



Good governance and tourism development in protected areas: The case of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, central Vietnam

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Dates:

Received: 17 Feb. 2013

Accepted: 06 Nov. 2013

Published: 24 June 2014

How to cite this article:

Hübner, A., Phong, L.T. & Châu, T.S.H., 2014, 'Good governance and tourism development in protected areas: The case of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, central Vietnam', *Koedoe* 56(2), Art. #1146, 10 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koedoe.v56i2.1146>

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Protected areas are increasingly expected to serve as a natural income-producing resource via the exploitation of recreational and touristic activities. Whilst tourism is often considered a viable option for generating income which benefits the conservation of a protected area, there are many cases in which insufficient and opaque planning hinder sustainable development, thereby reducing local benefit sharing and, ultimately, nature conservation. This article delineated and examined factors in governance which may underlie tourism development in protected areas. Based on Graham, Amos and Plumptre's five good governance principles, a specific analysis was made of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in central Vietnam, which highlighted challenges in the practical implementation of governing principles arising for nature conservation, sustainable tourism development and complex stakeholder environments. Despite the limited opportunity of this study to examine the wider national and international context, the discussion facilitated an overview of the factors necessary to understand governance principles and tourism development. This article could serve as a basis for future research, especially with respect to comparative analyses of different management structures existing in Vietnam and in other contested centrally steered protected area spaces.

Conservation implications: This research has shown that tourism and its development, despite a more market-oriented and decentralised policymaking, is a fragmented concept impacted by bureaucratic burden, lack of institutional capacities, top-down processes and little benefit-sharing. There is urgent need for stakeholders – public and private – to reconcile the means of protected areas for the ends (conservation) by clarifying responsibilities as well as structures and processes which determine decision-making.

Introduction

Parks and protected areas (PAs) serve a multiplicity of functions and are confronted by an array of social, political and economic expectations. At the same time, PAs stand increasingly in conflict with the preservation of natural resources, rising socio-economic expectations and their productive importance for local populations. There are also conflicts with local government and forest enterprises. Land-use issues and suppressed viewpoints of local communities, the depletion of natural resources, illegal activities such as poaching, logging, agricultural use and global environmental change further fuel challenges for PA conservation and management (Dearden 2000; Eagles, McCool & Haynes 2002; Gössling 2003; Larsen 2008).

Recreational and touristic activities are increasingly used as a justification for the creation of PAs or as an additional income source for their maintenance (Tang & Jang 2009). Tourism, particularly in evolving destinations in developing countries, may not be compatible with the standards of long-term sustainable development, but it generates important income which benefits PA conservation (Tosun 2001). Many cases have shown that uncoordinated management and lack of transparency in planning hinder sustainable development, thereby reducing local benefit sharing and, ultimately, nature conservation. Others caution against overrating the role of tourism in conservation, citing over-dependency on tourism for local populations living in and around PAs and against economic valuation of PAs as natural ecosystems continue to deteriorate (Gössling 2003; Semone *et al.* 2011; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2010).

The call for contributions to this Special Issue of *Koedoe* highlights that both positive and negative consequences have to be dealt with when managing and planning for tourism and its increasing economic role for PAs. It was pointed out during the 5th World's Park Congress held in Durban in 2003 that different forms of management and governance make a significant impact on the status and evolution of ecosystem services. The performance of governance is dependent on decision-

making and power-relationships based on objectives, accountability and capacities (including authority, legitimacy and finances) of a variety of stakeholders.

Conceptual papers which analyse the impact of governance on management structure and practices and the degree to which 'good governance' criteria may influence management and planning for tourism development in PAs have been limited (i.e. Buteau-Duitschaever *et al.* 2010; Eagles 2008; Eagles *et al.* 2010, 2013; Hannah 2006; Su, Wall & Eagles 2007; Su & Xiao 2009; Suntikul 2010). This manuscript will not close this conceptual gap, but it will attempt to help guide practice and future research for the governance of PAs. Some of the relevant questions which are pursued here address the challenges for (good) governance and discuss which 'good governance' criteria are critical for PA management, such as: how are local interests balanced with national interests? Sub-questions which are pertinent for parks and PAs in Vietnam generally are: how may the tourism system fit into the PA system in Vietnam, what is the degree of independence from government and the impact of decentralised governance on tourism development? To what extent are stakeholder networks and engagement impacted by PA governance issues or, vice versa, how does PA governance impact on stakeholder engagement? Are there values which are not obvious that can be revealed to underlie the methods and structures of governance? This article will not be able to cover all these topics in detail, nor does discussion take place on the macro level of policymaking or governance. Nonetheless, it may be a first step in advancing knowledge on aggregated issues which are reflected at the 'nested concepts of government', that is, at the local level (Eagles 2009:245). At the same time, topics addressed above remain under-researched, especially in South-East Asia in general and Vietnam in particular.

Based on the case study of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park (PNKB NP) in central Vietnam, this article initially describes the relationships which exist between planning, management and governance. Subsequently, specific factors relating to the creation of visitor opportunities, and which may exert more or less influence on the governance and planning of the PNKB NP, and of PAs in general, are discussed.

Graham, Amos and Plumptre (2003) outlined five main principles of good governance for a UNDP list of characteristics for PAs. Acknowledging that these principles may not be equally applied in different contexts, Eagles

(2009) examined these criteria in respect of eight common management models for tourism management in PAs and therewith provided an overview of the implications that a variety of partnerships have on the way tourism in PAs is governed and managed. Following his analysis, Eagles (2009:245) encouraged discussion on the 'contentious issues of criterion fulfilment with each model'. The second objective of this article is to examine to what extent proposed 'good governance' criteria apply to the PNKB NP. PAs in Vietnam are nestled within complex settings, which include a range of actors and a mix of management forms.

Protected area governance and governance principles

Governance and planning are widely, sometimes controversially, used terms, particularly within political environments. Planning develops long-term goals, whilst governance is defined as 'the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say' (Graham *et al.* 2003:ii; cf. also Abrams *et al.* 2003). Governance does not follow a fixed progress, but remains a rather loose process which involves a variety of stakeholders (Graham *et al.* 2003). To increase visitation, enhance visitor experiences and, often as a response to their own capability and capacity limitations, many parks connect to other stakeholders and enter into partnerships. Whilst partnerships have become forms of governance in many protected areas, the complexity of stakeholders involved in the planning process of PAs, as well as the dynamic socio-political and economic environments that PAs sit in, challenge tourism management and governance (Eagles 2009; Gössling 2003).

'Good governance' is defined as a 'fair' and effective way of exercising governing powers (means) in order to meet the objectives (ends) of PAs (Abrams *et al.* 2003). Based on characteristics which have been delineated by the UNDP, Graham *et al.* (2003) delineate five principles of 'good governance' for PAs, whilst considering that these principles might not be equally applicable in every context (Table 1). These principles are generally accepted as necessary requisites to the success of PAs (Abrams *et al.* 2003; Graham *et al.* 2003).

Eagles (2009) examined a variety of partnership models for the management of tourism services and activities in PAs. He illustrates a wide variety of possible partnerships involving

TABLE 1: Good governance principles for national parks and protected areas management.

The five good governance principles	The United Nations Development Programme principles on which they are based
Legitimacy and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Consensus orientation
Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic vision, including human development and historical, cultural and social complexities
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsiveness of institutions and processes to stakeholders • Effectiveness and efficiency
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability to the public and to institutional stakeholders • Transparency
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity • Rule of law

Source: Graham, J., Amos, B. & Plumptre, T., 2003, *Governance principles for protected areas in the 21st century: A discussion paper*, p. ii, viewed 26 July 2013, from <http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/handle/123456789/11190>



governmental institutions only, public and for-profit or non-profit institutions, for-profit or non-profit organisations alone providing public services, a state in which service activities in tourism are sold or leased out to non-profit or for-profit agencies, or involving public entities which might function like a private operator, a state or provincial entity or a delegated management to some other body, the community or a single individual from the community (Abrams *et al.* 2003; Graham *et al.* 2003). In addition, the different types of management bodies, ownership of land and conservation resources and income of sources take an important impact on PA governance (Eagles 2008, 2009). To encourage discussion for their practical application, Eagles (2008, 2009) applied the five criteria for good governance (Table 1) to the eight most common management models which underpin tourism partnerships in PAs on the criteria of management body, income source and land ownership constellation. Using a five-point Likert scale (from 'very weak' to 'very strong') based on secondary literature and personal experience, Eagles (2009) illustrated the extent to which the single governance criteria apply to the various management models. A precondition for analysis was that equal importance was given to the criteria and that the management models examined were not context-bound. Efficiency, public participation, strategic vision and responsiveness were the most common, whilst accountability and transparency were the least common criteria receiving attention. Financial effectiveness and equity were the most highly valued. These criteria were more likely strongly linked to management models in which a non-profit organisation rather than a for-profit organisation were involved (Eagles 2008, 2009). Furthermore, Eagles (2009) found that specific models, such as the 'National Park Model' (government ownership of resources, tax funded and management by local government), would involve more partners than other models if implemented (Glover & Burton 1998; Graham *et al.* 2003; Lockwood 2010; More 2005).

Jamal and Stronza (2009:185) examined the 'complex planning domain' in a broader PA context which evolves from the variety of actors present in PA management. They found that 'systems', namely the park, tourism, ecological and community-resident system, each with its own stakeholders and their interests and values, stand in an interdependent (not symbiotic) nested, but fragmented relationship to each other. An examination of these relationships, which was based on a community-based tourism concept implemented in Bolivia, revealed that only collaborative approaches (such as co-management) which consider powers, values and, above all, local knowledge, are likely to succeed in the long term. At the same time, Jamal and Stronza (2009) illustrated a major gap for tourism planning and management in PAs: the use and conservation gap. Tourism organisations, planners or businesses largely focus on marketing and promotion rather than on conservation and the sustainable use of resources, demanding for more commitment on 'process-related factors, such as trust, commitment, open communication, flexibility and the ability to manage conflict' (Moore & Weiler 2009:131).

Research method and design

The PNKB NP in Vietnam was designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Natural World Heritage Site (WHS) in 2003 and represents a typical provincially managed PA, as is the case with many PAs in Vietnam. Organisational ethnography was used to gather data for this study (Schwartzman 1993). Two authors of this article currently work for the German Corporation for International Development (GIZ) project 'Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Natural Resources in PNKB NP Region', which has been active in the Park region since 2007. Descriptions of governance and planning for tourism development in the PNKB NP are based on their daily participation and observation of park management, as well as on their working experience with relevant stakeholders. Numerous formal and informal interviews and discussions with local stakeholders were collected over three years of fieldwork. They cover a variety of issues, ranging from public-private partnership and product development to marketing and hospitality service improvement. Secondary sources relate to grey literature, as well as to internal studies and reports on, for example, responsible tourism, payments for ecosystem services through tourism, handicraft production, alternative livelihood development and value chain analysis. At the same time, data and knowledge have been integrated from the second author of this article, who is currently undertaking his PhD on the PNKB NP, examining the influence of governance principles on tourism development.

To investigate how international best practice governance principles were applied at the park, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect first-hand data. Key questions included, (1) whether these good governance principles apply to the park at the moment, (2) to what extent they were applied and (3) if any further underlying governance principles can be uncovered. Data were collected in two phases, from July to September 2012 and from February to April 2013. Data were analysed using content analysis (Yin 2003a, 2003b).

Results

Governance of protected areas in Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the most bio-diverse nations in the world (UNDP 2010), with 7.6% of its terrestrial land considered PAs. Vietnam features around 30 national parks (most of which are legally classified as 'special-used forests' [SUFs]), 48 nature reserves, 11 species management areas and 39 landscape protection sites (Government of Vietnam 2012).

Different ministries govern PAs in the country. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) holds management responsibility for terrestrial SUFs, marine and wetland PAs are under the Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Planning and Investment is concerned with financial issues, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism develops and implements the national tourism

**TABLE 2:** Examples of management types of tourism activities in the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

Management body	Ownership type	Income for the National Park
PNKB Tourism Centre (Unit under the NPMB)	Holding ownership of several touristic sites and caves in the National Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor entrance fees • Concession fees to photographers, souvenir vendors and boat operators • Souvenir vending
Paradise Cave	50-year lease contract of 55 ha of land until 2061	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2% lease payments of yearly revenues
DoCST	PPC assigned the DoCST to set up procedures for piloting touristic activities at Son Doong Cave in the strictly protected zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental fee
NPMB	PPC assigned the NPMB for setting up and facilitating procedures for tours to En Cave in the strictly protected zone (tours undertaken by the PNKB Tourism Centre and by two local operators)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental fee

PNKB, Phong Nha-Ke Bang; NPMB, National Park management board; DoCST, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism; PPC, Provincial People's Committee.

strategy and is responsible for promoting many of the PAs. Currently, MARD finances seven out of 128 SUFs, others depend on provincial budgets provided either by the respective Provincial People's Committee (PPC) or by other line agencies such as the Provincial Forest Protection Department.

The past two decades have seen drastic changes in tourism development in the country. The political reforms of *Doi Moi*¹ significantly influenced the way PAs are managed and governed. Suintikul, Butler and Airey (2010) examined the socio-economic, cultural and political issues which have been posed for tourism development and its stakeholders in PAs with the economic transition processes. They found that:

withdrawal of control ... has enabled and encouraged change in tourism patterns in national parks. International organizations and private enterprises have taken advantage of unprecedented possibilities opened up by the removal of government restrictions and monopolies. International NGOs generally are interested in only some aspects of park development. The decentralization of control has also given individual parks new powers of self-determination, but there is little evidence of vision or innovation from any specific park management authority. Currently, no single entity or interest can be said to have a complete vision for, or complete control of, the development of Vietnam's national parks. (Suintikul 2010:215; see also Larsen 2008)

Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park

The Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park is located in the central Vietnamese Province of Quang Binh. It covers an area of 123 326 ha, which has been divided into three administrative areas, each operating under a different management regime: a strictly protected area, an ecological restoration area and an administration and services area, with further sub-zones existing for the former two areas. The PNKB NP has received worldwide acclaim with the inscription onto the UNESCO Natural World Heritage list for its outstanding geological and geomorphological values (UNESCO 2013). The number of visitors has exponentially risen in the past decade from several tens of thousands to more than 400 000 visitors per year in 2012. The provincially approved *Sustainable tourism development plan 2010–2020* for the PNKB NP region (including the National Park and its buffer zone)

¹*Doi Moi* [renovation] was a period of reforms beginning in 1986 which introduced 'open-door' policies that encouraged a shift from a socialist-oriented to a market-oriented economy.

is, at least officially, the main guiding document for tourism development for provincial and district government as well as for planners and investors (People's Committee of Quang Binh Province 2010).

Ownership of land resources and types of tourism site management

Resource ownership of the PNKB NP, including the NP area and the World Heritage Property, lies with the National Park Management Board (NPMB) and thereby with the national government. The land of the NP is managed as SUF land and is protected under Vietnamese forest law. The NPMB, with a provincial status similar to that of a provincial line department, is responsible for (managing) the protection of these resources. The NPMB can also make sustainable use of the resources for tourism activities, given that relevant regulations set out by the respective responsible Ministries are adhered to. Cooperation with line agencies on the implementation of these activities is encouraged. Two villages with a combined population of around 78 inhabitants are located within the borders of the NP. Table 2 outlines the different types of management which apply to the resources that are currently exploited for tourism activities in the PNKB NP.

In June 2012, a Prime Ministerial decision (Decision 24/QĐ-TTg) (Prime Minister 2012) was released on piloting investment opportunities for private tourism development in Vietnam's NPs. The Decision proposes the conversion of tourism centres or other 'ecotourism business units' into joint stock companies (whereby the NPMB will hold at least 51% of capital), if annual revenues exceed 3000 million VND. Rental fees of operated sites and activities within the NP are subject to negotiation every 5 years, with rental periods of a maximum of 50 years to apply. At the same time, the Decision also encourages lease agreements between SUF Management Boards and tourism businesses, organisations or individuals. Leasing periods for up to 50 years can be agreed upon, with the possibility of extensions of up to 20 years. Whilst the PNKB NP has indicated interest in becoming a pilot site for conversion of the PNKB Tourism Centre into a joint stock company, so far no serious follow-up has taken place.

Income sources

Income for the NP derives from profits made by the PNKB Tourism Centre from a single lease contract with a private

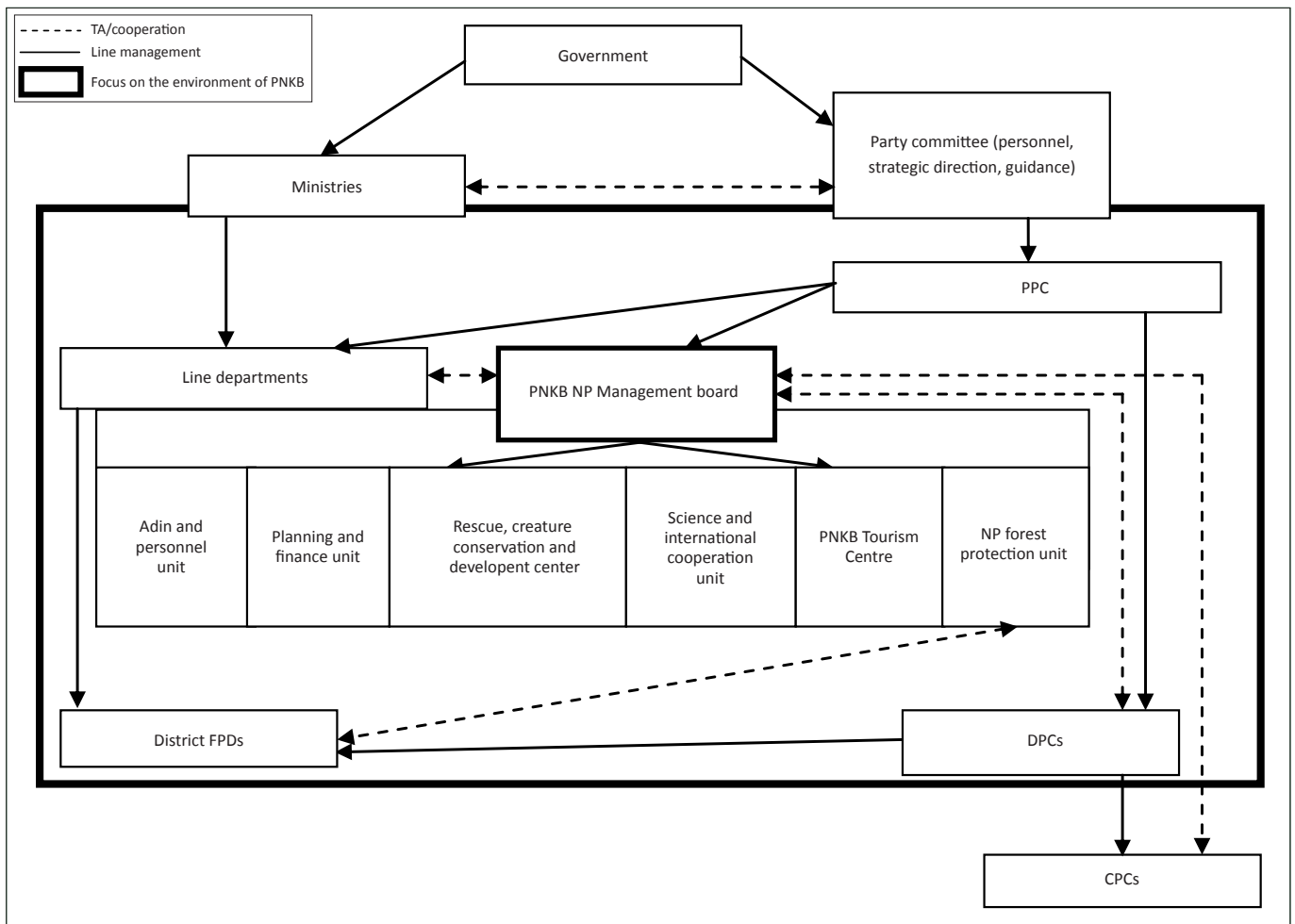


cave operator (2% of the yearly revenue), as well as from an environmental fee, which needs to be paid by every visitor to touristic sites within the strictly protected zone. Both the Tourism Centre and the Administration Unit handle, and are responsible for, financing activities carried out by the PNKB NP. Revenues are transferred to the Treasury House of the Department of Finance. Both the NP and the PNKB Tourism Centre have access to this money, according to budget estimations submitted for approval to the Treasury House at the beginning of each year. Salaries and administration, as well as fixed costs for the Park, derive from a separate provincial budget which derives from provincial revenues and societal taxes (Table 2).

The State also makes smaller budgets available for co-management protection practices of forest resources. Eco-touristic development is generally encouraged to ‘create revenue sources to cover incurred costs, generate income for staff and officers as well as become an alternate financial source replacing investments from the state’s budget’ (Government of Vietnam 2012).

Management body

The PNKB NP is under government management. It is under the authority of the PPC of Quang Binh. A management board (NPMB) with one director and three vice directors is in place, appointed by the PPC which directly reports back to the said authority. This Board is responsible for the operational management of the NP with management procedures documented and approved by the PPC. The NP is organised into four units and two functional offices (administration and organisation, planning and finance). The line departments most relevant to tourism development in the NP include the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (DoCST), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Planning and Investment. The former has responsibilities for monitoring activities relevant to cultural conservation and development, as well as for tourism in both the core and buffer zones of the Park. The latter two hold responsibility for directing the investment and implementation of infrastructural plans and activities delivered at the district and commune level. Figure 1 provides an overview of the institutional framework in which the Park is set.



Source: Based on People’s Committee of Quang Binh Province, 2010, *Sustainable tourism development plan 2010 to 2020: Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park region*, Tourism Resource Consultant, GIZ, Dong Hoi, p. 24

PPC, Provincial People’s Committee; PNKB NP, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park; FPD, Forest Protection Department; DPC, District People’s Committee; CPC, Commune People’s Committee; TA, technical assistance.

FIGURE 1: Institutional framework of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

The PNKB Tourism Centre officially assists the NPMB in the management and planning of tourism and in the organisation of tourism activities and services in the NP. It has to report directly to the NP. The PNKB Tourism Centre is a 'quasi-parastatal' and autonomously functioning unit and considered a profit-making business. Whilst the Tourism Centre has to apply, as do other tourism businesses, for permissions to operate tours within the strictly protected zone of the NP, it also owns and operates caves and other tourism sites in the NP's ecological restoration and service and administration areas.

Management model

Figure 2 illustrates the ideal management model according to legislation and policy documents. The NPMB holds the authority to manage and protect, as well as to develop, the Park's resources. The Tourism Centre advises on tourism development and is responsible for the management and organisation of tourism activities which have been approved for operations both by the NPMB and the PPC. The management can be conducted 'in house', or by co-management or concession agreements with third parties.

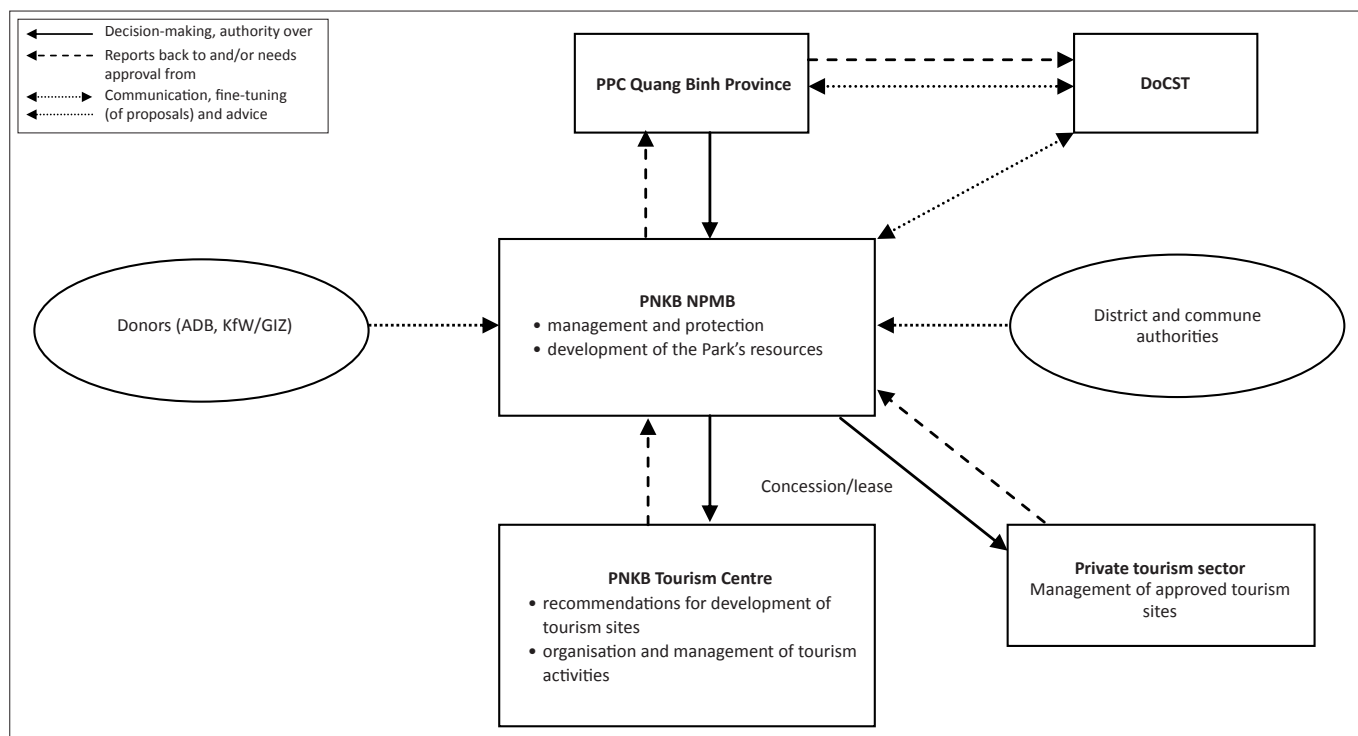
Private sector actors that are approved to manage specific tourism sites (e.g. through a concession type or forest lease agreement) report back to the NPMB. With the development of new sites and routes, the NPMB has to consult the DoCST for revision of the activity or site development applications. This can be done directly or indirectly via the PPC of Quang Binh. District and commune authorities support activities

by, for example, planning for public security. The Asian Development Bank, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and GIZ provide financial and technical assistance in the implementation processes. The PPC holds the final decision-making power on the management and development of sites within the NP.

Governance criteria and the public-private for-profit national park model

This ideal management model for PNKB NP is subject to a mix of different management types as outlined by Eagles (2008, 2009), namely the national park, the parastatal and the public and for-profit combination model. Resource ownership lies with the government, funding is obtained through both provincial taxes and revenues generated by the Tourism Centre and a private-run company, and the government-appointed Tourism Centre as well as the private company manage sites in the NP. In the following discussion, this model will be termed the public-private for-profit national park (PPPNP) model (see section above entitled 'Protected area governance and governance principles'). The PPPNP model demonstrates features which apply to the single forms of management, including the national park, parastatal and public and for-profit combination model (Eagles 2008, 2009). The focal points of this 'ideal' revolve around equity, participation and direction. However, a number of contextual issues which guide governance in practice underlie these factors.

The provision of a strong strategic vision is one of the strengths of this model. Although diverging in their nature,



Source: Based on People's Committee of Quang Binh Province, 2010, Sustainable tourism development plan 2010 to 2020: Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park region, Tourism Resource Consultant, GIZ, Dong Hoi
 PPC, Provincial People's Committee; DoCST, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism; ADB, Asian Development Bank; KfW, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau; GIZ, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; PNKB NPMB, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park Management Board.

FIGURE 2: Ideal management model in the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

both the National Park (through the Park management plan) (People's Committee of Quang Binh Province 2012a), and the PNKB Tourism Centre set forth clear visions on the future direction for Park protection and tourism development. The Park is environmentally driven, whilst the objectives of the Tourism Centre and of private stakeholders are clearly driven by economic concerns. At the same time, the longevity of strategic visions poses challenges. One interviewee from the NPMB states that:

'our park has announced a new strategy last year. After one year, another strategic vision was decided upon. The connection between stakeholders and projects [*e.g. which support the formulation of plans*] is not good ... when we have a strategic vision, we need to maintain it in ten or twenty years time and seek for expected outcomes. For example, we have just bought new clothes today. Suddenly, we find these not to be fashionable anymore the next day and we tend to throw it away. It is waste of resources and public money.' (NPMB employee 1, male, 55 years old)

At the same time, one interviewee fears that the imbalance of strategic vision may lead to a 'harvesting of the fruits while destroying the plant at the same time' (NPMB employee 2, female, 38 years old). Nature conservation objectives are increasingly being pushed to the background. Vietnam is currently undergoing a transition period and has recently been upgraded to a lower middle-income country (The World Bank 2014). This poses an increasing challenge to donors and current investors, as well as publicly involved project implementers in PAs. Although the socio-economic development plan until 2015 (People's Committee of Quang Binh Province 2008) acknowledges environmental protection, donors are increasingly challenged to retain a conservation focus due to changes in public authority commitment. In contrast, donors have had a great deal of impact on strategic visions, most often with 'good governance' intentions. The set principles however may not always apply to provincial or PA conservation visions.

In addition to differences in visions, Larsen (2008:441) highlights that there is at times 'institutional [*and juridical*] confusion with overlapping sites involving different ecosystems or overlapping categories (such as PNKB being both a national park and a WHS)'. The current PPPNP model only minimally reflects equity concerns, other than that there should be no entrance fees for entering the NP. Access to services and facilities is restricted in a number of ways.

Services offered by both the Tourism Centre and the private sector are bound to the supply-demand market mechanism and profits often far outweigh the coverage of incurred costs. This poses difficulties, particularly to domestic visitors, and specifically to those who arrive from the surroundings of the National Park. Many locals who have grown up and lived in and around the buffer zone of the Park can simply not afford to visit the World Heritage Site.

The PPPNP model suggests open revision processes of applications for touristic development sites, as well as for

permissions to access specific sites. Yet, accountability is undermined by lobbying activities, initiated from both the public sector and private enterprises. The latter seek to avoid, as far as possible, laws and regulations, and wish to create an environment in which public sector 'interference' is minimal. These attitudes also lead to conflict amongst private sector stakeholders who are interested in 'genuine' collaboration. Application procedures, contract selection and monitoring are constrained, to an unknown extent, by a lack of transparency. At the same time, allegations of negligence in drafting a contract between the Park (and parties involved in the revision process) and a private operator have been made, involving a 50-year lease agreement in which the operator can deny the monitoring of visitor numbers. The Park holds insufficient funds, authority and capacity to monitor tourism activities in the Park and has difficulties in communicating relevant information on budgets and operations. An NPMB interviewee points out that, despite a 'knowledge pool', there are still constraints in human resource capacity in tourism development. However, there are sometimes opportunities to seek help from NGOs or other counterparts, though it is often not known how and with whom to seek help from (NPMB employee 3, male, 40 years old).

Participation and benefit-sharing remain problematic outside the ideal PPPNP management model. Although both the recently introduced operational and management plans (People's Committee of Quang Binh Province 2012b) highlight ecotourism as one of the major incentives for the involvement of local people, communities do not currently benefit from the touristic developments that take place. In 2009, an eco-trail was developed on the basis of a co-management concept which would allow relevant stakeholders, especially local communities, to be substantially integrated into the management of the trail, especially through the employment of locals. After 2 years, it became evident that local staff, when they left, were being increasingly replaced by non-local staff. Financial compensations are sometimes demanded of job seekers by staff working in and around the National Park to secure a position.

There are some downsides to the practical implementation of the management model: there are too many boat operators and, in fact, too many photographers and souvenir vendors for whom tourism serves as an additional income source. Earnings are not sufficient to make a living, so that income is topped up with forest resources by families. This is often also the case for those locals who have sold their lands to government or to private (tourism) investors. Estimated income figures do not take into account the income from selling land and from labour migration.

Touristic sites are state-controlled (through the NP or the PNKB Tourism Centre) or leased to private operators. Both entities are profit-oriented, and benefit-sharing takes place only on a small scale, for example, through the employment of local porters. Participation is difficult around the main touristic sites in the Park. There is currently no participation of ethnic minority people living in the core zone of the Park

and their involvement in future activities can be seen as a form of cultural commodification (Larsen 2008). There is also increasing pressure on ethnic minorities' customary land rights and resources from the growing demand for touristic activity development inside the NP.

The financial flexibilities of the Park, as well as of the Tourism Centre, have been reduced. Revenues of the Tourism Centre are considered as revenue for the province. Staff, administration and other fixed costs are largely covered from the profits, or are funded from provincial budgets. At the beginning of every year the NPMB, as well as the Tourism Centre, are obliged to provide the PPC with an annual working budget. Throughout the year, both organisations can then apply for funds to be made available. This leads to restrictions in both responsiveness to urgent events and investments made by the Tourism Centre in nature conservation.

Ethical considerations

Application for ethical review for research involving the human participants of this study was approved in the scope of the PhD thesis by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University for a period from 25 October 2010 to 25 December 2013, with the reference number HSEARS20120627002.

Recruitment procedures

In qualitative research, many ethical issues can arise during a data collection period. When the researchers enter a community, it is considered good protocol to seek permission to conduct the research from potential stakeholders or groups within the community. In this study, although the researchers had officially been accepted by the top management of the Park, and had received support from the relevant gatekeepers, it was considered ethical not to coerce potential stakeholders to join the study (Buchanan, Boddy & McCalman 1988). It is the researchers' obligation to ensure that potential participants do not join the study because of the power relationships between employee and employer, as well as guaranteeing minimisation of harm.

Informed consent

The researchers took the necessary time to establish rapport with all interviewees (Buchanan *et al.* 1988). It was made sure that they received informed consent from each participant personally, which takes into account the right to refuse and withdraw without any report to the gatekeeper. Gaining ethical accessibility to all levels of a community is something out of the control of the researchers. Fortunately, in this case, the prolonged engagement with the Park has shown to work in addressing this issue.

During the data collection period, the researcher had to provide enough information about the study to the participants. As the result of the study needs to be written down as a report, the researcher needed to mention this

information at the beginning of every interview, in order to inform and obtain allowance from the participants.

Data protection

The researcher needs to ensure anonymity and confidentiality not only of the recorded data, but also of how the researcher discusses information gathered from participants in public areas (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). During the data collection process in this study, the researcher took various steps to ensure the interview situations remained confidential. Most of the interviews were conducted in private rooms or offices. If the setting had to be in an open air (e.g. at the ticket booth or cave entrance), the researcher asked the interviewees to move to a quiet part of the place or another location. All information identifying the respondents was removed from the interview transcripts and/or further quotations. Therefore, no individual participants can be identified personally. The interview recordings were stored on a password-protected PC to which only the researcher and the supervisor had access.

Trustworthiness

In this study, trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement, triangulations and member checks (Padgett 1998).

Reliability

For the prolonged engagement, the researchers spent approximately 3 years (for the GIZ fieldwork) and 4 months (for the PhD study) in the NP or surrounding areas. The aim of the prolonged engagement is to build relationships and rapport with relevant stakeholders within the Park. In order to fully intermingle with the stakeholders, the researchers lived in a rented guest house in the Park. Furthermore, collecting additional data and spending time with the participants also increases the ability for a qualitative researcher to reach data saturation (Lietz, Langer & Furman 2006).

Validity

This study used data triangulation and methodological triangulation to maintain the necessary rigour of case study method (Patton 1987). Multiple data sources from different methods (in-depth interview, documentary and observation) were used in the data collection and data analysis processes.

An important technique in dealing with trustworthiness is member checking (Creswell 1998, 2003; Horsburgh 2003; Johnson & Waterfield 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Sandelowski 1993). Apart from NPMB employees, the researchers invited the GIZ and academic researchers to join the member checking of the good governance result. The researchers believed that these professional external stakeholders (i.e. staff of the GIZ, academic researchers) would be able to make valuable contributions during the member checking process (Horsburgh 2003; Johnson & Waterfield 2004).



Discussion

This article reviewed 'good' governance criteria based on the specific case study of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, located in central Vietnam. The criteria helped to pinpoint some of the contentious factors which may be embedded in the 'ideal' management model (with 'ideal' meaning here the officially proposed PA management and structure) which governs the visitor and tourism management of the NP. The management model which guides the PNKB NP was termed the PPPNP model, with government-owned resources, public and private funding sources and co-management practices (between one private tourism business and the NP and/or provincial authorities) in place.

The discussion of the governance criteria revealed several contextual factors in the practical implementation of this model, which has implications for partnerships and planning, as well as for communication between the public and private tourism sectors in the Park. In theory, the 'ideal' PPPNP model assumes the high value of (financial) efficiency, strategic vision and, to some extent, equity. Our research, however, shows that, in practice, the PPPNP model is significantly governed by opaque structures and processes and underlain by cultural values which define responsibilities, decision-making and the degree of involvement of a variety of tourism actors.

Eagles (2009) highlighted financial burden as one of the major, if not as *the* major constraints, for NPs to act. It is interesting to note that, although the NP receives considerable income from tourism, there is a bureaucratic burden to access these financial resources, which is problematic for the PNKB NP. The fact that finances are centralised also has major impacts on tourism management and planning. Despite the decentralisation processes which has taken place in governance, fragmentation, little information sharing and slow progress have not only been caused by a lack of institutional capacities, but also because top-down processes still apply. Top-down processes, with the province holding control over investment applications in tourism, vitally determine tourism planning and management in the Park. Actors are most often still bound by 'the formal roles of responsibilities [*as well as by*] a complex set of power relationships and vested interests often cutting across formal roles and responsibilities' (Larsen 2008:457). Interests and relationships are defended to an extent that leads to a lack of control, unofficial communication flows and erratic commitment by any stakeholder (group). Burdens are not only created 'inter-systematically' (Jamal & Stronza 2009) (e.g. between different actors and public and/or private partners), but also 'intra-systematically' (e.g. amongst public partners or amongst private sector businesses).

Whilst top-down and decentralised processes have the ability to also guide equity, there is little evidence in the PNKB NP which would justify this. Local, national and international tour operators reap most of the benefits. Tourism development is not only concerned with cave and walking route leases, but new regulations such as Decision 24 (Prime Minister 2012) further facilitate private sector investment.

International organisations and private enterprises have taken advantage of unprecedented possibilities opened up by the removal of government restrictions and monopolies; NGOs or donors are generally interested in only some aspects of park development.

In late 2012, a private tourism stakeholder explained during an informal talk on public-private partnerships in PNKB that 'National Parks are managed by politics, not by nature lovers or tourism experts' (tour operator 1, male, 42 years old). Tourism is inevitably linked to local and national politics. The 'tourism system' is not standing in a 'nested' symbiotic relationship, neither with the park, the community-resident, nor least with the ecological system (Jamal & Stronza 2009). But how can the *means* (responsibilities in exercising powers according to the ideal PPPNP model) be better guided to suit the *ends* (conservation objective) in the PNKB NP? A reconciliation of the current model to ensure improvements in benefit-sharing mechanisms, policymaking and enforcement should be considered (Truong 2013).

Conclusion

This article has suggested further questions on governance issues for tourism and visitor management in Vietnam's PAs. First of all, a comparison of different management models prevalent in Vietnam should be undertaken. A specific comparison could take place not only amongst provincially governed PAs, but also between those provincially and centrally governed. To what extent do decentralised levels (national and provincial) exercise their powers on direction and equity of PA management in general? To what extent have political change and the socio-economic transition period in Vietnam influenced governance principles of PAs? What relationship is there between different powers of planning, regulations or control over finances? What is the (national and sub-national) government's relation with its citizens?

Tourism in Vietnam is developing controversially. It is a balancing act of reconciling socio-economic benefits and environmental conservation (including potential pressure on PAs to generate more income to fund PA management). Concepts such as responsible or eco-tourism development receive increased attention, but very often this attention is limited to promotional activities. PAs increasingly suffer from the one-sided direction of tourism development.

This article does not deliver a conceptual response, but it may be an initial step to further consider the importance of governance criteria for tourism and visitor management of PAs in Vietnam. It may furthermore guide future analysis of management models through its application to the 'real-world' case study of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.



Authors' contributions

A.H. (GIZ) was responsible for compiling secondary and primary data and prepared the research article. L.T.P. (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) collected large parts of the primary data and provided important input on drafts. T.S.H.C. (GIZ) provided important information on the PNKB context as a result of many years of working experience in the area and gave input on drafts.

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