

Preface

by

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The United Nations has designated the year 2002 as The International Year of Eco-tourism as well as The Year of Mountains. As a contribution to both, the Institute for Landscape Architecture and Landscape Management, Bodenkultur University Vienna, and its partners organised the International Conference on Monitoring and Management of Visitor Flows in Recreational and Protected Areas, January 30 – February 2, 2002, Vienna, Austria.

Tourism, in particular eco-tourism, is expected to double in the next twenty years, and a growing share of such travel will be to national parks and other protected areas as well as to other nature-based destinations. The predicted rising visitor numbers will lead to crowded recreation areas as well as stress on natural areas. The attractiveness of the landscape is diminished and recreational needs cannot be satisfied. Species and habitats, which require highest conservation priority, are at risk of being decimated due to the high recreational use. In particular, in densely populated regions, recreational and protected areas close to conurbations and sensitive conservation mountain areas are exposed to rising recreational use. Additionally, an increased expansion of recreational infrastructure is being registered. World-wide, the consequences of nature-consuming and unsustainable tourism are being lamented by nature conservationists, by visitors as well as by the tourism industry itself.

The big challenge for nature management is to preserve areas with minimal human impact, in particular by leisure activities, while at the same time, zones must be found to satisfy recreational and educational needs. The development of visitor management plans as part of the management of protected and recreational areas is widely accepted by park managers as a way of reducing these conflicts.

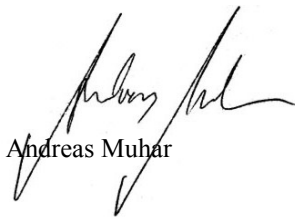
The establishing of such visitor flow concepts requires accurate knowledge of visitor numbers and activities along with information on their needs and motivations. But in most cases information about the recreational activities in investigated areas is only passed on by word of mouth. These subjective evaluations are a spontaneous help for small-scale decisions, but are not suited for a successful long-term management, for large-scale plans and are not transferable to other areas. While monitoring of vegetation and wildlife in European recreational and protected areas has a long tradition, a systematic monitoring of recreational uses and visitor flows is rarely carried out.

Therefore, the demand for qualitative and quantitative, spatially related and standardised data about visitor numbers is striking, in particular for areas with high visitor numbers and for conflict zones.

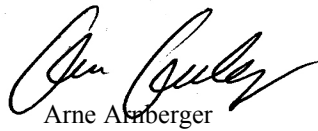
In order to manage protected areas within acceptable ecological and social carrying capacities, one needs to monitor visitor numbers, leisure activities and behaviour, and deepen the understanding of expectations and motivations. Data on public use help to improve management in order to preserve or to improve biodiversity of parks while at the same time helping to satisfy the public's need for recreation, to provide the recreationists the opportunity to find the sought leisure and recreation experience in the respective visited area, to "get away from it all". Useful data on public use contribute significantly to an optimal management of the protected area itself (best allocation of staff resources, the provision of visitor services etc.). The better the quality of information, the better the opportunity for good management. Also, the lack of acceptance of use-restrictions in recreational and protected areas by visitors and residents is a current problem of area management. Registering and considering visitor needs in park management can help raise the acceptance of protected areas and of conservation issues and objectives in both visitors and local residents. Thus, one objective of the conference volume is to demonstrate the importance of collecting data on public use and the importance of visitor management in recreational and protected areas.

The basis of every successful data collection on public use is the set of applied methods of visitor monitoring. In this conference volume a thorough exploration and debate of efficient and cost-effective monitoring and recording methods takes place. Advantages and disadvantages of various methods of recording qualitative and quantitative data (optical sensors, video surveillance, personal interviews, mailback questionnaires, choice modelling, decision analysis, GIS-applications etc.) are discussed and models to simulate and predict visitor flows presented. Different approaches to record public use and to manage visitors are demonstrated. Impacts on nature caused by leisure activities and new research results on recreation are described. Moreover, ethical aspects of applied methods, e.g. of video surveillance, are on the agenda.

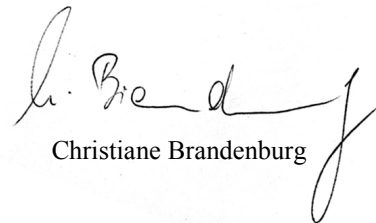
This volume aims to support wildland and urban park managers in identifying best practices and techniques for monitoring visitors and it is also designed to aid in their everyday work both practitioners and researchers who are engaged in park planning and administration, as well as in research projects.



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