

# 166 Recreational use vs nature protection in mountain protected areas - a case study of the Rax area, Vienna Alps, Austria

Kerstin Radakovitz, Karolina Taczanowska, Christiane Brandenburg, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria

## Introduction

The Rax mountain is a popular leisure and recreation area in the eastern part of Austria. In this region mountaineering has a long tradition and the area is used by a lot of visitors for different kinds of leisure time activities during the summer and winter months. The Rax mountain not only has a particular importance to leisure and recreation, due to the advantageous geological conditions it belongs to the watershed of the First Vienna Spring Water Main and therefore the Rax is declared as a water protection area. To enable the interests of leisure and nature conservation equally as well as to ensure the high grade of water quality, profound knowledge of visitors sociodemographic structures, individual behavior and the spatial distribution is crucial.

## Study objectives & methods

This study focuses upon a written survey among the visitors of the Rax region (n=1010) with regard to their visiting and activity motives, the preferred starting points and hiking routes. Furthermore, the planned length of stay, the group size, the state of knowledge of the participants about the research area as well as generally valid commandments and prohibitions are determined. Considering the origin of the visitors, parking counts are carried out in addition to the questionnaire at prominent starting points. On the basis of GIS-assisted route analysis highly frequented hiking trails are illustrated which in turn provides information about the preferences of the visitors with regard to the choice of the starting point or the degree of difficulty of the route.

## Selected results

The results indicate to high priorities in hiking and enjoying nature. The majority of respondents are very satisfied with the Rax leisure and recreation area and more mostly familiar with the behavior in protected natural areas and the water protection area. In the vicinity of two main starting points are heavily frequented hiking trails.

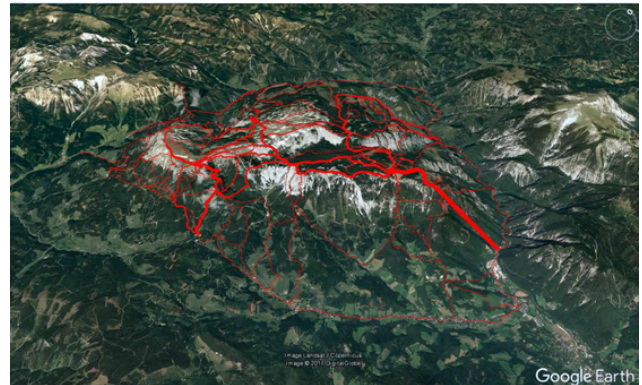


Figure 1. Spatial distribution of visitor flows in the Rax area, Vienna Alps, Austria. GIS-based analysis of trip diaries collected during on-site interview.

## Conclusions

The study contributes to the ongoing discussion on the management of visitor flows in protected areas as well as current preparedness planning based upon social distancing in the congested outdoor recreation destinations, especially those using climbing aid, such as lifts and cable cars.