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CONSERVATION & TOURISM

**The importance of local communities
in the governance of protected areas**

Jingyu Li



CONSERVATION AND TOURISM

The Importance of Local Communities in
the Governance of Protected Areas

Jingyu Li

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university of
 groningen

KU LEUVEN

**CONSERVATION AND TOURISM:
The Importance of Local Communities in the
Governance of Protected Areas**

PhD Thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Groningen
on the authority of the
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and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans

and

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
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and in accordance with the decision by the
Examination Committee and the Arenberg Doctoral School.

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ABSTRACT

As global conservation concerns intersect with surging tourism interest in natural landscapes, the intricate interplay between preservation and visitor demands on protected areas comes into focus. This study delved into the complexities of harmonizing conservation and tourism in these regions, aiming to offer practical insights for sustainable coexistence. Its primary goal was to ensure both biodiversity preservation and socio-economic wellbeing within this delicate balance.

At its core, this thesis addresses a central inquiry: What complexities arise in balancing conservation and tourism development within the governance frameworks of protected areas? Illustrated through a case study of the Wulingyuan World Heritage Site, this research dissects these intricacies across three critical dimensions in the interface of conservation and tourism: governance; socio-cultural considerations; and political-economic dynamics. Through a conceptual analysis of the literature in the field of protected area governance, I classified the governance approaches in the literature according to their perspective on human-nature relations. Accordingly, I proposed a research method for understanding the key processes that influence how protected area governance happens in real life, and which and whose values come to influence decisions made about protected areas.

Following this approach, the study uncovered that the governance of Wulingyuan is rather fragmented, both structurally and in terms of content, leading to major coordination difficulties. The research findings showed that residents' sense of place and place meanings were diverse, varied over time, and were affected by changes to their livelihoods and the economy that resulted from increased tourism. Moreover, the thesis explored the process of tourism-induced green land acquisition, unveiling that the expropriation of land by local government and the acquisition of use rights over land for tourism development have increased the rent gap and enabled accumulation of potential land value predominantly by the government, although private actors and local communities also received a share.

Addressing these intricacies, I argue that, to achieve equilibrium between conservation and tourism interests, a balanced governance paradigm for protected areas needs a coalescent approach. Such an approach needs a governance system that systematically

incorporates local stakeholders' opinions into the decision-making process, bolstered by adaptively engaging the senses of place of local communities, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and innovative funding mechanisms dedicated to conservation pursuits. By adopting this approach, the potential to cultivate socio-economic benefits while upholding environmental integrity and community welfare within protected areas is underscored.

SAMENVATTING

Wereldwijd neemt de aandacht aan natuurbescherming en de vraag naar natuurtoerisme toe. Het is echter moeilijk om natuurbehoud en toeristische dynamieken in natuurgebieden op elkaar af te stemmen. Daarom richt dit onderzoek zich op de complexiteit van het samenkomen van natuurbescherming en toerisme. Het doel was om inzichten te verkrijgen in duurzame ontwikkelingsprocessen in beschermd natuurgebieden, zodat het behoud van biodiversiteit en sociale en economische ontwikkeling gecombineerd kunnen worden.

Dit onderzoek heeft als centrale vraag: Welke complexiteiten doen zich voor bij het in evenwicht brengen van natuurbescherming en toeristische ontwikkeling binnen de bestuurlijke kaders van beschermd gebieden? Het onderzoek wordt geïllustreerd aan de hand van een casestudy van het werelderfgoed Wulingyuan in China. De casestudy benadrukt drie belangrijke dimensies van het raakvlak tussen natuurbehoud en toerisme: de meerschalgige bestuursstructuur van toerisme en natuurbehoud in het beschermd natuurgebied, de invloed van beschermings- en ontwikkelingsmaatregelen op sociaal-culturele dimensies in en rond het beschermd natuurgebied, en de politiek-economische dynamiek rond landgebruik.

In de eerste onderzoeksfase heb ik wetenschappelijke literatuur over de relatie tussen mens en natuur in beschermd gebieden geïllustreerd. Op basis van de classificatie heb ik een onderzoeksmethode voorgesteld om de belangrijkste processen te bestuderen die invloed hebben op hoe beschermd gebieden bestuurd worden, en wiens en welke visies in dit bestuur domineren. Deze onderzoeksmethode heb ik vervolgens toegepast op Wulingyuan. Het onderzoek toont aan dat het bestuur van Wulingyuan gefragmenteerd is, zowel structureel als inhoudelijk, wat leidt tot grote coördinatieproblemen en moeilijkheden om toerisme en natuurbehoud met elkaar te verzoenen. Wat betreft sociaal-culturele dimensies kwam uit het onderzoek naar voren dat toeristische ontwikkeling in het gebied een sterke invloed heeft gehad op de perceptie en ruimtelijke identiteit van de bewoners, met als gevolg dat traditionele culturele en landschappelijke waarden aan belang hebben ingeboet. Door de grote invloed van toerisme op het levensonderhoud van lokale inwoners, dreigt het gevaar dat strenge beschermingsmaatregelen, waar toerisme paradoxaal genoeg deels van afhankelijk is, lokaal op weinig steun kan rekenen. Ten slotte

laat het onderzoek zien dat de politiek-economische dynamiek rond landgebruik een grote invloed heeft op de verhouding tussen natuurbehoud en toeristische ontwikkeling in Wulingyuan. Door strenge natuurbeschermingsmaatregelen doorgevoerd door de centrale overheid nam de potentiële grondwaarde in Wulingyuan toe, door toegenomen toeristische aantrekkelijkheid van het gebied. Particulieren en sommige lokale gemeenschappen in het gebied hadden hier baat bij, maar het was voornamelijk de lokale overheid die er het meeste voordeel uit haalde, onder andere door speculatieve, deels gedwongen onteigening van grond.

Om deze problemen aan te pakken, is een evenwichtig bestuur voor beschermde gebieden nodig dat een evenwicht tracht te bereiken tussen natuurbehoud en toeristische belangen. Een dergelijk bestuursstelsel moet systematisch de visies van lokale belanghebbenden en met name lokale gemeenschappen in het besluitvormingsproces incorporeren, de positie van kwetsbare groepen versterken, en innovatieve financieringsmechanismen wijden aan natuurbehoud. Door deze aanpak kunnen sociaaleconomische voordelen gecreëerd worden en tegelijkertijd de ecologische integriteit van een gebied, alsook het welzijn van de lokale gemeenschap in het gebied, gewaarborgd worden.

摘要

随着全球对自然保护的关切与对自然风景游赏的兴趣越来越多地交织在一起，保护地内自然保护与游客需求间的复杂关系成为了关注的焦点。本研究深入探讨了在保护地内协调自然保护与旅游发展之间的复杂性，旨在为可持续地兼顾保护与旅游提供实用见解。研究的主要目标是在保护和旅游发展之间达成一种微妙平衡，既保护生物多样性，又增进社会经济福祉。

本论文探讨的核心问题是：在保护地的治理框架内平衡保护和旅游发展涉及哪些复杂性？通过对武陵源世界遗产地的案例研究，本论文解析了保护与旅游发展交织过程中三个关键维度的复杂性，即保护地的治理、社会文化和政治经济。通过对保护地治理领域文献的概念分析，我从人与自然关系这一视角对文献中的治理研究方法进行了分类，并据此提出了一种研究方法，用于理解保护地治理在现实中发生的关键过程，以及哪些价值观和谁的价值观会影响保护地相关决策。

按照这一方法，本研究发现武陵源的保护地治理在结构上和内容上都表现出碎片化，导致了实践中的协调困难。研究结果显示，居民对保护地意义的理解具有多样性，并且在受到旅游业的增长引起的生计和经济变化影响下不断变化。此外，本论文还探讨了由旅游业触发的绿地征用过程，揭示了地方政府征用土地以及为旅游开发获取土地使用权的做法加大了租金差距。尽管私营企业和个体以及当地社区也分享了旅游开发所产生的地租的其中一部分，但潜在的土地价值主要由地方政府积累。

基于以上这些复杂性，我认为，为了在保护地内实现自然保护和旅游发展利益之间的平衡，需要一个融合的治理范式。这种范式需要一种可以将地方利益相关者的意见系统地纳入决策过程中的治理体系，并且要适应性地纳入社区对保护地的感知，还要加强对弱势群体的赋权，并建立一个致力于保护事业的创新资金运行机制。通过采用这种范式，可以在开发保护地社会经济利益的潜力的同时，维护环境完整性并增进社区福祉。

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PLEASE NOTE: An appendix or compendium of data sources, although not included in this printed version of the thesis, is available on request.

Overview of the publications produced as part of this PhD research

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