

Exploring diversity and inclusion among protected area staff members in Armenia with a mixed methods approach

Judith Rakowski, Master Thesis

Abstract

The discussion about nature conservation increasingly recognizes the importance of social equity (SE) for protected areas (PAs), as inequity has shown to threaten conservation outcomes. Despite their crucial role in implementing conservation measures, research on the role of employees of PAs in conservation is scarce. In this study I investigate diversity and inclusion as indicators for SE among employees in four Armenian PAs. The goals are to assess a) diversity and decision-making (DM) structures, b) employees' perception of diversity in connection to working effectiveness and c) employees' perception of inclusion. I employ a mixed-methods approach with 16 semi-structured interviews, 25 questionnaires, and observations. Therefore, qualitative content analysis, cross-tabulation, and inter-method triangulation are applied.

My findings suggest that there are two groups of employees that vary in terms of gender, education and experience: Office and Law enforcement. DM seems hierarchically structured with unequal participation opportunities for the two groups. Barriers appear pronounced for employees with lower formal education and for women. Furthermore, my findings indicate that diversity is perceived and valued, yet other factors are seen as more relevant for working effectiveness. Mismatching statements imply malfunctioning of communication channels between hierarchy levels. This could indicate loss of information and decreased work performance. My results on inclusion differ greatly between formal and informal research methods, pointing at strong hierarchies, exclusive team atmospheres and apprehension of employees to criticize DM structures. I draw the conclusion that leadership is of high importance for diversity and inclusion in PA staff teams, because this position can influence social and organizational structures and attitudes that affect all other staff. Consequently, leadership plays a crucial role for team atmosphere, teamwork, and team performance, which seem likely to be relevant for overall PA effectiveness.

Satisfaction with diversity dimensions present

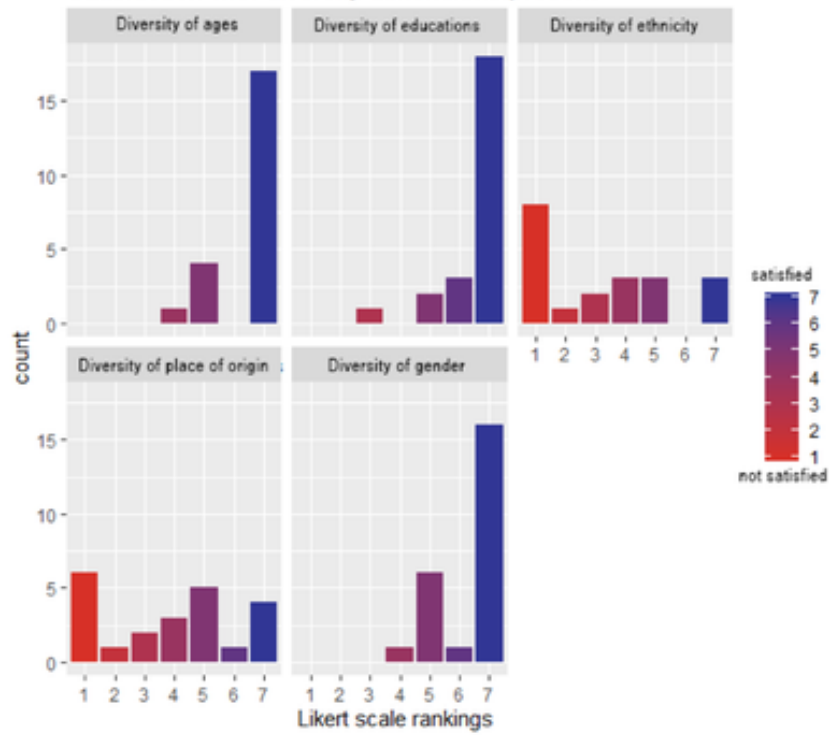


Chart: J. Rakowski