

Community entrepreneurship and collective orientation at the intersection of place-making and nature-based tourism

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Figure. Fishery harbour in Vardø

Introduction

This paper addresses the need for integrated perspectives on nature-based tourism and place-making through the lens of community entrepreneurship. The study is part of the research project BIOTOUR (from place-based natural resources to value added experiences, tourism in the new bio economy), funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The case area is the arctic town of Vardø in the Varanger region in Norway, located on a 3.7 square km island. The shifting arctic lights, rough geology and extreme weather conditions are prominent landscape features. Vardø has a long history as a strategic military outpost near Russia and as an administrative centre for trade and fisheries in the north. In the period from 1980–2010, Vardø suffered from a decline in the fishing industry, leading to a population drop from 4,000 to 2,000 inhabitants. This decay was followed by social problems and an impaired reputation. Vardø is described as a landscape on hold, waiting for future resolutions to contemporary problems (Kampevold & Hemmersam 2017). However, during the crisis, new initiatives emerged from a local alliance of actors trying to regenerate the place. In my study of the

regeneration process, I have focused on the story of the cultural heritage entrepreneurship project 'Vardø Restored', which combines the restoration of historic buildings and community-based art projects. A second entrepreneurship story is that of the architecture company 'Biotope', which uses their passion for birds to design and build modern windshelters and birding hides in combination with destination development. Both initiatives have a strong collective orientation, resulting in optimism and confidence in a better future for the inhabitants of Vardø.

Community entrepreneurship

The need to involve inhabitants and local communities in the development of nature-based tourism is a starting point for the discussion. The development of responsible, nature-based tourism should be combined with the principles of geotourism, in which place, culture and community are central concepts. This can create opportunities for new place-based nature and cultural experiences in which local communities are involved and take ownership in defining the tourism landscape.

'Community entrepreneurship' can be useful as a process perspective to understand activities leading to new collective solutions (Førde & Ringholm 2014). Such processes are characterised by their qualitative social and cultural value creation rather than merely economic orientations. Community entrepreneurs are often associated with local enthusiasts or activists, which are vital to a place's survival. The community entrepreneurship approach seeks to combine innovation theory with praxis-oriented perspectives on cultural change (Borch & Førde 2010). Social creativity is a central concept related to people's ability to meet new challenges and find solutions based on envisioning scenarios from bottom-up processes. According to Ingold and Hallam (2007), one must embrace the value of the lived creative praxis of experimentation and improvisation.

Methods and data

Fifteen in-depth interviews, several informal conversations, observations and participatory observations took place during five fieldwork trips to Vardø (for durations of one to two weeks) in the period between 2016 and 2018. A strategic selection of people and the snowball method have been used as strategies for finding informants. Participatory observation has been used to allow myself as a researcher to participate within the processes of the study.

Preliminary results and discussion

On the level of each individual entrepreneur, the role of bridging local and external resources is crucial. It is also important to take advantage of how different entrepreneurs can contribute to place-making based on their relationships with places. Both strong emotional bonds and an orientation towards new development possibilities can be the basis of an entrepreneur's value perspectives, as indicated in this case.

Two critical factors in understanding the collective orientation of community entrepreneurship processes are *abrupt changes* (cultural component) and *social arenas* (social component). Such an understanding involves how the processes create collective awareness, belonging and possibilities for inhabitants, in addition to a focus on how this adds value to visitor experiences. These processes also exist with complex actor–network constellations involving nature and built environments. Vardø Restored and Biotope are mutually reinforcing projects, and the study shows that both have contributed to positive changes within the community. As an example, the work of Vardø Restored has led to the preservation of Nordpol Kro, the oldest tavern in the region and an important meeting place in town for both residents and visitors. Vardø has five festivals during the year, in which

Vardø Restored and Biotope are involved. However, it seems that there is important work yet to be done regarding local anchoring towards the municipality's appreciations of small-scale entrepreneurial activities.

Cross-sectoral orientations and transdisciplinary working methods are vital to the future development of more responsible landscape-based tourism. Community entrepreneurship can be used as a practical process orientation for understanding and managing the intersecting areas of place-making and nature-based tourism within a place. Such an orientation illuminates bottom-up perspectives with collective orientations on development, in which residents are involved in defining the integrated tourism landscape to include both nature and culture.

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