Multi-level value deliberation for protected area management in an online forum

Riley Andrade, Carena J. van Riper, Devin Goodson, Dana Johnson, William Stewart, María D. López-Rodríguez, Miguel Ángel Cebrián-Piquera, Andra Ioana Horcea-Milcu, Veronica Lo, Christopher Raymond

Abstract

Protected area management faces a number of challenges, including the preservation of biodiversity while supporting human well-being in the surrounding communities. Social learning through deliberation holds a promising approach to facilitate a conservation approach where local stakeholders are actively engaged in research and decision-making processes for protected areas. A longstanding body of work has described social learning processes in natural resource management, yet few studies have quantified the outcomes of learning that occur through deliberation. In recent decades, the Internet has increasingly provided new ground for social interaction across previously geographically and socially disparate groups as it becomes ubiquitous in everyday life. Therefore, it is interesting to consider how interactions that occur in online spaces such as forums, wiki pages, and social media can further facilitate social learning. However, the effects of online-based deliberation on social learning processes—or whether values and attitudes can change in response to what is learned from in-depth interactions—have yet to be empirically tested using an experimental design. Our paper will advance value-related theories by determining how multiple levels of values and attitudes are influenced by online deliberation about protected area management visions. Our research process will also enable the development of collectively defined visions for future growth among residents surrounding protected areas in Alaska using a Delphi approach. Overall, the goal of our research is to provide a platform for local stakeholders to voice their opinions and deliberate about the values of protected areas in the Alaska region, while providing input to guide decisions being made about management of public lands that influence both biodiversity and human well-being.