

178 Collaboration to promote outdoor life (friluftsliv) in the Nordic countries – Is an action plan the way forward?

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About the session

Outdoor life (friluftsliv) has a strong position in all the Nordic countries, and is mainly built on the same traditions. In the Nordic collaboration, both between authorities and organisations, outdoor life have been a central theme. Nature-based tourism and outdoor life also have many commonalities in the Nordic countries.

In this round-table session, invited researchers and representatives from Nordic outdoor life organizations, will present and discuss opportunities and challenges in promoting outdoor life in the Nordic countries. The session also welcome participants to discuss ideas and reflections from other parts of the world. There will be several short presentations to set the stage, followed by plenty of time to discuss. At the end of the session we will ask if there is a need for a common Nordic action plan to promote outdoor life, or are there other and better instruments?

Collaboration between the outdoor life organisations

In 1993, the danish "Friluftsrådet" invited outdoor life organisations from all the Nordic countries to discuss formalization of the cooperation. Representatives from Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark met and agreed to continue a firm cooperation. Since then, there have been regular meetings and conferences between the national organisations for outdoor life in the Nordic countries, and the cooperation has been formalised in the NON-network (Network of Outdoor Organisations in the Nordic Countries). A main task for NON has been to approach and cooperate with the Nordic Council of Ministers, an intergovernmental forum to complement the Nordic Council and promote Nordic Cooperation.

The Nordic outdoor life tradition

Through the Nordic Council, several publications show the special features of the common Nordic outdoor life tradition. For example, the right of

public access to countryside in the different countries (TemaNord, 1997:501), Outdoor life by the Nordic coast in (Nord, 2001:12), and old communication routes (Nord, 1999:11).

NON has also arranged a number of conferences to discuss and support a common Nordic outdoor life culture: Public access to countryside (1995), Children and outdoor life (1997), Common policy for outdoor activities (2002), Sustainable outdoor activities (2003), Urban outdoor activities (2005), Outdoor activities in urban areas (2010). Between 2007 – 2011 the NON network managed a large project on outdoor recreation and health (Frisk i Naturen).

A Nordic action plan?

The next major project under the auspices of NON was "Nordic outdoor life". This project was based on the Nordic Council's 10/2014 recommendation on "Outdoor life for children and young people in the Nordic countries". The main objective of the project was to prepare a set of recommendations to secure a high focus on outdoor life in the Nordic region in the future with a particular focus on promoting participation and influence of children and young people. Based on this project, NON concluded with five main recommendations in NON 2018:

- Strengthen the cooperation between the Nordic outdoor life organisations.
- The right of public access must be preserved and secured.
- Enhance the use of nature-based integration.
- Prioritize outdoor life in schools as a mean of improving public health and better learning environment.
- Green spaces must be given higher value in land management and spatial planning.

The main conclusion was that a joint Nordic action plan is needed to follow up these five recommendations. The proposal for joint Nordic action plan has not been supported by Nordic

Councils of Ministers, and the further process is uncertain.

New opportunities, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

The importance of outdoor life activities has been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through various research activities, the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) has documented large increases in the use of recreational areas near the cities - in the Oslo area up to 300% increase. The increase is typical for the Nordic countries and among others Germany and Switzerland, while many countries have a decrease due to shut-down of parks and other green areas. (Burton, D, 2020)

On the other hand, shutdowns have led to less international travel and fewer visits to traditional tourist attractions. There is an interesting transition where domestic travellers and local recreationists are filling up the empty spaces. Under such a scenario, small scale nature-based tourism

operators are likely to benefit local communities better than large scale destinations (Fredman and Hakuleand, 2021).

Nature-based tourism in the Nordic region is largely based on the abovementioned Nordic outdoor recreation traditions. If the future of nature-based tourism implies less travel and more small-scale operations, the connection with the outdoor life tradition is likely to strengthen. Regardless of the current pandemic, both nature-based tourism and outdoor activities must take greater account of sustainability in their further development. Hence, both an increased knowledge about the opportunities associated with the outdoor life tradition and the sustainability challenges should be included in the further design of a common Nordic outdoor life policy. Whether it will be in the form of a joint Nordic action plan, or through other instruments.

References

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