Myplacetobe.eu – A smart way to collect landscape preferences

Martin Goossen, Wageningen UR, The Netherlands;
Jappe Franke, Wageningen UR, The Netherlands; **Henk Meeuwsen**, Wageningen UR, The Netherlands; **Arjan de Jong**, Wageningen UR, The Netherlands

Introduction

According to the prognosis of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2012 will be a record-breaking year as 1 billion international tourist arrivals are expected worldwide. For many decades, the traditional European natural areas and landscapes have been amongst the most popular tourist destinations. This worldwide growth in tourism is one of the reasons European policy makers are considering tourism as a significant sector for rural and/or regional development. At the same time, the purpose of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) is to promote landscape protection, management and planning of European landscapes. Europe has beautiful landscapes to offer but a lot of tourists don't know these destinations. Do we have to promote these unknown places or to protect them, or doing both in a sustainable way? The balance between protection and development of the landscapes is a challenge in Europe. In many European studies (Leidner, 2004, Wascher et al, 2008, Maes et al, 2011) scientists are trying to prove the relationship between certain types of landscape and the (potential) amount of visitors in order to give objective impacts of development. But on European scale there is a lack of data concerning preferences from tourists for certain types of landscape. The alternative in many studies therefore is to use the amount of beds and overnight stays. In Europe the amount of beds and overnight stays are collected at NUTS level; large geographical scales. Those scales are not detailed enough to find relationships between types of landscape and visitors preferences. The central question therefore is how to collect landscape preferences data without using traditional inquiries which are very costly?

Method

We introduce the concept of smart landscape. Smart landscape is about thoughtful planning and connection of divers systems of physical features, users and services in an area. With smart planning and cooperation it is possible to develop sustainable spatial use and quality of life in the future against low costs. In smart landscape the use of a good chain of knowledge (data -> information -> knowledge -> wisdom) is essential. It can create advantage with respect to other areas that are not using the concept of smart landscape. According to McKinsey & Company (2011) 'big data' will change the economy radically. Big data will be the basis for innovation and competition. It is also cost-effective because data can be changed much quicker into relevant information. Smart landscapes use new technologies. New technologies give in abundance possibilities of anticipating on the experience economy we are living in. In an era where society is making vast information resources available to anyone, at any time, from anywhere in the world, competitiveness of tourism destinations and regions increasingly depends on timely access to the right information. With this huge information supply modern visitors coordinate their own needs and preferences and finely their travel destination.

We develop e-SCAPE as a smart landscape tool; an Electronic information system for landScape preferences. It consists of:

1. a large GIS database of European land use and other touristic important data
2. a website www.myplacetobe.eu
3. a database with individual preferences and personalized maps.

The website www.myplacetobe.eu was developed to enable Internet users from all over the world to locate their own preferred travel destinations in Europe according to their landscape preferences, using all kinds of digital topographical data. The users can fill in how much they want of certain landscape types and supplemented features. The application draws a personalized map of Europe which indicates where the European landscape corresponds closest to the user's stated preferences. Using Google Maps, it is possible to zoom in on the map and getting more tourism information about that destination. All preferences and maps are saved in a special database.

Results

Results from the European version are yet limited, because it is still a beta-version. Till now there are about 10.000 visitors, mostly from The Netherlands (16%), but also from Canada (12%), The United States (11%) and France (6%). The "visitors" are mostly search engines. Till now we have a database with preferences of 96 real visitors making 345 maps. More results are available from the Dutch version. Each day there are150 visitors on the Dutch website (www.daarmoetikzijn.nl) creating a database at this moment of 35.000 unique visitors with their preferences and maps of the Dutch landscape. This database is growing every day without any costs. Most preferred type of landscape of the Dutch is the forest. Most preferred type of landscape of Dutch speaking Belgians is heath (Goossen et al, 2011). The most important result is that people want a diverse landscape; build upon different types of landscape. If they have a lot of a certain type of landscape in their environment, they want less of that type. If they don't have a lot of a certain type of landscape, they want more of it. On the website visitors can give a score for the attractiveness of the landscape around their place of living. The average is 6,9 at a 10-point scale. Using a stepwise multiple linear regression

analyses, the attractiveness score can be for 52% predicted with most of the types of landscape.

About 6.000 visitors have left their email to participate in following research concerning recreation, tourism and landscape. About 625 of them participated in a research about their actions after they received their destination recommendations. Results shows that 30% of them actually visited the destination which was recommended and 54% of them made an overnight stay.

Conclusions

This database gives opportunities to analyze the data in impact and assessment studies on every national and regional scale in Europe. The database gives answers to questions like what the location of the most preferred European landscape is, are the Natura 2000 sites preferred tourism destinations, which European region do people from Sweden most prefer and which tourists prefer Cornwall in England the most? In a partnership with European institute (universities, DMO's and the tourism industry) this database can be used when it has reached a certain amount of visitors. Hopefully it will give answers to the question whether policy makers and managers have to develop or protect landscapes.

Goossen, C.M, M. Sijtsma, H. Meeuwsen en J. Franke, 2011. Vijf jaar daarmoetikzijn; Het ideale landschap volgens de Nederlanders op basis van analyse van de website www.daarmoetikzijn. nl. (Five years daarmoetikzijn; the ideal landscape according to the Dutch based on an analysis of the website www.daarmoetikzijn.nl) Wageningen, Alterra, Alterra-rapport 2197.

Joachim Maes, Leon Braat, Kurt Jax, Mike Hutchins, Eeva Furman, Mette Termansen, Sandra Luque, Maria Luisa Paracchini, Christophe Chauvin, Richard Williams, Martin Volk, Sven Lautenbach, Leena Kopperoinen, Mart-Jan Schelhaas, Jens Weinert, Martin Goossen, Egon Dumont, Michael Strauch, Christoph Görg, Carsten Dormann, Mira Katwinkel, Grazia Zulian, Riku Varjopuro, Outi Ratamäki, Jennifer Hauck, Martin Forsius, Geerten Hengeveld, Marta Perez-Soba, Faycal Bouraoui, Mathias Scholz, Christiane Schulz-Zunkel, Ahti Lepistö, Yuliana Polishchuk, Giovanni Bidoglio 2011. A spatial assessment of ecosystem services in Europe: methods, case studies and policy analysis – phase 1. PEER Report No 3. Ispra: Partnership for European Environmental Research.

McKinsey & Company, 2011. Big data: The next frontier for innovation, competition, and productivity. McKinsey Global Institute.

Leidner, R, 2004. The European Tourism Industry. A multi-sector with dynamic markets. Structures, developments and importance for Europe's economy. Report for the Enterprise DG (Unit D.3) of the European Commission

Wascher, D.M.; Schuiling, C.; Hazendonk, N.; Looise, B., 2008. Map of European Leisurescapes, A Geographic Image of Tourist Values, Trends and Potentials in European Landscapes. In: Greetings from Europe, Landscape & Leisure / Sijmons, D., Venema, H. Hazendonk, N. Hendriks, M., Dijk, Rotterdam : 010 publishers.