

# **The management measures - components of sustainable tourism development in natural parks. Case study: Natural Park del Carrascal de la Font Roja (Alcoi-Spain) and Bucegi Natural Park (Romania)**

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**Abstract:** *The management teams of natural parks are able to achieve sustainable development goals only by involving all stakeholders and through creating population awareness on the negative effects of the activities carried out within the parks, including or, first of all, tourist activities. The main objective of the article is to highlight the specific management measures for sustainable tourism development in two natural parks: del Carrascal de la Font Roja (Alcoi-Spain) and Bucegi (Romania). Considering that the continuous improvement of managerial measures represents a necessity, the paper also emphasizes the need to educate visitors, especially the young ones, by introducing specialized tours with the main objective to shape their desired responsible behaviour.*

**Key-words:** *natural parks, management measures, sustainable tourism development, visitor management*

## **1. Introduction**

Tourism development contributes to ensuring the necessary economic, financial and human resources, both for the development as well as natural parks' protection. However, the destructive effects that uncontrolled tourism expansion can cause at host-destinations cannot be omitted. A natural park is a delimited territory where natural, historical and cultural elements are protected under a well-established regulation for conservation and sustainable development (Puteanu, 2016). National and natural parks are regarded as places with high levels of biodiversity and unique ecosystems (Tai, et al., 2016, p.34), ensuring wildlife safety, maintaining

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biodiversity and several ecosystem services (Karanth and DeFries, 2011; Whitelaw, King and Tolkach, 2014). Such areas are especially valuable to the endangered or near endangered species (Lal, et al., 2017, p.141). Ensuring the conditions to protect existing ecosystems depends, to a high extent, on the quality of the managerial activities carried out and the capacity to transpose them into practice.

This article presents a parallel analysis of management measures within del Carrascal de la Font Roja and Bucegi Natural Parks with particular attention to aspects related to tourism development and visitor management measures.

## **2. Management approaches in the context of sustainable tourism development in natural parks**

Tourism destinations are recognised as complex governance contexts and the complexities of tourism destination governance are further exacerbated when the tourism destination is also a protected area setting (Islam, Ruhanen and Ritchie, 2017, p.1). More often, protected areas such as national parks and wilderness areas are also important locations for tourism activities (Deguignet, et al., 2014). In such resource-based tourism destinations it is necessary to manage visitor use with policies to eliminate inappropriate activities, enhance visitors' experience and their understanding of the destination, while maintaining the quality of tourism resources (Cooper, et al., 1998). It was largely acknowledged that exceeding carrying capacity not only reduces visitor satisfaction but also has substantial impacts on wildlife (Bultjens, et al., 2005, p. 738). At the same time, despite the negative impacts on the sustainable development of such destinations, visitor management can also be an important financial contributor, as sufficient finance is required for parks to provide benefits to society, such as outdoor recreation and biodiversity conservation (Eagles and McCool, 2002). Visitor management is an ongoing process and is considered to be a tool of sustainable tourism management and ensures that the visitor receives a high-quality experience, while encouraging visitors to adopt appropriate behaviour (Cooper, et al., 1998). It is also well known the fact that visitors are willing to discover natural landscapes, unchanged by humans (Vijoli and Marinescu, 2016, p. 161).

Being important recreational areas, the management teams in natural parks cannot remove tourism issues from their efforts. Therefore, in order to create the prerequisites for sustainable development "hardware" combined to "software" upgrades should be undertaken. These measures enhance competitiveness and enable efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness to park tourism management (Ly and Xiao, 2016, p.13). Software upgrade refers to staffing and human resources, i.e. management style and staff awareness of tourism services, elements much easier to achieve compared to investments or other financial initiatives which are components of hardware upgrades. Park planning and management occur within a hierarchy of law and policies, with the governing legislation at the top, site planning and

operational management at the bottom, management plans being central within this hierarchy (Eagles, Coburn and Swartman, 2014, p.46).

Recent studies concluded that due to efficient managerial measures development of the tourism industry can cause scale effects and promote the improvement of eco-efficiency and, moreover, meeting the requirement of eco-efficiency maximizes desirable outputs (Peng, et al., 2017, p. 208). The management actions can influence the sustainable development even of the most fragile parts in the park in a shared vision which can ensure: (a) to preserve as much as possible the local ecosystem; (b) to preserve the cultural landscape; (c) to preserve the geological structure; (d) to allow the tourist uses with minimal infrastructure construction (Benedetto et al., 2016, p. 46). Moreover, by developing appropriate communication strategies the managers are able to maximize visiting experience and to attract new and responsible visitors (Nechita, 2014, p. 276).

### **3. Management measures undertaken in the natural park del Carrascal de la Fonta Roja (Alcoi – Spain)**

This protected nature area occupies the Menejador sierra (1,352 m) in the municipal areas of Alcoi and Ibi and covers 2,298 ha of protected area. It has one of the best preserved Mediterranean forests in the land, with shady evergreen oak forests (holm oaks, small-leaf oaks, maples) and perennials such as yews, flowering ash and kermes oak. Each of the areas has its own associated fauna, including mammals (wild boar, genets, wild cats, badgers, etc.), reptiles and above all birds (Bonelli's eagle, golden eagle, vultures, eagle owl, etc.) (Parque Natural del Carrascal de la Font Roja).

The Park's personnel of 9 permanent employees are organized into two departments, i.e. technical and conservation. Their activity is supported through a voluntary project (VOLCAM type) as well as by various volunteer groups with whom they have a fruitful collaboration (Conselleria de Medio Ambiente, Agua, Urbanismo y Vivienda, 2009). A research that highlighted the elements that influence the decision to visit the park revealed that more than half of respondents considered that the following elements are excellent: the equipment, the activities of exploiting and preserving the potential of the park, and also the attention paid to the visitors. Therefore, the park is certified with the quality label Q- Calidad Turística, in recognition of visitors' appreciations.

In the park visitors have numerous routes for visiting the sights (old farmhouses, caves, etc.), with the starting point at the Nature Park Information Centre. Regarding the managerial concerns for sustainable tourism development in the park, the main measures were: creation of informing points about the park in the tourist information centres located in major urban agglomerations nearby, namely Alicante, Alcoy and Ibi; easing communication channels between tourism offices

and park employees as well as applying several visitor security programs (Conselleria de Medio Ambiente, Agua, Urbanismo y Vivienda, 2009).

#### **4. Management measures undertaken in Bucegi Natural Park (Romania)**

Bucegi Natural Park is one of the 27 natural and national parks in Romania. It is located in the eastern part of the Southern Carpathians and comprises the entire Bucegi Massif. It has an area of 32.497 ha in the administrative territory of three counties: Dâmboviţa, Prahova, and Braşov.

The tourism activity in the park is mainly related to the delimitation of the 41 visiting routes, the park administration providing details on the itineraries, with a brief description of them, the marks, the duration and the periods in which they are dangerous. As an important measure for visitor management, it was introduced a visit fee.

The analysis of the management plan reveals the special attention given to fauna and flora, through specific monitoring actions and extensive research activities. Also, the "Visitor Management Strategy of the Bucegi Natural Park" reflects the measures concerning the sustainable development of tourism activities (Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, 2016). Within this framework, tourism specific indicators, visitor segments, as well as visitors' impact on natural, on the protected areas as well as on the local community are constantly evaluated. Among the measures undertaken in this respect, the most important are: permanent monitoring the accommodation units, sanctions for those units which do not apply the environmental legislation, visitors' safety measures, information materials and visitor awareness partnerships, zoning the spaces accessible to visitors and also other specific actions to promote sustainable tourism (Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, 2016).

#### **5. Conclusions**

Effective managerial measures are, perhaps, the most important answers in the attempt to ensure the sustainable development in natural parks. The analysis carried out in the two natural parks revealed the extensive concerns of administrations regarding the sustainable tourism development.

An important issue is the degree of specificity that should be given in management plans. Considering that the young generation needs to be educated to acquire a responsible behaviour since the early years, the natural parks are one of the best environments to carry out such a task. Implementing specialized tours for the young visitors, differentiated by age groups, in the parks' visiting programs, with detailed presentations of flora and fauna, and the negative effects of the human activities, can contribute to achieve the main objectives of sustainable tourism

development. The ways to approach tourism management of natural parks have no limits, the lack of creativity being the main cause of failures (Stăncioiu, 2004) and innovation is the tool to ensure the advantage in a highly competitive environment (Epuran, 2015, p. 61).

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