

## 51 Local spatial planning as tool for integrated visitor strategies and community development

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Nature-based tourism is to a large extent based on different types of protected areas, adjacent landscapes and communities. In this paper we explore how municipal spatial planning may serve as a tool for integrated visitor strategies and community development. In Norway, visitor strategies are introduced for national parks and other large protected areas. These strategies are based on the planning system inside protected areas, regulated by the Nature Diversity Act. The research question is: How can local spatial planning support integrated visitor strategies and community development?

Norway has two different institutional systems for spatial planning within and outside protected areas. The relationship between these two planning systems is often conflict-ridden and dominated by contrasting paradigms (Stokke and Clemetsen 2021). Norwegian conservation policy has been rather restricted and wilderness oriented, focusing on protecting nature from human activities. At the same time, spatial planning, where the municipalities are the main planning authority, primarily focuses on development and urban and built-up environments.

Findings from analyses of three protected areas in Norway, Varanger Peninsula National Park, Fulufjellet National Park and Folgefonna National Park, show that the integration of the planning systems across protected area borders, is rather undeveloped (Stokke & Clemetsen 2021). Spatial planning in the municipalities according to the Planning & Building Act (PBA), on the one hand, and the planning efforts within the protected areas according to the Nature Diversity Act, on the other hand, have only been linked together to a minimum degree.

Implementation of visitor strategies for the national parks and other large protected areas in order to facilitate sustainable nature-based tourism, could be regarded as a “golden opportunity” for integrated planning across protected area borders, because most of the infrastructure development

related to tourism activities is located in areas adjacent to the national park borders. However, the findings from the above-mentioned study show that the visitor strategies are mostly focused on the areas inside the protected area borders and on some selected entrance points. Little attention is paid to the adjacent communities. Municipal spatial planning according to the PBA is not being applied to fulfill the ambitious aims expressed in the visitor strategies with respect to protect vulnerable nature, facilitate attractive visitor experiences and contribute to community development.

In Norway, spatial planning according to the PBA serves as a comprehensive system to balance nature conservation and community development interests and is considered an integrated tool for sustainable development. The municipalities are the primary planning authority, where their elected bodies, the municipal councils, approve the plans. Local participation and cooperation with relevant sector authorities in the planning processes is emphasized. In our view, visitor strategies should therefore be integrated in the municipal master plans to be able to fulfil its aims.

To illustrate how community development and spatial planning can be included in visitor strategies, we present a student work from the master-course in Regional landscape planning and community development that we organize at NMBU (Clemetsen and Stokke 2019). In September 2019, we were one week in Hardanger in Western Norway on a field study of Folgefonna National Park. Folgefonna is the third largest glacier in Norway and has relatively a high number of visitors. An important motive for the students’ involvement was to support community development in the adjacent communities based on place-based resources connected to nature and culture, and to create meeting places between inhabitants and tourists.

The student group work we present here focuses on entrance points to Folgefonna National Park. An important starting point was the ongoing process with a visitor strategy for the National Park,

where a draft was out on public hearing. Through interviews with the National Park Manager and other public and private actors, they chose to investigate one entrance point to Folgefonna, Bondhusdalen (see Figure) in further detail. This is a popular gateway to the glacier and the lack of parking areas has been a crucial challenge addressed in the draft visitor strategy for the Park. However, the students realized quite early in their work that the affected local community, Sundal, was not included in the formal visitor strategy. Through landscape analyses and qualitative in-depth interviews with representatives from the community, they developed a feasibility study on how Sundal and the agricultural landscape between the fjord and national park entrance point (Bondhusdalen) can be integrated in a more comprehensive visitor strategy (illustrated by a feasibility map in the Figure below). Figure 1. Feasibility map of the community Sundal and Bondhusdalen.[JVH1] (Legends in Norwegian)

The small community Sundal by the Hardangerfjord has a long and rich history of tourism, dating back to the time when tourists mainly came by boats. Today Sundal is “a hidden place” people are just driving through, either to the

parking area at the Folgefonna entrance point or to another place in the region. Based on the feasibility study, the students suggested various strategies and concrete measures to strengthen the community and the landscapes between Sundal and the National Park. One central strategy is proposed to facilitate visitation in Sundal by offering more varied experiences and to reduce the traffic speed on the main road through the village. Another strategy is the revitalizing of the harbor area in order to re-establish a ferry route on the Hardangerfjord. They also suggest opening up the fjord for the public by creating a coastal trail, in addition to developing a pathway from Sundal, through the agricultural valley of Bondhusdalen and up to the National Park. Such strategies may reduce the pressure on the parking area at the entrance point to the National Park. To be able to realize such strategies for integrated community development and tourism development, it is important to activate municipal planning according to the Planning & Building Act.



## References

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