

Recreation trends and sustainable development in the context of the environmental objective “A magnificent mountain landscape”

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This paper provides preliminary results from a national survey on recreation in the Swedish mountain region. The survey is part of a larger study on recreation trends and sustainable development in the context of the national environmental objective “A Magnificent Mountain Landscape” (En storslagen fjällmiljö).

The Swedish mountain region is an attractive recreation landscape and tourism is an increasingly important use of the area. Previous research has shown that almost half the Swedish adult population visits the mountain region during a five-year period and about 5% of visitors are from outside Scandinavia (Heberlein et al., 2002). The tourism industry is growing in many mountain areas and has become an important development issue including stimulus for related industries and increased government revenues. Although tourism may be attractive as a means of economic development, its social and environmental impacts on local communities can be a serious concern. More recently, there are indications of significant changing recreation behaviours, not the least in typical mountain activities (Odden, 2008; Sandell et al., 2011) and the impacts from these are largely unknown. In order to maintain a sustainable development, in all its dimensions, it is critical to consider current recreational use, how it is likely to change in the future and the stimuli behind it.

The New Mountain Experience

The main purpose of this project is to analyse trends in recreational use of the Swedish mountain region at different spatial levels to support and critically examine a sustainable development in the light of the environmental objective. The Swedish mountain region has a long history of recreational use, but more recently new activities and changing recreation behaviours have been observed. The project will therefore take advantage of previous studies of mountain recreation in Sweden to analyse current use and trends with special focus on activities, experiences, benefits and impacts. Besides analysing trends in more traditional use, the project will emphasize contemporary recreational phenomena that are of utmost importance for future development: outdoor events, sportification and indoorization of traditional outdoor recreation activities, the use of new technology and social media. The aims of the project are;

- To analyse trends in recreational use of the Swedish mountain region with respect to (i) recreation activities, experiences, motives, benefits and impacts; (ii) eventification, sportification and indoorization; and (iii) use of new technology and social media.
- To analyse how trends in recreational use will impact a sustainable development of the mountain region and to critically examine the environmental objective with respect to recreational experiences.

- To provide input for a more efficient planning, management and development of the mountain region with respect to the environmental objective.
- To evaluate use of new technology in data collection and visitor monitoring, including the efficiency of different monitoring approaches to measure different user groups.

Mountain Recreation Trends

Given the size and complexity of the Swedish mountain region, data requirements at three spatial levels have been conceptualized – local, national and international – based on information usage and following the most recent guidelines including harmonization with adjacent countries (Kajala et al., 2007; Yuan & Fredman, 2008). At the national level, a web-based panel survey representative of the Swedish population has been used to collect data on domestic recreation in the mountain region (3 waves of 1000 responses each during 2013). The web-survey was supplemented with a traditional postal survey sent to a sample of 1000 individuals. These surveys will replicate selected parts of previous studies on mountain recreation (i.e. Fredman & Heberlein, 2003) providing trend data from 1980 up to present time. Initial results from the current data show that;

- Almost half the Swedish adult population (15-70 years old) has visited the mountain region at least once during a five-year period. Visitation is most popular in the winter months (January to April) – 15 % of the population did at least one visit to the mountain region during this period in 2013.
- The average annual number of visits to the mountain region was 1.9, which implies a total number of visits of almost 4 million during 2013. The average length of stay was 5.7 days.
- Downhill skiing is the most popular activity during January to April (participation 67% among visitors) followed by cross-country skiing (participation 35% among visitors). In the summer period (Maj-August) walks in nature are most popular (participation 78% among visitors).
- When asked what recreation activities people think will increase the most in the mountains the next 10 years mountain biking, downhill skiing, hiking and backpacking are most frequently mentioned.
- The average expenditure for a visit to the mountain region is SEK 9 252 (1 EUR ≈ 8 SEK). Winter visitors spend about 10% more compared with summer visitors.

Future analyses will focus on trends in these data with respect to e.g. spatial visitation patterns, activity participation and demand for lodging. Through a mixed method approach, quantitative information will then provide input to a qualitative analysis of impacts on sustainable development in general with special emphasis on key parameters of the environmental objective “A Magnificent Mountain Landscape”.

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