Monitoring for tourism cluster in the Gauja National Park, Latvia

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Introduction

The goal of this report is to elaborate monitoring system for Tourism cluster members in the Gauja National Park, Latvia. The report is based on the case study of the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster in Latvia. The beneficiary institution of the research outcome is the non-governmental organisation "Gauja National Park Tourism Society".

The used methodology for the elaboration of Tourism monitoring system is a content study method, statistical data, case studies of several questionnaire forms of visitors in national parks and 16 interviews with experts in this field. I also applied my previous experience in two projects of integrated monitoring system in North-Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, Latvia and I adapted the best experience from other elaborated visitor monitorings in different studies for carrying-out Tourism monitoring of the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster.

The novelty of this research is the established Tourism monitoring system for Gauja National Park Tourism cluster. The main difference from other visitor monitoring systems in national parks is the management organisation, which in the case of the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster is the non-governmental organisation with around 55 to 60 members. Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia is the only one of all members with the same impact. The Gauja National Park Tourism cluster involves many private companies, which operate in tourism market. At the same time, The Gauja National Park Tourism cluster has limited number of staff, only two persons.

Till now they have not one unified Tourism monitoring system for all Gauja National Park Tourism cluster members. The elaborated monitoring system will be a tool for stakeholders to make decisions about new markets, new products, services, quality and seasonality on the basis of tourism monitoring results.

Theoretical aspects

Understanding about a monitoring system is crucial. Eagle gives precisely the description of monitoring that it is a systematic and periodic measurement of indicators of biophysical and social conditions (Eagle et al, 2002, PP.151). Eagle has noted two significant aspects for tourism monitoring, particularly in protected areas: visitor impacts and service quality. Hadweb states that it is important to build an optimized monitoring approach through careful indicator selection and through clever implementation of monitoring schedules (Hadweb et al, 2013). Many authors have written about significance of monitoring on time, which means to carry out monitoring before the sites are damaged. Financial resource cutting of national park management organisations has been

done in several countries, for instance, the US, Canada and Latvia in at least last three to five years. From this point of view, managers of protected areas (PA) are interested to attract more visitors for reporting for governmental institutions about their significant role in society and on the other hand it provides more income for PAs. Gauja National Park is located in a populated area where are strong tourism traditions and local municipalities would like to attract more visitors during all year around. In case, when the goal of PA and local municipalities is to increase number of visitors in the area, tourism monitoring system became more important than before.

Overview of the case

In 2012 the Gauja National Park established a long-term cooperation tourism cluster, which involves 60 stakeholders: owners of tourism objects and tourism service providers as private, public and educational/research institutions. The Gauja NP tourism cluster has a goal to create the Gauja NP as a tourism destination with well-known brand "Enter Gauja" and to be innovative in tourism service offers for specific target groups. The tourism cluster focuses on strengthening of national park in marketing campaigns to attract visitors to tourism objects and services inside and in corridors to national park.

The long-term goal of the Gauja NP tourism cluster is to increase the number of visitors in export markets and domestic market. Therefore indicators are significant to measure achievements of Tourism cluster.

The Gauja NP Tourism cluster wants to offer more tourism services and to attract more visitors for longer visits in the park. However, it is important to find balance between the offer and demand; income and nature conservation or by simplifying, it will be about the capacity of resources and the number of visitors. The institutional form of the Gauja NP Tourism cluster is a non-governmental organisation that is running European Union funded project to develop tourism in the Gauja NP. Therefore my project is elaborated according to needs of the Gauja NP Tourism cluster project. One of the work packages of the project is to create Tourism monitoring system of the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster.

Proposed monitoring for Tourism Cluster

Researcher Hadweb W. of recreation ecology explains the main reasons of visitor management necessity in protected areas (PA) in the article (2007). He and other authors (Eagle, Cessford, Livina) have emphasised the increasing number of visitors in protected areas, particularly in National Parks (NP) in the world; the rise of tourism services and products in protected areas by private sector and administrations of PA; the capacity of most popular or icon sites; in some countries monitoring of protected areas is included in legislation. The next discussed issue according to Hadweb is what we need to monitor or what we need to know of our visitors in NP. During the talk with well-known researcher of tourism in PA P.Eagle (Canada), he mentioned that the first significant step is to understand the purpose of tourism monitoring in NP, the second advice was to keep it as simple as possible (2012).

Visitor monitoring in the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster consists of four themes: economic development value, market research, service quality and sustainability. Each theme includes various indicators with sub-indicators. The number of indicators and sub-indicators for each theme vary on the basis of significance and amount of prevalence particularly in the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster and rules of the European Union financed project guidelines.

Below I show you the chosen indicators for each theme. All indicators are selected carefully by significance for the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster, taking into account recommendations of other similar researches in the world. The last rule was to keep visitor-monitoring system as simple as possible for the data collection and analyses.

Economic Development value theme includes six main indicators with sub-indicators. Each company or Tourism information centre, which is a member of Tourism cluster provides necessary data of indicators in specific working sheets (protocols)**:**

> 1.1. Visitor dynamics in Tourism Information Centres/Points, Number of visitors of municipality tourism website
> 1.2. Number of overnights, occupation rate
>
> 1.3. Number of visits in tourism objects
>
> 1.4. Main data by Central Statistical Bureau
>
> 1.5. Turnover of companies
>
> 1.6. Employment of companies. The average number of employees per year.

Research of the market:

> 2.1. Benchmarking of supply in the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster
>
> 2.2. Survey of foreign visitors every year. (Satisfaction after visiting Gauja National park, including expectations, NET promoter score, spatial data of entrance and exit of the park)
>
> 2.3. Dynamics of products of value chain (Regular overview of cooperation among companies to offer tourism services).

Quality:

> 3.1. Review of clients (as it is done for trip advisor, booking.com). Analyses of reviews twice per year.
>
> 3.2. Quality of provided tourism services
>
> 3.3. Nature Trails includes several parameters of trails, as well as type of trail.

Sustainability:

> 4.1. Sustainability of nature environment. How to measure the use of nature resources. (Rural bird index, number of companies which support biodiversity, cultural heritage, traditions)
>
> 4.2. Sustainability of social environment. Social environment sustainability in the context of Tourism in the Gauja National Park (Satisfaction of population to take part in tourism planning, number of visitors on 100 populations, willingness to change living place)
>
> 4.3. Survey of inhabitants once every two years.

Conclusions

The Tourism monitoring is created in four themes. Each theme of the monitoring consists of several indicators and in two cases is proposed to carry out qualitative data from foreign and residential

surveys in the Gauja National Park. The created monitoring system will be at first discussed with stakeholders of the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster and then started to implement in the Gauja National Park Tourism cluster in 2014.

The most complicated part of this tourism monitoring system is the data collection and management because it involves around 60 different stakeholders by size of company, by interest in tourism, by capacity and social responsibility of nature values.

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