

BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING ECOTOURISM IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL PARKS IN SLOVAKIA



On behalf of

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This Handbook is realized within the project *Fewer barriers for more benefits in utilising nature* and is supported by a program ACF – Slovakia, which is financed from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021. An administrator of the program is Ekopolis Foundation in partnership with Open Society Foundation Bratislava and Carpathian Foundation.

Executive Summary

This practical handbook was put together by Linking Tourism & Conservation (LT&C) on behalf of Aevis n.o. as part of the project “fewer barriers for more benefits in utilizing nature” funded by EEA Norway grants under the Active Citizens Fund – Slovakia grant programme, to support the project component on “data & research”. The handbook aims to provide stakeholders from Slovakia, specifically from the Poloniny national park, with arguments from different international LT&C examples and the wider LT&C network on how ecotourism can directly benefit conservation in protected areas. Interviews were conducted with key conservation and tourism professionals in the areas of:

- Stakeholder engagement for protected area management,
- Financial mechanisms to support environmental protection,
- Tools for ecotourism product development and
- Visitor services and cooperation schemes.

Main findings include the need to create a joint participatory approach to sustainable ecotourism development within the protected area and the wider destination. Tourism being a possible tool for protected area financing, management and income generation for local communities, supporting already existing local economies and environments through a diversified ecotourism offer. A staged approach to ecotourism development, as part of a multi-land use approach, was described, which is based on a selected

target area in a national park. It was highlighted that a people centered outlook, where ecotourism is seen as an integral part of rural development is crucial. Inventories, baseline assessments and market segmentation form the basis of product development, together with careful planning, consideration of sustainability, health and safety standards and constant monitoring. It was found that tourism and conservation can work hand in hand, but often it requires thinking outside of the box and finding ways that provide benefits for all parties.

The handbook aimed at collecting relevant practices, policies and guidelines in the available scope, to set the base for further cooperation between LT&C, Aevis n.o. and its partners.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

As part of the project “fewer barriers for more benefits in utilizing nature” funded by EEA Norway grants under the Active Citizens Fund – Slovakia grant programme, Linking Tourism and Conservation (LT&C) has been commissioned by the Aevis n.o. to support the project component on “data & research” by developing a practical handbook which provides stakeholders from Slovakia with arguments and international best practice examples from the LT&C network on how tourism can directly benefit conservation in protected areas.

Aim of handbook:

- Present best practice examples of ecotourism and conservation in key areas of concern that are relevant to Slovakia
- Provide practical testimonies and experience
- Highlight approaches, tools and recommendations for Slovakia.

LT&C is a global network of members from the fields of both tourism and conservation, working towards a global complete network of protected areas, for which the organisation profiles so called “LT&C-Examples”, where tourism is leading conservation. For this, LT&C searches and promotes initiatives, projects or businesses globally, that represent an outstanding example of tourism supporting the establishment, management or the further development of (a) protected area(s). The members or partners of LT&C are encouraged to describe such an “LT&C-

Example” in detail, with the aim to share knowledge that makes replication at (an)other protected area(s) possible. Thereby the importance lies on showcasing examples that provide either financial or political support to a protected area or facilitate educational activities.

As part of the cooperation and in order to provide an understanding of the destination and the challenges faced by the Aevis n.o. and their partners, a 5-day study tour to Slovakia was organised for LT&C in September 2019, visiting the Poloniny National Park, Slovak Paradise National Park, Tatra National Park and Poľana protected landscape area and respective stakeholders from public and private sector. Based on the guided visits, interviews, discussions and participation in the inception workshop in Zvolen, jointly with the local stakeholders, LT&C members were able to identify the main key areas of concern for ecotourism development in the protected areas, which needed to be addressed in this handbook.

The best practices of this handbook were selected based on the experience of LT&C in Slovakia. Relevant LT&C members, partners and other contacts were subsequently contacted, to present examples that are of relevance for Slovak partners. Each of the following chapters and the highlighted case studies aim to be as relevant as possible for Slovak partners. However, the feasibility can only be judged by Slovak partners themselves, as LT&C has only a limited understanding of all the problems and opportunities in the Slovak areas of concern.

CURRENT TOURISM TRENDS OF RELEVANCE FOR PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

Nature-based travel

The tourism industry has been estimated to account for about 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide (WTTC, 2019). And within the sector nature-based tourism, including wildlife watching and outdoor recreation, often in protected areas, has been gaining the most popularity amongst travellers all over the world since the 1990s (Balmford, Beresford, Green, et al. 2009). Whereas in more recent years it has picked up momentum due to increasing rediscovered public awareness of our natural surroundings and our role within global ecosystems.

These statistics underline widespread recognition that nature-based tourism is indeed capable of generating substantial resources for both conservation and local economic development (Chen & Prebensen, 2017; Gössling, 1999; Boo, 1990). It is predicted that nature-based tourism is going to continue growing in its many forms (Balmford, Beresford, Green, et al. 2009). Some of these are thought of being especially relevant not just in the coming years, but for this handbook (UNWTO, 2019).

Climate aware travel

According to the World Meteorological Organisation (2019), 2019 recorded the highest concentration of carbon dioxide in

the atmosphere since three million years, with increasingly severe impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures, more extreme weather, water stress, sea level rise and disruption to marine and land ecosystems.

International tourist arrivals have reached 1,4 billion in 2019, the number of international air passengers is 130% higher than in 2004 (WTM, 2019). Transport accounting for 75% of emissions related to tourism. With its close connection to the environment and climate itself, tourism is a highly climate-sensitive sector (Cabrin, 2019). In the climate change debate, tourism is victim and offender at the same time. Destinations around the world are gathering data on the implications of climate change for their business (New Zealand recognizing the threat of environmental impact of travel on its industry (1 News, 2019)), experiencing first-hand the increasing negative effects that natural disasters can have on destinations (flooding in Venice, bush fires in Western Australia).

With the science and noticeable growing impacts of climate change comes an increasing global awareness of climate change and through activists such as Greta Thunberg, the perception and needs of travellers has shifted towards climate friendly holidays. Ecotourism is naturally a part of tourism that is in line with this mindset. Especially remote natural areas and wildlife experiences are attracting travellers that have become aware of the fragile ecosystems affected by climate change, or those who would like to escape modern routines to reconnect with nature

(Joyner, Lackey, & Bricker, 2018; Weaver, 2008). These, often young, emerging markets offer great opportunities for new (eco)destinations and innovative products in protected areas. Increasingly, many travellers choose alternative modes of transportation over flying (flight shame¹), giving lesser known, remote and niche destinations a platform to attract visitors that search for new experiences on their own “doorstep”. Flight free movements like the one from the UK, aim to collect 100,000 flight-free pledges for 2020 (4.819 signatories in December 2019²) and show that although it is a tiny fraction of the market, there is a dedicated, growing part of Western society that is willing to take radical steps that will shape the future of the industry.

This growing green movement also adds popularity to climate-neutral trips, which seek to offset travel related carbon into climate action projects across the globe. One solution developed for climate aware (tourism) companies is offered by LT&C’s partner South Pole, which helps businesses (and individuals) to offset carbon emissions and become climate neutral. This concept can be especially interesting for protected areas, where trips can be offset through conservation projects within its core zones (Brown et al., 2000; Marchetti et al., 2012).

[South Pole help to realise decarbonisation pathways across industries](#)

¹ Comes from the Swedish word ‘Flygskam’ and is an environmental movement which encourages people to stop taking flights

² www.flightfree.co.uk

Successful protected areas carbon sequestration projects:

[WWF: Rewetting and reforestation in Sebangau National Park, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, 2015-2018](#)

[REDD: Noel Kempff Mercado Climate Action Project](#)

Tourism providers and offers such as Katzensprung, a German travel company specialized in small distance, climate-friendly unique holiday trips (also in protected areas) are gaining popularity.³ The world’s first hotel charging it’s guests based on their carbon emissions will open its doors in 2022 in Finland.⁴ Travel media is also adapting to the trend, with the Funke media group, a large German publishing house, issuing a magazine for sustainable travel “natürlich Reisen”, which is distributed with a print run of currently 250,000 in three regions of Germany, focusing on an educated, travel-loving, affluent part of German society that is conscious about sustainable travel.⁵

Transformative Travel

A looming climate crisis, political turmoil or security risks in several destinations and the increasing competition of destinations, shapes a traveller who has the need for holiday experiences that have a transformative character. Skift (2018) defines transformative travel as “any travel experience that empowers people to make

³ <https://www.katzensprung-deutschland.de/>

⁴ <http://arcticblueresort.com/>

⁵ <https://www.mediaimpact.de/data/uploads/2019/01/Nat%C3%BCrlich-Reisen-2019.pdf>

meaningful, lasting changes in their lives, whether big or small” and sees it as one of tourism’s mega trends.⁶ The positive change can either affect the destination, people within it, or the visitor. Travellers are seeking experiences that can fundamentally change them as a form of self-actualization. Such experiences may include community work trips, yoga retreats or volunteering.

Spartan holidays, pairing digital detox holidays with minimalist living, seek to help visitors to escape their modern daily routine and free themselves from technology and related stress, reconnecting to themselves and others. This is reflected in current accommodation trends such as micro hotels and companies like Fuselage⁷, Unyoked⁸ and Vipp Shelter⁹, offering small accommodations in a natural setting. Protected areas especially benefit from the low environmental impact and large economic and social benefits such products can have on the destination.

Closely related to transformative experiences is the trend of slow travel, where travellers want to experience remote, local and niche destinations, where they can fully emerge into local culture, cuisine, traditions and lifestyle on the search for “unscripted moments”. Destinations are especially valued for their rich culture and

remoteness, as well as their picturesque beauty thus compatibility to social media.

Rural Tourism Development

Rural tourism is of great importance to protected areas, which are often found in rural settings, as it provides direct benefits to the livelihoods of local communities and strengthens their sources of income related to tourism. It is also a way to diversify ecotourism and generate a network of providers outside of the core areas of the protected area to reduce pressure and create more experiences for visitors. UNTWO is declaring 2020 as the international year for rural tourism development¹⁰ and certain destinations, such as Albania are receiving substantial donor-funding to develop income opportunities and create jobs related to authentic agricultural products, rural experiences and agritourism. The first Slow Food villages have been launched in Carinthia¹¹, the first Albanian Slow Food tourism products are developed in the mountain regions in the North of country, with the support of the Italian development cooperation (Italy being a pioneer and successful case study for agritourism, with 23.000 agritourism providers in the country, 12 million guests and 1,3 billion in revenues) (Maccari, 2019).

⁶ A survey conducted by Skift in 2017 found 54 percent of respondents ranked the importance of transformative travel as 7 out of 10 or higher and 52 percent said they place increasing value on this type of travel.

⁷ <https://treetents.co.uk/products/fuselage/>

⁸ <https://www.unyoked.co/>

⁹ <https://vipp.com/en/hotel/vipp-shelter>

¹⁰ <https://iica.int/en/press/news/world-tourism-organization-and-iica-strengthen-rural-tourism-latin-america-and-caribbean>

¹¹ <https://www.slowfood.com/back-to-the-villages-the-worlds-first-slow-food-villages-launched-in-carinthia/>

Astrotourism

With growing cities and a growing population, 80% of the Earth's land mass suffers from light pollution, which affects 99% of people in Europe. Thus, a growing trend since 2001 is astrotourism, harnessing the last outposts of dark sky areas. The International Dark Sky Association launched the International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) Program to encourage communities, parks and protected areas to adapt responsible lighting policies and education to safeguard dark sites around the world. They offer an international seal to places that fit the guidelines. Guided tours, courses and themed accommodations can bring the visitor closer to a part of our history that has been lost in our daily lives. Some products related to astrotourism might be: observatories, astro-experiences, such as stellar-tours, a starry-yurt stay or stargazing hotels.

Additional Material

[International Dark Sky Park Program Guidelines](#)

[International Dark Sky Association website](#)

Social Media and Instagrammability

Social media is broadly used by DMOs for destination marketing and has become an important inspiration source to the consumer. A survey by home insurance company Schofields Insurance for instance asked over 1000 UK millennials (adults between 18 and 33) what was most important when choosing a holiday destination. Two fifth answered it was most important to them "how 'Instagrammable'¹² the holiday will be (40.1%) (Hosie, 2017). Other studies show that Social Return¹³ seems to be strongly related to the intention to travel to a destination and social media can induce travellers' behavioural changes (Boley, Jordan, Kline, & Knollenberg, 2018; Chung & Han, 2017).



Photo 1: Example of Instagrammable natural setting, Source: Instagram

¹² *Lending itself to being photographed and posted on social media; photogenic; attractively wholesome*

¹³ *Social Return, in this case, means the amount of positive social feedback that one's social media posts of travel generate*



Photo 2: Examples of instagrammable places posted by popular travel influencers, Source: Instagram

On the other hand, DMOs use social media as marketing tool, due to the fact that nowadays social media validates as digital word of mouth for the traveller and has influence on the perceived image of the destination (Bokunewicz & Shulman, 2017; Reza Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Yaghoubi Manzari, 2012; Roque & Raposo, 2016).



Photo 3: Australian tourism board promoting its protected areas with unique content, Source: Instagram

There also have been voices against destination marketing through social media. A study by Siegel & Scarles (2019) explores the destination response of the Tourist Board of Vienna according to their “anti-hashtag” marketing campaign which aims at encouraging visitors to go offline while traveling in the city, which has experienced a positive response. Another study by Huang & Sun (2019) uses social media as a type of “surveillance” for inappropriate behaviour in the Yushan National Park, Taiwan. Improper behaviour triggered overall positive response, which begs the question if this again encourages this type of behaviour in future visitors.

Essentially, the relationship between DMOs of emerging destinations and Influencers is vital and must be considered with care (Gon, Pechlaner, & Marangon, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2019)

[Additional Reading](#)

[CBI \(2019\), Which trends offer opportunities or pose threats on the European outbound market?](#)

[ETFI \(2019\), Tourism and Nature: Key Market Trends and Important Implications for SMEs](#)

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this handbook was based on desk research and qualitative interviews, held with a series of LT&C members, or partners from the network. The authors identified suitable interview candidates from the LT&C membership base and the LT&C example pool, based on the topics of importance of this handbook. Additionally, research was done to identify suitable candidates outside of the network who would complement certain aspects.

The choice of examples was also influenced by geographical/destination relevance, as the authors tried to pick comparable protected area destinations, which provide realistic learning experiences for Slovakia. Although the focus was on studying examples that are geographically close to Slovakia and comparable, some examples from other parts of the world were chosen due to the exhibition of very concrete comparable elements, which can provide tools, guidance and inspiration for Aevis n.o. and their partners.

A total of 22 individuals were contacted. After initial email conversation, the authors held phone interviews with a total of 11. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour and were recorded with the interviewees' permission. Based on the results, case studies were formulated as the basis of this report.

ECOTOURISM BEST PRACTICES SUPPORTING NATIONAL PARKS

Overview of case studies

Case Study	Destination	Summary	Page
Stakeholder Engagement			
Triglav National Park	Slovenia	Multi-stakeholder approach steered by a neutral coordinator for a dynamic regional management structure	11-12
Soomaa	Soomaa National Park, Estonia	Public-private partnership in support of national park	12-13
Soča Valley DMO	Slovenia	DMO and national park partnership	14-15
Financial Mechanisms			
Costa Rica	Costa Rica	Costa Rica's pioneering Payment for Ecosystem Services Programme	16-18
Torres del Paine Legacy Fund	Torres del Paine National Park, Chile	Legacy fund established in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park	19-20
Products			
Soomaa	Soomaa National Park, Estonia	Product development in line with environment, seasons and target audience	21-22
Ecotur	Abruzzo National Park, Italy	Tour company based on model of coexistence with large carnivores	23
Tree Top Walks of the Erlebnis Akademie AG	Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Austria	Platform for environmental education and job creation in synergy with protected areas	24-25
Certification			
Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Destination Program	Jackson hole ski area and Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, US	National park destination with a Sustainable Destination Program working towards certification in line with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	28-30
Visitor Services			
Schutzstation Wattenmeer e.V.	Wadden Sea National Park, Germany	Approach to conservation through education	31
Regio-Ranger®	Several Protected areas, Germany	Model of strengthening the position of rangers/nature guides	32-33

CHAPTER 1: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

The secret and stable base of success of most of the LT&C examples is the level of stakeholder commitment, ownership and collaboration towards achieving a common vision. In view of the challenges that Aevis n.o. are facing in terms of bringing foresters and conservationists at one table and setting the base for a sustainable use of national parks, the examples provided in this section of the report show how collaboration is key to support and help developing effectively protected national parks on a local and national level by working within an agreed agenda with a common goal.

Overall, all protected areas which are to be utilized for tourism need a plan that describes how tourism and associated development will be managed (IUCN, 2002). A management plan represents the desired future state or condition of the protected area and the most efficient and justifiable path to achieve it. The plan outlines the specific goals and objectives mandated for the area in its founding legislation, decree or government policy, explains the objectives for tourism development, and specifies the management actions, budgeting, financing and park zoning needed to achieve those goals. A crucial component in designing a planning process is to adopt a procedure that is understandable, valid and transparent. But most importantly, a

participatory multi-stakeholder planning approach needs to be adopted, involving concerned local populations, visitors, private sector, park authority and scientists in the process of developing the plan. The IUCN (2002) set out a series of guidelines for successful planning, being:

- Clarity in plan production,
- Implementation oriented,
- Socially acceptable,
- Mutual learning oriented,
- Responsibility and shared ownership,
- Representative of wide interests,
- Relationship building oriented.

As an important exercise when starting the management planning process of protected area management is to undertake a stakeholder assessment and to evaluate the degree to which the parties are to be involved in the planning process and how the process is to be governed and by which parties (Annex 1: Stakeholder map).

Different approaches for management planning for protected areas exist, but of importance is the fact that they are timely, adaptable and evidence based. As a rule of thumb and especially in the days of overtourism quickly affecting protected areas, a proactive approach needs to be taken rather than a reactive one.

A report by CEETO (2018) assessed the coordination of ecotourism in six partner countries (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia, Germany and Italy). The report further outlines a collection of

methodologies used to monitor visitor flows and to enable strategic decision making, which can be of use for stakeholders in Slovakia as well. The methods mentioned range from GPS, surveys, interviews, social media, over to geotagging to map visitor flows and gain insights into preferences of visitors. Ultimately taking into account carrying capacity of the natural environment and experience for visitors. These exercises help to assess risks, designate management zones and areas of conflict and introduce indicators and standards, together with specific management actions (CEETO, 2018).

The following case studies outline the success story of how a multi-stakeholder approach steered by a neutral coordinator brought about a dynamic management structure and how different models of public-private and DMO partnerships can support protected area planning.

Triglav National Park engaged in regional cooperation for a destination strategy



Map 1: Triglav National Park in context, Credits: Triglav NP

Overview

- Only national park in Slovenia
- Established in its current form in 1981
- 83.982 ha/840 km² (4% of Slovenia), 2.337 residents (Jan 2018)
- Part of biosphere reserve Julian Alps: 3.5 million overnight stays in 2018, 1 million visitors per year (approximate numbers)
- Seasonal tourism
- 20% is state-owned, the rest private



Photo 4: Soca River. Source: Triglav National Park

Triglav NP is managed through the Slovenian Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. There are no entrance fees collected by the national park management. Instead, different fees to tourism sites apply that are managed by local communities. The wider Julian Alps destination (which includes Triglav NP) has seen tremendous visitor growth over the past ten years, overnight stays have doubled in Slovenia and there have been effects on all areas of life for the local population within the national park, in terms of traffic, trash and environment. Villages in the national parks face problems related to rapid tourism growth, such as real estate prices going up and foreign investors coming in as tourism numbers climb. There is also a demographic decrease, as locals are leaving the area. Additionally, logging in Slovenia increases

due to the bark beetle, which is treated as natural disaster allowing foresters to intervene.

According to the National Park, it is a great challenge to address the current problems in the next 5-10 years. Rapid, uncontrolled tourism growth is a problem that concerns all stakeholders at the destination.

Regional Cooperation approach

In order to tackle the challenges through an inclusive approach, working together with DMOs, municipalities, national park authorities and others, a common destination strategy for the Julian Alps was developed, with the mission to:

- SUCCESSFULLY COPE with balancing nature and culture conservation and tourism development
- WORK TOGETHER ON DEVELOPING the sustainable tourism offer,
- ACHIEVE higher VISIBILITY and COMPETITIVENESS

The development plan is built around: Sustainability Objectives, Management Objectives and Marketing Objectives. In a joint approach, 6 product areas were identified: hiking and winter sports avoiding quiet zones, events/festivals, gastronomy, (fly) fishing and cycling. It was also decided that apart from these product areas, sustainable mobility and joint marketing should also be tackled. Importantly the involvement of inhabitants in the implementation of plans was key.

Results

- Ongoing stakeholder cooperation model through association of Julian Alps: non formal association (created in 90s). Since 2015 has gained strength when the development plan was introduced.
- Based on the joint tourism products, a long-distance trail "Juliana Trail" was developed.
- The development plan is seen as a process. In 2020 this document will be remodelled by the tourism stakeholders and with the help of municipalities and the regional development agencies.
- Will be updated on basis of workshops, help of associations, and municipalities, involving experts as consultant/mediator.
- Social and environmental carrying capacity is partly included in the document for specific destinations.
- Slovenia Green¹⁴: certification adds value and sets tourist providers apart, was awarded to Triglav National Park.
- Reducing plastic: started by the Ministry of Environment; action plan turned into a long-term process to eliminate plastic as much as possible or totally; tourism is an appropriate place to start from, since it affects all aspects of life in Slovenia; it is seen as a trend to follow if destinations want to succeed and be set apart; Schools will be involved in 2020.

¹⁴ <https://www.slovenia.info/en/business/green-scheme-of-slovenian-tourism>

LT&C-Example: Soomaa - A tour operator with influence



Photo 5: Aspen Longboats in Soomaa National Park by Aivar Ruukel

Overview

- One of 5 National Parks in Estonia
- Size: 390km²
- About 25 cooperating tourism businesses operating in Soomaa NP
- Small local population

Soomaa belongs to the previous PAN Parks and the Natura 2000 networks, is a Ramsar site of protected wetland and an important bird area occupied by forests and meadows and is located in the south-west of the country. It is home to black grouse, many owls, elk, deer, wild boar, lynx, wolf, bear and beavers. Soomaa NP's human settlement date back to the Stone Age and a special tradition is continued with the building of aspen logboats, a skill still to be learned in Soomaa. Estonian National Parks consist of mostly privately owned and managed land, and also, but not necessarily, state-owned land. Visitation is not limited.

¹⁵ The successful PAN certification elevated Soomaa towards international awareness and recognition and

1993, Soomaa, a tourism operator in Soomaa NP was established. Due to a joined effort of the Soomaa National Park authority, tourism operators and journalists, first international visitors were attracted. An organisation, within the Estonian Ministry of Environment implemented and still manages the touristic infrastructure, such as trails, signposting and the visitor centre.

Soomaa NP Cooperation Model

The Ministry of Environment takes care of planning and development within all 5 NPs in Estonia and the National Tourism Board oversees marketing activities. There is a positive correlation between Soomaa, the NP and governmental efforts. The government profits from incoming tourists and visibility, and Soomaa, as a business, profits from the infrastructure and tourism development within the NP for attracting more visitors, whereas the NP profits from regulated planning and monitoring activities from the government and conservation efforts and the creation of environmental awareness from Soomaa.

A cross-sector approach of the regional nature conservation office (State Nature Conservation Centre/ Environmental Board), the county governments of local municipalities, several NGOs, and tourism entrepreneurs, implemented a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (STDS) aimed to set a strong base for achieving PAN certification¹⁵ at the time (Tooman & Ruukel, 2012). All tourism stakeholders

brought visible positive changes and higher visitor numbers to the destination.

have agreed on a shared vision and development goals and planned joint steps to achieve them.

Four ecotourism aims for tourism development in Soomaa:

- Environmental aim - Soomaa tourism supports the objectives of nature conservation in Soomaa NP and does not harm the natural environment of the Soomaa tourism region;
- Economic aim - tourism supports local livelihood with job creation and entrepreneurship and supports the sustainability of traditional businesses;
- Social aim - tourism supports the welfare of the local community and preservation of local way of life and does not harm the social environment of the area;
- Tourism development aim - Soomaa tourism products and services have an outstanding quality, and the tourism entrepreneurs are competitive and sustainable.

To represent the interests of all stakeholders, the Soomaa Cooperation Panel coordinates activities of state organisations, NGOs and entrepreneurs and supervises sustainable development in the Soomaa area. The panel meets four or more times per year and makes suggestions on how to solve problems and face challenges.

Success story: Logging in Estonia and preventative measures

The logging industry puts a huge pressure on protected areas of Estonia. Since 2014 Soomaa is part of a local group in the NP, which actively participates in the dialogue and campaign for better forest conservation. As a result of this campaign, the protection regime of some state-owned floodplain forests has been changed and planned logging inside the national park was cancelled.

Cooperation model at regional level between DMOs and National Park Authorities – Soča Valley perspective



Photo 6: Soca valley website, Source: www.soca-valley.com

Overview

- Soča Valley located in the west of Triglav National Park, close to Italian border
- Famous for activities on the river Soča: fly-fishing, kayaking and rafting
- Soča Valley DMO, one of 7 DMOs in the park, established in 2017
- Involves 3 municipalities within Soča Valley
- 4 tourism information centers (TIC) in the Valley
- Tourism growth of 20-25% per year
- 2/3 of service providers new

The Soča Valley DMO is different to other DMOs in Slovenia, in the sense that it was created out of a merger of two local tourism organisations and encompasses three municipalities which decided to build a common destination. The process of the municipalities agreeing on a common approach to tourism took nearly twenty years, with mistrust and competitive thinking having to be overcome. But now, stakeholders are very optimistic and see the DMO as enabling them to yield results and better negotiation power, e.g. towards national organisations.

Early on, the Soča Valley DMO started working on creating its own income streams to be less dependent on local community budgets:

- 35-40% of budget from local communities,
- 10% international calls, EU funds,
- More than half of the budget is generated through management of its own sites and products, e.g. booking center for the Alpe Adria hiking trail and local sites (memorial church and gorges),
- Reservation system and small commission (10%) via its website (which is very frequented and brings together the 800 or 1000 service providers in the valley and helps make them less dependent of large international booking platforms).

Cooperation with National Park

Soča Valley DMO works very closely with Triglav National Park. There were times under different management, when both organizations were at opposing sides, the national park seeing tourism as a threat, but by now there is a common vision. The touristic sites, like the memorial church and gorge are within the National Park. All touristic activities are planned together with the park to fulfil requirements. Based on first overtourism observations in peak season, a carrying capacity model will be introduced in 2020, having been developed by the National Park. Thereby the park calculated the capacity of natural sites (among them Tolmin Gorge, managed by the DMO) and will limit the number of arrivals, based on a digital system which will issue entrance tickets in advance with a cap on certain numbers.

The DMO confirms that as a unique case in Slovenia there is fruitful cooperation at regional level with the Julian Alps. Although the initial reason for cooperation was based on marketing objectives, the common denominator was always the National Park, which is also a partner and manages the wider Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve. The strategic plan for the Julian Alps was developed in a collaborative way, considering marketing and product development aspects, but also focusing on ecological and smart mobility objectives. One of the participating DMOs has been elected as coordinator for the development and review of the

management plan on a rotational basis (currently the DMO Bohinj).

Results:

- Carrying capacity model with Triglav National Park for sites managed by DMO,
- Part of unique regional collaboration case in Slovenia between DMOs and National Park (Julian Alps),
- Regional tourism products were created:
 - Brand new trail Juliana,
 - Destination card,
 - Circular biking trail
- Aim of these products is to encourage development in areas less pressured by tourist arrivals, evenly distributing visitor flows.

Recommendations:

The case studies of this chapter aimed to show that it can often be a lengthy process until main stakeholders jointly work towards one goal, but that once a functioning structure is in place, the protected area/ecotourism destination benefits as a whole.

- A key lesson learnt was given by the DMO Soča Valley in terms of finding the right approach when dealing with different stakeholders and building cooperation models: sustainability is not just about an eco-centric approach, it is about considering the social environment and the development of the communities within or adjacent to the protected areas and safeguarding their culture. Keeping a **people centred**

approach in mind, which offers income opportunities and ways how to explain to local communities how to meet certain standards and supporting their development, then this can go hand in hand with nature protection and conservation.

- The Julian Alps example showed that approaches of park stakeholders can be different, thus it is important for a **neutral coordinator** to moderate stakeholder and management planning processes.
- Also, keeping up a constant conversation and regular updates to management plans with the main stakeholders involved is vital, as tourism is highly volatile.
- It is crucial to see tourism as one, but not the only income source for local populations, as protected area destinations face limits in carrying capacities. Once the damage is done, it is difficult to reverse.
- Visitor flow management is a critical tool in terms of distributing tourists across the destination for maximum benefits for the populations and less pressure on certain sites. Good practices in tourism should be shared and replicated, hence the importance of cooperation at regional level.

[Community participation in tourism development as a tool to foster sustainable land and resource use practices in a national park milieu](#)

Further readings:

Guidelines on sustainable tourism management:

Convention on biological diversity (CBD): Guidelines on biodiversity and tourism development

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN): Guidelines for planning and management for sustainable tourism

European Commission's Guidelines, initiatives and good practices in Europe and Nature 2000

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST)

CHAPTER 2: FINANCIAL MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

It was found that to date there are limited financial incentives for both the public and private sector to develop ecotourism in Slovakia's national parks. Especially in the national park of focus for this project, Poloniny. This is on the one hand linked to limited resources within the national park management to provide the necessary framework conditions and develop certain touristic offers on behalf of the national park, as it is done, e.g. in the Slovak Paradise National Park. On the other hand, private sector initiatives remain fragmented and do not receive support when making their offers available to an international market. Therefore, it became clear that experiences from LT&C examples and

partners need to be provided, which outline successful financing models for protected areas. The handbook therefore dedicates this chapter to innovative and successful funding mechanisms of national parks and wider destinations, which go beyond the traditional governmentally funded approach. It presents expert insights into financing models of national parks in Europe and showcases LT&C example's Costa Rica's pioneering Payment for Ecosystem Services Programme, as well as a legacy fund established in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park. Expert advice from LT&C member Simon Collier gives insights on developing a business case for ecotourism in protected areas.

The aim is to showcase how leadership and stakeholder commitment can tackle a financial challenge in protected areas and provide for long term financial benefits through tourism.

Although globally, the number of protected areas is growing, budgets to maintain these parks are in decline, which has led to the term of "paper parks". Declaring a protected area is the "easy" part, finding a long-term sustainable financing mechanism is the most challenging. However certain countries, such as Costa Rica are taking the lead in finding innovative ways of funding protected areas. Global programmes such as BIOFIN (implemented in 31 countries) are set out to identify financial gaps to fund biodiversity and find suitable sources of income, among them often tourism.

Financial mechanisms to reverse deforestation in Costa Rica



Photo 7: Costa Rica offers breathtaking natural landscapes, Photo: Peter Prokosch

Overview

- Country in central America
- Population: 4.9 million
- Protected area cover: 26%
- Ecotourists: 2,142,580 domestic and international visitors to protected areas¹⁶

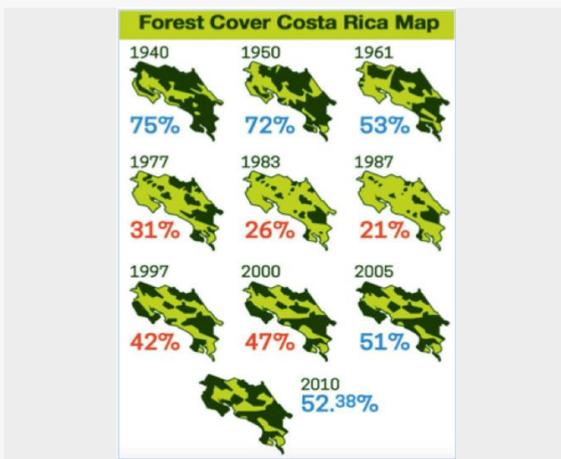


Figure 1: Map of forest cover in Costa Rica since 1940, Source: ACMCR

Costa Rica's government has played a significantly large role in the collaborative efforts to improve the country's bio-capacity. Costa Rica—the only tropical country in the world that has managed to reverse deforestation—is home to individuals who operate in public and private organizations. These are primarily aimed at increasing environmental awareness and sustainable practices in order to ensure a prosperous future for the country.

During the 1970's, the government began to pinpoint the deforestation crisis, and by the 1980's they had begun acting to reverse it, focusing mainly on the development of international ecotourism.

This reverse deforestation, through government incentives to increase both forest cover and protected areas, has allowed Costa Rica's ecotourism sector to thrive. The Institute of Costa Rican Tourism (ICT), founded in 1955, was originally created to promote domestic tourism, and eventually began marketing to international countries. Later, the ICT created the Certification of Sustainable Tourism (CST), which is recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The CST was designed to ensure the cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic sustainability of tourist enterprises by rating businesses on a scale of 1-5. The rating is determined by a businesses' percentage of compliance with the CST's standards—the higher the level,

¹⁶ SINAC (2018):

<http://www.sinac.go.cr/ES/transprncia/Informe%20EMEC/Informe%20SEMEC%202018.pdf>

the greater the compliance. Designed on the idea of sustainability, the certificate enhances the sustainable process of the country's tourism sector through its regulations. It creates a level of competitiveness between tourism sector businesses by allowing these businesses to renew their certification every two years.

Another organization that works to promote sustainable tourism within Costa Rica is CANAECO, the National Chamber of Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism of Costa Rica. Developed in June 2003, CANAECO works both domestically and within Central America to address issues of and related to sustainable tourism and ecotourism. The organization provides volunteer activities for individuals of the community, as well as tourists who visit the area. CANAECO's volunteer provisions focus primarily on educating individuals, groups, and businesses on sustainable tourism management techniques through workshops, hands-on activities, and accessible webinars and seminars. CANAECO is only one of many among Costa Rica's non-governmental organizations that provide both volunteer and educational services.

Costa Rica's National Parks System (SINAC), which also provides an inclusive volunteer program, was created under the 1988 Biodiversity Law and oversees all the country's national parks. SINAC is an agency of MINAET (the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Technology), a conservation entity responsible for the implementation, management and administration of biodiversity, as well as the coordination of all issues regarding

conservation and natural resources in Costa Rica. One of the aims of MINAET is to increase the country's protected territory, thus they have established 11 areas of conservation.

The vast conservation of Costa Rica's natural areas has been made possible by the county's Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) Program under Forestry Law 7575. Through its financial mechanism, FONAFIFO (Spanish acronym; National Forestry Financing Fund), Costa Rica's PES Program has been able to offer financial incentives for businesses and landowners who provide services to the natural environment. FONAFIFO provides its funding through 3.5% of the gasoline tax, as well as donation, credits, and state contributions.

Results

- Within 11 areas of national conservation, the following are included: National Parks (28), National Wildlife Refuges (73), Protective Zones (30), Forest Reserves (9), Wetlands (12), Biological Reserves (8), Nature Reserves (2), Other Reserves (4), a Protective Zone and a Conservation Easement.
- The following services are recognized by the PES Program: Carbon sequestration, water protection of hydrological services, protection of biodiversity, and scenic beauty.
- The number of landowners who are eager to participate in this program has shown to exceed FONAFIFO's financial supply. In response to this, the program has been teaming up with private businesses, including those that are

tourism related, to allocate additional funding, which has shown outstanding results; the program was able to allocate about \$7 million in additional funding in recent years.

- According to the WorldBank, the country's FDI, net inflows was \$163 million in 1990; by 2010, it was recorded to have been \$1,907 million. By 2016, however, the data shows that the net inflow was \$2,958 million.
- Costa Rica's reforestation and thriving biodiversity became internationally visible in 2008, the country received about 2 million inbound tourists generating over \$2.14 billion.

When it comes to funding a protected area, LT&C member and expert Simon Collier points out current developments within Europe. These show that it is most advised to start by selecting a small sample area which is representative for the local context, i.e. one aspect within the national park. This area should be prime and ready for ecotourism, or other sustainable land use models. The initial step is to value it at per hectare, equating the value of land and the attached flow-down for the local community allows stakeholders to be able to develop a business case.

FAO (2019) Valuing forest ecosystem services

Upon this basis a business model can be built that outcompetes the current income base (e.g. logging). A **staged, stepping-stone approach** is recommended, which can gradually grow over time, as the business model strengthens, and important stakeholders come on board. The long-term objective being to manage a fully

protected area which is (partly) accessible for ecotourism and supports local communities.

In the first crucial phase, it is vital to look for ways to financially engage forestry and government for their benefit, whilst developing local services. The forest needs to be viewed as a commodity that one wants to protect (in short term there is a need to look at it as an existing commodity that needs to be accessed and utilized to some degree to keep conversation alive). Over time the attention and focus can be shifted, as government and forestry come on board with the new business model. It usually takes between five to six years to see results, having ecotourism levies and government tourism grants in place.

Staged approach to Ecotourism development in a national park:

- Select a target area within your national park for a test phase. Establishing a sustainable forestry model, including ecotourism, in an entire national park of substantial size is difficult and provides high chances to fail.
- Finding the opportune size enables direct impact in a short period of time.
- That small case over time can be scaled, by shifting the existing forestry model to a more selective model approach with a core area and harvesting areas with business cases, as well as carbon credits.
- Designate a core zone, e.g. the old growth, virgin forest as tourist zones and obtain special permissions for guided activities, followed by

overnights in special locations and nature-based accommodation which is serviced by the local community e.g. tree hotel in Sweden.¹⁷

- Ideally a levy of tourism activities within the park goes to government and forestry.
- Management model for operational structuring on the ground needs to be developed regarding food and beverages, accommodations, access and services.
- Guide training, hospitality engagement and training modules are an additional integral part.
- Once the basic offer is set up, specific tour operators can be targeted and local DMCs can be created.
- Finding the sustainable value proposition of your forest: A multi land use approach is favoured, which foresees different zones in the forest:
 - Ecotourism is one pillar, along with forestry and natural forest products, other activities, such as berry and mushroom picking.
 - New style of hunting management style: selective hunting, for sales of meat.
 - Carbon credit and carbon sequestration.

¹⁷ <https://www.treehotel.se/en>

¹⁸ Ruiz et al. (2018), *Governing nature-based tourism mobility in National Park Torres del Paine, Chilean*

Torres del Paine Legacy Fund: Alternative ways to fund National Parks



Map 2: Torres del Paine National Park in context, Source: Google Maps



Photo 8: Dramatic landscapes shape the NP, Source:Wiki

Overview

- National park in Southern Chilean Patagonia
- 227,298 ha, representing five different ecosystems of the Patagonian Region
- More than 250,000 visitors in 2017¹⁸

Financing approach

Over time Torres del Paine (TDP) National Park has increased in popularity among tourists, recording around 6,000 annual visitors in the 1980 and arrivals exceeding 250,000 in 2017. The national park authority CONAF was increasingly overwhelmed and did not have the

Southern Patagonia, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17450101.2019.1614335>

financial resources to keep up the park infrastructure, safety aspects, manage the conservation activities and ensure impact mitigation. There was no local NGO to support the national park authority in some of these aspects. In 2014 local stakeholders, the Think Foundation and Sustainable Travel International (STI) came together to launch the TDP Legacy Fund. Inspired by the North American model of national park support mechanisms through NGOs, e.g. friends of national park associations, volunteer schemes or similar. Initially the Legacy Fund was designed to provide solely financial support to channel finances towards sustainable initiatives needed on the ground and acting as a small grant funding mechanism in support of CONAF and other local organizations. The objectives of the fund were working towards:

- Preserving and restoring ecosystems
- Improving tourism infrastructure and mitigating visitor impacts
- Promoting community development
- Diversifying recreation opportunities and tourism products

Thereby the funding comes from international and local tourism businesses (and tourists):

- International tour companies mostly have a per pack donation for every traveller of e.g. 10 dollar per head
- Local businesses contribute by getting the word out, encouraging clients to donate and donate in-kind
- Clients: it was found that within TDP tourists tend to have most interaction with their operator, making it crucial to

make them the intermediate. These tourists are usually wealthy individuals, and in the case of the North American market, familiar with this model and likely to donate.

Gradually, the legacy fund shifted from being a hybrid organisation into being a donor and implementer.

Due to a lack of local NGOs, technical and human resource expertise, an implementing function was introduced in addition to finance. For the activities within the park, TDP Legacy Fund works closely with CONAF. Every year they discuss the annual operating plan of CONAF, budget needs, priorities and capacities. Subsequently, there is a commitment to one or two projects per year.

Results

- Close relationship with CONAF
- Funding specific objective-aligned projects through donations from businesses and visitors
- Shift from donor to hybrid

Recommendations

- To sum up, from a financial point of view, ecotourism needs to be a key source in financing a national park on a sustainable, long term basis, but cannot be the only one. A multi-land use approach is highly recommended, which designates different zones within the forest, ecotourism being one pillar, alongside other natural forest products.
- By testing ecotourism products and models on a small scale first, not only possible negative impacts can be

tackled early and effectively, but monitoring is easier, as well as enlarging the protected area with time and widen buffer zones. It is recommended to choose an area that is already protected, such as a part of the beech forest in Poloniny NP.

- In terms of involving tourists and private sector in funding initiatives, an environmental conservation giving culture needs to be adapted.
- A survey of businesses and potential visitors can prove that this is a viable model: visitors are willing to pay and would like such a system implemented (conscious eco-tourists)
- Survey results are a positive aspect to be added to the business case.
- It is advised to integrate a fund into the industry from the start by promoting it as an ecotourism public and private sector cooperation.
- Establish the fund as 3rd party independent entity, in benefit of both the private and public sector.

CHAPTER 3: TOOLS FOR ECOTOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

So far ecotourism in Slovakia is in its early development stages. There is vast potential in terms of the natural and cultural assets of the areas in and around the national parks. However, a series of limiting factors, such as governmental regulations, lack of training, etc. make it hard for private investors to develop ecotourism

businesses. This sub-chapter presents successful ecotourism products from LT&C examples, and beyond, which have proven to be financially successful and of benefit for the protected area and community in question, supporting conservation, providing jobs, raising awareness and funds for environmental protection.

LT&C-Example Soomaa: Finding your Unique Selling Proposition

In Soomaa, as in so many other destinations, seasonality has been a challenge due to the fluctuations of nature tourism demand within different seasons. Product variations, financial management and the establishment of a unique selling proposition (USP) have helped to overcome this challenge. Known in Soomaa national park as the 'Fifth Season', several times a year, the area is flooded by melting snow or heavy rainfalls. Today, specified products around this USP, help Soomaa to attract a diversified local (~50%) and international (~50%) market and young people are involved in sustaining Soomaa's cultural knowledge of traditional boat building¹⁹.

Products

- **Canoeing** through the rivers or flooded forests and meadows (USP). 2-3 hours duration
- **Guided Canoe Trip** through the rivers or floods.

Guided Trips

¹⁹ *The boats were used as mode of transport when the area was flooded and are in the process to apply for UNESCO world heritage.*

- **Guided day trips** once a day, throughout the whole season in English, German, Russian, Swedish, Finnish and Lithuanian.
- **Guided wilderness experience** daytrips combine bog shoeing and canoeing.
- **Night walks** Guided programme lasts ca 4 hours and includes canoeing and walking in the riverside forest, with a high chance to observe beavers and other wildlife.

Self-guided Trips

- **One day canoe trip:** 12 km on the river + 4 km forest trail or/ and 3 km peat-bog trail.
- **Wilderness canoe camping trip:** paddling 2 or 3 or more days. Camping at prepared campsites with firewood and dry toilets.



Photo 9: Guided Walks in Soomaa by Aivar Ruukel

- **Pedal and Paddle:**

Three-day programme combines one day bicycle trip from with self-guided two days canoeing trip in Soomaa wilderness. **Snowshoeing** through Soomaa NP

- **Bog Shoeing**
Tour through the bog with special shoes
- **Kicksledding**

Guided Kicksledding on frozen flood-water for 2-3 hours.

- **Mushroom and Berry picking**
Learning about wild mushrooms, picking, cooking and tasting on guided walks.

Lessons to be learnt

Choosing the right products for Soomaa, the founder took three major factors into account:

- **Environment**

The environment of the place determines the products you can offer to your market. When setting up Soomaa, the founder especially thought of the unique selling proposition (USP) of the area, which in this case has been the fifth season - the floods set Soomaa national park apart from other destinations. Products are built around this theme, related to natural occurrences, heritage and traditions that associate with it.

- **Seasonality**

As nature tourism and ecotourism are highly dependent on the seasons, diversification of a range of products is key to receive visitors during the whole year and tackle seasonality. Even though, the focus of Soomaa is on the fifth season, when flooding does not occur, Soomaa offers more traditional nature tourism products such as snow shoeing, canoe tours and guided walks. This ensures visitors all year around and distributes pressure on the area.

- **Target audience and visibility**

Soomaa takes its target audience into account to tailor and diversify their

products. Early on, Soomaa invited bloggers and journalists to experience their products, this gave Soomaa and the National Park visibility in a European context. Another important marketing tool has been the certification as a PAN park. There are additional joined efforts of governmental institutions and well-connected stakeholders in the national park to strive for Europarc Federation and a UNESCO certification of the traditional dugout canoe as well as a Green Destinations certification of the national park.

LT&C-Example Ecotur: Successful coexistence



Photo 10: Guided wildlife tours are a highlight in the Abruzzo NP, Source: Ecotur

Overview

- National Park: Abruzzo National Park, Italy (1922)
- Size: 496.80 km²
- Population: 25 villages
- USP: Marsican brown bear (40-100 individuals) and Italian wolf

Ecotur was founded 1989 and is a local ecotourism operator, offering wildlife watching tours in the Abruzzo National Park in Italy. Their USP is carnivore watching tours of the Marsican brown bear and the Italian wolf. They have a strong

“Ecosophy” and work closely together with the local population and schools.

Products

- **Trekking tours** (2 or more days)
- **Guided cultural or wildlife themed tours** of various difficulties the whole year around, approximate price range from 120€-450€
- **Excursions** (day-trips)

Scheduled forest and wildlife excursions, price range from 10€-40€

Managed facilities:

- Center of Environmental Education (CEA)
- Information Centre
- Shop of local products

Ecotur’s model of coexistence with large carnivores

- Eco-friendly: for the wildlife

Misinformation and prejudice are common when it comes to large carnivores in Europe and can lead to misunderstandings and mistreatment of the animals. Ecotur tries to counteract this by providing their audience with latest research within their channels and on their trips. In comparison to other European countries, they do not feed the animals for observation.

- Eco-economy: for the local population

Both the Abruzzo NP and the Poloniny NP inhabit a small local population, which can gain from and provide value to the area. Ecotur’s philosophy recognizes that the (e.g.) Shepherd, living in Abruzzo NP, understands that the wolves (USP) attract tourists, which in return add value to the

local economy by staying at guesthouses or buy local products such as the Shepherd's cheese. Thus:

Heritage cycle: If they understand they can value it, if they value it, they want to care for it, if they care for it, they will enjoy it, if they enjoy it, they want to understand it - By making people understand you can raise their willingness to take care.

Results

- Successful combination of land conservation and the economic and cultural development of local populations
- Successful CEA (Center for Environmental Education) recognized by the Abruzzo region
- Facilitating of impactful environmental education classes and presentations for school groups in the area
- Leading of environmental awareness campaigns

LT&C-Example Tree Top Walks of Erlebnis Akademie AG: The attraction as USP



Map 3: Tree Top Walks locations, Source: Erlebnis Akademie AG

Overview

- Visitors: 2.2 Million in 2018
- Turnover 2018: 15.3 Million Euros
- Locations: Germany (Bavarian Forest, Saarschleife, Rügen, Black Forest), Slovakia (Bachledka), Czechia (Krkonoše, Lipno), Austria (Salzkammergut), Slovenia (Pohorje)

The first Tree Top Walk of Erlebnis Akademie was built in 2009 in Germany through a cooperation with the Bavarian Forest National Park, which sought an attraction that would be relevant to a broad range of visitors across markets. The goal was to attract tourists to the national park and the information centre in order to educate them on the natural environment. The second aspect was to regulate and concentrate visitors in one place, therefore being able to control visitor flows and protect core zones in the national park. The business model is based on a joint venture between Erlebnis Akademie and a partner-company within the host country, which has important insights in the local environment, market, laws and regulations. In return, The Tree Top Walks of Erlebnis Akademie offers a platform for environmental education and job creation and hires rangers for guided tours provided by the partner organisation or directly from the national park.

Results

- Guided tours are developed in cooperation with protected areas.
- At some Tree Top Walks, a part of the revenues flows directly to the park administration.

- Employees in all sectors consist of solely locals across all ages.
- Partnership models with NPs and organisations within vary according to interest and local circumstances.
- Tree top walks attractions are estimated to have a draw area of about 2 hours by car or 150 kilometres.
- Due to a strong outdoor (activity) affinity of the Eastern European market, instalments were built in NPs in Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- The visitor market at the installation at the Pieniny NP is estimated to consist of 50% Polish visitors and 50% Slovakian visitors across all ages.
- Positive impacts for the local population have especially manifested in the proximity to the instalments.
- Tree top walks have a partnership in some destinations, e.g. on the island of Rügen, with local transport providers, whereby there are buses every 40-45 minutes, which visitors who have a *Kurkarte* (destination visitor pass) can use free of charge and which connect to all main touristic parts of the island.
- Estimated environmental awareness creation of 10% in 2018, within 2.2 million visitors, these are 220.000 people that have been reached.
- Tree tops walks attractions conduct visitor surveys, albeit with a relatively small sample size (according to the Rügen attraction), these surveys give a snapshot of the environmental awareness of visitors. Tree Top Walks on the island of Rügen organizes on average 3 daily guided tours per site for visitors in high season and 2 daily tours in low season.



Photo 11: Tree Top Walk Saarschleife installation in NP Saar-Hunsrück, Germany

Challenges for Slovakian Ecotourism

Bernd Bayerköhler, CEO of Erlebnis Akademie AG mentioned that the lack of transportation to and from national parks, as well as the missing touristic infrastructure in and around national parks, is a major challenge for developing ecotourism in Slovakia.

Recommendations

The case studies presented in this chapter highlight the importance of identifying the USP of a protected area destination and developing products in line with a specific theme to communicate an identity. The involvement of local populations is key to make sure that they are at the centre of the product, identify with it and can benefit positively from it. Lastly, environmental education is central to find pathways to integrate environmental awareness training for local communities as well as for the tourists, to enhance the positive effects of the product.

Step-by-step recommendations for ecotourism product development highlighted by Tree Top Walks and Ecotur:

1. A bottom-up approach of a well-**connected and organised stakeholder network** within the NP can push the destination for more visibility and certification within relevant networks.
2. For lesser known destinations, a **joint venture** with an already established tourism advocate, can help to give visibility to the destination on a broader market.
3. Managing or concentrating **visitor flows** with thought out tourism products and routes to certain areas of the NP, emphasises zoning, protects core zones and benefits conservation efforts.
4. When establishing new ecotourism products in a NP, the success of these products often rise and fall with the **level of support of the local community**.
5. Keeping track of the **latest trends and research** helps to keep your products relevant and spreads awareness of the appropriate treatment of wild animals within the NP and across your audience and market.

Concerning Poloniny national park, interviews highlighted the high potential in the domestic market of Slovakia, as well as the overall eastern European market, categorized by Tree Top Walks as highly “outdoor-loving” markets.

LT&C member Prof. Dr. Knapp, an advocate for the European Beech Forest network,

emphasized that around the world UNESCO heritage sites are considered high level tourism destinations, whereby the UNESCO status can act as a real tourism magnet for protected areas, attracting wealthy educated travellers who seek these special areas. Being very familiar with the current situation of beech forests in Slovakia, he further highlighted as four of these areas being in Slovakia there is vast potential to develop ecotourism in conjunction with the UNESCO Carpathian beech forest and the UNESCO biosphere reserve. Making them available for guided tours and hiking, featuring the local authentic villages. In his opinion, a sustainable forestry model, together with the support of local agriculture is indispensable for this development to happen. Small villages need to be supported to strengthen their autonomy and offer in terms of touristic infrastructure. Once a sustainable forestry model is in place, and ecotourism products are developed, Poloniny as part of a UNESCO Biosphere reserve of the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, it will be able to position products on relevant channels and networks.

CHAPTER 4: CERTIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDISATION ON REGIONAL AND DESTINATION LEVEL

An awareness for ecotourism is growing globally. Certification has positioned itself as a reliable tool for consumers to find committed destinations and sustainable touristic offers, and for some destinations, certification is used as a measurable sustainability framework to operate in, providing benefits to all parties involved. For businesses adjacent and operating within national parks, certification can be an independent seal of approval of their dedication towards environmental protection and sustainable business practices. During the stakeholder discussions in Slovakia, the topic of certification was addressed, and it was noted that it would be of value to shed light into the benefits of certification for an ecotourism destinations and possible approaches.

With increasing awareness for sustainable tourism worldwide, certification programmes, accreditation systems and indicators have been developed as a tool to help distinguish between sustainable and unsustainable practices (Spenceley, 2018). As defined by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES): „Certification programs in the tourism industry serve as important tools for distinguishing genuinely responsible companies, products, or services from those that are merely using

“eco-” or “sustainable” as a marketing tool to attract consumers”

Certification schemes have been developed for tourism businesses such as the accommodation sector and tour operators, travel agencies, as well as for destinations, in form of voluntary procedures that assess, audit and give written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards (Spenceley and Bien, 2013). Based on the assessment a marketable logo is awarded to those that meet or exceed baseline standards (Honey and Rome, 2001). Obtaining certification signifies that an independent third-party has verified the conformity of a tourism business or destination to a written standard, based on socioeconomic, cultural and environmental criteria (Spenceley and Bien, 2013).

Since the late 1980s, sustainable tourism labels have appeared around the globe in different forms, from global standards such as ISO 14001 and Green Globe, to regional efforts e.g. the Southern Africa Sustainable Tourism Alliance, as well as in form of national certification and eco-labelling in Costa Rica or Australia and in provincial efforts (Honey and Rome, 2001). Hundreds of tourism quality labels exist worldwide and the term *label jungle* that emerged, shows that it can be challenging for tourists, businesses and destinations to identify which ones to trust.

Initiative by a working group on tourism and development „guide through the tourism label jungle”

Efforts to introduce a more common understanding, approach and transparency led to the establishment of the Global

Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Criteria) in 2008, and Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in 2009. The GSTC establishes and manages global sustainable standards with the aim of increasing sustainable tourism knowledge and practices among public and private stakeholders.



The GSTC manages two sets of criteria: [Destination Criteria \(GSTC-D\)](#) and [Hotel & Tour Operator Criteria \(GSTC-H&TO\)](#)

They form the guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism business or destination should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the natural and cultural resources of the destination it operates in, while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. The GSTC does not directly certify businesses or destinations, but recognises or accredits certification schemes, such as travelife or EarthCheck via their criteria and process. In 2012 the GSTC issued a call to destinations around the world to join their Early Adopters of Sustainable Destinations programme, which aimed at supporting further research and development of the GSTC destination criteria.

[List of GSTC certified destinations](#)

Sustainable tourism certification at national park level is an area in which national park destinations with matured tourism markets have started to venture to. Teton county in Wyoming, USA was among the selected Early Adopters of the GSTC and is presented in this chapter as a best practice national park destination for its certification in line with the GSTC.

In Europe, the EUROPARC Federation (the network of European Protected Areas) is dedicated to practical nature conservation and sustainable development and created the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECSTPA) as a management tool to ensure a viable and healthy future for people and nature in living, working and visited landscapes. The charter is based around five principles and a set of components required from protected areas, together with a Permanent Sustainable Tourism Forum (an arrangement between all major stakeholders of the destination). This sets the basis for jointly developing a 5-year sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. Following these steps, a destination can seek award of the charter, done through an evaluation through an external verifier. The ECSTPA also encourages the involvement of local businesses, initially through the Permanent Sustainable Tourism Forum. Subsequently businesses can apply for Europarc Star Awards which recognizes their contribution to sustainable tourism at the destination. Engaging with local businesses is directly managed by the protected area authority under the guidance of EUROPARC.

[EUROPAC Sustainable Destinations guidelines](#)

In Germany this has led to the development of the German national park partner label *Partner Nationale Naturlandschaften*, which is a cooperation between protected areas and regional businesses that aims to combine customer-oriented nature experiences with high quality requirements and contribution to conservation. The programme exists since 2000 and includes 28 partner initiatives from protected areas with more than 1.400 business partners (December 2018). After thorough analysis through a regional awarding council, businesses that have been accepted in the programme can use the partner logo of their respective protected area and become part of a network.

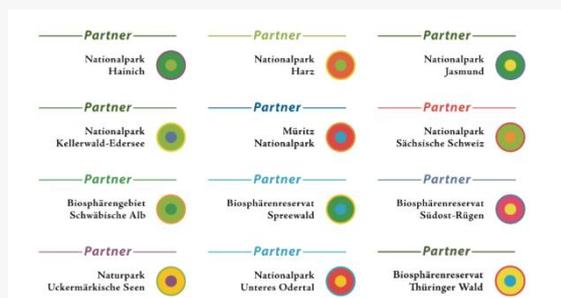


Figure 2: Partner Network, Source: Nationale Naturlandschaften

LT&C-Member: Schutzstation Wattenmeer

In the National park Wattenmeer the national park partner label is used as a marketing tool, a sign of trust and a way for mutual communication within the park. Within the information centres of the Schutzstation Wattenmeer only information and marketing material of national park partners is on display for tourists. Regular meetings of national park partners take place for exchange, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders.

Any business or organisation that supports the park can apply upon the basis of complying with the criteria and thus they can reach certification. Associations, such as the Schutzstation Wattenmeer were some of the first to become part of the label.

Teton County and the Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Destination Program



Map 5: Context map of the Grand Teton National Park, Source: Google Maps



Photo 12: Picturesque scenery can be enjoyed at the NP, Source: Grand Teton National Park Authority

Overview

- County in the US state Wyoming
- Population: 23,500
- National Parks: Grand Teton National Park, 40.4% of Yellowstone National Park
- 97% of the county is national parks, national forests and wildlife refuge lands

- In 2018: 3.5 million visitors to the Grand Teton National Park and 4.1 million to the Yellowstone National Park

Certification approach

In 2012, Teton county was accepted as part of the GSTC early adopters. Upon acceptance in the programme, an assessment was conducted by GSTC and its partner Sustainable Travel International to evaluate how compliant the destination was regarding the 120 criteria of the GSTC destination catalogue. Results from the assessment showed that approximately half of the indicators were met, with strengths in natural and cultural preservation and environmental management and needs for stronger destination management and planning. The individual efforts were good, but a programme or organization was missing that could unify sustainability efforts at destination level.²⁰

Hence the Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Destination Program was created. The purpose of this programme was to strengthen, sustain, and balance policies and practices for environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic vitality in Teton County. Its creation was facilitated through the set-up of a steering committee and an MOU that was signed by 57 stakeholders of the destination (federal, local government, NGOs and businesses) endorsing and supporting the described vision, goals and objectives. Importantly it was decided to

design the program as an overall sustainability program and not only focused on sustainable tourism. A five-year action plan was set up by the destination program regarding project priorities based on the early adopter assessment, with the aim to go for certification after the 5 years. This programme is managed by the Riverwind Foundation, a non for profit, with the core role to unify efforts and bring everyone together around the common certification vision. The programme complements existing initiatives and programmes in the realms of sustainability.

1% for the Tetons (the only local chapter of 1% for the Planet²¹) funded an inventory in 2014 of sustainability efforts which found that 120 businesses, NGO and government agencies in Teton county were actively engaged in the categories of energy efficiency, waste management, alternative transportation, local and green purchasing, showed that majority wanted to engage in trainings and workshops (which are now provided).

The overall funding model of the destination programme is as follows:

- Federal/local grants: originally 60% of overall budget but shifted to 30%.
- Donations and sponsorships: originally 35%, shifted to 60% based on the track record of working with businesses in the destination and gaining their trust and support.
- Programme receipts: 5-10% - These revenues generated e.g. via costs of

²⁰ <https://www.gstcouncil.org/teton-countys-destination-sustainability-journey/>

²¹ <https://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org/>

stakeholders participating in a workshop is kept at a minimum to be as inclusive as possible.

Results

- National Geographic World Legacy Awards finalists for destination leadership
- WTTC Tourism for Tomorrow Award finalists for destination management
- EarthCheck audit in September 2019, resulting in Jackson Hole receiving conditional destination certification
- Green Destinations Top 100 in 2016, 2017, and 2018

Lessons learnt (from Riverwind Foundation):

1. Establish a goal that all stakeholders embrace and are inspired by early, and regularly articulate it, e.g., to be a world-leading sustainable community and destination, evolve local tourism economy to sustainable tourism economy, sustainable community/destination certification, sustainability award recognition, etc.
2. Destination management and integration is dependent on relationships – take the time to build relationships with one-on-one and group meetings
3. Communications to destination stakeholders need to be regular and content-rich. Do not under-resource communications. Coordinate communications with key sustainability stakeholders

4. Educate, educate, and educate. This builds stakeholder sustainability literacy, interest, and involvement. Leverage any certification and awards to increase stakeholder and public awareness, education, and engagement

5. Diversify funding streams: Federal and local government grants, national and private foundation grants, private cash and in-kind contributions

6. Strengthen local capacity whenever possible. Minimize the export of work and reliance on outside parties for management and technical support

7. Focus on understanding strengths and areas needing improvement for destination, and place priority on building and sustaining collaborative partnerships (rather than competing with existing organizations and programs for resources)

Recommendations

Certification is a major topic of conversation these days for established destinations wishing to institutionalize and communicate their commitments and sustainability actions. It became clear through the case studies presented in this chapter, but also from interviews with stakeholders from Slovenia (chapter 1) that certification needs strong governance and a collaboration across the destination.

“A very systematic and strategic approach of the Slovenian Tourist Board on a national level helps a lot in building green

awareness at home and placing the green image on the international market.”²²

The most recently awarded GSTC destination Azores, Portugal, confirmed that it took two years for the archipelago to achieve certification through a joint public-private sector effort.²³ It can therefore be concluded that for an emerging destination like Poloniny, pursuing certification at destination level, would be too premature. However, the principles and practices that underpin a successfully certified destination are relevant even at an early development stage:

- Establish a common vision early on – where you want to be and where you want to go – In the case of Teton county (which is both a community as well as a destination), the vision which was adopted and passed as a resolution was for “Jackson Hole to be a world leading sustainable community and destination”, and became the organizing principle for stakeholders to work together.
- An inventory and baseline assessment are crucial to understand where the destination is at and to pinpoint priorities.
- Rally key leaders and influencers of the business community, who work together with the NP, can provide testimonials and references to other businesses and help spread the word and (financial) support.

Further Readings

[Green Scheme of Slovenia website](#)

[ETIS toolkit and best-practice examples](#)

²² <https://sustainability-leaders.com/soca-valley-slovenia-interview-janko-humar/>

²³ <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-2019-global-conference-in-the-azores/>

CHAPTER 5: VISITOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY NATIONAL PARK AND NGOS AND COOPERATION SCHEMES WITH TOURIST GUIDES

When it comes to ecotourism in protected areas, the most valuable incentive and knowledge provider is the tourist guide. It was stated that guiding activities to this day, are forbidden within national parks in Slovakia and information centres are sparse, or not fully utilized. Nevertheless, guiding activities amongst other visitor services are vital to ecotourism in such areas, as they act as the main source of knowledge transfer between tourist and the park and are a first reference for the visitor. LT&C Examples provided below, have managed to provide outstanding models of visitor services through their guides and/ or information centres.

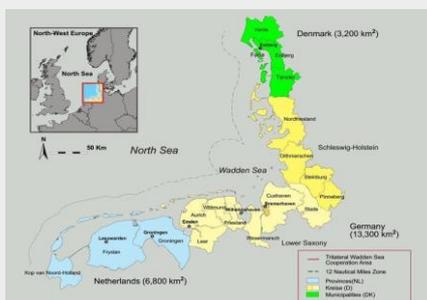
- 20 information centres along the German Schleswig-Holstein coast
- 25 employees, 100 volunteers
- 240 members



Photo 13: Volunteers and employees work together to educate visitors and protect the NP. Source: Schutzstation Wattenmeer

The whole National Park area in Schleswig Holstein is governed by a governmental NP administration, dividing the NP into different zones, giving financial support and mandates for education and monitoring activities to different NGOs. Being one of the latter, the Schutzstation Wattenmeer safeguards 70% of the area. This concept is unique to Schleswig Holstein. The vision of the Schutzstation Wattenmeer is creating understanding and fascination for the ecosystem Wadden Sea and the North Sea and thus increases their level of protection.

LT&C-Example Schutzstation Wattenmeer e.V.: Conservation through education



Map 6: The Wadden Sea NP in context, Source: Wadden Sea National Park

Overview

- Conservation society founded in 1962

Information centres and volunteer guides

Information centres have an educational exhibition and offer guided walks through the tidal flats by young volunteers, who are currently undergoing a voluntary social year (German *Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr (FSJ)*). The young volunteers are trained 6-8 weeks upon arrival at the destination, learning about flora, fauna, the environment, events and guided walks as well as first aid skills. For one month they

are shadowing the already trained guiding groups and are then ready to lead their own. The goal is to not just take people on walks through the tidal flats but also create awareness amongst them concerning their natural environment, nature protection conservation and responsible consumption.

Results

- Safeguards 70% of the Wadden Sea NP in Schleswig-Holstein
- 8.500 events per year
- 160.000 guests per year taken across the mudflats
- 170.000 visitors per year to exhibitions
- 2 million Euros funding per year
 - consisting of 400.000€ grant money
 - and 700.000-800.000€ from events
 - the rest from projects
- 160 National Park partners

LT&C-Member Regio-Ranger®: A ranger agency concept



Photo: The Lüneburger Heide protected nature area. Source: Regio Ranger®

Overview

- Private company offering services in sustainable tourism and conservation,
- Founder helped to establish the profession "ranger" in Germany,
- "Heathland-Ranger-Project" for the nature park Lüneburger Heide in the North of Germany:
 - 1,000 tourists and pupils guided through the park per year,
 - Maintain more than 1.000 km of trails
 - Involved in several regional projects promoting sustainable tourism and nature protection.

In the early 90s, the trade of rangers in Germany could only be found in the Bavarian Forest National Park, thus as part of a WWF working group, founder of Regio-Ranger Jan Brockmann, developed a concept and occupational profile for nature guiding. This concept is governmentally approved today, and the job is acknowledged as "verified nature and environmental caretaker". Jan Brockmann has also been one of the founders of the

“Bundesverband Naturwacht e.V. / German Rangers Association”, today member of the International Ranger Federation (IRF) and European Ranger Federation (ERF).

After this governmental regulated concept, Jan Brockmann has established a similar privatised concept in the Lueneburger Heide Nature Park in Germany, called “Heide-Ranger®”, which involves a range of visitor services such as guided tours, environmental education programmes, maintains hiking-trails, monitors rare species, and develops projects to manage and protect habitats. The idea being to complement traditional tour guiding (45% of revenues) with hands-on conservation support in the nature park and thereby strengthening the position of ranger by enabling year-round revenues, working closely with conservation authorities, NGOs, and regional tourism organizations. Heide-Ranger® uses different channels and cooperation models to promote its services either directly via posters or brochures, via stakeholders (established relationships with tourism providers, such as camp sites) which book the services of Heide-Ranger® for their guests, group-marketing with operators which include Heide-Ranger® services in their packages and also via local businesses (incentive trips or company excursions).

In addition to Heide-Ranger®, the company Regio-Ranger® offers different ranger trainings (via e-learning), either to strengthen the business skills of experienced conservationists and guides or providing the technical skills to individuals wanting to venture into this career.

Regio-Ranger® has participated in international knowledge exchange and twinning projects and offers business management, marketing and nature education services nationwide. They also offer regional workshops for local communities and schools, lead junior ranger clubs and forest schools. A key aspect in the success of the concept of Regio-Ranger® is to strengthen the marketing skills of rangers and enhance product development by creating the demand for their services in the destination. The ranger becomes a service provider for communities and nature.

Results

- “Verified nature and environmental caretaker” is currently occupied by 70% of rangers in Germany
- The Regio-Ranger concept has received the sustainability award of Lower Saxony (Tourismus mit Zukunft)
- Model project, replicated in other places, business concept to become a freelance guide in a certain region – e learning
- Advantage of tailoring the profession of ranger to the region and to the individual ranger.

Recommendations

Following these examples of how visitor services can elevate a National Park to have an impact on visitors' understanding of the natural environment and its conservation, some general recommendations can be derived for the case of Slovakia.

- Information centres are a tool for information transfer between the destination and the visitor.
- Information centres are important as a focal point for visitors to arrive at and learn about the NP.
- Information transfer is elevated when there is guiding available at the destination.
- There are great opportunities to involve young people in the guiding scheme.
- Legalising guiding in some parts of a NP in Slovakia, can be highly beneficial to the destination.

Replicating Regio-Rangers' approach

Based on the interview with Regio-Ranger®, a similar approach might be applicable to Slovakia, which would be based on an assessment of the current situation and structure of rangers in Slovakia and specifically in Poloniny and which could involve the following elements:

If state-lead profession of a Ranger exists:

- Labour division between "Ranger" (tasks: e.g. maintenance, path development, landscape upkeep) and ecotourism profession "tour-, or

nature-guide" (tasks: guided walks in the area), complementing each other.

If a state-lead profession does not exist, through a coordinated approach, the profession "Ranger" could be established with the following tasks:

- Monitoring and environmental observation
- Species and biotope protection
- Public relations and environmental education
- Area control and visitor management

Arguments for implementing/strengthening the Ranger profession instead of solely tour-guides:

- Rangers bear an authenticity and credibility, as they are not only guiding in nature, but working on different tasks in nature. This also gives them more acceptance within the destination and towards various tourism stakeholders.
- Helps integrate and employ local population or already existing nature guides within the destination.
- The profession of nature guiding alone might not be profitable due to seasonality, thus planning tasks for the winter season through ranger activity is vital, e.g. maintenance works financed by communities, partnerships, tasks related to winter sports, species monitoring; active search for tasks via governmental funds and subsidies
- Like the case of Heide-Ranger®, this can make up a concept consisting of 45% profits from nature guiding, the rest consisting of different tasks such as these listed above, forming a building block system

- Rangers can be a main driver for product development at the destination, due to their knowledge of the destination and close relationship to the visitor.
- Previous occupations such as forest worker, forest manager, landscape architect, farmer, gardener or related skills and knowledge may be highly desirable for the ranger occupation. Helping the National Park with the transition from a highly managed forest industry, to an ecotourism destination.

Further readings

[*The FSJ in Germany*](#)

[*The European LEADER Scheme of rural development and the involvement of young people*](#)

[*Bachelor's degree Landscape Management and Nature Conservation \(often entry requirement for ranger jobs in Natura2000 sites in Germany\)*](#)

[Twinning programmes via the International Ranger Federation \(of which Slovak Ranger Association is already a member\)](#)

CONCLUSION/ OUTLOOK

This handbook presented several case studies from LT&C members, examples and partners in the areas of:

- Stakeholder engagement for protected area management,
- Financial mechanisms to support environmental protection,
- Tools for ecotourism product development and
- Visitor services and cooperation schemes.

The vital message that was apparent throughout all chapters of this handbook, is the need to create a joint participatory approach to ecotourism development within a protected area and the wider destination. Where tourism is seen as one element of protected area financing, management and income generation for local communities, but which needs to be embedded in an overall conservation approach and sustainable forestry model, accompanied by strengthening other sectors such as agriculture. In turn, by supporting local agriculture and enabling links to the tourism value chain, e.g. through agritourism offers and other rural tourism experiences, the ecotourism offer diversifies naturally. It is crucial to see protected areas as part of rural communities and rural economic development, in order to ensure ownership. This goes hand in hand with careful planning, standards in terms of sustainability, health and safety and constant monitoring.

The need for a diversified tourism product also needs to be reflected in the tourism infrastructure in terms of accommodations, soft mobility offers and information services, e.g. visitor centres.

The potential for ecotourism in Poloniny being clear and confirmed in this handbook by experts, a market segmentation, collecting data and understanding the ecotourist is vital. This is where partnerships between DMOs and national parks are crucial and where both parties can complement each other.

An initial observation would be to position the destination focusing on one overarching theme, which can establish a strong brand and easily be marketed to an international audience. Suggesting that Poloniny's strongest **USP** is its nature, wildlife and abundance of species, hence already bearing the name 'Wolf Mountains', it is close at hand to make it the core focus when developing the products of the area. Products and activities can be built around the theme, such as e.g.:

- Guided (night) walks,
- Wildlife watching,
- Sky observation (centers),
- Culinary and cultural experiences,
- Different cultural and nature walks and experience paths.

The handbook aimed at collecting relevant practices, policies and guidelines as a basis for further cooperation between LT&C members, Aegis and its partners from Slovakia. Due to limitations in time and scope, the handbook was able to touch on main points of interest for developing

ecotourism in Poloniny National Park, highlighting the necessary tools, lessons learnt and best practices from other places.

In a next step, specific assessments, strategies and action plans will need to be developed by stakeholders from Poloniny. The project workshop in September 2020 will be the ideal occasion to start deeper discussions, based on the results of this handbook, ideally forming specific working groups for each thematic area. Most interviewees featured in this handbook expressed their interest in joining the workshop in September, which will provide ways to build relationships and create partnerships for exchange of experience. This reflects the true essence of what LT&C stands for as a network, to replicate successful models where ecotourism can support protected areas.

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ANNEX

Stakeholder Map



Source: own depiction based on IUCN 2002

Interview Participants

Country	Organisation	Contact Person	E-Mail	LT&C-Example/ Member, or website	Focus
USA	Teton County and the Jackson Hole & Yellowstone Sustainable Destination Program	Tim O'Donoghue	riverwind@woming.com	https://www.ltandc.org/member_profile/timothy-odonoghue/	Certification, stakeholder engagement
Europe	Nature Tourism Development	Simon Collier	simon@natur etd.com	https://www.ltandc.org/member_profile/simon-collier/	Various
Germany	Regio-Ranger®	Jan Brockmann	info@regio-ranger.de	https://www.ltandc.org/member_profile/jan-brockmann/	Tour guides, training
Germany/ Czech Republic/ Slovakia/ Slovenia/ Poland	The Erlebnis Akademie AG	Mr. Bayerköhler/ Matthias Gütersloh/ Barbara Payenberg	barbara.payenberg@eak-ag.de	https://www.ltandc.org/tree-top-walks-of-the-erlebnis-akademie-ag/	Product development, cooperation NP
Italy	Ecotur	Paolo Iannicca	informazioni@ecotur.org	https://www.ltandc.org/eco-and-wild-carnivore-tourism-supports-abruzzo-national-park-italy/	Product development, education
Germany	Schutzstation Wattenmeer	Harald Förster	h.foerster@schutzstation-wattenmeer.de	https://www.ltandc.org/member_profile/schutzstation-wattenmeer/	Visitor management, cooperation NP, visitor services
Various	UNESCO Beech Forests	Prof. Hannes Knapp	hannes.knapp@t-online.de	https://www.ltandc.org/member_profile/hans-dieter-knapp/	Potential beech forests
Estonia	Soomaa	Aivar Ruukel	aivar.ruukel@gmail.com	https://www.ltandc.org/guided-nature-activities-promote-soomaa-national-park/	Certification, cooperation, start up
Slovenia	Soca Valley (DMO)	Janko Humar	janko.humar@dolina-soce.si	https://www.soca-valley.com/en/	Cooperation NP
Slovenia	Triglav National Park	Majda Odar	majda.odar@tnp.gov.si	https://www.tnp.si/en/learn/	Cooperation NP, management plan
Chile	Torres del Paine legacy fund	Emily Green	emily@supporttdp.org	https://supporttdp.org/	Financing