Case Studies – Level 1

The Southwestern Archipelago National Park

Area: Province of Western Finland   Country: Finland (SW Region)   Date of Completion: 29.12.’05

Pen Picture

This National Park is at the core of the Archipelago Sea Biosphere Reserve. There are over 8,000 islands and islets, most of which are uninhabited. The National Park is managed by a state enterprise which has established a number of initiatives for sustainable tourism development. There are good examples of organisational and product innovation in terms of growing and managing tourism in this area.

Key Lessons

- The importance of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve designation giving a wider context for the National Park (the core area of the Biosphere Reserve) and having buffer and transition zones
- The establishment of commercially focussed business units within the state agency managing national parks specifically to grow and develop sustainable tourism activities. All income generated is reinvested into conservation and further product development.
- Comprehensive institutional and policy support at national, provincial and local level
- Establishing pilot projects that can be used to demonstrate good practice locally, involves local communities and has potential to draw down funding from various sources.
- Encouraging networks of local and community-based attractions such as Local History Museums which stimulate civic pride, local ownership and involvement and give tourists a strong sense of place
- Voluntary cooperative agreements established between national park services and local businesses on the principles of sustainable tourism
- Establishing a close working relationship between the Natural Heritage Service and the local tourist association with the TA primary role being marketing, promotion and guest information for wider destination.

Location

The National Park is situated in the outer archipelago at the southern part of the south western archipelago, some 20 km south of Turku (population 175,000) and 150 km southwest of Helsinki: 60°N/22°E. Nearest mainland communities are Korpo and Nagu.
Overview

The Southwestern Archipelago National Park is part of the UNESCO Archipelago Sea Area Biosphere designated in 1994. This biosphere reserve is situated in the Province of Turku and Povi in south western Finland and has 20,000 islands and a population of 2,000. It includes terrestrial and marine habitats such as coniferous forests, wood meadows, heaths, islets, seashores and open sea areas. The Biosphere was designated in UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and is designed to achieve sustainable development in a landscape with traditional forms of land use.

The National Park represents the core area of the Biosphere. It was designated in 1983 and contains 8,000 islands. It differs from other Finnish national parks because it comprises landscapes shaped by traditional forms of agriculture (grazing and hay cutting), as well as fishing and hunting. National Park designation took place to protect both the natural environment and the culture/way of life of this area.

The Park exists to safeguard the traditional ways of utilising natural resources, protect a living community and to promote awareness of nature amongst visitors.

It is now recognised that the existence of the Biosphere Reserve, a buffer zone and a transition area surrounding the National Park has been critical to the success of sustainable development in the National Park.

Approximately 1,200 people live in the Biosphere Reserve area which is visited by some 200,000 visitors each year. It covers an area of 420,000 ha, of which 91% is marine and 11% is designated national park, comprising:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total (ha)</th>
<th>Marine</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Park Core Area</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffer Zone</td>
<td>232,000</td>
<td>218,000</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Zone</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>121,000</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>420,000</td>
<td>384,000</td>
<td>91%</td>
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The altitude through the whole area is -105 to +50 m above sea level.
The Southwestern Archipelago is one of 35 national parks in Finland, all managed by Metsähallitus. This is the state enterprise whose main tasks are the management of protected areas and the supply of wood. It administers more than 12 million ha of land on behalf of the State. As of 1 January 2006 the operations of Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services Division will be organised on the basis of three regions: Lapland, Ostrobothnia and Southern Finland. The Archipelago will be in the Southern Region.

Sustainable tourism within the Archipelago is part of a wider programme coordinated by the Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus that covers the Southwestern Archipelago and Western Estonia. The project is focused on the National Park and began in July 2002 and ended on 30 December 2004 (see www.metsa.fi/natural/projects).

The overall aim is to find an economically, socially, ecologically and culturally sustainable model for nature tourism.

The project was primarily funded under Interreg IIIA and was known as the South Finland Coastal Zone Programme – Tourism Scheme. The Administrative Body consisted of seven representatives from Metsähallitus, the Regional Council, the Biosphere Reserve and the Tuuru Foundation.

National funding in support of the project came from the Regional Environment Centre (28%), the EU Coastal Fund (31%), Metsähallitus (37%) and the Municipality of Houtskari (4%).

The objectives for the project were to:

- Create a strategy for nature tourism in the Archipelago
- Develop sustainable tourism projects involving local communities and enterprises
- Share expertise and experiences across the wide area of the project.

The main pilot project involved the island of Jungfruskär in the Municipality of Houtskari on the north western sector of the National Park in the Sound of Kihti (see later).
**Status of Conservation Designation**

National Park (designated in 1983) within UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (designated in 1994).

**Planning Framework**

- National park and biodiversity conservation requirements set in the context of national planning by the Ministry of the Environment
- Sustainable tourism for the Archipelago in new strategy coordinated by Natural Heritage Service
- National Park Plan prepared by the local Area Office of the Natural Heritage Service.

**Background/History**

- Unique landscape and cultural area
- Designated as National Park in 1983
- Designated as Biosphere Reserve in UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme in 1994
- Interreg IIIA Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2002 - 2004

**Aims/Objectives**

The management of the National Park in a manner which is economically, socially, ecologically and culturally sustainable.

**Key Resource Facts**

**Habitats**

The major ecosystem is temperate, broadleaf forest and woodland with Brackish water archipelago comprising:

- Terrestrial and marine habitats
- Coniferous forests, wood meadows and heaths
- Rocky and sandy islets
- Seashores
- Open seas
- Grazing-dependent biotypes.

**Topography**

- Altitude -150 to + 50m above sea level
• Low-lying islets and seashore with rocky outcrops created in the Ice Age
• Multitude of small islands
• Land area in National Park is 6% of total designation, 94% is marine.

Climate
Long, cold winters with relatively short, warm summers.

Biodiversity
• Coniferous forest of Scots pine and spruce
• Mull-soil forest with alder, ash, spruce, birch and aspen
• Wood meadows with wide range of flora and fauna (25 species of mammal), including flying squirrel and hedgehog and 132 species breeding birds
• Agro-ecosystems with rye, barley and sugar beet
• Baltic marine areas, a sea of few species but those that exist have high abundancy (high salt content of water).

Culture/Heritage
• Traditional agricultural land use combined with subsistence economy of mixed farming, fishing and hunting
• Area has been populated since 2000 BC
• Trade, handicraft and navigation has taken place from Bronze Age – fundamentally part of the Baltic region
• Present National Park area inhabited in the Iron Age and continually farmed since that time
• Swedish settlement from 1200 when population increased dramatically – 50% of villages date from Middle Ages
• Population increased until mid 1500s, after which decline as resources could not support numbers – the 1700s Great Northern War and the Black Death further reduced numbers
• Continued out migration and appeal of new work in mainland towns and villages led to further depopulation
• 1970s increasing population as people rediscovered islands and found ‘summer paradise’ – growth of second homes and population to service new demands from tourism and recreation.

Key Tourism Facts

The Republic of Finland has a population of just 5.2 million but is one of the largest countries in Europe (338,000 sq km). Its rurality is highlighted by the fact that its population density is 17 persons per sq km and 62% live in towns. Over three quarters of the land area is forest and there are 190,000 lakes and 180,000 islands.

In 2004 some 4.9 million international visitors crossed borders into Finland, primarily from Sweden, Russia, Estonia and Germany. The total overnight stays by international visitors were only 4.4 million nights. The majority of border crossings are transit or day trips. Domestic tourism accounted for 12.3 million overnight stays. Demand is heavily seasonal, concentrated in July and August. The average spend per person per trip was €238, with tourism being worth €1.2 billion in 2004 for the Finnish economy.
The Finnish Tourist Board estimates that, of the 14 national parks and nature reserves, whose visitor numbers are recorded, they received 500,000 visits per annum, suggesting that the national park system as a whole in Finland received 1.5 – 2 million visitors per year. Of this total an estimated 16-20% would be international tourists.

The Finnish Tourist Board recognises and actively promotes images that relate to Finland’s high quality environment, its space and tranquillity and its national parks and reserves as a major attractor for domestic and international tourists.

Product Services and Infrastructure

- Main visitor centre (accessible by car) is at Blåmusslan, in the village of Kasriäss, supported by a network of five nature information huts (unmanned) on the islands of Högland, Konungskär, Berghamn, Yxskär and Jurmo, providing basic interpretation.
- The National Park is not accessible by car other than to the Blåmusslan Centre. Visitors use public transport from Turku and Helsinki to the ferry departure points at Dragsfjard, Prostrik and Parnas. There are ferries to all the islands.
- Travel within the archipelago is good and easy with lots of ferries, bridges and sea taxis.
- There is a modest range of shops and restaurants on the mainland, together with summer shops and restaurants on many of the islands.
- The Turku Tourist Association (www.saaristo.fi) provides a comprehensive information service – branding = *The Archipelago is an Experience*
- High quality local food, especially fish, obtainable from local people
- Ten nature trails and series of waymarked routes on island
- Sailing, motor boating and canoeing with guest harbours and slipways
- Ice fishing and angling allowed free under everyman’s right but line fishing needs licence
- Only residents able to use net fishing
- 11 campsites with dry toilets and one open wilderness hut (Konungskär Island)
- Volunteer camps run by Naturschool and Metsa
- Interpretation events programme provided by both the public and private sector
- A network of small community museums and heritage attractions such as at Korpo, Houtskar and Rodeborg (the Viking Centre)
- A park-wide waste management initiative is in place called ‘Keep the Archipelago tidy’ run by the KTA Association (www.pidasaavistosilistina.fi).

Volume

- An estimated 200,000 – 250,000 visitors a year, of which 80 – 85% are domestic Finnish tourists and 15 – 20% are international tourists.

**Key Issues associated with tourism development/management**

- Ensuring that local businesses can derive sufficient income from sustainable tourism projects to make them viable
- Establishing and maintaining clear roles and responsibilities that ensure Metsähallitus and pubic sector enables enterprise to take place
Managing a large, disparate and fragmented land and water resource

- Providing an appropriate level of tourism infrastructure to attract visitors and provide a framework within which private sector services can be provided and a traditional culture and landscape sustained
- Providing adequate and appropriate information to visitors both using the Internet and on-the-ground
- The integration of local activities and strategies into the wider context of the Baltic Region and especially the Baltic 21 programme (see Baltic 21 Sea Region Tourism).

Management/Organisation/Funding/Finance

The Archipelago Sea Biosphere is coordinated by the Southwest Finland Regional Environmental Centre. This involves working with a wide range of partners including:

- Local communities
- Individual businesses
- Regional Council of Southwest Finland
- The Archipelago Development Centre
- Abo Akademi
- The University of Turku
- The Forest Service.

Key projects include:

- Creation of village plans for sustainable development
- Sustainable leisure fishing and related tourism activities
- Sustainable tourism in general.

The Management of the National Park is vested in Metsähallitus, the State Enterprise and its Natural Heritage Service.

The Service is headed by a Director with three Regional Directors and a series of Area Managers responsible for operations and the line management of Park Superintendents with their local teams.

There are four integrated areas of operational focus:

- Protected Area Management and Planning
- Game and Fisheries
- Nature Conservation
- Recreation

A recent international evaluation of Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Service, based upon the IUCN and World Wide Fund for Nature, was applied to the Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of Finland’s protected areas in 2005. The evaluation examined the context, state, planning, processes, outputs and outcomes of the Park’s system. The assessors reported that “In Finland, the management of national parks is in good hands, even though one can find things to improve, especially in Southern Finland and in marine areas”.

Metsähallitus has established two business units, trading as wholly owned companies, to develop a portfolio of income generating activities from the sale or
rent of plots for holiday homes (run by Laatumaa) and a tourism operator (trading as Wild North).

Achievements/Innovation

(1) Establishing voluntary Cooperation Agreements and code of conduct between Metsähallitus and private sector commercial operators on the principles of sustainable tourism development. These businesses include:

- Strandbogroup accommodation provider and fishing trips (www.strandbogroup.fi)
- Berghamns Stugor AB accommodation and excursions (www.ikp-safety.com)
- Pensar Syd accommodation provider (www.pensarsyd.com)
- Houtskär Skärgårdshögskola excursions, guided tours and other customised programmes for interpretation (www.hkf.fi)
- Skärgårdshauets naturskola, a nature school offering a wide range of interpretive activities (www.naturskolan.com) and organising volunteer work camps
- Stefan Mickelsson fishing trips, boating and other transportation
- Sailing trips in traditional sailing boats (www.talassa.fi).

(2) Jungfruskär Pilot which is the main pilot project in the National Park within the Interreg IIIA Sustainable Tourism Programme 2002 – 2004 on the Islands of Jungfruskär, in the Municipality of Houtskär, some 15 km west of Galtby on Korpoo. The Islands are located near several busy shipping channels and have provided shelter for seafarers and the area was a maritime centre over many centuries.

Storlandet is a 120 ha island, the majority of which is owned and managed by Metsa as part of the National Park since 1980. 50 ha are wooded meadows and pastures with flora dependent upon cattle grazing from May to October.

The Island has been inhabited by several cottages with the main settlement being the village of Hyppeis. Fishing was the main source of income. The population reached a peak of 43 in 1909 and a school was established in 1933. During World War II the Island become part of the defence of the region and barracks were built. These were ceded to Metsa in 1999 and include a beach sauna, warehouses, guard rooms and cannons.

Metsähallitus is now developing the Island for nature tourism using these facilities for tourist accommodation, offices and as an attraction. A landing stage has been built with a nature trail (3 km) and bird watching towers.

(3) Wild North – Metsähallitus Company has established two wholly owned and operated tourism/recreation-focused businesses: Wild North and Laatumaa. Laatumaa is focused on the sale and lease of holiday home plots to Finnish residents. Wild North is a sustainable tourism operator which manages the rental of self-catering cabins and lodges in national parks and elsewhere on Metsähallitus-managed lands.

Wild North is a multifaceted tourism business that successfully sells specialist tourism packages and products including:

- Group hiking tours
- Hunting and fishing tours
- Group and incentive packages
Wildlife and nature tours.

The agency directly operates a range of recreational activities in the national parks. Many of these are available to visitors free of charge including the overseeing of everyman’s rights, along with:

- Wilderness huts
- Trails for walking and cycling
- Launching facilities for boats
- Tourist information centres

A number of fee charging activities are also operated by Metsa:

- Guided walks and tours
- Hunting permits
- Fishing permits
- Rental accommodation

Contacts

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