

# Effectiveness of Consensus-Building Methods Using Sustainable Tourism Indicators in the Collaborative Management of Japan's National Parks: A Case Study of the Oku-Nikko Area in Nikko National Park

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## Introduction

Japan's national parks are organized based on a regional land designation system that is not tied to land ownership or limited to the public use of the area. These areas are home to a significant number of people (600,000 people across 32 parks). Therefore, it is necessary for park management to accommodate the local residents' daily living, economic activities, and the natural areas' protection and use. Based on these circumstances, managing national parks appropriately requires building a consensus among and striving to win the cooperation of a variety of stakeholder organizations and individuals. This is not limited to only park officials, but also residents, businesses, and visitors. In Japanese national parks, there are venues to examine individual issues and conduct liaison and coordination functions. However, these venues are extraordinarily limited with regard to which have been established as places in which the greater park system's stakeholders can come together (Tsuchiya, 2014).

Conversely, research continues to identify the indicators for sustainable tourism, particularly abroad (Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005; Griffin et al, 2010). Sustainable tourism indicators (STI) are monitoring tools that measure certain conditions in a tourism destination, such as local resource statuses, the area's sightseeing use, the local economic situation, and the local community's mindset (UNWTO, 2004). Various stakeholders' participation and consent is desired during the STIs' introduction process. As such, there are great expectations for the indicators to serve as a management method that would work effectively with the national park system's collaborative management. However, there is currently little research and experience on this topic in Japan (Nakajima and Shimizu, 2013).

Therefore, this paper aims to evaluate the potential of implementing STIs as consensus-building tools to collaboratively manage Japan's national parks. By attempting to apply this method to the Oku-Nikko area in Nikko National Park, we will evaluate the introduction process' effectiveness and challenges.

## Study Area

In 1934, Nikko National Park was designed as one of Japan's first national parks. It is situated approximately 120 km from Tokyo. The Oku-Nikko area is located within the park and is blessed with an abundance of natural resources: mountains, lakes and marshes, wetlands, waterfalls, and hot springs. It has long been developed as a

tourist destination that has received many visitors. The area averages 700,000 lodging guests per year. The majority of the 600 residents are involved in tourism-related industries, with approximately 130 tourism-related offices. However, in recent years, the Oku-Nikko area has seen decreases in mid-to-long-term visitors, population, and local businesses.

## Methodology

The STIs were implemented and evaluated in the study area via the following processes.

1. Understanding the situation in the Oku-Nikko area and building a favorable relationship with local stakeholders
2. Discovering and motivating key talent
3. Establishing a discussion venue
4. Conducting discussions with stakeholders and developing the STI Oku-Nikko Model (draft)
5. Collecting and analyzing data
6. Providing feedback to local stakeholders

## Results

### 1. *Understanding the situation in the Oku-Nikko area and building favorable relationships with local stakeholders*

In the Oku-Nikko area, we gained an understanding of the condition of local resources and the status of various relevant organizations by reviewing literature, conducting on-site observations, and interviewing a variety of stakeholders; this included neighborhood associations, local governments, hotel associations, restaurant associations, and transportation firms. We thereby built positive relationships with stakeholders.

### 2. *Discovering and motivating key talent*

Through our interviews, we discovered key talent in the community. With the expectation that they would play key roles in future consensus building, we invited these individuals to join us in a public forum as representatives of the Oku-Nikko area. It was our intent to make them aware that they were key to promoting understanding of the study.

### 3. *Establishing a discussion venue*

Next, we established a place in which the stakeholders could gather. However, in Oku-Nikko, there were already several meetings and conferences. Therefore, even if we created a brand new official place for stakeholders to gather, we understood from a preliminary assessment that there was a strong possibility that people would not meet. Therefore, we used a venue with a relaxed atmosphere, established with the encouragement of local government staff and locals who wanted to improve Oku-Nikko.

#### 4. *Conducting discussions with stakeholders and developing the STI Oku-Nikko Model (draft)*

With local stakeholders, we examined the vision for this area's future and the specific steps necessary to attain it (the indicators) from four perspectives: visitors, residents, business people, and local resources. We then developed the STI Oku-Nikko Model.

#### 5. *Collecting and analyzing data*

We found data sources for each indicator. For values in which it was necessary to acquire new data, we obtained measurements by surveying visitors, residents, and business people connected to the tourism industry. We believed that by taking time to use the survey consider everyone's questions and objectives, we could obtain more proactive responses. Therefore, we also conducted meetings and interviews with local stakeholders during the study item planning process. If there was an item that the stakeholders wanted us to address, we incorporated it in addition to the questionnaire items. We also recruited local residents and business people to participate in conducting the survey and involved them in the fieldwork.

#### 6. *Providing feedback to local stakeholders*

We held a debriefing session for local residents, business people in the tourism industry, local governments, and others. The participants were enthusiastic about attending and were very positive during the question-and-answer session.

### **Conclusion**

By introducing STIs, we achieved the following results:

- Stakeholders obtained and shared quantitative and objective understandings of the local situation.
- The area's objective was identified.
- Stakeholders engaged in a small amount of consensus-building.
- Stakeholders adopted a more positive, forward-thinking attitude.

The application of STIs can therefore be considered as effective consensus-building tools for the national parks' collaborative management.

When using STIs, the important points to remember are: find key talent with resolve and motivation; listen to input from a variety of members; communicate frequently; progressively work toward your goal by starting with small initiatives; pay attention to your verbiage, and use vocabulary that is easy for locals to understand; involve stakeholders in a variety of activities; share the results; assume an attitude that focuses not only on the indicators you are measuring but also on your future responses and countermeasures; develop close relationships with local experts; and conduct fundraising.

This project is still ongoing. In the next stage, we will need to review the indicators based on results, establish target ranges, and consider countermeasures.

Table 1. The STI Oku-Nikko Model (draft)

	Ideal visions for the Oku-Nikko area	Indicators (STI) * as an example
Visitors	Visitors enjoy their stays	Level of visitors' satisfaction
	Visitors are fans of the area	Percentage of repeat visitors
	Visitors stay for a long time	Length of time spent in the area
	Visitors commune with nature	Length of natural walk time
	The area is easy for anyone to visit at any time	Level of visitors' intentions in winter
Residents	Locals are attached to the area	Percentage who are proud to live in the area
	The Oku-Nikko area is comfortable to live in	Local satisfaction level with area's comfortable living
	The population is being retained	Population
	Tourism has a positive influence on daily life	Local satisfaction level with tourism
	Locals are participating in community activities	Local participant level with community activities
Business people	Business people are satisfied working here	Level of business people's satisfaction
	Business people are attached to the area	Percentage who are proud to do business in the area
	The labor market is vibrant	Average age of employees
	Business people experience stable sales	Tourists' expenditures per person per day
	Business people accept a variety of visitors	Average age of visitors
Local resources	Business people cooperate with companies inside and outside of the area	Percentage of participation in meetings inside and outside of the area
	Water is beautifully maintained	Level of lake water quality
	Original biological diversity is maintained	Level of feeding damage created by the deer
	Beautiful scenery is maintained	Litter amount

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