

56 Managing sustainable development in recreational and protected areas

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In the process of developing local visitor strategies for the Norwegian Protected Areas within 2020, the intention is to facilitate for better visitor experiences and improve local economies related to tourism, without affecting the conservation values (Norwegian Environment Agency, 2015). Hence, protected areas have become more closely connected to their economic and social environments, with an emphasis on integrating national parks into wider regional and local tourism development processes (e.g., Hidle, 2019; Puhakka & Saarinen, 2013).

This case study involves a mountain municipality with two of the largest national parks in Norway, Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella and Rondane-Dovre. More than 73% of the municipality's area has protection status. As protection regulations restrict tourism development within the borders of the park, the governmental policy is to encourage tourism development in the edge zones. However, recently the government has asked each national park to develop individual visitor strategies in order to allow for extended tourism activities within the borders of the national park. Tourism development is welcomed in mountain communities that experiences depopulation and shrinking job opportunities. Local inhabitants do on the one hand resent the protections regulations as it put restriction on how the protected areas were used traditionally, and on the other hand they are concerned that increased tourism inside the park will prioritize the needs of visitors more than of the local inhabitants.

In other words, measures taken to achieve ecological sustainability are not necessarily consistent with what is perceived as the most acceptable solutions for reaching social or economic sustainability. Tourism destinations present complex governance contexts because of the multiple, and often competing, stakeholder groups involved in producing and delivering tourism products (Islam et al., 2018). Despite new trends and political intentions

toward more collaboration, conflicts between local authorities and the state government continue in rural areas (Overvåg et al., 2015b). The main aim of this study is to explore how key stakeholders, with their different interests at stake, identify dilemmas, challenges and opportunities in a national park, and to suggest if the various opinions can be integrated in an adaptive management framework for sustainable development. The inclusion of ongoing discourses in the management process may open gateways to innovative thinking of sustainability goals as opportunities for unifying current tourism development and the preservation of the nature for future generations (Carayannis et al., 2012).

Tourism scholars use complex adaptive cycles for understanding how complex systems of ongoing transitions can play out (Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011). For example, a tourism destination is an open and flexible system characterized by a high degree of interaction between firms providing tourist services, residents of destinations, local authorities and tourists. Adaptive management strategies are held to be appropriate in contexts characterized by uncertainty, and where governance processes are unable to establish agency and collaborative actions (Baird et al., 2016). In a national park context, the adaptive management strategies can be seen in light of the community-based tradition. This tradition involves the social and political dimensions of sustainability that makes negotiations and participation of a variety of local stakeholders possible, and takes how the host communities can benefit from tourism into account (Saarinen, 2014).

Two focus group interviews, supported with a number of individual interviews, were conducted with private and public key stakeholders. In order to accomplish a broad understanding of the dilemmas, conflicts and opportunities in the protected areas, the interview sample included public national parks stakeholders at both local, regional and national level and enterprises of the tourism industry. The study is part of a larger industry-oriented research

project in South Eastern Norway. Semi-structured interview guides were used and the focus group interviews were taped and then fully transcribed.

The main results from the interviews with key stakeholders reveal three components of the adaptive management framework. Firstly, 'combining a bottom-up/top-down strategy in protected areas' is highly relevant to strengthen and integrate stakeholders' perspectives to wider regional development processes. Several local stakeholders were worried about future tourism development given the power of the national protected areas authorities. This approach provides opportunities to examine social issues from different perspectives and build alliances on shared conservation values, thereby improving collaboration between governments, local authorities, and residents. Secondly, 'Channeling different user groups in protected areas' may help national park management maintain and enhance conservation values in line with visitor strategies through activity-based management approaches and

soft management techniques, (e.g., applying zoning to achieve differentiated use, trail management, offering more guided tours). This approach supports the facilitating for better visitor experiences without affecting the conservation values in the national parks, e.g. the wild mountain reindeer.

Finally, the adaptive management approach 'The dynamics between protected and surrounding areas' was recognized in the material. The tourism suppliers can develop and offer attractive and modern outdoor recreation activities (e.g. cycling, snow experiences) and focus on user groups all year to increase the local value creation. This approach provides inspiration for new product (guided tours/new technology/packages) development, new and exciting stories to tell, and enhanced understanding of place knowledge in these outdoor areas. Hence, if reflected in the national policies and governance (e.g., in the visitor strategies for the national parks), this component can contribute to create more attractive environments for economic development.

References

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