Tourism and Natural Protected Areas
WIT Series on Tourism Today

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F.D. Pineda, Complutense University, Spain
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Cultural Tourism
Tourism and Environment
Tourism and Natural Protected Areas
Tourism as a Tool for Development
Tourism as a Challenge
Tourism and Natural Protected Areas

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Preface

Yellowstone National Park spans the states of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho in the USA. It is famous worldwide. Since their creation in 1872, most 'protected natural areas' have been considered as probably the greatest achievement of nature conservation. Many countries have such spaces within their territories and many visitors, native or foreign, use some of their free time to get to know them. In this sense these spaces undertake to conserve nature and educate society and provide us with a kind of cultural tourism that has grown considerably in recent decades.

Protection of nature involves motivating all human societies and addressing their attitudes and behaviours. For an ecologist, however, this is not easy to define. That is to say, in the areas of environmental planning and management of natural resources, the application of science is perhaps less clear when dealing with 'conservation' than with 'energy management', 'water resources management' or 'biological productivity improvement' – whether this be agriculture, livestock or forestry. Ecosystems compare physical phenomena and biological processes. Study thereof increasingly needs to include cultural processes and not just rural ones. Maintenance of ecosystems is not only committed to protecting wildlife and vegetation but, above all, to maintaining the physical phenomena on which they depend. Nature conservation involves all these aspects, but this is not the popular message of some naturalists. Obviously, these phenomena cannot remain within the more or less arbitrary boundaries of a protected area. Nevertheless, these spaces constitute an important milestone. The landscape dominating any protected space is the result of these phenomena and processes.

Pictures of protected areas generally show sights of a wild landscape. This is sometimes a rural one with a traditional appearance. This picture if often a photograph of a wild animal of a certain size and appearance. It almost always has hair or feathers. If it is an insect it is usually a butterfly or a large-sized beetle. All this represents 'nature' not found in the city and clearly has a strong appeal as part of the so-called 'cultural tourism'.

Traditional tourism in many mountain and beach destinations now
started to be complemented by cultural tourism. Although until recent times, this type of tourism was for a small privileged group of visitors, it has now grown considerably and its demand continues to increase.

Cultural tourism today specifically includes, along with cities, museums, monuments and rural traditions, the aim of 'getting to know nature'. Protected natural areas are ideal for this. The tourism industry has realized this and, consequently, the value of the landscape and natural resources is becoming increasingly recognized. This is a welcome development and represents a challenge for tourism management, for environmental education and for dissemination of nature and conservation.

The goal of environmental education is to teach how to make wise use of our natural resources. Protected natural areas are probably the best sites in which to recognize the value of these resources and, above all, the role of the local people. This is another major challenge for managers and politicians, who face problems such as the recently recorded and published displacement of over a hundred million refugees due to the creation of large protected natural areas worldwide.

Landscape and biodiversity protection are the duty of all human societies. There is a need to promote the creation of natural areas as tourist attractions. Visitors should also be aware that the values contained within these spaces frequently result from the traditional practices of the local population. Natural protected areas should not serve as outdoor zoos or botanical gardens and we need to be aware that the quality of tourism depends on participation by the local people.

This volume of the series Tourism Today considers the dialectic between tourism and protected natural areas. The contributions were selected from papers presented at relevant conferences organized by the Wessex Institute of Technology.

M.F. Schmitz, 2013
About the Editor

Maria F. Schmitz is a professor of ecology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid since 1994. PhD in biology (1990), she has extensive experience in landscape ecology. She has participated as a researcher in several projects funded by public calls and contracts, in recent years as a coordinator of several of them. She has published numerous papers in various forums, most recently in J. Biogeography, Landscape and Urban Planning, Environm. Monitoring & Assessment, Environm. Management, Ecological Indicators, Environm. Conservation, Biol. Conservation, Ecol. Modelling, etc., as well as books and chapters of books of her specialty – the last one Pineda, F. & Schmitz, MF 2011. Ecological connectivity. OAPN, Ministry of Environment, Madrid, Sustainable Tourism I, II, III, IV. WIT Press, Southampton; Advanced computing techniques. Aconcagua, Sevilla; Nova Science Publ., New York, among others.
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