1989 and 2002 several projects were initiated with the goal of convincing local residents that the establishment of *Fulufjället National Park* would be a good idea. One of these projects was *Fulufjället Omland*. Throughout this project, the SEPA and the county administrative board of Dalarna (a province in mid-Sweden) went around the mountain to have discussions with residents over a cup of coffee. In Sweden these coffee moments are better known as *Fika*. The main question raised during these *fika* moments was what residents thought would happen to the region if there would *not* be a national park. Since the 1960s people had been moving away from the area due to limited economic opportu-

nities. Given this background, the conversations with residents focused on the future of the villages at the foot of the mountain. Slowly the perspective of residents was said to change as they started to see that having a national park might actually bring more people and jobs to the region. At the same time, there remained a group of critical residents that were upset about losing their hunting, fishing and snowmobiling areas. As a result, multiple zones were set up in the national park where these activities would still be allowed to some extent.

The approach

Even now that the area has been established as a national park for almost 20 years, there are still residents who are upset about unfulfilled promises. The management of the national park has - up until today - continued to organise *fika* moments to allow criticism to be aired by residents in the *Naturum*. Even though the national park was established in this area through a governmental decision, the park management feels it is their responsibility to listen to residents since this area has been their home for generations. Also, by allowing people to air their frustrations and enter into a dialogue, not only frustrations become emphasized but also their appreciation for aspects they actually do value. One recurrent aspect of criticism is the lack of actual jobs produced by the establishment of the new national park. The residents expected that these jobs would become available to them, as this is how they interpreted the government's promises for more jobs and income to the region. However, the *Naturum* office explains that these job opportunities are not automatically created for people, but rather must be taken up by those who want to become engaged with the park, such as entrepreneurs.

After the *Fulufjället Omland* project had finished, an association was set up with all entrepreneurs around the mountain, including those on the Norwegian side of the national park. Here, entrepreneurs would work together to create a package deal for visitors, including accommodation options, dinners, and activities

Highlights

Fika represents an important coffee moment in Swedish Culture. Having *fika* with residents who live nearby the Fulufjället national park has proven to stimulate a constructive dialogue and mitigate frustrations by many residents around the park. It is key to allow such a dialogue to happen so that residents can air frustrations while gradually starting to appreciate the development of a national park and its benefits to the region. These are not immediately an opportunity for employment, but those who engage can benefit, especially if this is done together through long term and regional partnerships.

facilitated by various entrepreneurs in the region. This initiative was called the *Fulufjället Ring* and was supported by Interreg funding. However, this initiative eventually ended due to the termination of the project time and funding. The SEPA, therefore, came with yet another solution to make sure that regional entrepreneurs would stay involved with the national park. This was done through the option for entrepreneurs to become national park partners. For this, the entrepreneurs go to a one-day course to learn about what the national park stands for. When this is completed, they sign a contract saying that they will work according to the values of the national park. In turn, the entrepreneurs get their names published on the homepage of Fulufjället, and their activities become promoted. No costs are charged to entrepreneurs for this course and promotion. The themes of the course are in part suggested by entrepreneurs themselves. From 2016 until 2018, a project was set up in which the Swedish side worked closer together with the management on the Norwegian side to create a common visitor strategy for *Fulufjället National Park* across the border. During this initiative, all those involved could once again participate through *fika* moments to connect with residents more generally. Ads were put in local newspapers



in which residents were called upon to come enjoy a cup of coffee while sharing opinions on related subjects. During these discussions, the park management re-asked residents what Fulufjället means to them in order to take their answers into consideration when making decisions about the future of the national park.

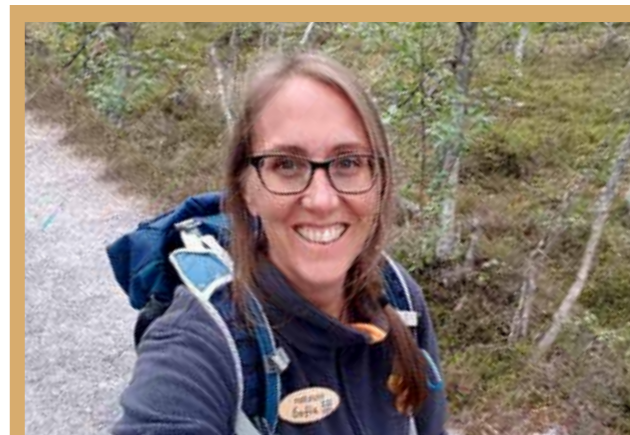
Results

Even though not all residents are content with the establishment of the national park, many residents have changed their minds over time. It used to be that only negative voices were heard, but once some residents started to acknowledge publicly that the national park helped the area to thrive more than it would have done without the park, the general perspective flipped to a positive stance overall. People now emphasize that roads have been fixed, there are more jobs for current and future generations, and the mobile phone coverage has improved considerably. These are all important aspects for those who live at the margins of the national park.

Now that the park has been in existence for almost 20 years, it is time for a review of initial park boundaries, zoning, rules, etc. The national park will include residents in this review process once again because it is considered to be also their national park. Since all tax payers in Sweden contribute to financing the national park, the management also believes tax payers should have a say. This process of involving those that know the national park best will surely rely on a lot more *fika* moments to facilitate the process in years to come. On the one hand, these times are for discussing new park initiatives, and on the other hand to consistently offer opportunities for residents to discuss issues that emerge over time. The latter is not structurally organized, but rather emerges from time to time as residents visit the visitor centre to have a *fika* with available staff.

References

- www.naturvardsverket.se/Documents/publikationer/620-5246-6.pdf?pid=2900
- www.lansstyrelsen.se/download/18.3494a051175c8731beeff1/1606743984891/2011-09%20H%C3%A5llbar%20turistutveckling%20Fulufj%C3%A4llet.pdf
- www.naturvardsverket.se/Documents/publikationer/6400/978-91-620-1294-6.pdf



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Sofia Tiger (manager of the *Naturum* in Fulufjället National Park).

Email: sofia.tiger@lansstyrelsen.se

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera

*Using tourism profit for nature
conservation*

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera (FCLP) is a private, Spanish, independent foundation that invests in education, social affairs, nature protection and the promotion of culture and nutrition. All the proceeds which their activities generate are invested into social, environmental, educational and cultural projects.

Planes de Son >





Background

The FCLP began as a number of different foundations, before becoming a single foundation in 2013. These different foundations were cultural, social welfare, educational, environmental and food and nutrition related. Their main mission was to take care of the most vulnerable, to encourage knowledge, to protect their natural spaces, to encourage healthy eating habits and to support their culture. When it existed as a range of foundations, the money came from bank operations. This meant that there was a large spending capacity invested into social affairs. Now that the FCLP has become a foundation on its own, it does not get funded by bank operations any longer. It also does not receive, nor accept, any public subsidies. It has an internal policy which states that it must raise its own spending capacity. This operating concept is rather unique in the context of Spanish environmental protection since most environmental conservation is supported through external funding. Yet the decision was made to operate in this way in order to publicly show that the foundation is viable and sustainable under any circumstances, and does not rely on public funding or on a major single donor.

The opportunity

The main facility managed by the FCLP is the Gaudi House in Barcelona, which is named *Casa Batlló*, and is a non-profit organization. Before the pandemic, the Gaudi House received one million visitors a year. A certain percentage of the income that is received from the tickets are invested into nature conservation. The rest of the revenue goes to the other programmes and expenditure of the foundation. This nature conservation occurs at all of the sites in the network of natural sites which the FCLP owns. Currently they own a total of 27 sites in the region, covering 8,000 hectares.

< *Casa Mila in Barcelona (photo: Jaroslav Moravcik)*

Highlights

Sustainable financing of protected areas can benefit from long term engagements and self-financing, rather than short term dependence on external funding. Taking charge as a foundation engaged in various for-profit activities outside of nature conservation, the *Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera* uses operational surplus from tourism activities, such as the Gaudi house in Barcelona, to financially manage natural or cultural heritage sites in their portfolio. The pandemic has furthermore shown that large dependencies on global tourism can be risky. The Fundació hence explores alternative financial potential to sustain its conservation objectives

In 2019 there was a total of 28 million euros to invest. The Gaudi house naturally reserves a fraction of this to invest into its own conservation. However, the income generated is much larger than the amount needed for restoration and upkeep, which makes it possible to use this extra money for nature projects. Nature protection projects and environmental education are about 5.5% of the total expenditure, which totalled roughly two million euros in 2019.

The approach

A large amount of the money needed to conserve the nature areas is thus obtained from the entrance tickets to the Gaudi House. The choice has been made to focus specifically on the Gaudi House as it is the most important asset they have with very high economical value. Besides the Gaudi House, income generated at the natural sites also contributes to the environmental protection expenditure. Approximately 50-60% is covered by the direct income of the natural sites (including parking and activities) and the remaining 40-50% is covered by the visitors to the Gaudi House (entrance fees and other revenues derived from visitors).



Volunteers in Parc Natural Del Delta de l'Ebre

Besides using revenues from visitors' entrance fees to the Gaudi House and dedicate surplus to nature conservation, they also want to make sure that visitors become involved with associated nature developments. The FCLP has done this by placing signs at the exit of the Gaudi House on which visitors are thanked for making the conservation of these nature areas possible. While it would be interesting to learn the effects from such signs, there

is currently no system in place that monitors whether visitors to the Gaudi House also visit associated natural sites benefitting from their visits.

Results

The *Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera* is currently not planning on purchasing more land as beneficiary nature areas. Sometimes it

has proven not to be necessary to buy the land, as agreements can be made with the owners to help them with restoration or planting trees on the land. In other areas, the foundation pays for environmental services for 20 to 30 years at a particular site. In this way, the foundation has been able to assist many nature areas with their conservation. To continue doing this they plan to promote volunteer work more actively. Currently they already work together with a network of 800 environmental volunteers.

Until 2019, everything was looking bright with more resources coming in every year, more capacity to do projects and more money. The pandemic has completely changed this as there were suddenly no more tourists visiting the Gaudi House. This meant that they were not getting in the money they were expecting and so budgets and programmes had to be adjusted on a long-term basis. The pandemic has shown the foundation that they were too dependent on international tourism. This has led them to setting up four strategic plans to get additional forms of income. The first is to focus more on attaining European funding. This is the only exception to the objective of the foundation to not accept public funding. The second is to brand the name of the foundation more strongly, including the selling of merchandise such as souvenirs related to the Gaudi House. Thirdly, the FCLP aims to create the option for supporters of the foundation to become paid members. The fourth plan is to start charging money for the educational programmes which have been offered for free up until now. All these actions will be taken in order to build resilience in an organisation that has been so highly dependent on tourism.

The impact of the funding scheme has been that it helped develop the ecological and social benefits of the nature related programmes of the foundation. This has included 8,000 hectares of land that has been protected and managed, several large restorations and re-introduction of species, and providing environmental education to around 40,000 people each year.

References

- www.fundaciocatalunya-lapedrera.com/en



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Miquel Rafa Fornieles (director of territory and environment at the *Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera*).

Email: miquel.rafa@fundaciocatalunya-lapedrera.com

INFORMATION

NAME Hoge Kempen National Park

LOCATION In the Belgian province

Limburg ESTABLISHED IN 2006 SIZE

12.000 hectares NUMBER OF VISI-

TORS PER YEAR 1.2 million (In 2019:

360,000 hikers, 650,000 bikers,

100,000 mountain bikers and

horseback riders, 14,000 partici-

pants in ranger activities, 355,000

visitors to activities around the en-

trances) LANDSCAPE Forests (pine for-

ests), sand drifts, ponds and heath

TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, biking,

mountain biking, horseback riding



Hoge Kempen National Park

Towards an(Re)Connection Model

The *Hoge Kempen* area has seen a lot of unemployment since the coal mines were closed in 1990. A plan was set up to restore the area with the emphasis being mainly on economic growth. At that time, various corporations were planning to tackle the high unemployment rate by, among other things, building large recreation parks. In 1990, the owner of the former coal mines and the largest NGO for nature conservation in Belgium, Natuurpunt, founded the organization Regional Landscape Kempen and Maasland (RLKM). Its aim was to reduce unemployment and develop the area economically on the basis of nature and landscape values, instead of at the expense of these values. Inspiration for this was gained in the Dutch Gelderland.

< *Mechelse Heide* (photo: Peter Baas)



Overview map National Park Hoge Kempen

Park background

For six years, the RLKM lobbied the municipalities, province and the Flemish government to set up a national park. This eventually resulted in part of the budget that was meant to go to economic projects being made available for nature conservation. With this, the area that was known to give 'dust lungs' during the existence of the coal mines would now become the 'green lung' of the region.

In 2002, the minister of environment gave permission to develop the nature area in the *Hoge Kempen* into a national park on the condition that additional financing would be obtained and a master plan was created. This led to the opening of Belgium's first national park in 2006, *Hoge Kempen National Park*. The Flemish government's Agency for Nature and Forests (Agentschap Natuur en Bos) manages 70% of the national park, while 10% is managed by third parties such as nature associations and municipalities, and 20% is private property. Since the establishment of the national park, visitor numbers have steadily increased, currently reaching 1.2 million annual visitors. This group of visitors consists mainly of cyclists and walkers who enter the park, but also of visitors who stay at the entrance gates.

What draws visitors to this national park is the scale of the open space. Flanders is densely populated and has urbanized rapidly, leaving little untouched open space. *Hoge Kempen National Park* is an exception to this, which is a pleasant surprise for visitors. In addition, the history of the region gives the park a special character. The remains of the mines that were once there are still visible, as well as boulders that can be found in many places.

Since the establishment of the national park, it has been a source of inspiration in Belgium when it comes to nature conservation and sustainable tourism. In the first five years after opening, the park generated 40 million euros per year and created 400 jobs for the local community. In addition to the existing campsites,

souvenir shops and cafes, more attractions are being planned to further increase revenue.

The opportunity

During the development of the national park a *(Re)connection model* was set up by means of a bottom-up approach. This model is praised worldwide, including by the *International Union for Conservation of Nature* (IUCN), as a successful model for protecting biodiversity in national parks. In this model the park does not limit itself by the borders of the national park. They have succeeded at both protecting the biodiversity – by the establishment of the national park – and at drawing many visitors to come and recreate here.

In the *(Re)connection Model*, the word 'reconnect' is crucial. Most national parks that are being set up are concerned with existing nature reserves which are then designated as a national park. The essence of the *(Re)connection Model* is that several things must first be reconnected before transitioning nature reserves to national parks in Western Europe. This involves reconnecting nature with nature, policy with practice and people with nature. The idea behind the model is that these connections need to be invested in because the relationships are not currently satisfactory. This way of thinking has become a guiding motif for the park, and has resulted in a change from using an inward model to an outward model. This model implies that *Hoge Kempen National Park* welcomes visitors in the villages or existing recreation centres around the park, rather than in the actual park itself. As a result, villages have started to inquire whether the national park can be enlarged so that their village will also be located on the edge of it.

The approach

Since the establishment of *Hoge Kempen*, the park has not been isolated as an attraction. Instead, the perspective which park management has adopted is that the attractions are located

around the park. In this way, park management does not look at only the national park but considers the wider region of Kempen and Maasland. The region must be included in the story of the park. In addition, economic gains mainly come from just outside the park.

With the park's outward approach, the entrance gates are seen today as more than just car parks. Instead, they are designed as attractions in themselves. The gates have been laid out in such a way that visitors can enjoy themselves for a full day without passing through the gates into the actual national park. This way, the visitor numbers can increase without increasing the number of people entering the park and thereby affecting natural assets. In order to involve the region in the management of the park, all relevant stakeholders are furthermore represented and involved in decision-making as follows:

1. Steering Committee

Every stakeholder has a voice, with 32 stakeholders in total. Examples are governors, ministers and mayors. At the moment, the Minister of Environment, Nature and Agriculture chairs the steering committee, which has been beneficial in making the region enthusiastic about the park.

2. Master group

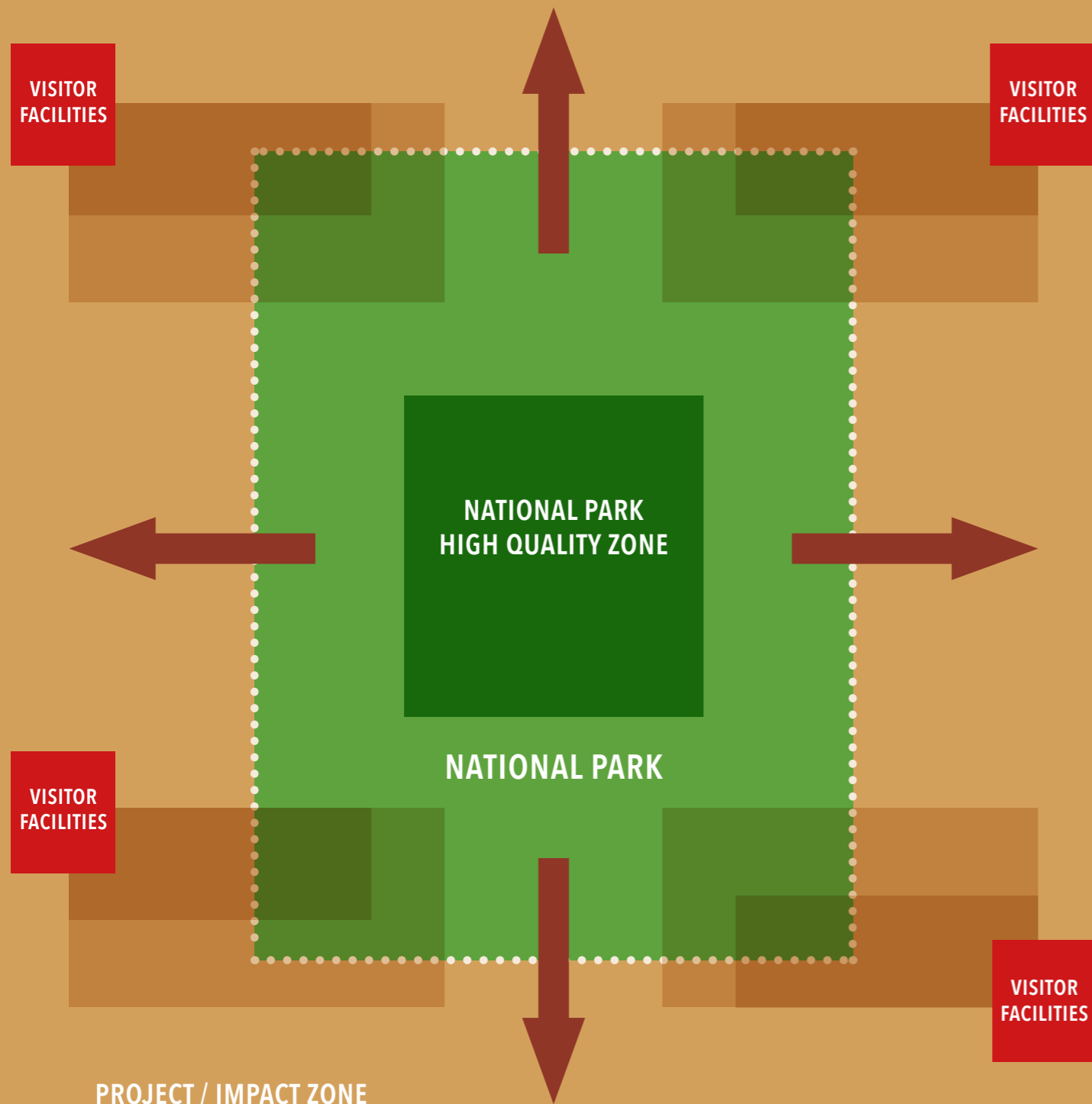
These are the same 32 stakeholders that are represented in the Steering Committee, but in the master group it is the employees, directors and officials who take the lead.

3. Theme groups

These groups work on an operational level in the fields of nature and tourism, among others.

4. Bilateral contacts with stakeholders

Stakeholders quickly give up if no concrete actions follow discussions. It is therefore very important to stay in touch and continue discussing plans.



Highlights

By focusing on the region and involving all stakeholders, *Hoge Kempen National Park* tries to reconnect different things: nature with nature, policy with practice and people with nature.

By means of smartly designed entrance gates, the core of the national park can become better protected. Specifically, this can be achieved through adopting an outward approach to recreation instead of an inward approach in order to protect heavily used areas.

Results

By focusing on the region in which the park is located, the negative impact on the environment is not directly related to the growing number of visitors. This past year, visitor numbers increased by 50%, but since many of them did not go beyond the entrance gates, the negative impact on the natural habitat inside the park did not increase by the same percentage.

Nevertheless, various stakeholder groups continue to express criticism. Conservationists consider the approach which the park is taking to be too much of a tourist project, while tourism entrepreneurs find it too much of a nature project.

Since money intended for an economic recovery policy was used in setting up the national park, park management has been monitoring revenues closely from the beginning in order to share economic outcomes. For this reason, the expenditure of hikers, cyclists and visitors are monitored at the entrance gates. In 2019 this totalled an amount of 32 million euros.

< (Re)connect model *Hoge Kempen*

References

- www.nationaalparkhogekempen.be/nl/groter-mooier-en-sterker
- www.nationaalparkhogekempen.be/nl/over-ons/master-plan-20-40
- www.nationaalparkhogekempen.be/nl/over-ons/partner-plan-20-25
- Goossen, M., Elands, B., & van Marwijk, R. (2010). *Recreation, tourism and nature in a changing world: proceedings of the fifth international conference on monitoring and management of visitor flows in recreational and protected areas*. Alterra, Wageningen University and Research Centre.



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Johan Van Den Bosch (Coordinator *National Park Hoge Kempen*).

Email: johan.vandenbosch@rlkm.be

Hohe Tauern National Park

Personal touch through experienced rangers

National Park Hohe Tauern stretches out over three provinces, namely Salzburg, Carinthia and East Tyrol. In each of these provinces the environmental law regarding national park administration differs, but there is one head office that brings cross border projects together. Of the total 185,600 hectares, 121,300 hectares form the core zone and the other 64,300 hectares the outer zone of the national park. In the core zone, 75% of the area is not allowed to be used for economic purposes (following the IUCN guidelines for PA Cat. II). In the other zone, alpine farming measures (seasonal alpine grazing) are in place to help preserve the characteristic landscape. Part of this characteristic landscape is the many mountain peaks in the park, including some of the highest in Austria: the Grosslockner, the Grossvenediger and the Hoher Sonnblick. The largest glacial areas of the Eastern Alps can be found in the national park. In addition, it is the largest national park in the Alps and one of the largest protected areas of Central Europe.

Views Hohe Tauern National Park >



INFORMATION

NAME National Park Hohe Tauern LOCATION Covers the Austrian states of Salzburg, Carinthia and East Tyrol ESTABLISHED IN 1981 SIZE 185.600 hectare NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 2 million LANDSCAPE Mountain landscape TOURISM ACTIVITIES Mountain-eering, hiking (between alpine huts), mountain biking, ski touring, snow hiking





Ranger takes visitors for a walk

Park background

Back in 1913, a member of the Salzburg Provincial Parliament, August Prinzing, convinced the association for national parks (*Verein Naturschutzpark*) that this mountainous landscape needed to be protected. The association was in turn convinced to purchase 1,100 hectares of land to be turned into a protected area. In 1918, Albert Wirth, a Carinthian forest industrialist, do-

nated 4,072 hectares of land to the Austrian Alpine Club. These two large land areas are now the core zone of the *National Park Hohe Tauern*. After the Second World War, reconstruction and economic growth in the area led to the area becoming more attractive. As a result, both the tourism and energy industries saw potential in the *Hohe Tauern* region. Energy industries planned to set up power stations here and wanted to build roads and

cable cars. However, local residents were split in their opinions, and NGOs boosted the discussion to a more national level. In the end, the governors of Salzburg, Carinthia and Tyrol signed an agreement in 1971 stating that they wanted to establish a national park together in the Hohe Tauern region. Before the national park could be established, a legal framework had to be set up by the three provinces, and sceptics had to be convinced. After a lengthy process, the *National Park Hohe Tauern* became formally established in 1981 by the municipality of Carinthia. In 1984 the Salzburg municipality joined, and in 1992 the provincial parliament of Tyrol also passed the legislation. Today, the main management goals of the park are to protect the natural high alpine ecosystem and all freshwater ecosystems.

The main motives for visitors to visit the national park are that they wish to recreate in untouched alpine landscape, have nature experiences of alpine animals and plants, and do this in a place far from mass tourism. The main tourism challenges which the park is currently facing is that there are a number of hotspots which, particularly during the winter season, are under too much pressure. For instance, wildlife often struggles to find food and shelter during the winter months, while tourism activities such as skiing create a large deal of stress for them. This forms a key challenge.

The opportunity: Rangers as leaders in nature

National Park Hohe Tauern believes that the best way to sensitise people concerning the protection of nature is to share knowledge with them about the delicate balance in the habitats of Hohe Tauern. In addition to wildlife conservation, natural experience and research, education is seen as one of the most important responsibilities of the national park.

The park has set up different educational programmes and four educational facilities. Along with the educational programmes and facilities, the national park has around 40 rangers who re-

ceive a 3-year training. This training is based on a standardized programme that has been set up for all national park rangers in Austria. In addition, they receive courses that are specific to their working region. These rangers are there to guide visitors through the park and share knowledge about the environment and importance of nature conservation. Through this, the national park wants to foster personal contact with the visitors coming to the park. These rangers are full-time employees paid by the government. As such, the park aims to keep these rangers on board as they accumulate valuable knowledge of the park over time. This knowledge can be shared with visitors in different ways.

Highlights

It is key to connect with people that live in or nearby the national park. Through hiring full-time rangers and setting up different educational programmes and facilities, *National Park Hohe Tauern* aims to connect with local residents as well as visitors coming from afar. This connection is based on sharing knowledge so that all visitors are aware of the importance of having this national park and of what makes the nature in the area unique.

Instead of working with free-lance rangers or volunteers, this best practice shows the value of employing experienced full-time rangers that have been educated according to a set programme. These rangers can help in connecting people to nature and sharing the importance of nature conservation. At the same time, these rangers accumulate a lot of valuable knowledge on the park that needs to be fostered for the long term.

The approach

The two educational programmes that have been set up are the Climate School and the Water School. These have been set up specifically to be used in schools. The Climate School (*Klimaschule*) began in 2010 as a free education programme to bring attention to natural processes that play a role beyond the borders of the national park. Climate change is considered as a key challenge and invites learners to consider its impacts on local, regional and global scales. *National Park Hohe Tauern* offers the *Climate School* in partnership with VERBUND, the biggest electricity company in Austria. Since it began, 25,000 children and young adults have attended the programme. Today it is also offered as an online programme for aspiring environmentalists all over central Europe. This programme can be viewed on the website klima.schule where games are offered for three age categories (until age 6, until age 11 and adults) with a focus on sharing knowledge about climate protection.

A second educational programme in which *National Park Hohe Tauern* is involved is the *Water School*. Water plays a central role in the national park in the form of glaciers, waterfalls, rivers and lakes. However, these water resources were threatened by a plan to build glacier ski resorts and hydroelectric power plants. The park is aware of the need to protect this key natural resource which is running short globally. The last untouched resources should be handled with care. This led to the park's focus on this issue in their educational programmes.

For this, the park uses [the Swarovski Waterschool Programme](#), a programme which wants to empower children around the world to become water stewards within their communities. Schools in the provinces of Salzburg, Carinthia and Tyrol offer this programme free of charge. The schools are visited by rangers from the national park who have been trained on the topic of water. These rangers share about water for two to four days as they visit the schools. During these days, knowledge is shared in the class-

room through experiments and group work as well as outdoor sessions. The overall goal is to educate students about the element water using various teaching methods to make them understand how this valuable resource can be protected and used sustainably.

Besides being involved in these educational programmes, *National Park Hohe Tauern* has also set up four educational facilities. These facilities are the knowledge centres of the park where knowledge is transferred. Examples of topics which are focussed on here are the formation of the Alps and eco-systems in the mountains. Knowledge on these topics is presented in a fun way with the goal of making children, young people and adults excited and eager to expand their knowledge about nature. The four educational facilities are the *Ranger labs*, the *House of Water*, *National Park Learning Workshop* and a *Science Centre*.

Ranger labs

The Ranger labs are located in the Mallnitz Visitor Centre. In these labs, workshops can be booked with national park rangers during which experiments are done on the topics of climate, herbs or nature. These workshops are paid for by the visitors: €15 for adults and €9 for children aged 6 to 15.

House of Water

In the *House of Water*, located in East Tyrol in the municipality of St. Jakob, the focus is on the importance of water to both humans and the environment. The House of Water can be visited by families, booked by school groups for three-to-five-day courses, visited by teachers and accessed through summer camps which are offered in collaboration with the Austrian Alpine Club.

National Park Learning Workshop

The nature and culture of the national park can be experienced with all senses in the *National Park Learning Workshop*, located in Klausnerhaus in Hollersbach. Examples of activities organised

here are identifying animal tracks, making butter and tasting local herbs, berries and fungi. These workshops are organized for school classes with a price per school class of €110.

Science Centre

The *Science Centre* in Mittersill is designed to be a place where young people and those interested in science and technology can come together to discuss and test solutions to scientific and technical challenges. Young researchers can make use of two laboratories located in the *Science Centre* in which national park rangers are there to assist. Experiments can be conducted based on 7 available modules, each lasting approximately 2 hours: snow flake and ice worlds, weather kitchen and climate laboratory, national park microcosm, survival in the high mountains, the creation of a mountain range, rocks and minerals, and alpine ecology.

The fees which are paid to partake in these various activities only cover a fraction of the actual costs. 50% of the costs remains largely financed by the province of Tyrol and the other 50% by the state. These educational activities for visitors are not developed for economic purposes, but rather for increasing environmental awareness and protection of key resources.

Results

Since 2004, a total of 235,625 participants have been involved in these programmes and institutions. In addition, there is a partner school programme from which 73 schools currently benefit. Some of these are provincial schools, others are state schools. Each year, each class in these schools gets a visit from a national park ranger for a few days. As a result, each child comes into contact with the national park during their school time. If these educational activities had not been made available, the park management believes that the acceptance of the national park and the realization of the need for environmental protection would not have increased as it has done now. In addition,

the educational activities have been popular for tourists coming to the region.

The educational programs are evaluated and monitored every year. Evaluation happens through questionnaires which participants complete. Visitors that had a guided tour with a ranger receive a small card at the end with several questions to evaluate their experience. In addition, monitoring is done by official institutions to make sure that they can maintain their ISO 9001 quality management which evaluates the quality of the programmes.

References

- hohetauern.at/en/education.html



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Florian Jurgeit (coordinator at Tirol administration for the *Hohe Tauern National Park*).

Email: florian.jurgeit@tirol.gv.at

INFORMATION

NAME Nuuksio National Park LOCATION Finland
ESTABLISHED IN 1994 SIZE 5500 hectare
NUMBER OF VISITORS IN 2020 365.900 LANDSCAPE Forest (hills and rocks) TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, geocaching, skiing, fishing, birdwatching, canoeing, biking, horseback riding



Nuuksio National Park

Making mobility more sustainable

Nuuksio National Park was established in 1994 after local scouts had expressed their concern that the Nuuksio area would be taken over by housing projects. Today, the park is seen as a unique nature area which is only 35 km away from Helsinki. This means that more than one million people live within an hour drive of the park. This has introduced an enormous challenge, particularly that of parking. Visitor research has indicated that 84% of the current visitors come to the park by car. Many of the access roads to the park are narrow. The high number of cars, together with these narrow roads, have led to regular traffic jams, with the associated frustrations, and illegal parking. The park has asked for enforcement to regularly issue fines to discourage mis-parking..

< Photo: Jukka-Pekka Ronkainen

Park background

In the Finnish culture it is normal to make day trips by car instead of using public transport. This is partly due to the large distances that have to be covered between destinations and also to limited accessibility of nature areas by public transport. In addition, when hiking trails were set up in the national park, it has always been done from the viewpoint of the car. Car parking thereby directs both starting and ending points of a national park. This, therefore, needs to be challenged first.

The opportunity: Livestreaming the car park

To give visitors more insight into how busy the Nuuksio National Park parking lots are, cameras have been installed on the two largest parking lots. The aim is to make visitors aware of possible crowds and to - if indeed it seems too busy - encourage these vis-



Photo : Rami Koskinen

itors to park in a less crowded place or to come by means of public transport. Encouraging visitors to come by public transport has also been stimulated through a second service that has been set up recently. This is a website with extra information about starting points of routes and the possible ways to get to the park using public transport.

The approach

To share data about parking crowdedness in real time, the cameras that have been set up take periodic snapshots of the parking spaces. The cameras are powered with solar energy due to a lack of electricity infrastructure in the area, and they are connected through 3G/4G. Visitors can see these images on a specially set up website (parkkihaukka.fi). Given the fact that the cameras run on solar energy, the images are only available during the sunny, summer months. There is currently no reason for the park to adjust this, since the extreme crowds only occur during these months. The costs for the website are approximately €10,000 - €20,000 per year. At the moment there are a total of 3 cameras on the two largest parking lots.

In addition to regulating visitors that come to the park by car, the park also wants to encourage visitors to use public transport. As previously mentioned, one of the tricky points here is that all trails start from the parking lots. The park is currently working on changing this, and is giving visitors tips about trails that start from a bus stop on a specifically set up website (nuuksioon.fi). On this website, visitors can indicate for which type of activity they are going to the national park. This could be for a short visit, taking a long walk, visiting with children, running in nature, cycling, or picking mushrooms and berries. After making a choice on the planned activity, the visitor enters the day and time during which they plan to visit and, as an extra option, their starting point, such as a home address. The website then shows an overview of the different routes for the preferred activity and the starting points in the park, including public transport options. In

this way the website promotes using public transport but also shows the variety of routes available in order to spread visitors across the national park.

To continue receiving large numbers of visitors, and specifically their cars, the park management has also considered creating additional parking spaces. However, so far, they have decided against it since trees would have to be taken down, and its specifically these old trees that make the park unique.

Results

One of the ambitions of the park is to start using artificial intelligence to automatically estimate the current occupancy rate of a parking lot. This would be useful, given the lack of ground marking on the parking lots. Parking lots which are suitable for 8 cars often have only 5 cars since parking is not done efficiently without markings on the ground. Using artificial intelligence would help to give a better indication of the available parking spaces despite the lack of ground marking. In addition, artificial intelligence could also make use of weather forecasts to give an indication of the expected crowds.

Visitors that have made use of the cameras when planning their trip to the national park have indicated that it helped them to avoid crowds. The park management indicates that a lot can still be improved on in terms of how well the service is known by the public. Another possible future improvement is related to the fact that currently, most visitors making use of the service check the cameras while still at home. However, the level of crowdedness on the parking lots can change during their trip to the park. The park management is therefore considering the possibility of sharing real-time information about available parking spaces on signs along the road so that visitors can make other choices while travelling to the park.

Highlights

Having cameras placed on the biggest parking lots of Nuuksio National Park has made it possible for visitors to see possible crowdedness from their home and adjust their plans accordingly. This could help spread visitors to the different parking lots or motivate them to travel by public transport, decreasing the crowdedness that often occurs and the related frustrations experienced by those living around the national park.

References

- www.europarc.org/case-studies/nudging-towards-sustainable-mobility-behaviour-in-urban-nature-destinations-park-hawk-mobile-information-service/
- www.metsa.fi/tiedotteet/parkkihaukka-auttaa-autoiljaa-ja-reittipalvelu-esittelee-uusia-vaihtoehtoja-nuuksoon/
- nuuksioon.fi/en



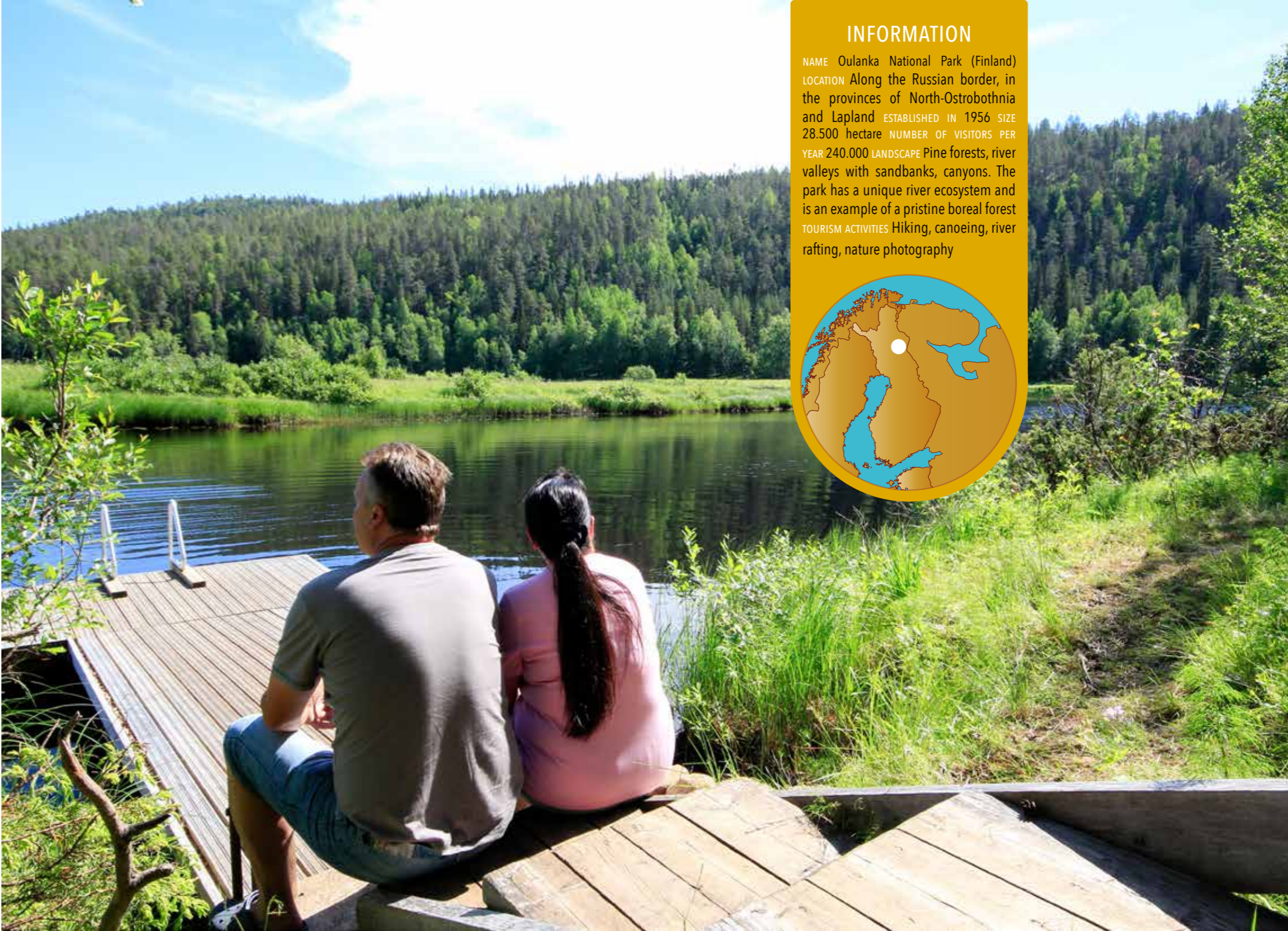
Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Joel Heino (planner and designer at Nuuksio National Park). Email: joel.heino@metsa.fi

Oulanka National Park

Oulanka Wilderness

In 1956, seven national parks were established in Finland of which *Oulanka National Park* was one. Long before its establishment, it had already been a popular destination for hikers and researchers, particularly due to the diverse nature found in the area. The region in which the park is situated is sparsely populated, and traditionally it has been dependent on forestry, reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. Since the establishment of the national park, it has been a place where nature-based tourism is practiced, and is internationally known for its boreal forests.



INFORMATION

NAME Oulanka National Park (Finland)
LOCATION Along the Russian border, in the provinces of North-Ostrobothnia and Lapland
ESTABLISHED IN 1956
SIZE 28.500 hectare
NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 240.000
LANDSCAPE Pine forests, river valleys with sandbanks, canyons. The park has a unique river ecosystem and is an example of a pristine boreal forest
TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, canoeing, river rafting, nature photography





Park background

Not all parts of the national park are accessible to visitors, yet in Finnish culture and way of thinking it is difficult to restrict the use of a specific area due to the right to roam. The access to nature has always been open in Finland, which is why it is considered important to channel the use of the different zones in a national park.

The opportunity: Oulanka Wilderness

From 2000 until 2010, *Oulanka National Park* participated in the Pan Parks initiative. To become part of this initiative, Oulanka had to establish wilderness zones. This began to formally take shape in 2007. By not intervening with nature development in wilderness zones, the ecological processes in such areas are deemed protected. For visitors, this means that the use of motorboats and fishing is strictly forbidden at the core of the wilderness area. Camping, however, remains allowed in designated areas and handpicking, which is normally forbidden, is allowed for edible berries and mushrooms.

The formation of a wilderness zone comes along with a broader zoning plan in Oulanka. In fact, the national park has four zones: a tourism zone, a restricted zone, a border zone and a wilderness zone. All visitor facilities are located in the tourism zone, and the most famous hiking trail of Finland, *'the Bear's Trail'*, goes through this zone. In contrast, the restricted zone, containing rich biodiversity, forms a no-go area. The border zone borders with Russia and is – like the restricted area – also a no-go area. The fourth zone is the wilderness zone. Currently, 85% of the park is covered by a wilderness area containing the remote zone, the border zone and the restricted area.

The approach

As indicated before, the wilderness zone added a new zoning plan in the area. To influence traffic in the different zones, trails have been created which guide visitors towards the areas that

Highlights

To protect its wilderness zone, management at *Oulanka National Park* has developed its walking trails in such a way that they lead away from areas that need the most protection. Furthermore, as few facilities as possible are provided in wilderness zones to make it difficult for visitors to travel to these zones. And finally, the park collaborates with stakeholders in different regions to support tourism development where it makes sense economically.

can handle them better in comparison to more sensitive areas that require more protection. In principle, visitors are allowed to go everywhere, yet the difference between zones can be found in the level of services provided. In some areas services are offered while in other zones this may not be the case.

It has proven important to involve local residents in planning these zones. The main issue for local residents relates to the rights for hunting and fishing. This is logical as some of these have been taken away from them in the restricted zones. Besides being in close contact with local residents, the park has also found it to be important to be in contact with other nature areas nearby. *Oulanka National Park* has begun promoting day trips to other sites, which means that a part of the flow of visitors are guided to these places. In addition, the park has been investing more in relationships with local tourism businesses. For example, the park management has been cooperating with the largest Finnish holiday resort which is located next to the national park. In this way the resort can share the responsibility to educate visitors on responsible behaviour in the park and can assist in spreading visitors to other areas.

Results

The investment into tourism cooperation has resulted in a network of 700 business partners all over Finland, with *Oulanka National Park* having 40 partners. Some of these operate inside the national park, for example by offering guided tours, while others are outside the park, of which accommodation is an example. Some of these tourist organisations have indicated that they would like more services in the park so that it would become even more attractive to tourists. However, most of these businesses understand the importance of protecting the nature in Oulanka, and understand the need for visitors to be channelled to other places nearby. An additional challenge at the moment is that some of the most beautiful locations in the *Wilderness Zone* have been shared extensively on social media by visitors. This has led to an increase in the number of visitors to this zone. This highlights the importance of the pathways leading visitors away from these vulnerable areas



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Matti Tapaninen (manager at *Oulanka National Park*).
Email: matti.tapaninen@metsa.fi

References

- european-wilderness.network/listing/oulanka-wilderness
- www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2009_Brochure_Pan_Parks_As_nature_intended_Best_practices_wilderness_management_N2000_network.pdf



INFORMATION

NAME Parc National de Forêts LOCATION On the Plateau of Langres in Northeast France ESTABLISHED IN 2019 SIZE 242.148 hectare NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 30.000 LANDSCAPE Forests and swamps TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, tree climbing, yoga with bees, riding donkey



Parc National de Forêts

Collaboration with local residents and farmers

Parc National de Forêts is a very young national park and receives a relatively low number of visitors considering the popular destinations of Burgundy and Champagne which are nearby. The expectations are that the current visitor number of 30,000 will grow to 100,000 in two to three years. However, it might be that the growth will be even larger considering the fact that 22 million people live within a 2 to 2.5 hour drive from the park. Currently, life is very quiet in the park, and local residents would like to keep it that way. The challenge for the coming years is how to handle the predicted increasing visitor numbers while keeping local residents satisfied.

< *Black Storks (photo: Ondrej Prosicky)*

Park background

Roughly one fifth of the park forms a core area (*coeur*) in which economic exploitation measures apply. This includes a zone that is not accessible for people (*réserve intégrale*). Beyond these zones, there are areas in which municipalities have joined the park's charter (*aire d'adhésion*). The national park is spread over 127 municipalities which have around 28,000 inhabitants in total.

The aim of the area is to make land use more sustainable. As an example, after a long journey from West Africa, the black stork can nest in about 50 million trees in the national park. There were many more in centuries past, but many of these trees have been felled since the French Revolution for the construction or heating of houses as well as ships. Today there is still an old deciduous forest which is now protected. Many of these trees grow on a limestone substrate which is not very suitable for large-scale farming. This has meant that the area has not been used extensively for intensive agriculture. This makes it a unique park in France, as most other parks in the country are located in the mountains. There is no other French park that protects forest areas in the lowlands.

The opportunity: becoming an eco-destination

The park is a few hours' drive from Paris and may become an important attraction for eco-tourists. By seeing the park as an eco-destination, the region has received an important nature-based boost.

"The '*national park*' label allows people to change their vision of the territory, elevating it and giving it value," says Claire Colliat, mayor of the village of Saint-Loup-sur-Aujon, on the park's eastern border. Colliat helped champion the park's creation through the grassroots *Oui au Parc* campaign. "Residents now recognize its incredible wealth and resources: natural, cultural, human." (Nicklin, 2020).

The foundation of this positive park representation has a longer history than the recent establishment of the park. There was considerable resistance, and the establishment of the park went hand in hand with a lot of negotiating with NGOs, farms and municipal councils. What makes this park different from other national parks in France is that many traditional activities are allowed in the heart of the park which is the more protected area. In this area, hunting is allowed, and forestry and agricultural practices are maintained. Thus, the park became a sort of people's park in which the emphasis is not on nature alone, but on a blurred border interplay between nature and mankind.

"The 'national park' label allows people to change their vision of the territory, elevating it and giving it value," says Claire Colliat, mayor of the village of Saint-Loup-sur-Aujon, on the park's eastern border. Colliat helped champion the park's creation through the grassroots Oui au Parc campaign. "Residents now recognize its incredible wealth and resources: natural, cultural, human"

Nicklin, 2020

The approach

In order to establish this new national park, initiators had to present and discuss plans at different national, regional and local levels. For example, conversations were held with people from 250 municipalities, and a public survey was conducted among the 28,000 inhabitants. When the final plan was presented after ten years, 91% of the inhabitants agreed with the plan (Hervé Parmentier, in Hanks, 2020).

The main challenge remains how to deal with traditional activities, particularly timber and hunting activities. For this, park management has had discussions with local hunters as well as timber companies. These two groups were afraid that they would no longer be allowed to carry out their activities if the national park were created. During the discussions that were held, the focus was on specifying which activities would, and which would not, be allowed with the establishment of this new national park.

The final decision to establish the national park was made by the French government. In the end, it was decided that even if not all locals agreed, the decision simply had to be made since the nature in the area needed to be protected. Still, until today conversations are held with farmers, hunters, foresters and timber companies in the area. At the moment, there is a good relationship with hunters. With farmers it is a bit more complicated. Initially there was a lot of resistance from farmers, but in the end, the majority understand the importance of the park's goal to use the land more sustainably.

Park management is very careful not to make any promises they cannot fulfil. In hindsight, previous promises made during park negotiations with local stakeholders may turn into negative backlashes. Certain ecotourism visions – for instance – were presented as too positive and this turns out to become a problem in conversations today. One lesson learned herein is that it is indeed important to stay honest and realistic about what you set in motion, at the same time one has to remain positive.

Results

Since the summer of 2020, 95 villages have voted to be part of the national park. Despite the Coronavirus crisis, the park management remains optimistic and hopeful about the future of the region where many local (and import) entrepreneurs seem to find new opportunities within the new national park. For example, yoga classes are given while surrounded by the buzzing of

Highlights

In establishing this new national park, initiators faced the challenges of traditional practices (hunting and timber production) that have been going on for ages. The majority of residents in the region eventually agreed to form a national park in order to protect the unique nature in the area and because of the potential for ecotourism. However, as soon as the national park was established, a lot of promises could not be kept. This situation requires an ongoing dialogue with companies, residents, mayors and others to continue forming this national park.

bees, bed and breakfasts have been set up as well as do-it-yourself camping routes with donkey rides, and forest therapies are given.

The question the park is currently dealing with is what can be done - by the park management - to promote various businesses in the area. The fact is that the production of timber is decreasing. However, the commitment of the park is that the park management and timber businesses will work together to promote the products coming from the area and agree on a price premium for the products. In this way, commercial logging continues to take place in the park, but is now managed in such a way that it does not negatively affect the old forests and other remaining forests in the area. An area of 3,000 hectares is closed off for visitors, except for forest researchers who are monitoring how the flora and fauna evolve in a strictly natural setting.

Since the park has been established quite recently, park management is still working on setting up a platform on which discussions with local residents and businesses can be held and structured. The first stage is to organise dialogues with stakeholders in a bilateral way. The park management has already



done this with hunters, mayors and professional representatives. The next stage is to have discussions in a more collective way through the yet to be developed platform. The reasons for first having bilateral discussions before collective ones is that the area is very rural with small towns where the residents are used to traditional ways of communicating. With the manager of the park being new to the area, he opted to first communicate with local stakeholders in a personal way.

References

- Nicklin, M.W. (2020) At France's newest national park, it's all about the trees, National Geographic, retrieved the 1st of march 2021 from www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/burgundy-champagne-national-park-a-new-model-for-sustainable-tourism



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Philippe Puydarrieux (Manager at *Parc National de Forêts*).
Email: philippe.puydarrieux@forets-parcnational.fr

Peneda-Gerês National Park

Bridging heritage with a long-distance route

Peneda-Gerês National Park was established as the first national park in Portugal to ensure that the ancient customs of the region would be kept intact. It remains the only national park in Portugal today. This area has a long history of human habitation, of which signs are still visible, such as a Roman road, castles, monasteries and stone tombs dating back to the third century. Shepherding and agricultural work have always been the main sources of income for local residents living in over 100 villages inside the park. These traditional practices remain a source of income for many of the residents today. Some villages consist of only a few houses, whereas others include accommodations, shops and restaurants.



INFORMATION

NAME Peneda-Gerês National Park LOCATION North Portugal, bordering with the Spanish Natural Park of Baixa Limia – Serra do Xurés ESTABLISHED IN 1971 SIZE 72.000 hectares NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 93.000 LANDSCAPE Mountain plains, oak forests, green valleys TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, visiting villages, water activities (canoeing and rafting), horseback riding





Park background

The park is divided into three zones. The first zone is an integral part of the park. It is a protected area which offers no access to visitors, only to those residents that are involved in agricultural activities that are allowed in that area. The second zone is the total protected area which has limited infrastructure. The third zone is the rural zone which includes all the villages and popular places for visitors.

The organisation that assists the national park management, as well as the wider region, is *Adere-Peneda Gerês*. *Adere-Peneda Gerês* is a private, non-profit entity which was established in 1993. It organises activities within the five municipalities that are included in the Peneda-Gerês National Park. The organisation focuses on developing projects that can contribute to improving both the living conditions of the local population and the conservation of nature and built heritage. They also develop training courses for local residents that wish to gain more knowledge regarding tourism so that they can create an additional source of income next to their agricultural jobs.

The opportunity: Integration of natural and cultural heritage

Tourism is not the main activity which people living inside the national park are involved in. Most of them have a job in the agricultural sector, while others work in the cities around the national park. Yet, many residents have been noticing that an increasing number of visitors are coming to the national park and that this could generate new sources of income for them.

The *Adere-Peneda Gerês* organisation aims to encourage visitors to be in contact with the residents living in one of the many villages inside the national park. They also promote this in their branding so that the focus is not only on the natural beauty which the park holds but also on the rich cultural heritage and customs it contains.

Highlights

To help residents feel more connected to the national park and tourism, a long-distance walking route has been established. This route passes through various villages in the area, and allows visitors can get in touch with nature and locally established cultural heritage. Altogether, this route offers the potential for broader support of the national park and connection to it among both the regional society and those who visit the park from afar.

The approach

To get local residents on board, the *Adere-Peneda Gerês* organization has set itself the mission to provide information and raise awareness to those living inside the park concerning questions of nature conservation and how they can collaborate with the national park management. For this, evening and weekend activities are organised in which residents are able to share their experiences and needs. The organization then sets up projects that respond to this feedback.

To encourage this further, the GR 50 *Peneda-Gerês* long distance route has been set up which makes its way through various villages so that those hiking along it will come into contact with local stories, food, wine and artisans. To complete the full route, which covers 200 km, requires 7 days. The route consists of 19 stages and connects the five municipalities that form the territory of the national park.

This long-distance route has become a way for the park to work together with local businesses and to brand itself. Its establishment has several goals. Firstly, to encourage visitors to interact with residents so that visitors experience not only the nature but also the culture, and for residents to experience tourism positively. Secondly, with the grand trail the park hopes to convince

visitors that it is important to donate money for nature conservation. This is communicated on the website and on signs placed around the park. Since this has only been set up this year, conclusions cannot yet be drawn on how successful this will be in the long run.

Results

The *Adere-Peneda Gerês* organization has found that it is important to find a balance between providing an experience for visitors and conserving the cultural heritage and nature of the park. Even though this might be challenging at times, they have found it feasible. Overall, the relationship between locals and tourists has been a positive one.

Over the past years there has been an increase in visitors coming to the national park. Park management has tried to control the flow of visitors using forest guards and promoting different are-

as. However, this has not proven to be easy, particularly because the type of visitors has changed. Visitors are no longer only people that enjoy quiet time in nature, as often used to be the case. During this past year, with everything else being closed, people would come to the national park simply because it was the only place in which they could still enjoy an outing. They would come with radios playing loud music and bring their own food rather than enjoying a local meal at one of the many restaurants. Currently there is no plan to educate this specific group of visitors because the expectation is that once the covid pandemic is over, these visitors will no longer come to the national park.

Since the GR50 grand tour has only recently been finished, it is now time for the organization and the national park to invest in promoting it. Although the response so far has been positive from both visitors and locals, very little evaluation material is currently available.

References

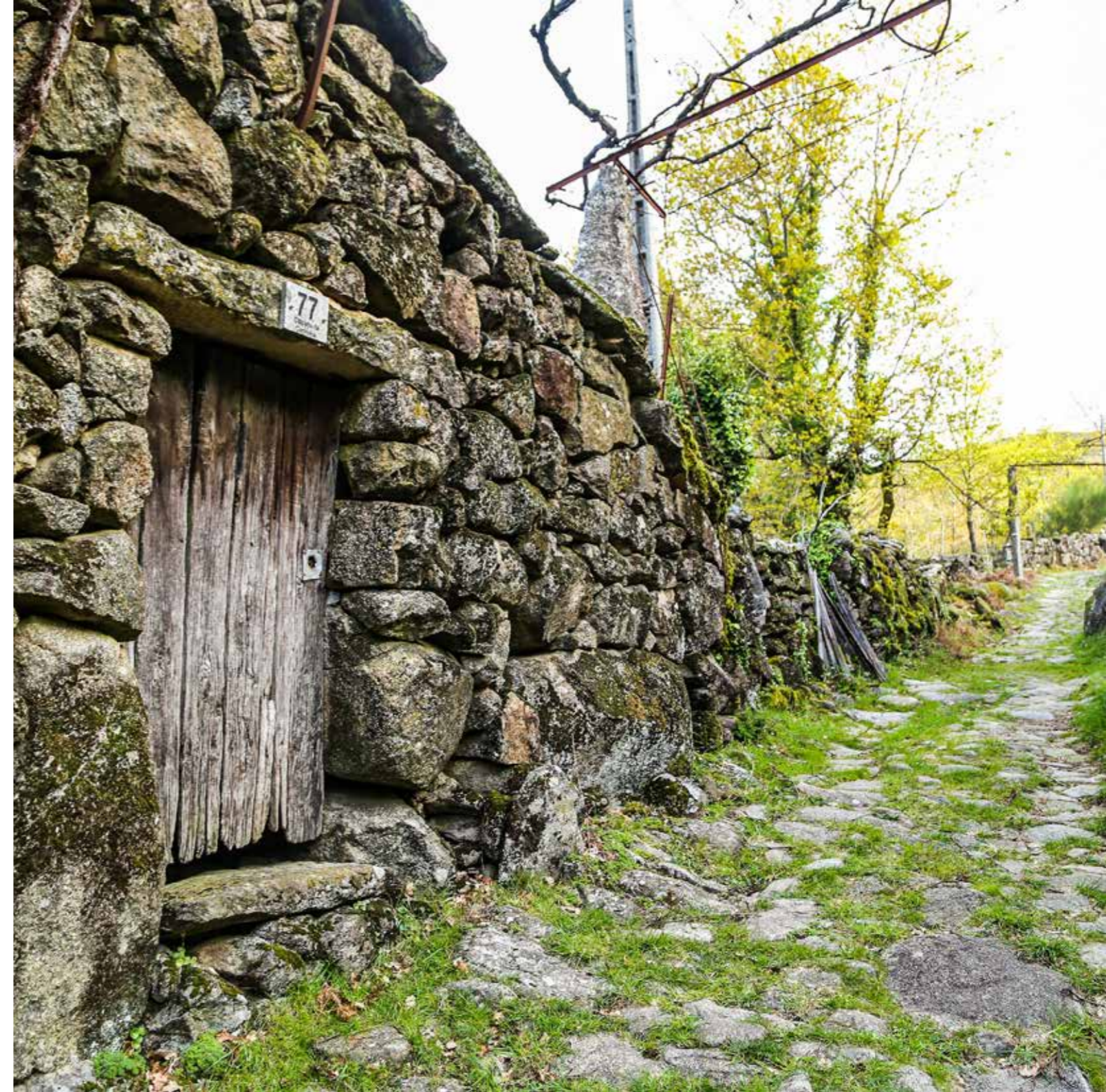
- www.walkingpenedageres.pt/en



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Sónia Almeida (CEO of *Adere-Peneda Gerês*)

Email: sonia.almeida@adere-pg.pt



INFORMATION

A collaboration between more than 200 nature reserves in the United Kingdom



Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Collaborative and Strategic Monitoring

The RSPB has over 200 nature reserves across the UK. For each of these, the RSPB either owns the land, is in partnership, or manages the areas for a third party. Of these 200 nature reserves, some receive no visitors at all, while others receive many. The reserves that receive many visitors are referred to as visitor havens or flagship sites. The reserves have varying wildlife and habitats, from woodlands to wet grasslands to native conifer forests. Some of the reserves use technology to count the number of visitors, while others do not participate in any counting. This is the case especially in small reserves, receiving few visitors throughout the year, where counting is not deemed necessary. This creates different needs for monitoring in different reserves, each requiring different sets of questions that connect to different challenges including vulnerable species habitats, need for volunteers, problematic visitor behaviour, etc.

Photo: RSPB Images



Background

At the moment, visitor counting remains somewhat inaccurate and inconsistent. This makes it challenging when using data for operational planning of activities (such as retail and catering). There is no need to make visitor counting 100% accurate, but streamlining counting activities can benefit the RSPB and associated nature reserves. The monitoring of visitors is just one part of the monitoring done in the RSPB reserves. Different departments of the RSPB engage differently with the reserves, each having its own observations while simultaneously benefiting from interaction among departments.

The opportunity: Strategic Monitoring

Last year the RSPB began a project that aims to streamline visitor monitoring across their most visited nature reserves in the UK. The questions they aim to answer through visitor monitoring are:

- How many visitors come to the nature reserves? Can the sites accommodate such numbers?
- How many visitors make use of visitor centres, catering and/or retail outlets? What is the reason for their choice to either visit or not visit these places? How can they better engage with their visitors?

Monitoring will not only allow the RSPB to respond to these questions, but will also enable them to report numbers accurately to other parts of the organisation and to other parties, for example funders, government agencies, etc. Since monitoring depends on site-specific questions, there is no need to have monitoring dispersed evenly among all the reserves or evenly throughout a given reserve. Instead, to answer questions above, it makes more sense to place monitoring units at strategic places. An important aspect in this endeavour is the safeguarding of ecological assets within the reserves. Different places are subject

to different habitat sensitivities. It is important for RSPB ecologists to know how many visitors come to these sensitive places and at which points visitors mainly gather and what they do there. Such information could be linked to the huge amounts of species data made available by other observers. Visitor monitoring follows visitors, while ecologists have been busy monitoring habitat conditions and species distribution.

The approach

In the UK, the RSPB has approximately 47 nature reserves with a high number of visitors. Of these, six reserves have recently been selected in order to gather the most visitor data possible. The data collection has not yet started, but a supplier for the equipment has recently been selected. The RSPB will test how the equipment functions in different areas of the country. For example, one of the questions is whether Wi-Fi connectivity can be set up in all areas so that live data can be captured and transferred to an online portal. Depending on the data that each reserve wishes to gather, they will be able to choose the most suitable equipment from a range of solutions. This equipment is either manual, uses a tablet or laptop, or uses Wi-Fi to download data. If Wi-Fi is not available, the supplier also offers the option of using satellite technology. In addition, to be able to draw conclusions based on the visitor numbers, the monitoring system can explore predictive patterns by using weather information and events taking place on a reserve.

With this monitoring system, the RSPB further hopes to be able to understand what visitors are doing in the nature reserve; how many just visit the site versus those who engage with their staff. Through the data gathered in the visitor centre, retail and catering areas, conclusions can be drawn on which visitors enter these areas. This would work for those reserves that have a visitor centre. For those reserves that do not have a gate or visitor centre, monitoring could be done by counting the number of cars that come into the car park to gain an estimate.

Highlights

A national monitoring of visitor numbers carried out by the RSPB allows for a more accurate, consistent and strategic monitoring of visitor numbers. This can help with decision-making about the nature reserve as a whole as well as specific areas such as visitor centres, shops and cafes. By doing it this way the organisation can save costs and is better able to offer suitably placed experiences in nature. In addition, collaboration between organizational disciplines and several of the RSPB nature reserves can help with place-specific questions and challenges.

On the basis of this data, ecologists can better estimate to what extent visitor densities are welcome or not in different areas of a reserve. This will lead to diversion strategies to lead people to explore other, less sensitive areas in the reserves. In doing this, ecologists try to think from a visitor's point of view and offer them the most interesting experiences, such as good viewpoints and diverse activities, that do not have a large impact on nature.

“Variety keeps things interesting, with focus moving between close interest and vistas. For example, cutting gaps in vegetation so that people can see through to other areas (providing that this does not conflict with the conservation interest of the site)”

RSPB Viewing Wildlife Visitor Trails

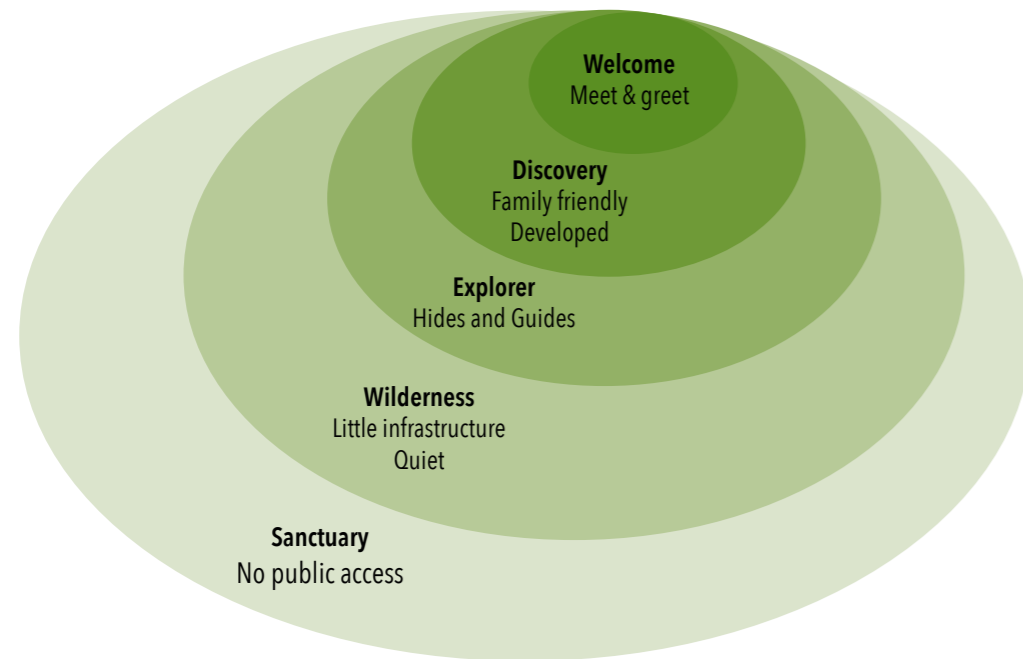


Figure 1. Reserve Zoning schematic diagram (source: RSPB Viewing Wildlife Reserve Zoning)

Areas that are sensitive, or become increasingly threatened by escalating visitor pressure, are made less accessible by, for instance, limited to no infrastructure, fewer interpretation signs, improved screening of sensitive habitats, seasonal trails, or no wildlife hides. To decide what activities are possible, the RSPB works with an activities decision tree in which visitor staff and ecologists jointly explore what is – and is not – possible in a reserve. These decisions contribute to the zonation set up in RSPB zones (see also figure 1) that can be distinguished in zones known as: welcome (building expectations), discovery (family-friendly and highly developed), explorer (less developed and mostly natural wildlife viewing opportunities) and wilderness (no or limited infrastructure), and in some cases also sanctuary zones (no access).

Results

Having one organization that oversees the monitoring for multiple reserves is a lot more affordable than if each reserve were to do it on an individual basis. In addition, it allows for expertise and knowledge concerning the equipment and methods to be shared across the various reserves. In addition, having one organization that is involved from the very beginning in proposal writing and the related visitor monitoring decisions, allows for anything that would not be good for the reserves to be picked up quickly. During the coming six months, the new equipment will be installed in the six selected nature reserves. The types of equipment include radio technology, wireless and satellite loggers, directional and non-directional dataloggers and Automag car counters. The equipment assigned to each reserve will be determined by the needs of that reserve and suited to the en-

vironment (i.e. weather conditions, volume of traffic and number of entrances to the site.) The equipment can be installed by on-site RSPB staff which will save on installation fees. Following installation, on-going monitoring of data will take place and, if necessary, counting equipment will be moved in order to capture the best data available.

As the streamlining of visitor monitoring is taking shape, the RSPB has benefitted from interdepartmental collaboration. Ecologists benefit from information related to visitors which helps them to identify new opportunities and risks in the reserves. Visitor monitoring can benefit from ecologists in the RSPB as well. For example, they ensure that habitat creation, particularly for disturbance-sensitive species, is done in suitable places. Some

species, such as the Common Crane and the Eurasian Spoon-bill, need nesting sites a long way from popular footpaths. The chance of success is maximised if their nest sites are positioned in undisturbed locations.

Such interdisciplinary / interdepartmental collaborations offer organization-wide benefits as different RSPB employees are given responsibility for particular processes. Ecologists are, for instance, responsible to oversee an area. At the same time, they also share ecological advice when needed elsewhere. Different colleagues with specific expertise are brought into different reserves when important questions emerge.

So far, the RSPB ecology department hosts a great number of ecologists but not many social scientists. They are currently exploring the possibility of hiring more, with the hope that they could help explore ways in which different reserve users engage with other users and with nature. This would include exploring how different users understand what is considered appropriate behaviour in the reserves. A good example of this is the question of how to deal with the many new – and inexperienced – dog owners that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Showing them pictures of birds would probably not interest them, as they are mostly interested in their dogs and not observing the wildlife. It is important to understand the viewpoint of these users and the different cultural practices and observations they bring with them. When ecologists, visitor managers and social scientists look at these complex problems together, they can search for broadly supported solutions. The challenge lies in bridging observations and developing strategic observation points and practices.

References

- www.rspb.org.uk

Want to know more?

For more information about the visitor monitoring practices, please contact Sue Beeching.

Email: sue.beeching@rspb.org.uk

Or more information concerning ecological zoning/decision making in RSPB reserves, please contact Vivienne Booth.

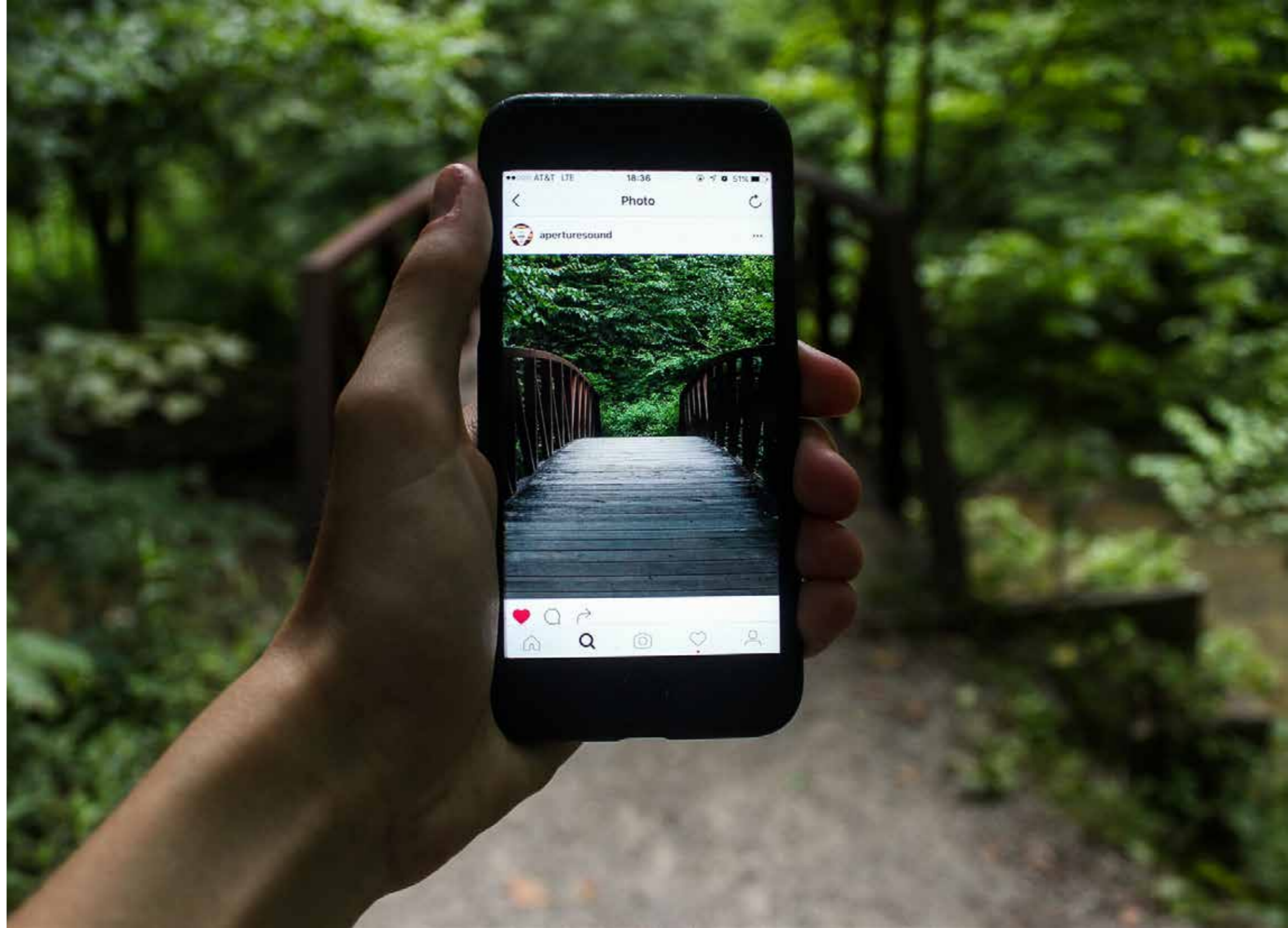
Email: vivienne.booth@rspb.org.uk



Social Media Monitoring

Without gates or entrance fees, it can be difficult to precisely monitor how many visitors enter a national park. The monitoring of visitors can have different focal points, for example, getting insight into the numbers, the background or the behaviour of visitors. Having information on each of these can be valuable for making predictions of future visitor numbers and for helping to make decisions on infrastructure projects.

Social media representation of nature experience >



Highlights

Current ICT developments allow for more and easier ways to monitor people, including visitors in national parks. There are – in this example – possibilities in using social media data, as visitors increasingly track their visits by means of pictures and words. This offers not only free promotion for nature, but also a large dataset from which we can learn about these visitors (e.g., where they are from, what desires they have, etc.). While this seems quite possible in theory, it is not yet that easy to derive such information in practice.

Background

Many of the monitoring methods are expensive. Consider, for instance, the need for satellite connections and the expertise and time needed to implement such measures. Given these costs, monitoring is not often carried out by national parks, especially not in a structural way over a long period of time. If it takes place, it is often performed as an experiment, student research, or maybe due to an inclination by park staff. The findings from these efforts can offer insights into mobility patterns, visitor behaviour and/or preferences. They can also further support communication with regional stakeholders. For instance, infrastructure issues can be discussed with regional politicians on the basis of visitor monitoring insights.

This best practice does not focus on a specific European national park, but instead provides an overview of the potential in using social media as a monitoring tool.

The opportunity

Research conducted in Germany focussed on using images shared on social media. The main goal was to get insight into where the visitors to the national park come from and which places within the park are most popular to visit. For this, researchers

made use of photos that were uploaded to Flickr and Vkontakte. These photos are geo-tagged which can help in predicting when the spot is busiest, even down to the hour. In addition, the profile of the photographers could be studied to see what the home location is of these visitors, and even further, to see what meaning nature has for particular social media users.

The results reveal that August is the busiest month and that overall, Saturdays and Sundays are the most popular days to visit the national parks. The time during which they are busiest is between 11:00 and 15:00. In addition, conclusions could be drawn on the predicted number of international tourists.

Barros et al. (2020) conducted similar research using geotagged photographs and GPS tracks in Teide National Park, Spain. Their aim was to analyse visitor behaviour in national parks. The national park simultaneously collected statistics through surveys so that the researchers could compare these to their social network data when possible. In the end, the researchers were able to recommend which locations in the park would be optimal for information stands, based on where visitors typically gathered. For this, they applied the location-allocation model.

The advantages of using social media to monitor visitors are that it can be done as desk research, is very cost efficient compared to on-site monitoring and it can be used for areas that are difficult to monitor on-site as they are difficult to get to or not visited often. Think – for instance – of rather distant and large protected areas in which visitors are not easily monitored normally. Furthermore, next to available geographic information systems (GIS) patterns, it may be possible to get a better understanding of how associated visitors/social media users interpret nature. There are many interesting questions to consider in that regard. For instance: what effects may nature education have on social media interpretations of nature? Does increased knowledge influence our attitudes towards nature (conservation)? Does it

bring our visitors closer to nature? And to what extent may these questions become answered through social media monitoring?

This brings us to some disadvantages. A first is that it takes a lot of time and specific knowledge to work with GIS. A second disadvantage is that the method includes many assumptions since you only see an online photo but not what happens in the context or mind of the maker. What was the exact route of the visitor to get to the place in which the picture is taken? How long did he/she stay in that location and why? Thirdly, this method only works well for areas where many photos are taken. Fourthly, you do not know how representative the data is since not all visitors might take photos during their visit or share them on the social media platform selected. And finally, there is an increased concern in considering whose data and identity we are using in this kind of research, given strict privacy laws.

Nevertheless, the internet and big data increasingly offer opportunities for visitor monitoring. There are various technological developments related to social media monitoring that are emerging, and the more these are offered as open-source technologies (including the use of data), the more efficient it will become to work with these tools in the future. National parks could collaborate herein (see also the chapter on practices within the RSPB). For instance, they could establish their own social media platform for their visitors. This could offer visitors information about the parks they visit, and in return visitors could give permission to share their mobility patterns or other information needed by the parks.

References

- Barros, C., Moya-Gómez, B., & Gutiérrez, J. (2020). Using geotagged photographs and GPS tracks from social networks to analyse visitor behaviour in national parks. In: *Current Issues in Tourism* 23(10), 1291-1310.
- Sinclair, M., Mayer, M., Woltering, M., & Ghermandi, A.

(2020). Using social media to estimate visitor provenance and patterns of recreation in Germany's national parks. In: *Journal of Environmental Management* 263, 110418.



Thingvellir National Park

Less is More - Infrastructure to tame visitor flows

Thingvellir National Park was established in 1928 and became a World Heritage Site in 2004. It has always been popular among international tourists due to the history (the parliament used to be here) and landscape of the area. This landscape has been strongly affected by increasing tourist numbers which are now around 1.5 million a year. 98% of these are foreigners.



INFORMATION

NAME Thingvellir National Park **LOCATION** In the southwest region of Iceland, about 35 km from the capital, Reykjavík **ESTABLISHED IN** 1928 **SIZE** 23.700 hectares **NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR** 1.5 million **LANDSCAPE** Rift valley, lava-tourism **ACTIVITIES** Hiking, observing waterfalls

< Overlooking platform (photo: Kristi Blokhin)



Park background

With the national park being located in the northern part of the hemisphere, it could be argued that environmental issues are even more important here compared to the southern part of the hemisphere, given the fact that the environment is very fragile and the natural growth period is shorter.

In most countries, tourism picks up mainly during the summer months. Over the last 8 years, Icelandic tourism has also been picking up during winter months meaning that tourism is no longer a seasonal issue. Many of the sites in Iceland are one-stop locations such as spectacular waterfalls in Thingvellir. Visitors stay for a short time, take a photo, and move on to the next one-stop must-see location. As a result, a lot of tourism issues are related to the peaks of visitors in very specific areas.

The opportunity

The most important objectives of *Thingvellir National Park's* management plan for 2004-2024 are to protect the nature and heritage sites in the park while also preparing for the many tourists. To achieve this, it is important to continuously monitor the number of visitors and their behaviour which is done using electronic counters in the most congested areas. From 2011 until 2015 the park management was constantly trying to keep up with the rapidly growing number of visitors. The main issue used to be parking, specifically how to streamline the parking and related flow of visitors. In 2018 the park staff managed to come up with a solution to the parking issues at the place where most visitors come together. However, it soon became clear that something else was causing issues, namely the very volume of tourists arriving at the same time and place. To monitor this, the national park had to put counters in place. As a result, park management now has a clearer idea of visitation patterns, almost down to the very hour.

< *Crowds in the Thingvellir Valley (photo: Salajeau)*

Highlights

In facing over-tourism, many national parks tend to look into solutions oriented towards distributing visitors elsewhere. However, selective and simple infrastructure (lines, boardwalks and viewing platforms) can also aid in keeping the crowds under control and minimizing damage to nature. 99% of all visitors in this *Icelandic National Park* only visit a small part of the park, leaving other areas relatively untouched.

The park is about 35 kilometres northeast of Reykjavik. Through monitoring, the park has been able to conclude that visitors have breakfast in Reykjavik and then get on a bus between 08:00 and 08:30. At 08:55 there are barely any visitors in the park, and at 09:05 there are many. Such moments create peak visitation hours. The park has managed to fix some of the issues for those visitors coming by car. However, complicating the issue, many visitors also come from cruise ships. On the days that cruise ships come into the ports, the national park will get approximately 1,000 extra visitors which clearly adds up to a further congestion of the site.

With all the monitoring that has been done, the national park staff are slowly but surely gathering a holistic view of how people move and behave in the park. However, one of the challenges in dealing with this behaviour is how the site is set up. The entry down on to the site is set up as a narrow channel which all visitors need to go through. This has raised questions on whether they need to invest in more infrastructure to protect the nature in this area.



Entrance to Thingvellir National Park (photo: b-hide the scene)

The approach

Even though the national park covers a large area, there is a central, core assembly site which 99% of all visitors go to. In fact, this is the only place they will visit in the park. It could be argued that this can be both a good and a bad development. Right now, the park management has decided that it is fine as visitors as such do limited damage to the rest of the park. As a result, they focus all their infrastructure on this specific area. Park management has realised that in order to deal with the rising number of visitors a balance needs to be found between

keeping the national park pristine but also setting up infrastructure for the tourists. In terms of infrastructure, what has worked really well are simple lines that have been placed along the trails. This has shown to streamline the flow of tourists, and people seem to obey them as they now stay more on the tracks. This seemingly simple solution has thus also meant that fewer tourists wander off the footpaths.

Other infrastructure projects have also been initiated. For example, boardwalks have been created, again to limit the pressure

that is put on the natural environment. These boardwalks are wooden structures, creating a path above the ground. In addition, viewing platforms have been put in place. Before, large groups of tourists would also gather at these spots, but now the boardwalk takes away that pressure from the natural environment as visitors do not walk directly on it. Both of these structures have helped to increase the carrying capacity of the site in many locations.

Results

The lines, boardwalks and viewing platforms that have been put in place have been deemed successful in both releasing pressure from the natural environment and streamlining the flow of visitors. However, work remains to be done on streamlining the area of most visitation. For this, the aim is to go from site planning to larger landscape planning.

In the current situation there are many car parks and the flow of pedestrians has been unregulated. The plan is to reduce the number of car parks and to move the remaining ones further away from the main assembly site. One of the new car parks will be next to a new entry point to the site, so that not all visitors have to enter through one point as has been the case up until now.

In addition to this infrastructure planning, park management is trying to do a carrying capacity analysis to be able to say something about the maximum numbers of visitors a site can handle. This will be done specifically at the core site, where most visitors come. During 2020 they have been able to record a zero-point analysis for this due to Covid-19. The best scenario would be to have an estimate of the optimal number of visitors. In the future this could result in a limited number of parking spaces for cars where visitors would have to book a parking spot in advance. Adding more car parks is not an alternative as this adds too much pressure to the natural context of the park.

Location planning today:

- Ongoing precision monitoring
- Streamlining visitor flows by means of ropes/lines along the paths
- Wooden promenades and viewing platforms

Landscape planning in the future:

- Reduce and relocate parking locations
- New entrances to generate multiple entry points
- Carrying capacity analysis to support future visitor policy (e.g., compulsory parking reservations)

References

- www.thingvellir.is/en



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Einar Sæmundsen (Director of Thingvellir National Park).

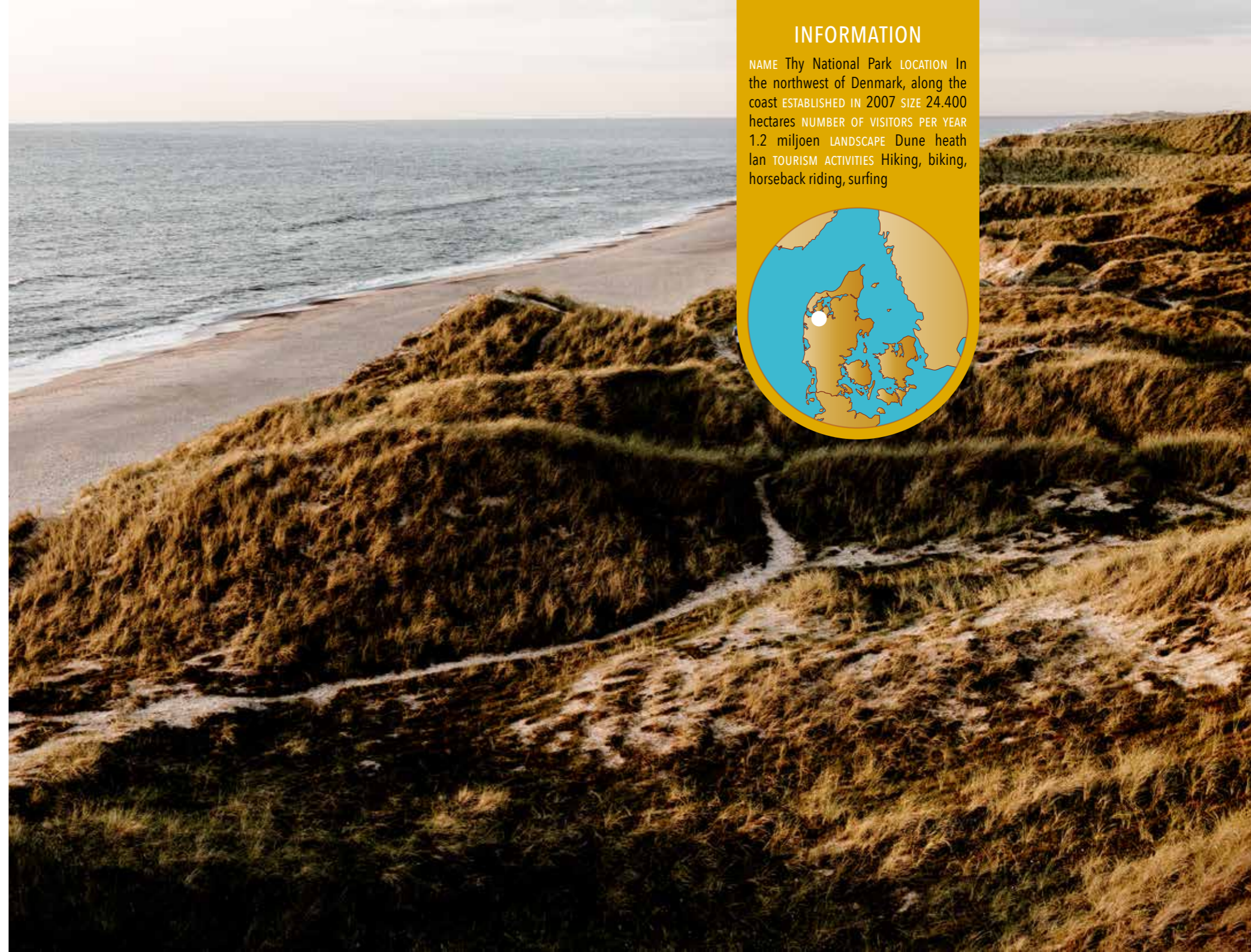
Email: einar.a.e.saemundsen@thingvellir.is

Thy National Park

Nationaal Park School

In 2007, the minister of environment established *Thy National Park* as Denmark's first national park. The minister was convinced that this was important to do for various reasons. One of these reasons is that the nature in this area, consisting of vast landscapes with dunes, has great national and international significance. In addition, it was already recognized at that time that there would be the possibility of creating a large connected nature reserve, which would strengthen the flora and fauna. Since the beginning, the establishment of the national park has been supported by the local population. This support stems from back in the days when the ministry of environment began searching for suitable locations for the first Danish national parks (at the time of writing there are 5). Already at that time, local residents in the Thy area united to show that they embraced the idea of establishing a national park in the area. This group still exists, now as a volunteer organization.

Dune area >



INFORMATION

NAME Thy National Park LOCATION In the northwest of Denmark, along the coast ESTABLISHED IN 2007 SIZE 24.400 hectares NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 1.2 miljoen LANDSCAPE Dune heath lan TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, biking, horseback riding, surfing





Guided walk

Park background

In Denmark, an area can become a national park if it can be used for people to experience and gain knowledge of nature, the landscape and the history. In Danish law, there is no legal protection for national park status since the term 'National Park' is not included in national legislation. This means that, in fact, not much changes if an area forms a national park. The main purpose of the status is to put a group of people together, give them money, and let them work on nature development and education. There is no legislation that can further support them. It is essential that this group of people agrees with the landowner(s) within the national park. Certain activities, such as logging, may be permitted simply based on the fact that a landowner benefits from it. A lot of the land is owned by the Danish Nature Agency, a governmental organization. The emphasis on creating

consensus concerning land use and access, as well as stimulating nature development on a voluntary basis, means that nature education is crucial for local inhabitants in the Danish system.

The opportunity: the National Park School project

A few years ago, the Danish government initiated a research project to study how visitors can influence nature conservation in Thy National Park. This study showed that involvement of the local population is crucial. To create this involvement, the focus should be on increasing awareness, experiencing nature and sharing knowledge of nature. This conclusion led to the development of the *National Park School* project in 2019. In this recent project, those that are in direct contact with visitors receive lessons on hospitality and communication so that they can transfer

knowledge of nature conservation to visitors. These lessons are compulsory for volunteers who wish to be guides in the park. The lessons are also available for private guides whose organisation partners with the park.

The approach

The *National Park School's* motto is 'your path to knowledge, skills and meaning' (*din vej til viden, kunnen og mening*). The *National Park School* is currently offered to five target groups:

- Friends of the national park, including holiday homeowners and local citizens
- Frontline employees working in the tourism sector
- Hosts of the national park
- Intermediaries, such as volunteers
- Primary school teachers

These target groups can sign up for four courses:

1. Introduction to the national park: Why the park was established, history of the park, Danish legislation and land ownership, nature conservation and restoration, endangered species, geology and various forms of volunteering.
2. Guided tour: during which the same subjects are discussed as in course 1 but can now be seen/experienced in practice.
3. Rules and standards of behaviour: Where can and can you not go in the park? What is allowed and what is not? Some areas are always accessible, others are closed during specific times of the year.
4. First aid course

The courses are offered free of charge to local residents who want to contribute to the park in some way. This makes it a nice opportunity for the park to recruit new volunteers. The funding for the *National Park School* comes from the government, but the costs mainly come down to the time that one employee spends on preparing and giving the courses.

Since involvement is considered crucial in protecting nature in the national park, the park has also begun investing in transferring knowledge to children. This is done through *National Park Thy Classroom* for which courses have been developed whereby the park is used as a classroom. The national park's website lists more than 80 courses which teachers can download to use during a lesson in the park. Courses are available for all levels and they cover a wide range of topics including plants but also the life of soldiers during the Second World War. Regular math lessons can also be given in the national park. In addition to the courses that can be downloaded, the website also has a map indicating interesting and suitable locations for a lesson in the park. This project is done together with another Danish National Park called *Mols Bierge*.

Results

The courses are considered a great success. Every time a course is offered, all 70 places are booked. Most participants have retired and have more time now to serve as guides in the park. A challenge at the moment is how more young people can be reached to learn about nature and its conservation. As a result, the aim is to develop more one-day courses in the future for people who do not necessarily wish to become a guide but do want to learn

Highlights

Danish national parks rely on nature education to make local residents in and around national parks aware and involved in nature development and protection. The Thy National Park School forms a set of courses which are mandatory for all volunteers who want to work as guides in the national park. In this way the volunteers do not only gather more knowledge about the park, its history, composition, rules, etc. but such courses can potentially make local residents prouder of their park.



Nationalpark – fra USA og Verden til Danmark

- Yellowstone var den første i verden (1872)
- Fænomenet spredte sig hurtigt til Australien, Canada, New Zealand,
- Abisko, Stora Sjöfallet, Sarek, Pieljekaise, Sänfjället, Hamra, Angso, Garphyttan og Gotska Sandön var de første 9 i Europa (1909)
- OECD's evaluering af dansk naturforvaltning (1999)
- Wilhelmudvalget: En rig natur i et rigt samfund (2001)
- Nationalpark Thy – den første i DK (2007/2008)

about the park. This could further stimulate local pride in the landscape. For these courses, nothing would be expected from the participants, as is the case with the previously described four courses. The idea is that the more people learn about the area, the prouder they become about living there and the more passionate they are to further support the park by volunteering. It does take a lot of time to put the courses together, but over time it seems to pay off. However, the relationship between the courses/school and the pride/bond with the park has not yet been studied. This would require a long-term study.

For the *National Park Thy Classroom* the results are mixed. While it is a nice context to facilitate education in a nature area, traveling to the park is costly for many schools, both in terms of time and costs of transport. In addition, not all teachers feel comfortable teaching in nature since they are not used to this. One idea is to organize a day together in the park, with the park school, for teachers so that they can get used to the context and possibilities of teaching inside the park. So, a kind of 'teach the teacher' concept. The dream is to eventually work towards a kind of 'license to nature' whereby every Danish child would be taught out in nature at least one day a year. In order for this to become a national concept, the idea needs to be widely accepted by teachers and schoolchildren.

If the National Park School project proves to be a success, then it will also be implemented in the other Danish national parks. The three national parks which are currently interested will evaluate the performance of the *National Park School* at the end of 2021. No matter what the outcome of this evaluation becomes, it is expected that a number of things will certainly continue, also in other national parks. What has become clear is that cooperation with other parks on such themes pays off. A Danish proverb states that 'two heads can think better than one alone' (*To hove-*

< *Introduction to the national park*

der tænker bedre end ét), which has been evident in the regular exchange between the parks on this theme. Each involved park has its own focus for which they take responsibility, depending on the need of the park. In the more southerly located *National Park Vadehavet*, tourism is already much bigger and many guides are already working in the park. In this park the focus is more on guides and not on volunteers because there is less need for them. In *Thy National Park* there is a greater need for guides and they focus on training volunteers.

References

- nationalparkthy.dk/media/219670/oplaeg-trainthetrainer110917pptx.pdf
- nationalparkthy.dk/undervisning



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Cathrine Lykke Sørensen (project manager *National Park School*).

Email: catls@danmarksnationalparker.dk

INFORMATION

NAME Triglav National Park LOCATION
Julische Alpen in Slovenië ESTABLISHED
IN 1961 SIZE 83.982 hectares NUMBER
OF VISITORS PER YEAR Over 2 million
LANDSCAPE Alpine region with water-
falls, mountain peaks, gorges, rivers
and lakes TOURISM ACTIVITIES Mountain
climbing, hiking, rafting, cycling, kay-
aking, winter sports (alpine skiing), ge-
otourism and traditional scenic villages



Triglav National Park

Finding a balance between man and nature

The only national park in Slovenia – named *Triglav National Park* - consists of 83,982 hectares, of which more than 64,000 hectares are strictly protected areas. The remaining 20,082 hectares form a developed area where visitors are allowed to recreate. There are 33 villages located in this accessible area, with 2,300 inhabitants. The park is one of the oldest in Europe and takes its name from the Triglav mountain in the centre of the park which, at 2,864 meters, is the highest mountain in the country. The main goal of the park is to protect its natural and cultural heritage (Rodela & Udovc, 2008). Triglav National Park and the surrounding region are also part of the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve, which includes three municipalities: Tolmin, Radovliica, and Jesenice. It covers about 10 percent of Slovenia's territory (195,723 ha). Management of the area is done in transboundary cooperation with the Italian Natural Park Prealpi Giulie.



Park background

In 2007 an initiative was launched to establish a transboundary park, and two years later the Europarc Federation established the Julian Alps Transboundary Ecoregion. This includes the entire territory of the Man and Biosphere (MAB) reserve Julian Alps in Slovenia and Natural Park *Prealpi Giulie* on the Italian side. In 2019, the Slovenian Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve was joined by the newly designated Biosphere Reserve Italian Julian Alps with the aim of establishing a uniform, transboundary biosphere reserve in the Julian Alps.

Every year, over 2 million visitors come to *Triglav National Park*, mainly because of the diverse range of outdoor activities that are offered. Sports activities are popular both in summer and winter. As a result, a large part of the population is employed in the national park. However, the rapid development of tourism has had its impact on the region. In recent years, for example, many trees were felled so that extra parking spaces and facilities could be built. The increasing number of cars has become a major problem, causing traffic congestion. Finding ways to attract visitors was considered normal ten years ago but is no longer necessary today. Now it is common to find information online about special places to visit, such as Triglav. In addition, in recent years Slovenia has often been portrayed as a very green and beautiful destination. The Lonely Planet has even called it one of the best places to visit.

The fact that the park is frequently visited is nothing new in itself. It has a long history, partly characterized by the botanists and writers who came to explore the area in the 18th and 19th centuries. The stories that they shared became widely known and in turn began to attract more and more visitors to the area. Previously, Slovenia was part of the former Yugoslavia, and the country was relatively easy to visit for foreign visitors. Most visitors used to come from Western Europe, but over the last 20 years there has been an increase in visitors coming from Eastern

Highlights

By making local stakeholders directly responsible for regional park activities and related tourism, a stronger sense of shared ownership and cooperation within the national park can be gained. This way allows stakeholders to carry out the initiatives that they themselves support, rather than just have their opinions heard about initiatives carried out by the park.

This also applies to branding activities which are carried out by municipalities and tourism boards. They do this in dialogue with the national park so that nature aspects are appropriately considered. The park, thereby, takes an advisory role in the regional representation of nature.

Due to the limited investment put into infrastructure, a large part of nature in this park has remained untouched. This makes it very attractive.

Europe. A major problem is the lack of a strong tourist infrastructure since this was not invested in during Yugoslavian rule. Interestingly enough, this has ensured that large parts of nature have remained intact as they have always been, and still remain, difficult to reach. Visitors have always appreciated this since the nature seems to be untouched.

The opportunity: the charter for sustainable tourism

More and more national park authorities, local municipalities, various organisations and residents are collaborating on sustainable tourism in order to continue to stimulate nature conservation and local development. The Slovenian biosphere reserve - of which *Triglav National Park* is a part (together with Nature Park Julian Prealps under the joint name Transboundary Area Julian

Alps) - aims to become included in a worldwide network of reserves that constantly seeks a balance between man and nature, a balance between biodiversity and sustainable development, and the preservation of cultural values. To achieve this, four objectives have been set up which *Triglav National Park* contributes to:

1. Strengthen cooperation with local tourist organisations
2. Set up a network of information sites to inform visitors about the special qualities of the area
3. Protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage through tourism
4. Promote activities that do not affect the area's nature and culture heritage

The park, together with Transboundary area Julian Alps, has been a member of the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism since 2016. An important requirement for this was setting up a regional strategy, defining a joint action plan and involving regional and local partners. To involve partners, they first had to be found. As such, the charter takes the form of an invitation to look beyond the usual partnerships. New partnerships include cultural institutions, museums, young people, farmers and others.

The approach

An annual forum has been set up in which local stakeholders and residents can discuss goals and strategies with the park management. Around 40 to 50 people usually join this meeting each year. The purpose of the forum is to collect opinions, follow up on leads and share best practices. The park management present its own plans, but also listens to what the expectations of stakeholders are regarding different matters.

Furthermore, the charter application needs to be re-submitted every five years, which in practice is a push to actually take action in the joint approach to tourism and nature conservation in the nature reserve. In the first charter application, the two

involved national park authorities took the lead in developing and coordinating 30 activities within the charter. In the second application, this responsibility was given to other stakeholders in the region. Municipality X would take responsibility for one activity, and other municipalities, entrepreneurs or institutions would take the responsibility for other activities. In this way, as many people and organizations as possible became actively and jointly involved in shaping the national park.

The *Julian Alps community* is an informal association of authorities that manage tourist destinations in the Julian Alps. Some of these destinations are among the most visited in the country. The pilot case of sustainable tourism management was based on the *Development Plan for MAB Julian Alps* as a Sustainable Tourism Destination, which was devised in 2015 and implemented in the years that followed. The first sustainability-based plan at a national level focused on the redirecting of visitors from high-impact areas where nature conservation was at risk to lower exposure locations. The development plan does not consider tourism as a stand-alone activity but rather as a product of an environment that is both favourable to its inhabitants and attractive for visitors in terms of its nature conservation and environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects. Several successful products developed within the framework of the Development Plan have been introduced in the past years (e.g., the Juliana Trail). Other locations, such as *Bled* and the *Vršič* pass require further development.

Results

There are 10 municipalities within the reserve that each have their own tourism board. The national park works together with them, but whenever promotion of tourism is necessary, it is done by these tourism boards. In recent years, these boards have increasingly worked together in branding the region. Since they share the same goals, a lot of costs can be saved when this is done as a joint effort. Branding is not done by the park itself,

but park management does work together with the boards to align the growing number of visitors and the conservation of nature as much as possible. This does not always work out, but in general the relationships are good. By jointly taking this responsibility, the members have a growing sense of ownership of the park and related tourism activities, and a desire to collaborate is always central. People are generally curious about what the neighbours are doing and interested in hearing about similar challenges that they are facing. They also see opportunities that are shared by others and that attracts more stakeholders. Covid has limited the effectiveness of the forum, since everything now has to take place online.

On the Italian side of the Transboundary area *Julian Alps*, in the natural park, attracting stakeholders seems to be a little easier than on the Slovenian side since tourism is less developed on the Italian side. Infrastructure is limited and the number of tourists is lower. On the other hand, there are many means to deal with tourism, while in Triglav they mainly have to deal with the crowds in terms of the number of tourists who are attracted to the area. The problems that arise due to the high visitor numbers in Triglav are comparable to what has led to many problems elsewhere. For example, the blockages of local roads are a major frustration. As a result, the park and local authorities are now working hard on realizing public transport options leading to the park. Other problems also remain to be tackled together in the forum.

References

- Mlekuž P. & Mojca S. 2020. *The Mangrt Road* at: www.tnp.si/assets/Publikacije/Na-cudovitih-poteh-Julijskih-Alp/zlozenka-TNP-Mangrt-Road-ANG.pdf
- Triglav National Park Authority 2016. *Načrt upravljanja Triglavskega narodnega parka 2016 – 2025* at: www.tnp.si/sl/javni-zavod/nacrt-upravljanja-triglavskega-narodnega-parka [In Slovene]

- Ogrin, M. 2012. *The Alpine Convention and its Contribution to Sustainable Development in Slovenian Alpine Areas* at: www.researchgate.net/publication/272651007_The_Alpine_Convention_and_its_contribution_to_sustainable_development_in_Slovenian_Alpine_areas/fulltext/57aa774508ae7a6420bd11a5/The-Alpine-Convention-and-its-contribution-to-sustainable-development-in-Slovenian-Alpine-areas.pdf: 91 – 105. Ljubljana.
- Razvojni načrt Biosfernega območja Julijske Alpe kot trajnostne turistične destinacije 2016 - Bled. [In Slovene]
- Pravilnik o označbi geografskega porekla Tolminc at: www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV5248 [In Slovene]
- Triglav National Park Authority and Julian Prealps Nature Park Authority, 2018. *Transboundary Ecoregion Julian Alps, Triglav National Park with UNESCO MAB Julian Alps Area – Prealpi Giulie Nature Park, A New Vision* - Trenta at: www.tnp.si/assets/Partnerji/Ekoregija-Julijske-Alpe/vizija-ang-6-2018.pdf
- Triglav National Park Authority, 2020. *Triglav National Park, Public Transport in Biosphere Reserve Julian Alps* at: www.tnp.si/assets/Spoznajte/Publikacije/Odkrivaj-Discover/Javni-prevozi-v-Biosfernem-obmocju-Julijske-Alpe-2020.pdf

Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact *Triglav National Park*.

Email: Triglavski-narodni-park@tnp.gov.si

Yorkshire Dales National Park

The Three Peaks Project

Yorkshire Dales National Park was established in 1954 in order to protect its natural beauty, the diverse wildlife habitats, the opportunities for outdoor recreation and the rich cultural heritage present in the area.

More than 95% of the park is privately owned. This land is not a wilderness area as there are also 24,000 people living inside the park's borders. The National Park Authority owns less than 0.4% of the park. This small portion consists mainly of car parks and smaller nature reserves.

Photo: Andy Kay



INFORMATION

NAME Yorkshire Dales National Park
LOCATION Covers the central Pennines in North Yorkshire and Cumbria and also includes a small part of Lancashire
ESTABLISHED IN 1954
SIZE 217,900 hectares
NUMBER OF VISITORS PER YEAR 3.2 million
LANDSCAPE Caves, farming land and meadows, waterfalls, woodlands
TOURISM ACTIVITIES Hiking, mountain biking, horse riding



Park background

One of the main reasons for people to visit *Yorkshire Dales National Park* is to go hiking. The three peaks: Whernside, Ingleborough and Pen-y-Ghent cover approximately 16,000 ha, and every year approximately 250,000 hikers climb these peaks. Of these, approximately 80,000 take up the challenge to climb all three within a 12-hour period.

The opportunity

In the mid-1980s, the British Research Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (ITE) concluded that the Three Peaks area was not just one of the busiest areas of the *Yorkshire Dales National Park* but also one of the most eroded areas in Britain. Park management hence started to further investigate the erosion and impact on the habitat in the national park. For this investigation, they secured funding from various sources to commence restoration works. By 2008, the park management concluded that the majority of the severely damaged routes and habitats had been addressed but were now having to be maintained on an annual basis, for which funding was not available.

In 2009 a project was initiated involving a visitor payback scheme which is called the *Three Peaks Project*. Since it is costly to maintain and conserve the hiking tracks on the Three Peaks, this project was set up with the aim of finding a long-term solution for covering these costs. During this project, the park authority worked together with businesses, set up merchandise and established two organizations: 'corporate friends' and 'Friends of the Three Peaks'.

The project has four main objectives in order to secure that maintenance and enhancement of the Three Peaks area can continue in the long term. These objectives are that they will:

- Encourage ownership
- Create opportunities to donate and become involved for both existing and new participants

- Generate a source of income which can assist in the ongoing management of the area
- Promote the special qualities of the area so that people will gain an understanding of them

National parks are considered to be for the nation. Every individual should be aware of national parks and as such have an ownership in seeing them managed for the benefit of themselves and others. Building on this, park management has given the Three Peaks its own brand and identification within the overall national park setting. It is unusual to choose a particular area and promote it, but this area has its own individual issues which the park management wants people to understand and then support so that they feel it is theirs. If they feel this way, they will want to assist in protecting it because of what they take from the area.

The park management was aware that such a project would take at least two to three years to establish, and they did not expect to get their input returned until year four or five. With 250,000 annual visitors, their initial hope was that it should be possible to secure one pound from each user. This would provide them with a substantial amount of funding. It was not expected that every visitor could be engaged in the project, but those that were would perhaps contribute more. This simple aspiration turned out to be much more complicated in practice.

The approach

After setting up the Three Peaks visitor payback scheme, park management realised that visitors were not quick to fund maintenance of the footpaths. This led to the park employing a *Three Peaks Ranger*. The ranger is a full-time employee maintaining the routes together with volunteers. This maintenance work includes fixing gates, surfacing and fixing signposting. This meant that they could communicate to visitors that they would be contributing to the post of this ranger if they were to donate. This

gave the whole project a more personal feeling and a visible face.

Park management would like to take the *Three Peaks Project* to the next level which would be to increase the current level of income. One way in which this could be done is by creating additional existing staff support for the project. Another way would be to create a new post which would be dedicated to looking at funding streams within the project area and build on the systems that have already been established to generate income. This would be ideal, but would be costly in the initial establishment period. There are opportunities to look at existing bodies that already work in this sector, but early approaches have shown there is also a significant potential cost in the early years before seeing a suitable level of payback. Due to the high cost of this step, what park management has been doing is looking at the things that they do on a day-to-day basis and explore if they can generate further funds from those activities without making this labour intensive for the existing staff.

In 2009 they launched the organization '*Friends of the Three Peaks*' which consists of individuals who strongly identify with the protection of the area. The membership fee is ten pounds a year for which they receive invitations to events such as guided walks, but also regular newsletters explaining what is being done with their donation. Currently the *Three Peaks Project* has around 365 friends, some of whom further raise money on a regular basis to generate supplementary donations to the park.

The Three Peaks is popular with large scale walking events which are usually run by established charities. Park management will be in contact with these charities to ask for a donation per participant. Anyone is free to use the area, so it is not a forced charge, but they hope to make the charities realize that with such events the additional pressure on sensitive areas will increase the need for maintenance. The large charities have responded positively

Highlights

Maintenance of protected areas can be costly, and there are times when external funding cannot cover these expenses. It is therefore key to explore opportunities that can help finance park management, preferably without investing too much of staff time which is already limited. An important yet fragile area in *Yorkshire Dales National Park* is the well-known three peaks. This area is very popular with visitors, yet related infrastructure requires on-going maintenance costs. Asking directly from users for donations is time consuming and does not seem to work very well. Instead, a type of visitor payback scheme has been established which directly supports the employment of a specific ranger which in turn provides a real face/person to the project. Visitors can then directly associate their financial support with a person. This way visitor engagement can be enhanced, and transparency of financial support becomes realised.

to this request and some have now added these costs to the registration cost for their walking event. To save time in securing these collaborations, the park management explores online to find out when and by whom such events are organised. They will then contact the organizer through email. This is a small investment of time that brings a considerable amount of funding in return. In addition to securing financial engagement with such events, the park management also shares hiking guidelines (see Code of Conduct in References) for the Three Peaks so that participants are up to date on what are – and what are not – good walking practices in the park.

In the past few years, the main source of income for maintenance has come from these large-scale events. However, it is not the only method which the park management uses to raise funding. Another way is through corporate sponsors. For example, a business in the area donates a certain amount for every portion



of chips that has been sold. Another method has been merchandise (mugs, hoodies, magnets, medallions, etc.) which has been selling well. They have also installed donation buttons on the car park machine, as well as QR codes which are found on the three summits. Recently they have set up donation cairns into which visitors can put cash in the sections where maintenance work is being done. Here visitors can see what the park management does with the money that they donate by showing pictures taken before and after the maintenance work.

Results

Even though park management would have liked for the *Three Peaks Project* to become fully self-financed, this has proven to be somewhat ambitious. However, they have been able to raise a substantial amount during the past years. They have now set themselves the target of 20,000-25,000 pounds a year. In 2019-2020 they raised 31,000 pounds (60.9% from donation and sponsorship, 24.6% from retail sales, 7.4% from other income, 4.2% from app sales, 2.3% from individual membership and 0.6% from corporate membership). The remaining money that is needed for maintenance is taken from their central national park authority budget. Since most people come to *Yorkshire Dales National Park* for hiking, the footpaths are a high priority, so a considerable amount of the central government budget allocated to the national park authority has been made available for this. A lesson which they have learned during the past years of the project is that it is all about identifying opportunities which take as little time as possible from the park team. Therefore, they will continue to seek to contact the parties that organise large events inside the park but also the smaller number of visitors that use the area to ask them for a contribution since this continues to provide a significant proportion of the current funding income.

Photo: Paul Harris



Want to know more?

For more information about this approach, you can contact Alan Hulme (Head of park management).

Email: Alan.Hulme@yorkshiredales.org.uk

References

- 3peaks.yorkshiredales.org.uk/Three%20Peaks%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf

Accountability

Origin of the Lessons

These lessons are the result of a QuickScan carried out by six student teams from Wageningen University from November to December 2020 in six European regions (Scandinavia, Germany, United Kingdom, France/Belgium, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe). By means of desk research, these teams looked at eye-catching initiatives regarding the use of tourism in well-known national nature parks. Based on this, a long list of indicators was made that provides examples of how tourism can be organized in and around parks.

This long list was then discussed in phone conversations with Dutch representatives who are committed to the development of tourism within their national park. From these conversations a central point emerged, namely that the year 2020 (a COVID-19 year) led to increased recreational pressure in many national parks. This is not only the case in the Netherlands, but also beyond our national borders. By focusing on recreational pressure, we quickly arrived at a sorting of aspects that people would like to learn more about and find solutions for. This led to the following shorter list of aspects that corresponds to criteria that the Dutch National Parks Bureau quotes in their guideline for Sustainable Tourism in Dutch national parks:

1. Visitor monitoring: how can we map visitors and their behaviour?
2. Ecological carrying capacity and zoning: how can we manage recreational pressure in relation to the ecological carrying capacity of an area?
3. Social capacity and participation: how do we deal with social tensions around an area?
4. Tourism as an ecosystem service: how can tourism contribute to nature?

5. Regional collaboration and branding: how can we collaborate on a broader provincial level with multiple partners?
6. Nature education: how do we connect people and create more awareness about nature?

These aspects and questions have been decisive in our search for two to four inspiring examples (for each aspect) of European national parks or national park systems (e.g. national park consortia). The insights from these examples are mainly based on conversations with initiators or tourism and recreation experts involved in the selected best practices. The insights were also partly supplemented by available reports and websites. Most of the best practices in this guide were selected based on the first QuickScan, while other cases were selected in consultation with experts in tourism in European national parks. The descriptions of best practices are ultimately a pragmatic reflection of long-term experiences with tourism, but they can never fully represent all those directly involved who may interpret the described practices differently. While the conversations certainly offer more depth than the first QuickScan based on reports, there could certainly be a more detailed look in the future at how the discussed initiatives further evolve and generate impacts. This would require lengthy fieldwork on site and more conversations to capture the ins and outs of these practices.

Colophon

This work is covered by an Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Design: www.studioids.nl

Disclaimer

The information in this guide is mainly based on interviews, which were conducted by the first two of the authors involved. In addition to interviews, regular consultations took place to better clarify relationships between best practices. The best practices and lessons that emerged are therefore part of such consultations, but they mainly tell the story of the various respondents and their experiences with making tourism and recreation in or near national parks more sustainable. What respondents see as a success or challenge is always central, but these can also be interpreted differently by the reader. Efforts have been made to combine the interviews with additional desk research, but many descriptions are not documented or are closely monitored by practitioners in their day to day routines. If we want to further evaluate the best practice experiences in practice, then lengthy research into the operation and effects of discussed practices will have to be further documented. If readers would like more details, they can contact those involved directly, as mentioned in each chapter.

