

46 The sharing economy in the context of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism in Innlandet County, Norway

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Background

The sharing economy (SE) refers to an economic model defined as a peer-to-peer based activity of acquiring, providing, or sharing access to goods and services that is often facilitated by a community-based on-line platform (Ranjbari et al., 2018).

SE is growing rapidly, and it is assumed that both new business models and new products based on digital sharing platforms can provide more efficient resource use through increased competition and innovation (NOU 2017:4). Thus, the paper addresses the future role and potentials of SE in the context of outdoor recreation and nature-based regional tourism in Innlandet County, Norway. SE research has so far been mainly concentrated within urban contexts, whereas there is a shortage of apposite studies connected to sparsely populated regions in general and to outdoor recreation/nature-based tourism in particular. Opportunities of the SE in rural areas lie in e.g., provision of shared mobility, accommodations, food, specialized tools and equipment, and personal services such as guiding, courses, and other skilled human resources; needed for recreational stays and activities in nature areas; and availing prosumption of nature-based assets. SE can be particularly viable in nature areas where such resources may be scarce, or where traditional commercial establishment may not be sustainable.

Problem statement

Given these developments, our main question is: what are considered, among the various stakeholders, to be the prospective benefits and obstacles potentially derived from SE in these sectors in this particular region towards 2030?



Figure 1. Innlandet County, Norway

Based on the perspectives of regional planners, local business actors, and NGOs in Innlandet, we identify plausible future scenarios and how such general developments will tend to affect the conditions for sharing of physical products and services within the sectors in question. In addition, we aim to identify the necessary measures to be employed to effectively support SE and fulfill its potentials.

Megatrends and scenarios

A megatrend is a comprehensive societal change that influences many aspects of society and has long-lasting effects. Megatrends also affect outdoor recreationalists' propensity to share equipment and services related to their activities. The understanding of megatrends is thus a useful analytical backdrop for our understanding of the driving forces that make future scenarios probable. Megatrend-derived scenarios can serve to describe and inform users about situations and conditions that, with a certain degree of credibility, can be expected to occur in the future (Moriarty, 2012), and as fairly plausible descriptions of an upcoming state e.g., in a 10-year perspective. Scenarios make reflections "outside the box" possible, i.e., they open for discussions of

factors that can affect the future without being "stuck" in the perspectives of the present. Thus, consequences, solutions and measures that are relevant to conceivable developments become more feasible.

Mixed-method approach

Our method is based on a combination of a qualitative with a more structured quantitative approach. At the outset, the researcher team organized a one-day online Scenario workshop in November 2020 among specially invited key stakeholders located in Innlandet. The stakeholders comprised public and private interests in relevant sectors. Three scenarios were presented to the participants by means of narratives prepared by the chairing researchers, and then discussed in separate breakout groups. The dialogues in the following plenary sections concluded, supported by the use of instant polls, with two of them being appraised as the most plausible ones in Innlandet. Attending stakeholders were invited to discuss and assess to what degree the identified scenarios would lead to more sharing of products and services; name the consequences for consumers, tourism industry, public authorities/ community/ larger society, and natural resources/ climate; and finally, identify which measures should be prioritized to fulfill the SE potentials of the most probable scenario.

Based on these outputs from the scenario workshop, a follow-up internet-based Delphi study will be organized and presented to a wider audience of knowledgeable stakeholders in Innlandet. The Delphi method is considered appropriate in analyzing problems involving uncertainty, such as future studies, and has previously been used in studies of ecotourism (Donohoe, 2011) and prospects for nature-based tourism (Konu, 2015; Haukeland et al., 2021). The Delphi method is a

structured communication technique that includes opinions from experts in two or more consecutive questionnaires with controlled feedback. In our case, the Delphi study consists of two rounds probing beliefs regarding general pros and cons of SE, the likelihood of the two selected workshop scenarios, their potential consequences including climate and sustainability issues, and the associated measures they will require.

Preliminary empirical findings

The initial workshop identified, firstly, the accelerated technological developments, and secondly, the climate changes, as the two most credible scenarios. The technological innovations include expansions of the platform economy and possibilities for marketing and controlling shared assets and offering personal services remotely online, while climate change includes the greening of production and consumption patterns of our societies, among other aspects.

The Scenario workshop attendants expected the technological development to lead to more sharing of products and services and, moreover, to have positive impacts on consumer choices, create opportunities for local businesses, and to be beneficial for local communities. Also, the piloting, support and implementation of pioneering socio-technological solutions were considered helpful to sustain natural resources and climate.

The follow-up Delphi study, which comprises assessments of the two abovementioned scenarios and their implications, is being conducted in the spring 2021. The results of this two-staged inquiry will be presented at MMV10.

References

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