74 Visitors awareness and behavior regarding donations for Mount Ibuki conservation: A comparative study between climbers and car users

Takako Kohori, **Kiyotatsu Yamamoto**, **Yuki Yamashima**, The University of Tokyo, Japan

Introduction

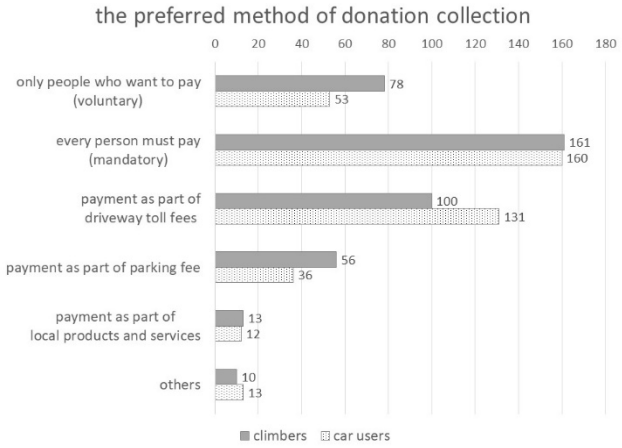
Resource managers seek to protect both visitor experiences as well as natural and cultural resources. There are three main categories of income for the management of conservation resources: societal taxes, toll road charges, and donations. However, donations are less contributive in most cases (Eagles, 2009). In Japan, there are a few compulsory collection systems, and most of them are based on voluntary donations. This study investigated the awareness and behavior of visitors with respect to donations for Mount Ibuki conservation and compared them between climbers and car users.

Study area and methods

Mount Ibuki is located in Biwako Quasi-National Park and has a wide variety of plants, including more than 1,300 endemic plant species. For this reason, the mountaintop grassland plant community has been designated as a Special Protection Zone of Lake Biwa Quasi-National Park and a Special Natural Monument of Cultural Property. There are two routes to the summit of Mount Ibuki. One is the mountain trail, and the other is the Ibukiyama-driveway, which opened in 1965.

In 2015, the Nature Restoration Council of Mount Ibuki, established mainly by Shiga Prefecture and Maibara City, introduced donations. The basic amount was set at JPY 300 per person and was collected voluntarily. The total amount of donations was approximately JPY 12 million in 2019. This money is used for vegetation recovery projects, trail maintenance, and cleaning activities. The method of collecting donations differs depending on the route. In the case of climbers, the local conservation group directly engages with visitors at the trailhead, seeking their cooperation. For car users, several unattended donation boxes and explanatory boards are used to collect the donations.

Questionnaire surveys were used to investigate visitors' attitudes on October 31 and November 1, 2020. The visitor was handed a questionnaire sheet and asked to mail them back after their hike. We distributed 1907 questionnaire sheets and received 536 responses (262 climbers and 274 car users). The questionnaire was designed to understand the attributes, awareness, and behavior of the visitors. Furthermore, to consider a fairer way for making donations, six options were set up: 1) only people who want to pay (voluntary), 2) every person must pay (mandatory), 3) payment as part of driveway toll fees, 4) payment as part of parking fee, 5) payment as part of local products and services, and 6) others.



Results and discussion

There was a difference between climbers and car users regarding whether they knew about the donation system before visiting Mount Ibuki. One hundred forty-three people (55% of climbers) had prior knowledge of the fees. However, only 37 car users (14% of car users) had prior knowledge of the fees. Furthermore, a difference was observed between the two groups with regards to payment of donations. Two hundred and eighteen people (83% of climbers) paid the donation, but only 81 people (30% of car users) made the payment. Of the 164 people who did not pay the car users donation, 127 people explained their reason for not doing so as "I did not notice the donation box for the fee"

Additionally, the results indicated the preferred method of donation collection. The option

"every person must pay (mandatory)" was selected by most climbers and car users. This implies that both visitors believe that donations should be more mandatory. The option of "only people who want to pay (voluntary)" was found to be the significantly popular choice among climbers ($P<0.05$), while "payment as part of driveway toll fees" was significantly higher among car users ($P<0.01$).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates differences in the knowledge and behavior pertaining to donation systems, between climbers and car users. Awareness of the purpose of the donation system, visibility of the collection site, and the act of encouraging or soliciting donations were identified as important factors (Yamamoto, 2017). In the case of the Mount Ibuki donation, it is posited that the low cooperation rate of car users may be the result of discreet collection sites and low awareness of the donation system. Meanwhile, we found that both visitors preferred fairer donation collections for all people, signifying the potential to build a more equitable collection method. By considering ways to financially support the system and protect the environment in collaboration with all visitors, the overall willingness to cooperate would increase, along with the sustainability efforts of conserving the mountain.

References

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