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## **WIDENING THE FOCUS OF MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS ALONG THE GREEN BELT OF FENNOSCANDIA; FINNISH PROTECTED AREAS AS A DESTINATION OF RECREATION**

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The growing need to discover and use the whole potential range of services Protected Areas (PAs) may provide is obvious. In relation to the network of Protected Areas along the Green Belt of Fennoscandia, this is even more clear due to its transboundary nature and thus varied management practices and objectives. Promotion of ecosystem services, recreation in particular, naturally creates challenges as regards the fundamental objective for protection – biodiversity. PA managers should more often recognize this pressure as a potential tool to secure the integrity and conservation values of PAs – it should not only be seen as a challenge but also as an opportunity. Recreational use of PAs can be divided into two major approaches: local use approach and tourism approach. Local use is intense in urban PAs and tourism concentrates on rural PAs. Especially within regions where tourism is/could form a backbone for the local economy, PAs need to be able to show the benefits they bring in and services they provide for regional development. PA managers should play an important role in turning the «business as usual» development of tourism destination towards creation of *Green Destination*, where destination level sustainable use of areas and resources is a key priority. The major elements for success are: ability to demonstrate the wide range of benefits provided by PAs, ability to create strategies by participatory approaches and lastly ability and commitment to use available methods and tools to execute the strategies at all levels – vertically and horizontally.

Key words: conservation, benefits, protected areas, enabling environment, recreation, green destination, biodiversity, sustainability, values.

### **К. Лаhti. РАСШИРЕНИЕ ПОДХОДОВ К УПРАВЛЕНИЮ ОСОБО ОХРАНЯЕМЫМИ ПРИРОДНЫМИ ТЕРРИТОРИЯМИ ЗЕЛЕННОГО ПОЯСА ФЕННОСКАНДИИ; ООПТ ФИНЛЯНДИИ КАК РЕКРЕАЦИОННЫЕ ОБЪЕКТЫ**

Нарастающая потребность в выявлении и использовании всего диапазона услуг, которые могут предоставлять ООПТ, очевидна. Еще более явно ощущается эта потребность для сети ООПТ ЗПФ в связи с его трансграничным положением и, соответственно, разнообразием практики и целей управления. Продвижение экосистемных услуг, в частности рекреации, не может не создавать вызовы для базовой цели охраны – биоразнообразия. Руководителям ООПТ следует начать воспринимать это явление как инструмент, который может обеспечить сохранение цельности и ценностей этих объектов – не только как проблему, но и как возможность. В их рекреационном использовании можно выделить два основных подхода: местное использование и туристское использование. Местное использование является более интенсивным в городских, а туризм концентрируется в сельских районах.

В особенности там, где туризм образует или может образовывать костяк местной экономики, ООПТ должны быть способны продемонстрировать приносимые ими выгоды и услуги по региональному развитию, которые они предоставляют. Руководители ООПТ должны играть важную роль в переходе от схемы развития туристской территории как «обычного бизнеса» к созданию *Зеленого туристского объекта*, где главным приоритетом является устойчивое использование территории и ресурсов на уровне природоохранных объектов. Основными составляющими успеха являются: способность показать весь диапазон выгод от ООПТ, способность вырабатывать стратегии при участии всех заинтересованных сторон и, наконец, способность и готовность использовать доступные методы и инструменты для реализации принятых стратегий на всех уровнях – как по вертикали, так и по горизонтали.

**Ключевые слова:** охрана природы, выгоды, охраняемые природные территории, среда, создающая возможности, рекреация, «зеленые» туристские объекты, биоразнообразие, устойчивость, ценности.

## 1. Background:

Traditionally, PAs provide **aesthetic and spiritual** experiences for visitors. The understanding of PAs as a destination for **physical renewal and subsequent mental health and balance** is increasing in particular with regards to urban environments with limited natural space around. The pressure due to the growing need for multiple use of PAs is increasing and there are consequences and opportunities to be seen.

There are a number of threats that are explicitly connected with the growing number of visitors of PAs. Therefore it is of outmost importance that we take note of these threats and do analyse them thoroughly prior to creating recreational/tourism related **strategies** and similar documents. Concepts like LAC, Limits of Acceptable Changes that measures the impacts of recreational use are needed since the primary obligation of the protected area manager is to conserve the biodiversity and other natural values the PAs harbour.

The **benefits that PAs provide for life on earth** include ecological, economic, social and cultural modules, and recreational use of services provided by PAs plays an integral part in many of these modules.

**There are two general views** to be considered in discussions regarding the relation between recreation and protected areas. The management challenges and the practices are very different whether the

1. PA is located in the vicinity of **urban** area where the manager's biggest challenges often lie in securing the conservation outcomes against heavy pressure of use, frequently with illegal activities caused by unsound recreational use, vandalism etc.

2. PA is located in **rural, remote area/region** where the local communities or/and

local economies rely on the ecosystem services provided by the PA. In this case the manager's biggest challenges lie in how to make sure that the conservation outcomes are met and at the same time support and not harm the local community.

## 2. Recreation in Protected Areas as a source of economic benefits for local communities

Tourism industry and nature oriented tourism in particular is one of the largest economic engines today. International tourism grew 2004 by an extraordinary 10,3 % (WTO World Tourism Barometer, June 2005 – Volume 3, Issue 2). In addition, WTO's Tourism 2020 Vision (1995–2020) forecast long-term global growth rate of 4,1 %.

(Tourism 2020 Vision: Set of 6 regional reports and «Global Forecast and Profiles of Market Segments» ISBN 978-92-844-0532-9, see also: <http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/vision.htm>)

Tourism generates tremendous direct economic benefits critical to the economies of the majority of less developed countries. The rate of growth is in great part driven by growing interest in nature oriented tourism and thus the increasing numbers of visitors to PAs.

Examples:

1. The 50 000 residents of Lupande Game Management Area in Zambia raise annual revenue of U\$ 230 000 from two hunting concessions.

*Mulongoy K. J., Gidda S. B.* The Value of Nature: Ecological, Economic, Cultural and Social Benefits of Protected Areas // Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Montreal, 2008. 30 pages.

2. The Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala generated an annual income of ca. U\$ 47 M and provides employment to 7 000 people.

*Mulongoy K. J., Gidda S. B.* The Value of Nature: Ecological, Economic, Cultural and Social Benefits of Protected Areas // Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Montreal, 2008. 30 pages.

One of the major risks within a country/region where PAs' financing relies only on tourism revenue is when the political environment is unstable. Political crisis can quickly create a situation where most of the services will be shut down due to lack of any income. There is thus a huge threat also for the actual conservation if the financial sustainability is not in place.

The benefits of PAs extend spatially far beyond their boundaries. In order to support and argument the benefits, consideration of PAs must be incorporated into wider sustainable development and economic strategies. The greatest challenge with the network of PAs within the Green Belt of Fennoscandia is how to approach and receive adequate attention of the other sectors of both countries and all regions in order to integrate PAs into the wider regional strategies and economic plans in harmonized manner.

### 3. Protected Areas, Green Destinations?

There are many aspects for PA managers to take into consideration in order to create sound management practices regarding recreation and benefits derived from nature oriented tourism. Conservation and recreation can be successfully linked by proper planning. A number of key elements as tools and means to manage PAs must be chained in right order to facilitate sound process and outcomes (Fig. 1).

Explanation and the rationale behind the concepts in Fig. 1.

#### 1. Ecological sustainability:

→ Conserving valuable biomes, ecotypes, forests, coral reefs, species, scenery, landscape etc. needs action of conservation and understanding of the framework of ecological sustainability behind it.

→ In global context the fundamentals regarding nature conservation are to understand the threats and at the same time to realize opportunities protected areas provide.

→ Ecological threats such as climate change, invasive species, pollution etc. are extremely important issues and readily recognized but socio-economical threats are not as evident.

#### 2. Socio-economic sustainability:

→ Threats **for and due to protection** like increased poverty, uneven benefit sharing, weakening of local well being subsequently causing illegal activities, hostile environment and such negative impacts on protected areas and their sustainable management are particularly difficult to overcome.

#### 3. Mainstreaming:

→ Managers need to incorporate the available tools and lessons learned regarding socio-economic sustainability and equity and benefit sharing into their day-to-day work and find the ways to support local economy in order to create the key element of success: **enabling environment**.

#### 4. Enabling environment:

→ Creates opportunities and solves problems. The ecosystem services such as «recreation services» and «health and well being services» can be seen as indirect benefits and services that protected areas

#### Ecological sustainability

- Conservation of biodiversity
- Securing ecological natural processes

#### Socio-economic sustainability

- Preserving and promoting cultural heritage
- Supporting local economies
- Providing recreational services to i.a. contributing to health and well-being

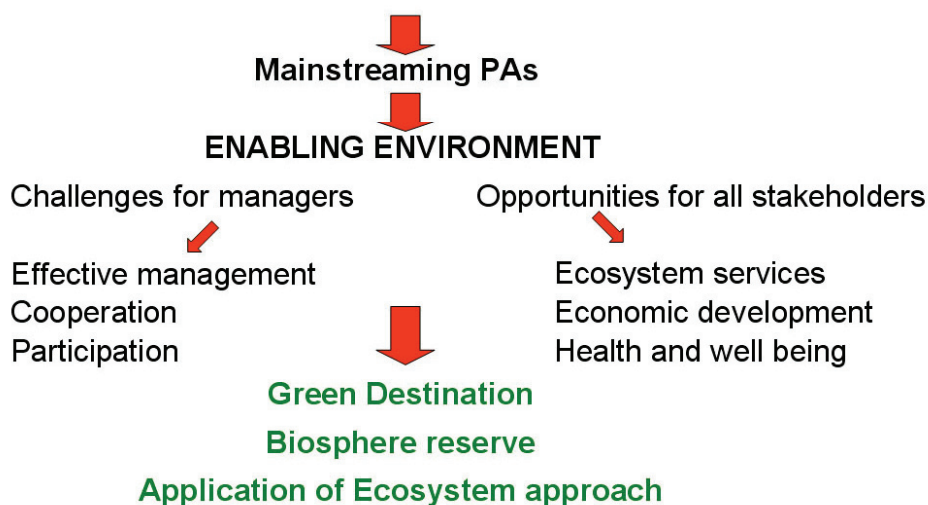


Fig. 1. Schematic presentation of the chain of activities needed to achieve the goals set for Green Destination, Biosphere reserve and application of the Ecosystem approach

provide for people since they need in most cases **active management practices** and thus human interference. **Recreation** can be seen as a service to people providing adventure, outdoors experiences, new skills etc. and **health and well being services** can be seen as more focused activities aiming at concrete human well-being impacts.

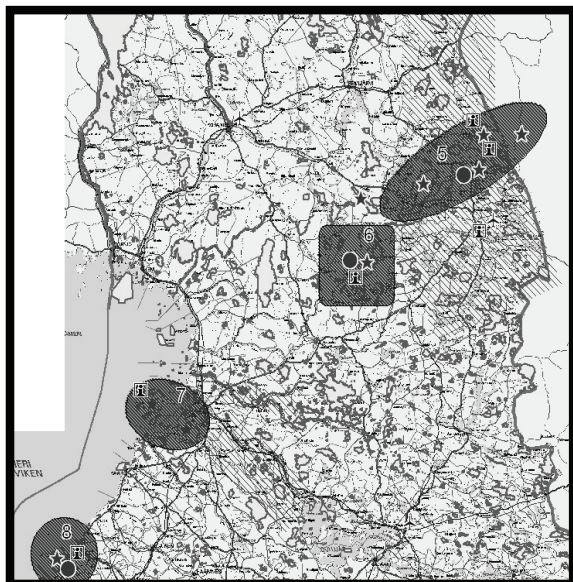
→ Creates management challenges in terms of its effectiveness and its integration into wider society

→ In order to achieve the goals set for sustainable use of PAs, there is a need for a process that involves not only the manager but also all relevant stakeholders, local communities, tourism sector, authorities etc. including effective practices, wide participation and cooperation.

5. Potentially one major outcome of the unbroken chain described in Fig. 1 can lead to tourism destination that fulfils the criteria of «**Green Destination**». The **Biosphere reserve** concept can also act as a tool to achieve a comprehensive green destination. Both need application of the Ecosystem approach and common understanding of sustainable way of utilizing natural resources.

#### 4. Finnish National Network of Protected Areas with high potential for Tourism Development

Sustainable resourcing and financing of PAs are huge constraints and challenges globally. The agencies/organisations responsible for nature conservation should be encouraged to focus on strategic planning of tourism development at all levels. Such planning conducted in a participatory manner brings about many benefits to all relevant stakeholders.



**Network of special interest PAs for tourism development in the County of Northern Ostrobothnia**

Metsähallitus, NHS 2008

Fig. 2. Implication of sustainable tourism strategic planning for PA management

In Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services (NHS) in Ostrobothnia region an exercise was carried out to set up a «Network of Special Interest Protected Areas for Tourism Development» (Fig. 2). Steps are described below:

- 1) Examination of existing and planned tourism strategies by regional authorities, municipalities etc. to find out the possible overlap and gaps between the directions of NHS and other authorities.
- 2) Development and creation of a combined map that reflects the matching interests between the strategies of regional authorities and NHS in tourism development. The circles represent the strategic areas that were identified as key areas for tourism development.
- 3) Incorporating the concept of «Network of Special Interest Protected Areas for Tourism Development» into the regional planning and day-to-day operations.
- 4) Decision to allocate resources strategically as a major step towards a more sustainable approach.
- 5) This network of special interest PAs forms a basis for guidelines for NHS in order to meet the challenges in regards to sustainable development of these rural and remote areas with a strong emphasis on nature oriented tourism.

#### 5. Value of recreational use of Protected Areas for all relevant stakeholders

To generalize, there are four interest groups involved in the use of PAs and their resources:

1. PA Managers
2. Local communities and stakeholders
3. Tourism industry
4. Visitors

1) Backbone for focused planning and resource allocation

2) All aspects of sustainable development must have a special attention in these selected areas

3) Increased activity and resources to cooperation with all stakeholders including local communities, municipalities, universities and other education providers, nature tourism oriented businesses, relevant associations etc.



1) From the PA managers' perspective, Protected Areas need recreational use in order to

- promote nature conservation
- create enabling environment for sustainable development to secure the biodiversity values of the PAs

- secure sustainable financing of PA

2) From the local communities' perspective, recreational use of PAs provides

- means to compensate the disadvantages of protection for the traditional livelihoods and land use practices

- opportunities for employment
- opportunities for further education in rural/remote areas

3) From the tourism industries' perspective, recreational use of PAs provides them with

- growing business opportunities
- image and marketing benefits
- exceptional environments for their services and products

4) From the visitors' perspective, PAs provide a haven

- to interact with nature
- to learn and educate themselves
- to relax physically and mentally
- for adventurous experiences in unique environments

## **6. Securing the biodiversity conservation of Green Belt of Fennoscandia**

To conclude, the critical and evident links between protected areas, biodiversity conservation and economic development are to be taken seriously not only by the managers of PAs but also by the other sectors. Unfortunately, the value of PAs is poorly understood and thus undervalued by markets, politicians and the general public. The importance of recreation and related tourism for local and regional economy and the relevance of PAs in this context need to be successfully communicated to the widest audience. Understanding that PAs do support not only biodiversity conservation but greatly also economic development, helps the integration of PA matters into other sectors' (e.g. land use sector) strategies and action plans. The network of PAs within Green Belt of Fennoscandia may play a significant role in showcasing this approach.

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