

How Involvement and Economical Benefits can Change Local Residents' Attitudes of Nature Conservation and Tourism: Karula National Park, Estonia

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Introduction

In case of tourism development in protected areas, local community involvement and benefits from tourism are important issues. Income from tourism has potential to raise local awareness and satisfaction of national parks. Consequently, crowds and traffic can cause negative impacts on the local community (Andereck et al 2005, Tosun 2006). Public involvement in decision making processes in park management and participation in tourism are important aspects to increase resident satisfaction (Fennell 2003). This paper presents an overview of local resident satisfaction of tourism and nature conservation in Karula National Park.

Karula National Park was established in 1993 to protect diverse post-glacial and cultural landscapes in Southern Estonia. Seventy percent of the park is covered by natural landscapes includ-

ing eskers, cupolas, lakes and forests. Cultural landscapes of Karula formed as a result of human activities during hundreds of years and covering 30% of the park's territory. The national park's territory is 111 km² and population is 178.

Methods

In 1998 and 2005 studies were carried out among local residents of their perceptions and satisfaction about the national park's regulation and tourism development. Seventy-seven households live permanently in the area; sixty-six were interviewed in 1998 and 62 in 2005. The working group visited each home and interviewed one representative of each household. The sample was compiled considering equality of gender and proportionality of age. Onsite structured survey was used with a brief follow-up interview. In 2005 also 14 summer residents were investigated.

Table 1: Respondents' assessments of the statements.

	True (%)		Not true (%)		Cannot say (%)	
	1998	2005	1998	2005	1998	2005
Thanks to the existence of Karula national park I have gained economic benefits	16,7	31,6	72,7	60,5	10,6	7,9
I hope to gain economic benefits in the future due to the national park	31,8	44,7	39,4	36,8	28,8	17,1
I am glad to live in Karula national park	53	75,0	4,5	10,5	42,4	13,2
The existence of Karula national park disturbs my daily life	21,2	11,8	75,8	81,6	3	3,9

Results

In both years respondents thought that nature in the national park was worth protection. During the second investigation when the national park was already in existence more respondents hoped to gain economic benefits than during the first study and less people said that the national park disturbs their daily life (table 1). In both studies the main problems were related to forest cutting and building restrictions.

The number of tourism enterprises has grown from 4 in 1998 to 12 in 2005. Entrepreneurs who were operating before the establishment of the national park did not find so much help of the national park's promotion for their businesses as those entrepreneurs who started later.

As residents' attitudes towards the national park got more positive towards visitors their attitudes became more negative (table 2).

Table 2: Is a large amount of visitors a danger to Karula area?

	True (%)		Not true (%)		Cannot say (%)	
	1998	2005	1998	2005	1998	2005
Thanks to the existence of Karula national park I have gained economic benefits	16,7	31,6	72,7	60,5	10,6	7,9
I hope to gain economic benefits in the future due to the national park	31,8	44,7	39,4	36,8	28,8	17,1
I am glad to live in Karula national park	53	75,0	4,5	10,5	42,4	13,2
The existence of Karula national park disturbs my daily life	21,2	11,8	75,8	81,6	3	3,9

There are several reasons for attitude changes in the national park during the two investigations. In the beginning of the establishment of the national park people were sceptical of the national park regulations which were new and caused misunderstanding. After 1998 the national park administration made an effort to inform and involve locals more in the management process. The national park administration helped to clean up some locals' favourite recreation places and provided financial support for maintenance of cultural landscape.

Conclusion

Each year with the increase of visitors, locals have perceived more disturbances by visitors. The study showed that locals who were more involved in tourism were more positive about the national park and less critical towards visitors than those residents who benefited less from tourism. Summer residents were much more negative about vis-

itors than locals because they are mostly in the national park at the same time than visitors and they do not benefit from tourism like many locals do. Despite more negative attitudes towards visitors in 2005 the majority of respondents were positive about tourism development in general and thought that this was an important tool to improve life quality of a local community. Due to involvement and informing process by the national park administration locals' attitudes about national park have become more positive during 7 years; many of them found that the national park does not only mean restrictions but also support for their activities.

References

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