



# **Report Visitor Survey SNP 2020**

Felix Poelsma



## Intro

The season of 2020 has been an unusual one as the influences of COVID-19 were also felt in the SNP. A higher number of visitors has been recorded in the SNP, this raises the questions, how visitors experience these higher visitor numbers in the park and to what extent their activities are influenced by the current pandemic. To answer such questions a visitor survey, together with quantitative interviews have been conducted, to gain more insight into the experiences and motivations of this year's visitors of the SNP. Visitor surveys are conducted irregularly in the SNP and are typically held when something special or unusual occurs. The last visitor survey by the SNP has been conducted in 2007, however the university of Zurich also conducted a survey in 2013, when investigating the economic value of the SNP and Biosfera Val Mustair for the region. To call this year unusual is a bit of an understatement.

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# 1. Qualitative interviews

## 1.1 Methodology

The qualitative interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible then a survey with predetermined questions which are asked in a predetermined order. By working with a 'topic list' instead of a survey, interview participants can elaborate on certain issues and the interviewer has the opportunity to ask follow-up questions when deemed necessary. The interview guide which was used for this project are found in appendix 1.

#### Sampling

When selecting potential interview participants, a 'purposeful sampling' approach was used (Patton, 1990). This means that the researcher selects potentially 'information rich cases' and reaches out to these possible interview participants. The goal was to include many different kinds of visitors of the SNP. To determine what constitutes an information rich case for this project, several indicators which could be obtained from the quantitative survey were used to select the interviews participants (see Table 1 for an overview of the interview participants).

- Age
- Gender
- Language
- Amount of times they have visited the SNP
- Typical holiday destination
- Influence of COVID-19 to come to the region (ordinal)
- Would also have come to the SNP if the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred (binary)

Several strategies were used to select the interview participants. Firstly, at the end of the quantitative survey, respondents were asked if they would like to participate in a more in-depth interview, if so they could leave behind their contact details. Then would be contacted by telephone Most interviews participants (18) were found in this way. Further people were also asked if they wanted to participate in the SNP itself. However, this proved to be a less effective way to get in contact with people, as most of them stated that they did not have the time to conduct such an interview instantly. Only 1 interview was conducted by asking people directly, instead of via the quantitative survey. Finally, there were many shorter conservations between visitors and the researchers during the fieldwork of collecting the quantitative surveys. Several (3) of these conservations were also included in the qualitative interview, as field notes. Such field notes were included as they added new insights into visitor's motivations or experiences, which has not been captured in the interviews.

#### **Telephone interviews**

All interviews were conducted by telephone, this was the most practical for both the visitors and the researcher as it appeared that most people did prefer to do such interview during their visit, but rather sometime later when they were at home and their holidays are over.

However, a telephone interview is not the same as a face-to-face interview and some precautions needed to be taken. Most notably, with telephone interviews, non-verbal communication is limited and social cues such as body language cannot be picked up

(Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, social cues can ease the atmosphere and influence the flow of the interview (Christmann, 2009). This means that the interviewee should make an efforts to express such social cues via telephone. For example, by articulating clearly, changing intonation and pause (just for a few seconds) now and then during the interview. Small breaks, allow both the interviewer and interviewee to process the information and making sure that both sides understand each other or add additional information Christmann (2009).

### Transcription

In order to analyse the data from the interviews, each interview was converted into text. Following Poland (1995), an interview transcript should reflect what was said by the interview participant as closely as possible. This means that the transcripts were written out word-byword, which resulted in texts that are almost the exact reproduction of the spoken interview. The transcripts were corrected for possible grammar mistakes, but preserved the way the interview participant chose to express his or herself. Each interview has been transcribed in the language the interview was conducted in. However, the 2 French and 1 Italian interview transcripts were translated to German, as this suited the person responsible for the data analysis best. Subsequently, codes were all done in English, as this language allows for the most feasible use of the data in the future.

#### Coding

The coding process was conducted with the computer software 'MAXQDA'. The analysis was done on various levels, as coded segments consisted of 'sentences', 'paragraphs' or sections of the data (i.e. the interview transcripts). An open coding approach was used, which means that different categories to organize the data are developed directly from the text.

Table 1	, inte	erview	participants
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Interviewee	Age	Gender	Times in SNP	Typical holiday destination	Influence of COVID-19	Would also come to SNP if COVID- 19 pandemic did not occur	Language
1	69	М	0	Almost always in CH	No data	Yes	DE
2	49	W	8	Mostly in CH	Little	Yes	DE
3	58	W	0	Mostly in CH	No data	Yes	DE
4	48	Μ	1	Both in CH and abroad	Strong	Yes	DE
5	26	W	2	Almost always in CH	Somewhat	No	DE
6	44	W	3	Almost always in CH	No influence	Yes	DE
7	52	М	50	Almost always in CH	No influence	Yes	DE
8	Around 50	Μ	No data	Both in CH and abroad	Strong	Yes	DE
9	53	М	3	Mostly in CH	Somewhat	Yes	DE
10	40	W	3	Mostly in CH	No influence	Yes	DE
11	55	W	6	Almost always in CH	No influence	Yes	DE
12	73	Μ	5	Mostly in CH	No data	Yes	DE
13	27	Μ	1	Mostly abroad	Somewhat	No	DE
14	78	W	Often	Mostly in CH	Somewhat	Yes	DE
15	60	Μ	0	Mostly in CH	Strong	No	FR
16	59	М	3	Mostly in CH	Somewhat	Yes	ІТ
17	46	W	No data	Almost always abroad	Strong	Yes	FR
18	32	W	0	Mostly abroad	Strong	No	DE
19	44	Μ	1	Mostly abroad	Strong	No	EN

#### 1.2 Results

In this section the results of the qualitative survey are described, after the analysis of the 19 interviews and 3 conservations on location (field notes), 511 segments were coded. These codes were subsequently organized into categories. In this section all categories will be briefly discussed and several issues highlighted. All 511 codes can be seen in detail the MAXQDA file, depending on the wish and need.

#### **Positive feedback**

First, several participants state that they like the fact that there is such a protected area and that they find nature conservation important. As these participants were appreciative of the conservation efforts, they also enjoyed their visit in the SNP (T4, Pos. 27; T5 Pos. 35; T8, Pos. 50; T9, Pos. 67). To add this, the landscape with its flora and fauna were an important factor to make the visit a positive experience.

On a more everyday level, several participants expressed they were positive about the infrastructure present in the SNP, this relates to the signage (T1, Pos. 67; T10, Pos. 13), good public transport connections (T1, Pos. 63; T10, Pos. 13; T18, Pos. 25; T19, Pos. 64), the state of the roads and free parking. One participant also stated that they were surprised that parking was free and actually would not mind to pay a little fee to park.

Gut, ich verstehe wenn man etwas zahlen muss, vielleicht auch eine Tageslösung oder für eine Woche oder irgend so was. Aber ja, zum Glück hat es nicht so einen Automaten, und dann denkst du, ja wir sind in 3 Stunden zurück, und dann dauert es fünf Stunden, hmm, und das ist dann auch nicht witzig. (Transcript 1, Pos. 69)

Further, participants stated that they liked the quietness of the region, implying that calmness is an important feature for some people visiting the region. Lastly, and encounters with employees or park rangers are judged positively.

#### Negative feedback

First of all, the participants stated little negatives about their stay in the SNP. This is probably also influenced by the fact that might not be comfortable sharing this, as they were aware that they were interviewed by someone from the SNP.

Negative feedback referred to garbage, mostly paper tissues on the roads and the noise of the Ofenpass road. Further the building design of the visitor centre was judge by some as being not fitting with the SNP.

Wir haben uns gesagt, es sei unmöglich, dass es wirklich dieses Gebäude ist, darum haben wir rundum etwas anderes gesucht (Transcript 15\_de, Pos. 47)

#### Improvements

Interview participants mentioned various things which can be improved. Some related to the website, as for example the map of the SNP which the hiking routes was seen as a bit cumbersome.

das Fenster, das dann innerhalb von der Karte aufgeht, das ist nicht flexibel, also das Fenster geht dann auf und ist nicht flexibel. Also das verdeckt dann auch einen Teil von Wanderweg und Park und es ist nicht mehr ersichtlich, von wo nach wo die Wanderung geht. Und ja das finde ich nicht so benutzerfreundlich. (Transcript 18, Pos. 75)

Others had trouble finding the visitors centre, as they did not recognize the building as being part of the SNP.

Es hat ja schon einen Wegweiser beim Gemeindehaus, aber mir hat es gefehlt, auf diesen Kubus, etwas an der Strasseseite, eine Beschriftung einzufügen. (Transcript 1, Pos. 39)

Further, others mentioned that more information on the SNP, for example by placing more infopanels would be an improvement. Such remarks also show that some visitors are often not aware of what the SNP already offers in this regard, such as the 'Naturlehrpfad'.

Lastly, some visitors would have liked to have more information about the facilities in the SNP, for example they would have like to be informed about whether or not toilets or garbage bins were available in the SNP.

maybe you could mention, maybe in the parking lots, mention something that there are no toilettes. That people see it and then they go before they start walking. (Transcript 19, Pos. 79)

#### **Reason for visit**

The reasons to visit the SNP varied widely among participants, however experiencing nature and the high chance of seeing animals was often mentioned as being an important factor.

Regarding visitors that had not visited the SNP before, simply visiting the SNP itself was a major reason. These participants wanted to go to the SNP, however until now a good opportunity had not presented itself.

Wir haben eigentlich so eine kleine Rundreise geplant und ja, den Nationalpark wollten wir immer mal besuchen und das ist dann so der Auslöser gewesen, so: chum jetzt gön mer mal go luege. (Transcript 13, Pos. 9)

Visiting the SNP often was not the sole purpose of the trip, but often it could be combined in a larger trip through Graubünden, or with a visit to friend or family in the region. Other reasons to go to the SNP could be more specific, for example for geography, seeing deer during the mating period.

#### Amount of people

The way the amount of people in the SNP is perceived, can have an important influence on visitor's experience. Especially as some mention that peace and quietness are part of a positive experience in the SNP, which could be threatened when visitors perceive it to be crowded. The interview participants showed that there was a large difference regarding this issue. Some stated that there were a lot of people, while others did not feel to have encountered many other visitors.

People which visited the SNP often stated that it felt more busy than other years. However, some were not surprised by this, as they expected more people to come to the region because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ja, ja doch, also so auf den Wanderrouten würde ich sagen hat es sich zu grössten Teil ja verteilt. Aber natürlich. Ist halt auch, also so ein Tourismus Hotspot und haben wir ja auch erwartet, ist nicht nur für uns attraktiv, haha, eben, sondern auch für andere, ja. Aber ich denke schon, einerseits sind wir auch schon im Herbst gewesen und eben mit Corona (Transcript 10, Pos. 29)

Because some people expected a high number of visitors, encountering this had a less negative influence.

Further, some participants had developed different strategies to encounter less people, for example by taking specific routes, which they know to be less crowded. Another possibility is to go hiking on more quiet times, for example early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

Ja ja, also wir sind am morgen früh gegangen und dann hat noch nicht so stress mit Platz im Nationalpark, so ja wir sind sehr viel am morgen früh auf den Bus, mit den Leuten, die wissen wo sie hin müssen und warum. Und der Massentourismus ist eher so a chli später, also das sieht man, wenn man dann wieder auf dem Rückweg sind. (Transcript 4, Pos. 47)

On the other hand, many participants also stated that they did not have the feeling that there were a lot of people and when they did, they did not perceive this to be an issue. Many stated that people quickly spread out in the park and encounters with others went smoothly. This was especially the case for people who came after the peak-holiday or the school-holidays,

Wir haben eigentlich nicht viel angetroffen, ich habe auch das Gefühl gehabt, das war jetzt auch eine Woche in September, also keine Schulferien. Von dem her war sicher weniger Tourismus als in anderen Jahreszeiten. (Transcript 18, Pos. 53)

Besides the amount of people in the SNP itself, it was clear that it was also more busy in the region of Engadin. This made it more difficult to find accommodation or parking places.

Dieses Jahr ist es wirklich sehr gut besucht gewesen und darum hatten wir ein bisschen Mühe, einen Parkplatz zu finden. (Transcript 10, Pos. 19)

#### **Different types of visitors**

One difference to previous years, is that visitors who have been more often to the SNP, felt that there were more different kind of visitors around. Meaning that these interview participants felt that people who might have less experience with outdoor activities also came to the region. This feeling that there were more different types of visitors than usual, also younger and more from the Frenchspeaking part of Switzerland was expressed by multiple participants, however this needs not necessarily be seen as a negative

Man sieht einen Unterschied, sieht schnell ob man ja, öfter mal so wandern geht und in die Berge wandern geht. Und andere die vielleicht zum ersten Mal unterwegs sind. Vielleicht so zum ersten Mal hier geweseni sind, ja so sehr einfach unterwegs sind, also so mit einfachen Schuhen unterwegs sind, nicht mit so viel Ausrüstung oder nur einer kleinen Trinkflasche. Es hat das ganze Spektrum ume, also viel mehr als sonst. Sonst sind es ist es eher Leute, die viel bewuster in den Nationalpark gehen, also mehr ähnliche Leute, und dieses Jahr hat es viele verschiedene Arten von Leuten oder Besuchern gehabt. (Transcript 2, Pos. 31)

#### COVID-19

For some participants, COVID-19 had little or no influence in their decision to visit the region, while others had to cancel their original holiday plans and would not have come to the SNP under normal circumstances. Especially visitors who visit the SNP more often, had already planned to come this year anyways.

das machen wir Jährlich, also das hat wirklich gar nicht mit Corona zu tun. (Transcript 12, Pos. 9)

However, also for these visitors COVID-19 could influence their stay, as for example the same interview participant later states that they did not feel comfortable by using public transport during these times.

Also wir fahren, jetzt mit Corona und so, wir fahren Auto. (Transcript 12, Pos. 27)

Other participants stated that they felt uncomfortable doing certain activities they would have done normally. These include, going out for dinner, doing groceries on busy times, or staying in dormitories such as the Chamanna Cluozza.

Regarding the visitors who stated that, without the current pandemic, they would not have come to the SNP, the abundance of outdoor activities was an important factor.

you might also think now, it might be better to sit outside. With this pandemic you would think that places who are outside, are better places to go. (Transcript 19, Pos. 90)

In the SNP itself, many participants expressed that the 'forgot' the presence of corona as during hiking one was not confronted with the issue.

also ich habe das Gefühl, eben in der Natur vergisst man es fast. Ja wenn man ein bisschen nah kommt, aber, frische Luft ist klar nicht so ein Problem. (Transcript 14, Pos. 91)

Additionally, keeping distance was not perceived to be much of an issue in the SNP by the participants. Therefore, it was often not difficult to follow the social distance guidelines by the BAG. Also in the visitors centre, this was perceived to be well managed. The only instance where this sometimes was difficult, was when there were large groups on guided tours and people got close as they want to listen to the guide's explanations.

#### **Rules and conservation status**

The vast majority of the interview participants are aware that the SNP is a protected natural area and support that there are rules regarding how one should behave in the SNP. The extent to this understanding remains hard to measure however.

Several participants had the feeling that other visitors had an insufficient understanding of the rules and several saw people breaking rules, such as going off paths or seeing cyclists in the SNP.

Was mich halt immer wieder stört, ist, das habe ich glaub ich auch auf den Fragebogen so beschrieben, dass es immer noch Besucher im Nationalpark hat, die nicht verstehen dass man, ruhe, ruhig sein soll. Nicht herumschreien, nicht laut sein soll und das sie die Wege nicht verlassen werden dürfen. Ich stell immer wieder fest dass, ja Familien, ja es sind unter anderem auch Familien mit Kind unterwegs und denn ja, nicht nur die Kinder auch die Eltern laufen regelmassig vom Weg. (Transcript 7, Pos. 87)

The extent to which people have understanding of the rules of the SNP seem to differ, as some visitors express that they have not seen info panels, which explain the rules.

Nei, nei eben wir haben uns eigentlich noch gewundert wie wenig mir aufgefallen ist, wenn an einfach schaut, aber ich habe wirklich mich dann irgendwie gefragt, also vermutet, es ist hier ein Pflanzen- und Tierschutzgebiet, aber irgendwie, Tafeln habe ich irgendwie verpasst. Falls es hat, hat er sicher oder? Habe ich wirklich übersehen. (Transcript 3, Pos. 57)

Also, rules were sometimes misinterpreted: one interview participant believed that the regulation of not leaving the trail was meant to guarantee the safety of the visitors, instead of conserving the environment. Because of this, the interview participant believed it to be no issue when leaving the trail on locations that seemed to be safe.

Another interview participant, who actually photographed a sign (see Image 1), to take a look at it later, did not spot the symbol about leaving the trail (shown in the top left), but only focused on the six symbols which are shown in close vicinity of another (those on the bottom half of the sign).

I would imagine that there are a lot more then just these (point towards picture). I mean I do not know if there are rules about walking off the trails, I imagine when we were in this region (shows foto of resting area), that one should not pass these yellow markers. I just sort of assumed that this was the case. In the rest of the trails I assumed, that I would not be appropriate to leave the trails. (Transcript 19, Pos. 84)



Image 1, Sign containing some of the regulations in the SNP.

#### Informing

Visitors appeared to inform themselves about the SNP in various ways, such as online, info panels in the SNP, the visitor centre or on guided tours. However, in some instances, interview participants suggested improvements regarding how the SNP could provide visitors with information. Especially visitors who had not visited the park before. Sometimes these suggestions were in fact done in certain areas of the SNP, but the visitors were not aware of this. For instance, one interview participant suggested that it would be cool if the SNP would have an app with all the information. Such an app already exists, however the interview participant was not aware of this. Another example would be that some visitor would have liked to have more infopanels on the landscape and ecosystem in the SNP or having areas for children. These areas do exist in the SNP, for example with the 'Naturlehrpfad' and the 'Bärenerlebnisweg', however not all visitors seem to find these areas.

vielleicht können sie noch mehr von solchen Infotafeln machen, über Pflanzen zum Beispiel oder irgendwie ja was mir noch aufgefallen ist, sind die Ameisenhaufen, also es hat viel und was sie dann machen, also vielleicht hat es gehabt. Aber ja so ein bisschen entdecken und so mit Infos (Transcript 5, Pos. 43)

Another participant mentioned that they would have liked to have a better understanding where they could find resting areas, for example by including them on the signage in the SNP. So, for some visitors it was unclear where they could find the information they wanted. The most striking example of this was a visitor who had been to the visitor centre, but believed it to be only a museum about the SNP. This person was not aware that one can also get advice, maps, book tours etc., for this the interview participant went to the Tourist Information in Scuol instead.

# 2. Quantitative survey

The quantitative surveys have been based on previous surveys which has been conducted in the SNP, and additional questions on the influence of COVID-19 have been added. The surveys were conducted on site as well as online

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/10TyuXOIIwJbfSdUwk9t13hhgntflXzgh11Pi3L4mgP8/edit?usp=sh aring). Several employees of the SNP, typically stationed at resting areas, approached visitors with paper questionnaires. Posters with a link to the online version of the questionnaires were placed at entrances in the SNP. The survey design is shown in Appendix 2. The survey was conducted in 4 languages, German, French, Italian and English.

The online surveys were conducted via Google Forms, and the paper surveys were subsequently also digitalised via Google Forms. Subsequently the data from google forms was structured and analysed with RStudio (currently saved under the name 'Project', however this might be changed in the future). At the time of writing, not all surveys had been digitalized yet, however to give an impression some preliminary results are shown below.

## 2.1 Role of COVID-19 to come to the region

It is evident that COVID-19 played a role in visitor's decision to come to the region. However, the extent of this influence also varies. This suggest that COVID-19 is one of multiple factors that led



## Role of Covid-19 to visit the SNP region

people to visit the SNP and the influence can also be indirect. Further, it has to be noted that 22,6 % of the respondents did not answer this question.

## 2.2 Amount of visitors

Another example relates to the amount of people who expressed that they were uncomfortable with the high number of visitors in the SNP. The graph below shows on which location in the SNP, people stated that they were annoyed by the amount of people (NA refer to surveys which have no specific location assigned to them, these are at the time of writing still being added). It also had to be noted that so far, only 77 visitors out of 1279 (the total amount of surveys might rise) have stated this in their surveys. This relatively small number might suggest that the amount of people was not perceived to be a major issue for a lot of visitors.



Locations where people felt uncomfortable with the amount of visitors

## How visitors inform themselves

Visitors were asked with which medium on which time during their stay, they informed themselves about the SNP. The results of this are shown in the following pages. This shows that there are large differences into which mediums are used, with the website being clearly the most used. Mostly, the large majority of the respondents left these questions blank, suggesting that they have not informed themselves with this medium. For a future survey project, this could be prevented by asking whether or not visitors have informed themselves about the SNP in the first place.













#### 2.3 To do for the quantitative surveys

At the time of writing, not all survey are yet digitalised, additionally the locations and interviews of some paper questionnaires have to be added. How to add the interview locations and interview is shown in the script in RStudio, step 4.

When this is done, results and plots of the data can be made. In step 5 in the script in RStudio are some example of how to make pie and bar charts of certain variables, which can also be used depending on the variables of interest.

## 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, this project showed that the interview participants as well as the survey respondents are in general very satisfied with their experience in the SNP. This gave the impression that, despite higher visitor numbers, many enjoyed their stay in the SNP. COVID-19 did play a role into the decision of many visitors to come to the SNP, however to various extents. Different kind of visitors take different kind of routes and also at different times. This might suggest that visitors that prefer quietness, naturally are hiking earlier in the morning and on more remote areas of the SNP. However, the results also show that, with a higher number of visitors and also first-time visitors there is of course also room for improvement.

The SNP already offers a lot which could help visitors plan and enjoy their stay optimally, however not all visitors are aware of this. Therefore, reaching these visitors could enhance their experience. For instance, the existence of the iWebpark app, different trails tailored for different kind of visitors or communicating more clearly where and when people can expect resting areas. Furthermore, some first-time visitors had trouble identifying the visitor centre as the place to go for information. This might be solved by clearer signage to the visitor centre, or placing a banner in front or on the building itself, to make the building more recognizable as the visitor centre of the SNP. As of now it is unclear to what extent higher visitor numbers can be expected in the future. If so, more structural issues such as the amount of parking places and resting areas in the SNP might need to be evaluated.

Regarding the use of the collected data, both the data from the quantitative interview as well as the quantitative surveys can be a good starting point for answering many potential questions. For future research projects it might pay off to invest more time into the development of the survey design, therefore feedback and improvements of the survey design can be found in the same folder under the name 'Improvements for current survey' and 'New survey design'.

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