

Negotiating co-existence in multifunctional landscapes: trails as facilitators for communication

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Trails are important elements in natural and cultural landscapes, and many ancient pathways have developed into routes of great significance for recreation and tourism in contemporary societies (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). However, international research on recreational trails is somewhat limited. Results from a systematic quantitative literature review of 195 articles in scientific journals reveal that research on trails for tourism and outdoor recreation in non-urban settings to a large extent is carried out by natural scientists, and the focus has mainly been on environmental and managerial aspects of trail use. The review identifies gaps in trail research, especially in a socio-cultural context on topics such as heritage, public health and conflict management (Godtman Kling, Fredman & Wall-Reinius, 2017). Table 1 displays the spread of the researched study topics in the reviewed articles. In order to identify how the study topic varies over time, the table also contains the time-periods when these topics were published.

Table 1. Study topics of the reviewed publications and variation over time

Study topic	Total		Time-period (%)		
	Publications	%	1970-1999	2000-2009	2010-2016
Environmental protection	70	35.9	41.4	29.2	39.4
Trail management	47	24.1	13.8	34.7	19.1
Planning and design	22	11.3	10.3	4.2	17.0
Economic impact	17	8.7	6.9	11.1	7.4
Conflict management	11	5.6	10.3	5.5	4.3
Heritage	10	5.1	6.9	2.8	6.4
Public health	10	5.1	6.9	5.5	4.3
Interpretation, education	7	3.6	3.4	5.5	2.1
Tourist attraction	1	0.5	0	1.4	0

Trails in the landscape can be used as a tool to handle conflicts between different user groups (Jackson, Haider, & Elliot, 2003). However, research on trails as a conflict management tool in land use conflicts is limited (Godtman Kling, Fredman & Wall-Reinius, 2017). Research has mainly focused on trail conflicts between different recreation activities or groups and within recreation groups, and less on how trails can handle conflicts between different users in the landscape.

Against this background, this study explores the role of recreational trails as a potential tool for managing conflicts in a multifunctional landscape. The results are derived from a case study of the southern Jämtland mountain region in Sweden, an area where conflicts of interests exist. There are several different interests and perspectives on how such mountain

landscapes should be used. There are conflicts both between actors that use the landscape for various purposes, such as between tourist entrepreneurs and reindeer herding companies or between hikers and mountain bikers; but there are also conflicts between different governance levels, for example between government agencies and local population (Godtman Kling, Wall-Reinius & Fredman, 2017).

The case study area has also experienced changes in land-use, mainly due to an increasing number of visitors that engage in various outdoor recreation activities (SEPA, 2014). Stakeholders in the area argue that conflicts of interest regarding trails mainly relate to erosion, worn trails, fragmentation of landscape, disturbance of reindeer and reindeer herding, and displacement of wildlife as well as unsuitably located trails (Wall-Reinius et al., 2018). It is therefore a challenge in this area to balance multifunctional use in ways that combine sustainable livelihood for local populations, recreational use, local business development, and reindeer herding, as well as national environmental goals related to conservation of both the natural and cultural environment.

This study examines the recreational trail as an applied example where actors in the mountain landscape 'negotiate' and collaborate. Through the recreational trail, dialogue and discussions are made possible among stakeholders. Trails can therefore function as facilitators for communication, and thus enhance the possibilities of building trust and promoting collaboration between actors. In connection to nature conservation, tourism interests, land use by local communities, including reindeer herding, the role and function of the recreational trail becomes central and can thus constitute a conflict management tool.

Researchers of this study have worked closely with stakeholders in the area by organizing workshops where issues regarding the land-use in the area have been discussed. Results from the study show that creating platforms for collaboration and dialogue are important for increasing the understanding between different interests represented within stakeholder groups. Such platforms can therefore be highly valuable in handling conflicts regarding land-use (Wall-Reinius et al., 2018).

This research contributes to the existing literature on handling multiple land-use interests, and adds to previous knowledge by taking on a rather new approach; that of the recreational trail as a facilitator for communication.

References

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