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VISITOR MANAGEMENT TOOLS FOR PROTECTED AREAS FOCUSED ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CROATIAN EXPERIENCE

Lidija Petrić*, Ante Mandić

University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Cvite Fiskovića 5, 21 000 Split, Croatia

Abstract

The protected natural areas are becoming increasingly popular vacation destinations with both international and domestic travellers. Protected area may be an area of land and/or sea dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other means. It might have many different purposes. This means that biodiversity protection, though a critically important function is far from being the only purpose and is often not the primary purpose of many protected areas. As an ever-growing activity, tourism in protected areas produces benefits and cost that often interact in complex ways. Therefore, it is obvious that special attention has to be paid to the protected areas governance model and its effectiveness, especially in terms of the planning and control process enhancement for the purpose of avoiding possible conflicts over nature protection and tourism development.

This paper focuses on the analysis of problems that protected areas are facing in relation to tourism development, in particular from the Croatian protected areas' point of view (specifically, national parks and nature parks). Additionally it offers some recommendations concerning possible environmental management strategies, specifically those related to visitor management, whose tools ought to be implemented in order to keep both the protected areas' system and tourism development sustainable. These recommendations are to be discussed from the perspective of the new governance system implementation that might help in achieving the sustainability goals of Croatian protected areas.

Key words: Croatia, protected areas, sustainability, tourism, visitor management tools

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* Author to whom all correspondence should be addressed: E-mail: lidija.petric@efst.hr; Phone: +385 21 430 670; Fax: +385 21 430 701