

# Touristic events as generators of visitations increase and tourism sustainability of Nature parks

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Increased demand and interest in outdoor recreation is an ideal opportunity for tourism development in protected areas, but also a challenge for park management to attract more visitors, meet their needs and expectations. Satisfying the needs as well as the expectations of the visitors, mostly lead to achieving a higher level of touristic experience which brings multiple benefits for the visited protected areas, such as increased spending, longer stay, return, recommendation etc. Seeing that the revenues from traditional government sources are decreasing, tourism provides a vital source of revenues for park agencies. It also provides a key means for protected area agencies to realize their objectives relating to visitor appreciation and enjoyment (Bushell, Eagles, 2006). Anyway, the tourism development in protected areas brings not only benefits, but also the expenses, from the ecological, economical and socio-cultural point of view. Ensuring that tourism contributes to the sustainable management of protected areas, it will require enhanced cooperation and partnerships among the tourism industry, governments at all levels, local communities, protected area managers and planners (Eagles et al., 2002).

Most protected areas constitute a prime tourist attraction and can, therefore, benefit from this fact. Indeed, many protected areas have successfully achieved their conservation objectives, thanks to the financial resources that have been obtained through tourists'/visitors' expenditures (Bushell, Eagles, 2006). On the other hand, some parks and park systems are poorly funded because of inadequate tourism development or insufficient income derived from tourism. The fact is that some parks are having insufficient visitation and therefore insufficient income to cover the costs of management. So, the lack of funding will influence on future developments and maintaining existing protected areas and tourism is therefore fundamental to developing a public and political constituency for parks and protected areas (Bushell et al., 2006). It concludes that, despite the pleas of environmentalists, the establishment and continued existence of protected areas will depend largely on market forces (Dharmaratne, 2000). Opportunities for tourism sustainability of parks and protected areas are vaguely seen, with strengthening infrastructure and substructure, creating accompanying facilities, as well as organizing different attractive touristic, sports and recreation events and others which can create desire in other potential group to visit such area.

Events are an important motivator of tourism, and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations. Planned events within tour-

ism are of increasing importance for destination competitiveness (Getz, 2008) and an effective enhancer of destination image (Hall, 1992). Events play an important role in making significant contributions to tourism, travel, leisure and lodging industries by becoming a creator of a strong tourism demand. They are an important tool to catch the various economic, social and environmental aims and to make benefits for the communities and destinations (Arcodia and Robb, 2000). In addition to this, events do not only serve a destination to attract tourists, they both help to protect and develop social identity at the same time (Derrett, 2004:39). There are so many advantages of event tourism for the destinations such as attracting tourists (especially in the off-peak season), creating new sources of revenue for the regions, increasing the awareness and attraction of destinations, making the new infrastructure and services or develop the current infrastructure and services, encouraging visitors to make a re-visit to the destination etc (Getz, 1997).

In Croatia, according to the Nature Protection Act (NN, 80/13), there are nine different categories of protected areas, of which only the National parks and Nature parks were effectively used for tourism purposes. Nature parks are a lower rank of protection opposed to National parks, but are more numerous and their surface occupies more than any other category of protected areas. Nature parks in Croatia are faced with big problem of sustainability, especially in economic terms, therefore it is necessary to valorize the touristic resources more adequately as Law permits greater economic opportunities in using resources opposed to National parks. Seeing the whole picture, it is necessary to seek ways of more intensive tourism development, so far there are still insufficient touristic developed areas of Nature parks. Considering the great incapability of Nature parks in attracting a bigger number of visitors, events could be seen as a possible solution of increasing visitations.

In order to improve the recent situation, this paper will conduct an empirical research with the purpose of determining the possibilities and the limitations in developing and holding events, as the core of visitations increase and the sustainability of Nature parks. The main aim of the paper is to establish the perception of Nature park management, their willingness, but also the main obstacles of holding touristic events. Besides this, attitudes, willingness and obstacles of the tourism policy management in supporting events in Nature parks will be established. In order to collect primary data on a convenient sample, the method of in-depth interview will be used.

In the empirical part of the paper results will be given of an original research done on Nature park Papuk management and tourism policy management at the local and regional level, which is in its final phase at the moment. It is to expect that the theoretical level of the paper will provide better understanding of the role of touristic events in strengthening of Nature park sustainability. On the conducted level will assure the increase of number of touristic events which will acquire a better position on tourism market and achieves sustainable and more competitive development of Nature parks.



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