

Tourism development in Norwegian national parks - some management challenges.

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Abstract

The existence of national parks requires managers to find a balance between two competing goals - preserving the natural resource base and providing access for visitors who come to enjoy the same nature and landscape. Since the main objective for establishing national parks in Norway historically has been and still is (according to the Nature Diversity Act 2009) to sustain ecosystems and landscapes, our research is focusing on official national park policy and guidelines for national parks in the country, in order to reveal the potential within the management system to support sustainable use and development with special attention to tourism and outdoor recreation.

In Norway national park management has not much tradition for visitor management or supporting tourism businesses based on protected natural resources or supporting tourism businesses based on protected natural resources. The traditional management policy has been primarily focusing on the protection of the nature diversity and unique landscapes, with little attention to visitor infrastructure and visitor services. The local tourism industry stakeholders are nevertheless often totally dependent on the actual landscape and natural resources alike for their own economic benefit and social wellbeing.

The analysis is based on personal interviews comprising key representatives of national management organizations (the Ministry of Environment, the Directorate for Nature Management, the Nature Inspectorate and The Norwegian Mountain Board Association). The following main research questions are dealt with: Is the traditional (historical) mandate for Norwegian nature management taking new directions, and is the (potential) integration of nature based tourism activities in the protected areas being welcomed as beneficial or is it primarily seen as a threat to the natural resources? Moreover, are the legal frameworks and the organizational and planning resources at hand, including the recently implemented local management model for national parks, assessed as appropriate means among the managers in order to cope with emerging tourism interests?

Preliminary findings indicate that central management actors define their role not to be tourism development 'drivers'. They claim they do not possess the competence but still they are aware of their role as facilitator for tourism. In concrete cases, cooperation is seen as important and they are also acting as a partner for tourism interests. Special problems are related to lack of knowledge about visitor interests and visitor strategies are not developed. They also underline the lack of adequate planning instruments to regulate pressures in external gateway areas. The new local management model is promising but it is still unclear if the reform has led to more integration of tourism interests.

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