

# Revealed and stated preferences and their determinants for cross-border visits of protected areas in the Polish-German border region

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## Objectives

Since the full opening of the border between Poland and Germany in 2007 in the wake of Poland's accession to the Schengen Treaty, it was to be expected that the shadow effect of the border on tourist activities would abate and that the dividing effect of the border would be restricted to cultural distances (Wachowiak, 1997; Knowles & Matthiessen, 2009). Several million people live close to the nearly 500 km long border between both countries. Large parts of this region are sparsely populated, structurally weak and provide huge potentials for nature-based recreation and tourism in many protected areas of all categories. However, the attractiveness of those parks is not fully recognized by tourism yet.

According to earlier studies, cross-border tourism in the protected areas has only been discovered rarely (e.g. only a share of 1.5% Polish visitors in the German National Park "Unteres Odertal"). Obviously, this national border still constitutes an (especially mental and cultural) barrier for tourism (Dębski & Niemczak, 2014; Kurth et al., 2018). Therefore, the present study examines the barriers to cross-border tourism for the case of protected areas along the Polish-German border between inhabitants of both countries. These protected areas are a suitable object of investigation insofar as the natural prerequisites are comparatively similar on both sides of the border and thus can be neglected as a moderating factor for the travel decision. In our study we compare the revealed and stated preferences for visits of protected areas in the neighboring country.

## Methodology

A representative online survey was conducted in the Polish Voivodships (regions) Zachodniopomorskie and Lubuskie, as well as in eleven bordering German counties (including Berlin) from Vorpommern-Greifswald in the North to Spree-Neiße in the South. 1,312 respondents participated in the survey, 656 in Poland and Germany each. In addition to sociodemographic characteristics, questions were asked in relation to the knowledge about and interest in protected areas in both countries, the travel behavior, the perception of the border and the emotional, cognitive and intentional image attributes of the neighboring country. The prejudice measurement took place in the context of a cognitive context framing inspired by Liebe et al. 2016 to reduce the bias of social desirability. The revealed preferences for visits of protected areas in the neighboring country were operationalized by the self-reported visits of the respondents to a list of 41 protected area destinations in the border region.

In order to measure the stated preferences for visits of protected areas in the neighboring country, the respondents had a simple choice task to answer, in which they should select the preferred protected areas for a hypothetical day- and a weekend-trip in the border region out of the same 41 protected area destinations which were visualized on a map. The purpose is to first investigate the share of protected areas chosen in the neighboring country and second, to analyze the influences on the decision to visit a protected area in the neighboring country.

That is, we tested among other the distance from the place of residence, the protected area category, the familiarity of the protected area, the affinity of respondents to protected areas, the location in Poland or Germany, possibly existing prejudices and other attitudinal and image variables (see Mayer et al., 2018 for details).

## **Main Results and Contributions**

Results show that significantly more Poles visited protected areas in Germany (18.3% of Polish respondents) than the other way around (10.9%). All in all, the respondents' stated preferences for day- and weekend-trips are very similar. Also the stated preferences for visits in protected areas are very similar to the revealed preferences which validates the results of the choice task. The share of chosen protected area destinations in the neighboring country is 16.8% for the day-trips and 20.9% for the weekend-trips.

Similar to the actual park visits, the number of both revealed and stated visits of Polish and German respondents to a protected area are negatively related. Polish respondents have a statistically significantly stronger tendency to choose protected area destinations in Germany both for day- and weekend-trips than the other way around. While 81.3% of day-trip choices of German respondents are directed to domestic protected areas, this is only the case for 69.8% of Polish day-trip choices. In contrast, only 6.4% of day-trip choices of German respondents refer to Polish parks while the Polish respondents indicate 24.5% preferences for a park in the neighboring country (the missing percentages derive from respondents preferring other destinations or abstaining from the hypothetical trip).

The following main drivers of cross-border visitation of Polish and German parks can be identified: Visitors of parks on the other side of the border are younger, have better active and passive language skills of the respective neighboring language, have a higher education level, are relatively more affluent, live closer to the border and are not only more interested in and inclined to travelling abroad but also have indicated a higher number of cross-border trips for leisure reasons. Respondents travelling or willing to travel to the neighboring country for visiting protected areas know more about parks in general, have a better top-of-mind knowledge and aided awareness of both domestic and neighboring parks, visit parks more often and show more travel motives related to parks.

Revealed and stated visitors of protected areas abroad show a lower border perception as well as a significantly lower aggregated barrier effect of the border. In general, they have a more positive affective, cognitive and intentional image leading to a more positive overall image of the neighboring country. Regression models show that combinations of these variables are the best predictors of a destination choice for the neighboring country's parks.

One major difference between revealed and stated preferences for parks is the fact that reported previous visits to protected areas abroad positively influence the probability of choosing such a destination in the future. It also seems that for revealed preferences overall country image and negative prejudices play a smaller role compared to the stated choices (Mayer et al., 2018).

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