

Maintaining high biodiversity and landscape diversity for and through tourism – approaches for co-financing models

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Introduction

Pristine nature and aesthetical landscapes form the basic fundament for many outdoor recreation destinations. Studies on landscape perception show that tourists have an overall preference for cultural landscapes with great structural richness and traditional agriculture (Schelsky 1996). In Europe, these landscapes often provide a high level of biodiversity. Main threats are the intensification of farming practices as well as the abandonment of agriculture.

Protecting biodiversity and maintaining traditional landscapes are aims closely linked to each other and can be seen within the framework of the Ecosystem services (ES) concept. To sustainably maintain these ES, Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) are more and more under discussion (Wunder 2005). The implementation of such instruments by which ecosystem services – mainly public goods – and the protection of biodiversity can be sustained through linking them successfully to market mechanisms, like the tourist economy, is seen as a major future challenge (Job et al. 2011). Through the internalization of these positive externalities produced by farmers or nature and landscape conservation actors for tourism, the costs can be allocated directly to the users of these common goods and market failures can be compensated (Socher & Tschurtschenthaler 1994).

Regional governance models help to understand successful regional cooperation, especially those dealing with public goods. According to Fürst et al. (2005), the most important factors are (a) the regional or local context, so actors have a common sense of place and feel obliged to participate in its development, as well as to build up (b) effective frameworks of common action which are embedded into the existing institutional system with adequate authorities for decision making.

Existing instruments

Since tourists do not directly pay fees to the farmers for utilizing the landscape, other instruments have been developed and discussed in the past (cp. Socher & Tschurtschenthaler 1994). If the farmer is at the same time a tourism entrepreneur, higher prices for services can include preservation costs. Less direct instruments are subsidies and transfers from the tax payer to the agricultural sector. Each instrument has its pros and cons: for example the latter model also taxes people who never visit the region, whereas the other (farmer as service provider) isn't a practicable mo-

del for all agricultural actors.

In Europe and especially in Germany, financing nature and landscape protection by tourism is not common, but might be a new and widely accepted way. An example for PES can be found in Müntertal (south-west Germany). Traditional farming practices are subsidized by visitors' taxes to maintain the typical scenery of the Southern Black Forest. About one third of the tax (approx. 70 to 90 thousand € per year) are distributed to the local farmers. Generation and distribution of the money and supervision of the management actions are kept in a local context, with actors (e.g. from the distributing institution) having specific knowledge of the local challenges in landscape preservation and often close relationships to the beneficiaries.

Interviews with stakeholders from the tourism sector

Some effort has been made to figure out the tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for nature conservation and landscape preservation, and studies found out, that WTP increases with the relation tourists have with the specific object. For instance, conservation measures on a local scale are more accepted than measures on a broader spatial level, like state or national level (Degenhardt et al. 1998).

Only few studies focused on the internalization instruments for nature and landscape preservation through payments by the tourism industry itself. First interviews with stakeholders from the German biosphere reserve "Südost-Rügen" and nature park "Feldberger Seenlandschaft" showed a high interest for transferring the mentioned eco-tax model also to their destination. Beside these expert interviews, a first explorative empirical study for WTP was conducted in the nature park "Ore Mountains" in spring 2012. The survey included over 70 touristic service providers from different branches like accommodation, gastronomy, information or offers.

Results

An overall majority of the service providers classifies nature and landscape as most important factors for choosing the destination and estimates nature activities (hiking, biking, alpine/nordic skiing, nature observation) as the most sought-after leisure activities of their guests (see Figure 1). The majority also considers conservation areas as vital for tourism development and of high value for touristic attractiveness, such as the conservation of mountain meadows

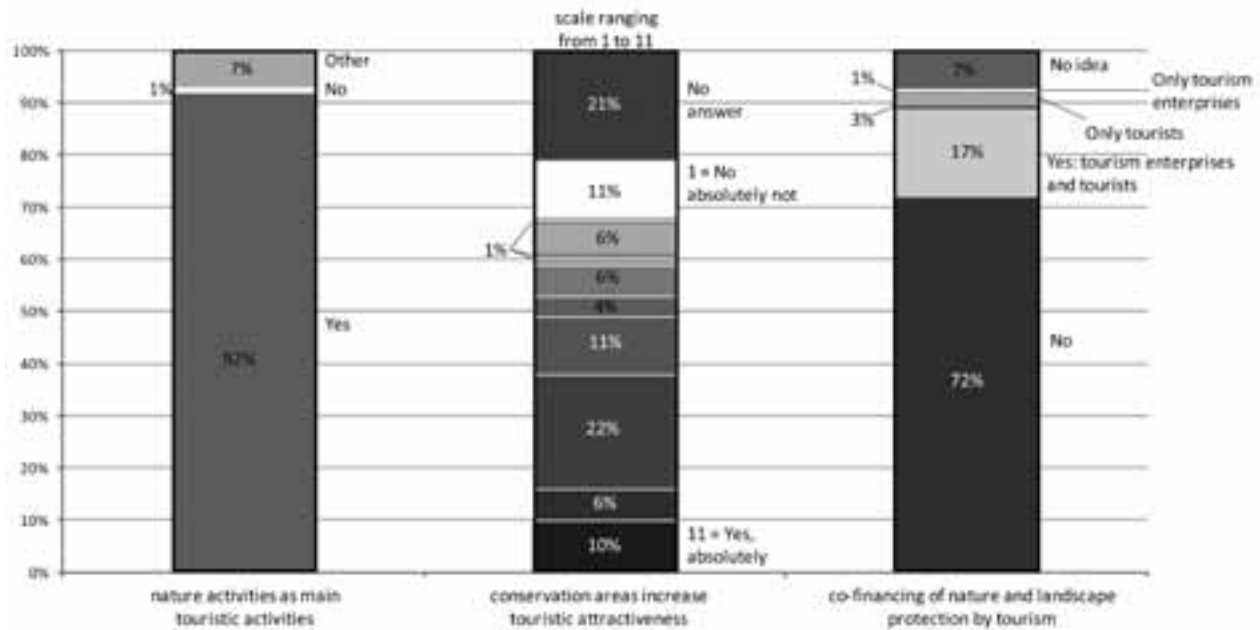


Figure 1. Relevance of nature and landscape for tourism in the Ore Mountains (Germany) and acceptance of co-financing instruments (combination of several survey questions)

or landscape structures typical for the Ore Mountains like stone walls or hedgerows. All interviewees stated a high relevance of landscape protection and management actions to maintain attractive sceneries for recreation. Nevertheless, over two third (72%) of the tourism service providers refused to participate the tourism sector in financing landscape preservation, so the costs remain to agriculture and nature conservation. Only one fifth regarded co-financing as a fair instrument to internalize these costs.

Outlook

In the next steps, we will conduct empirical studies to figure out the acceptance for concepts of touristic payments for ecosystem services (PES) within the study areas “Feldberger Seenlandschaft” and “Südost-Rügen”. The possibilities for transferring the eco-tax model will be evaluated by repeated expert interviews (using the delphi method). Starting from the hypothesis, that tourism service providers and politicians dealing with tourism agree to financially support landscape protection if the benefits for tourism by preserving regional identity can be clearly seen, the advantages and disadvantages of various instruments should be discussed and synergies between landscape protection and the

regional tourism industry will be revealed, e.g. by sustainably strengthening and maintaining the regional touristic unique selling propositions like characteristic agricultural methods and landscapes. Large protected areas in Germany (such as national and nature parks or biosphere reserves) are marketed with slogans like „living responsibility“ or „living in harmony with nature“. If these principles are meant to be more than mere advertising, visitors should see a difference in nature and landscape to non-protected areas.

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