PROTECTED AREAS IN TOURISTS’ DESTINATION CHOICE IN THE ALPINE SPACE

Forest Recreation & Tourism serving urbanised societies, Hämmeenlinna, Finland
DI Veronika Wirth
Prof. Dr. Ulrike Pröbstl
Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Haider
Background

- Landscape and nature experience is increasing as motivation for tourism
  - Experience nature is for 78-83% of the German population very important or important. (F.U.R. 2004)
- Alpine summer tourism strongly relies on landscape.
  - Landscape is the most important factor in the decision for a summer holiday in Austria (Tourismus Monitor Austria 2005:16).
- Trends supporting nature based tourism and eco-tourism in the alpine area
  - Hopes for a revival of summer resort epoche of the Alps (“Sommerfrische”) in the Belle Epoque as more days of sun can be expected in the alpine space. (Müller et al. 2007).
Rural development – role of protected areas

- In Europe there is a trend to urbanisation. Negative impacts for rural areas are feared.
- This trend takes shape especially in the alpine space

Bevölkerungsbilanz 2006: Wanderungsbilanz nach Gemeinden

Wanderungssaldo (Binnen- und Außenwanderungssaldo) je 1.000 Einwohner
- bis -10,0
- -9,0 - -5,0
- -4,9 - -0,1
- 0,0 - 4,9
- 5,0 - 9,9
- 10,0 und mehr
Marketing of rural areas enhancement via protected areas

In the context of rural tourism marketing and branding plays an increasing role:

- The competition in the tourist sector increases. On the market there are more and more similar products without independent profile.
- The destination choice becomes more difficult and complex for tourists. The image of a destination can be the critical stimulus in the decision
- This situation makes it necessary to offer a differentiated product with a clear profile and an appealing image. This can be achieved most effectively by branding.

Model of destination branding

Existing organic Image
- Managing secondary Associations
- Marketing Communications
- Marketing programs

Brand Element Mix
- Attributes Component
- Affective Component
- Attitudes Component

Existing Induced Image

Brand Identity
- Existing organic Image
- Brand Element Mix
- Existing Induced Image

Positioning & target markets

Brand Image Building
- Marketing programs

Dest. size & Composition

Liping Cai 2002:725
Factors in tourists’ destination choice

Destination appeal and experiences offered are shaped by:

- Attractions
- Amenities
- Accessibility
- Human Resources
- Image and Character
- Price

UNWTO 2007:1
Research questions

- Which role do protected areas play in the destination choice?
  - Which tourists find destinations in protected areas attractive? What are their expectations?
- Can protected areas contribute to destination branding?
- Is a higher price in a region with protected areas acceptable, a kind of “nature-tax”?
  - Under which conditions are tourists willing to pay more in regions with protected areas?
  - What amount are tourists willing to pay?
Sampling and survey

- Web based survey in a major tourist origin area for alpine summer tourism
- Germany-wide representative online survey
  - at least one holiday trip in the last 3 years
  - age group: 18-70 years
- Sampling procedure via online panel
- N= 1153
- Response rate: 56%
- 34/26 questions
Design of one choice set

Protected areas in the surroundings

Nature and landscape in the surroundings

Possible Activities (Sports and Infrastructure)

Cultural offers and events

Days of sun in the summer period

Size, character and offers of the location

Price difference
Results – Motives

Motives for summer holidays in the Alps (alpine interested)

- Resting and relaxing
- Intact nature and unspoilt landscape
- Traditional regional cuisine
- Way of life of the local population
- Cultural sights and offers
- Fun and diversion
- Challenge and special experience
- Company and conviviality
- Physical fitness and sports
- Luxury and treating oneself
- Physical well-being and beauty
- Others

Motives for summer holidays (non-alpine interested)

- Resting and relaxing
- Intact nature and unspoilt landscape
- Traditional regional cuisine
- Way of life of the local population
- Cultural sights and offers
- Fun and diversion
- Challenge and special experience
- Company and conviviality
- Physical fitness and sports
- Luxury and treating oneself
- Physical well-being and beauty
- Others

Results – Motives

N= 990

N= 125

*** p<0.001
** p<0.01
* p<0.05
## Attributes in the destination choice

### Attributes and offers of a holiday destination in the Alps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>5 Very important</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 not important</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good quality of accommodation and gastronomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intact, unspoilt nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good price of accommodation and gastronomy</td>
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<td>Over average days of sun</td>
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<td>Protected areas in the region (e.g. national parks, nature parks)</td>
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<td>Swimming opportunities</td>
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<td>Beautiful, versatile cultural landscape</td>
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<td>Hiking and mountaineering opportunities</td>
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<td>Nature experience offers (e.g. guided tours, educational trails…)</td>
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<td>Versatile cultural offers</td>
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<td>Family friendly offers</td>
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<td>Versatile shopping facilities</td>
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<td>High quality wellness and spa facilities</td>
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<td>Events and festivals</td>
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<td>Entertainment and nightlife</td>
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<td>Health resort facilities</td>
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<td>Extended sport offers (e.g. horse riding, golf, indoor facilities)</td>
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<td>Climbing opportunities and fixed rope routes</td>
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<td>Versatile mountain bike routes</td>
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<td>Other offers</td>
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N= 990
First results of the DCE
Latent class segmentation to document heterogeneity

- Social oriented visitor (60%)
  - Significant attributes influencing the destination choice positively: rather large busy locations, sport activities, cultural offers, nature experience offers, days of sun, price; no influence of protected areas.
  - Group characteristics: Over average representation of young persons, with basic education and A-levels, under average time spent outdoors; Motivational factors: Conviviality and fun.

- Nature oriented visitor (27%)
  - Significant attributes influencing the destination choice positively: small locations with only basic facilities, sport activities, cultural offers, national parks, nature experience offers, price.

- Outdoor oriented visitor (13%)
  - Significant attributes influencing the destination choice positively: sport activities, days of sun, national parks.
  - Group characteristics: Over average representation of elder persons, basic and secondary school.
Different protection categories in the destination choice

- National parks and nature parks are a selection criteria for some market segments
  - National parks are most preferred
  - Nature parks are a significant selection criterion only for people who are well informed about PA
- Natura 2000
  - Opportunities have been associated with this “brand”
  - Disappointing results
  - Even negative for some visitor segments
Willingness to pay for PA

Would you consider to pay a higher price in a region with protected areas, a kind a "nature tax" if the following conditions apply?

If the money is dedicated...

- to protect endangered plant and animal species
- to the protected area in general
- to improve the quality of the recreational infrastructure, e.g. trails information, look outs
- to research related to protected areas
- to guided tours and educational offers
- Other

[Bar chart showing percentages for each category]
Willingness to pay for PA

Which amount do you consider to pay if your selected criteria apply?

- More than 10€ per adult and week: 2%
- None at all: 13%
- Up to 1€ per adult and week: 11%
- 1€ - 3€ per adult and week: 30%
- 3€ - 5€ per adult and week: 27%
- 5€ - 10€ per adult and week: 17%
Discussion

- These results reflect the opinions of a representative sample of the German population interested in spending summer holidays in the Alps.
- For a market segment of about 30-40% (classes 2 and 3) protected areas are an attribute affecting destination choice, strongly related to the motives.
- Protected areas are an attraction only in combination with other offers, especially recreational activities.
- There are large differences between different protection categories.
- Respondents state a general willingness to support the maintenance of conservation issues and recreational infrastructure in protected areas.
DI Veronika Wirth
Prof. Dr. Ulrike Pröbstl
University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna
Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences
Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning

Peter-Jordan-Str. 82, A-1190 Vienna
Tel.: +43 1 47654-7248, Fax: +43 1 47654-7209
veronika.wirth@boku.ac.at, www.boku.ac.at

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Haider
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada
School of Resource and Environmental Management

8888 University Drive, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6
Phone: +1 778- 782-3066 wolfgang_haider@sfu.ca, www.rem.sfu.ca