

Linking Nature and Culture in World Heritage management. Lessons learned in Norway

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Introduction

Sustainable visitor management means finding a balance between preservation of important sites and giving visitors a rewarding experience, while at the same time supporting local economic development. Linking nature and culture with peoples approach to planning and management is fundamental to support sustainability. This is time consuming and anchoring the processes will be difficult if roles and responsibility are not understood or accepted. Lessons learned from projects in the West Norwegian Fjords WHS (Lykkja et al, 2018) are taken into account as Nordland County is building up a new visitor strategy for Vega World Heritage Site, the Lofoten islands (on the tentative list) and Meløy/Svartisen (entrance National park) (Hansen and Lykkja, in prep).

Tourism - threat and opportunity

UNESCO (2012) considers tourism to be one of the greatest threats to the World Heritage Sites, while the industry also provides economic opportunities in and adjacent to the sites. In 2014, the small communities of Flåm and Geiranger had around 300 residents and received 700.000 visitors in (including 280.000 cruise ship passengers). In 2017 the number of visitors was close to 1 million. Limits of sustainability for nature, the local communities and tourism is a big debate. Each year, the media describes protests against mass tourism, pollution and noise. This is also the case for the Lofoten islands, who are on the tentative list. (Lykkja et al, 2018).

Local involvement

UNESCO has experienced that including the locals in the decision making is needed for long term results and sustainable development (Court and Wijesuriya, 2017). The Heritage council for the West Norwegian Fjords WHS is working to establish more sustainable practices, both within and outside the protected areas. The goal is to find a balance between preservation of important sites, and giving visitors a rewarding experience, while at the same time supporting local social and economic development. The visitor management strategies are built on these fundamentals.

Report to UNESCO

UNESCO demands Visitor Management Strategies and regular reports proving the sites are being well maintained. The West Norwegian Fjord landscape was entered on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2005. The report system is still under development. UNESCO is now integrating the ICCROM-led Managing Cultural World Heritage manual and the IUCN-led Managing Natural World Heritage manual into a single new publication. This will take years to be finished, but we have taken advantage developing a system that fuses both natural and cultural resources.

Visitor management in the West Norwegian Fjords

The project has developed different types of maps and methods for rural development and visitor management that takes care of nature and landscape, supports local community growth

and broad value creation. The project has been using interviews, public assemblies, regional park meetings, dialog conferences, student theses, expert seminars, and collaborations with other research projects, seeking to involve as many actors as possible. Findings from visitor studies have been charted against landscape resource analyses, and have been subject to new gatherings and workshops.

During this project, we have been working closely with the authorities and managers of the protected areas, the tourist organizations, landowners and other stakeholders to coordinate visitor management strategies inside and outside the protected areas. During this cooperation, we were able to map how the world heritage values are developing and changing over time (positive/negative patterns) and, also the creation of new digital maps showing touristic infrastructure.

Challenges: Anchoring, roles and responsibilities

The last step was to work with the municipalities and the counties to establish the visitor management plans. In this case, it was not possible to succeed because of not enough time and resources to establish a common understanding of roles and responsibilities. This has to be part of the common planning processes in the municipalities. It has to be done properly, to secure involvement of stakeholders and cooperation with decision makers.

The research shows that we are lacking a holistic management of the World Heritage Fjords. Both the Nærøyfjord World Heritage Park and Green Fjord-partnership have been established as a result of this. These important integration actors have, together with other local and regional actors, contributed to put sustainability on the agenda, and succeeded through networking with regional and national actors. For example financial support for farming and maintenance of traditional culture-landscape and regulations of the cruise ship-traffic (Stokke et al, 2017).

- A new discipline takes a long time to integrate, in both education, business and management. In the planning area, we naturally find more actors who have not identified and/or accepted visitor management as part of their area of responsibility.
- The World Heritage Park and the World Heritage Council have helped financing development projects and mobilized volunteer community efforts. They are important integration actors, but they are advisory bodies and lacking management tools.
- The World Heritage Municipalities have to work closely together with the management of the protected areas to develop visitor management strategies. The Tourism industry and local communities must be integrated to a larger extent than what has been the case so far (Clemetsen and Stokke, in press).

Visitor management on the county level – pilot project in Nordland

Nordland County is on the way to accomplish a pilot project in visitor management for the region of Lofoten, Vega and Meløy-Svartisen (2018-2020/22). The project is strongly anchored in both political and administrative ways. Nordland County has taken the lead in Norway, when it comes to landscape inventory and development of an innovative and experience-based tourism (Lykkja og Hansen, in prep).

To work out examples of good practice, the project cooperates with managers and researchers on many levels. Tests will be done to understand how the person-as-groups (that you find among both local and far away visitors) correspond to different landscapes and how this can be used to reach the visitor groups throughout their customer journey. This landscape approach seems to open up for new dialogs between the many shareholders, and will be a part of the ongoing planning processes for outdoor recreation and visitor management on municipal and regional level. The Project is a good follow up of the work started up in the West Norwegian Fjords (Lykkja og Hansen, in prep).

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