

SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM AND THE ROLE OF PAN PARKS STATUS IN OULANKA NATIONAL PARK, FINLAND

Riikka Puhakka¹, Stuart Cottrell², Mylene van der Donk³ & Pirkko Siikamäki⁴

¹Thule Institute, P.O. Box 7300, FIN-90014 University of Oulu, Finland, +358 40 5640 490, riikka.puhakka@oulu.fi

²Colorado State University, 1480 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80525, USA, +001970-491-7074, Cottrell@cnr.colostate.edu, <http://welcome.warnercnr.colostate.edu/HDNR/people/stu.htm>

³PAN Parks Foundation, PF 264, 9002 Gyor, Hungary, +31-641886633, mdonk@panparks.org

⁴University of Oulu/Thule Institute/Oulanka Research Station, Liikasenvaarantie 134, FIN-93999 Kuusamo, Finland, +358 8 8515 212, pirkko.siikamaki@oulu.fi

Abstract

National parks have become important tourist attractions in Finland, and the role of tourism has increased in the management and land use of parks. Meanwhile, tourism has become an important tool for regional development, especially in northern Finland. New international initiatives to develop sustainable nature-based tourism have been introduced also in Finland. PAN (Protected Area Network) Parks Foundation is a non-profit organization aimed to balance the needs of wilderness protection and community development by facilitating sustainable tourism development.

This study examines the socio-cultural sustainability of tourism in Oulanka National Park located in northeastern Finland. The central question concerns the role of PAN Parks certification in community and tourism development. How does it benefit socio-cultural development of the area, and how does this ideology fit in with the values of local people? The study is based on a questionnaire (n=314) and semi-structured interviews (n=40) of representatives of NGOs, tourism and other businesses, local authorities and local people.

Findings show that most of the stakeholders have a positive attitude towards tourism development in Oulanka. The economic benefits of PAN Parks status have not yet been realized, but interviewees expect the benefits will grow while tourists' familiarity with PAN Parks increases. Local inhabitants' knowledge of PAN Parks is still weak. Despite the aim to aid community development, PAN Parks ideology may be perceived to conflict partly with the local way of life. PAN Parks is based on the idea of untouched wilderness where humans are visitors who do not remain. For rural people nature is often an integral part of their way of life, and they do not aim at separating nature and culture. Thus, some locals defend their special rights to use their natural surroundings and worry further restrictions will be set (e.g., fishing and hunting in the park). Increasing co-operation with local people could improve the mutual relations.

Key Words

nature-based tourism, national parks, socio-cultural sustainability, PAN Parks

Key References

- Cottrell, S.P. & J. Raadik (2008, in press). Research note: Socio-cultural benefits of PAN Parks at Bieszczady National Park, Poland. *Finnish Journal of Tourism Research (Matkailututkimus)* 4: 1.
- Puhakka, R. (2008, forthcoming). Increasing role of tourism in Finnish national parks. Submitted to *Fennia*.
- Törn, A., P. Siikamäki, A. Tolvanen, P. Kauppila & J. Rämetsä (2008, in press). Local people, nature conservation and tourism in northeastern Finland. *Ecology and Society*.