

Attitudes of local people to nature protection in the Belianske Tatras region, Slovakia

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Abstract. Nature protection and socio-economic activities of human society very often collide. Executive bodies of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic supervise and pass decisions on activities in protected areas according to the valid legislation. Operation of the nature conservation and developing projects influence people and their activities living in the given region as well as tourists. This article presents the views of the public on nature protection, tourism and proposed activities (revitalisation and construction of tourist paths and cycle-ways) mainly in the Belianske Tatry region and partly in Spišská Magura Mts. The survey was conducted in 2009.

Key words: tourism, public opinion, Belianske Tatry region, High Tatras

Introduction

Tourism develops especially in attractive protected areas which are also very vulnerable. This is why the State Nature Conservancy tries to regulate the number of tourists in protected areas, in extreme cases also closing the disturbed areas. On the other hand, tourist organisations try to increase the utilisation of the landscape by the construction of various buildings for tourism directly in the core zones of protected areas and to decrease protection levels of these protected areas.

Public opinion often helps to register the environmental impacts of developing projects; another advantage of public implementation is to support people's feeling of social responsibility which is a product of implementation (Tvevad 2004). The input of public views should bring better solutions.

Material and Methods

An opinion survey about revitalisation and construction of tourist paths and cycle-ways in Belianske Tatry was conducted by the exploration method (use of questionnaires) in 2009. The main aim was to find out public attitudes to nature protection, tourism and

planned activities. The advantage of this type of public survey is the possibility it offers to catch the opinion of the "silent majority" (Tvevad 2004).

A main hypothesis, "We predict that the public will turn to opinions matched with the development of tourism and more benevolent processes in nature protection", was tested by asking questions. A Sub-hypothesis, "We predict that the public will react positively to proposed activities and will support them", was also checked.

Questionnaires with eight structured, mainly not parametric, questions were answered by randomly selected respondents in various locations. Visitors to Plesnivec chalet in Belianske Tatras, where questionnaires were also available, had the chance to express their opinion on the questions asked. The research sample consisted of 100 respondents. The response rate was 67%, i.e. 100 responses from 150 questionnaires sent out. Respondents were randomly stratified by gender, age, education and residence. Visitors from the Czech Republic (6%) also presented their opinions. Respondents from the Tatra and sub-Tatra region (Fig. 1, from the towns Poprad, Kežmarok, Spišská Belá and the High Tatras and from the communities of Ždiar and Lendak) formed 53% of all respondents and we can consider their opinions as very important, because the proposed activities will influence their lives. Their view is mostly similar with summary opinion.

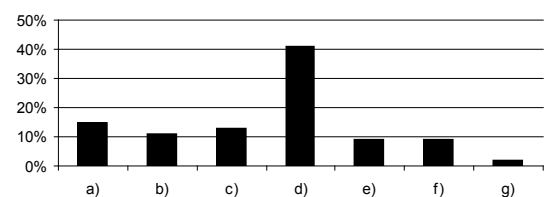


Fig. 1. Diversification of respondents' origin from the Tatra and sub-Tatra region. a) Poprad; b) Kežmarok; c) Vysoké Tatry; d) Spišská Belá; e) Ždiar; f) Lendak; g) Podbanské.

Results

Hiking dominated among the activities performed during stays in the protected area. Only a 2% interest in cross-country skiing is not positive in relation to proposed activities. Cycling was more popular among the visitors (13%).

The visit rate of given locations of Belianske Tatras was considered adequate by the majority of

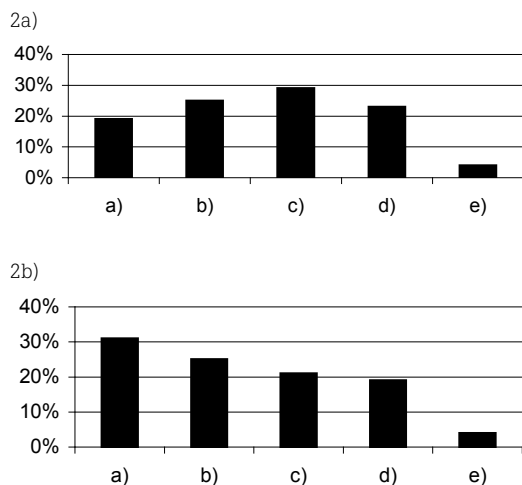


Fig. 2. Evaluation of the question: Do you consider nature protection in Slovakia as: a) too strict, as a strong restriction; b) adequate, matched with its value; c) low, lots of violations are unpunished; d) inadequate, there is visible damage to the natural environment; e) I can not consider this. 2a) All the answers; 2b) Respondents from Tatra and sub-Tatra region.

respondents (59%). Sixty-two percent of respondents in submountainous region of Belianske Tatry and 39% in Spišská Magura evaluate it as acceptable.

Evaluation of the question, "Would you support accessing closed tourist natural locations?", shows that exactly half the respondents would support this activity. The other half was against it. In the sub-Tatra region more people (57%) would agree with this action.

The majority of respondents thought that nature protection in Slovakia is low and that there are lot of unpunished violations; on the other hand people from the sub-Tatra region considered it as very strict and they felt it to be a strong restriction (31%) (Fig. 2).

The existing technical background of different types of activities at the given locations was evaluated by respondents variously. Road network, shelter huts, hotels, tourist paths and ski lifts were rated as adequate, on the other hand the majority of respondents considered cycle-ways to be deficient. The Spišská Magura region was difficult to rate by people, this area being less visited and less well known. This result is not so valid for people from the Tatra and sub-Tatra region (among whom the percentage of "I can not consider this" answers was significantly lower). Apparently due to the relative satisfaction of respondents with local technical background, more than half those asked disagreed with realisation of other large sport and more activities which require additional construction in protected areas (e.g. modification of relief concerning expansion of ski slopes, cycle-ways etc.) (Fig. 3).

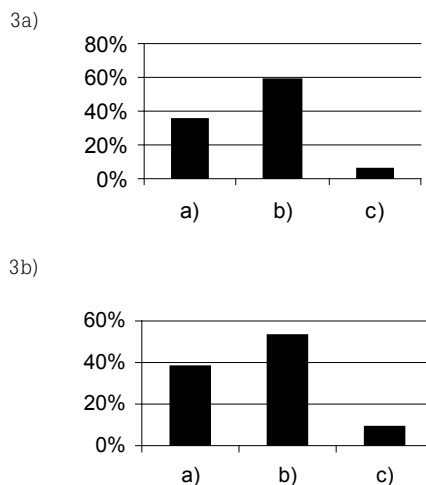


Fig. 3. Evaluation of the question: Do you agree with realisation of further large sport and other activities which will require construction in protected areas? (e.g. modification of relief concerning expansion of ski slopes, cycle-ways and so on) a) yes; b) no; c) I can not consider this. 3a) All the answers; 3b) Respondents from Tatra region.

Discussion

The hypothetical expectations were not confirmed. Consistent answers of respondents were often based on a sensitive approach, adequacy, parsimony, limits etc. In answers which mentioned activities supported, a distrust of mega projects has emerged and respondents have started to feel concerns about exceeding the limit of carrying-capacity.

The opinion survey was also focused on investigating what could be the advantages and disadvantages of further development of tourism in the given locations. The majority of respondents see advantages in disclosure of unique natural environment and in creation of new job opportunities. The presentation of the region is also important. On the other hand, respondents were especially afraid of environmental pollution as a side effect of these activities and increasing negative influences and impacts on the environment (48% expect this pressure in Belianske Tatras and 23% in Spišská Magura Mts.). Other disadvantages of further development of tourism according to the respondents are: disturbing local life, loss of public welfare (comfort, peace), stress and traffic problems.

References

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