

The Pan Parks Sustainable Tourism Strategy as a Tool for Nature-Based Tourism Development in and around Protected Areas

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Introduction

Since 1997, the PAN Parks Foundation has been challenging European protected areas to meet higher management standards and to provide high quality tourism experiences. The key to the foundation's success has been the engagement of local businesses and local communities with protected area managers in the visitor management of protected areas. The foundation aims to combine high nature management standard of protected areas with quality tourism, bringing together several stakeholders and involving local communities. All stakeholders of PAN Park's regions have its role in contributing the development of the region's nature-based tourism package. The tool which guides them through this development process is called the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (STDS). This paper discusses this process and deals with the lessons learned from its implementation in 8 different European protected areas. The EU DG Environment, referred to PAN Parks as one of the most relevant initiatives to manage sustainable tourism in NATURA 2000 sites (European Commission DG Environment, 1999).



Figure 1: PAN Parks Logo.

Methods

While working with protected area managers and local partners we recognised a serious lack of knowledge in relation to tourism development in rural regions. Therefore the foundation commissioned experts to design an easy process that guides its partners through the process of defining a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (STDS) which includes all major points mentioned in the CBD Guidelines. When preparing this strategy a wide range of experts of different fields have been consulted.

The foundation developed a third-party verification system, which includes three elements:

- 1) 5 Principles and criteria for sustainable management and tourism development (see table 1 for principle 4 which relates the STDS).
- 2) The verification manual.
- 3) Independent verification.

Results

Since March 2006 eight national parks across Europe are certified by PAN Parks and are working on the implementation and development of the strategy (see figure 2). Many others throughout the continent have engaged in negotiations which may eventually lead to their joining the network. Although there is a growing network of PAN Parks, the benefits of the concept for both the local communities and biodiversity conservation should be

Table 1: Principle and criteria of STDS.

<p>Principles on the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy</p> <p>4.1: A Local PAN Park Group is set up and assumes responsibility for formulating, implementing, and monitoring STDS and executes verification of the business partners. Stakeholders and potential PAN Parks partners formally confirm their support and commitment to the conservation goals of the protected area and PAN Parks Foundation.[1]</p> <p>4.2: The Local PAN Park Group formulates, implements, and monitors the STDS for the PAN Parks region.</p> <p>4.3: The PAN Parks region[17] has sufficient tourism potential and carrying capacity for sustainable tourism.[18]</p> <p>4.4: The Communications and Marketing Strategy of the STDS aims at informing all target groups.</p> <p>4.5: Planned tourism development and existing tourism activities are based on sustainable use of the ecological resources of the PAN Park region.</p> <p>4.6: Tourism development and existing tourism activities are based on sustainable use of the socio-economic resources of the PAN Park region, including minority and if appropriate indigenous people's issues.</p> <p>4.7: Planned tourism development and existing tourism activities are based on sustainable use of the cultural resources of the PAN Park region.</p>
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further studied. PAN Parks Foundation therefore developed a methodology of cost-benefit analysis, which can help measuring the socio-economic development of the regions. The network of certified PAN Parks presents a modern management practice, which involves communities more in nature conservation through visitor management. The protected areas joining the network act as role models in terms of ensuring long-term protection of biodiversity and adding economic value to nature. The network of certified PAN Parks presents a modern

management practice which acts as a kind of role model in terms of ensuring long-term protection of biodiversity and adding economic value to nature.

The development of the STDS has been experienced by most of the regions as one of the most difficult parts of the certification. Communication between the protected areas, the communities and the local entrepreneurs improves as a result of proper development of the STDS. Involving all stakeholders in the process involves effort and is a time consuming task, especially in those areas where large distances and the lack of modern communication technology make the situation more difficult. However, the efforts from the park management are highly appreciated by the local stakeholders. A study done in Bieszczady, Poland, showed that local partners and non partners value being involved and informed as a very positive effect of the PAN Parks project.

References

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Figure 2: Overview of certified PAN Parks.