

192 A new guideline: “Visitors count! Guidance for protected areas on the economic analysis of visitation”

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Introduction

This paper introduces a guideline: “Visitors count! Guidance for protected areas on the economic analysis of visitation”^[i] published by German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and UNESCO. The guideline aims at providing all knowledge needed for measuring economic impacts of tourism in protected areas (PA). The objectives are to provide essential knowledge about:

- How to evaluate economic effects of tourism in PAs;
- How to do visitor counting;
- How to do visitor surveys;
- How economic analysis works, and how to do it;
- How to best report and communicate findings and
- How to use findings for establishing sustainable PA tourism management strategies.

The guideline targets PA managers, their respective natural and cultural heritage agencies, practitioners, academia, consultancies, international stakeholders and donor agencies. It is currently translated into a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Within a series of online webinars over several months participants will acquire all relevant knowledge to conduct PA tourism economic impact assessment and a successful final exam will be certified.

Why to assess PA tourism’s economic impacts?

The establishment of PA is a widely accepted tool for biological conservation^[ii] and globally their number has 15-fold since 1960.^[iii] Typically, PAs are primarily dedicated to the protection of natural and cultural heritage and the conservation of biodiversity.^[iv] Nevertheless, often such nature conservation goals conflict with the economic interests of local

communities and governments, which may burden PA management costs and the limitations in economic activities within the area (such as agriculture, property development, extractive industries etc.). Consequently, PAs are often confronted with limited acceptance, resistance, and violations by part of the society.

However, the economic contribution of PA tourism can support the economies of local communities by providing employment and income opportunities and by contributing to the sustainable finance of PAs. Worldwide, PAs are estimated to receive about 8 billion visits per year, which generate approximately USD 600 billion in direct in-country expenditure.^[v] Well managed tourism in PAs has the potential to generate tangible mutual benefits as it can increase PAs’ acceptance and reduce the dependence of local communities on other economic activities, which conflicts with PA’s nature conservation goals. Therefore, making the economic benefits of PA tourism explicit can help advocate for enhanced public, political and financial commitments for PAs by showcasing that PA may often generate economic benefits exceeding their costs.

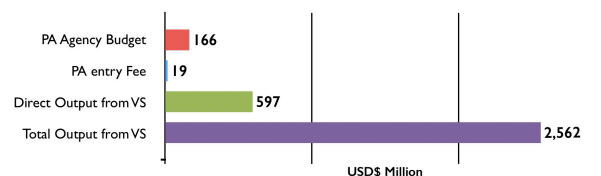


Figure 1: Economic assessment of visitor spending in protected areas of Brazil (USD million)

As we can only manage what we can measure, the evaluation of these economic impacts is increasingly needed to develop sustainable PA tourism strategies

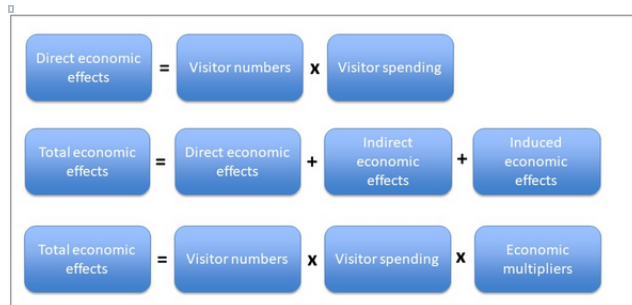
and to justify protection considering other competing land use options.

How to assess PA tourism economic impacts?

During a trip to a PA visitors spend money on entrance fees, accommodation, souvenirs etc. This money causes a range of economic effects, so-called:

- direct economic effects,
- indirect economic effects and
- induced economic effects.

Multiplying the number of visitors with their mean visitor spending results in the so-called direct economic effects. Indirect economic effects emerge from the purchase of input goods from a business selling directly to the visitors and induced economic effects result from increased demand within the region due to extra income generated by the PA tourism sector. Indirect and induced economic effects are calculated by multiplying the direct economic effects with specific economic multipliers.



Figur2: From visitor numbers, visitor spending and economic multipliers to total economic effects.

Estimated economic impacts used to improve policy and management decisions. To maximize PA tourism economic impacts, visitors need to (1) come, (2) stay, (3) spend money and (4) the money needs to circulate within the local economy. However, potential adverse social and environmental side effects need be considered when developing a PA tourism strategy to ensure a sustainable development.

The guideline provides all knowledge needed to collect and combine the required data in and cost-effective and efficient way and how to translated into improved management decisions.

Conclusion

PA tourism can have a significant economic impact on local economies. Their assessments can support the development of sustainable PA tourism strategies while increasing the acceptance of PAs within local societies by making these impacts explicit. Therefore, we provide guidance on how to estimate the economic impacts of PA tourism.

References

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