

161 Creating synergies between nature-based tourism and local community development through enhanced dialogue processes.

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Nature-based tourism (NBT) has for decades been a major resource for value creation and local development in rural districts in Norway. However, in recent years some areas have experienced an increasing pressure from the tourism industry, both in fjord- and coastal and mountain regions (Stokke et al. 2017). A more fine-tuned and sensitive attitude to attractions related to wildlife, quietness, and local stories and storytelling is emerging, and has a substantial potential for integrating NBT and local community development. In a long-term perspective, it is essential for municipalities and local communities to balance the influx of tourists and the capacity to welcome them. To inform planning and development processes, it is therefore important to understand the tangible and intangible place-based values and resources attached to minor rural communities.

In the present global situation represented by the pandemic lock down, climate and bio-diversity crises, there is a growing awareness in local and regional governments, that tourism in general, and nature-based tourism specifically, also should be a partner in developing place-based and sustainable transition-processes (Clemetsen et al 2021). This might involve a broad variety of actors, from local residents – young and older, small scale entrepreneurs, farmers, schools, municipal administrators, etc. Thus, in the process of developing strategies for an unknown and uncertain future, there is a need to apply appropriate process tools that may foster development of shared visions, strategies and measures that support sustainable development.

The complexity in the process of understanding place, place-based values, and their potential for future value creation, demand methods that commits the participants beyond what is required in ordinary local planning processes. To pursue this ambition, it is necessary to create arenas for negotiation of interests, and for developing strategies for social and economic initiatives

involving the local community, the municipality, and other stakeholders.

On the background of a participatory workshop conducted in the BIOTOUR[1] case area in Trysil municipality in 2019, we will discuss possible methods and tools that can provide arenas for dialogue processes, supporting nature-based tourism development and social viability within the local community.

The case area; Trysil municipality and the local villages of Ljørdalen.

The municipality of Trysil covers 3000 sq.km and is located in the great forests along the border-region to Sweden, in south-east Norway. There are under 7000 permanent residents in Trysil, growing to 30000 in the major holiday periods, as a top winter and summer destination. Tourism is a substantial part of the local economy. The municipal center is located along the Trysil river, and there are 7 minor rural village centers (“grend”). The potential capacity of villages for supporting local economy and social resilience are often neglected in conventional municipal planning. Traditional stories, myths, legends as well as experienced nature-based knowledge has a substantial potential in nature-based tourism. The major challenge is to share and to make this knowledge operational within the local community, without compromising people’s values and identity with place.

One of these villages is Ljørdalen, located close to the border to Sweden and the Fulufjellet National Park. A workshop addressing the entrepreneurial and community potential for future nature-based value creation, was conducted.

Dialogue processes and methods applied in the Ljørdalen workshop

The methodological experiences in approaching and performing dialogue processes in Ljørdalen was based on two methodological tools; Participatory, adaptive storytelling and Open Space workshop (Owen 2008). Through the participatory

storytelling approach, residents, tourism entrepreneurs, municipal staff members and others were invited to share personal experiences or other stories that expressed certain characteristics and values connected to the place. The title of the workshop was "Local community and nature-based tourism- – two sides of the same coin?"

The first section of the workshop was based on expressing values and identity to place; each participant was asked to present an object (token) and share a story of the meaning behind this. The second section was based on the Open Space methodology. On the background of a shared understanding of the place-based values, stories and assets, each participant was asked to present a personal and value-based key question related to important future issues of place development. These questions were in turn, discussed in smaller groups, providing a basis for future scenario and strategies. The contributions were systemised and merged into some major question, which were discussed in groups.

Three of the questions were as follows:

- What should be the content of a guided bear safari, to be considered a peak-product?

- What are the main characteristics of a valuable cultural landscape? How can we maintain and manage the qualities?
- What kind of activities can be offered to children and young people, that involves two or more people in the valley?

This type of questions expresses essential place-based values and challenges, and the processes itself provided a feasible arena for discussing future development issues within the framework of co-creative motives among the actors involved. According to the participant from the municipal administration, the outcome of the workshop should also fit well into the intended objectives of the social part of the municipal master plan. The methodology developed in this case study, may serve both the local development processes in the small communities ("grendene"), and at the same time provide input to the social part of the municipal masterplan. This may help to anchor local development strategies, and vitalize this type of planning instrument, which up to now has not been fully recognised. In general, this may also strengthen the local community democracy.

References

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