

Developing Grassroots Land Management for Community Based Tourism in the Mongolian Taiga

Master's Thesis by Jürg Endres, Germany

Introduction:

Today, many rural and indigenous communities build up their own community based tourism (CBT) projects. It is believed that such self-initiatives have a great potential for sustainable development, especially in remote places where few other options exist. However, tourism, including this highly participative form, can lead to substantial impacts on natural, social and cultural resources of a host community – especially if it is poorly planned, and neither the scope of its impacts nor their acceptable maximum level are understood. While land management can help to mitigate such impacts, and ensure sustainable resource use, existing tourism related methods do not work for CBT projects, as they do not foresee indigenous people living in, or managing, a touristically used "wilderness" area.

Objective:

- To develop a functioning grassroots land management and impact planning approach for CBT that works out a) in the local context, and b) is applicable globally (in similar settings)

Methodology/Approach:

- Participative planning workshops based on an adaption of the "Limits of Acceptable Change" (LAC) method (Stankey et al. 1985). The adapted working method included the perspective of an additional key-stakeholder group (community), social and cultural impacts (additional to those on land and natural resources), land use other than tourism (e.g. subsistence activities).
- Participant observation, community mapping, GPS, interviews
- Analysis and amendment of working method in the post-field phase (see below)
- Putting the new method into the local context: proposal about rural development approach built on community-based land and resource management ("holistic area management")

References:

Stankey, G.H., D.N. Cole, R.C. Lucas, M.E. Peterson & S.S. Frissell, 1985: *The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) System for Wilderness Planning*. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Services.

All Photos:

Susanne Högemann & Jürg Endres
1:500,000 Russian military topographic base maps: Touratech. Adaptions made by the working group (East Taiga/Udzeg) and author

Problems/Findings:

- The method had to be adapted to local/typical backgrounds: Less technical and analytical, but incorporating more indigenous knowledge.
- New method now builds strongly on indigenous ways of interpreting the world (e.g. more qualitative).
- Problem of working with indicators addressed by the creation of a kit of "ready-to-use" indicators, including qualitative, new photo-"indicators".
- Community based land management must be integrated into daily routine and traditional practices as much as possible (e.g. monitoring by hunters). Nevertheless a few specialists are needed – this should become a priority for the community's education goals.
- Some wrong assumptions about cultural impacts: Issue was not relevant for working group. Poverty and some cultural factors make long-term impact planning difficult.
- Amended method is more subtle and holistic. Cultural impact planning more merged with other tasks, fully integrated with community based land management.
- Land and resource use (e.g. hunting) rights, along with responsibilities, are pivotal for everything. Yet no appropriate mechanisms are available for the Tsaatan. Instead, government focuses on hand-outs, increasing their dependency and creating new problems. The strict hunting law exacerbates conservation-related and social problems massively.
- Findings/paper can serve as a counter-proposal: Community based "grassroots" land and resource management instead of non-participative welfare distribution and rigid, exclusive conservation approaches. This will enhance the quality of tourism, which then can in turn fuel the programme financially.



Tsaatan, Reindeer & the Taiga: Background Information

The Tsaatan (or "Dukha") are the indigenous Tuvan population of northwestern Huvsgul, the northernmost province of Mongolia. They live in a very remote and rugged mountain land along the Russian border, simply referred to as "the Taiga" – famous for their Siberian-style "teepees", powerful shamans and highly mobile traditional subsistence lifestyle based on reindeer herding and hunting. Perhaps for all of these reasons, in the past two decades, they have been subject to an ever growing, uncontrolled and unsustainable boom of adventure-tourism. In an effort to finally gain more control over this, and for the first time also obtain a fair share of the profits of tourism, in 2005, they founded their own CBT initiative, the "Tsaatan Community and Visitors Center". (TCVC).

In spring 2008, the management of the TCVC requested assistance in setting up a land management based impact planning system that would work for CBT conditions. In September 2008, in the frame of a three-month field-trip, planning workshops were held in the East Taiga – based on an adaption of the "Limits of Acceptable Change" (LAC) nature tourism land use planning method.



Digital Map, produced by the working group. It resembles diverse "land classes", which are defined and identified by land use-, or resource condition-related criteria. Each land class has a range of specific management options and conditions, as well as touristic land use rules, assigned to it.

