

# Selling nature? – Building customer relationship management (CRM) systems for nature areas

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The Dutch government policy related to biodiversity and nature conservation shows two main trends. The amount of financial support is diminishing drastically in conjunction with a strong decentralization trend away from central government towards the regional level of the provinces. In this changing policy context there is an increased demand for community-based appreciation of ecosystem services to support nature protection. To halt the current loss of biodiversity in the highly urbanized and densely populated Netherlands it is essential to understand the way nature areas and biodiversity are appreciated (Sijtsma et al. 2012a; Sijtsma et al. 2012c). Nature areas are generally seen as public goods, the provision of which is logically in governments hands. However, in the Netherlands, due to the financial crisis less government means are available to support these public goods, fueling a search for new funding and new support by nature conservation organizations. What can nature conservation organizations learn from organizations operating in private markets?

Organisations providing private goods and services face a an enduring trend in society towards individualization (e.g., Hoekstra et al. 1999, Prahalad and Ramaswami 2004), which becomes apparent in consumers becoming more demanding and well-informed, and desiring products and services corresponding exactly to their specific needs. As a result, heterogeneity among individuals increases, which weakens the role of background characteristics such as demographics in consumer behavior. Illustrative in this respect may be the fact that ten years ago, wireless carriers managed three demographic segments, while nowadays they need to manage 20 need- and value-based segments (Day 2011). Organizations that want to be successful in this changing market environment, need to be customer-driven (Franke et al. 2009), requiring capabilities in the fields of market-learning (i.e., learning from – potential – customers, Day 2011), and customer-linking (i.e., creating and managing relationships with customers), based on knowledge of individual customers. Such knowledge is derived from so called CRM systems, that may store data on individual's behavior (e.g., donations, visits, preferences, volunteer work), interactions (contacts through different channels), lifestyle profile etc.

The aim of the paper is show the possible content of a spatially explicit Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for nature areas as a basis for new funding and support strategies. This CRM can be built on the basis of first of all a richer and deeper understanding of the appreciation of nature areas by different people and the spatial structure of this appreciation. Aggregate knowledge of needs and desires (for instance based on market research) is no longer sufficient. Rather, in order to increase stakeholder

appreciation for and involvement with nature areas, decisions about communication with (potential) visitors (e.g., which message, through which channel), about the specific offers to make (e.g. discount on entrance fee, guided tours with limited access) should be based on knowledge of individual needs and individual behavior (Franke et al. 2009). Second, due to different forms of distance decay the location of the different nature areas is important and especially their degree of proximity to urban agglomerations.

In this paper we focus on the Netherlands and the largest private nature conservation organization: Natuurmonumenten. For the appreciation part of the CRM we use among others data from the hotspotmonitor databases ([www.hotspotmonitor.eu](http://www.hotspotmonitor.eu)). The University of Groningen and Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) in cooperation with Alterra have since 2010 successfully cooperated to develop the hotspotmonitor ([www.hotspotmonitor.eu](http://www.hotspotmonitor.eu)) in which, to date, approximately 5000 geo-located respondents have marked specific natural areas in their neighborhoods, their regions, and throughout the Netherlands that they find to be highly attractive. Figure 1 on the left hand side shows the nationally most preferred spots from a survey of 3300 respondents. Analysis indicates that most of the high biodiversity nature areas of the Netherlands are mentioned, which indicates an indisputable correlation between appreciation and biodiversity. The right hand side shows how these preferences differ for scales (local, regional or national) for two example areas (Arnhem and Groningen). The database furthermore contains specific information on the cultural ecosystem services the areas provide for the respondents. Respondents have indicated why they find the place attractive, how often they visit the place and what activities they undertake at this place. Analyses of this information can shed new light on the services provided by specific nature areas.

We first present the general approach and how we used these data in defining a typology of nature areas. In this typology areas differ as to whether they are locally appreciated, regionally appreciated or appreciated on a national scale for instance. Second we present how we classified customers/appreciators of nature areas according to their lifestyle, using an newly developed transparent method. Finally the paper explores how both the typology of nature areas and the refined view of lifestyles could add valuable information to support new customer based management strategies for nature conservation organizations. Key in this will be the creation of online communities around different nature areas. The need to learn from individual customers is enhanced by today's increasingly networked society, in which individuals interact easily with other individuals and with organizations through social networks and other me-

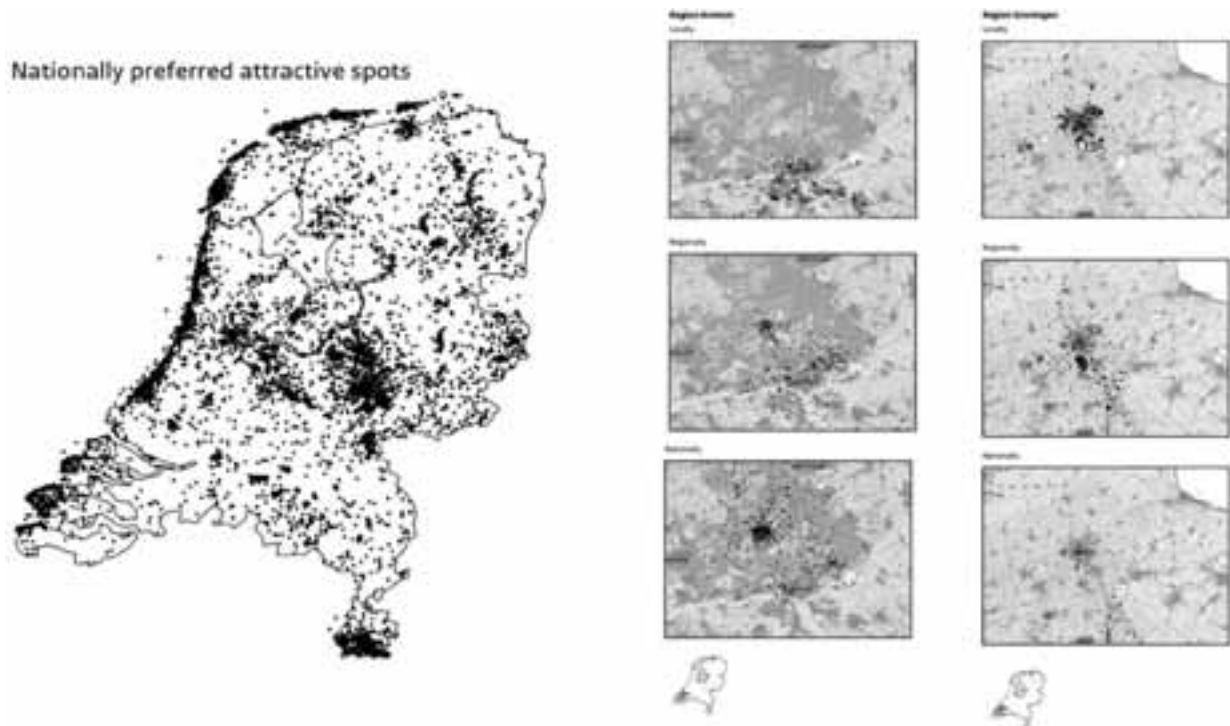


Figure 1. Selected results from the hotspotmonitor database (Sijtsma et al. 2012b)

dia. When these interactions have a brand or firm focus, it is referred to as customer engagement behavior, or 'behavioral manifestations, beyond purchase, that result from motivational drivers'. Examples of customer engagement behaviors are blogging and providing word-of-mouth through Facebook, but also engaging in co-creation activities, volunteer work, collecting donations etc. Such activities, when stimulated and closely monitored and streamlined by nature conservation organizations (Day 2011) may give a powerful tool for new funding and support for nature areas.

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