

# Protected areas, the tourist bubble and regional economic development

Julius Arnegger, Azerbaijan Tourism Institute, Azerbaijan, julius.arnegger@cimonline.de

## Introduction

Nature-based tourism is nowadays representing an essential part of the global tourism industry. Several scholars recently indicated a tendency for mainstreaming in the sector and suggest that many natural attractions such as protected areas are increasingly drawing the attention of a wide range of different types of tourists (e.g. Weaver and Lawton, 2002). This study evaluates how the presence of a 'tourist bubble' (e.g. Jaakson, 2004) of Fordist/neo-Fordist mass tourist resorts impacts visitation and the economic leverage of tourism in nearby protected areas, drawing on case studies in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (SKBR, Mexico) and the Souss-Massa National Park (SMNP, Morocco).

## Case study areas

The two coastal protected areas are both situated close to the most important beach resort of the respective country: Both Cancun and the 'Riviera Maya' in Mexico as well as Agadir in Morocco are the outcome of tourism strategies implemented in the 1960s with the aim of generating export-based economic growth. The tourist structure in both regions is marked by a strong emphasis on Fordist or neo-Fordist patterns of production and consumption, marketing highly standardized products to large numbers of package tourists. The regional focus on Fordist mass tourism can be expected to have substantial influences on the visitor structure in nearby protected areas, and to cause serious threats to sensible ecosystems.

## Methodology

Standardized face-to-face interviews and visitor counts were realized in each of the two protected areas at selected census points and on various days over a period of several months, so as to reflect seasonal changes in visitation. A total number of 4,736 interviews were conducted. Based on visitor counts, the total number of visitors was extrapolated using adjustment factors for different seasons and the day of the week (for methodology c.f. Mayer et al., 2010).

Different approaches for visitor segmentation were applied with reference to the distinction between types (trip motivations) and forms (patterns of travel arrangements and socio-demographic data) of tourism as suggested by Uriely et al. (2002). E.g., in order to account for the true economic value of protected areas, visitors with high and low protected area affinity were distinguished. The different visitor segments were analyzed with reference to size, structure and regional distribution of tourist expenditures, attitude toward nature protection and spatial behavior. Economic impacts from visitor spending were assessed as follows: First, gross turnover generated by tourist spending was calculated by multiplying mean tourist expenditures in different economic sectors by the number of visitor days.

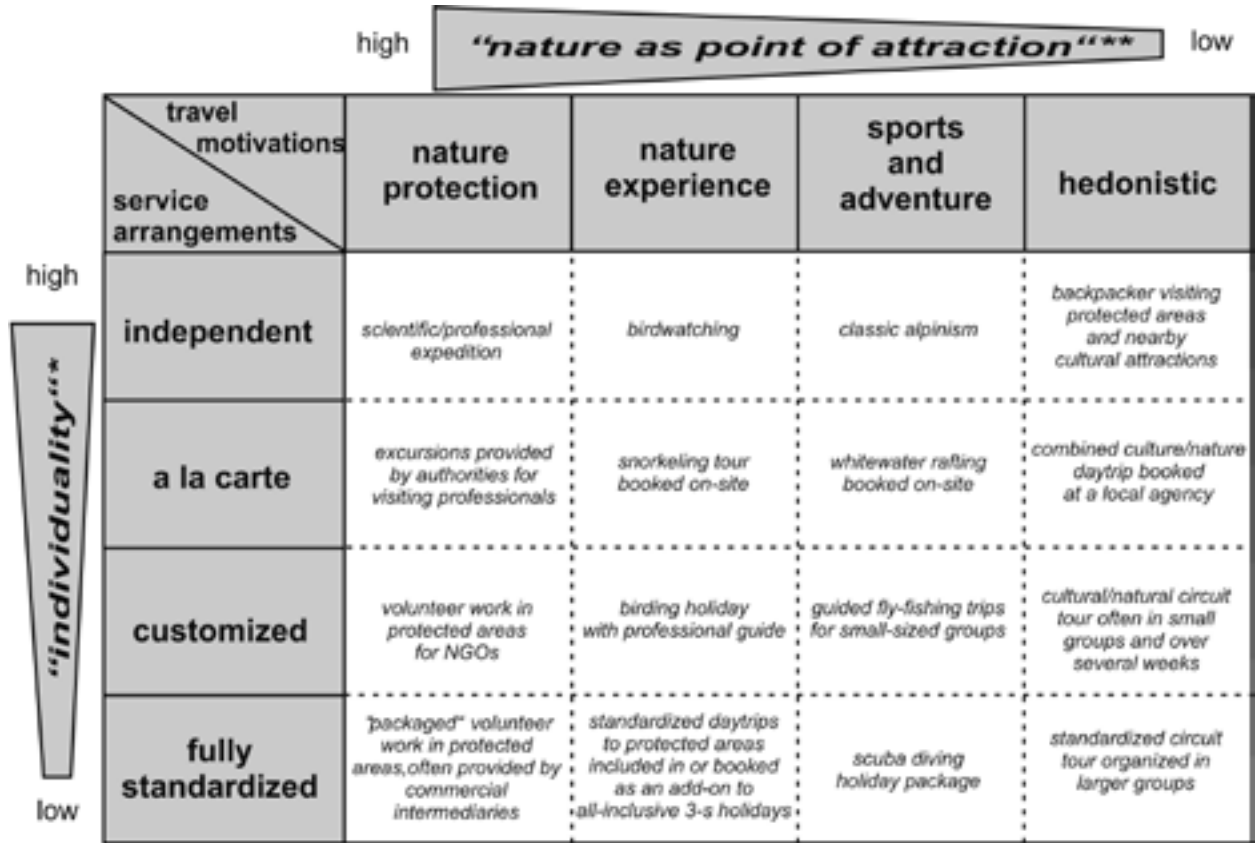
Second, regional income effects were estimated based on income multipliers obtained from regionalized input-output tables.

## Results

Both protected areas can be considered of considerable importance for the regional economy: The total regional income effects of tourism in the SKBR and the SMNP account for USD 1,023,300 and USD 1,867,400 respectively. Accessibility from regional mass tourist resorts has a strong influence on the heterogeneity of the visitor structure. With reference to a classification of tourist demand proposed by Pearce (2008), both SKBR and SMNP are visited by independent, customized and package tourists. Significant differences were found between those groups with regards to spending behavior; e.g., customized tourists, a segment that includes special interest visitors like fly-fishermen or bird-watchers, spend between 52.7 and 79.6 percent more than the average visitor and represent thus a small yet attractive market segment. With regards to visitors' motivations, it was found that in the SKBR as well as in the SMNP tourists with high nature affinity spend, on average, more money than travelers with more indifferent trip motives.

## Conclusions

In both protected areas the visitor structure and its economic and ecological implications are currently not assessed with a socioeconomic monitoring; management decisions regarding tourism development are thus often based on weak or incomplete information. In a deductive approach based on experiences from the two case studies, a conceptual framework is suggested to help protected area managers and regional tourism planners identify core market segments, professionalize visitor management strategies and promote tourism products that are both economically attractive and environmentally sustainable (Arnegger et al., 2010). Incorporating both the supply and demand sides of tourism, a two-dimensional matrix links four different travel motivations to four different degrees of standardization in service arrangements, thus giving a total number of 16 nature-based tourism product types (c.f. figure 1).



\*extent to which service arrangements are booked individually decreases

\*\*relevance of nature for the product decreases

Figure 1. Classification for nature-based tourism based on nature orientation of tourism product types and service arrangement categories (with typical examples). Source: Arnegger et al. (Arnegger et al., 2010).

Arnegger, J., Woltering, M. & Job, H. 2010. Toward a Product-based Typology for Nature-based Tourism. A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 18.

Jaakson, R. 2004. Beyond the Tourist Bubble? Cruiseship Passengers in Port. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31, 44–60.

Mayer, M., Müller, M., Woltering, M., Arnegger, J. & Job, H. 2010. The Economic Impact of Tourism in Six German National Parks. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 97, 73–82.

Pearce, D. 2008. A Needs–Functions Model of Tourism Distribution. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35, 148–168.

Uriely, N., Yonay, Y. & Simchai, D. 2002. Backpacking Experiences: A Type and Form Analysis. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29, 520–538.

Weaver, D. B. & Lawton, L. J. 2002. Overnight Ecotourist Market Segmentation in the Gold Coast Hinterland of Australia. *Journal of Travel Research*, 40, 270–280.