

9 From place-based resources to value-added experiences: Future perspectives on Nature-based tourism

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Nature-based tourism is framed and flavored not only by the socio-economic conditions of the region where it occurs, but just as much by natural resources and opportunities to make use of them in a tourism context. This session summarizes five years of research on nature-based tourism in the BIOTOUR project and discuss future prospect of this sector in the light of a greener economy, more robust communities and sustainable practices. It will also present key content from the recently published book “Nordic Perspectives on Nature-based Tourism. From place-based resources to value-added experiences”, edited by professors Peter Fredman and Jan Vidar Haukeland.

The first part of the session consists of a series of short presentations: An overview of BIOTOUR; key findings and research approaches from the five work-packages (nature-based tourism in the bioeconomy, resources, markets, tourism actors and innovative products); an international (outside) reflection on the research; and reflections from stakeholder organizations supporting the project. The second part of the session will be a round table discussion, where all participants are invited to discuss the following questions:

- Pros and cons of large and multi-disciplinary research projects with stakeholder involvement
- What's next for nature-based tourism in a Nordic context – challenges and opportunities ahead
- Future research – needs and formats

The BIOTOUR project

BIOTOUR is funded by the Norwegian Research Council 2016-2021 with the aim to research and disseminate key conditions for future development of nature-based tourism in the bioeconomy that contribute to business innovation, community resilience and sustainable use of resources in a

Norwegian context. For this purpose, data was collected internationally, nationally and in several case-study areas reflecting significant nature-based tourism settings: Coastal mountains and fjords (Hardanger region), Boreal forests (Trysil region), and Arctic north (Varanger region). This data also captures many of the significant features of nature-based tourism in the Nordic region, stretching from the rugged mountainous western parts to the more forested east and agricultural dominated lands in the south. This region is known for a progressive bioeconomy, including service industries such as nature-based tourism. Much of the region also share long traditions of outdoor recreation practices (friluftsliv) and good accessibility to nature through rights of public access – both important for the opportunities and challenges of future growth in nature-based tourism.

To capture the “mosaic of knowledge” needed to successfully develop nature-based tourism, the project is organized as five integrated work packages for research and two supporting work packages for outreach, communication and administration (Figure 1). This also implies close collaboration with key national stakeholders of the Norwegian nature-based tourism sector, including Norwegian Hospitality Association, Norwegian Farmers Union, Norwegian Trekking Association, Innovation Norway and Hanen – all represented in a reference group which closely follow the project. Additional stakeholder collaboration at the local level takes place in the case study areas Hardanger, Trysil and Varanger. This includes interviews, workshops, focus-groups, excursions and conferences.



Figure 1. Organization of the BIOTOUR project.

Selected findings

Results from the national inventory of nature-based tourism service providers shows that firms in this sector contribute to the robustness (resilience) of local communities in different ways: Economically through increased diversity of the business sector, socially through development of networks and infrastructure, and environmentally through care for nature and the cultural landscape. Workshops with local tourism stakeholders and communities in Varanger and Trysil show that nature and culture-based resources need to be closely connected to successfully develop tourism. Further analyses also demonstrate that dialogue-oriented processes can be fruitful planning approaches to deal with the social dimensions in small municipalities. Trends in nature-based tourism are studied with the help of over 60 experts from Norway, Sweden, Finland, the European Alps and the Western United States. Experiences from local culture and locally produced products and food is a recurrent, while the Norwegian expert panel also rates sustainability and responsible travel high.

A border-survey among foreign tourists show that hiking in forest- and mountain areas, and experiences of the Norwegian landscape, are central components. The follow-up e-mail survey shows that most people prefer physical activities over more

References

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passive experiences of beautiful nature. When it comes to management of nature areas for tourism, availability and accessibility, maintenance of trails and signs are highly ranked features. Interviews with business operators show that an important motivation to start up a business in nature-based tourism is the possibility to turn a lifestyle into an economic sustainable tourism product. New ways of thinking and networking is important for product innovation. A visitor survey among muskox safari participants in Dovrefjell demonstrates the role of interpretation and the importance of the guide for the tourist experience.

Research in BIOTOUR also shows a need for closer collaboration between municipalities and management organizations of protected areas. We suggest that visitor strategies should be integrated with the physical planning according to the Planning and Building Act. A PhD- thesis that analyses the provision of tourism experiences in climbing parks, sea kayaking, ski touring and mountain biking shows a high degree of dependence on the characteristics of natural resources. The providers' dedication is, together with the experience, activity and place, the core of the nature-based tourism product. These items in combination make up the key driving force, a "glow", that characterizes many nature-based tourism producers. An experiment with 733 participants to analyze the impact from mobile phone applications on the nature-based tourism experience shows that planning and navigation are key functions for the total experience. The study reveals that opportunities for «digital disconnection» are important to provide deeper nature experiences. There are an increasing number of outdoor cultural and sport events around Norway visited by domestic and foreign tourists. Interviews with event organizers has revealed the significance of nature when designing such event, as well as how different natural resources can contribute to learning, memorable and transformative experiences.