

The economics of wilderness – Role of policy and tourism for enhancing the protection of Europe's wilderness

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PAN Parks Foundation (PPF), the European wilderness protection organisation, has recently published *The Economics of Wilderness* (Houdet & Kun 2011). This publication was desirable to develop a better understanding of the economic benefits and costs of wilderness areas to European stakeholders. Indeed, while *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB 2010) reports have successfully mainstreamed concepts such as the economic values of nature and the need for payments for ecosystem services (PES) to support effective protected area (PA) management, tangible mechanisms and tools are needed by PA managers to help them engage with stakeholders to accomplish ecological and financial stability.

Due to the economic crisis governments are cutting their financial contribution to PAs, managers have to look for new, innovative schemes to guarantee protection of wilderness. The managers though face with the great challenge in relation to implementing PES schemes, because the services of wilderness areas in principle are limited to non-extractive use or non-direct use values. Therefore tourism as a non-extractive industry is one of the potential activities, which – if planned with care – can provide income to local communities and generate funding to enhance protection of wilderness PAs.

Developing wilderness policy in Europe

Wilderness protection is a natural phenomenon globally, but it is relatively a new concept in Europe. Nonetheless, there have recently been several policy successes with respect to the protection of Europe's last remaining wilderness areas. A special report on wilderness was adopted in 2009 by a huge majority of the European Parliament. This notably led to the development of an Agenda for Europe's Wilderness and Wild Areas, outlining 24 tangible recommendations. The NGO community then formed a Wilderness Working Group (WWG) in August 2010 to develop a wilderness definition to clarify the interpretation of wilderness in a multicultural continent and prepare a set of criteria for a wilderness register applicable throughout Europe. The WWG finalised this process in April 2012 and agreed that: *Wilderness areas are large unmodified or only slightly modified natural areas, governed by natural processes, without human intervention, infrastructure or permanent habitation, which should be protected and overseen so as to preserve their natural condition and to offer people the opportunity to experience the spiritual quality of nature.* The WWG also set up the minimum size requirement for protected areas being recognised as wilderness at 3,000 hectares.

A presentation of the European Commission representative at a wilderness conference in Brussels in 31 January, suggested that 13% of the Natura 2000 (N2000) network is

managed to protect wilderness attributes. The primary aim of the N2000 network is to guarantee long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. However the comparative mapping analysis of N2000 network and the CDDA database of PAs concluded that wilderness areas may cover only around 4% of N2000. This confusion regarding wilderness coverage in Europe clearly underlines our lack of accurate information and constitutes a real barrier to enhancing European wilderness protection. This in fact highlights why the Message from Prague included clear recommendations to improve the scientific background for wilderness protection in Europe, including mapping of wilderness and linking the societal benefits to wilderness protection. For the sake of this abstract the statement from the European Parliament report is used that only 1% of Europe's land territory remained wilderness.

Tourism benefitting wilderness protection

PPF felt particularly important to highlight why and how tourism as a funding and awareness raising tool might be used in the context of wilderness protected areas in Europe.

But is wilderness a priceless heritage for future generations? Unfortunately it looks as Europeans are not valuing wilderness as much as they should. In addition to their intrinsic spiritual, landscape and biodiversity value, wilderness areas offers benefits for landholders, farmers, communities and society in general. These can be derived through traditional activities such as nature tourism, bringing income and employment. The PAN Parks Tourism Model was introduced 3 years ago in order to link local providers, incoming and international tourism operators for the sake of enhancing the protection of wilderness in Europe.

The tourism model has three major objectives:

1. increasing the income of local communities through a non-extractive activity
2. improving the knowledge of visitors about wilderness in Europe
3. generating non-restricted funding for wilderness PAs as tourism packages include a 30 EUR donation to PAN Parks Foundation

Above all PPF uses its tourism model as one of the tools to implement The Million Project aiming to protect 1 million hectares of wilderness in Europe by 2015 (www.panparks.org/what-we-do/the-million-project).

The best example of the tourism model is the Finnish Wilderness Week, which is a packaged linked to Oulanka PAN Park (PP) and designed by local provider, Basecamp Oulanka. This package is sold by Exodus as international operator on the UK market. On average it generated 250 visitors a year and resulted in roughly 23,000 EUR for pro-



Figure 1. The PAN Parks Tourism Model links local providers, incoming operators, PAN Parks and international operators

jects within the network of PAN Parks. This funding was used in 4 different PAN Parks for the following projects: a) improving the visitor centre of Retezat PP, b) opening a new eco-trail in Rila PP, c) displaying new information boards for visitors in Borjomi PP and d) starting a photo documentary project in Majella PP.

Conclusions

The original projection of the annual income from the tourism model was 300,000 EUR. However after 3 years PPF managed to make a more realistic plan and set a simple goal for the tourism model: to build an effective and mutually beneficial cooperation between PPF and Tourism Businesses in order to allow businesses and their clients to support wilderness protection while clients can experience wilderness and the business can profit.

The implementation of tourism model requires the following:

1. at least 10 destinations where the destination management and marketing are in one hand;
2. at least 4 different types of product: package tours, special interest tours, self-guided tours, and corporate adventures;
3. quality check of local businesses should include environmental and client service elements.

If these are implemented the tourism model can generate 150,000 EUR annually which might be an unrestricted new income for protected areas and a good example of PES.

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