

National park tourists and their integration to the surrounding rural community

Tuija Sievänen, Marjo Neuvonen, Eija Pouta and A. Sarkki

National parks are often national icons and destinations for nature tourists. Park tourism is seen as a substantial cultural, social and economic phenomenon, which is going to be even more important with decreasing space and expanding human populations. Structural changes, such as decreasing primary production, in the economic base of rural communities, have forced communities to seek alternatives in order to maintain their economic viability. Park tourism is identified as an opportunity to strengthen the rural economy in regions that can provide natural amenity values and recreation services. The case study from two national parks, Seitsemien National Park and Linnansaari National Park, analyses how park visitors relate to the surrounding rural communities. The purpose of the study was to examine the association between attitudes toward rural areas, place attachment, the use of and satisfaction with the services in rural communities and the intention for future visits. Data was gathered by a mail questionnaire for park visitors. The study identifies different types of visitors in terms of their attachment to the region, satisfaction to services and their interest to become a frequent visitor. The preliminary results show that about 10% of the visitors feel attached to the surrounding country-side of a national park. The attachment is positively correlated with the attitude towards the rural area around the park. Both the measure of attachment and the positive rural attitude were positively associated with the satisfaction related to the services provided by the area. The majority, 65-70 % of visitors planed to visit the region in next five years. In the model for future visitation the positive rural attitude and the place attachment increased the visitation willingness significantly. The service satisfaction had also a positive but smaller effect.