

Role of PAN Parks in local community development in Oulanka National Park, Finland – a mixed methods approach

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Mixed Methods in Tourism Research

Tourism is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, thus difficult to study comprehensively. A mixed method analysis offers a promising yet little used (Decrop 1999) approach to understand tourism-related issues versus quantitative or qualitative analysis singularly. Although qualitative methodologies have substantially increased since Riley & Love's (2000) review of the state of qualitative tourism research in 1996 among the four major tourism journals at that time (i.e., *Journal of Travel Research*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*), sole methods continue to dominate the methods published in those journals versus multi-method (Ateljevic et al. 2008) or more recently referred to as mixed methods (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2007). With the development of both quantitative and qualitative research in social science, mixed methods, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches in combination, has become more frequent (Bryman 2006). Mixed methods represent a step forward in the evolution of research methodology as it combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell 2009). Yet, a recent analysis of trends in tourism research by Ballantyne and his coworkers (2009) reported that only 6 % of a stratified random sample of 144 articles used a mixed methods approach.

Much of the early work in tourism was initiated through qualitative research (see Boorstin 1964, MacCannell 1976, Smith 1977, Cohen 1979, Graburn 1983 in Riley & Love 2000) and tended to be published in non-tourism journals, such as the early works in sociology (Forster 1964; Cohen 1972, 1973, 1979; MacCannell 1973). Perhaps tourism researchers were less familiar with qualitative methods today while these techniques were less known during that period (Riley & Love 2000). Meanwhile, the proliferation of quantitative methods has been and still remains predominant in the literature, although graduate study programs have included more training in the qualitative approaches within tourism studies (Love & Riley 2000, Jamal & Hollingshead 2001).

Purpose

This article seeks to position mixed methods as a complement to traditional qualitative and quantitative research and to provide a framework for designing and conducting mixed methods in sustainable tourism research. Specifically, we focus on the beliefs and perceptions of local stakeholders on tourism development pertinent to the PAN (Protected Area Network) Parks trademark that is an international ecolabel aiming to promote a sustainable tourism network of European national parks. The socio-cultural sustainability of tourism perceived by local stakeholders nearby Oulanka National Park in northeastern Finland is examined via mixed methods (semi-structured interviews linked to survey data from the same respondent concurrently). The central question concerns the value of a mixed methods approach for understanding local residents' beliefs and perceptions of tourism development pertinent to an international ecolabel, namely PAN Parks.

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Results and conclusive highlights

Four discourses were identified, based on 33 semi-structured interviews that have different views on socio-cultural development pertaining to tourism in the national park: 1) discourse integrating nature-based tourism and conservation, 2) discourse defending the rights of local people, 3) discourse stressing the economic utilization of nature, and 4) discourse accepting tourism development and the national park. Results of qualitative and quantitative analysis complemented each other; survey results strengthened the identification of four discourses and provided further information about the representatives of the discourses. Discourse groups differed for length of residence in the area, distance from the park, employment in tourism, familiarity with PAN Parks, PAN Parks partnership, belief in the benefits of PAN Parks, satisfaction with tourism and park development, and satisfaction with various dimensions of sustainability.

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