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TAB

Tourism in large nature reserves – Interactions and possibilities for cooperation between nature conservation and regional tourism

Summary



TAB

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TAB

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SUMMARY

COMMISSION, PROJECT GOALS

The TA project »Development of tourism in large nature reserves – interactions and possibilities for cooperation between nature conservation and regional tourism« is based on a suggestion of the Committee on Tourism mid-1999. The TAB was commissioned to carry out an analysis of tourism and nature conservation in national parks and nature and biosphere reserves in Germany. The TA project duly designed by TAB was commenced at end-1999 following approval by the Committee for Education, Research and Technology Assessment.

Within the framework of the TA project a background report (TAB Background Paper No. 5) was prepared by summer 2001, documenting part of the project. The background paper provides an overview of sample projects seeking to achieve the goals of nature conservation, strengthening regional agriculture and promoting growth in tourism through an overarching approach (status August 2001). The most important information on the projects for cooperation between nature conservation and regional tourism on large nature reserves were collected and presented in the form of structured »post-its«. These provide an overview of the existing impressive network of initiatives of a productive partnership between nature conservation and tourism in Germany.

The subject of the present final report is a review and evaluation of the framework conditions, opportunities and conflicts and the options for designing economically viable and ecologically and socially compatible tourism in large nature reserves, which could serve at the same time as innovative approaches for sustainable regional development. This complex is the focus of the report (sections III, IV, V).

LARGE NATURE RESERVES

The present report deals with national parks (NLP), biosphere reserves (BR) and natural parks (NRP) (see particularly section II). All three meet the definition of a large nature reserve (LNR). They also have in common the fact that they can only be used for tourist purposes if these are compatible with the various conservation goals. Mass tourism facilities and leisure uses which are technical



or intensive infrastructure users are generally not compatible with these goals. However, the three types of large nature reserve differ in key dimensions:

- > In national parks, the focus is on nature. Extensive activities or forms of land use which consume extensive resources are not possible. Tourism and recreation are also important goals, but only to the extent that they are not associated with (unreasonable) negative impacts on nature. The 13 German national parks represent sections of major landscapes of European importance (even global importance in the case of tidal flats and beech forests). NLP take up in all around 2% of Germany's total surface area, with some 80% of this comprising bodies of water and tidal flats by the North Sea and Baltic.
- > Biosphere reserves are internationally significant natural and cultural landscapes under new forms of management based on the principle of sustainability, which are intended to evolve into model regions serving as examples. As such, BR offer the possibility of developing new approaches to land management on large areas. Development of tourism within the framework of model projects is specifically possible and desired in the development zones of biosphere reserves. In Germany there are now 14 BR recognised by UNESCO, occupying some 4.5% of Germany's total surface area.
- > In the case of natural parks, which should be regarded as integral elements of zoning, the focus is on people. The over 90 NRP (24% of total surface area) are regionally important cultural landscapes suitable for recreation, whose preservation is frequently combined with channelling and managed use over wide areas. NRP are available for regional tourism in numerous variants. As in BR, sustainable forms of land use offer the possibility of developing and marketing specific and typically regional »products«. In this way, nature reserves offer numerous possibilities for the development of tourism.

Tourism in large nature reserves

Tourism already plays a considerable role in all large nature reserves, and nature reserves in particular are often magnets for tourism (see particularly section III). A rough dichotomy of tourist flows shows that same-day visitors dominate in Germany, compared to overnight visitors (and particularly in natural parks). The number of day-excursions in areas where there are large nature reserves is significantly higher than the number of overnights – in some cases, a multiple of these. Conversely, it is also apparent that where the number of same-day visitors in total visitors is particularly high in a given area, there will also be a very large number of large nature reserves.

As destinations, large nature reserves have particular appeal to central tourist motivations for travelling. In surveys, travel motivations involving untouched nature and environment as a basic element generally rank high. Travel motivations which can support the decision to visit a natural or national park include »cleaner air«, »cleaner water«, »getting away from a polluted environment« and »experiencing nature«. These have been decisive travel motivations for years for more than one-third of the German population.

Marketing for large nature reserves

In view of the numerous attractive possibilities offered by tourism, a central future task for all large nature reserves, local authorities and regions should be to establish firm ties with existing demand and create new demand. Large nature reserves as a positive image vehicle, offer the possibility of positioning them competitively as a unique and attractive destination for specific target groups. As most LNR visitors are same-day visitors, marketing efforts should be specifically directed at these customers, with the aim of converting them to overnights. It is in principle difficult enough to strike an appropriate balance in the range of services.

However, attractive marketing and efficient management for large nature reserves which can help bind existing visitors and address new target groups, could contribute towards strengthening domestic tourism in Germany, sustainable development of endogenous regional potential and climate protection.

It is, however, necessary to improve the conditions for this. Numerous LNR administrations are responding to the significance of tourism with measures including improving the infrastructure, information and communication services and marketing. Even so, such activities are still too rarely integrated into an overall strategic concept, and are often still lacking in professionalism. The focus in information activities is mostly on traditional forms (brochures, maps, information centres) and events, tours etc. A survey carried out at the suggestion of the TAB (cf. Diepolder/Feige 2000) showed that LNRs are only beginning to implement adventure-oriented marketing of the wide range of possibilities for natural adventure.

From a marketing-oriented perspective, it is clear that strategic product portfolios and corresponding policies on products and services offered are currently not adequately established. In fairness, however, this is true generally of regional tourism in Germany.



SUMMARY

German tourist destinations so far all too rarely rely on products and services in a clearly formulated product range within the framework of a target portfolio. The objective must accordingly be:

- > to increase significantly the overall diversity of products and services offered,
- > to establish priorities with attractive packages,
- > to increase the emphasis on themes and adventure in designing packages,
- > to search systematically for types of packages which can generate earnings for reinvestment for conservation purposes.

Another approach is cooperation with tourist organisations. According to the results of a study in 13 Land tourist organisations in the large (i.e. non-city) Länder, positive initiatives are apparent here in that all LNR administrations know what organisations there are in their region, and who to contact there. Cooperation is also apparent (among other ways) in working groups, joint projects and trade fair visits.

At the same time it must be said that tourist organisations still show insufficient awareness of large nature reserves as destinations, and fail to advertise them accordingly. This is clear from the simple fact that the majority of Land tourist organisations have inadequate information on LNRs, and it can be assumed that this will also apply to regional organisations.

Active area management

Large nature reserves should not be regarded and treated as »islands«. They are part of a region, and form a complex e.g. with adjoining regions (reserves) and communities. Structures and development processes in one part can have a wide range of impacts (interactions) with other parts. Regulations which apply to NLPs (among others) often result e.g. in compensating measures for agriculture, routing roads etc, visitor guidance measures in the area around the reserve, rather than directly inside it. Anthropogenic development pressure is also often greater in the area adjoining the LNR than in the reserve itself.

The region will only be able to make optimal use of the development potential inherent in a nature reserve – and specifically in tourism – if nature conservation and park management are coordinated with regional development. To avoid »socio-economic isolation« it is accordingly essential to integrate large nature reserves into regional and local authority planning to the point where the interests of the nature reserve on the one hand and local authority interests

(particularly of adjoining communities) on the other hand can all be addressed and coordinated.

For this, the relevant parameters must be identified and monitored and the interrelationships analysed. However, a system of monitoring proposed by experts to this end with integrated coverage of ecological and socio-economic aspects has yet to be established, and is only in the early stages of implementation. This could make it possible (among other things) to build up a database for planning and decision-making and to identify development potential in LNRs and their area.

Monitoring socio-economic development and documenting management measures in the LNRs is ultimately intended to help make the work of the LNR administrations accessible to a broader public, specifically in the regions concerned. In addition, it is intended to show the relationships with the regional and local economy or visitors flows more clearly than is now the case.

PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK AND COMMUNICATION

Awareness of the need and possibilities of professional public relations work and improved communication is growing in many nature reserve administrations. This process needs to be accelerated and intensified, as target-group-oriented information and communication aimed at both locals and visitors are ultimately the key to success for a productive partnership between nature conservation and tourism.

Public relations work should involve two linked dimensions: communication and cooperation. Information flows should be continuous in both directions. It is also important to take a proactive approach to designing communication, and not merely develop these in response to external events. Satisfying all these requirements implies the need to professionalise public relations work. Communication without offers of cooperation and collaboration is an empty exercise. Accordingly, procedures and for need to be offered:

- > »Round tables«: discussions between key local authority people and national park staff (as e.g. practised in the Bavarian Forest NLP, where it is very favourably received by those involved).
- > Special-purpose associations of adjoining communities: the goal is to coordinate joint interests of local authorities and LNRs in advance, and to integrate the nature reserve as an equal partner into the life, recreation and economy of the local community.



- > Committee for direct participation in decision-making (mayor, councils, national park management): such a committee serves to protect the interests of locals, and above all to ensure transparency in the LNR's planning and activities.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ON USE IN LARGE NATURAL RESERVES

The list of problems in LNRs frequently contains substantial conflicts of interest on use and overarching acceptance problems among the population living in the reserves. It is, for example apparent that there is a potential tension between ecological conservation goals and tourist development goals, as attractive natural areas are generally located in ecologically sensitive landscapes which can be endangered through tourist use. There can also be social tensions: for example, the restrictions on use associated with achieving conservation goals are not always accepted by the local population, so that the important identification of the population with »their« nature reserve may under certain circumstances be lacking. Finally, economic problems can arise for parts of the population and local industry, as use restrictions involve economic disadvantages for specific actors, and not everybody profits from the revenue from tourism. These differing goals and interests generally result in numerous tensions and conflicts.

Such problems are inherent for almost all large nature reserves (see section IV), even though they tend to be fewer or less intensive in natural parks than in national parks. Visual changes, restrictions on movement and particularly on use are rejected, and the administration in particular is criticised as the perceived originator. Besides the criticism from all sections of the population, however, criticism is particularly strong from specific user groups, such as hunters, foresters, associations etc.

Particularly evident are problems which arise in zoning national parks. As a nature reserve category under the German Federal Nature Conservation Act, the NLP are unique in largely preserving the development of natural processes from human influence over a large area. At the same time, national parks are meant to be opened up to visitors for recreation and education, and the needs of the local population and »soft« tourism, as far as the conservation purpose allows. However, this conservation purpose often demands measures which in some cases lead to far-reaching changes in the familiar environment. These are often perceived as negative by those affected.

Tension between tourism and nature conservation

The link between tourism and nature conservation is frequently marked by contradictions. Tourism benefits from the appeal of untouched nature and environment, but excessive use by tourism can damage this, destroying its own basis. Conversely, tourism can actually be the instrument for securing natural resources – careful development of the natural landscape within the framework of ecotourism may under certain circumstances prevent ruthless exploitation for other types of use. Nature conservation, meanwhile, is seen as a restraint on the development of tourism because of the relatively strict statutory regulations. At the same time, it is supposed to (and can) secure the untouched landscape which is an important basis for tourism: Conservation measures which result in an ecology with little or no disruption, »original« landscapes and a rich fauna and flora offer tourist attractions which are increasingly at risk.

Despite all the problems, however, there are also successful, tried and tested examples of sustainable ecofriendly and socially compatible concepts for leisure and recreation use of large nature reserves. Here again, the combination – frequently attempted and practised with different emphasis – of nature conservation and tourism (national parks) and tourism and nature conservation (natural parks) can produce positive results. However, successes generally only emerge if a balance of interest is ensured through careful planning, ongoing involvement of all those affected, and accompanying measures.

Visitor guidance

Problems due to conflicting use claims arise for the most part from the concentration of tourists (in terms of both time and space) and violations by visitors of existing rules, many of which are due to lack of explanation of proper behaviour in nature reserves. Long-stay vacationers are likely to have a much less serious impact on natural parks and national parks than local visitors, and particularly day trippers from the major conurbations, as these are particularly concentrated in time. Parks with easy transportation access to these conurbations are correspondingly affected.

Statutes and regulations give the national park administrations enough instruments to take action as needed to manage and regulate. Seen in this way, tourism (e.g.) in the national parks is primarily a question of the quality of visitor management, which helps prevent unguided tourism from exceeding limits to burdens on the natural zone or environmental media.



A key element in visitor management is targeted guidance of visitors (visitor flows). Visitor guidance is practised in one form or other in all the larger nature reserves. Basically, at the level of regional and landscape planning this includes developing corresponding infrastructure and zoning. Guidance is also provided through individual measures. The most frequent form of visitors guidance is a combined strategy of incentives and prohibitions (a honey pot strategy). The infrastructure (marked paths, thematic paths, visitor centres) and services (guided tours, excursions, facilities for children) focus most visitors on specific areas and also enhance acceptance of no-access rules for particularly sensitive areas of the national parks. The forms of visitor guidance used within a large nature reserve can be distinguished and differentiated, e.g. through high-level measures of use and landscape planning (including infrastructure development, zoning etc) or through detailed individual measures (regulations, bans, charges, barriers, networks of paths, information, events etc).

Cooperation as an integrative strategy

The existing range of instruments for zoning and visitor guidance is aimed solely at limiting the ecological impact of tourism on nature and the landscape. By taking into account social, cultural and economic needs – in the interests of sustainable development – the integrative approach attempts to embed regional tourism more effectively into nature and landscape conservation processes, initially by setting a specific framework:

- > formulating an appropriate central idea
- > carrying out cost-benefit analyses and identifying the impact on jobs to increase economic transparency
- > comprehensive information and briefing for those affected to improve acceptance
- > rewarding ecological services and compensating for restrictions

Experts variously call for integration of tourism into a regional system of ecological management as the basis for sustainable tourism. Large nature reserves – particularly biosphere reserves and (the new type of) natural parks – represent conceptual model regions or landscapes for sustainable (economic) development which conserves the environment and resources. As such, the task is not only to make the experience of nature as accessible as possible to the population, but also to strive for a comprehensive presentation of the region through regional marketing.

Regional marketing is a policy for selling various products tied in with regional features and regionally-defined qualities, such as agricultural products, timber, food or even tourist products and services. Regional marketing is defined as the planning, coordination and control of all activities in a region aimed at current and potential target groups. The goal is to improve the quality of life within the region, to improve the image outside the region, and to enhance the qualities of the location. In this process, the sectors of nature and landscape conservation, agriculture and tourism are linked.

Large nature reserves as a regional factor

The effects of large nature reserves generally for a region may occur in numerous dimensions, from economic effects in the stricter sense of the term through infrastructural to ecological consequences. However, tourism alone can also be an actual and potential cause for numerous stimuli in regions with large nature reserves, in economic, ecological and social terms.

The positive results (»regional benefits«) arise (among other things) from tax revenue, the creation of infrastructure and jobs. Particularly important are the changes in payments flows and added value. Tourism as an economic factor can make a great contribution to added value in a region, primarily through spending by visitors and holidaymakers. External promotional funds from the EU Structural Fund and structural promotion programmes and from Land and foundation sources can substantially improve the quality of the region as a location and enhance its appeal e.g. private enterprises.

Other particularly important aspects are preserving the cultural landscape and stabilising ecosystems. BRs and NRPs in particular are pursuing a strategy of combining extensification, landscape conservation, integrated and ecological cultivation and set-aside to conserve a historically-evolved diverse cultural landscape as a landscape for production and recreation, while NLPs and BRs contribute towards stabilising and regenerating the nutrient and water systems and to species and biotope protection. They perform the function of climatic equalisation areas and refuges and sources for animal and plant species.

Despite the numerous stimuli for the region that tourism combined with large nature reserves can provide, its importance for regional economic development (like that of the large nature reserves) should ultimately be viewed realistically. This also includes the fact that effects cannot be achieved on the same scale in all types of region. For example, the positive effects in structurally weak regions with underdeveloped tourist infrastructure are likely to be smaller than in agri-



cultural and tourist regions with a diversified range of products and services for tourism. The strategies need to be correspondingly different. Whereas in the first case it would be a question of developing the local tourist sector, in the second case it would be more a question of differentiating and ecologising products and services.

SUSTAINABILITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the framework of the discussions about developing and implementing tourism which takes consistent account of nature conservation and environmental protection aspects, many regions – particularly peripheral ones and those in or near large nature reserves – are hoping that the possibilities of sustainable tourism will also offer the chance of sustainable regional development generally. A combination of regional (sustainable) tourism, nature conservation and regional (sustainable) development in this way is capable of meeting the hopes placed in it if corresponding paradigms are developed and concrete measures specific to the regions are initiated and implemented. Such an integrative approach requires concepts and instruments assembled from various fields, e.g. nature and landscape conservation, tourism, marketing, agriculture, land management and regional planning (see section V).

Cooperation between regional actors, public-sector decision-makers (local authorities), tourist service providers, and local tourist industry and organisations is a key element in promoting regional identity and autonomy. For this, multi-sectoral solutions will have to be formulated which take into account transport, agriculture, sewage treatment, tourist infrastructure, promotion for craft trades and building land zoning as interrelated system elements.

Large nature reserves can be consistently integrated into the concept of sustainable regional development. They emphasise and further strengthen the ecological dimension of sustainable regional development. In addition, conservation and development of the cultural landscape are integrated as a constituent element. Another rationale for the specific appeal is that conservation concepts are, in principle, more feasible as a result of integration into regional development, and expansion of or links between nature reserves shift the focus to intensively used areas (and transitional zones between them). This allows the cultural landscape with its forms of use to play a greater role, so that broader, more comprehensively dimensioned and multisectoral strategies can be developed.

Overall, this also marks the start of an evolution towards a flexible concept of sustainable development. Cultural landscape becomes at one and the same time a touristic, cultural and ecological asset of a region. Cultural landscape conservation is becoming a constituent element of regional development. The regional economy and nature conservation are not competitors, but rather counterparts.

Sustainable regional development requires the maximum possible economic independence. Accordingly, tourism should be integrated into an extensively diversified regional economy, and the region itself should derive a higher percentage of added value from tourism. Tourist products and services should be linked with other sectors of the economy to promote their market potential as well. One possible strategy is to bundle various products and services as standard tours to the region, or combine agricultural production and subsequent processing in catering and restaurants. Flourishing tourism can contribute towards boosting orders to regional craft trades, construction and the distributive and service sectors.

NEED FOR ACTION AND RESEARCH

Section VI contains a list of exemplary topics intended to provide suggestions for necessary action and research. In part, these cover fundamental questions, such as the need for operationalising the primary role and objectives of individual nature reserves and their future tasks. However, they also reveal the need for concrete formulation of national and regional paradigms for large nature reserves which address the relevant statements in international and national nature conservation conventions. The section also analyses deficiencies in tourism research, specifically on sustainable tourism integrated into regional development. The cross-cutting nature of tourism as a topic needs to be reflected in special interdisciplinary and applied research.

The section also looks at more strongly practice-oriented research issues, such as the lack of an overview and evaluation of all instruments and possibilities for promoting cooperation between tourism and large nature reserves. It also highlights the need for comprehensive evaluation of selected large nature reserves with different methodologies and for putting research in this area on a broader empirical base. Finally, there is a recommendation to reorient research activities on the basis of improved identification of target groups.



SUMMARY: LARGE NATURE RESERVES AS MODEL REGIONS

Conservation of nature on the one hand and making it accessible to visitors on the other are two goals which at first glance seem difficult to reconcile. However, this can be done if tourists and tourist industry operators see themselves as allies of the large nature reserves and support their conservation and development goals. Experience with productive partnerships also shows that cooperation between tourism and nature conservation – as partners in conflict and cooperation – can have positive results for both (and for other actors).

The recent debates on amending the German Federal Nature Conservation Act have also shown clearly that the idea of combining nature conservation, tourism and regional sustainable development has acquired new significance. Biosphere reserves, natural parks and national parks all provide forceful demonstration of the possibilities of combining economic development and nature conservation. This trend emerges in the fundamental discussion of sustainability, in which context large nature reserves are identified as model regions for sustainable development. In this light, large nature reserves take on the role of interesting examples (or institutional exceptions) demonstrating new possibilities - also for others. This could lead to a situation where development efforts in large nature reserves provide interesting stimuli for other regions as well. It is also possible that many nature reserves could present an interesting possibility for development not only for tourism but also for other services compatible with nature conservation. Large nature reserves should also proactively attempt to redefine the role of their regions, in view of the (global) structural transformation which is leading to an entirely new evaluation of e.g. productivity and locational advantages.

The future prospects of large nature reserves will depend decisively on whether a form of tourism which is both ecologically and socially acceptable can be developed. If this is not done, tourism will endanger its own basis – nature, specific regional features and the structure of local societies – and, ultimately, its very existence. Large nature reserves are not insulated from the natural area, social and region-specific situation of the areas around them, nor do they represent a completely separate natural area which local tourism would completely change. The dual goal of tourism which is both ecologically and socially acceptable, i.e. ensuring nature and environmental conservation in the identified areas while making possible regional added value from tourist use, is only possible through conceptual involvement of larger regional units.

Summarising, it can be said that tourism in large nature reserves can be a potentially socially compatible and ecofriendly form of use and development of cul-



ture and nature in regions, as an alternative to land and infrastructure-intensive leisure uses in the form of e.g. leisure and holiday parks. Even if these effects are not automatic and a balance of interests can only be achieved through careful planning, involvement of all stakeholders and accompanying measures, it should be worthwhile to develop further the model and practice cooperation between tourism, nature conservation and regional development in the context of large nature reserves as a concept which also has economic appeal.

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