

Visitor Flows in National Parks and other Protected Areas of Serbia: Case Studies of Proper and Improper Practices

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Abstract: The principles of management in the protected natural areas of Serbia are defined by the Environment Protection and National Parks Acts of the Republic of Serbia. Even though these laws were adopted by the Parliament as early as 1991 and 1993, respectively, their implementation is not performed in an equal manner in all the protected areas. According to these laws, the tourism in such areas is not primarily considered as an activity of economic/commercial character, but as one of the environmental principles. It is supposed to contribute to the protection and development of the national parks and nature reserves by promotion and presentation of the natural and cultural values. The role of such tourism in the environmental education of the general public is also of paramount importance.

The Ministries of the Environment and Tourism of the Republic of Serbia have brought in 1998 the Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Protected Natural Areas. On this basis, the Ministry of the Environment has also brought the Action Plan for Sustainable Management of Hunting Grounds and Game Fauna in the Protected Natural Areas. In addition to a brief survey of the above legislation, some case studies are presented of both positive and negative practice in performing the management of the protected natural areas in this respect. The case studies relate to the Nature Reserve „Begej - Carska Bara“ and the National Park „Kopaonik“ as the two extreme examples of the corresponding approaches

INTRODUCTION

The system of management in the national parks and other protected areas in Serbia is defined by the Environmental Protection Act, the accompanying bye-laws and other laws arranging the particular issues (the protection and utilisation of the natural resources – forests, water, soil, planning and arrangement of the space, construction of objects) by the basic management instruments (normatives, plans, institutional – organisational framework, informational – documentational basis and financing).

Starting from the fact:

That the protected natural good is a well-preserved part of nature of especial natural values and features, due to which it possesses permanent environmental, scientific, cultural, educational, health-recreational, touristic and other importance, due to which as a good of general interest it enjoys particular protection;

Also, to follow Basic legal principles of the protection and development of protected areas:

1 Protection, preservation and enhancement

- biogeographical characteristics of the area, the ecosystem and biological diversities

- representative biological, geomorphological, geological, hydrological and landscape characteristics

- cultural heritage;

2 Development:

- scientific research activities
- cultural educational activities
- activities on the presentation and advertising of the natural and cultural values
- tourist, recreational and other development activities within the scope and in a way that will ensure the protection, preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural values of protected areas

3 Improvement and construction must be in line with:

- obligations of protection, and aims of preserving, renewing and enhancing natural and cultural values
- with the needs of presentation, rehabilitation and revitalisation.

4 Activities that could damage the basic and other characteristics of the protected area must be prevented.

One of the most important functions of management by the protected nature is the management of users and visitors. The reports on the state of management as well as performing the activities of protection and development in these areas indicate the need of improving these models

in practice. In this sense, the models from the practice have been chosen illustrating the positive and negative examples of management, with the consequences either of successful protection or the increase of the level of degradation of the protected natural values.

The Action Plan for sustainable tourism in protected areas in Serbia was drawn up having in mind all the key trends in European tourism, the main tourism strategies in Serbia, sustainable tourism actions undertaken at international and national levels and it is of national interests to preserve the values of nature. Its aim is to implement the national tourism and environment protection policies and promote natural heritage while following the framework of the European Charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas.

The strategy of sustainable tourism in protected areas can only be developed and implemented in cooperation with institutions responsible for nature protected areas and environment protection, for tourism, culture, education, with representatives of the tourist industry and other sectors of the economy, local authorities and the local population. Activities have been charged with regularly following the implementation and effects of these activities.

In all the protected natural areas, where there are the touristic and recreational objects, the number of visitors is followed only by the number of overnight stays during the year or the educational groups of schoolchildren and adults.

In the Special Nature Reserve „Stari Begej – Carska Bara,, only the environmental tourism programme is organised and the number of visitors is followed only according to target groups whose transport is organised by a special tourist boat (60 adults or 80 children), accompanied by guides, to the I zone of protection where there are the habitats of the colonies of the Great Gray and Great White Heron. The reserve is suitable for bird watching, with so-called photo-waiting shelters..

Special Nature Reserve "Stari Begej - Carska Bara" (1600 ha) represents the richest site of wetland birds (340 species), fish (24 species) and endangered plants. This reserve is placed on the Ramsar list.

The methodology of following the number of visitors relates to the number of visitors according to the target groups (children or adults) during a month. The active period of the organised visits to the habitats of colonies of the Great White and Great Gray Heron (I zone of protection) lasts from the month of May to November each year.

METHODS

With respect to the fact that the visitors’ management and monitoring in all protected goods in Serbia were directed to the models from the conventional touristic activities, the reliable results on the total number of visitors were not obtained, and in that sense, there is no representative model.

SOME SELECTED RESULTS

Special Nature Reserve "Stari Begej - Carska Bara":

In the following tables the dynamics is shown of the visitors in the period from the year 1996 to 2001, and as an example the motion of the visitors’ numbers in 2000.

month/year	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Total
1996	2120	2960	320	410	1950	1460		9220
1997	2804	3205	252	309	1870	1415		9855
1998	1996	2236	492	350	611	950	50	6685
1999		60	25	290	1018	1055	50	2498
2000	3311	2531	542	775	455	288	51	7953
2001	5170	3303	885	695	896	802		11751
Total								47962

Table 1. Review of dynamics of the visitors (1996-2001)

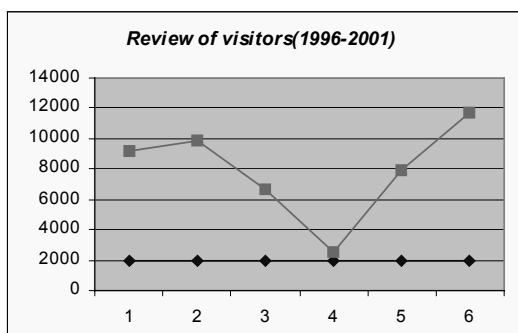


Figure1. Review of visitors per years from 1996 to 2001

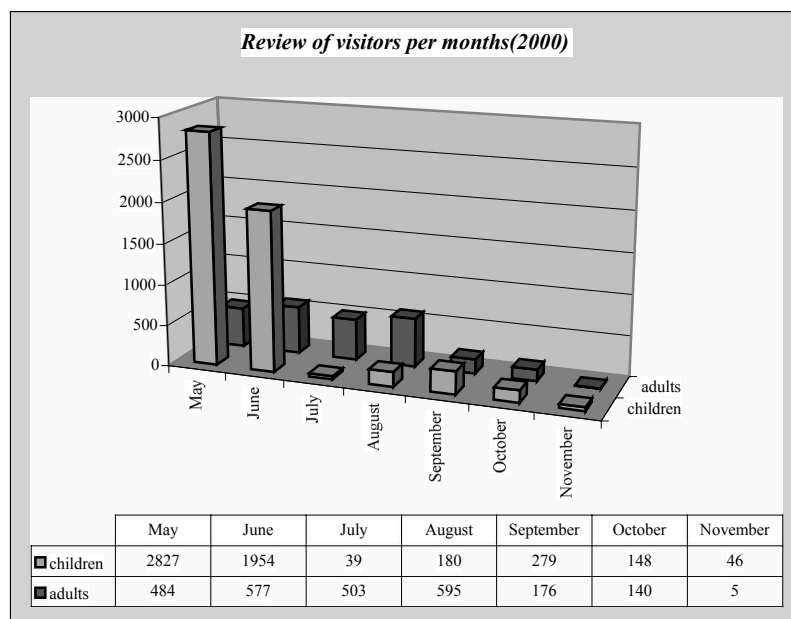


Figure2. with a table of the Review of visitors per months (2000) in Special Nature Reserve "Stari Begej carska Bara" - for example

In the II and III degree of protection zones sport fishing is also allowed with the special permit from the managers. Also, during the summer camps are being organised for the students, and researchers (NGO's) who usually also organise the actions on cleaning the waste from the park. The waste issue is one of the negative effects of the visitors. Also, still a good co-operation has not been established with the local population, since the benefits have not been clearly defined of the limited utilisation of the area.

The Kopaonik National Park:

The Kopaonik National Park was founded and proclaimed in 1981. It covers an area of 11.800 ha and has a protecting belt of 19.986 ha. The Park is placed on the highest parts of the mountain. The highest summit is "Pancicev vrh" (2017 m).

According to the laws of the Republic of Serbia on protection of nature, a large number of objects of nature, natural and man-made objects which can be found in the NP Kopaonik, are singled out and classified according to the different ways of protection.

The following programmes are developed:

- schools in the nature
- excursions - walking encompassing the programmes of environmental education:
 - a) about the nature of Kopaonik
 - b) about flora and fauna
 - c) about minerals and geology
 - d) about ethnography and customs of the locals
 - e) about waters and springs
 - f) orienteering and map reading
 - g) recreation: horse riding, mountain-byke ...

There are some examples of the educational activities within the Park.

Two days visits were organised of students of biology and forestry and Geografy (231). Also there were (160) school children, then (38) members of the Mountaineering association of Yugoslavia who paid the 2 days visit to the NP. Groups of Young Gorans were in the NP in shifts lasting 7 days (68). 90 Young Researches also stayed in the NP in shifts of 7 days.

Within the classical tourism framework, during the 3 winter months there are 72000, and in the summer 10000 overnight stays in the area, which exceeds the carrying capacity of the park and causes the environmental problems.

DISCUSSION

The informative system as a necessary instrument for identification, valorization and monitoring of the particular natural values and cooperation in management has not been established as yet (anticipated in the Programme of Development of the Unified Information System of the Environment of the Government of the Republic of Serbia)

The development functions in the national park and other protected areas have to respect the principles of protection and promotion of the natural values, rarities and phenomena due to which such an area is placed under protection. Achievement of the high level within the system framework implies overcoming the conflicts between the environmental and economic objectives and achieving their harmony. For purpose of performing and respecting a series of legal regulations and rules, the mechanisms have been established of the continuing control and surveillance.

Problems of our Protected areas are:

- building of objects and urban structures above planned levels and their discrepancy with zoning character of the nature protection in national parks
- illegal and inadequate building of Summer houses, temporary objects etc.
- inadequate protection and exploitation of waters
- support to stone mining and similar banned activities
- exaggerated and inadequate tourism development in certain national parks
- lack of coordination among exploiting and conservation activities in forests etc.

The negative effects of the utilisation of the national parks and other protected areas caused by the former way of management indicate the necessity of changing the former concept of management and introduction of the new mechanisms and system solutions, applied to the large extent in the countries of the developed part of the world.

From this also the necessity appeared for a pilot programme to be performed on organising the service of volunteer-monitors in the national parks. The public enterprise „National Park Kopaonik“ dared as the first with this intention, in order to promote the quality of performing all the protection and development functions in the park, especially at the time of the winter tourism. The world experiences show that the best way to overcome the negative effects of the management is to include, in the measures and numbers as high as possible, the local population viz. Volunteers as the people of good will, of different specialities, crafts and interests.

Thus, in the National Park Kopaonik, following the professional training, volunteers – volunteer rangers were chosen, assisting the official surveying service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the members of the EUROPARC Federation, the protected natural areas of Serbia should follow the sustainable tourism concept ("Loving them to death?")

Guidelines for managers of protected areas: Developing sustainable tourism

The aims of sustainable tourism for protected areas:

Environmental aims:

- Conservation in the long term - the essential over-riding aim
- Better knowledge and awareness of conservation among local people and visitors

Social aims:

- Visitor satisfaction and enjoyment
- Improvement of living standards and skills of local people

- Demonstration of alternatives to mass and package tourism and promotion of sustainable tourism everywhere
- Making sustainable tourism part of local and national culture
- Enabling all sectors of society to have the chance to enjoy protected areas

Economic aims:

- Improvement of the local and national economies
- Provision of local business and employment opportunities
- Generation of increased revenue to maintain protected areas

Bear in mind also the carrying capacities for sustainable tourism:

Environmental carrying capacity

The degree to which an ecosystem, habitat or landscape can accommodate the various impacts of tourism and its associated infrastructure without damage being caused or without losing its sense of place.

Cultural and social carrying capacity

The level beyond which tourism developments and visitor numbers adversely affect local communities and their ways of life.

Psychological carrying capacity

The level beyond which the essential qualities that people seek in the protected area (such as peace and quiet, few other people, few signs of human developments) would be damaged by tourism developments.

Action plans of protected areas should be based on the following principles of the Charter of Sustainable Tourism in protected areas:

1. Integrated approach towards tourism management
2. Preservation of resources and open air spaces
3. Development of specific and quality tourism
4. Recruiting new clients
5. Distribution of duties in the preservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage
6. Involvement of the local community
7. Support to the local economy
8. Development of new forms of employment
9. Education on how to behave in line with the preservation of the environment
10. Support to the economy to take into account the environment factor, economic, social and ethical factors.

CONCLUSIONS

1. According to the presented practical examples the system of management of the protected natural areas should be promoted, and in this framework to develop particularly the new methods of monitoring of visitors, including the categories of those who come for longer stay, as well as the day visits and according to the target groups and various programmes. The entrance gates to the national parks are a good possibility to establish control and render the first informations to the visitors.
2. The environmental education programme should be systematically conceptualised and performed, including the management, tourist guides, park surveyors and volunteers who are the key factors of organising, control and informing.
3. Within the process of harmonisation of legislation in the area of environmental protection with the EU legislation, to regulate the criteria and instruments for managing the visitors (legislation, institutional and organisational frameworks, action plans, professional structure, monitoring, financing etc.)
4. Implementation of the Aarhus Convention into the frameworks of the National strategy of education for environmental protection.
5. Grants, subsidies or tax concessions for farmers and local communities to set up small-scale enterprises for the sustainable enjoyment of protected areas.
6. Pioneering Projects should be to show innovative approaches to small-scale sustainable tourism to rural Economies;
7. Government and protected area management authorities should encourage innovative forms of transport, e.g. electrically-driven buses, to enable people to reach and circulate within protected areas in ways that do not harm the environment

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