

Trends in protected area management: Policies and the reality at national parks in Iceland and Japan

Harald Schaller, University of Iceland, Iceland, hjs11@hi.is;

Rannveig Ólafsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland; **Sigurbjörg Sigurgeirsdóttir**, University of Iceland, Iceland

New paradigms and philosophies have influenced international and national frameworks for protected area (PA) management over recent decades, with the role of PAs having evolved to the present situation (Fennell, 2003). Management objectives of many PAs describe their role as balancing the conservation with the need to derive economic benefits from use of the natural environment. Many changes in PA management strategy have aimed to balance both of these objectives. This study looks into the major streams of development of PA management on an international scale within the past 20 years, to follow up on developments since the 1992 Earth Summit, to understand how PA management can meet these two objectives successfully. We explore international regulations and agreements, and published literature on the current trends of PA management to identify good management procedures by comparing the 'theory' behind current PA management trends with, on a regional scale, the 'reality' of actual PA management in two national parks (NPs).

The literature review used published articles within the field of PA management, and international conventions on sustainability, conservation, and public participation, as well as regulations on PA management to identify best practices and public participation (theory) of PA management. For the case studies (practice), two sites were selected according to their similarity in environmental factors, use, and management challenges. The case sites are: the Vatnajökull NP in Iceland and Daisetsuzan NP in Hokkaido, Japan (see Figure 1). We analyzed the Act on the Vatnajökull National Park (no. 60 of March 28, 2007) in Iceland and the Japanese Natural Park Act (no. 47 of June 3, 2009) which are intended to describe the NP governing body, the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process, define the zoning of the NP area for different uses, and specify regulations for the use of resources and management. We examined the extent to which the management philosophies and procedures described are integrated into the reality of the management of the NPs.

The results show a considerable change in the PA management paradigm over the last two decades, with a clear trend from a 'closed' towards an 'integrative' management approach (Fennell, 2003). The establishment of sustainable management systems with regards to tourism builds on the cooperation of many players. Currently, policy makers and the public alike acknowledge that a successful PA management strategy has to be based on the collaboration of stakeholders. In PA management policies, including stakeholders in the decision-making of PA management has been the most prominent development, and has been described as part of modern PA management (Phillips, 2003). The main challenge of integrating the public in the deci-

sion making process remains. Politicians and conservation spokespersons continue to pay "lip-service" to the need for public participation, whilst arguing for it in international agreements by the UN or IUCN. While international institutions are important, they are not without criticism, both from the public and scholars (c.f. Chapin, 2004). They cannot be seen as the only solution to environmental degradation, and strengthening environmental policy will rely on the support of national governments and individual institutions, the participation of the public, and the accountability of PA institutions to stakeholders. However, the involvement of outside organizations is also dangerous, since their interests can dominate those of local stakeholders (ibid). Therefore the need for participatory management has to be rooted in the understanding that sustainable PA management needs a robust decision-making process which is based on the capability for collaboration of all those involved. Participatory management processes are believed to be able to achieve robust decision-making and call for an interdisciplinary and multi-level view (Berkes, 2007). Such view is, however, difficult to achieve. An integrative process has to build upon the consensus among different stakeholders and the willingness to implement majority decision which can conflict with long term goals. Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), as a participatory management process, is seen as one tool to achieve a common understanding of the management situation and to reach consensus, while allowing for the participation of diverse stakeholder groups. LAC is seen critical to achieve the goal of balancing the interests of stakeholders and empower different contributors (McCool and Cole, 1997).

In both case sites, the actual management of the PA seems not to match the standards set by the international agreements and suggested best practice identified in the scholarly literature, and integration of stakeholders into all levels of decision-making processes is lacking. While PA management integrates stakeholders into the decision-making in some form, this takes place at different levels and to different extents. The documents do not define the selection process of board members, and leave the accountability towards the public unclear. Accountability of selected stakeholders and their decision-making practices are important when it comes to the question of good governance and trust by the affected stakeholders. However, reading the documents from the case studies, it still appears 'natural' that the management of government-funded conservation institutions, such as NPs, lies in the hands of selected public representatives.

A previous study revealed that PA management in Iceland and Japan has more similarities with regards to stakeholder opinion and conflict management than expected

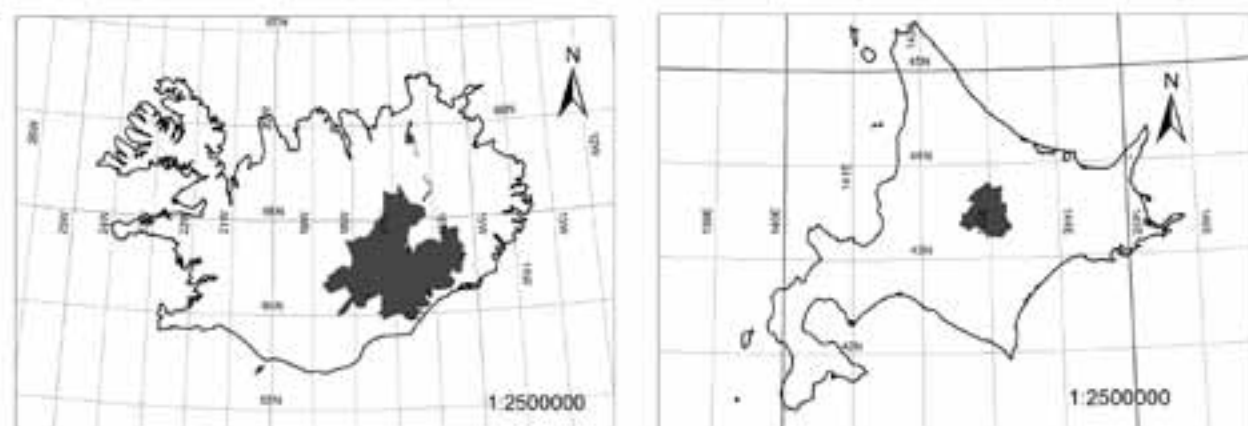


Figure 1. Location of the sites (in dark grey): (a) Iceland – Vatnajökull NP, (b) Hokkaido – Daisetsuzan NP

(Schaller, 2011). This similarity suggests that PA management, although examined in different cultures, is, in general terms, similar, beyond national borders. Hence, we believe that not only do the two case sites have to deal with the same problem of trying to increase participation, but they lack the means of execution. We suggest that participatory management methods, such as LAC, would solve this problem. It would enable PA managers to reach out to stakeholders, integrate them into the decision-making process, and thus enact participation rights as promised by international agreements and regulations, as well as promote sound management decisions and sustainability.

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