

53 Visitor management as a tool to develop sustainable local communities Experiences from pilot project in Nordland, Norway 2018-2021

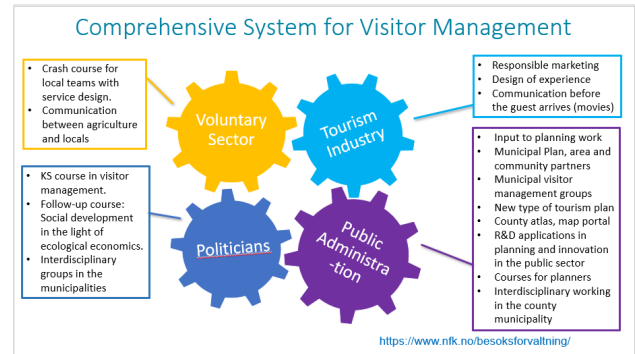
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Global travel has exploded in recent decades and challenges the current management system. How can attractive destinations like the popular Lofoten islands in Northern Norway face the “tsunami” of new travelers? Who will pay the hidden costs? The effect of strong growth in the number of visitors and changes in travel patterns, type of experiences, as well as visitor behavior is now creating a challenge for many communities and destinations. How can the local communities be empowered to take more control over their own tourism development?

Nordland extends about 250 km both north and south of the polar circle and offers exciting experiences connected to a broad range of landscapes, it borders the North Atlantic which creates a climate more moderate than any other place in the arctic.

Nordland County Council (fylkeskommune) which runs this project, is the regional governing administration of Nordland county, running upper secondary schools, county roads, public transport, culture and cultural heritage, providing regional planning strategies and advising its 41 municipalities in local planning and management. Nordland County Council has worked systematically with experience-based tourism for the last 10 years and this project is anchored in the Strategy for Tourism and Innovation. What characterizes tourism is that, because production and consumption of the experience takes place in the same place, customers are brought to the place of production. This is the reason why tourism greatly affects the communities in which it is practiced. The aim of the pilot project is to develop tools and methods that ensure sustainable visitor management. The focus is to empower communities to participate in the development process as they bring local knowledge which can make the difference between a policy succeeding or failing. The object of this project is to involve communities and other actors in a holistic way, in order to develop tools which will help to take care of nature and the environment, ensure that the experience is good for both visitors and residents, while the local value

creation is the greatest possible. The figure below shows some of the sub-projects within its focus.



5 questions that provide direction for the work locally, regionally, and nationally

In the dialogue on societal development, we need a vision for tourism. What we want tourism to do for us depends on the society we want in the future. How can tourism help us create that development? We have taken inspiration from Ireland for this work: **Cillian Murphy: Whose place is it anyway? - Besøksforvaltning (nfk.no), 2018**) These are questions which have to be asked by local communities in order to produce sustainable results, regardless of where those communities are.

- 1) Why do we need visitors?
- 2) What do we have? - What resources do we have that we want to build tourism on?
- 3) Where do we want visitors - and when is it acceptable for visitors to come? Are there any places and times we do not want visitors? (need to be discussed with other industries).
- 4) Who do we want to invite home?
- 5) How do we get the right visitors? We know that there is a limit to how much we can manage tourism, but we can choose to work actively to get the right visitors to achieve the long-term vision for our village and our region.

The questions are used to promote increased knowledge and competence for all actors and management levels in the project. The first four are about local community development, - and are far too important to leave to the tourism industry alone. The fifth concerns marketing. Who provides good value creation and what hidden costs does it entail to invest in different groups? The focuses include:

Local communities / local groups / voluntary sector: Hamlets and villages with many visitors asked for help in managing traffic, creating good meeting points, and finding the place's resilience for balanced development. Together with them, we have developed crash courses in visitor management for the voluntary sector.

The tourism industry (incl. influencers) has participated in communication projects and developing a new understanding and competence in what responsible marketing means in practice.

Public planning and administration are major areas of work. Meløy Municipality will integrate visitor management in municipal spatial planning according to the Planning and Building Act. Vega municipality wants to develop a comprehensive destination management program. Inter-municipal approaches to remedy acute problems with parking, rubbish and sanitation are being tested in Lofoten. Municipalities have established professional groups and committees for visitor management. Interdisciplinary collaboration and routines are being built up internally in the County Council. Together with NMBU, we have developed a first course in visitor management for planners and administrators

at university level in Norway. According to Innovation Norway, Visitor management is a key to the new national Tourism Strategy, and we work closely with the Norwegian Environment Agency on visitor management for national tourist trails and other areas with many visitors, such as cultural landscapes and heritage sites.

Educating local politicians: The pilot project has developed an introductory course in collaboration with KS (the organization for all local governments in Norway). Together with NORD University in Bodø, a follow-up course for community development in the light of ecological economics has been developed, with visitor management as a recurring theme (4 evenings). The course inspires politicians to work with communities to come up with mutual solutions which will produce sustainable tourism offerings which will satisfy both communities and those responsible for their economies.

We know we must prepare for waves of big change. Challenges include Covid-19, economic decline, climate change and a great decline in biological diversity. Visitor management is a new field, and we see that it helps us to think in new ways and work systematically together across disciplines and management levels, to create a society we want in the future. Business as usual is not an option. The County Council, in collaboration with its communities, families and businesses, has a key role in building back better!

References

For references and more information: <https://www.nfk.no/besoksforvaltning/>