

PAN Parks principles: cross-cultural comparison – Bieszczady & Slovenski Raj National Parks

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Tourism is noted as the fastest growing industry with many environmental and socio-economic impacts, which significantly effect *Natura 2000* locations. *Natura 2000* is an ecological network of protected areas in the European Union, which serve as the centre of the EU's policy on nature conservation. The purpose of this network is to maintain and restore habitats and species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range. *Natura 2000* will happen in 20-25 European countries and it is important to know how tourism will impact or affect these sites. The PAN (Protected Areas Network) Parks project, initiated by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and a Dutch leisure company in 1997, was named as one of two most relevant management initiatives for *Natura 2000* sites (DG Environment, Lisbon conference, 1999). PAN Parks is based on the concept of active involvement of the tourism industry in conserving Europe's wilderness areas within a network of effectively managed and verified protected areas. To receive PAN Park's verification, a park must meet principles and criteria (i.e., nature values, habitat management, visitor management, sustainable tourism development strategy, and business partnerships) adopted in 2001, which include criteria to develop and implement a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (STDS). Sustainable tourism development in protected areas may mean 'no development' and any tourism in protected areas should be carefully evaluated and, where permitted, carefully regulated and monitored.

The *purpose* of this study was to determine if PAN Parks principles and criteria are feasible and applicable cross-culturally for candidate parks in different countries. The main objective was to assess if the criteria must be adapted or compromised within the context of the five principles for each country or region. The prism of sustainability *framework* adapted from the Wuppertal Institute, Germany, was used as the theoretical lens from which to conduct this study. The prism includes four dimensions of sustainability including the institutional, social-cultural, economic and environmental.

Core questions were: *Do the three verified parks differ in the process and quality of implementation of principles one to three to obtain PAN Parks verification? What influence does implementation of principles one to three have on the STDS process? and Do elements of the dimensions of sustainability play a role in the STDS process?* This presentation will describe how to use the sustainability framework to analysis PAN Park principles and STDS implementation processes at the park level.

A *qualitative methodology* involving a comparative case study approach was used. At the time of this study, there were three verified parks as of September 2002. The study is divided in two phases. In phase one a comparison of three certified PAN parks, namely Bieszczady NP (Poland), Fulufjället NP (Sweden) and Oulanka NP (Finland), on the first three principles was done. Content analysis of verification documents, participant observation, and expert interviews among park managers at a PAN Park workshop in Poland (April 2003) was used to

gain insight into differences in implementation of PAN Parks principles in these parks. Phase two focused on PAN Parks principal four (STDS) with indepth interviews during May to July of stakeholders at Bieszczady NP (n=8) in Poland (verified park) and Slovensky Raj NP in Slovakia (n=11; candidate park) for comparison Interviews were designed to collect data about the economic, ecological, social and institutional dimensions in both parks and their surroundings and were assisted by local interpreters, taped, and transcribed for textual analysis with Nud*ist, qualitative software for the social sciences. PAN Parks principles and criteria were integrated within the four dimensions of sustainability as an approach to data analysis and ordering of results into thematic categories (e.g., institutional divided into policy, management, status of protection, legislation, etc.). It has been argued that principle four depends on the specific social and institutional dimensions of each park. We believe these dimensions and relations between them vary between countries and even between regions within the same country. These differences can influence the way and extent to which a park can meet – or not – the criteria defined by PAN Parks. Therefore, we sought to determine if it is realistic to use the same criteria for each site.

Findings show that there are indeed differences between the social-cultural, economic, environmental and institutional contexts in Poland and Slovakia with more extreme differences when compared to Sweden and Finland (i.e, laws, governmental structure, economic and political stability, etc.). From a general perspective, PAN Parks principles and criteria are broad enough to be used for each cultural context and standards and integrity of the criteria should be maintained cross-culturally. Yet, the conditions on which the criteria should be met for each park location should vary for each country (i.e. time frame for verification, funding available, help and technical assistance, etc.). The degree of readiness for an STDS in Poland remains in the beginning stages since the park was recently verified on principles 1 to 3 and they are presently developing the structure of an STDS. In Slovakia, the park is not yet verified and may not be due to limitations not related to ability to establish an STDS; therefore, direct comparisons among the parks was not possible. Many of the ideals of PAN Parks and an STDS are based on western European situations, which should be considered in the verification of parks in former eastern block countries.

In *conclusion*, the sustainability framework was useful for examining issues of sustainability in implementation of PAN Park principles and will be helpful in developing indicators to monitor the balance between sustainable tourism and nature conservation. PAN Parks is an innovative initiative and still in its infancy, yet the task of networking Europe's finest parks is apparently succeeding.