

Regional economic impacts of nature-based tourism in Switzerland – the relevance of activities and landscape elements

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Most studies concerning regional economic impacts of tourism treat either the impacts of all types of tourism within a defined region (e.g. federal states, national parks) or of temporally limited events (e.g. Olympic Games). There has been a lack of surveys that deal with the economic impact of specific tourism forms and components of tourism supply respectively, which are less tangible and definable – such as nature tourism in general, or more precisely, specific landscape elements and guests' nature activities. However, such knowledge is important for considerations of the appropriate tourism development of destinations, and prospective destinations, such as protected areas.

We approached the issue of the regional economics of nature tourism in two interrelated studies. The first one analyzed the con-

tribution of *nature-based tourism activities* to the regional economy in two valleys in the Swiss Alps, Simmental and Diemtigtal in the Bernese Oberland [1], [2]. The survey can be seen as an ex-ante-evaluation of the intended regional nature-park in the Diemtigtal. Using the results from 2006 the economic impact of this newly established protected area could be evaluated some years later.

The applied method was a value-added analysis following Job et al. [3], [4].

Interviews with 1 314 tourists were implemented to find out the expenditures in the local economy and which activities were practiced. Furthermore, we used a random sampling of visitors at predefined census points throughout the Simmental and Diemtigtal to obtain information on the number of visitors by activity types such as hiking, cycling or skiing. A subset of the passers-by was asked how long they stayed within the region and, if they were overnight visitors, which accommodation type they had booked.

Data from visitor counting and data from 5 087 flash-interviews were used for estimating the total number of visitors and for weighting the structured interviews according to the percentages of the visitor categories. The interview days were chosen according to sea-

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sonal, weekday and weather criteria, in order to obtain representative data [4].

We compared types of tourism (e.g. overnight visitors vs. day-trippers) and activities with a different degree of infrastructure intensity (e.g. hiking, downhill biking, ski touring, cross country skiing, alpine skiing). One main result is that the economic importance of these activities depends mainly on the respective number of tourists and their chosen accommodation level which determines the spending to a great extent [1].

We concluded that the economic impacts of nature-based tourism are an important contribution to the local/regional economy, but are not to be overestimated. Nevertheless, we were able to reveal potentials for added value [2]: the quality of accommodation and gastronomy should be improved; the possibilities for many nature-based day-trippers to spend money within the region are limited.

The second study is brought to bear on the first study by addressing another feature of nature tourism. We again try to measure the regional economic impact but, in this study, also directly examine the *motives for destination choice*. Is it really nature, which in our case is represented by a specific landscape element (the forest), that motivates a tourist to visit a particular place? Expenditures of guests can be ascribed to this kind of nature tourism if, and only if, forests and their attributes are important for a destination

choice. A conjoint analysis is used to determine the motives for destination choice of tourists in two quite densely wooded areas (Sihlwald near the agglomeration of Zurich, a prospective nature park, and the Bergell valley in the Grisons Alps). Do the aesthetics, products (e.g. mushrooms or berries) or other facets of forests (silence, high quality of air) influence the decision of tourists to visit a particular destination? Or is this decision primarily dominated by factors such as the quality of accommodation and the variety of entertainment and activities? Results of this project will be available in late 2009.

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