

Innovation in Protected Area Governance: Competing Models and Their Impact in Different Places

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Innovation has become a key topic in the ongoing search for more effective, efficient and legitimate forms of protected area governance. In response to changing circumstances, new management challenges, and failed policies, managers of protected areas are continuously rethinking and adapting their policies and practices and exploring new ones. Over the years it has become clear that the sustainable management of protected areas remains a difficult challenge. The huge diversity of practices shows that protected areas can be governed in many different ways and that approaches should be dynamic. Management practices regularly need to be revised in order to adapt to changing social and ecological circumstances. Managers for example need to deal with increasing visitor numbers, changing visitor' demands, environmental pressures due to recreational activities, budget cuts, or changing organizational beliefs. To some extent such changes reflect wider societal developments, such as emerging trends in outdoor activities, a changing political landscape, or economic ups and downs.

Shifting forms of governance are an important driver for innovation. Traditionally public organizations played a pivotal role, taking the lead in coordinating the different land use activities and designing and implementing a wide range of policies, laws and plans that help in protecting, managing and developing protected areas. In the last decade the role of governmental organizations has changed and increasingly attention is given to participatory and privately initiated forms of governance that give a more important role to citizens and entrepreneurs (e.g. Owley and Rissman, 2016; Van Assche et al., 2016). These shifts in governance are reflected accordingly in the strategies and instruments that actors are using to govern protected areas and manage visitor flows. Traditional hierarchical forms of governance, often focusing on conservation, are complemented and replaced with new forms that focus on participatory forms of planning, public-private partnerships, and place branding strategies. In the Netherlands, for example, we can observe a diminishing political support for strict protection, a reduction of available resources, and a growing emphasis on tourism development and branding. This urged managers of protected areas to look for new approaches, new partnerships, and new sources of income, such as recreation and tourism.

Innovation is also stimulated through the exchange of ideas, experiences and possible management models. A wide variety of models and approaches have been developed in the ongoing search for suitable forms of protected area governance. Scientific research, professional networks, NGOs, and fora such as the MMV all have contributed to a deeper insight in the various challenges of sustainable management, the possibilities and limits of particular management approaches, and they are a rich source of novel ideas and approaches. Much effort is spent on sharing experiences and learning from each other. Within this endeavor one should however

not forget that the effectiveness and legitimacy of particular models and approaches always depend on their implementation in a particular context. Approaches that have been successful in one place do not necessarily produce the same effects elsewhere. The concept of a National Park, for example, is applied in many countries, all over the world, but the ways in which National Parks are institutionalized, the ways in which they are management and protected, as well as their actual impact in various places, largely diverge. The diffusion of particular models and approaches to new places is thus anything but simple. We have for example observed this during our research in the Danube Delta, where several NGOs have been promoting models and approaches that were successful elsewhere, but that once introduced in the Danube Delta sorted a very different effect than expected based on experiences elsewhere, and regularly failed (Van Assche et al., 2011).

The context-dependent performance of particular models and approaches is not always fully taken into account when management models are evaluated and introduced elsewhere. Drawing on examples from a range of different countries we will elaborate on the difficulties that arise when certain models are promoted and implemented in a new context and put forward a perspective that can help to analyze and explain how the actual impact of such efforts are shaped by a diverse set of dependencies (Beunen et al., 2015). Furthermore we will argue that a strong emphasis on innovative projects and initiatives tends to overlook the political, economic, and ecological complexity that characterizes protected area governance. Such an approach not only fails to contribute to sustainable management practices, but might in some cases even undermine these.



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