

Integrated Conservation Processes – A Tool for Reducing Conflicts in Area Conservation Processes

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Introduction

In the field of area management, controversies and conflicts appear according to different interests, values, rights and facts. A wide range of stakeholders, like commercial interests, property owners, indigenous people, environmentalists, hikers, authorities at different levels and sectors, as well as the local community, promote strong rights and interests according to area resources along the Norwegian coastline as well as the mountain landscapes and rural regions. In addition, disputes regarding local vs. national governance and management of common lands, amenities and biodiversity have a long history. The governance and management of protected areas hence suffer from conflicts occurring at different levels, i.e.:

- Interests, i.e. commercial vs. non-commercial interests
- Fundamental values from which area planning and management should be outlined.
- Different right holders (property owners, vs. public right to access) and undefined *prima-facie* rights.
- Factual contradictions.
- Sectoral planning, including contradictive national authorities (i.e. land use, vs environment, vs. fisheries/aquaculture, vs. rural and local development), and regulatives (Plan and Building Act vs. Nature conservation act).

The different conflicts can be divided into use-protection conflicts, which mostly occur between local communities and municipalities on the one side, and centralized environmental authorities and environmental organisations on the other, and conflicts between traditional and new utilisation of protected outfields and common land (use-use conflicts).

Whereas the former has long history and is well-known (and established) the latter one is expected to increase over the next decade as commercialization of the outfields, including protected areas, was politically agreed upon in 2003 [St.prp.65 2002-2003]. In that sense, new actors as well as new ways of commercial exploitation of area resources are being introduced on land and shorelines all over Norway. Authorities responsible for area management as well as coastal and rural develop-

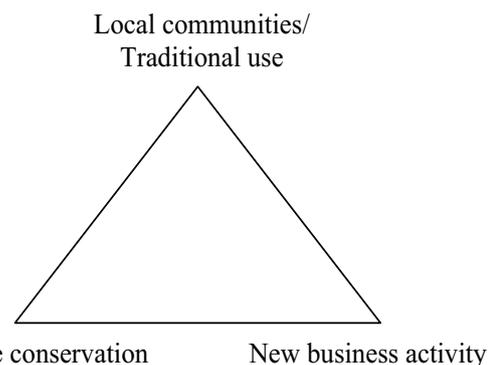


Figure 1: Different interacting interests in protected areas.

ment should be aware of the changing dynamics between i.e. different economical agents and the local communities, as well as between protection authorities and different user interests.

As figure 1 shows, there are reasons to believe that, due to an expected increase in both conservation and commercial activities, future conflicts may appear between the three different parties: traditional users, conservation interests and new business.

Here we would focus on a particular approach within area planning, namely integrated conservation and county planning processes, and the way that this approach seems to facilitate both nature protection as well as coastal and rural development. IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has emphasized the need for partnerships between local communities and conservation authorities. We believe that approaches like this will both strengthen the relationship between conservation and user interest, and reduce the conflicts that may appear in conservation processes. We will also present an ongoing project, which greatly will emphasize this integrated approach.

Traditional conflicts both in conservation processes and in protected areas

Use-protection conflicts

Conflicts regarding protection of nature have long traditions in Norway. For many rural and coastal communities it is perceived as a paradox that area protection, which excludes the locals from exploiting the areas, should be the sufficient tool for preservation, since careful use of the areas in many occasions is the reason for why the site has become worthy of protection. Clearly, many of the protection-use conflicts express concern over economical loss and ability to govern private property or commonly used land. For two of the municipalities taking part in the integrated plan processes, more than 50 and 75 per cent of the area will be protected according to the Nature Conservation Act. This may clearly represent a heavy burden for sparsely populated communities fighting against decreasing population and a scarce labour market. When establishing national parks or “the 100m protec-

tion zone” along the shoreline, property owners have to withhold large areas for collective purposes like ecosystem preservation, outdoor life and recreation.

In addition to economical and household interests, conservation conflicts may also reflect a more fundamental and value-laden disparity connected to the value of nature. According to environmental ethics nature may be of instrumental, inherent or intrinsic value for people. Whereas nature is conceptualised as something of inherent value by the international environmental community [UN 1992] like i.e. biodiversity, nature clearly also is considered as something of instrumental value, that is, valuable because it supports people. Hence area management may suffer from dissension according to what values or ends are at stake; is it the cultural landscape or wilderness? Is it the ecological mechanisms or the maximisation of yield? Both local communities and private property owners are provoked by central government and NGOs that do impose negative impacts on them (i.e. restrictions on land use), in order to realise their particular visions for nature use and management, without taking into account that their visions not necessarily correspond to local values. Moreover, the values protected by international environmental conventions are sometimes expressed as absolute values in the sense that they are “right” and/or true.

Authorities at different levels (local, regional and national) may also be considered as stakeholders in these processes as they have duties they aim to fulfil through area planning. Area protection is the main tool for the Ministry of Environment to fulfil national and international obligations regarding i.e. protections of biodiversity and natural heritage for future generations. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture or Ministry of Fishing may have strong interests in the area, resulting in clash of national interests and regulations at a local level. The regional and local potential to plan holistically is therefore constrained by national sectoral planning.

Finally, concepts of knowledge and unsettled judicial regimes also complicate the picture. For example, people may disagree according to the factual basis onto which protection measures are decided, like the number of predators or fish, the calculated

probability for species extinction, or the environmental impact from increased traffic or physical installations. This brings into account differences between local and scientific knowledge. Unsettled regulations may also represent a problem for use of area resources. In Sámi regions this is of fundamental concern, like i.e. Tysfjord municipality where Sámi people claim their rights to land and waters on the basis of ILO convention 169. The County Governor on the other hand, pursues the Nature Conservation Act as the tool to regulate areas of conservation interests.

Use-use conflicts

Even though protective measures may hinder economical development and local management of area resources, there is not necessarily a contradiction between business activity and nature preservation. Area protection may be of great benefit to both traditional businesses and new, innovative activities. For example, will area intensive businesses like reindeer herding, rough grazing, and ecotourism welcome regulations that prevent technical interventions and fragmentation of landscapes (roads, installations etc). Protection may also be beneficial to businesses in coastal and marine areas, i.e. for the fishing industry (spawning ground), fishing tourism, and aquaculture. “National parks” are being marketed worldwide and have become important branding for the tourist industry as well as i.e. different niche-products.

However, a peaceful relationship between authorities and commercial agents does not seem to be sufficient for economical development to take place, as economical actors also need to relate to other right-holders, including other businessmen and -women. In Norwegian mountain National parks a considerable amount of economical activity is taking place, and particularly tourist businesses are accelerating. However, conflicts appear, both among different tourist operators in the same area, and between the tourist industry and local community.

An integrated approach

Area management encompasses different priorities of different parties. Additionally, it seems clear that both business interests and conser-

vation interests need local legitimacy for fulfilling their aims. This confirms the need for a participatory and integrated approach within area management, that is suited to resolve disputes and conflicts, not only between conservation regimes and local communities, but also between new innovative business approaches and traditional ways of exploiting coastal and mountain areas.

In Northern Norway several conservation processes emphasizing local participation and public partnership are taking place at present. During the last five years, the County Governor in Nordland (CGN) has established three partnerships with regional/local authorities (county municipality and/or municipality). These processes combine conservation and county area planning into one process, and aim at developing sustainable, holistic area plans that benefit both conservation and user interests. While the CGN has the over-all responsibility for the development of conservation regulations, the county municipality is supposed to promote business interests during the planning process. Additionally, all stakeholders are invited to join different fora, i.e. working groups on business activity, outdoor-life, culture, history and the like. Property owners are asked to register any use- or spatial preference they may have in the particular area. Compared to conventional conservation processes, these integrated approaches clearly undertake a new design for area conservation as it includes a wide range of stakeholders. County plans on the other hand, have longer traditions for including stakeholders i.e. throughout the implementation of the Norwegian Plan- and Building Act among others.

Preliminary results stemming from follow research and evaluations of the three plan processes indicates that the level of conflicts between national authorities and local community is lowered, and that confidence between the conservation and user interests has increased. This might have connection to other results like i.e:

1. A wide range of stakeholders take part in the combined processes.

2. A lot of information about the areas has been possessed through impact assessments and inclusion of local knowledge.

3. The stakeholders have increased their knowledge about one another; their views, interests, rights etc.

4. The processes have worked out as meeting places and facilitated the exchange of information; facts about the area, commercial ideas, planning traditions within different legal frameworks etc.

5. A list of initiatives for facilitating economical development has been developed.

6. Financial funds for realising business projects have been established.

The processes in Nordland aim at highlighting new commercial possibilities connected to protected areas and opens up for regulative adjustments so that conservation instructions do not restrict economical actors unnecessarily. Though conflicts between different user interests, in particular between reindeer husbandry and hiking/outdoor-life, have been excessively debated, it seems as though the processes in general stimulate cognitive and normative matters, like understanding and confidence, as well as economical and instrumental factors like financial funding and concrete innovative measures.

The partnerships between the two authoritative bodies at the regional level have clearly balanced the planning processes according to the many user interests (i.e. economical and private interests) as these have been represented at the uppermost level of the planning process by the municipality and county municipality. Moreover, the deliberative approach, including the many stakeholders in the area, has facilitated meeting places where conflicting issues as well as common interests have been debated. Exclusion and closed decision making fora may effectively promote speculations and misunderstandings in situations where parties suffer from lack of trust and confidence. On the other hand, a robust and reliable relationship between the governing and governed parties is not automatically gained simply by gathering people in a meeting. To attain a compromising and flexible dialogue, the many issues at stake need to be articulated and debated. It seems as though this has been the case for

the three processes in Nordland, and that the processes have contributed to both procedural legitimacy, as well as several benefits in the meaning of increased knowledge (in a broad sense), less time and resource-demanding conflicts, entrepreneurial and innovative measures, as well as improved infrastructure at the regional level.

PROBUS – Protected areas as resources for coastal and rural business development:

The facilitating efforts made (i.e. projects on infrastructure and innovation policies) have not yet led to concrete results, probably due to scarce traditions and knowledge in the local community, about developing new niches like ecotourism. This indicates that a judicial framework for commercialisation is not enough for entrepreneurial performance to take place, and that innovative aims also depend upon viable ideas and entrepreneurial abilities and performance.

Integrated conservation processes and their implication on business development in protected areas will be evaluated through the PROBUS – project. Questions remaining to answer are, amongst others:

- Can deliberative processes serve as a tool for resolving area conflicts and conflicts due to social and institutional features?
- How do business actors participate in the conservation processes, and what do they do to affect decisions?

Looking upon the integrated conservation processes is only one of four main goals with the project. The others are linked to gaining knowledge of commercial activity in relation to protected areas, evaluating formal and informal institutions and their role in business development, and obtaining knowledge on area-conflicts between nature conservation, traditional use and new business development.

The project aims will be fulfilled with the combination of several methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative approaches: case studies, follow-studies, surveys, interviews, investigation of sources and GPS-monitoring. The project has chosen four cases, representing all the three northernmost counties in Norway. The cases vary in size

and how developed the conservation process is, and they also vary in conservation status. By follow-up studies it is possible to evaluate the integrated processes and include observations in conservation processes: meetings and the role of business actors. In monitoring the business activities in these areas, the project will use surveys to measure the legitimacy of new businesses or protective regulations. Interviews will be used to get a deeper and more complete understanding, and of main interest here are reindeer herders, farmers, public agencies and the established fora in the on-going planning processes. The investigation of sources will mainly focus on the process documents from the conservation planning procedures. These documents are kept by the county governor in each county. GPS-monitoring will be used to log the movements of reindeer, hikers/tourists, hunters, boats etc.

The project's main objective is to improve the level of knowledge on how different factors influence the possibilities for business development in the protected areas. We expect the results to contribute to an integrated model for future area management, encompassing commercial development in protected areas. The time period for the project is from 2006 to 2009.