

Comparison of visitor surveys gives useful insights: an example of the Kellerwald-Edersee National Park (Hesse) compared to the South Harz Nature Park (Thuringia) in Germany

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Are there differences in the visitor types in typical low range mountain areas in Germany and what recommendations can be made for the administrations? To answer these questions the surveys of a national and a nature park were compared. The surveys were conducted as questionnaire interviews. Survey plots were established at parking places or at crossings of different hiking trails. The survey in the Kellerwald-Edersee national park (NLP-KW-ES) was conducted in the year 2013 with 876 respondents (18 working days, weekend and holidays from spring up to autumn) and the survey in the South Harz nature park (NRP-S-H) in autumn 2013 with 106 respondents (4 weekend days in autumn). In the NLP-KW-ES the first person of each passing group was asked to take part in the survey. The respondents in the NRP-S-H were selected by a question concerning the last birthday.

German nature parks are instruments for the sustainable regional development (IUCN Category V). In contrast to national parks (IUCN Category II) they allocate landscape requirements mainly for recreation.

Study Areas

Differences

NLP-KW-ES (5724 ha) was implemented in 2004. The whole area of the national park is a Natura 2000 reserve. 1.467 ha of old Beech Sites were designated as part of the UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE "Ancient Beech Forests of Germany" in 2011. There are 20 roundabout hiking trails, 7 long distance hiking trails and 2 long distance bicycle-routes crossing the national park.

The NRP-S-H (26.700ha) was established in 2010. There are 8 Natura 2000 reserves ($\Sigma = 5000$ ha). In this area there are 5 roundabout hiking trails, 4 long distance hiking trails, which lead through the nature park.

Commonalities

The low range mountain areas are at nearly the same latitude. The accessibility through highways is good and there is one certified long distance hiking trail in both parks.

Results

The type of visit differs in these two areas. 51% stay overnight in NLP-KW-ES and 49% come just for a day visit. In the NRP-S-H only a quarter of visitors stays overnight. Regarding the type of accommodation there are some similarities. In both areas one third stays in holiday flats and one quarter stays in hotels. The only noticeable difference is that 19% stay private in the NRP-S-H according to 7% in the NLP-KW-ES region. In both areas the main length of stay is from one up to four days. 21% stay longer than 8 days in NLP-KW-ES according to only 7% in the NRP-S-H. One third visits the NLP-KW-ES for the first time, 15% visit for the second up to the fourth time. In NRP-S-H is visited for the first time by 15% and a third visits it for the second up to the fourth time. Both parks share a high percentage of more than 4 time visitors, which is for both parks near 50%. In both areas the most overnight guests come by car. According to how people get notice of the area, there was a surprisingly high percentage of almost 20% that got to know the NRP-S-H region by the "Harzer Wandernadel" (literally: "Harz Walking Badge"). This is a system of hiking badges based on a network of 220 checkpoints, where guests record their visits by a stamp in a special passport. For the NLP-KW-ES the multipliers were recommendations from relatives and friends (25%) followed by the internet (20%).

Also the visit-activities in the areas were compared. The most visitors came to the entrances by car (70% NRP-S-H and 60% NLP-KW-ES). Around one quarter in both areas came by foot and bikers were mentioned on the third place (12% NLP-KW-ES and 3% NRP-S-H). Trains and buses were used just by a small number of visitors. The average length of the visit was 3.4 hours in the NRP-S-H and 3.9 hours in the NLP-KW-ES. Hiking is the main activity in both areas (NRP-S-H 96% & NLP-KW-ES 82%). In the NLP-KW-ES there were more bikers (13%). In both areas ~60% were male and ~40% female.

Recommendations

For the sustainable regional development it is important to increase the number of overnight stays in NRP-S-H because these visitors spend more money per day in the area than day-visitors do (Job et al. 2009). According to the various types of accommodation used by the visitors, the park administration needs an efficient way to keep in contact with the providers of accommodation. For this, the NRP-S-H can learn from the NLP-KW-ES, which runs the network "Nation Park Partners". Both areas have a high percentage of short time visitors (1-4 days) so they should adapt their marketing for that kind of visitors. According to the marketing, it is recognizable that Harz Walking Badge has a substantial importance for the first time contact in the NRP-S-H. This can also be a tool for visitor guidance particularly in sensitive areas. The percentages of people who visit both areas again show that the visitors are satisfied with the possibilities of recreation.

It is important to improve or maintain the signage to the entrances of the hiking trails and offer parking opportunities to the visitors, because the majority come to the entrances by car. Additionally proper accessibility for people who use public transport should be considered. The average length of a hiking tour shows what kind of hiking trail system is needed. Both areas have most visitors in middle ages. The percentage of activities should be monitored in short distances, because an increase of a user-group can change the conflict potential between the groups.

Conclusions

Although the differences of visitors are not very pronounced, the comparison of two regions can be recommended, because it shows strengths and potentials of each area. The discussion of the results and experiences of the other park may give each administration useful insights for future management. For exact comparisons a standardized survey design should be used.

References

Job, H.; Woltering, M & Harrer, B. (2009): Regionalökonomische Effekte des Tourismus in deutschen Nationalparken. BfN-Schriftenvertrieb. Münster.