

Approval of Black Forest National Park by local companies

Dominik Rueede, Black Forest National Park, German and dominik.rueede@nlp.bwl.de

Background and Motivation

Besides their character as nature protection sites, National Parks are often expected to have positive outcomes on the economic development of the region they are situated in. So far the main literature is on the economic impact on tourism and mainly concerned with the degree of revenue and employment generated by tourist spending (Mayer & Job 2014). The main industries that are analyzed for such calculations are hospitality and transportation as well as the corresponding downstream industries. Another major concern of nature protection sites is the approval by the local community. Here, the main research is concerned with the degree of approval by the local community and possible explanations for variations in such evaluations as well as managerial implications to shape these evaluations (Oldekop, Holmes, Harris and Evans 2015).

Looking at these two streams of inquiries, namely economic impacts and local approval of a nature protection site, the main interest of this research is a) the amount of approval by local companies and b) explanations for the variation of such approval.

This research contributes to the existing research in multiple ways. First, the analysis is not only related to tourism-specific industries but investigates the whole corporate sector surrounding a protected area. Second, this research is not only limited to financial effects but also covers non-financial effects. Third, the subjects under investigation that provide approval are not the local community but the local corporate sector.

Empirical Site and Method

Situated in Southern Germany and established in 2014, Black Forest National Park is the second-latest of sixteen National Parks in Germany. The local enthusiasm and resistance for the establishment of the Park varied across communities. Not only citizens felt skeptical about the establishment but also voices out of the corporate sector expressed their concerns. Besides the concerns of negative effects on the local logging industry, also a more general concern of “backwardness” was expressed. The fear was that a nature protection project would be at odds with the image of an “innovative region in the digital age” as the local industry wished for to be seen like.

This site specific history pushed the idea to investigate the amount of approval by local companies and possibilities to explain the variation of such approval. In order to develop a meaningful questionnaire and to get access to the local companies, the local Chambers of Industry and Commerce were contacted. Luckily they supported the project and together a questionnaire was developed.

Items were constructed to measure the dependent, independent and moderating variables. The sole dependent variable was “popularity of National Park”. In order to explain the variation of the expressed approval the following independent variables on corporate characteristics were constructed, see content in the bracket for the rationale to include the variable:

- “ecological orientation” (The more ecologically oriented, the more in favor of a nature protection project)

- “business success” (The more business success, the more in a mindset of “National park as an opportunity”)
- “relevance of innovation” (The more innovative, the less in favor of a project associated with concerns of backwardness vs. the more innovative, the more open to a new project)
- “relevance of quality” (The more quality-oriented, the more in favor of the high quality brand ‘National Park’)
- “degree of internationality” (The more international, the more in favor of the international brand ‘National Park’)
- “employee orientation” (The more employee-oriented, the more in favor of an area they can experience after work)
- “benefits from National Park” (The more benefits, the more in favor of the entity responsible for the benefit).

To control for further influencing factors, the following four moderating variables were constructed: “industry”, “size”, “ownership”, proximity” (see Figure 1 for the resulting model).

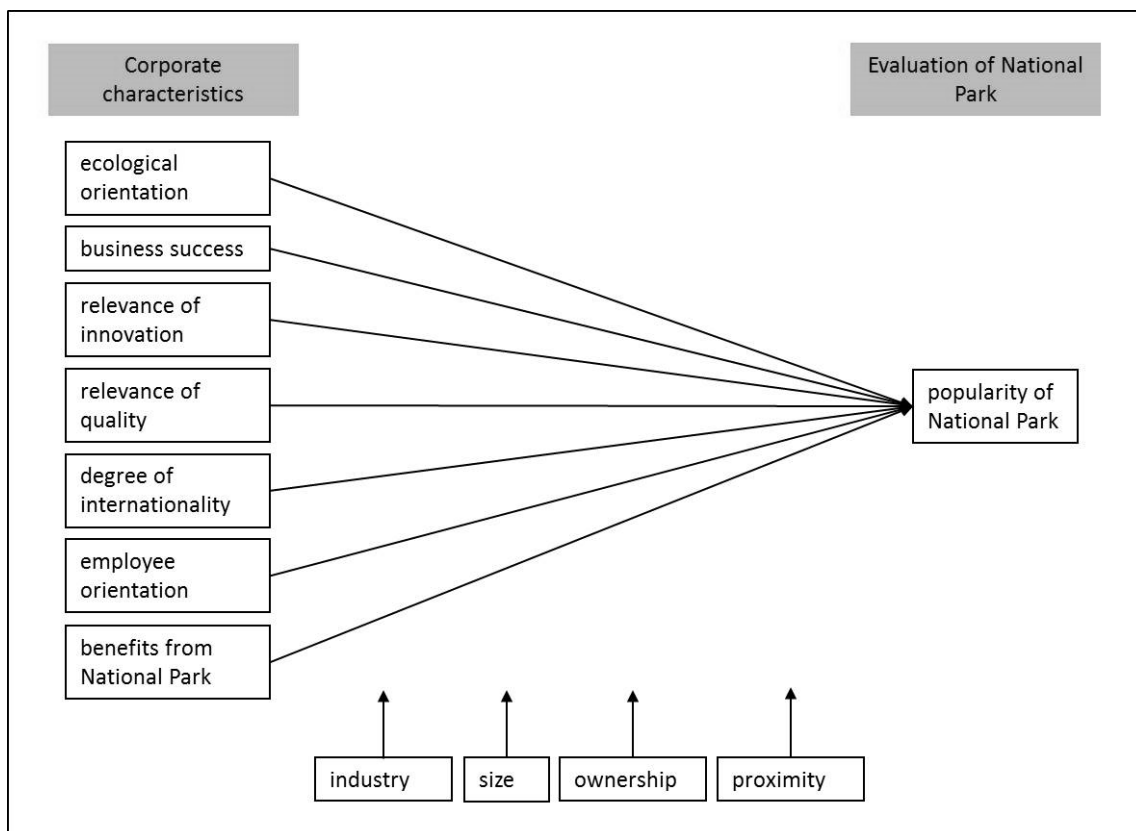


Figure 1: Model of National Park approval by corporate sector

The final online questionnaire was distributed by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce to all companies within a 25km circle around the National Park boundaries that provided an email address and allowed to be contacted. Data collection started end of 2017 and lasted with one reminder until beginning of 2018. In total 3.848 companies were contacted of which 108 replied which yields to a response rate of 2.8 %.

Findings and Discussion

Currently the data analysis is conducted.

As we do not have the results yet, we can not elaborate on theoretical or managerial implications. However we expect that this research contributes in several ways. First, this kind of research lays the ground for a National Park to strengthen the ties with the whole local economy. Such investigations deepen the knowledge about each other and provide opportunities to promote mutual benefitting relationships. For example, corporate volunteering activities of local companies in cooperation with the nature protection site can be an innovative possibility to supplement sole “touristic interactions” with a nature protection site. Secondly, researching beyond sole financial effects provides alternatives to promote and justify nature protection towards the local economy and beyond. In case a protected area is also supported by businesses with desirable characteristics, the protected area is not only justified by increased tourism spending but could also be justified by increased attractiveness for businesses operating in that region.

References

Mayer, M. and Job, H. (2014). The economics of protected areas – a European perspective. *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie*, 58(1), pp.73-97.
Oldekop, J., Holmes, G., Harris, W. and