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Nature-based tourism, forests and well-being

English abstracts

Research on nature-based tourism expands and becomes more diverse

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Tourism is inevitably a many-sided and global phenomenon. Even tourism occurring in the most remote places is intertwined with urban lifestyles and consumer expectations. Thus, tourism studies are interdisciplinary in nature. In Finland, the importance of nature-based tourism is rapidly growing and the pressures towards research rise from the needs of the livelihood. As forests are so important for Finnish nature and society, Finnish Forest Research Institute Metla has been the leading organisation in enhancing research of nature-based tourism. This publication is an outcome of Metla's project "Tourism and sustainable use of natural and cultural environment" (2000-2006). The project has ended by now but research continues in a project called "The meaning of tourism and recreation for rural development and landscape of the north". Also a new more extensive research programme "Well-being from the Forests" will begin in 2008. Main challenges for future research are firstly, to get more knowledge about international tourists' environmental expectations, secondly, to study the regional income and employment effects caused by tourism, and thirdly, to create processes on how the different land-use interests are reconciled in decision-making.

Keywords: amenity values of forests, nature tourism research, rural development

Icons for ramblers

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“ Rambler ” is a type of tourist who is nature or culture oriented. In this study rambler and his/her road marks are analyzed in the social context of recreational walking. The symbols and signs for the trails, and the development of signs into meaningful icons for ramblers, are discussed on the basis of iconographical analyses along some real life long distance trails. The graphical form of signs and the message of the symbols are discussed in several international cases. Ramblers’ road marks are classified according to the type of the trail, the destination and the theme for the long walk. Ramblers’ certificates about the tour are studied in the context of the ramblers’ personality and different groups of ramblers.

We can see that several signs for long distance trails are uniform. The form and meaning of signs, like the shell symbol for the pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostela in Spain, are developing into highly appreciated and well-known icons. Similar processes can be seen in the creation of marketing brands for nature tourism. Trail icons are adapted for marketing different products for long distance ramblers.

Keywords: brand, icon, trail, rambler, sign.

Tourists’ images and experiences of the landscape of Ounasselkä Fell Region

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The study combined the perspectives of sociological study of nature-based tourism and environmental psychology to examine tourists’ experiences and expectations concerning landscapes. The data consisted of seventeen focus-group interviews conducted in the Ounasselkä Fell Region in the EU-financed project LANDSCAPE LAB.

Within sociological study, tourists’ experiences in a forest landscape were explored. The focus was on the cultural and subjective nature of experiences. When recounting experiences tourists highlighted either general images related to wilderness forest or their personal experiences in the forest. Arguments and maps were studied within environmental psychology. The study illustrated that spaciousness helps people understand the composition of landscape, increases feelings of security, and helps orientate in a strange environment. In addition, visual and biological diversity of landscapes was emphasised and infrastructure was expected to be in harmony with its natural surroundings.

Even though combining perspectives from different disciplines within one study is challenging and laborious, the images related to particular landscape can be studied both generally and in more specific ways. Research information was produced in a localised form and could be implemented in land use planning. By recognising tourists’ role in formulating landscape objectives for planning, the development of tourism resorts can be conducted in more sustainable way.

Keywords: landscape, focus groups, sociology, environmental psychology, tourism

Tourist segmentation based on environmental values and quality consciousness of the tourist segments – results from ecolabel research in Koli National Park

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Environmental issues have been a hot topic lately. For example, there have been public discussions on global warming and its future effect. People are in general more interested in environmental issues and they also want to make a difference. It has been stated that individuals can also have an effect on what is happening, with their consumer behaviour for example. People have adopted environmental friendly ways in their everyday lives and now they also have started to think about the impacts of travelling to the environment. More environmental friendly forms of tourism, such as nature and ecotourism have been born as a reaction to this demand. Protected areas have also become more and more attractive and more popular tourism destinations. This creates a huge challenge to the managers and developers in protected areas. On the other hand when people are more environmentally conscious they also respect nature; protected areas have profiled themselves as nature tourism resorts and therefore attract more tourists that are really interested in the environment and also want to keep nature in good condition. Customer survey in Koli National Park showed that tourists can be grouped based on their environmental values. The groups were formed with the assistance of the New Environmental Paradigm statements (by Dunlap et. al. 2000). In Koli three groups were found: Biocentrics, Ambivalents and Anthropocentrics. These groups did not differ a lot from each other based on demographic factors, but the differences became more evident when their opinions on ecolabels were asked. The tourists' environmental values (tourist types) affected their opinions on ecolabels and certifications as well as their opinions on ecolabelled products and services.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, tourist-types, ecolabel/regional ecolabel, environmental attitudes

Accessibility, an important issue when planning nature based tourism

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In Finland there are approximately 500 000 people with different levels of disability. All those people with a disability and also people living and spending time with disabled people have the same need for relaxation and recreation as any other person. As the population ages, there will probably be a significant shift in demand for recreational opportunities, as well as changes in the facilities and activities required in recreational areas. Furthermore, accessibility does not only improve usability for people with special needs but it makes tourism in general more accessible for all. Accessibility is an overarching term. It is an important issue for all nature visitors not only for those with disabilities. Therefore it is relevant to consider it as a tool for realizing tourism for all. Although the emphasis in accessibility is in infrastructure and facilities, it is even a wider context including availability of guidance and information, user-friendly services as well as activities that are easy for all kinds of visitors to participate in.

Keywords: accessibility, tourism for all, nature, information, special needs

The importance of nature to Finns and the relationship between the use of nature and perceived health

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The relationship between the use of green areas and human wellbeing is increasingly recognized and may also have important economic implications. This paper presents the main results of a large survey conducted in autumn 2005 aimed at (i) identifying different types of relationships in the urban nature of Finland, (ii) studying the relationship between the use of nature and self-reported health and well-being as well as (iii) investigating the differences of restorative benefits in different kinds of favourite outdoor places. The data was collected through a mail survey in the cities of Helsinki and Tampere. A postal questionnaire was sent to 3000 residents aged 15–75, randomly sampled by the Finnish Population Register Centre.

Perceived psychological wellbeing was influenced by total amount of time spent in nature areas. Moreover, the results suggest that the intensity of restorative experiences differ between different kinds of favourite green and urban environments. The results show that nature is still important to most residents living in urban environments and therefore, special attention should be paid in city planning to safeguarding socially valuable nature areas.

Keywords: green areas, favourite places, forest recreation, human health, land use planning, urban forestry

Collective entrepreneurship and commoditization of ecosystem services: the case of Saimaa-Pielinen area

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The market creation for ecosystem services is currently a hot topic in environmental economics and policy. The research projects concerning the conceptual, ecological and institutional aspects of commoditization of ecosystem services are under way in various parts of the globe. In this article I focus on the collaborative and institutional conditions of organizing collective action, the purpose of which is to identify and utilize certain ecosystem services and aesthetic expectations in designing the club goods for regional eco-tourism. The perspective used is that of Collective Entrepreneurship. The case area is Saimaa-Pielinen, Eastern Finland, which is well known for its geological, biological and cultural values, e.g. the glacial upheaval of the surface of land, thousands of lakes, and endemic species. The purpose of the article is to articulate, tentatively, a proposal for the action research that would support the process of acquiring the World Heritage Status for the Saimaa-Pielinen area by offering some substantial and procedural guidelines for reaping the collective economic, social and ecological benefits from the commoditization of ecosystem services.

Keywords: ecosystem services, collective entrepreneurship, aesthetic imagination, institution building

Recreation value markets and ecosystem approach

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The aim of this article is to consider recreation value markets as means of carrying out the ecosystem approach. In the beginning some basic issues about nature value and recreation value markets (trading) are presented and then a brief account of the paradigm change in forestry towards systems approach is given. Special attention is directed to ecosystem services and it is reflected on why the production of landscape and recreational benefits require that the activities of nature users are coordinated in a wide landscape scale. It is noticed that the markets fail to produce the optimal landscape in an ecological and esthetical sense. That is why some kind of co-operation between landowners is needed. It is then examined how it is possible to harness that kind of co-operation by creating ecosystem markets. The production of recreation and landscape values concentrates on dynamic cross-border processes after which practicing command-and-control policy is very difficult. The market mechanisms require co-operation. Pure co-operation and markets are close to each other.

Reconciliation of tourism and traditional livelihoods – action research in the village at the end of the road

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Tourism is regarded as an extremely important and often the only growing industry in so called peripheral regions. People in such areas as Finnish Lapland are bound to move from traditional natural-resource-based occupations to the field of tourism, at least to some extent. However, tourism does not only bring prosperity but also problems with different understandings of nature-use and with jobs that do not fulfil expectations. There are a lot of possibilities but also problems in combining the traditional nature-based-work and tourism in the context of peripheral dwelling place, village. Action research method can be one possible method in finding the best local practices in reconciliation of traditional livelihoods and tourism industry. The action research method is a participatory and communal process, where a researcher and a group of people try to solve together the problem that is affecting the daily life of the group. An empirical study case in this research is the village of Lokka. Lokka is a remote and relatively isolated village beside the biggest artificial lake in Finland. The aim of the research is to produce a local story of the spatial and temporal practices of everyday life and their relationship to land-use and to different livelihoods.

The role of forests and forestry organizations in coastal tourism

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Coastal areas, archipelagos and forests attract tourists. The policies concerning coastal areas emphasize the economic significance of tourism especially in rural and remote regions. The role of forest-related tourism has also been recognized in these strategies. Along with traditional timber-production forestry, coastal forests are considered as a resource for developing livelihoods based on nature and cultural tourism. The forests close to the sea and on islands differ ecologically and aesthetically from forests on the more sheltered mainland areas. Coastal forests have been strongly affected by the long history of human settlement that has resulted in diverse cultural landscapes, in which trees and timber are present, for example, in wooded pastures and specific traditional wooden buildings and other constructions. The special ecological, geographical and cultural features, in addition to the facts that almost half of the population of Finland live on the coast and that shorelines are scattered with summer cottages, impose new challenges for practical forestry organisations. The role of Metsähallitus (the state-owned enterprise taking care of public forests) as a coastal actor has been increasing steadily because of the popularity of maritime national parks and other recreation and nature conservation areas. About 80 % of the forests situated on the coast are owned by private people. The organizations providing services for private forest owners affect forests first of all through the silvicultural advice promoting landscape aesthetics. These advisory organisations also carry out coastal development projects. The income of the people living on the coast, and especially on the islands has through centuries come from many different sources. In the future, the typically small-scale forest-related nature and cultural tourism activities are likely to contribute to the continuation of this tradition.

Keywords: coastal forestry, maritime tourism, forestry organizations, policy, research

Increasing role of national parks as destinations of nature-based tourism and tools of regional development

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In Finland the number of visitors to national parks has grown, and the economic and political expectations of tourism have increased. This study analyses how the role of tourism has changed in national park planning. Parks are understood as socially and historically produced spaces, and thus, the role of tourism in parks is neither historically nor culturally unchanging, or indisputable. The study is based on the land use and management plans of Finnish national parks and some other official planning documents. According to the analysis, the role of tourism has increased in national parks as a result of the growth of nature-based tourism and changes in conservation thinking. At present, tourism is justified not only with recreational and educational arguments, but the aspects of regional development are increasingly raised in the plans. The aim is to combine the ecological goals of nature conservation and the economic goals of nature-based tourism in national parks by implementing the principles of sustainable development. At the same time the interests of local people are taken into account more widely than previously. The changes show that nature conservation has become more instrumental and market-oriented.

Implementation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Koli National Park

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EUROPARC Federation, the umbrella organisation of European Protected areas, has developed The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas to help combine the needs of both tourism and the environment. In Koli National Park the charter was implemented by making a sustainable tourism strategy for the area. In addition, seven action plans, which concentrate on structures and path erosion, waste management, energy use, drinking water, environmental education, safety and accessibility, were formulated for the National Park. Action plans were also made for 26 partner enterprises and associations. The planning process was led by the aims and resources of the stakeholders. Importantly, this makes it possible for businesses that are not in the forefront of environmental protection to join. However, it can be asked if self-imposed aims and actions are too modest to have any positive effect on the environment? The Charter can also be used as a regional environmental label. This raises questions about the validity of self-imposed objectives in contrast to minimum standards which must be fulfilled in environmental labels like the Nordic Swan Label.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, tourism management, national parks, environmental labelling, stakeholder co-operation

The factors explaining the number of visits to national parks

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Visitor flows to national parks are increasing all over the world. Understanding the relationship between the number of visits and park characteristics is crucial for the planning and management of existing parks and in assessing the impacts of new parks. The study examines how natural characteristics of a park, the recreation facilities and services inside a park and tourist services in surrounding communities, and park's location, are related to the number of visits. Two methods, classification and regression modelling, are used to analyze the visits to thirty-five national parks in Finland. The results of the classification approach show that both natural values and good provision of recreation facilities are related to a high number of visits. The regression modelling showed that recreation opportunities, number of biotopes, provision of trails and the park's age, increased the number of visits, while the park location in relation to population has a minor effect.

Horse trails and ski runs as dispersal routes for alien species

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Outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism represent an increasingly intensive form of land-use, which has considerable impacts on native ecosystems. We report results on two experiments, which assess the effects of horse riding and ski run management on vegetation and on the introduction of alien species in northern Finland. In the first experiment carried out at Oulanka National Park we investigated, whether seeds of introduced species can be dispersed to protected areas by horse manure and whether disturbance increases the density of introduced species. In the second experiment carried out at Ruka ski resort, we investigated whether ski run management increases the potential of alien species germinating and establishing in natural forests. Our results reveal that new alien species can be introduced and established in protected areas through recreational horse riding, if horses are allowed to defecate in the area. Soil disturbance further enhances the establishment and spread of introduced species, and therefore horse trails can act as dispersal corridors for introduced species. Management of ski runs including disturbance, revegetation by alien seed and fertilization poses a threat to the biodiversity of native environments. Nevertheless, alien species have not spread to adjacent areas due to mowing. Our results indicate that it is important to consider the threat of alien species at all stages of planning and management, especially areas nearby nature reserves.

Keywords: alien species, disturbance, introduced species, horse riding, ski resorts

The relationship between nature tourism and nature conservation in two tourism areas on the island states of South Pacific?

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Tourism is an important source of foreign exchange and employment in the island states of South Pacific. Yet its negative impacts on the environment and local culture are widespread. Despite this, the importance of tourism for the nations will grow as the traditional forms of economy in the area are giving way to globalization. Small states do not usually have the resources to manage tourism development in a sustainable way, but regional cooperation may help in fixing these shortcomings.

Tourism development in the region is distributed unevenly both between the island nations and within the nations. Fiji belongs to one of the most popular host regions in South Pacific, while in Tonga tourism development is yet in its early stages. Fiji's travel industry has been developed on a large scale with the help of foreign investment, whereas in Tonga tourism development has been small-scale and largely locally owned. Taveuni island in Fiji and 'Eua island in Tonga were studied as examples of host areas for nature tourism.

Nature tourism and ecotourism are growing sectors of tourism that many developing countries are trying to utilize. These forms of tourism help in redirecting benefits of tourism in remote rural areas and in giving an economic justification for nature conservation in poor countries. Local populations' views on development of tourism and nature conservation have been charted with a questionnaire survey made in Taveuni island in Fiji and in 'Eua in Tonga during the months of June and July in 2003. Attitudes towards tourism and tourists in the two islands are so far positive, although the population of Taveuni is more reserved about tourism development. Attitudes vary but are mostly receptive to nature conservation. It is also regarded as economically useful. The people of the two islands share their wish for more local ownership in tourism development.