

ORIGINAL PAPER

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**ROLE OF RURAL TOURISM FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS****Andrej Udovč, Anton Perpar**

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Manuscript received: July 22, 2006; Reviewed: September 1, 2006; Accepted for publication: March 5, 2007

**ABSTRACT**

The paper analyse the role of rural tourism for the development of rural areas, on the comparison of two regions with different types of rural tourism. One area is of highly diversified rural tourism with wide range of tourist products (rafting, hiking, cycling, farm tourism, skiing ...). The tourism offer in the second area is much more uniform (mainly farm tourism and some spa). The study analysed how the two different types of tourist product diversifications influence the development possibilities of studied rural areas. We analysed how different systems are able to maintain its functions in the context of identified perturbations (socio-economic and geophysical). We analysed the influence of different factors on systems stability, its resilience, robustness and integrity. The gained results show that only the higher level of diversification is not a guarantee for systems higher stability, resilience, robustness and integrity, but there also other factor which influence the outcome as: size of the area, diversity of actors involved, type of governance ...

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, socio-economic system, system stability, system resilience, system robustness, system integrity

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The study explores two protected areas in Slovenia with a focus on rural tourism. The main purpose of the research is to analyse a rural tourism situation in two areas and to explore the influence of tourism in rural areas on resilience of the region. The analysis focused on social, economic and environmental aspect of protected areas.

The study areas were selected upon two most important criteria presented below:

Protected area established at least 15 years ago (selected were: Triglav National Park (TNP) and Kozjanski Regional Park (KRP) as they were the only parks in Slovenia that were established more than 15 years ago);

Extent of tourism diversification – TNP is characterized by highly diversified forms of tourism activities and infrastructure, while in the KPR the activities offered to tourists and tourism infrastructure are not yet so diversified.

The analysis focused on the key dimensions of a functioning system over time, namely: integrity, robustness, stability and resilience [3, 4]. Functioning of social-ecological systems is also conditioned by internal and external factors having an influence on the system. These factors differ from each other not only by their character (biophysical vs. socio-economic), but also by impetuosity (shocks vs. shifts). As part of the research, in each case there were four variants of factors of change identified, which have an influence on the system (table 1). Adaptation processes to the identified shocks and shifts were analyzed with particular focus on two processes: institutional change and social learning.

Research questions studied were: Does the type of tourism activities influence whether stability, resilience, robustness and integrity are promoted or reduced by tourism over time? What were the main outcomes of specific disturbances in each of the study regions? Are there some institutions in Slovenia (measures or funds), which aim to buffer shocks or perturbations?

Research hypotheses

More diverse tourism leads to higher stability, resilience, robustness and integrity of social-ecological systems.

A diversity of actors and social roles are essential as sources of stability, resilience, robustness and integrity in the social dimension of natural resource management.

The main social sources of resilience are institutional redundancy, flexible social networks, social memory and organisations that bridge levels in systems of multi-level

governance.

## 2 METHODS AND DATA

For conducting the research in question we used a case study approach as a particular method of qualitative research to be able to capture the complexity of social-ecological systems and to identify (not to omit) non-linearity of processes [1]. Primary data were collected in June and July 2006. Because of the limited time and resources we asked representatives of the local authority who know the situation and stakeholders involved in rural tourism in protected areas well to prepare a list of most important actors for interviews – for both cases TNP and KRP.

In TNP interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders<sup>1</sup> the representatives of Triglav National Park Board, the employees from Information Centre of TNP in Trenta, the owners of Tourist Farms in Trenta, the representatives of Tourist Association of Trenta, the representatives of Local Community Log pod Mangartom and the owners of guest houses in Log pod Mangartom. In KRP interviewees were: the representatives of Kozjanski Regional Park Board, the major of Municipality of Kozje (as a central local community in the park), the representative of Local Community of Kozje who is at the same time owner of tourist farm, the representative of Local Community of Bizeljsko, who is also at the same time owner of tourist farm and the representatives of Tourist Association Pišce.

Sources of secondary data collected were: legal documents, official statistics, reports, articles, scientific and other publications and other documents, internet resources, reports of self-government bodies and organisations websites.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stability of the system we tried to assess by analysing the reaction on the closure of the Rabelj mine in TNP and establishment of the border to Croatia for KRP. In connection to the establishment of border and loss of markets, we can say that this event was really a shock for the region and it took some time to adopt to it, and this adoption took a kind of evolutive path from “what to do now” over smuggling to redirecting to new more distant markets and change of structure of the products (from vegetable to more fruits and wine and rural tourism). The

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<sup>1</sup>As TNP area is big, we concentrated our interviews only in Posočje region – villages Trenta and Log pod Mangartom. The reason is that we used examples of shocks and shifts from there.

Table 1: Overview of perturbations

Perturbations			Triglav national park - Trenta Diverse tourism	Kozjanski Regional park Not diverse tourism
Shock arising from socio-economic sphere	External	Shock	Independence of Slovenia and accession to EU; Closing of mine Rabelj	Independence of Slovenia and new border with Croatia; Accession to EU
		Shift	Political system change	Political system change
	Internal	Shock	Initiatives for a new Law on TNP and initiatives for changing the borders of park	
		Shift	Emigrations from area	Emigrations from area
Shock arising from geophysical sphere	External	Shock	Earthquake in Posočje in 1998	Earthquake in Kozjansko in 1974
		Shift	Growth of game (reed and roe deer, bear, wolf, and lynx)	
	Internal	Shock	Landslide in Log pod Mangartom	Drought in 2003
		Shift	Farming land overgrowing, Decreasing of Soča trout population	Farming land overgrowing

same kind of adoption happened in tourist industry (local SPA), so that on the long run the area don't feel that the border presents a development problem.

In case of TNP and Log pod Mangartom the closure of the mine had both: positive and negative effects. The positive is that water pollution from the mine stopped, but on the other hand a lot of local inhabitants lost their jobs with little possibility to find a new one. The village itself did never really try to compensate this loss with some other activity, but over time the activities of surrounding area and the park (development of tourism in Soča valley and development programs such as organic farming in National park) have produced new opportunities. But still a number of people left the village.

In the case of system resilience in regard to the change of political system and accession to the EU, it is hard to tell which area adapted better. At the beginning the area of TNP had better chances to use the instruments available because of the accession process (EU financed projects) and also the private initiative could start to develop sooner (experience from neighbouring countries and national parks as well as more financial sources from people who were working over border), but also the KRP area used the available possibilities well and is increasing it use nowadays (structural funds, international cooperation on projects etc.).

Regarding the system robustness we could notice that both areas tried to use the available opportunities (tourism

development, introducing new products, engaging in rural development programs and projects etc.), where the effect of this seems to be better in the KRP than in the TNP. The reason for this might lie in the fact, that both protected areas are of different size. The KRP is smaller and more homogeneous, so also the coordination among actions and projects is easier. On the other side the TNP is generally divided on three almost not connected valleys (because of natural barriers-mountains) with different needs and visions of future development.

With reference to the integrity of the regions, if we try to assess it over the problem of out migration than we cannot really notice the difference, because in both regions the problem persist and for the time being also the development of tourism cannot reduce it. But on the other hand in both regions was also mentioned, that the development of tourism is inducing the inflow of people, especially those who want to build there their second houses, what brings a new problem: so called "black building" - building of second houses without spatial plan and permissions.

### 3.1 Discussion

On the example of two analysed cases it is possible to notice, that some actors are simultaneously performing different roles (i.e. the same person is local representative, chair person of local tourist board and owner of biggest tourist farm in the area) what leads to the better adaptation to shocks and shifts. Such a situation is taking place in

both cases. This facilitates to see at a lot of issue from different perspectives, to understand different arguments; it leads the better adaptation, higher stability, resilience, robustness and integrity.

In the TNP regions the social memory and social networks could be recognised as the important factor enhancing the adaptive potential of governance, as the national park has a long lasting tradition (over 80 years) and because of closed alpine communities also process of social memory transmission is still present. In the case of KRP this is not so evident; as the region is more open and less developed the out migration was much higher.

The appearance of the appropriate innovation is the symptom of the effective adaptation to the changing context and shocks or shifts. In the case of both investigated regions it is possible to identify the occurrence of several innovations. TNP has developed its own scientific research institute which works as independent institute in frame of TNP Public Institution since 1998. The main task of institute is to collect and to arrange the results of scientific researches in the park, to stimulate and direct individuals and the researches of research institutions, and to research natural and cultural heritage. TNP also opened some Information Centres of the park: one in Trenta (it helped a lot to Trenta development, providing also new working places and it is a motor of development) and one in »Pocarjeva domačija« in Radovna. TNP was selected also as a partner in pilot project »Young Ranger« - innovative way to present ranger's work to pupils and to stimulate them for nature protection and to share the awareness in local communities. In TNP they are also developing a model of eco-tourism as a way of sustainable tourism appropriate for protected areas.

KRP also developed some really innovative products and projects based on natural and traditional cultural heritage of Kozjansko. They recorded rural architecture (more than 3000 units, 800 of them can have a status of cultural monument), and introduced the »Kozjansko apple« and all products developed from them with trade mark SOŽITJE for this products. The park also organized education programme how to cut the tries, and how to make different products from them (brandy, vinegar, juice...). As a result of education a special group of »tree cutters« were qualified and they go around and cut the tries and teach people in area how to do that. They found also a special way of bottle filling – it enables to store a juice for two years without preservatives. At the end »apple project« finished also with now traditional international »Apple festival« (professional, seminar, cultural and social event). Renewal of high trunk meadow orchards became also an international (INTERREG) project. In Kozjansko also joinery was traditional and "apple project"

brought new possibility for revival of some products from very colourful apple or nut tree wood. Innovative is also breeding of capons under meadow orchards as revival of an old Middle Ages Characteristics. In one abandoned hamlet with four homes they want to develop ecological village with apartments and with parallel tourist and educational offer.

Summing up the issue of learning it is worthwhile mentioning that the effective process of learning must co-occur with the process involving all actors into the process of deciding and managing protected area and its surroundings [2]. In both case such action is being taken. Main initiator of these actions in both areas is the park administration, where the TNP is much more active due to its bigger size, higher financial support from national budget and longer existence. The active learning is organized in forms of different workshops, seminars, participation in national and international projects and transfers of good practices for different kind of people. Both parks administrations are also putting a great effort on cooperation with children, so in both areas they are trying to involve actively local schools into the park activities.

The analysis shows that rural tourism is seen as a very important, probably even the most important, factor for economic development in both areas, and it is also seen as a solution for lost working places. However none of the area is interested in mass tourism or every kind of tourism. Both areas promote sustainable way of tourism in connection with nature protection and local area characteristics. Endogenous potentials (natural and human) of each area are most important. Tourism in park is increasing and it means also important contribution to economy of individual area. In TNP they have vision about ecotourism as an appropriate way of tourism for protected areas. Ecotourism is one way of sustainable tourism; it is an instrument for natural protection and at the same time assures sustainable economic benefits for local people [5]. Ecotourism can be understood as environmental, sociological and economic category. As economic category it can crucial contribute to sustainable rural development and it is at the same time a motor of development. As sociological category it can contribute to higher awareness of public about importance of nature protection, at the same time visitors have impression that with their appropriate treatment contribute to protection and maintaining. As economic category ecotourism assure promotion and marketing of products from protected areas like nature, cultural heritage, clean water, fresh air, local authentic products (also from ecological farming). But all kind of tourism activities and their development should be adjusted with local population in protected

areas.

### 3.2 Conclusions

Generally, on the case of two analysed protected areas, we could not find firm evidence which indicates higher stability, resilience, robustness and integrity of the region with more diversified tourist offer. In some cases the less diverse area (KRP) proved to be better off (i.e. stability). However the rural tourism proved to be one of the most important factors for securing the sustainable rural development in analysed regions.

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was financed under the EC's FP5, Quality of Life and the Management of Living Resources (QLK5-CT-2002-02718)

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