

“Friluftsliv” (outdoor life): Sustainability, trust and social inclusion

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The Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT) aims to act as a responsible organization that carefully addresses key challenges for social and environmental sustainability in outdoor recreation through our strategic plan. This lecture will discuss and present approaches to key challenges for DNT and likely also for similar NGOs across the globe.

Sustainability

Principally, DNT view our activities as essentially sustainable, and a future low-emission society will require more outdoor life, not less. Still, overconsumption, climate change and degradation of valuable nature are the most severe challenges of our time. DNT's new sustainability strategy sets overall goals for our own operations and aims to make it easier to participate in nature- and climate-friendly outdoor life. By improving operations, we aim to inspire people to make more environmental-friendly choices in their everyday lives and push decision-makers in a sustainable direction.

Trust and sharing economy

A priority ambition is that DNT's cabin- and hiking route network must be Norway's most sustainable holiday and leisure offering. Maybe it already is, after all, DNT has been based on sharing economy principles for 150 years, long before the term was coined. Trust is a key concept of DNT. It is actually the foundation for the unique system of cabins and trails. As a member of DNT, you may borrow a DNT cabin key for a deposit of NOK 100. This key fits the locks in all the 450 self-service cabins. Upon arrival, you can serve yourself food and beverage, and pay afterwards. After trekking in Norway and experiencing how this system worked, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated that “this restores my faith in humanity!”.

However, Norwegians' total consumption is too high and is reflected in for instance the number of holiday airplane flights they take, and many have private cabins of a high standard, all of which have major impacts on the environment. It would have a positive effect if people were to choose short-

distance trips and use DNT's cabins instead of flying abroad or acquiring their own cabins. DNT must maintain and further develop a cabin and route network based on a sharing economy, which will allow as many people as possible to enjoy the countryside in a sustainable way.

Volunteering and inclusivity

Outdoor life is an important arena for creating more inclusive societies, as well as contributing to good health and improved quality of life. DNT aims to create social meeting places that can work for everyone, and DNT is actively working to include new groups in outdoor life. This is challenging and we have a long way to go, since our operations and offerings must be inclusive for all ages and social groups and reflect current diversity in society. An important approach is to make outdoor life less expensive. To hire the equipment you need, buy secondhand and repair your own stuff are important measures both for the environment and for increased inclusivity. These offers must therefore be expanded.

Use and protection

For DNT it is also important to be a clear voice in favor of outdoor interests. Every year, important natural areas are lost to development. This also has an impact on people's ability to pursue an active outdoor life. DNT wants Norwegian nature to be both used and protected. We believe that the use of nature for simple and nature-friendly outdoor activities contributes to the enjoyment of nature and thereby to greater understanding of the need to protect it. DNT has a privileged role in the Norwegian society, since we have cabin operations in vulnerable and protected nature areas. This entails great responsibility. As an example; 80 % of all European wild reindeer lives in Norway. This means that Norway has a special responsibility to take care of and manage wild reindeer in a way that will allow future generations to experience viable populations of the species. We do hike in the same mountain areas, and must accept that outdoor life may have a

negative effect on reindeer. DNT has and will continue to work with conservation authorities to evaluate our cabins and trails network and have already relocated cabins and marked trails to reduce the conflict between wild reindeer and outdoor recreation. This work will continue and be given even stronger emphasis in our new strategy, as human infrastructure and activity continue to put high pressure on vulnerable biodiversity.

The right to roam

Allemannsretten – the right to roam or the right of public access is an important element in Norwegian and Nordic outdoor culture and a part of our national identity. The right allows you to hike or put up your tent nearly anywhere you want. But now we see a challenge with few rules and regulations – and our right to roam is under threat from increased tourism. When too many people hike the same path or want to put up a tent on the same beach or urban forest, it becomes challenging. To find ways to protect “Allemannsretten” – and at the same time cope with increased numbers of hikers and campers in nature – will be an important issue for the next years.

“Friluftsliv” as an escape room

How could “friluftsliv”, our word for outdoor life, improve our lives even further? Facilitating outdoor life is documented as a good public health measure.

The last year has been tough for many of us. News headlines like “How ‘friluftsliv’ can help you through the pandemic” have been seen all over the world during the last year. DNT conducted a poll in late 2020 and found that four out of 10 Norwegians said that the outdoors had become more important to them as a result of COVID-19. Many had re-discovered their nearest forest or urban beach. Local outdoor activities have always been important for DNT, and we must motivate as many of us as possible to use our local area for activities and outdoor life. Fuglemyrhytta, one of our most popular overnight cabins, is just two kilometers from the nearest tram station in Oslo. It has been booked every night through the pandemic. You can view the city skyline from the cabin – but still get a totally different feeling than from staying in your own home. We believe that to ensure and facilitate such offers, gives our members valuable experiences – and a better everyday life.

About DNT

Den Norske Turistforening DNT (The Norwegian Trekking Association) is Norway’s largest outdoor recreation NGO. DNT has approximately 320,000 members and manages more than 500 cabins and 22,000 kilometers of waymarked trails across all of Norway, for use by its members, other inhabitants of Norway as well as foreign visitors.