

Biodiversity and tourism – funding instruments for financing measures in favour of biodiversity through tourism

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Introduction

Many tourist regions in Switzerland offer high biodiversity value and wide scenic variety. These values form an important basis for tourism and they are part of the diversity of Switzerland. Biodiversity offers many opportunities for experiences in nature, recreation, and tourism. It is thus of great importance for housing and living space, as well as for the tourism destination Switzerland.

Tourism and its subsectors have in many respects negative impacts on biodiversity, as e.g. through ski tourism or tourism mobility. But also nature sport can result in negative impacts on biodiversity, since those seeking recreation increasingly reach untouched natural areas with their activities. However, tourist use does not only result in negative impacts, and an intact biodiversity is not incompatible with tourism. A major challenge is, however, to find an optimal balance of protection and use between biodiversity and tourism. While literature is usually devoted to the problem of negative effects, positive feedback effects of biodiversity on tourism are rarely appreciated. Nevertheless, many synergies exist (e.g. ecological design of tourism and recreational infrastructure, protected areas as core products of tourism destinations). However, based on the rather one-sided impacts on biodiversity, tourism should have an interest to preserve its basis. One possibility is to support the promotion of biodiversity financially by tourist partners.

The aim of the study was to identify the various funding instruments used by tourism to finance biodiversity, to evaluate these options and, based on that, to propose appropriate funding instruments for Switzerland.

Methods

The study consisted of four steps. The first step included the analysis of interactions between biodiversity and tourism by relating the two fields and their elements to each other, using the method of the influence matrix of Vester (Vester 2007). The empirical basis was a literature and document analysis as well as further research. This resulted in a model visualizing the interdependencies between tourism and biodiversity (see figure below).

In a second step, funding instruments to promote biodiversity through tourism at an international level were identified and assessed relating to their applicability in a Swiss context. The empirical base formed a literature and document analysis and expert interviews with actors from different government institutions and private organisations. This resulted in an overview of existing international instruments, including examples of good practice and a strengths and weakness assessment.

The third step encompassed the evaluation of a selection of specific funding with a range of assessment criteria, developed for this purpose. Similarly, experience with existing instruments in Switzerland to finance biodiversity with respect to tourism was incorporated. Again, expert interviews were the basis for this assessment. The assessment resulted in two funding instruments which would be applicable in the Swiss context and have the potential to increase biodiversity preservation.

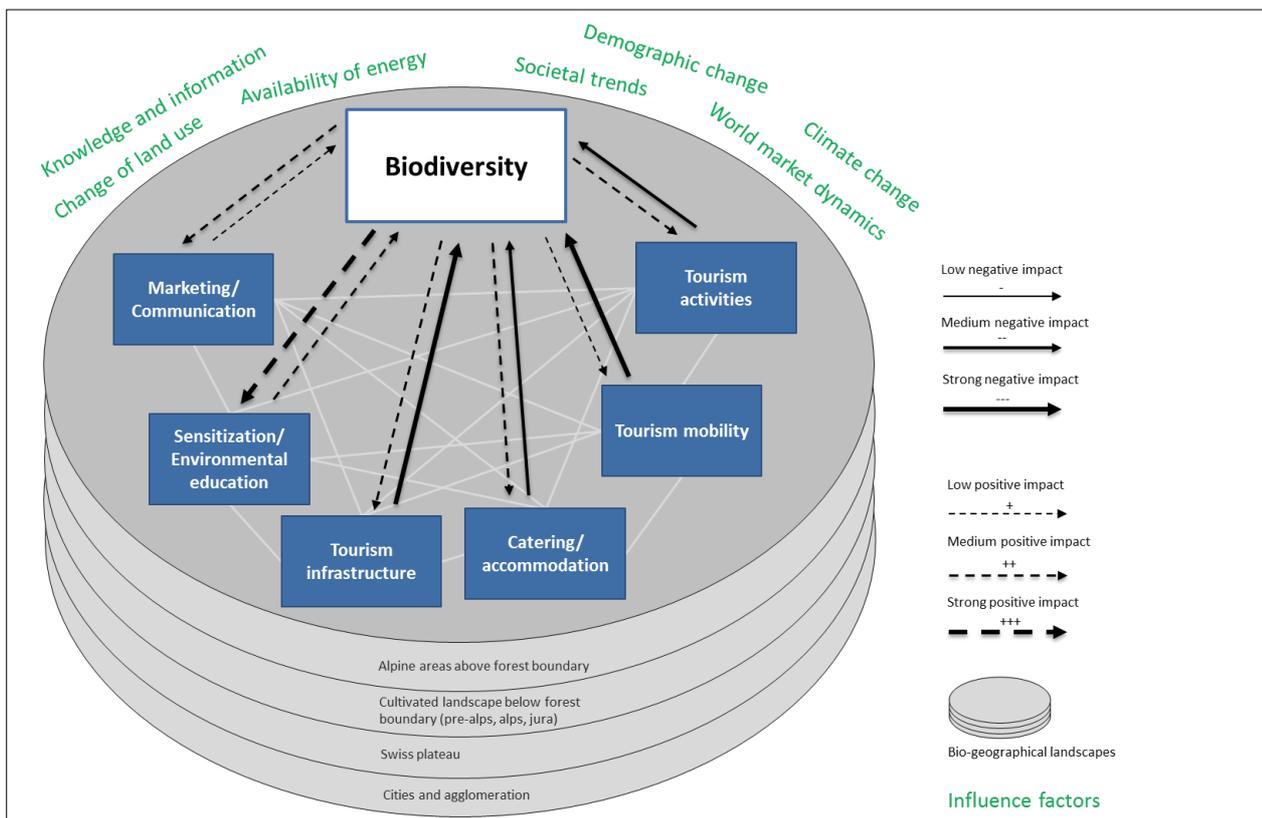
In the fourth step, the two instruments were described in detail and their implementation was elaborated. This process was accompanied by expert interviews and a document analysis.

In addition, a number of recommendations were provided for the consideration of the federal government, the cantons, and the tourism and outdoor-equipment industries to support the implementation of these two funding instruments in Switzerland.

Results

The analysis of interactions between biodiversity and tourism showed that tourism and its elements have a stronger negative impact on biodiversity than vice versa. In contrast, the impact of biodiversity on tourism is in a mostly positive way – an intact biodiversity has an important function for tourism – for nature-based activities or related to nature and landscape marketing. Summing up, tourism should have an interest in making a contribution to the preservation of biodiversity.

Figure: Evaluation of the Interactions between Tourism and Biodiversity



Source: Own illustration

At an international level, a variety of funding instruments exists where tourism contributes to the financing of biodiversity: entrance and user fees, concessions and licenses, sales of products and services, voluntary contributions, and voluntary participation (including the financial contribution of participants) (vgl. Bieling 2009; Buckley 2009; Font et al. 2004; Rebanks 2012; WWF 2009). The different legal framework and socio-political context of each country have a strong influence on the implementation of funding instruments. A funding instrument is successful if the financial output contributes as directly and strongly as possible to the on-site preservation of biodiversity. This allows the funding recipient (e.g. a given protected area) to highlight the benefits of a funding instrument directly to its guests. Transparency of the allocation of funds is important for the acceptance of an instrument. Well-functioning funding instruments can also help guests sensitize to the preservation of biodiversity.

Conclusion

Some of the instruments listed and rated have already been implemented in Switzerland (e.g. volunteering) or are difficult to implement (e.g. entrance fees). Therefore, two primary instruments – Biodiversity Swiss Franc and Biodiversity Foundation – were discussed in-depth.

The Biodiversity Swiss Franc instrument consists of a voluntary financial contribution that is made by guests at a particular destination, which is then collected by the tourism organization or by any other regional institution. The revenue is used for the preservation of biodiversity at that destination. The implementation and control of the Biodiversity Swiss Franc should rest with the individual destinations and not be assumed by the federal government or the cantons. However, the

federal government and the cantons may contribute to the initial financial aid in the implementation of the Biodiversity Swiss franc.

The Biodiversity Foundation instrument should be implemented in the context of a specific organization. Outdoor-equipment companies provide financial contributions to the foundation. The federal government should be involved in the initial financing of the foundation. The purpose of the foundation is to fund biodiversity preservation projects in Switzerland and abroad. For this reason, transparent criteria need to be in place for the foundation to follow in order to award grants. The idea of a Biodiversity Foundation is primarily to promote biodiversity projects in areas where outdoor tourism is carried out. Projects are not tied to a specific region (e.g. sensitization campaigns could be also considered).

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