

Storytelling as an intermediary between local communities and visitors in nature-based tourism

“Creating values through the encounter”

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest economic sectors in the world, with substantial impact on national and local economies in many countries. Local communities in rural regions in Norway are increasingly dependent on income from tourism, especially from nature-based tourism (NBT). Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) define NBT as 'recreative activities occurring when people visit "natural" areas away from the area they live'. In Norway, many districts and communities provide space for a broad range of unique nature experiences, attracting people from all over the world. Nature features and the landscape as a whole offer spectacular sceneries to the visitor. Sometimes these attractions are only accessible through organised activities that require both skills and special equipment, such as dog sledging, fjord rafting and mountain hiking. Although NBT is concerned with 'nature experiences', in most cases, they are part of culture. There is always an element of facilitation dependent on knowledge, embedded experiences and versatile practical and communicative skills. Someone is 'opening the gate' to facilitate visitor experiences. These people can be NBT entrepreneurs or guides, or simply residents in the local community.

We claim that nature-based tourism experiences will always take place in a cultural context, and the broad range of interconnected human and cultural resources related to the territory in which NBT is performed must be recognised. NBT has the potential to facilitate encounters between visitors and local communities, adding value in both directions. Thus, it should be possible to achieve a more sustainable tourism industry and enhance the viability and wellbeing of local communities. In this paper, we will present and discuss methods to identify and activate potential resources for integrated tourism and community development and wellbeing, particularly using storytelling as a way to reveal resources and to focus on integrity and the ethical aspects of NBT.

From an integrated planning perspective on NBT, the role of the local communities in which the tourism activities take place has not been sufficiently acknowledged as a vital part of the entire value chain. The taking of a more deliberate, proactive position—by both the tourism industry and local authorities within a region—may generate a broad range of added values for the tourism industry and for the society.

Identifying landscape resources

The landscape—with its natural elements, its cultural history, its built features and the skills, memories and stories associated with it—is the framework and the arena for both residents' and visitors' activities. Sharing the same space might imply some challenges, but there is also a great potential for synergies. Applying a 'landscape perspective' means less focus on boundaries and more focus on connectedness and interactions between man and nature in local and regional contexts (Gambino and Peano 2015). It also implies a sense of strong forward looking. A model of landscape resource analysis (LRA) is presented and discussed in

light of transdisciplinary theory (Vilismaier 2008), perspectives on landscape and place (Selman 2012) and theories on integrated regional planning (Welter 2002).

The LRA model has been applied in several place-based projects and functions as a process tool at the level of local communities. It consists of four stages, each of which addresses certain questions related to the past, present and future, as well as the outer, shared reality and the inner, individually perceived reality.



Local NBT entrepreneurs and other community actors in Varanger, telling their story using an object that connects personal values with the common landscape and future potentials.

Methods and data

The procedure and the outcome from the two case areas that will be presented; *Nærøysfjorden*, which is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Area of West-Norwegian Fjords. Data was collected from the research project: 'Ideals, Models and Practice in Natural Resource Management. Does Local Management Matter?(LOCALMAN) Norwegian Research Council No.203784 (2011–2015). (Some additional data from other projects is also used.) In the other case area—the *Varanger peninsula*, including Varanger National Park—data was collected from the project: From place-based natural resources to value-added experiences: Tourism in the new bio-economy (BIOTOUR) – funded by the Norwegian Research Council, project no. 255271 (2016–2020).

The research material was derived from several methodological approaches: semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in both *Nærøysfjorden* and Varanger, a simple questionnaire administered within gateways to the *Nærøysfjorden*, two workshops in Varanger (2013 and 2017), one in *Nærøysfjorden* (2005) and a continuing education course in *Nærøysfjorden* (2011).

Results and discussion

The LRA process goes through four stages or levels of reality: *empirical* (material and cultural resources), *pragmatic* (individual identity and competences), *normative* (ideas and visions for the future) and the *value level* (sustainable value creation). Storytelling has proven to be a very effective tool in the process of moving from one level to the next. In Varanger, the participants were asked to bring a 'token', an object representing something precious to them, something that biographic information and personal values could be projected through. Taking an individual ethical position as an NBT entrepreneur is vital for activating the broad

potential of added value that makes it possible to develop tourism industries that both visitors and local communities can benefit from.

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