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MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION OF WILDLIFE TOURISM: THE CASE OF CROATIA

STAVOVI MENADŽMENTA PREMA TURIZMU DIVLJINE: STUDIJA SLUČAJA HRVATSKA

ABSTRACT

As the understanding of the importance of monitoring environmental and economic wildlife tourism aspects grows, management stakeholders face the challenge of greater responsibility in strategic decision making, as well as in achieving sustainability of this type of tourism. The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of the local tourist organizations' managers in Croatia towards the importance of monitoring of the economic and environmental impact of wildlife tourism. For the needs of the research, the data were gathered from the managers of 35 tourist organizations, using a mail-back questionnaire. The results of a hierarchical cluster analysis show that management stakeholders can be divided into four clusters, "Enthusiasts", "Rationalists", "Unconvinced" and "Sceptics". The profiles of four clusters show differences in attitudes, the biggest difference being in the belief that wildlife tourism could be the primary motive for the arrival of tourists. Similarities of opinions can be found in the view that the development of wildlife tourism represents an indirect incentive for generating additional income, which is an economic benefit. The results of analysis also indicate that the local tourist organizations' managers recognise the potential and are willing to actively participate in the development projects of wildlife tourism.

Key words: wildlife tourism, impacts, management attitudes, local tourist associations, Croatia

SAŽETAK

Kako shvaćanje praćenja ekonomskih i ekoloških aspekata turizma divljine raste, menadžeri turističkih zajednica suočavaju se s izazovom većih odgovornosti kod strateškog odlučivanja, kao i kod postizanja održivosti ove vrste turizma. Svrha ovog istraživanja je utvrditi odnose između stavova menadžera lokalnih turističkih zajednica u Hrvatskoj o ekonomskim i ekološkim aspektima turizma divljine. Ovo istraživanje utemeljeno je na podacima prikupljenim putem web upitnika provedenog na uzorku od 35 menadžera turističkih zajednica. Rezultati provedene hijerarhijske klaster analize otkrivaju četiri klastera, "Entuzijasti", "Racionalisti", "Uvjereni" i "Skeptici". Profili sva četiri klastera pokazuju razlike u stavovima, a najveća razlika se očituje u uvjerenju da turizam divljine može biti primarni motiv dolaska turista. Sličnosti mišljenja mogu se naći u stavu da razvoj turizma divljine predstavlja neizravan poticaj za stvaranje dodatnih prihoda, što je ekonomska korist. Rezultati analize također pokazuju da menadžeri lokalnih turističkih organizacija prepoznaju potencijal i da su spremni aktivno sudjelovati u razvojnim projektima turizma divljine.

Ključne riječi: turizam divljine, utjecaji, stavovi menadžera, lokalne turističke zajednice, Hrvatska

1. Introduction

Natural area tourism is a major growing global industry (Rodger, Moore, & Newsome, 2007) and is becoming one of the major industries in many underdeveloped countries. Access to natural environment and the desire to experience a change from the hectic workday environment has been recognised as a key component of wildlife tourism (Buckley, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that understanding the interplay between local tourist organizations' managers and wildlife is gaining more attention since it is becoming increasingly important to the sustainability of this type of tourism. Humans have been fascinated by animals from time immemorial, and their desire to be linked with them in their natural environment has led to the development of a sub-sector of tourism, today known as wildlife tourism (Duffus & Dearden, 1990; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001; Rodger et al., 2007). Past research in the context of wildlife tourism explored primarily the residents' or tourists' perceptions (Moscardo & Saltzer, 2004), with little attention being given to management attitudes and perceptions. Understanding both the economic and the environmental aspects of wildlife tourism is essential to sustainability, and the support of stakeholders (e.g. local tourist organizations managers) is definitely key to the implementation of sustainable tourism development (Gunn, 1994). Thus, what remains to be investigated is the interplay between local tourist organizations managers' attitudes and perceptions, and both the economic and the environmental aspects of wildlife tourism.

For that reason, the main purpose of this research is to help better understand the interplay between managers' perceptions, the way they perceive wildlife tourism, and to establish whether local tourist organizations managers are aware of the potential of wildlife tourism and are willing to support it. We build upon the social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), which assumes that attitudes of tourist organization managers towards and support for tourism in their community will be influenced by their evaluations of the actual and perceived outcomes of tourism in it (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). To this end, we examined their "representatives", i.e. tourist organizations, using a survey, both within two contexts – economic and environmental. This research work focuses also on methodological issues of how local tourist organizations managers can be grouped on the basis of perceptions and attitudes towards the impact of wildlife tourism. The final objectives of this research are: (1) to identify different clusters of managers of tourist organizations according to their attitudes towards wildlife tourism; (2) to describe the main characteristics of each of the previous clusters and show the differences between them; we apply one-way ANOVA analysis to detect the main variables differentiating the clusters: (3) to derive, from the cluster analysis conducted, applicable results to suggest strategies for future wildlife tourism development in Croatia; and (4) to map spatial clusters of management attitudes toward wildlife tourism.

2. Literature review

As a sub-set of nature-based tourism, wildlife tourism (hereafter WT) can be defined as tourism based on interactions with wildlife, whether in its natural environment or in captivity

(Burns & Howard, 2003). It occurs in a range of settings, including artificial environments where animals are captive (e.g., zoos, aquariums and wildlife centres) and natural habitats where animals are non-captive (e.g., ecotourism experiences, national parks) (Packer & Ballantyne, 2012). The essence of wildlife tourism is promotion of ethical, non-invasive and non-disturbance behaviour, with wildlife viewing being overall an example of a nonconsumptive use of wildlife (Duffus & Dearden, 1990). Broadly, wildlife tourism can be defined as tourism undertaken to view or encounter wildlife (Newsome, Dowling, & Moore, 2005); activities such as whale and dolphin tourism, birdwatching, safari tours, bear/wolf viewing and general nature-orientated tours to encompass insects and plants (Curtin, 2009) are all part of wildlife experience. According to Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001), the experiencing of wildlife by tourists has become the business of wildlife tourism. Rodger and colleagues (2007) also found support for the overlap between ecotourism, nature-based tourism and wildlife tourism. There is agreement between scholars that the goal of wildlife tourism is to raise visitors' awareness and appreciation of natural resources by alerting them to the fragile state of the environment (Turley, 1999). For the purpose of this research, the term wildlife tourism will be restricted to activities that involve non-consumptive wildlife viewing or interaction opportunities, and consumptive wildlife activities such as hunting or fishing (Moscardo & Saltzer, 2004).

Long-term conservation of the wildlife and wildlife habitats is one of the main arguments for the continuing development of wildlife tourism attractions (Newsome et al., 2005; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). If carefully designed and managed, WT has the potential to influence the conservation knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of tourists and other visitors (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes, & Dierking, 2007; Packer & Ballantyne, 2012). Not surprisingly, therefore, designing engaging experiences that provide close encounters with wildlife yet still protect animals and their habitats is quite challenging (Ballantyne. Packer, & Hughes, 2009). To analyse local tourist organizations managers' perceptions and attitudes, different clustering approaches have been adopted in a growing number of research studies (Brida, Osti, & Barquet, 2010). However, little research is available that analyses and clusters the opinions of local tourist managers in a country which is more or less oriented to mass tourism and where there exists a paradox situation: a constant pressure towards more development in tourism on the one hand, and towards greater environmental protection on the other. Croatia is a rare European place where you can visit an island which is one of the last habitats of the griffon vulture in Europe, or encounter the rare Mediterranean monk seal. Wildlife tourism here involves a large range of species and a vast array of activities. Some examples of these activities are scuba diving, swimming with dolphins, or spotting birds in nature parks (e.g., Kopački Rit). In the past, these close interactions with nature used to have a different impact on wildlife and often meant death or removal of species from their natural environment (Duffus & Dearden, 1990). Today, things have changed and such activities have become less destructive and more focused on feeding, observing, touching and photographing animals (Duffus & Dearden, 1990; Higginbottom & Buckley, 2003).

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The data were collected from managers of tourist organizations during a one-month period between September and October 2011. A random method was used to select participants. From the 256 administered questionnaires distributed by e-mail, a total of 36 usable questionnaires were obtained, of which 1 had to be excluded from further analysis due to some missing values, resulting in a total of 35 usable questionnaires (13.67% response rate). The questionnaire was composed of 12 attitude statements primarily designed to gather information on the managers' general opinion towards wildlife tourism.

3.2.Instrument and Measurement

One part of the questions were adopted from Enck and Decker (1997), and Tarrant, Bright, and Cordell (1997) studies on social and biological impacts of development and preservation strategies. The other questions were inspired by seminal work by Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001). A five-point Likert scale was applied to each statement, with one indicating total disagreement or total opposition and five total agreement or total support, in order to allow managers of tourist organizations to express different intensity degrees in their attitudes towards wildlife tourism. Because tourism benefits cannot be generalised (Frochot & Morrison, 2001) and are often related to a specific destination, one part of statements in the questionnaire were specific to Croatia. Wildlife tourism was defined in the questionnaire as tourism which promotes the concept of economically, environmentally and socially balanced tourism development.

4. Results

A descriptive analysis of the geographical analysis of the sample was conducted. The County Tourism Board system consists of city/town tourism offices, municipality tourism offices and local tourism offices. In addition, as each county has particular competence over land use, the county's economic development, infrastructure, and the development of educational and cultural institutions, it was logical to separate managers of tourist organizations according to geographical and administrative criterion. The data about the number of tourism offices and municipalities were obtained separately from the official website of each county tourism board. Of the 21 counties, 16 were included in the study, the overall response being 76.19%. The data were analysed in two steps.

First, a descriptive-statistics analysis of the collected data was conducted to explore the overall sample profile and to calculate univariate statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviations. The second step was cluster analysis. To determine the number of clusters, we adopted a two-step clustering procedure: (a) a hierarchical cluster analysis to identify the appropriate number of clusters, and (b) Ward's linkage analysis to provide further elaborative information on the cluster membership. In the absence of an objective criterion. Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (2010) suggested a trial process in which a number of cluster solutions are computed. There are two different approaches to segmentation: a priori and a posteriori, also known as common-sense or data-driven (Dolnicar & Grün, 2008). In our research, the decision for one of the alternative solutions was based on posteriori criteria, practical judgment, common sense, and theoretical foundations (Dolnicar, 2004; Hair et al., 2010). We applied *hierarchical cluster analysis* to the data, with the number of clusters initially varying from two to five. Following a review of the resulting options, we considered the four cluster configuration to be the most suitable, as the group sizes were much better than in the two-, three- or five-cluster versions, and substantial enough to show the likelihood of differences in stakeholders' attitudes. A one-way ANOVA was used to identify statistical differences between clusters in terms of all attitude statements. F-statistics were used to provide information about differences. In addition, the Bonferroni post hoc tests were employed to examine how each cluster differed from any one of the others. The results of the Bonferroni tests show that statistically significant differences were found within clusters, thus supporting the fact that distinct clusters had been identified. The data were analysed using Stata Statistical Software package (Release 12., StataCorp., College Station, TX: StataCorp LP., 2011).

Overall	Attribute	Mean
rank		
1	The ticket price in WT should comprise a percentage intended for the conservation of	4.54
	habitats.	
2	There is natural potential for this type of tourism in my area of work.	4.31
3	The development of WT projects has a potential to generate additional income in	4.26
	other contents of the destination (accommodation).	
4	Introduction of WT could increase the level of destination quality.	4.20
5	WT is a long-term sustainable concept of tourism, as it preserves natural resources	4.14
	and strengthens the competitiveness of the country.	
6	This type of tourism would extend the tourist season.	4.09
7	We are prepared to provide marketing support for this type of tourism.	4.03
8	Tourists have expressed their interest in some form of WT (e.g., bird watching in their	4.00
	natural habitat).	
9	WT would promote development of accommodation (autochthonous environment).	4.00
10	WT would promote development of ecological and traditional agricultural practices.	3.54
11	WT could be the primary motive for tourists' arrival.	3.46
12	The private sector has asked for information on tourists' demand for some form of	2.60
	WT.	

Table 1 Attitude statements - tourism boards

Source: Authors research

Since the number of clusters was not known beforehand, a hierarchical cluster analysis was used. Due to the exploratory nature of our research, the hierarchical approach appeared to be logical and superior to other methods, not demanding that the number of clusters be chosen a priori. The hierarchical clustering procedure with *Euclidean distance* as a similarity measure between cases was used. The *Ward method* was used to maximize within-cluster homogeneity, because it is a frequently used cluster algorithm known to produce stable and interpretable results (Hair et al., 2010). Cluster analysis has been frequently used in different studies, for example in studies of resident attitudes toward local tourism activity (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). When compared to other solution algorithms, such the Single linkage, the Wards method (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000) was found to produce the best cluster solution in this study, a four-cluster solution. The solution with four clusters appeared to be the best because it relates to identification of the most meaningful and distinguishable clusters and the results are easily interpreted. Moreover, a solution with four clusters was supported by the dendogram. The cluster analysis results are summarised in Table 2.

Attitude statement	Overall	SD	Cluster I Enthusiasts (n=13/37.14%)	Cluster II Rationalists (n=7/20%)	Cluster II Unconvinced (n=7/20%)	Cluster IV Sceptics (n=8/22.86%)	F - value	ANOVA (p)
1	4.00	1.138	4.62 ^{acd}	4.86 ^c	4.00^{d}	2.25 ^b	37.86	< 0.0001
2	2.60	1.218	3.69 ^a	1.43 ^b	2.43 ^b	2.00 ^b	13.13	< 0.0001
3	4.31	0.796	4.77 ^a	4.71 ^a	3.86 ^b	3.63 ^b	7.52	0.0006
4	3.46	1.067	4.15 ^a	3.57 ^a	2.29 ^b	3.25 ^{ab}	7.56	0.0006
5	4.03	0.891	4.38 ^a	4.71 ^a	3.00 ^b	3.75 ^{ab}	9.57	< 0.0001

Table 2 Cluster analysis results^a

Attitude statement	Overall	SD	Cluster I Enthusiasts (n=13/37.14%)	Cluster II Rationalists (n=7/20%)	Cluster II Unconvinced (n=7/20%)	Cluster IV Sceptics (n=8/22.86%)	F - value	ANOVA (p)
6	4.09	0.818	4.31 ^{ab}	4.57 ^a	3.43 ^b	3.88 ^{ab}	3.43	0.0289
7	4.20	0.994	4.77 ^a	4.57 ^a	3.00 ^b	4.00 ^{ab}	8.93	0.0002
8	4.26	0.780	4.54	4.71	3.71	3.88	3.95	0.0170
9	0.54	0.611	4.69 ^a	5.00 ^a	4.43 ^a	4.00 ^{ba}	5.12	0.0054
10	4.00	0.840	4.23 ^a	4.43 ^a	3.14 ^b	4.00 ^{ab}	4.36	0.0113
11	3.54	1.067	4.08 ^a	4.00 ^a	2.43 ^b	3.25 ^{ab}	6.23	0.0020
12	4.14	0.733	4.46 ^a	4.43 ^a	3.43 ^b	4.00 ^{ab}	4.59	0.0090

^a Means with different superscripts are significantly different (based on the *Bonferroni* test) at the p<0.05 level. Source: Authors research

The results of comparing clusters are presented in Table 2. The first cluster, named "Enthusiasts" (N=13, 37.14% of the sample), assigned the highest level of importance to seven attitudes (see Table 2). This is the largest group of managers who are the most interested in participation in wildlife tourism. Examples of key motives include: "Strong potential for development of accommodation" (M=4.00), and "WT is a long-term sustainable concept of tourism, as it preserves natural resources and strengthens the competitiveness of the country" (M=4.14). The second cluster was named "Rationalists" (20% of the sample). Compared to other clusters, this group of tourist organization managers does not find support in "The private sector has asked for information on tourists' demand for some form of WT" (M=1.43). Instead, they seem to have in their work more positive experiences with "This type of tourism would extend the tourist season" (M=4.57), "Introduction of WT could increase the level of destination quality" (M=4.57), "The ticket price in WT should comprise a percentage intended for the conservation of habitat" (M=5.00), hence the name Rationalists. The "Unconvinced" cluster (20% of the sample) exhibited low interest in statements such as "We are prepared to provide marketing support for this type of tourism" (M=3.00), "The private sector has asked for information on tourists' demand for some form of WT" (M=2.43), and "This type of tourism could be the primary motive for tourists' arrival" (M=2.29). Moreover, respondents in this group are mostly neutral about the remaining motives, despite showing an opinion that there is modest potential for wildlife tourism development. The last cluster was labelled "Sceptics" (22.86 % of the sample) as they expressed relatively low concern for wildlife tourism. The Sceptics indicated a lower level of agreement with the statement "WT would promote development of ecological and traditional agricultural practices" (M=3.25) than the Unconvinced. Moreover, "Tourists have expressed their interest in some form of WT" was supported by Enthusiasts, Rationalists and Unconvinced alike, but not by the Sceptics (M=2.25). The managers of tourist organizations in all clusters vary significantly in their attitude towards wildlife tourism in Croatia the difference being statistical (p < .05) in every wildlife-related question except for the interest expressed for "The ticket price in WT should comprise a percentage intended for the conservation of habitats".

4.2. Geographical Distribution of Tourism Boards' Attitudes

Information on the spatial distribution of attitudes can inform managers and conservation organisations on where best to focus their interventions, thereby mitigating conflict and advancing conservation efforts (Carter, Riley, Shortridge, Shrestha, & Liu, 2014). In this part of the study we were interested to determine how clusters are distributed across the country.

As mentioned above, the difference in the influence of local tourist organizations managers can be observed from a geographical location alone. Figure 1 shows fragmentation in the northern part of Croatian, where all clusters can be found, while in the southern part of Croatia (Dalmatia), a higher proportion of cluster 1 (Enthusiasts) can be observed. Clusters of respondents were mapped and performed in ArcGIS 9.3.



Figure 1 Spatial assessment of tourist organization managers' attitudes

Source: Authors research

5. Implications and conclusion

The results of cluster analysis indicate that the managers of tourist organizations recognise the potential and are willing to actively participate in the development projects of wildlife tourism. The findings also suggest that, on the basis of their attitudes toward wildlife tourism. the tourist organization managers can be divided into four groups: Enthusiasts, Rationalists, Unconvinced and Sceptics. Based on some previous studies (Andriotis, 2005; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994), it can be assumed that management groups will differ in their perceptions of tourism development in their community (Byrd et al., 2009). The profiles of four clusters show differences in attitudes, the biggest difference being in the received information about the tourists' interest for wildlife tourism. A significant difference is evident also in the belief that wildlife tourism could be the primary motive for the arrival of tourists, as well as in the one that this type of tourism would increase the level of destination quality. In addition to implications for wildlife tourism as derived from comparisons of tourism managers groups, our research has several managerial implications. This paper thus provides useful information to those concerned with the design and management of powerful and effective tourist experiences, like destination management organizations (DMOs), community planners, and government and non-government environmental associations.

5.2. Limitations and future research directions

Most managers of tourist organizations are grouped in the cluster of Enthusiasts, which accounts for 37.14% of all respondents. From the aspect of geographical criteria, no significant differences were observed. It also is interesting to note that both markedly tourist and non-tourist destinations were equally represented in all clusters. Units of local government in which there is potential for wildlife tourism were also present in all four clusters. The sample size of 35 tourism organizations (i.e. managers as their representatives) is relatively low. Another limitation of this research is also the possibility of further research.

This study focused on potential wildlife oriented tourist organizations managers without actually interviewing those who have already carried wildlife tourism oriented activities. Clustering and then comparing these clusters with the ones presented in the study could provide some insight on wildlife manager's behaviour. Future studies may investigate the perception of different stakeholder groups (e.g. residents, entrepreneurs, tourists and environmental associations).

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