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Protected area tourism: Progress, innovation and sustainability

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Protected areas are highly sought after destinations by the increasing number of global travellers. Tourism has grown faster in the last 60 years than most other industries and the United Nations World Tourism Organization estimates that the number of international tourist arrivals will increase by an average of 43 million (3.3%) a year in the second and third decades of this century. The literature on tourism is substantial, in 2012, there were >150,000 items in total, with around 5000 relevant to sustainable tourism (CIRET, 2012 in Buckley, 2012). Eagles et al. (2002: 13) explain that the growth in interest in sustainable tourism and ecotourism reflects a rising tide of social concern about the quality of the natural environment and the effects of tourism. McCool (2009) highlights that the management of sustainable tourism in protected areas essentially requires numerous trade-offs between two goals: (1) protection of the key values that form the basis for preservation and (2) allowing access to visitors to enjoy and appreciate those values. He goes further to say that these trade-offs occur within a context of a lack of societal agreement on goals and also a lack of scientific agreement on the relationships between causes and effects; two conditions needed to identify and implement effective tourism management actions (McCool, 2009).

Many researchers have described how tourism and visitation to protected areas can generate both positive and negative environmental, economic and social impacts (Eagles et al., 2002; Leung et al., in press; McCool, 2006; Mitchell and Ashley, 2010; Snyman, 2014). The past decade has seen the publication of research on protected areas addressing several core themes in relation to sustainable tourism, including: the economic impacts of tourism (Lapeyre, 2011; Nielsen and Spenceley, 2011; Snyman, 2012, 2014; Spenceley, 2010; Telfer and Sharpley, 2008), including a recent focus on value chain analysis (Meyer, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2009; Rogerson, 2012; Rylance and Spenceley, 2013; Spenceley et al., 2010) and inclusive tourism (Rylance and Spenceley, 2014a, 2014b), the social impacts of tourism (Deery et al., 2012; Esteves et al., 2012; Mbaiwa, 2005; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008) and the environmental impacts tourism has in protected areas (Buckley, 2010; Eagles, 2013; Mbaiwa, 2003). Another area of research which has progressed in the last decade is that of understanding visitation (Kajala, 2009, 2013; Kajala et al., 2007, Leung et al., in press; Spenceley et al., 2015a; Telfer and Sharpley, 2008) and the importance of understanding the impact of visitation on tourism and conservation and finding ways of maximising benefits and, at least, satisfying all stakeholders. There has also been research focusing on the different governance types of protected areas and the various tourism models that accompany these, for example transboundary protected areas, involving different country's governments (Spenceley, 2006; Vasilijevic et al., 2015); community conserved areas (Lapeyre, 2011; Snyman, 2012) shared governance, and governance by the private sector (Borrini-Feyeraband et al., 2013). The linkages between tourism and poverty reduction have also been explored extensively in the literature (e.g. Ashley et al., 2001; Erskine and Meyer, 2012; Hall and Brown, 2006; Mitchell, 2012; Rogerson, 2012; Scheyvens, 2011; Scheyvens and Russell, 2012; Spenceley and Meyer, 2012), and particularly in relation to areas of high biodiversity and protection (e.g. Ahebwa et al., 2012; Nelson, 2012; Rylance and Spenceley, 2014a, 2014b; Snyman, 2012).

Demand for tourism in protected has largely grown since the end of Second World War and has been associated with the increasing convenience and reduced

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costs of visiting distant destinations (McCool and Eagles, in press). As the infrastructure in parks has grown in response to this increased visitation, there have been increased concerns about the negative impact of visitors and facilities constructed to support them. Professionals working on protected area tourism constantly face these types of trade-offs, and need to find ways to balance optimising the quality of visitor experience, and generating revenue for conservation management, with the integrity of the ecological resource base. New tools have been developed to guide practitioners on enhancing the sustainability of tourism, such as the *Manual on applying the CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development* (CBD, 2015), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's *World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Online Toolkit* (UNESCO, undated) and the United Nations Development Program's *guidelines for Tourism Concessions in Protected Natural Areas* (Thompson et al., 2014).

This special issue has been coordinated by the Tourism and Protected Area Specialist Group (TAPAS Group). The TAPAS Group is one of several voluntary groups convened under the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas and comprises of a network committed to promoting sustainable tourism in protected areas. The TAPAS Group's mission is to provide a forum where people collaborate, stimulate dialogue, share expertise, develop and disseminate knowledge and enhance learning, in order to enable the planning, development and management of sustainable tourism in protected areas (Spenceley et al., 2015b). The TAPAS Group has developed several publications on tourism and protected areas. For example, in 2002, the Best Practice Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas were published, led by members of the TAPAS Group (Eagles et al., 2002: 1). A forthcoming update of these guidelines from the TAPAS Group (Leung et al., in press) presents new knowledge drawn from 58 contributors in 23 countries. The guidelines include lessons learned and best practice examples of how to develop tourism sustainably in protected areas, and progress made over the last decade. The TAPAS Group has also coordinated special editions of other journals on similar issues (see Hvenegaard et al., 2012; McCool and Spenceley, 2014; Spenceley and Meyer, 2012) and has several others in preparation.

This special issue aims to demonstrate advances in our understanding of best practices in protected area tourism and to address the progress made in protected area tourism over the past decade, specifically between the World Parks Congress (WPC) held in Durban in 2003 and the last one held in Sydney in 2014. Papers were selected that could inspire more sustainable tourism practices by protected area mangers, tourism investors and operators and host communities and focused on one or more streams from the 2014 WPC. Advances over the past decade in research on tourism in protected areas are synthesised by Spenceley in this special issue in her review of knowledge shared at the 2003 and 2014 IUCN WPC. Expanding on Spenceley (2015), her paper describes an analysis of 107 presentations made at the 2014 WPC and also a comparison of the pertinent issues raised at the previous WPC in 2003. She explores three particular themes in detail: (1) sustainable use of natural and cultural diversity; (2) working with local stakeholders and poverty alleviation and (3) sources of financial support for protected areas.

Two papers in this special edition relate to the economic impacts of tourism in protected areas: the first at the country level and the second at the protected area level. Rylance's paper estimates tourism's contribution to conservation area financing in Mozambique. He produces an analysis of the financial sustainability of conservation areas, and the gap of what is required for conservation management, and evaluates their potential future revenue generation. His paper provides an important evaluation of the macro-level contribution of tourism in protected areas to the national economy of a developing country. Researchers often consider the economic impact of one protected area on a protected area authorities' finances, or on the local economy and surrounding communities (e.g. Lewis et al., 1990; Mbaiwa, 2003; Spenceley et al., 2010), but few provide insights into the macro-level impacts of tourism in a protected area network. At the protected area level, Adiyia's paper assesses the potential of tourism employment on local livelihoods associated with tourism around Kibale National Park in Uganda. The area around Kibale National Park is characterised by high levels of poverty, limited livelihood or off-farm opportunities and an agrarian economy (Adiyia et al., 2014; Mackenzie, 2012). His research supports that of Mitchell and Ashley (2010) who also found that non-managerial tourism wages were low, although sufficient to keep families above the extreme poverty line.

The second theme looks at approaches by private sector tourism to ensuring sustainability and their role in tourism innovation and progress. Spenceley and Snyman address this topic by focusing specifically on one tourism operator, Wilderness Safaris, and their operations in Botswana. The paper assesses whether or not it is possible for the private sector to influence conservation and the development of tourism in a specific destination. Spenceley and Snyman's research emphasises the importance of destination planning authorities encouraging and supporting reputable private sector

operators, who have a long-term interest in the destination, who promote sustainable practices, who mobilise a network of facilities and properties, can collaborate with competitors and can support and can advise government on policy and its implementation.

The third theme focuses on governance, the role of communities in tourism and the sustainability of this approach. McCool (2009) highlights that partnerships are important tools in constructing the public interest in tourism as they can provide the consensus and learning needed to develop and implement informed actions. He also emphasises that such partnerships do not just happen, they must be carefully engineered. This is clearly illustrated in Mearns and Burgoyne's paper which details the conflict that arises between a community, the private sector operator, and other stakeholders in a community conservation area in Tanzania. What is clear from their paper is that there is still much work to do be in the area of empowering communities to engage in protected area tourism sustainably and equitably.

According to Leung et al. (In press) tourism and visitation have been intricately linked to protected areas since their conception in the modern era and de Lacy and Whitmore (2006) in Worboys et al. (2006) go further to say that interpretation has long been at the heart of managing protected areas. The fourth theme, therefore, looks at interpretation and public perceptions of protected areas, including two papers looking at the influence of interpretation and visitation on behaviour and perceptions of the public towards protected areas. Hvengaard's paper is based on results from 497 respondents in a specific protected area: Miquelon Lake Provincial Park in Alberta, Canada. His study confirms the importance of interpretation in protected areas but also highlights the shortcomings and areas for improvement in the effectiveness of interpretation. Taking a country-wide approach, Weiler and Moyle's paper reviews perspectives of 1584 protected area visitors in Australia, to assess the relationship between visitation and perceptions of the personal and community-wide benefits of parks. They suggest that support for protected areas can be garnered from most citizens, as long as they, through good interpretation programmes, understand the importance of the protected areas.

As highlighted by Spenceley's paper in this volume, tourism standards and certification were one of the major topics emphasised in both the 2003 and 2014 WPCs. Bushell and Bricker's paper considers the application of standards to tourism in protected areas. They highlight that only 21% of protected areas in the world are considered to have 'sound' management practices, and in response the IUCN has developed The Green List which is designed to monitor and reward protected areas that have good management standards, and successful biodiversity conservation and equitable governance. It is envisaged that the Green List will bring greater international recognition to well-managed protected areas, and that this will help to improve the quality of tourism, and their overall visibility.

The eight papers presented within this special issue illustrate advances in how tourism contributes to national and local economies (Rylance; Adiya), the influence of the private sector in promoting sustainability in destinations (Spenceley and Snyman), the governance challenges on the interface between private sector, communities and protected areas (Mearns and Burgoyne), how visitor attitudes to conservation are affected by interpretation (Hvenegaard; Weiler and Moyle), and advances in standards for protected areas and tourism (Bushell and Bricker). These themes relate well to the key issues highlighted by Spenceley in her synthesis of knowledge presented at the past two IUCN WPCs.

In relation to the IUCN WPC themes from 2014, it is evident that some areas need further work and exploration, notably climate change and tourism, and also issues relating to culture and World Heritage Sites. There is a wealth of innovation in the field of protected area tourism research, and this body of knowledge will surely continue to expand. The application of these lessons, through the planning and management of protected area tourism; through private sector investment decisions and through enhancing the roles, responsibilities and benefits to local communities, will surely drive progress in sustainable tourism through the next decade.

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