

Green lifestyle or greening lifestyles? The social dimension of halting the loss of biological diversity

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Introduction

Among other aspects, research on biodiversity issues means dealing with people and their demand for nature and its perception. Therefore, in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and national strategies conserving biological diversity, an emphasis is also laid on human dimensions. National strategies in Central Europe for conserving biological diversity demand further research on some following examples: developing environmentally friendly recreation offers; education concepts raising awareness for biodiversity issues; as well as a higher appreciation; and acceptance for nature (e.g. Bundesministerium für Umwelt et al. 1998, BMU 2007). However, which concepts are needed to address the whole society?

Theoretical Background

Post-modern theories claim individualization with a wide range of options for conducting life. Humans act as individuals, but societal and cultural imprints as well as socialization, lead to similarities in behavior patterns. On a voluntary basis groups are formed with shared values, norms, similar tastes and preferences. These clusters are named 'lifestyle groups'. Lifestyles demonstrate and stage economic chances, unrestricted options of conducting life, cultural aspects, personal views, opinions, mentality and values. These concepts were developed in the mid-1980s for psephology and marketing. In Central Europe a number of concepts exist, with SINUS (e.g. Ploeger et al. 2005; 10 milieus) and the lifestyle-group concept developed by the German sociologist Schulze (1997; 5 groups) being the most popular ones. A literature survey is carried out to find out methodologies used and the main findings of the studies were summarized. They were compared with the researcher's own results gathered during on-site face-to-face interviews. Asking for education levels as a main indicator for lifestyles is reported to be a problem in this interview design (e.g. Korff 2005). Therefore, an alternative method was developed to assign interviewees to certain lifestyles.

First results

Studies conducting telephone interviews and postal questionnaires ('Ex-Situ') indicate a high acceptance of environmental protection in almost every lifestyle-group. People characterized by a high educational background and high incomes serve as trendsetters and role-models in society. They already have a very high awareness, but also 'the middle of the society' shows high acceptance for nature protection issues (Sinus Sociovision 2009, UBA 2009).

Nature experiences are considered to be an important tool raising awareness for nature protection issues (BMU 2007). Forests as an important resource of biodiversity are highly appreciated in all groups of society. Old persons with low educational background mentioned fewer visits due to a lack of mobility. They often have a functional relation with forests for example, collecting berries and fuelwood in their childhood. Preference was given for properly maintained forests. Beside trend sport activities, young people seem to not visit forests very frequently. Braun (1999) claims that forests therefore are mainly visited by middle-educated older persons with regular working-hours and relatively high income.

On-site surveys ('In-Situ') found that mainly elder visitors with a high educational background seem to visit protected areas, but there is also a larger group of younger persons leading lifestyles

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characterized by a high formal education (Lupp & Konold 2008). It was shown that for these groups, preferences for certain types of landscape were often based on knowledge or experiences made in nature.

Discussion

Looking at Lifestyle Group Concepts, they tend to order people according to stereotypes and assumptions are often idealized. The advantage of these concepts is to provide insights in everyday life and reality of various groups in society. They help to understand people and are useful to establish target-oriented information concepts. More research is necessary on groups characterized by lower education levels. People assigned to these lifestyles cannot be found in nature very frequently, although these groups form a large proportion of society and they claim to be interested in natural experiences in ex-situ interviews. Why is there a distinction between willingness to explore nature as an important tool in environmental education? Is there a difference between answers posted in surveys and real preferences? Do these people agree on trendsetters opinions since these groups are role-models, although personal interests are different?

Conclusion

Looking at the characteristics and values of lifestyles, distribution patterns might change but it does not seem to be very likely that a majority will turn collectively to similar 'green' lifestyles such as those described by Rey & Anderson (2000) or Wenzel et al. (2007). Raising awareness in all lifestyle groups by providing adequate offers and communication for each group seems to be a more adequate strategy. However, it is important to fill the gap of information between posted statements in off-site surveys and actual on-site use and perception of nature. There is a necessity for more on site-data and for certain lifestyle groups.

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