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Eagles, Paul F.J.; Romagosa, Francesc; Buteau-Duitschaever, Windekind C.; Havitz, Mark E.; and McCutcheon, Bonnie, "Good governance in protected areas: Evaluation of stakeholders' perceptions of British Columbia and Ontario Provincial Parks" (2016).

*Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 51.

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# **Good governance in protected areas: Evaluation of stakeholders' perceptions of British Columbia and Ontario Provincial Parks**

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TTRA 2011 Conference Theme: Nature based and sustainable tourism research in practice.

Extended Abstract for consideration as an oral presentation.

Revised extended abstract submitted to Professor Marion Joppe, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada on April 28, 2011

## INTRODUCTION

In a general sense, governance is “the system of formal and informal rules that establish the interaction and cooperation guidelines among the different stakeholders that intervene in the decision making process” (Roca, 2006). Hence, governance involves the state, but transcends the state, because it involves corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals. Governance has three spheres: political, economic and administrative. Political governance is the process of decision-making that determines policy. Economic governance concerns the processes whereby economic decisions are made. Administrative governance is the system that implements law and policy. All three are intertwined and dependent upon each other (UNDP, 1997). This research uses standard governance criteria to evaluate two different management models for the delivery of park tourism services in Canada.

## LITERATURE

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, 1997), good governance should be based on 10 criteria:

- *Public participation*: all people should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests;
- *Consensus orientation*: the ability to mediate differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group;
- *Strategic vision*: looking constructively towards the future, with consideration of the historical, cultural and social complexities of each situation;
- *Responsiveness*: when institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders using a proactive manner regarding complaints and criticism;
- *Effectiveness*: the capacity to realize organizational objectives;
- *Efficiency*: making the best use of resources or the capability of acting or producing effectively with a minimum amount or quantity of waste, expense or unnecessary effort;
- *Accountability*: officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their owners and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and accept responsibility for failure, incompetence or deceit;
- *Transparency*: sharing of information and acting in an open manner;
- *Equity*: just treatment; requiring that similar cases be treated in similar ways;
- *Rule of law*: legal frameworks being fair and enforced impartially.

Ontario Provincial Parks have the provision of services by the same park system that carries out the parks’ management. British Columbia Provincial Parks use for-profit corporations to deliver all the tourism services (Eagles et al, 2011). This research compared these two approaches for the delivery of park tourism services through an evaluation undertaken by the members of five key stakeholder groups.

## METHODOLOGY

The opinions of stakeholder groups related to the governance of the parks were solicited from five groups: (1) park staff; (2) visitors; (3) contractors working within a park; (4) nearby

residents to provincial parks; and (5) NGOs involved with or having an interest in provincial parks. The research team designed a survey to investigate stakeholder perspectives of governance and park management issues. The survey was based on the 10 governance criteria, as identified by the UNDP, which served as a framework for the survey. The UNDP criteria were chosen because they were much more detailed and exhaustive than other proposed criteria. Through an extensive literature review, the research team developed three to nine statements for each criterion designed to measure each of the governance criteria.

Responses to each statement were measured with a five point Likert scale: strongly agree (1); agree (2); neutral (3); disagree (4); and, strongly disagree (5). Also added were the options of “Do not know” and “Not Applicable” for participants that did not know the answer to a question, or, that the questions did not relate to them. Statements referred to the specific provincial park where the surveyed person felt closer, or to the overall provincial park network in case the person preferred to give his/her opinion about more than one park.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 245 surveys collected in the province of British Columbia and 380 in the province of Ontario (Table 1) (Buteau-Duitschaever, 2010). The surveys were conducted using an internet electronic survey. Participants were recruited through a variety of means, such as emails from senior park administrators, website notifications, newspaper advertisements, and personal contact. This low number of contractor responses in Ontario is due to the presence of many small contractors providing specific services within Ontario Parks, where generally the presence of private corporations is low; unlike British Columbia where a few larger corporations have a significant presence.

**Table 1. Survey responses by stakeholder groups**

Stakeholder group	British Columbia		Ontario	
	Number	%	Number	%
Park staff	69	28.2	63	16.6
Park visitors	120	49.0	255	67.1
Park contractors	12	4.9	8	2.1
Nearby residents	14	5.7	30	7.9
NGO members	30	12.2	24	6.3
Total	245	100	380	100

Overall results for all stakeholders showed that the Ontario Provincial (ON) Parks have more positive scores than did the British Columbia (BC) Provincial Parks. In other words, the general perception of respondents gave a value closer to good governance (scores closer to 1) to the Ontario provincial parks system for all 11 factors compared to the British Columbia park system. All of these differences were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Comparisons were also made between corresponding stakeholder groups from each provincial system. This comparison demonstrated statistically significant differences in the perception of certain governance factors. For instance, the park staff comparison between BC and ON Parks (Table 8) revealed that in the Ontario case, this stakeholder group had positive perceptions (scores between 1 and 3) for all 11 governance factors, while in BC park staff had a

negative perception of equity finance ( $m=3.48$ ). An independent sample t-test revealed that Ontario's park staff views were statistically significant for 6 of the 11 governance factors when compared to their counterparts in BC Parks. For the remaining 5 factors, the differences are not statistically different, but ON provides scores that are visually more positive for 4 of the 5 governance factors. This reveals that the Ontario parastatal management model is perceived as having more positive governance scores by its staff members, when compared to British Columbia park staff perceptions of their public and for-profit combination model, with all visitor services provided by profit-making corporations.

The park visitors' analysis again reveals that the ON model had better perceptions than the BC one. In fact, visitors to ON Parks had positive perceptions for all 11 governance factors, while visitors to BC provincial parks had negative perceptions (scores between 3 and 4) for eight of the 11 governance factors.

Regarding the park contractors and the nearby residents, the sample sizes in both ON and BC were small, resulting in a lack of observed statistical differences in perception between ON and BC park contractors and ON and BC nearby residents.

Finally, the NGO members showed comparatively similar results to the aforementioned park visitors group. NGOs in Ontario had positive scores for all the 11 factors, while in BC only 3 factors received positive scores (equity fairness, public participation and effectiveness) (Table 12). The t-test revealed that observed differences in mean scores for NGO members between the two provinces were statistically significant ( $p<.05$ ) for all the governance factors, except for the governance factor public participation, likely due to a small sample size for that factor. Once more, the parastatal model was the best valued.

An evaluation of the opinions of stakeholders within each province showed many significant differences. In BC, the park agency staff and the contractors tended to be in agreement in providing more positive scores. Generally, the NGO members and the visitors tended to be more critical. In ON, the park agency staff also provided the most optimistic vision of governance for their system. Importantly, the visitors and the NGO members were allied with the park staff. Conversely, the contractors tended to be more negative.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis shows how, generally speaking, the parastatal management model adopted by the provincial parks system of Ontario has the best overall perception of governance compared to the model adopted by the British Columbia provincial parks, based on the outsourcing (a combined public and for-profit management model). Nevertheless, both park systems offer positive general results. Importantly the visitors, the major public users of the parks, are much more positive about the governance of the parastatal model than they are of the governance of private operated tourism services. Even though the ON visitors pay at least twice as much as the BC visitors do for tourism services in the parks, the ON visitors give the ON system a much higher rating on the critical governance criterion of equity-financial. ON also uses contractors, but on a much smaller scale and only for the delivery of targeted services. The BC contractors, who operate all the tourism services in a park, provided much higher rankings than did the ON contractors. This case study of the perception of governance by stakeholders in the British Columbia and Ontario Provincial Parks provides new knowledge to this field and allows for a comparison between two very important management models; the public and for-profit model and the parastatal model. ON has an active set of NGOs, called Friends Groups,

that assist in providing tourism services, typically education and interpretation programs. BC does not have such a program. The much more positive rankings by ON NGOs is certainly due to the close working relationship with park management, while the BC NGOs tend to be outside groups striving to provide policy comment on the park system. Importantly, this data suggests that the higher level of involvement by the visitors and NGO members in policy-making and park operation in ON results in these groups perceiving more positive levels of governance.

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