Petra Blinnikka, Åsa Grahn,
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Responsible Tourism Best Practices in the Nordic Countries

Jamk University of Applied Sciences

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EDITORS

Petra Blinnikka, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Åsa Grahn, University of Stavanger

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre

Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

AUTHORS

Rositsa Röntynen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

Kajsa Åberg, Region Västerbotten

Astrid Laura Dam, Roskilde University Turism

Keld Buciek, Roskilde University

Gústaf Gústafsson, Adjunct – Hólar University

Helene Maristuen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir, Icelandic Tourism Cluster

Jessica Aquino, Hólar University

Magdalena Falter, University of Iceland

Mari Angeria, Lapland University of Applied Sciences

Anu Harju-Myllyaho, Lapland University of Applied Sciences

Pasi Satokangas, Lapland University of Applied Sciences

Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Petra Blinnikka, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Åsa Helen Grahn, University of Stavanger

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre

Janne Liburd, University of Southern Denmark

Harold Goodwin, Responsible Tourism Partnerships

PETRA BLINNIKKA
ÅSA GRAHN
GUÐRÚN ÞÓRA GUNNARSDÓTTIR
MINNA TUNKKARI-ESKELINEN
(EDS.)

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ABSTRACT

Petra Blinnikka, Åsa Grahn, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir & Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen (Eds.)
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The concept of responsible tourism was launched in 2002 in Cape Town, together with the Declaration on Responsible Tourism. Responsible tourism is about making better places for people to live in, and better places for people to visit, and especially in this order (Goodwin 2014). The development of tourism in a destination should involve the local community and take into account all the dimensions of sustainability. Responsible tourism is about minimizing negative impacts and maximizing the positive impacts of tourism.

The Nordic countries are united by long common traditions, similar cultures and social systems, and shared values, including a strong emphasis on sustainability and determined climate work. While each Nordic country stands out as a unique destination, their clean air, beautiful nature, quality of life and sustainability lend the Nordic countries a special status as a travel destination. The climate and natural environment of the Nordic region are facing climate change differently compared to southern European regions, for example. The speed of climate change is four times faster in the Nordic region compared to other regions in the world. Nordic tourism destinations often depend on unique conditions, and the survival of the future of tourism is therefore dependent the protection of these conditions.

This publication presents cases conducted in various Nordic countries, each addressing different aspects of responsibility in tourism. It primarily emphasizes two main themes: 1) competence development and the role of the individual in responsible tourism, and 2) the importance of effective cooperation in responsible tourism. The cases were collected in an open call in autumn 2022 and were double-blind reviewed by the editorial team of the book.

Keywords: Tourism, sustainable tourism, tourism research, nordic countries, responsible tourism, nordic tourism

FOREWORD

Harold Goodwin, Director of the Responsible Tourism Partnership

An overview of Responsible Tourism in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden reveals both similarities and diversity. In all countries, the private sector is working with local and national governments to take responsibility, to take action and to achieve sustainability. Responsible tourism is about determining what needs to be done to make tourism sustainable. As the 2022 Responsible Tourism Charter makes clear, ”Sustainability is an aspiration. It will only be realised if and when we take responsibility for making tourism sustainable. Responsibility drives sustainability. Responsible tourism is about making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” The diversity of our world drives tourism; we travel to experience other peoples’ places.

Greenhouse gas emissions, plastic waste and biodiversity extinction are global issues requiring local action. Access to potable water is an issue in many destinations, often exacerbated by tourism pressures, but access to drinking water is not an issue everywhere, floods and drought present different challenges. The 2022 Charter lists the issues that have been addressed around the world over two decades of practice since the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations was agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Responsible tourism is about reducing native impacts and maximising positive impacts across the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainable development and the SDGs. It is about practical action generally requiring collaboration and partnerships between local and often national stakeholders.

Responsible tourism emerged from the recognition that all too often sustainability was used as an undefined aspiration. As the 2022 Charter reminds us, sustainability is a journey. Those who engage need to say why they focus on particular issues, why they are taking responsibility, and what they are doing. They also need to transparently report the impacts of their efforts. Sustainability can only be achieved when businesses and destinations take responsibility and act to manage their business and location to ensure that it is sustainable. The responsible tourism movement promotes a broader view promoting the importance of providing ”more enjoyable experiences for all, through more meaningful connections with local people and a greater understanding of local history and culture, and social and environmental

issues"; and offering "culturally sensitive experiences engendering respect between tourists and hosts, building local pride and confidence."

There is a growing network of International Centres for Responsible Tourism, each one being an independent regional network, sharing knowledge and skills to accelerate change. They are part of an international federation developed by the Responsible Tourism Partnership.

> The ICRTs endorse the concept of Responsible Tourism as defined in the 2022 Responsible Tourism Charter and ensure that all activity is consistent with the spirit of the Charter. Responsible Tourism cannot be reduced to the green agenda; in all its activities the triple bottom line and the ethic of responsibility will be addressed.
>
> - **Campaigning** to promote the practice of Responsible Tourism whether by promoting the ideas or demonstration projects.
> - One of the core objectives of the international network of ICRTs is to encourage and facilitate **South-South exchange** and to enable Responsible Tourism academics and practitioners to further the development of Responsible Tourism through the exchange of experience, knowledge and skills.
> - **Advocacy:** to run conferences and workshops and disseminate information about the principles and practice of Responsible Tourism through print and other media.
> - **Research:** to undertake research on the practice of Responsible Tourism to create knowledge about the impacts of Responsible Tourism strategies and to determine which approaches are most successful in achieving the objectives of Responsible Tourism.
> - **Training:** to provide training on Responsible Tourism and undergraduate, postgraduate and professional levels both independently and in association with the ICRT
>
> International Centres for Responsible Tourism (n.d.)

Regional networks and the regional Responsible Tourism Awards report and share best practices. There is a great deal of practical experience to draw on and the regional networks are beginning to develop links with local universities to provide advanced training and research I hope that the Nordic Network will develop in a similar way.

This collection of papers ranges across the broad agenda of responsible tourism. Whilst approaches that work in one place cannot be slavishly replicated, and copying and pasting rarely works, reading about what has worked in one place can inspire action by another business or in another destination. When the approach is "replicated" and the success or otherwise

transparently reported with the details of how an inspiring example was adapted to work elsewhere, we add to the canon of knowledge about how we can take responsibility and make progress towards sustainability.

Publications of this kind are an important way of recording and sharing experiences of responsible tourism practice. The work at Jamk and elsewhere in the Nordic Network needs to find linkages to the other ICRT networks to further internationalise and develop the responsible tourism curricula, at the core of which is collaborative work engaging researchers and practitioners on equal terms. Only thus can the publications and learning methods include the practical knowledge and skills essential to the successful implementation of the vision of responsible tourism.

Enhancing communication globally, the ICRT South East Asia produces the Journal of Responsible Tourism Management (JRTM), published twice a year, which is ”a scholarly journal that aims to advance and disseminate cutting-edge knowledge pertaining to Responsible Tourism and hospitality based on theoretical argument, contemporary issues and rigorous reasoning in any developing destinations or regions”. All the papers are published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC 4.0) and are freely available to practitioners, teachers, and researchers.

WRAPPING UP THE CONTENT

Mari Angeria, Anu Harju-Myllyaho & Pasi Satokangas explore the idea of meaningful work through the lens of social responsibility using action research. By focusing on physical and psychological well-being and developing leadership skills, they were able to have a positive impact on the whole working community.

Gústaf Gústafsson explores the core issue: how can communities be engaged in realising responsible tourism given the ”uneven power balances” between community members and tourism businesses. Gústafsson concludes that a participatory approach, founded on ”partnership, a collaborative effort”, to be most likely to result in successful implementation. The 2022 Charter asserts the importance of involving ”local people in decisions that affect their communities, their lives and life chances.”

Helene Maristuen considers best practices in providing for people travelling with a disability. She explores how businesses and destinations can take responsibility to assist and make welcome those travelling with a disability throughout their journey: before the journey, during experience-scapes, customer interaction, storytelling, dramaturgy, and after the journey. Maristuen

concludes that disability should not reduce an individual's participation in travel and tourism and suggests a revised framework of quality assessment for business leaders to use in developing and facilitating experiences for persons with a disability. As she concludes, "… best practices will enhance the pull factor of destinations and at the same time provide meaningful experiences to ensure quality of life for persons with disabilities and thus enhance responsible tourism."

Rositsa Röntynen, reviews the "The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism" online learning programme put together by academics from five Finnish universities "to increase the responsibility in tourism nationwide by providing work-integrated training for different groups of tourism actors that is available regardless of location, time, and device." This initiative sought to harness "the Internet's capabilities to cultivate collaborative knowledge construction, utilizing phases of idea generation, organization, and intellectual convergence in smaller instructional environments where students actively solve problems through discourse, facilitated by teachers who serve as both guides and participants, thus enhancing the reshaping of education for the knowledge age." Röntynen's review revealed "the limited understanding of the concrete actions at the individual level that form the foundation of responsible tourism" and that: "it is difficult for learners to exchange knowledge and maintain their motivation without the social setting." In the international networks of ICRTs which often meet and engage on Zoom or Teams, social links are being forged between practitioners, teachers and researchers; which is essential if we are to accelerate progress.

Kajsa Åberg explores the importance of trust in planning and developing collaborations recognising that trust is important if collaboration is to be attempted or succeeded. Åberg's review reveals how complex the issue of trust and its maintenance are in achieving collaborative action to realise the Responsible Tourism agenda and sustainability. This review suggests that having a democratically controlled public sector lead is perhaps advantageous. Aberg concludes that "trust is an elusive element with several different interpretations and is hard to assess" and that reciprocity is important. One of the core characteristics of partnerships is shared risk.

Rositsa Röntynen reviews the application of a cooperation and ecosystem approach to the development of the new Southern Konnevesi National Park established in 2014. Röntynen focuses on "cooperation as a responsible practice, maximizing the benefits and minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity." He reviews the literature on networking and points out that it can compensate for the fragmented nature of the travel and tourism

sector. Röntynen reviews the contribution of the strategic intention to create cooperation around the new park, as well as the role of public-private partnerships fostering multilateral cooperation and joint marketing, in addition to the use of a video to engage businesses in an ”unforgettable national park experience.” She reports that the ”local companies and involved got a sense of belonging to the practical development and understood its purpose and dimensions better. By the time of its release, the story video had become a symbol of unity in the name of ”our national park”. Joint marketing is a practical exercise in cooperation. All too often, enterprises see the competition as being the other accommodation and activity providers in the destination, whereas the real competition is the other destinations which offer a similar and possibly superior experience for visitors.

Astrid Laura Dam and Keld Buciek report on the ways in which the Nature Park Åmosem in Denmark, achieves ”a useful and fruitful balance between considerations of use and considerations of protection in nature parks”, negotiating responsible access to nature. They use the analogy of a ”creative midwife to describe how nature park management, in theory, can act as nothing but a mediator between municipality, landowners and locals, facilitating communication and collaboration between the groups to ensure that their interests and goals are aligned.”

Jessica Aquino, Magdalena Falter, and Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir, summarise the work of the Nordic Regenerative Tourism (NorReg) pilot project seeking to develop and provide relevant and accessible tools for the development of regenerative tourism practices in the Nordic countries working with local small and micro-sized enterprises (SMiEs) in rural communities providing outdoor adventure and access to nature attractions. They highlight ”the limited understanding of the concrete actions at the individual level that form the foundation of Responsible Tourism.” They recognise that ”it is difficult for learners to exchange knowledge and maintain their motivation without…” social engagement. They conclude that ”… international interest towards a digital curriculum of responsible tourism is perceived as good” and that the ”internationalization of the curriculum calls for new, extensive background research of the needs and competencies of responsibility…” To sum up, community, collaboration, cooperation and co-creation including people, especially stakeholders with shared goals, are evidenced in this book.

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AN OVERVIEW OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Petra Blinnikka, Jamk University of Applied Sciences – Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre – Åsa Grahn, University of Stavanger – Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences – Kajsa Åberg, Region Västerbotten – Janne Liburd, University of Southern Denmark

The Nordic countries are united by long common traditions, a similar culture and social system, and shared values, including a strong emphasis on sustainability and determined climate work. In addition, the unique natural environment of the Nordic region, ranging from both the Arctic and subarctic regions to verdant forests, serves as a unifying factor among all these countries.

Each Nordic country stands out as a unique destination with clean air, beautiful nature with four seasons, a good quality of life, and a strong commitment to sustainability. These factors give the Nordic countries a special status as a travel destination, and therefore safeguarding these conditions and preserving socio-cultural resources are essential for the future sustainability of Nordic tourism.

However, the climate and environmental conditions in the Nordic countries face climate change differently compared to regions such as southern Europe. In fact, the rate of climate change in the Nordic countries is four times faster than in other parts of the world.

As this book explores best practices in responsible tourism from a Nordic perspective, it is important to acknowledge the distinctiveness of each region of the Nordic countries. Comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, these nations not only showcase breathtaking natural landscapes but also thrive with robust tourism industries.

In August 2019, the Nordic prime ministers unveiled a vision to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region globally by 2030. This vision guides Nordic cooperation efforts towards creating climate-sustainable welfare states, and a roadmap to decarbonization and green investments. The pursuit of this goal centers on three priority areas: fostering a green Nordic region, enhancing a competitive Nordic region, and making a socially sustainable Nordic region. These priority areas are fundamentally important for successful tourism development throughout the region (Nordic Council of Ministers 2021). The following descriptions of the Nordic countries

reveal this shared commitment to fostering more sustainable and responsible tourism throughout the Nordic region.

Below we provide a brief overview of how these countries govern the complexities of tourism development. While the descriptions provide a general overview of each country, it is important to note that they may not address all aspects related to this topic. It is relevant to mention that each country has a different tourism governance structure. Despite these differences, tourism is typically managed by various administrative bodies within each country. These different approaches can make the management of tourism complex and challenging due to the involvement of multiple entities and stakeholders.

DENMARK

Denmark has a long history of actions and responsible measures contributing to sustainable development, ranging from environmental technologies and design to social equality and public private sector partnerships. Still, it is only more recent for the Danish tourism industry to engage in sustainability matters. Increasingly more organizations, including small and medium sized tourism businesses, choose to work with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and take on voluntary commitments to be more responsible. As will be demonstrated in the following, there is plenty of room for improvement.

Tourism in Denmark marked a new record in 2022 with 62.9 million overnight stays, representing an increase in 12.1 per cent from 2021. Tourism revenue amounted to approx. DKK 153 billion. Tourism is an important contribution to Danish exports, the national economy, and a significant factor in local development and the quality of life. On the back of travel restrictions caused by the global Corona virus pandemic, and Danes having resumed international travels, tourism in Denmark is characterised by growth optimism.

The COVID-19 crisis, and its damaging effects on the travel and leisure industries worldwide, also brought tourism growth and sustainability to the fore. This became particularly notable through a renewed focus on tourism as a possible contributor to societal sustainability, and from 2021, unprecedented attention and investment in sustainable tourism actions by the Danish government. In June 2022, the Danish government launched a new tourism strategy, which sets the direction for the development of Danish tourism towards 2030. Entitled the *National Strategy for Sustainable Growth in Danish Tourism* (2022), the strategy hinges on three benchmarks and nine indicators distributed across economic, environmental, and social sustainability. It is important to note that responsible tourism is not an explicit part of the Danish

national strategy. Exemplified below, responsible tourism appears in numerous variations of interpretation.

Defined primarily as an export industry, tourism is part of the Danish business promotion system in the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs. Since 2016, when the first national strategy for tourism in Denmark was launched, the National Tourism Forum (hereinafter NTF) has been charged to monitor and coordinate public tourism promotion efforts, and to ensure that tourism continues to contribute to sustainable growth and jobs in Denmark. Sustainable development was not addressed in Denmark's first national tourism strategy (2016), despite persistent arguments by the first tourism research member of the NTF. The Danish state has since expressed strong commitment to sustainable development overall, as seen in ambitious CO2 reduction targets and contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Tomej, 2022: 197).

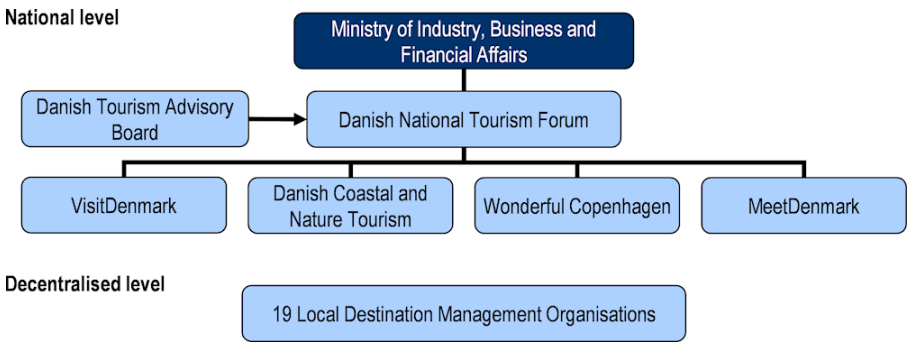

Figure 1. Organizational chart of tourism bodies in Denmark, 2022. (Source: OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs, 2022.)

The NTF is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs with appointed members from the tourism industry, municipalities, the largest public tourism promotion organizations, and one tourism researcher. The Danish Tourism Advisory Board assists the NTF. Three Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) oversee realising three prioritized business areas, namely coastal and nature tourism, meeting and business tourism, and urban tourism. The National Tourism Organisation (NTO), VisitDenmark, is responsible for international marketing.

The national tourism strategy towards 2030 hinges on the following three key elements:

1. Green and sustainable solutions with fewer environmental and climate impacts, which represent environmental sustainability.

2. More tourists with a higher spend in Denmark, representing economic sustainability.

3. Satisfied tourists, citizens, and employees, representing social sustainability.

Wonderful Copenhagen and Danish Nature and Coastal Tourism, and the Danish Outdoor Council (an NGO dedicated to promoting responsible outdoor recreation), worked together with the hotel and restaurant association, HORESTA, to augment HORESTA's well-established accommodation certification scheme, *Green Key*. The new eco-label certification scheme, entitled *Green Tourism Organisations*, includes the SDGs and the UN Global Compact as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility criteria. Rather curiously, in 2023, the DMO, Wonderful Copenhagen, proposed that references to sustainability should be replaced by the term 'green', and thus exclude a more holistic approach to sustainability, including social responsibility.

From a green certification scheme sanctioned by the Danish Nature and Coastal Tourism DMO and the Danish Outdoor Council, one would expect significant attention paid to nature. Yet, the 'Outdoor' and 'Nature' criteria of the *Green Tourism Organisations* certification scheme simply include omission of chemical fertilizers; artificial water systems used only at night; bike rental options; and information provision about nearby nature, if relevant. In parenthesis, event organisations are excluded from the latter. Another 'Outdoor' criterion is that organisations must adhere to nature and heritage protection laws when refurbishing or maintaining facilities. How legal compliance can be a 'green' certification criterion is not disclosed. Suffice to conclude that the new, national Green Tourism Organization certification system has been widely adopted, including in one of Denmark's five National Parks.

Whilst conceptual confusion is characterised by the interchangeable use of green, responsible, eco-friendly, sustainable, etc., the green tourism growth agenda prevails in Denmark. More tourists with a higher daily spend, who may

be engaged in active outdoor activities all year have captured the strategic priorities of the Danish Government and the public sector activities.

At the same time, higher education tourism programmes are closing across the country due to overall university budget cuts. From September 2024, only Aalborg University offers a master's degree in tourism at the main campus. The branch in Copenhagen was closed in 2021. The University of Southern Denmark (SDU) has closed both tourism programmes framed by sustainable tourism development, including SDU's only Erasmus Mundus accredited joint degree programme. The tourism manager programme at Roskilde University is closed, and Copenhagen Business School has converted its master's programme to a 1-year master's. Tourism researchers warn against a future lack of competitiveness without tourism graduates specialised in sustainability, innovation, and collaborative skills (Kofoed, 2024). Perhaps they are not needed, if green growth is the only shortsighted measure of success?

FINLAND

Finland is the country richest in waters and one of the richest in islands in Europe. Every Finnish municipality has waters, and altogether there are 188,000 lakes. Nature, including the lakes, are seen as a very important asset for tourism and for Finnish cultural history. "*Achieving more together – sustainable growth and renewal in Finnish tourism*" is the name of Finland's national tourism strategy for 2019–2028. Finland has a vision as the most sustainably growing tourist destination in the Nordic countries.

In 2018–2019, foreign tourism demand increased by an average of 8 percent a year. Over the same period, domestic tourism grew by 3 percent annually. In 2019 The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö) tourism was accounted for 2.7 per cent of Finland's GDP and reached the highest number of international arrivals ever (7 million). Now following the strategy, "the key objective is to double tourism exports. Cooperation plays a major role, as the name of the strategy indicates" (TEM, 2019). There are four key priorities that will enable sustainable growth and renewal of the tourism sector:

- supporting activities that foster sustainable development,
- responding to digital change,
- improving accessibility to the tourism sector's needs, and
- ensuring an operating environment that supports competitiveness.

Since Finland is considered as a niche tourism destination and tourists are seeking peaceful, nature-oriented experiences in Finland; preserving nature and its unique features is essential. Finland is home to 41 government-led national parks, covering 2.7 % of country's land area. Entry fees are prohibited by law, ensuring accessibility for all visitors. The number of visitors to natural parks has increased steadily within 20th century; from 3.2 M in 2018 to 8.5 M in 2021 (for example. Balmford et al. 2009, Siikamäki et all. 2015). Additionally, during COVID-19, natural parks gained a lot of domestic tourists with a 23% increase in one year. As a result, this gave rise to challenges in managing tourists flows and overcrowding, conflicts with the local community, and pressure on sensitive nature emerged as prominent concerns (visitor management in National Parks, 2019).

In the chart it is shown how tourism bodies are organized in Finland. The National Tourism Organisation (NTO), Visit Finland, is responsible for international marketing actions. Finland is geographically divided into four tourism market regions: the Capital, Arctic, Lakeland, and Archipelago areas. The regional level administration is strongly involved with financial resource allocation. Tourism destinations are managed by each municipality that implement national tourism strategy and chooses activities on their strength basis.

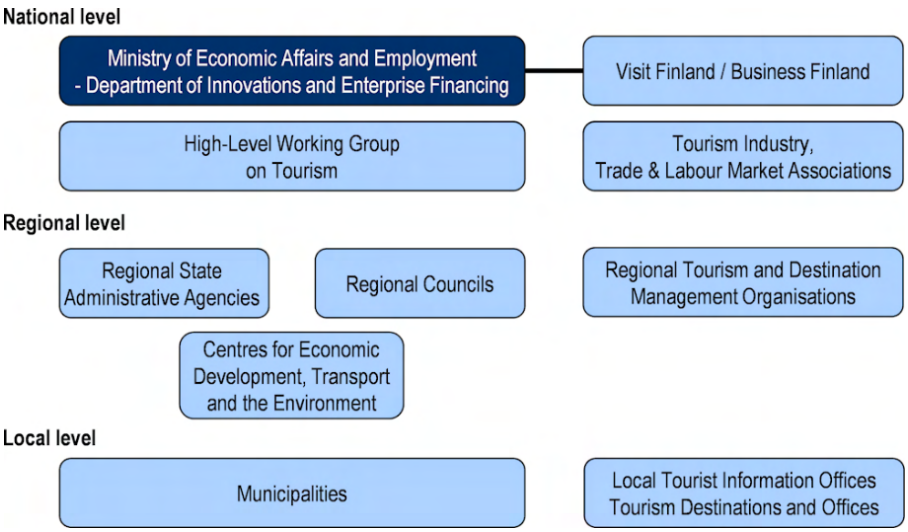

Figure 2. Organizational chart of tourism bodies in Finland (source: OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2022).

Furthermore, the vision is to become the foremost sustainable travel destination globally through a primary emphasis in adding value to Finnish society and customers while simultaneously safeguarding (taking care of) the unique environment (Visit Finland Strategy, 2021–2025). In order for the vision to come true, practical actions are needed. One of them is to work actively on environmental issues and to take climate actions. Visit Finland as the leading organization and 60 Finnish tourism organizations have signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. The aim is to become a ”holistically” sustainable travel destination, which is carbon neutral by 2035 (Visit Finland 2024).

One of the key actions in Finland has been the piloting, launching, and implementing the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) programme coordinated by Visit Finland as a Business Finland organization. This programme gathers professionals together, governs a knowledge platform, and announces new approved applicants annually. The programme aligns with global sustainable tourism standards, such as the Global Sustainable Travel Council (GSTC) and is designed for tourism companies and destinations in Finland to systematically adapt sustainable practices. To approach the STF label as a destination it requires over 50% of tourism enterprises to hold a label (Visit Finland 2024).

Companies and destinations that undergo the entire programme with seven steps on the path, are recognized with the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) label. The label is a definitive symbol of commitment towards sustainable practices and principles and is free of charge for the users. As one step, companies need to perform is to obtain a sustainability certificate. Limited financial and staffing resources were reasons why many Finnish tourism SMEs do not hold a sustainability certificate (Visit Finland, 2018), and therefore several development projects in different provinces aim to enhance companies in this matter.

When the STF programme was launched in 2020, altogether 942 companies and all the tourism destinations in Finland were implementing the programme. By 2023 five destinations and 365 companies have already received the label. According to a Visit Finland customer survey, 90% of the tourists consider Finland as a sustainable tourism destination (Visit Finland 2024).

Universities providing tourism education in Finland enhance sustainability issues in their curriculum in quite a broad way. University research on sustainable tourism in Finland comprehensively covers topics from the Arctic regions and sustainability to cultural sustainability issues. Educational institutions at the secondary school level are also aware of the needs of sustainable destination development, and teachers are already trained in basic understanding of sustainability in tourism. In Finland, there are two science Universities which

provide Masters and Doctors of Tourism. Several degree programmes organize applied scientific master's degrees. Degree programmes at the bachelor's level had been cut down a decade ago, but now they are available at ten (10) universities of applied sciences.

The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT Finland) network has an active role especially in sharing knowledge on responsible activities within tourism. ICRT Finland has organised two International conferences on Responsible Tourism in Destinations in 2016 and 2022. Additionally, information has been shared in meetings, workshops, and events. Furthermore, ICRT Finland annually organises programmes on responsible tourism at the Nordic MATKA Fair.

ICELAND

Tourism is a major pillar in Iceland's economy, and the country has in the twenty first century been transformed into a tourism destination. Tourism has become Iceland's biggest export industry and in 2022 the preliminary results of the Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs) indicated that tourism as a proportion of GDP was 7.8%. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism share of GDP was slightly higher or around 8.2%. Tourism as percentage of total employment is also high, or 8.3% in 2022 and went as high as 9.6% during the period 2016–2019 (Statistics Iceland, 2023). Tourism in Iceland is predominantly centred around foreign tourist's arrivals as the domestic population is rather small (around 388,000), compared to around 2 million international arrivals. Almost all tourists enter Iceland via Keflavik International Airport. The airport is located in proximity to the capital region, which has meant that the distribution of tourists around the country has been rather uneven, and the majority of the most popular tourism sites are in the South and the Southwest corner of Iceland. Iceland's natural environment is the country's main tourist's attraction; hence the management of natural areas has been a challenge in the circumstances of ever-increasing tourism.

The years between 2014 and 2018, foreign tourist's arrivals increased dramatically reaching a highpoint in 2018 when tourism arrivals increased by more than 40%. This resulted in Iceland often being associated with overtourism in the international media (Luebke, 2017; Mallonee, 2017) as well as in the domestic media where discussion focused on overcrowded places, nature being destroyed, and residents being fed up (Daðason, 2018; Sigurðsson, 2017). This initiated various actions and responses by the Icelandic tourism authorities. The development of tourism policy and the co-ordination of governmental bodies' work is the task of the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs (MCBA).

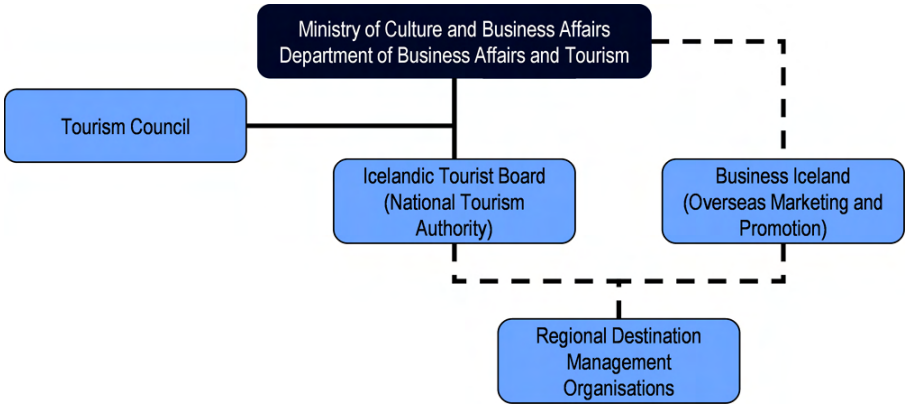

Figure 3. Organizational chart of tourism bodies in Iceland, 2022. (Source: OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs, 2022)

In 2014 the government and the Icelandic Travel Industry Association joined forces and devised a new Road Map for Tourism. Launched in 2015, the Road Map provided a long-term tourism strategy with an emphasis on sustainable development (Atvinnuvega- og nýsköpunarráðuneytið og Samtök ferðaþjónustunnar, 2015). The long-term vision was that the tourism industry would be a sustainable and profitable sector, yielding stable foreign exchange earnings for the economy and increasing the prosperity and the quality of life in Iceland by 2030. The Road Map identified seven focus areas that should guide the way: coordination, providing a positive visitor experience, reliable data, nature conservation, skills and quality, increased profitability, and a better distribution of tourists. To ensure speedy and coordinated efforts a high-level tourism task force was established. The task force, in operation 2015–2020, was composed of ministers responsible for tourism, finance, the environment, and interior in addition to representatives from the Icelandic Tourism Association and Icelandic Association of Local Authorities. The task force addressed the consequences of tourism on nature conservation, improved skills, and the quality of tourism services and provided a foundation for managing tourism development more effectively. The main goal of the Tourism Task Force was defined as:

…to ensure that the period between 2015–2020 is used to tackle the tasks required to lay the solid foundations that are needed in the Icelandic tourism industry. Its function is to coordinate measures and find solutions in collaboration with government administrations, municipalities, the support

framework for this sector throughout the country, the sector itself and other interested parties (Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs, n.d.).

The establishment of the tourism task force resulted in various programmes being launched to better manage the increased tourist numbers. The most prominent actions are the Tourist Attractions Investment Fund and the National Infrastructure Plan. Both focus on infrastructure development for the protection of nature and cultural heritage. In addition, work has been launched to put together what was called the Tourism Balance Sheet which is a measuring tool for regularly assessing the impact of tourism on the environment, infrastructure, society, and the country's economy. The project is based on a stress assessment of the number of tourists in Iceland, but to assess the situation, sustainability indicators were developed based on the tolerance limits of the environment, society, and the economy.

Most recently, the Ministry of Tourism launched a program labelled 'Varða – sites of merit' which aims to promote and facilitate an integrated approach to destination management (Menningar- ogviðskiptaráðuneytið, n.d.). The three main goals of the programme address the triple bottom line of sustainability: conservation of nature and culture, high quality service, and respect for residents. So far, only Þingvellir National Park has been awarded the Sites of Merit label.

Since 2014, the views of Icelanders towards tourists and the tourism industry have been measured regularly, both by national surveys and in individual communities. In general, the surveys indicate that Icelanders find it important to focus more on infrastructure development, better road systems, and environmental protection. Residents are predominantly positive towards tourists, and in general they feel that tourism has made their communities livelier and has led to increased service provisions (Helgadóttir et al, 2019).

Since its inception in 2015, the Icelandic Tourism Cluster has focused on promoting social responsibility and sustainability. The cluster is a project-based collaboration of different entities in the tourism value chain. One of the clusters' core projects is focussed on responsible tourism. The purpose of the incentive project is to maintain Iceland's status as an optimal future destination for tourists by supporting sustainability for future generations of the nation. Leaders from over 310 companies have now signed a declaration on Responsible Tourism in which they aim to demonstrate exemplary behavior and respect for nature, ensure the safety of guests and treat them courteously, respect the rights of employees, and have a positive impact on the local community.

A new Tourism Policy Framework 2020–30 was published in 2019 with the vision that Iceland will be a leading country in sustainable development for

tourism. The focus is on value creation, innovation, quality of life for locals, a unique visitor experience, environmental conservation, and a reduced carbon footprint (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Iceland's tourism policy vision until 2030 (Ferðamálastofa, n.d.).

Throughout the year 2023, extensive work on creating a detailed action plan was carried out under the auspice of the MCBA to ensure the progress of the tourism policy until 2030. It is assumed that the action plan will be updated every two years, until 2030, and simultaneously the progress of actions will be worked on creating defined measures until 2030 that cover the above four key pillars of the tourism policy.

NORWAY

The tourism industry in Norway plays a significant role in regional development and employment, contributing to 171,200 man-years in 2019, constituting 7.1% of total employment. According to calculations by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the industry's ripple effects extended to providing a total of 350,000 jobs. In terms of economic impact, total consumption reached NOK 193.9 billion, with preliminary figures from Statistics Norway (SSB) for

2019 indicating an export share of NOK 59 billion, consequently standing out as a significant export industry.

Pre-pandemic, Norway's tourism experienced robust growth from 2004 to 2019, with annual rates between 4–9%, except for 2007 and 2009. However, after the financial crisis, growth diverged due to the oil and gas sector and challenges such as a strong krone and the European economic crises affecting foreign markets. Despite challenges, foreign tourists returned, with strong growth in destinations focusing on nature-based activities, now also in rural areas. However, the increase in international tourism has brought new challenges, such as overcrowding in popular destinations and sustainability issues. This has led to negative media attention and a growing awareness that visitor management based on the community and nature's terms is essential for sustainable tourism growth. Additionally, the 2015 Paris Agreement and increased awareness of CO2 emissions has raised questions about the tourism industry's focus on distant markets like the USA, China, and other Asian countries (Jakobsen et al., 2021).

In terms of organisation, tourism development in Norway is primarily overseen by Innovation Norway, mandated by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries. (Visit Norway, 2022a). However, due to the industry's multifaceted nature, responsibilities are divided among various ministries. For instance, national parks and transportation are managed by the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the Ministry of Transport, respectively. Innovation Norway, a state-owned company, serves as the national tourism organization, with a primary focus on boosting economic growth and value creation for the Norwegian economy while adhering to sustainability goals (OECD, 2023).

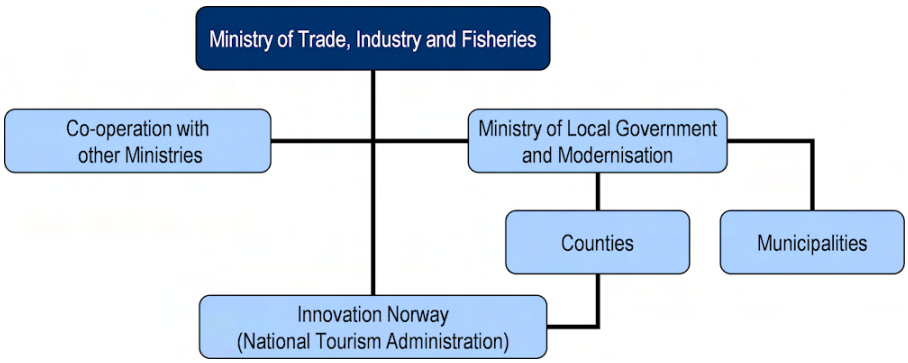

Figure 5. Organizational chart of tourism bodies in Norway, 2022 (source: OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, 2022).

As Norway moves forward, sustainability initiatives are taking place in all regions, county, and local authorities in Norway, as well as in numerous companies and organizations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are being incorporated into both national and international legislation, serving as a foundation for the tourism industry's sustainability activities, focusing explicitly on six specific goals (8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 17) (Innovation Norway). This is best shown in the work and commitment to various frameworks and certifications aiming at contributing to Norway's sustainable tourism development, in which both private and public entities are committed to working together towards a balanced system. Since 2015, Norway has led global efforts in sustainable tourism with its "Sustainable Destination Standard." This certification, taking about two years to complete, emphasizes collaborative planning, environmental support, and heritage preservation. In 2017, amid record tourist numbers, Norway launched the "Towards Sustainable Tourism" roadmap. This initiative aims to solidify Norway's position as a top destination for sustainable experiences by 2030, focusing on industry-government partnerships and resource conservation.

In addition, and as a response to the gaps in the Parliamentary White Paper on Norwegian tourism, an industry-led roadmap has emerged, aiming for Norway to be a top sustainable destination by 2030. Outlined industry and government strategies are all aligned with UN World Tourism Organization principles (see textbox).

Before the pandemic halted tourism in 2020, Norway experienced six years of growth, leading to optimism and collaboration between diverse stakeholders. However, challenges such as low profitability and recruitment issues arose. To address this, Innovation Norway developed the *"Big Impact, Small Footprint"* initiative, a national tourism strategy commissioned by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Fisheries. Introduced in April 2021, the strategy aims to make tourism more sustainable and profitable by 2030, aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly numbers 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 17.

The national tourism strategy, published in May 2021, highlights five key areas crucial for Norway's tourism development by 2030:

- Smart Digitalization (tourism's digital ecosystem, including an open data platform as the basis for radical innovation)
- Green Transition (tourism's green transport plan—with low emissions as a premise towards 2030)
- Services & Technology (how technology can address productivity challenges in tourism)

- Increased Value Addition/Creation (competitiveness through high quality and customer value)
- Valuable Jobs (tourism must compete for the best workforce)

Building on the national tourism strategy, the work of the NOU (Official Norwegian Report) on visitor management was released in 2023 and provides a comprehensive framework for addressing challenges arising from high visitor volumes and which emphasized the need for sustainable practices. This advocates for future destinations in Norway to be part of the *solution* to sustainability challenges, focussing on how tourism can contribute to protecting and rebuilding local ecosystems while enhancing community resilience. The committee proposes a new model for organizing sustainable destinations in Norway which consists of several elements.

In addition, and to prioritize research and innovation efforts towards these goals, the government established ”Tourism 2030” to provide suggestions. A strategy is underway, proposing focal points within current funding frameworks. This group, operating as of 2023, have adopted an inclusive and transparent process, seeking input from various stakeholders, including the public. Its recommendations will be consolidated into a report to be presented to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Fisheries in June, 2024.

Norway consistently demonstrates its commitment to advancing responsible tourism practices through various national initiatives. These efforts, such as the development of a national tourism strategy and the NOU report, underscore Norway’s determination to balance economic growth with environmental preservation, aligning with global standards set by organizations like the UNWTO. The recent membership acceptance into the Union of International Mountain Leaders Associations (UIMLA) via the Norwegian Nature Guide Association further highlights Norway’s dedication to sustainable nature-based tourism. This milestone not only simplifies and regulates guided services but also promotes safe and memorable adventures with certified guides, enhancing the overall quality of tourist experiences. Through collaborative approaches and innovative models like the ”Sustainable Destination” framework, Norway continues to address challenges posed by tourism while ensuring benefits for local communities and preserving its natural heritage. These ongoing efforts reinforce Norway’s position as a global leader in responsible tourism and exemplify its commitment to taking responsibility for sustainable tourism development.

SWEDEN

In Sweden, tourism development has a history of being addressed by the public sector as a tool for strategic purposes on the national as well as other geographical and administrative levels. This view on potential societal effects can be traced back to the decades surrounding the turn of the 20th century, when wealthy travellers from the southern parts of the country visited the mountainous areas in northern Sweden and expressed the outstanding effects they experienced on their health — mental as well as physical. Their stories of a wilderness untouched by civilization but increasingly accessible thanks to the expansion of extractive industries in forestry and mining spread among more well-off groups in Sweden as well as abroad. Of course, this storytelling was a construct that totally ignored the fact that the area had been inhabited for several thousands of years by the Sámi population — an aspect that is still relevant in discussions on attraction and extraction in tourism terms today.

The use of nature to increase the general well-being of the population turned into an explicit strategy in the 20th century with the introduction of the concept of paid vacations in 1938. To steer the vacationing population towards activities that were thought to benefit public health, the Swedish government established tourism information offices and subsidized the building of recreational facilities. By the end of the century, the phenomena of tourism had become an integrated, commercialized aspect of the Swedish society and public intervention was primarily related to perceived potential in economic terms rather than to common health. One hundred years after pioneering British aristocrats hiked the mountains, tourism was thus found within regional development strategies in all parts of the country. However, examples from other countries with a longer history of tourism development have presented benefits as well as less successful processes in terms of ecology, socio-economy, and culture. The initial advocacy has thus been paired with a more cautionary attitude that promotes addressing local preconditions and adapting development plans in accordance with a universal understanding of sustainability. This development of strategies is mirrored in the theoretical model of tourism knowledge presented by Jafari, which also leads to a more multi-faceted and knowledge-based standpoint (Jafari, 2001; Åberg, 2020).

In economic terms, Swedish tourism has long been characterized by a negative net export, meaning that Swedes consume more abroad than international visitors do in Sweden (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2022). In terms of jobs, an estimated 2.9% can be traced

to the tourism industry, meaning that almost 110,000 Swedes earn their living from tourism and a contribution to GDP of 1.9%. Sweden is located relatively far from major populations and suffers from being a high-cost destination with relatively less appreciated weather conditions. The more peripheral location in terms of unique and large-scale attractions has not helped overcome the so called 'tyranny of distance', as discussed by Koster and Carson (2019). Instead, domestic and neighbouring visitors have dominated together with the strong and increasingly noticeable effects of second home users in Scandinavia. Of course, tourism hot spots such as the Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi and urban centres in the southern half of the country attract international markets and dominate the industry in terms of numbers, guests, and jobs created. The export incomes created by incoming consumers is also a strong incentive for tourism development and although Sweden does not have any public organization or ministry designated for tourism, Visit Sweden is governmentally funded to promote Sweden as a destination for international markets (Figure 6). The organization works closely together with The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and partners up with the regionally governed tourism organizations in activities and projects aiming at strengthening specific areas of production and sales.

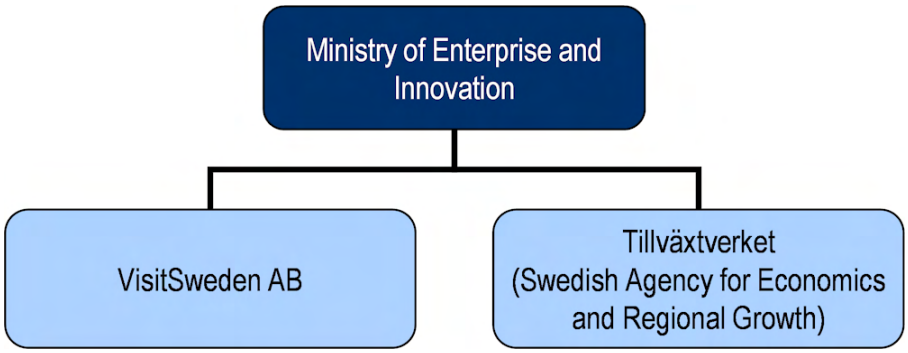

Figure 6. Organizational chart of tourism bodies in Sweden, 2022 (source: OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2022).

Similarly to the fellow Nordic countries, there is a national strategic aim related to sustainability in Sweden, presented in 2021 by the Ministry of Climate and Enterprise: by 2030, Sweden will be one of the most attractive and sustainable destinations in the world. Prior to this, Visit Sweden and the national tourism

trade association Svensk Turism had presented their vision to be the most sustainable destination in the world by 2040. Both initiatives have led to further focus on initiatives related to sustainability, but no national strategy has identified a common process such as a nationwide certification. Instead, a plethora of available programmes can be found mapped by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth in 2019, who determined there to be 42 established tools for enhancing sustainability in tourism available in Sweden (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2019). All public actors are however obliged to act in accordance with the Global Development Goals, and all publicly financed initiatives need to be aligned with the UN-based understanding of sustainability in all its aspects.

Initiatives are being developed and put into action by collaborations based on thematic associations such as the National Association for Nature-Based Firms (Naturturismföretagen), and geography such as the Association of Tourism Businesses on Gotland (Gotlands förenade Besöksnäring). Both mentioned examples use the criteria system developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as a starting point. This is also the case of the regional public sector actor in Västerbotten described as a case in this book. Due to the strong appreciation by private and public actors in Sweden, GSTC decided to perform the 2024 annual summit in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, with Visit Sweden and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth as arranging partners.

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Theme 1

Competence development and the role of the individual in Responsible Tourism

The first part of the book focuses on the individual's role within social responsibility. These chapters demonstrate how the application of theories from diverse contexts enhances the development work in responsible tourism. Within the tourism industry, ensuring accessibility for all is a fundamental aspect of acting in a socially responsible manner. Important aspect of social responsibility is education and well-being in human resources management.

QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR PERSONS TRAVELLING WITH A DISABILITY

Helene Maristuen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences & Åsa Grahn, University of Stavanger

INTRODUCTION

Exploring the realm of responsible tourism, this chapter investigates the critical question of providing quality tourism experiences for individuals traveling with disabilities, known as accessible tourism. As defined by the Directorate for Children, Youth, and Families in Norway (Bufdir, 2021), persons with disabilities (PwD) encompasses a diverse group facing various challenges. Bufdir defines PwD as someone experiencing: "*loss of, damage to, or deviation in a body part or in one of the body's psychological or biological functions*" and suggests categorizing this segment into five main categories, including persons with reduced vision, mobility, and hearing, as well as those with developmental and psychosocial functional reductions. It is essential to recognize that reduced function is not inherent to an individual's identity but rather a characteristic they possess (Bufdir, n.d.).

Through initiatives such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified in 2013) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community has underscored the importance of inclusivity and ***"leaving no one behind".*** However, despite these global imperatives, practical implementation often falls short, necessitating targeted efforts and measures. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2017) highlights the potential benefits for businesses that embrace responsible tourism practices, including enhanced efficiency, cost reductions, and strengthened social responsibility profiles. Targeting efforts and measures directly at the most vulnerable people, calls for a more responsible approach to tourism development. Against this backdrop, ***this chapter aims to elucidate the nuances of providing quality experiences for individuals traveling with disabilities***. The central objective is to suggest how to reduce constraints and barriers faced by stakeholders in providing accessible experiences and to encourage the systematic use of the proposed framework of experience quality assessment developed by Eide and Mossberg (2019, p. 106).

FOUNDATIONS OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: FOCUS ON ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Goodwin (2023) outlines seven principles of *responsible tourism*, with a particular emphasis on the importance of ensuring access for people with disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. He argues that responsible tourism goes beyond its rhetoric of sustainability, which can be interpreted as a broad and vague concept. Instead, he underscores the importance of tangible actions and responsibility as driving forces for sustainability. According to Goodwin (2023), responsible tourism is all about positive actions to make tourism better where transparency is an additional key aspect to asserting that businesses and managers should be questioned about their implemented measures. Failure to provide concrete examples could be indicative of greenwashing (the deceptive practice of falsely presenting an environmentally responsible image).

Jacobsen & Viken (2014, p. 235) align the term responsible tourism closely with sustainable tourism, encompassing nature, culture, cultural heritage, and society. They point out that the term implies a *shared responsibility* involving government, the tourism industry, and tourists alike. This perspective reinforces the idea that responsible tourism necessitates active involvement and commitment from various stakeholders to address the multifaceted challenges associated with sustainability.

A crucial aspect of responsible tourism is providing access to tourism experiences for persons travelling with a disability. This entails accessible accommodation, transportation, attractions, and facilities designed to accommodate diverse disabilities, including mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that about 1.3 billion of us or 16% of the population live with a significant form of disability and these numbers will increase dramatically due to demographic changes and chronic health conditions.

Activities, attractions, and experiences are the main components of a destination and are often referred to as the pull-factor (Dann, 1977). Developing experiences for persons with disabilities (PwD) will enhance the pull-factor for potential destinations, businesses, and experiences. On the other hand, for PwDs, travel serves as a means of escape, fostering independence, confidence, and able people (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011). The latter may be referred to as the push–factor, providing motivation to travel. According to the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (2023) accessibility for PwD means the possibility of using the physical environment, transportation,

technology, communication-information system, and other facilities and services on equal terms with others. Kolodziejczak (2019, p. 67) points out that tourism should be perceived in systemic terms, i.e., it should be provided with universal accessibility considering all its elements such as the transport system, tourist and para tourist infrastructure, as well as tourist attractions and information. Access to tourist information should be a crucial factor in determining a disabled person's decision about travelling and providers of touristic experiences should pay attention to the fact that it is not so easy for a person with a disability to change his/her course of travel as they are less flexible due to their disability. Reindrawati et al. (2022, p. 3) point out that the needs of people with disabilities have traditionally not been given much attention from the tourist industry. Some destinations and attractions do not provide the necessary services or facilities for people with disabilities. Therefore, people with disabilities are one of the groups in society that experiences marginalization from the tourism sector.

EXPERIENCE QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Given that tourists make decisions and take actions based on their perceptions, it is crucial for stakeholders within the tourism industry to try to comprehend and understand tourists' expectations. This understanding is imperative to provide high-quality services that align with the evolving needs and preferences of tourists. Experience quality originates from service quality, which has been extensively researched to understand its nature, measurement, and facilitation. Arnold & Prize (p.26, 1993) highlight the significant insights regarding service delivery drawn from the services literature, including works by Bitner (1990, 1992), Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990), Czepiel et al. (1985) and McCallum and Harrison (1985). They underscore that the service quality literature has primarily first and foremost focused on technical and functional elements, as demonstrated by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988). Central to this research are concepts such as customer expectations and satisfaction, with a key dimension being the evaluation of outcomes by customers, especially in functional services such as banking and insurance. However, should service quality concepts persist in experience contexts such as tourism, Eide and Mossberg (2019) indicate that challenges may arise, especially when evaluating and managing quality of experience-based industries, which differ from other more functional services. Significant disparities between functional services and experience-based products are evident in various aspects, including expectations, personal involvement,

customer motivation, and environmental factors (Eide & Mossberg, 2019; Eide, 2020).

To build on this, Eide and Mossberg (2019, p. 106) propose a framework for assessing the quality of cultural tourism experiences by integrating important dimensions (see Figure 1 for a concise overview of the varied quality aspects within each dimension). These dimensions, outlined as *experiencescapes*, *customer interactions, storytelling, and dramaturgy* (2019, p. 104), offer a comprehensive perspective on the diverse aspects of quality within the experience product. Additionally, they emphasize the significance of evaluating the customer journey from both the customer's and the company's viewpoints, encompassing activities and experiences throughout the entire process (pre, during and post) of production and consumption (Mossberg 2015; Pedersen 2015). The framework focuses on the entirety of the experience's "production process" from start to finish, what where and when, and possible x-factors. Customer journey tools are used in both service and experience design, with slightly different focuses but for both types of designs it is equally important to align with the customers desires to increase quality throughout the customer journey. For tourism experience design the focus is more on emotional and experiential actions (Pedersen 2015).

The following model by Eide & Mossberg (2019) is presented in Figure 1 and provides a concise overview of the different quality aspects within each dimension.

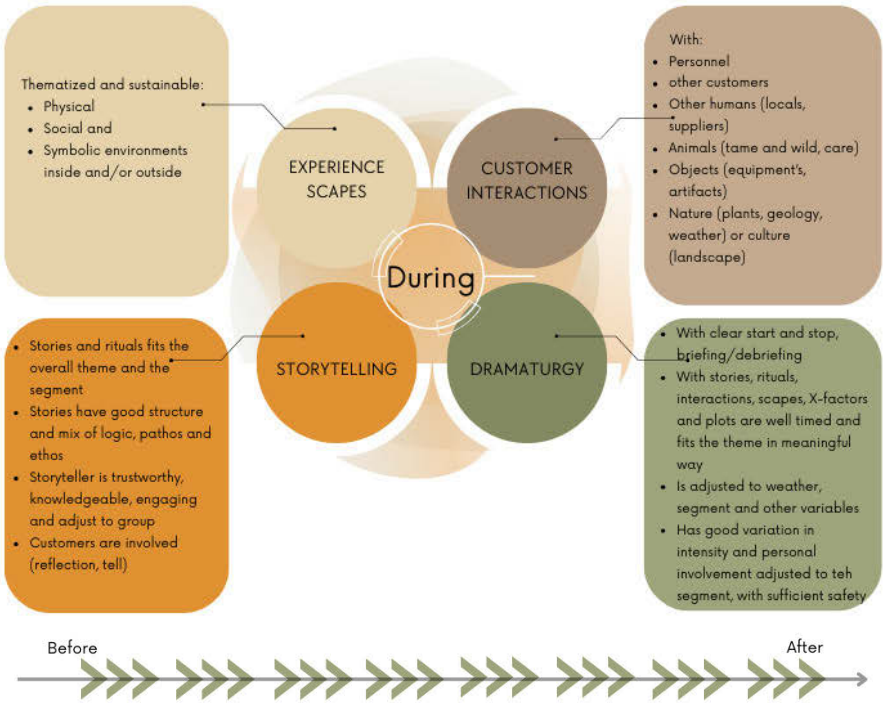

Figure 1. Model of experience quality assessment by Eide & Mossberg (2019)

The framework emphasizes the practical realization that contextual elements, including the setting, producer, and customers, shape the structure and implementation of its dimensions, thereby giving rise to local variations (Eide & Mossberg, 2019, p. 108). While the authors assert the significance of the four dimensions and the ”customer journey logic” in evaluating the quality of experience, they emphasize that advocating for a standardized application is not their intention. They underscore the subjective nature of experiences, highlighting that everyone will perceive and undergo them differently.

Related to PwD, some authors point out (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2010) the complexity of facilitating the PwD-segment because, i.e., people with cerebral palsy may have needs at different levels, i.e., some may need a wheelchair or crutches, while others may require communication tools to talk. This implies that a person with such characteristics requires an accessible physical environment, along with technology and social guidelines, in contrast to someone with reduced hearing, who does not

share the same needs and therefore requires less facilitation. The same was found in a study by Kusufa et al. (2022), emphasizing that different types of disabilities entail distinct and specific needs. However, researchers state that understanding disability in the context of tourism requires knowledge of four key dimensions: types or categories of disability, levels of support needs, access enablers, and universal design (Small & Darcy, 2010). These dimensions are interconnected and form the foundation of accessible tourism. In their study, Small and Darcy (2010) highlight the complex interplay between individuals, their environment, and the tourism context, illustrating how people with disabilities can face exclusion and marginalization due to structural constraints. While much research has focused on physical disabilities requiring mobility access, accessible tourism is recognized as more intricate. Factors such as impairment, independence, support needs, and aids significantly influence the travel likelihood and frequency and an understanding of all this is essential for enhancing the tourist experiences of individuals with disabilities. Referring to Kolodziejczak (2019, p. 69) and Skalska (2011), they both suggest that information should be accessible to the widest possible audience, presented in concise fragments, allowing recipients to decide when to access it. However, Reindrawati et al., (2022, p. 1) highlight the complexity of the term ”disability” and refer to the definitions as persons with intellectual, sensory, and/or mental impairments that can hinder overall participation in society on an equal basis with other member of the population. Barriers may be of various physical factors, i.e., inaccessibility for wheelchairs, difficulty of reading signs and other interpretative information. Darcy & Dickson (2009) refer to the definition of the available experiences at the destination level, and the decisive factor in the ”sense of place” is that the experience suppliers facilitate accessible experiences. They also refer to the fact that people travelling with a disability are left to find their own experiences with insufficient information from both the government and the tourist industry. Tecau et al., (2019) found that attitude, physical barriers, and lack of information were barriers for families with children with reduced functional ability. Being self-sufficient in travel and the feeling of being independent is something that motivates PwDs to travel and the feeling of not being a burden (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2019, p. 5).

Reindrawati, Noviyandi and Young (2022) found that when PwDs were travelling with someone it made them feel more confident. In a study by Cloquet et al. (2017, p. 223) it was pointed out that some of the barriers for PwDs were that they did not feel welcome at well-known and popular tourist attractions.

THE CASE

The objective of this case study is to illustrate how tourism attractions and activity companies can employ the multidimensional framework developed by Eide and Mossberg (2019) to provide high-quality experiences for persons with a disability. This case underscores a fundamental principle that disability should not by nature reduce an individual's participation in the community, daily life, or travel. This notion is rooted in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, indicating that everyone, irrespective of their abilities, has the right to engage in enriching experiences. The significance of this case lies in its commitment to challenging societal norms and advocating for inclusivity in tourism. Recognizing the universal importance of quality experiences, this case emphasizes the imperative for tourism businesses to strive for excellence, ensuring that such enriching quality experiences are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. This study therefore aims to answer the following case problem question: ***What specific measures do attractions and activity companies employ within the multidimensional framework to accommodate persons with disabilities?***

The study will utilize the multidimensional framework proposed by Eide and Mossberg (2019) to assess its applicability and integration across various stakeholders in the tourism sector. The aim is to aggregate outcomes across each dimension, providing valuable insights for enhancing the quality of experiences for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and promoting responsible tourism practices. Additionally, the study aims to present and analyze the findings to develop a potential best-practice framework, enabling future tourism stakeholders to learn and adopt responsible practices. This will provide significant value to the tourism industry in facilitating and developing quality experiences for PwDs and thereby advancing responsible tourism practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in orientation and required the use of non-probability sampling methods in the selection of the respondents. Consequently, a purposive sampling method was used to select respondents for the study based on their ability to provide significant knowledge and information on the issue under study (Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2011).

The study applied semi-structured interviews of six random tourist businesses (experience and activity suppliers and accommodation businesses) in a touristic region of Norway. The region is a typical tourism destination in

Western Norway with high mountains and a fjord landscape. We excluded the two accommodation businesses because in this study we chose to identify best practices within experience activity businesses.

The four respondents from experience and activity businesses were from the same destination company but were located in different municipalities. Then respondents were all general managers and the size of the businesses varied from two to thirty employees.

TABLE 1. Background variables of respondents

Respondents	Number employees	Experience room	Type of experience
Respondent 1	2	Natural attraction	Adventure related
Respondent 2	30	Human-made attraction	Culture and nature related
Respondent 3	4	Human-made and built attraction	Culture related
Respondent 4	16	Natural attraction	Adventure related

A partially detailed interview guide was prepared in advance and questions were formed to give input to our testing of the different dimensions in the quality framework and to map different concrete measures. The advantage of this method is that the interviews are easier to analyze because the same questions are covered but at the same time the approach is more flexible than conducting structured interviews as there is an opportunity to follow up with other questions. The questions in the interview guide were formulated according to the five main subcategories of people with a disability (Bufdir, n.d.). The data collection was carried out as a telephone interview and each interview was recorded to ensure no information was lost. Each interview was then transcribed and analyzed, and the responses were coded to reduce and group the information. Supplementary questions were then administrated via e-mail and telephone calls in the second round of data collection.

FINDINGS AND CASE DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we briefly present the results, organized within each dimension of the experience quality assessment framework by Eide and Mossberg (2019) (Eide, 2020). Our aim is to evaluate the framework and provide a comprehensive

understanding of how experience and activity businesses accommodate PwDs, if they do. The objective is to present aggregated results, to create a best-practice case, offering valuable insights for future stakeholders in the field committed to making a difference for PwDs and ensuring responsible tourism development.

BEFORE THE JOURNEY

As a preliminary step in the **before the journey stage,** we recommend *defining* the targeted sub-segment of PwDs and to utilize the multidimensional framework, as demonstrated in the findings presented in Figure 2 (page 15), for information and inspiration. When defining whom to target, it may depend on the attraction itself and, i.e., the setting of the experiencescape. For instance, if accommodating persons with mobility reductions such as those using wheelchairs poses challenges, it might be better to start to facilitate for persons with reduced vision or hearing. The findings underscore that businesses with a distinct vision and a commitment to facilitating experiences for PwDs as part of their values often set a best-case example. These businesses not only customize their marketing strategies to the targeted segment, but also engage in direct communication through e-mails, pre-testing their experiences for PwDs, showcasing a proactive and inclusive approach. This may be very useful and may give valuable input and feedback to their experience production and thus provide the potential for adjusting various practices. Tecau et al., (2019) identified attitude, physical barriers, and lack of information as barriers for families with children with reduced functional ability. Their study revealed solutions such as the use of VR technology in the planning phase (*before stage*). Tecau et al. (2019) underscored the benefit that potential visitors can gain from familiarizing themselves with travel-related aspects such as queues, transportation modes, and the destination itself. This familiarity helps alleviate stress factors stemming from the unfamiliar. The integration of VR technology into the pre-testing phase could prove to be a valuable addition. Among the four respondents, one highlighted positive responses and pre-journey measures for PwDs. This respondent emphasized the implementation of a targeted marketing strategy specifically designed for this segment. The approach involved direct engagement with PwDs through targeted emails, incorporating images featuring persons with various disabilities. Additionally, the respondent conducted product testing across diverse segments, including persons with Down Syndrome, Autism and MS Syndrome. Accommodating this segment was described

as an integral phase aligned with their organizational values and future vision. In contrast, none of the other respondents described initiatives or evidence of product testing or other targeted efforts directed toward this segment. Only one respondent had conducted a single test, and there was no information specifically addressing PwDs available on any of the four respondent's websites.

EXPERIENCESCAPES

The concept of experiencescapes revolves around consumers' perceptions of their surroundings, which encompasses the physical, social, and symbolic environment where experiences are consumed (Eide, 2020). When examining this dimension, certain measures emerge as challenging to implement, such as installing a lift, which may pose financial constraints for some tourism businesses. However, simpler adjustments like creating dedicated parking spots for PwDs should be feasible for most businesses and require fewer resources. Another obstacle arises when cultural heritage attractions are subject to regulatory constraints, limiting physical access. In such cases, it becomes crucial to highlight alternative possibilities. For example, attractions may possess other sensory attributes that cater better to specific sub-groups within the PwD community. A stave church, for instance, emits a distinct smell of tar, which could be particularly appealing to individuals with vision impairments.

One respondent specifically referred to the fjord landscape and high mountains as the main experiencescape. In contrast, two other respondents focused primarily on their human-made attraction experiences surrounded by mountain landscapes. However, both acknowledged physical barriers to entry, involving either steps or high door thresholds, making independent access to these activities challenging. While one of the attractions provided two designated spots for wheelchairs, it was evident that both attractions remain inaccessible without assistance. In contrast, the last respondent, representing the natural attraction category with a primary experiencescape in fjord landscapes had taken measures to ensure wheelchair accessibility by providing a dedicated lift. Notably, none of the four respondents had designated parking areas for PwDs, although two of them mentioned a flat parking area.

CUSTOMER INTERACTION

In examining the dimension of ***customer interaction***, it extends beyond mere engagement between the service provider and guests to encompass interactions between the guests themselves, other customers, the local population, animals, objects, and thoughtful reflections (Eide, 2020).

Our study revealed instances of personalized interactions, such as providing free entry for assistants, and offering support for travellers with disabilities, all contributing to fostering their sense of independence. This aligns with the findings by Reindrawati, Noviyandi, and Young (2022), who discovered that individuals with disabilities feel more assured when accompanied by companions. Particularly noteworthy is one respondent's comprehensive approach, which includes welcoming gestures, providing guidance, addressing safety concerns, and attending to health inquiries. This respondent sets an exemplary standard, demonstrating practices rooted in genuine care and serving as a model of best practice within the industry.

Moreover, it is crucial to underscore the significance of co-creation in contemporary experiences. Pedersen (2012, p. 66) emphasizes the importance of facilitating co-creation between producers and consumers to meet people's emotional needs during experiences. Eide (2020, p. 131) also highlights the role of assistance in mentally engaging guests and enhancing their presence. Our second finding regarding customer interaction underscores the value of tailored experiences and sensory engagement, exemplifying another best-case scenario where PwDs feel genuinely welcomed. Cloquet et al. (2017, p. 223) highlight that some PwDs encounter barriers to feeling welcomed at prominent tourist attractions. Therefore, customizing experiences, as demonstrated in our first dimension, becomes imperative to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all individuals.

Another noteworthy example within this dimension is exemplified by a respondent who demonstrated a steadfast dedication to personalized interaction for PwDs by providing tailored guidance and allocating one staff member per individual. This respondent emphasized the intrinsic symbolic values of sustainability intertwined with nature, while also offering tailored experiences specifically designed to accommodate individuals with reduced vision and mobility. In addition, they provided sensory-rich experiences encompassing sight, touch, smell, and hearing, while equipping staff members with apps to monitor insulin levels for those with diabetes. Creative solutions were implemented to accommodate individuals with reduced mobility,

alongside inclusive measures such as welcoming gestures, safety instructions, and addressing health concerns.

Another respondent opted to provide free entry for assistants and additional staff support if needed. They have incorporated specialized screens featuring pictograms and contrasting colours for persons with reduced vision, complemented by audio guides for those with hearing impairments. Notably, extensive training was provided to their staff to adeptly manage unique situations related to PwDs.

The third respondent extended assistance to persons with reduced mobility and offered private guides. The same business also aimed to facilitate and develop experiences specifically tailored for persons with reduced vision. Lastly, one respondent suggested that persons with reduced hearing could bring an assistant for sign language interpretation, further enriching the dimension of customer interaction.

STORYTELLING

In exploring the dimension of ***storytelling***, Eide (2020, p. 131) delineates key indicators such as the content of stories, adaptations to guests, and interactive elements such as inviting dialogue and encouraging guests to share their narratives. Emphasis is placed on the effective use of sounds, emotions, and relevant objects to enhance the storytelling experience. Our study findings demonstrate the significance of tailoring storytelling approaches to accommodate PwDs, with flexible guiding and dialogue emerging as exemplary practices. However, it is crucial to meet specific criteria, such as using appropriate tools for communication, such as sign language for individuals with hearing impairments.

Diverse approaches to the dimension of storytelling for PwDs were apparent among the respondents. One respondent referred to their ability to adjust storytelling to meet the needs of PwDs, providing dialogue and personalized experiences based on individual requirements. In contrast, another respondent opted for standardized storytelling, providing audio guides available in 15 languages. However, this respondent underscored their efforts to cater to individuals with reduced vision by offering interpretation using pictograms and colour contrasts. Two other respondents relied on live guides for storytelling, albeit without specifying measures tailored for individuals with reduced vision or hearing in these scenarios.

DRAMATURGY

The dimension of dramaturgy, as outlined by Eide (2020, p. 132), encompasses various criteria such as clear structure, seamless transitions, customer engagement, adaptation to segments, and the creation of memorable experiences. This dimension is crucial in ensuring a cohesive and effective guest experience journey. Additionally, the inclusion of an X-factor, representing unexpected delights or positive surprises, further enhances the overall experience. Our study revealed a spectrum of approaches to dramaturgy in the context of catering to persons with disabilities (PwDs). One notable approach observed among respondents was the implementation of reverse dramaturgy, wherein customers were actively involved in the storytelling process. This innovative approach not only encouraged customer participation but also tailored the experience to empower PwDs, fostering a sense of inclusion and ownership in the activity. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all businesses may have the capacity to adopt such a customized approach, as it may be constrained by factors such as size, scope, and financial resources. While not all businesses may have the capacity to offer this level of customization, the use of technology has been suggested (Tecau et al.,2019). The integration of technology, as suggested by Tecau et al. (2019), holds promise in enhancing dramaturgy and the overall customer experience. For example, leveraging VR technology throughout various stages of the journey, particularly in dramaturgy, could provide significant opportunities for tourist businesses, and can potentially serve as an X-factor in the guest experience.

When exploring the dimension of dramaturgy for PwDs specifically, insights from the respondents shed light on various approaches and challenges. One respondent highlighted their commitment to seamlessly integrating PwDs into the overall guest experience, ensuring they feel empowered and included alongside other guests. Notably, this respondent adopted a unique reversed dramaturgy approach by allowing PwDs to actively share their stories as part of the overall experience. Another respondent referred to maintaining a consistent dramaturgy approach for all guests, regardless of disability, yet acknowledged physical barriers present at natural attractions, posing challenges for individuals with reduced mobility unless provided with assistance. The last two respondents employed live guiding methods, focusing primarily on visual highlights, with limited specific measures for persons with reduced vision. However, the final respondent offered the option of providing a sign language assistant for those with visual impairments. Overall, the exploration of dramaturgy in the context of PwDs highlights the importance of

tailored approaches and innovative solutions to ensure inclusivity and enhance the overall guest experience. While challenges may exist, the integration of technology and thoughtful consideration of diverse needs present opportunities for continuous improvement in the tourism industry.

AFTER THE JOURNEY

The final dimension, referred to as "***After the journey"*** emphasizes the importance of proactive (continued) engagement with visitors post-visit. Eide (2020, p. 129) advocates for proactive measures such as actively seeking feedback, sharing pictures, newsletters, and utilizing social media platforms. In line with this recommendation, our study highlights a best practice exemplary case where businesses consistently send post-visit pictures to guests and actively request their feedback. This practice not only aligns with the suggestions put forward by Reindrawati, Noviyandi, and Young (2022) to involve persons with disabilities in destination planning and policymaking but also reflects an inclusive approach to tourism management, promoting a responsible tourism approach.

Responsible tourism is all about positive and proactive actions and concrete measures to enhance sustainability and inclusiveness. This study highlights quality experiences for PwDs while incorporating diverse measures across the five dimensions outlined in Eide & Mossberg's (2019) experience quality framework. The complexity of facilitating to the needs of the PwD-segment, as noted by various authors (Dary, Cameron & Pegg, 2010; Kusufa et al., 2022), stems from the varied requirements associated with different disabilities. The findings of this study echo this complexity, revealing that none of the four stakeholders implemented measures covering *all* four PwD sub-segments: reduced mobility, reduced vision, reduced hearing, or other health conditions.

Below, in Figure, the aggregated results not only illustrate the overall outcomes of our study but also signify the adaptation and enhancement of the original model proposed by Eide and Mossberg (2019).

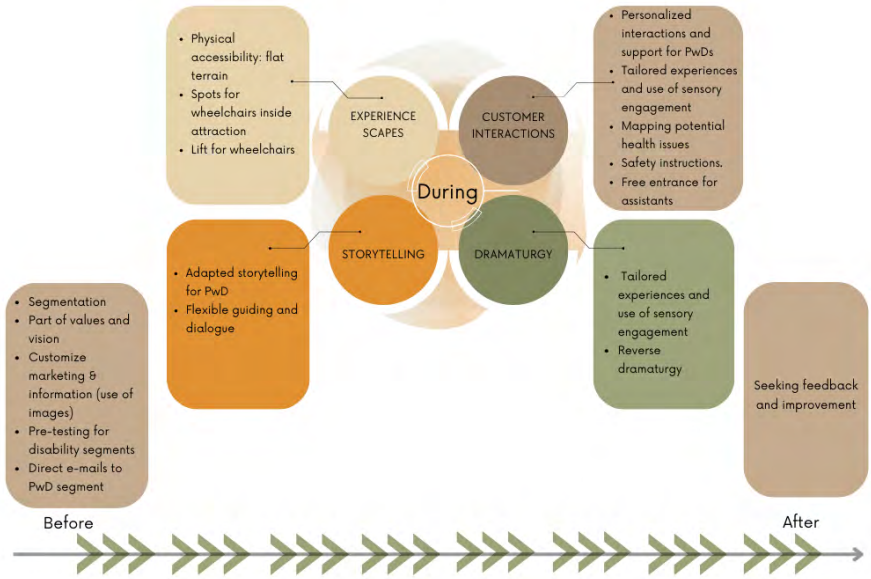

Figure 2. The experience quality framework adopted from Eide & Mossberg (2019) with aggregated measures for enhancing accessibility in tourism activities and experiences (from Maristuen & Grahn, unpublished).

The adapted model incorporates elements, particularly focusing on addressing the needs of people with disabilities (PwDs) within the tourism context, but for a tourism stakeholder to best accommodate PwDs, it will be of great importance to also consider to add the four key dimensions presented my Small and Darcy (2010). By combining the framework proposed by Eide and Mossberg (2019) with increased knowledge and information of the *categories and type of disability*, *levels of support needs*, *access enablers*, and *universal design* (Small & Darcy, 2010), the new model offers a more comprehensive approach. This integrated approach leverages the interconnectedness of all dimensions to establish a stronger foundation for accommodating and developing tourism experiences for PwDs.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the realm of responsible and inclusive tourism by examining the practices of four activity companies in a Norwegian tourist region concerning experiences for persons with disabilities (PwDs). By applying these practices and measures within the multidimensional framework proposed by Eide & Mossberg (2019), we aimed to identify best practices, as depicted in Figure 2. While Eide & Mossberg's framework does not explicitly target the quality of experiences for PwDs, it proves valuable as a systematic approach applicable to various segments. This framework offers tourism stakeholders a practical tool for developing and facilitating experiences for travellers with disabilities, whether they operate attractions, activity companies, or other experience opportunities. Nonetheless, our findings revealed various attitudes among managers involved in accommodating persons with disabilities. Ultimately, the study highlights the critical importance of fostering positive attitudes and motivations to cultivate a more inclusive and responsible tourism environment, while also addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, this study also highlights the diversity in forms and levels of disabilities. Naturally every business manager should strive to provide high quality experiences for all disability subgroups, however barriers such as costs, capacity limitations, and resource constraints may be an argument to start with one or two subgroups. It is essential to customize the marketing strategy, incorporating responsible and inclusive tourism in the business vision and values. Introducing pre-testing may identify potential barriers to physical accessibility. Best practices in customer interaction, involve offering free entrance for assistants, providing personalized support with tailored experiences, and addressing potential health issues. Adapted storytelling with targeted communication tools, i.e., sign language is crucial for persons with hearing impairments. In the dimension of dramaturgy, customizing experiences and encouraging customer involvement are advisable, just as soliciting feedback is vital for the continuous improvement of experiences. Practical aspects related to offering experiences for PwDs such as finance or regulations, often represent barriers. However, it might be useful to stress the potential that technology might offer—not only prior to the journey but in several of the dimensions.

Disability should not, by its very nature, limit an individual's participation in community life, everyday activities, or travel experiences. Independence, equity, and dignity are fundamental values in defining accessible tourism (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 33).

This study has highlighted various ”best practices” in tourism experiences, providing activity companies with valuable insights to assess and integrate into their operations. These practices aim to foster a more responsible and inclusive approach to development. The findings extend beyond individual companies, offering benefits to various stakeholders that seek to enhance their business and destination attractiveness for both local residents and tourists, particularly those with disabilities. However, it is imperative for destination managers to advocate for systematic and cohesive collaboration between all tourism stakeholders, not just experience providers.

Responsible tourism, encapsulated in the notion of *”making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit*” (Goodwin, 2023), serves as the cornerstone for this study’s exploration. The best practices unveiled herein will not only enhance the attraction of each company/ stakeholder, but it will also make a meaningful contribution to the broader appeal of the destination by developing a more inclusive environment for all. Thus, an inclusive approach not only enhances the experiences of tourists, and benefits individuals with disabilities, but it also enriches the experiences for the local community, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable living environment. This dual objective should be the shared aim of every business and destination committed to responsible and inclusive tourism, thereby strengthening their pull-factors.

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STEPS TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: A POSSIBILITY FOR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR ALL

Rositsa Röntynen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Responsible tourism is a steppingstone to building sustainability as it represents concrete actions of all participants in tourism—service providers, authorities, locals, and tourists—towards a common goal (Goodwin, 2014). A prerequisite for responsible action, regardless of whether it is in tourism or in another field, is to first understand how to be responsible. Therefore, educating the tourism actors in responsible tourism is the starting point.

Quality education is one of the seventeen Global Sustainable Development Goals specified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The goal calls for ensuring ”inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The required actions for achieving the goal entail ensuring equal access of all members of the society to tertiary and vocational education, development of competence of adults required for employment, increasing the knowledge and skills related to sustainable development, as well as developing an inclusive and effective learning environments (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Finland’s national programme for sustainable tourism, Sustainable Travel Finland (STF), also recognizes competence as one of the required steps towards the tourism industry’s sustainable development. The development path includes seven steps that provide tourism operators with concrete tools to build sustainability. Development of competence comes in the STF programme right after the initial step of commitment to the principles of sustainability (Visit Finland, n.d.).

Achieving sustainability through partnerships is another sustainable development goal, formulated concretely as follows to: ”Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. It calls for access to science, technology and innovation, knowledge sharing, as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share resources to support sustainable development goals, in addition to encouraging public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

Responsible tourism is an attempt to create a balance between ecologically, socio-culturally, economically, and politically responsible actions to ensure the wellbeing of, first, locals, and then, tourists in a destination. However, responsibility sets different requirements for different stakeholders of tourism. Tourists should be careful with their choices to minimize their visit's footprint and maximize the benefits for locals. Entrepreneurs should not only provide responsible services according to customer's changing needs but also communicate about their own responsible action, while also motivating their staff in terms of responsibility. Tourism developers and authorities in destinations should convey the values of responsibility to the partnerships and networks they maintain to provide a consistent experience in accordance with the tourism demand (Blinnikka & Grönroos, 2021). Different stakeholder groups have diverse needs of competence emerging from these various requirements, thus the education designed for them should also be tailored according to that point of view.

The tourism industry is challenged by a rapidly changing environment, constantly requiring new competences. Some of the recent developments embodying this change are the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the tourist demand for sustainability (Dolinšek et al., 2021). Competence in the tourism industry does not develop at the same rapid pace everywhere, because the training contents and formats on offer are usually not flexible enough. Often, a tourism professional cannot take the time off to participate in training organized by the schedules and settings of education institutions. Education must be implemented the other way around—by bringing tourism education closer to working life. Integrated educational models have proven to contribute more effectively to the development of professional knowledge because of the immediate practical application of theoretical knowledge (Virtanen et al., 2009).

One solution to bringing education closer to the working environment, which is flexible in terms of schedules, and tailored according to various stakeholder needs is offered by the advances of digitalization. Online education in the form of e-learning offers a variety of advantages for lifelong learning, including accessibility, time and location flexibility, and affordability over traditional institution-based education. It enables learners to apply new knowledge and skills immediately to their everyday and working life situations (Dhawan, 2020). Online learning is accessible through a variety of Internet-connected devices (computers, mobile phones, tablets) and is offered in both synchronous and asynchronous environments. Synchronous environments offer real-time lectures and interactions that provide instant

feedback, while asynchronous environments offer resources outside time constraints (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Online courses can be formal or part of established educational institutions' curricula (Singh & Thurman, 2019) or massive open fully online courses (MOOCs) open to all interested parties (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). For learners with diverse backgrounds, MOOCs and asynchronous learning courses are useful because they provide them with the freedom to create their own learning pathways.

According to Anderson (2011), "Online learning as a subset of distance education has always been concerned with provision of access to an educational experience that is at least more flexible in time and space as campus-based education". There are several learning models influencing online learning. According to the theoretical model of Community of Inquiry (CoI) developed by Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000), online learning fosters active learning environments where cognitive, social, and teaching presences intertwine, encouraging interactions between instructors and students sharing ideas, information, and opinions through learning environment platforms such as discussion boards, blogs, wikis, and videoconferencing, ultimately enhancing the interactivity and effectiveness of online courses. The learning model of connectivism is based on the major shift in gaining knowledge and information from individual and internal processes towards Internet-enabled large communication networks and group activities. According to George Siemens (2004), "learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more and are more important than our current state of knowing". Anderson (2011) notes that the Internet is not only a text-based environment but one in which all forms of media are supported and readily available—which also supports connectivism. Online Collaborative Learning (OCL), proposed by Linda Harasim (2012), harnesses the Internet's capabilities to cultivate collaborative knowledge construction, utilizing phases of idea generation, organization, and intellectual convergence in smaller instructional environments where students actively solve problems through discourse, facilitated by teachers who serve as both guides and participants, thus enhancing the reshaping of education for the knowledge age. These theories are all related to Anderson's (2011) model of online education. The scholar concludes that interactions—student-student as in OCL, student-content as in independent studying, student-teacher as in CoI, teacher-content, as well as teacher-teacher—are critical components of online learning.

Digital learning tools were available much earlier but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital learning solutions became an important topic of discussion both in Finland and around the world. A digital leap was made in many educational institutions on short notice and without much planning, dictated by necessity (Hodges et al., 2020). Therefore, many of the newly emerged e-learning courses during the pandemic did not comply with the criteria for high-quality digital education (e.g., Varonen & Hohenthal, 2020).

COVID-19 has not only affected ways of learning but also ways to travel and to conduct tourism activity. The pandemic instantly changed the focus from overtourism to the experience of locality and introduced new target groups (e.g., Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2021; Haywoor, 2020; Tremblay-Huet & Lapointe, 2021; Wendt, Sæþórsdóttir & Waage, 2022). It raised a conversation about business resilience (e.g., Partanen, 2021). It also highlighted the multidimensional issue of safety in tourism (e.g., Orindaru et al., 2021; Matiza & Slabbert, 2021). A reaction was required from the tourism industry in terms of competence.

CASE PROBLEM STATEMENT

”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” was a joint effort by the experts of five Finnish universities—Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, the University of Lapland, and the University of Oulu, to increase the responsibility in tourism nationwide by providing work-integrated training for different groups of tourism actors that would be available regardless of location, time, and device. Thus, the training programme was intended to fulfil the requirements of accessibility, inclusiveness, co-operation, and resource sharing set by the global sustainable development goals enabled by the solutions of digital technology.

The unpredictable global health crisis which started in 2020 and all its implications for tourism were not yet known when the ”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” project was planned in 2018. The growing demand for e-learning was identified, but during the global pandemic crisis, its value rose immeasurably high. ”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” curriculum was developed during the pandemic, but the criteria for high-quality digital education established in Finland (Varonen & Hohenthal, 2020) formed its basis, and careful planning of teaching and learning processes have been at the centre of its implementation. The purpose was to develop a model that could be used to offer high-quality digital education even after the pandemic.

The main issues regarding planning the online training were as follows:

- Which are the competencies tourism actors lack in the context of responsible tourism?
- How to make the education product relevant for diverse types of tourism actors?
- How to unify the knowledge about responsibility across the tourism ecosystem?
- How to incorporate the competence of five higher education institutions into a unified curriculum offering a flawless user experience?
- How to ensure that the training is independent of time, place, and device, immersed into everyday or working life?

CASE DISCUSSION

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Through extensive and careful planning, co-creation, and the involvement of different stakeholder groups ”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” was developed as a nationwide curriculum of continuous learning. There were about 30 higher education professionals, multiple external partners, and more than 200 tourism industry representatives involved in the development process. The following aspects were considered to provide a relevant, effective, and high-quality training programme.

A. THE TOURISM INDUSTRY’S NEEDS FOR COMPETENCY

The first step was to research what the tourism industry already knows about responsibility and what training should be offered. The initial research was carried out in 2019 with the help of workshops and a survey, through which 197 very different tourism operators around Finland were reached. One of the most interesting findings of the published research (Dolinšek et al., 2021) was that tourism operators are unsure of their own responsibility skills. Thus, competency should not consist of and be seen purely as the examination and testing of individual phenomena. Instead, the training was set out to hone the tourism operators’ ability to understand themselves and their activities.

At the same time, a separate study looked at the concepts of responsibility in tourism education in higher education institutions in Finland and the

competencies provided by existing curricula. Some of the main realizations of this study were that there was no comprehensive curriculum on responsible tourism on offer within Finnish higher education, and that not only the content, but also clear descriptions of courses are important.

With the help of this background research the development team was able to formulate the competencies to be included in the training. The competencies were used to describe what kind of knowledge regarding responsibility the promotion of responsible tourism in Finland requires. Eventually, ten themes of the curriculum were formulated based on these competencies, as follows:

1. The ABC of responsible tourism (introduction of the topic and why it is worth studying)
2. Ecological sustainability of tourism
3. The relationship between tourism and climate change
4. Social and cultural responsibility of tourism
5. Accessible tourism
6. Responsible tourism business
7. Responsible tourism cooperation and co-creation
8. The tourism industry as part of society
9. Foresight and future knowledge
10. Responsibility communication

B. UNIFICATION OF CORE KNOWLEDGE AND TAILORED LEARNING PATHWAYS

One of the most difficult aspects of designing the training programme was to define its target groups clearly. On the one hand, the tourism industry is extremely diverse, including individuals with different backgrounds, at different phases of their lives and careers, possessing different knowledge from this and

other fields, thus also with different competency needs. This heterogeneous group called for an asynchronous MOOC set of courses, enabling everyone's schedule and setting.

On the other hand, for responsibility to effectively promote sustainability, it should be understood in a unified manner not only in the tourism industry but throughout the whole tourism ecosystem, including not only tourism professionals but also decision-makers, suppliers, and partners of tourism, as well as the local community and tourists. It is typical for the ecosystem that the relations between the different actors are loose and informal, and the action of each one affects the others (Iansiti & Levien, 2004). Therefore, peripheral operators often do not recognize their role and responsibility: e.g., restaurants, grocery stores, and transport companies are an integral part of tourism, but usually do not consider themselves tourism operators; decision-makers, influencers and tourists influence tourism, even if they are not tourism professionals. This creates a need to unify basic knowledge and terminology.

The training programme was designed to serve different learners via the contents of each competency divided into three levels—the employee, the entrepreneur, and the developer. The common content relevant and recommended for everyone was presented at the core level, consisting of an introductory course and a responsibility communication course. The level structure was formulated as follows:

- Core level: The core level offers cross-cutting content with respect to all themes covered in the training. It is suitable for all learners, regardless of their skills and goals.
- Employee level: This level is for the learner who has the basics of tourism in hand. Previous knowledge of responsibility is not needed. The employee level provides the skills to solve everyday challenges related to responsibility and act in customer service situations. Courses at this level are suitable not only for those already working in the tourism industry, but also for those who dream of entering it. People working in various organizations as well as groups such as researchers in other fields can acquire skills that can be used in their work. The courses at this level include the basics of responsible tourism from different areas. By completing them, the learner can both apply their knowledge at work and make responsible choices as a tourist.

- Entrepreneur level: This level is for a learner who has a basic knowledge of responsibility. The courses discuss the challenges faced by the industry and the best practices of responsibility to support the organization. Courses at this level are suitable for those who work in responsible positions in companies, for example managers and entrepreneurs, as well as those planning to become entrepreneurs. This applies not only to producers of tourism services, but to all organizations operating in the tourism cluster, including, e.g., trade, transport, and the restaurant industry.
- Developer level: This level is for the learner who examines responsible tourism from a so-to-say helicopter perspective, maintaining a balance from the cross pressure of various actors. Courses at this level are suitable for those working in tourism development, coordination, and marketing tasks in local and regional public, private, and third sector organizations. The developer-level courses offer tools for responsible strategic management and the regional development of tourism in collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Twenty-four courses were developed and divided according to the levels presented above.

The uniqueness of ”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” curriculum is in its introductory course, where both the skills are unified, and the study pathways of individuals are tailored. In the free-of-charge introductory course, which is a mandatory beginning of the training programme, some learners are taught something new, but for others this is a refresher and confirmation of their own competency. This short and simple course is probably the most important part of the curriculum because the more learners complete it, the more often the same language is spoken in tourism: and the more the core knowledge about responsibility is unified. This also means that the entire tourism ecosystem moves towards a common goal, namely sustainability.

The introductory course also eliminates the need to set a starting level for advanced courses, as it includes a self-assessment tool. The tool, in the form of a survey, aids the formation of an individual study path of each learner by recommending further courses of the curriculum based on:

- The learner’s interests—at the beginning of the survey, the learner chooses the educational themes that are the subject of their own interest;

- The learner's competency by theme—the learner answers questions on selected themes that are linked to the content of training courses;
- The learner's goals—the learner gets recommendations for courses that suit them but is still asked whether each course meets their own goals.
- The self-assessment tool was found to be applicable in various situations, exceeding the initial anticipation:
- The learner starts their learning journey in the training programme and as part of the introductory course completes an initial assessment to receive recommendations for the following courses.
- The learner has already completed the desired or needed courses of the curriculum and returns to the assessment tool to compare their competency results with the initial evaluation situation.
- The learner completes an initial assessment to demonstrate to whom it may concern (teacher, employer, etc.) certain skills or the need to increase some skills in relation to responsible tourism.
- The employer or supervisor tests the competencies of the company's personnel or key employees in relation to responsible tourism and plans further measures based on the initial evaluation.
- A regional project or organization tests the knowledge of the actors on the topic of responsibility in its area of operation to plan further measures, or, with the help of an assessment tool, measures responsibility in the region during the starting and final phases.

C. CONSISTENCY, APPEARANCE, AND USER EXPERIENCE

The training programme was set to incorporate the competence of all five universities participating in its development to cover the topic of responsibility in tourism holistically. This was a challenge because different higher education institutions have different organizational cultures and aspects such as teaching approaches. The education provided by them also takes place in different learning environments—not only geographically but also digitally. On the other hand, a learner from working life differs from a degree student due to the time available for learning, the motivation for learning, and digital skills, among other factors.

For example, a rural tourism entrepreneur would not be willing or able to attend a course that regularly takes place in the city during customer service hours and requires writing pages-long assignments, or to attend a set of online courses with real-time lectures requiring getting acquainted to with the

functions of complex digital learning environments and signing in to each of them with different credentials granted by each university for the purposes of its own implementations.

The development team recognized the need for placing the learning contents on a common digital platform which could be easily accessible using existing credentials, like email address, and which would be easy to understand and use even for not so advanced digital users. The platform was formatted as a conventional website and adding the courses to one's portfolio was a simple, intuitive, web shop process, familiar from many other situations of contemporary life. Courses were shaped as products available to be individually bought from the common web shop, while an invisible-to-the-user shop-in-shop structure channelled the income and statistics to the respective universities in charge. Digital solutions also enabled automatization of the learning process. Not only the joining of a course, but the evaluation and the completion of it, as well as receiving a certificate of attendance, were designed to happen automatically, immediately, without any time contribution of an actual teacher, so the asynchronous nature of the curriculum supported learning according to the schedules of the learner.

The learning contents were presented in a unified manner. Decisions about the pedagogical approaches and the settings of each course were agreed on in advance, reducing the differences between the styles of different course providers. This included aspects such as the tone of voice, passing grade, structure of the course, repeated instructions, formats of learning materials and test questions. The co-creation by the five universities described in another research paper (Röntynen, Tunkkari-Eskelinen & Törn-Laapio 2021) also contributed to consistency.

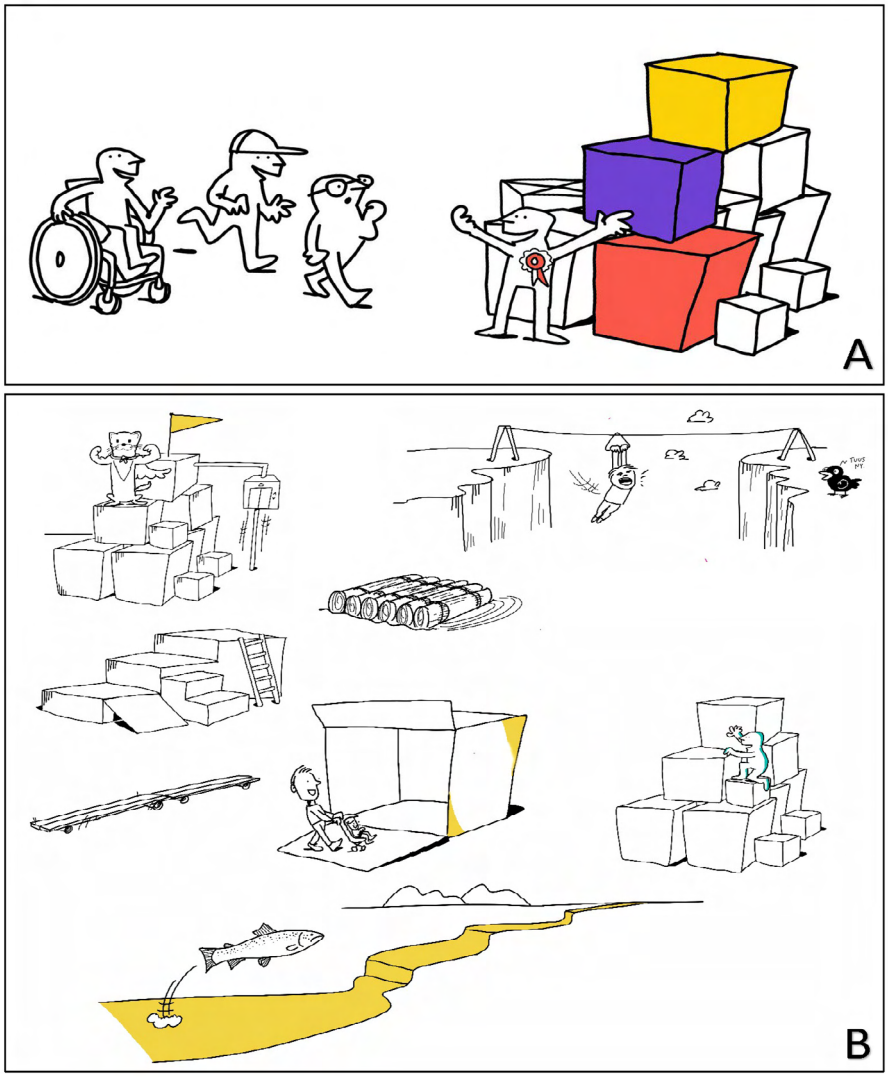

Figure 1. Some of the illustrations of the education programme (a) vs. illustrations considered during the storification phase (b). All illustrations by Linda Saukko-Rauta.

A unified display was also designed for the curriculum, not only regarding consistency but inclusion too (Figure 1a). Since responsibility was the subject of the curriculum, the development team invested in the ethical storification and illustration of the training programme. The characters used aimed at neutrality and inclusive social representation. There was even a passionate

discussion on the meaning of ”steps” and ”stairs” and their implication for accessibility, as these words were used in the name of the training programme, which resulted in different illustration suggestions (Figure 1b).

D. INTEGRATION INTO WORKING LIFE

The integrability of the curriculum into working life was designed according to the following features:

- independent of time
- independent of location
- independent of device

The learner was enabled by the automatization and the asynchronous character of the training programme to study according to their own schedules and regardless of the formal setting of any university, thus learning did not require time away from work. As the courses are fully digital and available on the Internet, learners were invited to study from any location where an Internet connection is available, not only in the locations of the administrating universities. In fact, the courses were not only available all-around Finland, but globally, as only their language of implementation constrained them to the sole use of Finns. Digital accessibility and responsiveness, as well as the simple format and display of the materials were considered to make the contents of the curriculum available on any device—at home, at the office, or on the go.

These features gained some further dimensions within the context of COVID-19, as many people were stuck abroad by the lockdowns, lost their jobs in tourism, or were redirected to remote work from home. Thus, the training programme evolved into a COVID-19 resilience solution, encouraging learners to ”learn on the couch”.

DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

”The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism” programme developed as a curriculum of ten themes and twenty-four courses with the total scope of 20 study credits. Each theme was intended to implement certain Agenda 2030 sustainable development goals indicated in connection with it. There were 1–4 courses related to the theme, assigned to different levels (core, employee, entrepreneur, developer). It was not required to study the courses of the theme in a certain order. Each course was internally divided into lessons, each of

which becoming available after the completion of the previous lesson. The courses were designed to be short, 0.5–2 credits, focusing on a concrete issue. Twenty-three of the courses were fee based, except for the introductory course. The organizers did not intend to profit monetarily, but the fees covered the costs caused by digitalization, because continuous learning, not generating actual credits, in Finland is not publicly funded.

A. RESULTS OF THE PILOT

The curriculum was extensively tested at the beginning of 2021—for nearly three months by 220 stakeholders. The pilot was announced with public messages through the communication channels of the universities and the steering group, and all willing to participate were recruited for testing with the idea on the one hand, to give an equal chance of participation in the publicly funded project to all, and on the other hand, to gather sufficient feedback on the implementation of the curriculum. Pilot participants chose the courses according to their own goals and interests and were allowed to study as many courses as they wished within the timeframe of the pilot. This resulted in 791 completed courses with a total scope of 458.5 credits.

The piloting phase confirmed the principle of independence of location because the self-registered pilot participants came from various locations within Finland, not related to the locations of the administrating universities (Figure 2a), and from a few locations abroad. The principle of independence from time was confirmed by the activity of the users on the digital platform, as the most active time was detected outside office hours (Figure 2b). The used devices for learning during the pilot were not as versatile or equally represented as anticipated (Figure 2c), as most of users used a computer (desktop or laptop) and not a mobile device (phone or tablet). This could be explained, however, by the timing of the piloting phase, which was during the pandemic lockdowns when fewer people were on the go.

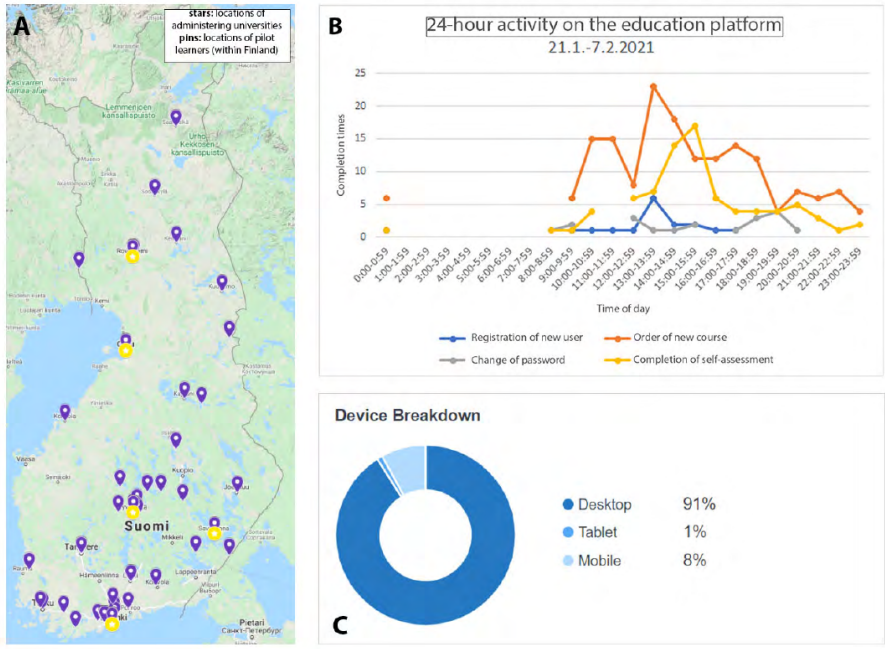

Figure 2. Analytics of the pilot supporting the designed independence principles of the curriculum.

The feedback received by the pilot participants was positive and encouraging, and the presented improvement suggestions were used to further adjust the curriculum to user needs and expectations.

B. INDICATIONS FROM THE ACTIVITY DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF EXISTENCE OF THE CURRICULUM

The training programme was launched on 1.6.2021 as a commercial continuous learning product. Unfortunately, it has not achieved the intended broad coverage and impact. In the two years of its existence a total of 650 credits have been achieved but most of them by integrating the courses into degree studies. This not only means that the curriculum has not produced the income needed for maintenance, but also that it has not reached the intended audience, namely non-degree students, as part of working life. The introduction course has been completed by 343 single users, which means that at least some progress has been made in terms of unification of basic responsibility knowledge.

The reason for the small number of customers is not the monetary nature of the training programme but lies more in the chain of overlapping crises that recently hit the tourism industry and put actors in survival rather than development mode. Additionally, the extensiveness of the pilot was seen from a time perspective partially as a disadvantage. Additionally, the administrating universities have had few opportunities for marketing as funding has been insufficient, and networking opportunities have been scarce due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The financial risk of maintaining the digital platform has resulted in some of the initial partner universities leaving the project, while the rest of the partners remain coordinating the whole programme and maintaining a shared-responsibility cooperation model. The logic of Finland's educational model, encouraging continuous learning and digital solutions but not providing educators with funding for maintaining them, however, puts the existence of the curriculum at risk.

CONCLUSIONS AND SOLUTIONS

ENHANCEMENT OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The enhancement of responsible tourism by the described training programme can be discussed from many points of view, both concrete and very abstract. For this case study, two concrete aspects are chosen to bring forward:

- the curriculum promotes the UN sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030;
- the curriculum is synchronized with the national Sustainable Travel Finland programme.

The principles used in the development of the curriculum particularly promote the goals presented in the introduction chapter: Goal 4, Quality education, and Goal 17, Global partnerships for sustainable development. In addition, each of the ten themes of the curriculum are linked to a number of SDGs, promoted by the content of the courses (Figure 3). In this way, the curriculum not only involves the learners consciously in the global effort for sustainability, but also informs them about the content of each SDG.

Figure 3. Presentation of the theme "Ecological sustainability of tourism" on the platform of the education programme (adapted to English). After the short description and the links to the courses, the theme links the contents to the most relevant SDGs.

The synchronization of the curriculum with the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) programme was planned throughout the development phase and ensured by the participation of a Visit Finland representative in the steering group of the project. Via the STF programme Visit Finland promotes Finland's sustainability at the level of tourism companies and destinations. Unlike the STF programme, "The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism" is intended for an individual, and not for a company or region. The certificates and achievements cannot be used directly as certificates in the STF programme because they are personal and not organizational, in addition, the training does not offer an audit required by STF. However, the responsibility knowledge of individuals also contributes to the sustainability of tourism because acts of responsibility come specifically from the individual, regardless of their position: employee, entrepreneur, or developer. Visit Finland encourages tourism operators to increase their knowledge of sustainable tourism, which is also one of the key criteria in the STF programme. Therefore, "The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism" fits the STF goal to increase competence. Visit Finland recognizes the importance of the nationwide curriculum and recommends it in its guide to STF programme participants.

SHORTCOMINGS

The curriculum managed to provide accessible responsible education for all according to the SDGs where diverse stakeholders' needs are considered. However, the curriculum also highlighted the limited understanding of the concrete actions at the individual level that form the foundation of responsible tourism. The universities acted responsibly launching a curriculum according to industry's needs, but the individual stakeholders representing the same industry did not recognize the urgency of upgrading their competencies concerning responsibility and strengthening their business resilience.

The asynchronous nature of the curriculum, although beneficial in terms of flexibility of time and space, as well as of resource use, causes a disbalance between the types of interactions described in Anderson's (2011) online learning models. It is difficult for learners to exchange knowledge and maintain their motivation without a social setting. On the other hand, when discussion and input platforms and possibilities for interaction were increased in the pilot version, the users felt anxious because the context of their statements might change in time, making them irrelevant or perhaps compromising their professional image which may be built up or developed further after the time of interaction with the learning environment. This contradiction is not specific to the investigated curriculum but needs more consideration within the global development of online learning.

DIRECTIONS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The curriculum has been presented to different forums of international scientific and educational society and has produced interest. In 2021 it was a competitor in the Skål International Sustainable Tourism Awards. In 2022, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy of the Netherlands mapped the curriculum in its report as a benchmark for the sustainability transition in the tourism industry.

The prospects of international interest in a digital curriculum of responsible tourism are perceived as good. An international version of the programme in English would mean, on the one hand, externally sharing the Finnish expertise on responsibility and unifying the understanding of responsible tourism globally, and internally providing even more inclusive educational options to the ethnically and language-wise diversifying Finnish tourism industry. It would also bring the needed volumes of customers to maintain the existing Finnish version. However, the internationalization of the curriculum calls for

new, extensive background research into the needs and competencies of responsibility. While the structure can remain the same, the global version needs plenty of contextualizing. The first steps towards a global version have already been taken by Jamk in 2023 as the university developed a few responsible tourism online courses in English based on the principles of the discussed curriculum.

By developing "The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism" curriculum, the development team also formulated a continuous learning model known as the Stair Model, applicable to other subjects, industries, and target groups. It has already been applied to various of unrelated projects, such as the productization of a consulting company and an international university-business cooperation project.

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SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN TOURISM AND SERVICES: FOCUSING ON MANAGERS' AND ENTREPRENEURS' WELLBEING

Mari Angeria, Lapland University of Applied Sciences – Anu Harju-Myllyaho, Lapland University of Applied Sciences — Pasi Satokangas, Lapland University of Applied Sciences

TOURISM IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

This chapter discusses Responsible Tourism in a constantly changing environment from the socially responsible management viewpoint. Focusing on responsible human resource management linked to human resources policies and practices, the chapter presents an existing best practice concerning social sustainability. The best practice case is based on the viewpoint of tourism workers in Finnish Lapland. The case is based on the perceptions of those working in management positions or as entrepreneurs in the tourism and service sector. Their perceptions of the recent changes were analysed during a yearlong wellness coaching process. The impact of the changes in the operational environment, as well as the effect of the coaching process, are presented in the chapter.

As an industry which is vulnerable to changes, tourism has been influenced by recent global changes in consumer behaviour, digitalisation, and general economic restructuring. The pandemic severely hit the industry, deepening the existing labour shortage, and damaging the industry's image as an employer. The nature of the labour shortage varies by occupation and region; for example, in Finnish Lapland, there is a shortage of travel guides, while restaurant and kitchen workers are needed throughout the country. By contrast, several regions have an oversupply of travel agency clerks (Harju-Myllyaho et al. 2022). These rapid but influential changes have negatively impacted how tourism is seen in terms of future employment and career-making. Tourism work had a precarious image already, but the changes have added weight to the current situation. As stated by the OECD (2021), tourism suffered from a lack of a skilled workforce, and after the pandemic, many people left the industry to work in retail or other industries that provide a more solid income (OECD, 2021).

In addition to those mentioned above, working life itself is in transition. The views and values of new generations entering working life differ from those of

previous generations. New skills and competencies are required, whereas the value of traditional professional skills is decreasing. Employees' commitment to an organisation can no longer be taken for granted. The "old" human resource management tools too seem short-lived and inadequate (Ehnert & Harry 2012, 223). More attention should be paid to social responsibility by renewing the practices of the work community and enhancing the sense of meaningful work.

According to Statistics Finland (2023a; n.d.a; n.d.b), the number employed in the accommodation and food service industry decreased during the Coronavirus pandemic 2020 (Figure 1). The sectors recovered slightly during 2021 and reached the pre-pandemic level during 2022. The number of those employed has increased in the retail trade between 2019 and 2023, while development in accommodation and food services is relatively stable (Statistics Finland, 2023a).

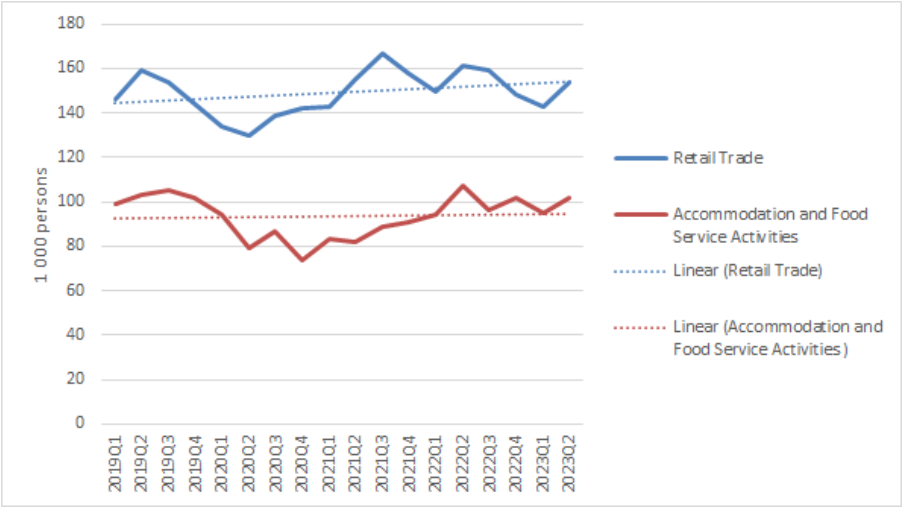

Figure 1. Employed persons and employees aged 15–74 (Statistics Finland, 2023a)

The pandemic and its recovery treated different parts of the tourism industry and their employment differently. In 2022, the accommodation industry recovered approximately to the pre-pandemic level. Food and beverage service activities (restaurants etc.) decreased clearly during the pandemic but recovered to a higher level in 2022. Rental and leasing service activities

decreased slightly during the first year of the pandemic but developed higher than before the pandemic, especially in 2022. Travel agencies, tour operators and other activities suffered the most during the pandemic. The industry recovered in 2022, but even then, clearly below the pre-pandemic level (Statistics Finland, 2023b).

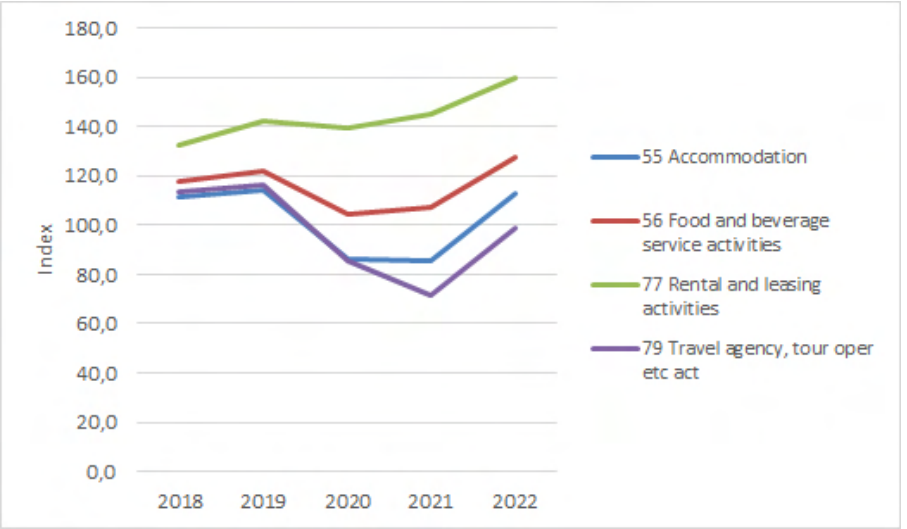

Figure 2. Wage and salary indices by industry 2015=100 by Year, Information and Industry (Statistics Finland, 2023b)

Consequently, this trend has been seen in practice at the operative and managerial levels, which have been under stress. The lack of employees is causing pressure on the management, who are often those with responsibilities concerning the recruitment process or finding solutions for the shortage of personnel in work shifts.

As described above, the changes in the operational environment have added pressure to the precarious nature of tourism work. Consequently, the current situation calls for socially responsible tourism practices and human resource management. Responsible tourism has been a part of tourism development for some time, and social responsibility has been defined as one of the dimensions of the phenomenon (García-Rosell, 2017). Social responsibility refers to the relationships between the company and its stakeholders (Sebastiani et al. 2014, p. 588). Social responsibility in tourism

ensures that the benefits of tourism are divided as equally as possible, and the negative impacts of tourism on the lives of the locals are as minor as possible (García-Rosell, 2017, p. 229). Responsible tourism practices are a way to achieve sustainable tourism. The social aspect of sustainable tourism has, according to Helgadóttir, Einarsdóttir, Burns, Gunnarsdóttir and Matthíasdóttir (2019, p. 405), been conceived both in substantive and procedural means. As Helgadóttir et al. (2019) has described, in many investigations concerning social sustainability in tourism, the residents are usually considered the primary stakeholders. Thus, the research, in general, mainly focuses on the attitudes and experiences of the locals.

Various scholars have raised questions concerning the precarious nature and uncertain qualities of tourism work (Robinson et al., 2019). However, until recently, the term social sustainability in tourism has not often been connected to the well-being of the workforce, let alone managers or supervisors. Tourism has been seen as a potential source of income and livelihood, especially in sparsely populated areas. Thus, tourism has been considered a positive factor in the lives of local populations. Tourism seems to be a resilient industry, but as insecurity increases, the workforce's well-being needs to be recognised as an essential part of social responsibility and socially sustainable management practices.

Concerning the tourism workforce and social responsibility, Mooney, Robinson, Solnet, and Baum (2022) have concluded that there has been little interest in responsibility in the workforce, even though the workforce is so obviously related to one of the fundamental aspects of sustainability. There is a multidimensional and clear connection between the well-being of the workforce and tourism sustainability (Mooney et al., 2022, p. 2708). Studies concerning the social impacts of tourism often postulate on the locals' quality of life in tourism destinations (e.g., Helgadóttir et al. 2019, p. 406). Locals can be divided into roughly two different groups: those who directly benefit from tourism and those who do not. The tourism workforce benefits from tourism, but this does not mean they should be seen on the outskirts of socially responsible tourism practices.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WORK AND MANAGEMENT

The case in this chapter discusses the well-being and quality of life of managers and supervisors as part of practices in the changing working environment. Responsible human resource management supports the organisation's

responsibility from the economic, environmental, and social dimensions simultaneously (Freitas et al. 2011, p. 226). This is crucial in building the organisation's reputation as a socially and ethically responsible employer. Socially responsible human resource management helps create and support trust and resilient relationships, and it is linked to practices that contribute to the development of human and social capital (Rok & Mulej, 2014; Robinson et al., 2019, p. 1014). Social responsibility toward employees is related to fair wages, satisfactory working conditions, labour relations, and employee well-being (e.g., Bhagtani, 2022; Robinson et al., 2019).

An unambiguous definition of well-being is non-existent. However, there have been attempts to form a theory of well-being. One such approach is framed by Seligman (2011) as he introduces well-being as having five elements: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011, p. 20). This chapter sees well-being as physical and psychological (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Managers and supervisors who promote positive emotions also create more commitment and satisfaction (Bono & Ilies, 2006).

As said, work and employment are in constant flux in tourism and services as well as other industries, and the changes and their consequential impacts on tourism work have been studied only to some degree (Ladkin et al., 2023). The changes are partly technological, in some parts caused by external forces, while demographic shifts can cause others. The views and values of new generations entering working life differ from those of previous generations (Lamberg, 2023). For instance, commitment to and perspectives on career development vary between generations.

The new generations demand a new way of leading (Plaskoff, 2017); thus, a new way of thinking about human resource management practices is needed in the tourism industry to ensure the industry's ability to engage and retain skilled human capital. Social responsibility will be a competitive advantage as the market tightens and companies compete to attract and retain skilled workers (Supanti & Butcher, 2019). In addition, companies investing in socially responsible human resource practices, such as the individual's psychological and physical well-being, are proven to perform better and be more profitable than companies not investing in it (Jarosz, 2021; He et al., 2019; Morgan, 2017; Surroca et al., 2010).

The supervisor plays a crucial role in adapting to various changes arising from the operating environment and organisational changes. Change leadership is even believed to be one of the most critical immediate leadership roles today. The direct manager can promote the team's ability to change and

adapt with their actions, support, and trust. For example, the support of the immediate manager during change can enhance job satisfaction and mutual trust. This can increase enthusiasm and interaction and strengthen employees' commitment to change (Laurila, 2017; Ford & Ford, 2012; Nyholm, 2008).

Employees' commitment to a particular organisation can no longer be taken for granted. Young generations starting their careers expect work to be meaningful in addition to providing an income (Lamberg, 2023), and old human resource management tools seem short-lived and inadequate (Plaskoff, 2017). New skills and competencies are required when managing human resources. As managers or entrepreneurs in tourism and services, those working in management positions shoulder great responsibility, and precarious times and times of crises challenge managers' resilience. Global megatrends and crises, such as the pandemic, climate change, or the war in Ukraine, are reflected in the everyday lives of managers and entrepreneurs. Prolonged uncertainty may weaken coping at work and well-being. However, in times of uncertainty, the readiness to lead and set an example is increasingly needed.

Tourism work is characterised by rapid changes and a quick response is required from both organisations and individual employees. The pressures and pace of change from outside need employees to have a high level of motivation and physical, emotional, and mental involvement (Turner et al., 2002). Taking care of the well-being, resilience, and know-how of those in management positions is also an essential part of social responsibility. This enables those in management positions to lead responsibly as well. But who takes care of the well-being of the managers and the entrepreneurs?

COACHING THE WELL-BEING OF MANAGERS AS A PART OF SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

In 2019, tourism was still one of the economy's fastest-growing sectors. The industry's rapid growth brought along challenges obtaining a skilled workforce for the sector. As a result of the pandemic, uncertainty of employment prospects in tourism and the future of the sector increased. Before the pandemic, employee experience in the tourism industry was studied by Kaihua, Kemi, Tapaninen and Vähäkuopus (2020). The results highlighted the vital role of managers and team leaders and managerial work in forming a positive employee experience. Great expectations were and still are placed on organisational work by both subordinates and upper management. The need to strengthen the ability of managers to lead change, to act as an equal leader supporting the well-being of the work community, and to provide supervisors

with tools for both short- and long-term leadership work had been identified (Kaihua et al., 2020). In the spring of 2022, the tourism and service sectors were recovering from the pandemic and the changes it caused to the industry and ways of working. Since the pandemic, the difference in the availability of the workforce is dramatic: it is tough to find workers, let alone skilled employees, especially for short- and fixed-term contracts (Larja & Peltonen, 2023).

This case is based on a coaching process aimed at supporting those working in management positions and as entrepreneurs in the tourism and service industries in Finnish Lapland. The aim was to support leadership development and organisational learning by combining psychological and physical coaching. The manager's well-being plays a significant role when the organisation faces changes, and the manager must have the qualities and skills to lead the work community in and through the change. Altogether, fifteen applicants were chosen to take part in the coaching process. All but one of the participants were women, which is in line with the female dominance of the industry. The occupational role of the participants was as follows: 33% (n=5) of the participants were managers in tourism, namely managers in accommodation, and 27% (n=4) were working as managers in services related to tourism such as restaurants, catering, or cleaning and 40% (n=6) defined themselves as entrepreneurs in the tourism and services sector. The participants came from different parts of Lapland, a sparsely populated area.

As the process started, the participants were asked to reflect on the impact of the changes on their work. The participants' self-reflections highlighted more diverse work communities require increasingly strong leadership skills. The times were particularly challenging during the pandemic. Managers had to lay off employees, and as the situation changed, call employees back to work. The managers felt pressured to succeed in recruiting to find suitable employees for the team. The restrictions imposed during the pandemic caused enormous changes and uncertainty in managerial work. On the other hand, the pandemic increased managers' resilience to uncertainty and strengthened their ability to act in the moment, change plans, and make quick decisions. However, if the labour shortage continues this way or worsens in the coming years, the tourism industry in Lapland will be in a tough situation (Kaihua & Vähäkuopus, 2023).

The coaching process was based on an existing coaching programme by LovelyLife Ltd., but some amendments were made to meet the project aims and the needs of the participants. The yearlong process (Figure 3) consisted of group coaching meetings, one-to-one coaching sessions, and

individual tasks to be completed online in a digital learning environment. In addition, the participants were provided with psychological and physical well-being measures to obtain a comprehensive overview of their current state of well-being. In addition, the participants wrote self-reflective reports alongside the coaching process to produce information about their strengths and weaknesses as leaders, their leadership philosophy, the meaningfulness of work, and the impacts of the recent changes on their careers. A work design workshop and the final seminar were organised for the participants and a broader audience to disseminate information about the process and relevant themes.

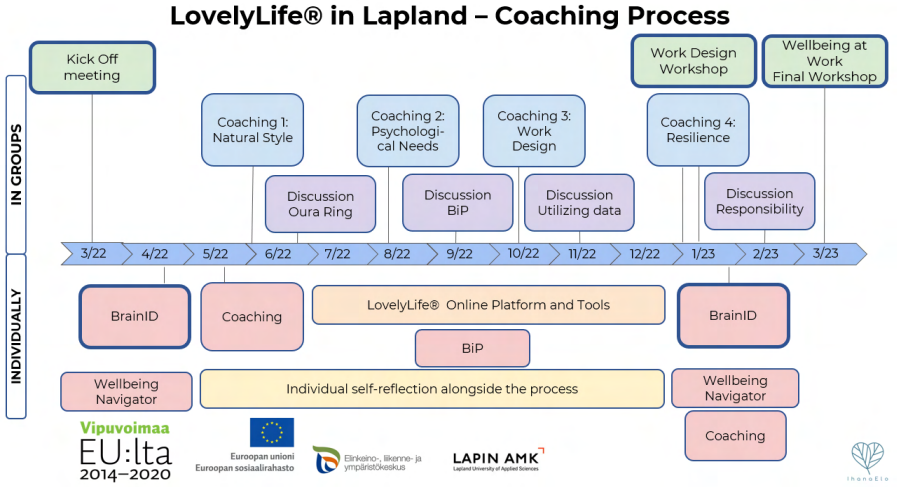

Figure 3. The coaching process

Each group coaching programme session concentrated on a specific theme to give the participants food for thought and tools for their everyday lives. The theme of the first coaching meeting was their own and their team's endurance. The meeting aimed to support the well-being of the managers and provide tools to take care of the well-being of team members. The topics covered were natural style (related to the Wellbeing Navigator TAZ® profile), nutrition, activity, and recovery to support the brain's well-being. The second group coaching meeting covered basic psychological needs and interaction. The aim was to help recognize one's own needs and those of others. In addition, the

topics covered were basic psychological needs and feelings and their impact on relationships and working together. The third group coaching session concentrated on job design for well-being. The aim was to provide tools for work design in a diverse work community. The topics covered included determining one's role in the team and identifying a personal thinking and operating style. The theme of the fourth group coaching meeting was building resilience—the coaching aimed to strengthen ability and readiness for change. The topics covered during the session were foreseeing crises and responsible management and leadership.

The process provided participant discussion sessions to support the process in between the group coaching sessions. The participants were divided into smaller groups during the discussion sessions to share peer-to-peer thoughts and experiences. In the first discussion session, participants were able to ask questions about the use of and interpreting the information provided by the Oura Smart Ring biometric tracking device and to discuss sleep and recovery in general. The second discussion session concentrated on the Business-Focused Inventory of Personality (BiP). In the third session, the discussion focused on how the participants utilized the information from the various surveys and measures and the data the daily tracker produced for personal development purposes. The fourth discussion emphasised the responsibility in leadership and management.

Psychological and physical measures were used during the coaching process. *BrainID®* mapping is designed for developing and monitoring an individually tailored coaching intervention for training and coaching. The BrainID® tool used in this case consisted of a self-evaluative survey and a qEEG measure, which resulted in an illustrative profile giving objective information about brain resources, fitness, and resilience (BrainId, 2023; Fingelkurts et al., 2020). A brain fitness measurement was used to provide comparable data at the beginning and end of the coaching process. The outcomes were discussed thoroughly with a certified mentor to give the participant insight and support for further personal development. The research outcomes were kept confidential and shared only with the participant and their mentor. A daily tracker the *Oura Smart Ring* was used personally by each participant to monitor and make observations of their daily physical activity, sleep and recovery, and the effects of changes in everyday practices during the coaching process. *Wellbeing Navigator (TAZ® profile)* was used to better understand the starting situation and enhance the participants' awareness of their natural style, which they preferably use naturally in daily activities. The tests gave an overview of the participant's current state of physical activity, the state of

nutrition, the amount of sleep and recovery as well as the fitness of the brain. *A BiP Business-Focused Inventory of Personality* assessment was used to give participants the possibility to self-assess their personality character traits relevant to their work behavior. The character traits were confidential and interpreted by an accredited psychologist. The results gave the participants an overview of themselves in an occupational context and supported them in setting development goals as well as assessing the development process (Hofgrede, 2015).

Even though many of the results of the process can be considered personal growth, it is possible to summarize them on a general level, still respecting the privacy of the participants. According to the natural style tests *(Wellbeing Navigator TAZ® profile)*, which were conducted at the beginning and repeated at the end of the process, the changes were positive in the participants' motivation, tendency to engage in physical activity, and nutritional indices. The motivation to engage in physical activity was initially strong and remained strong during the coaching process. However, the lack of time was considered the most common obstacle to physical activity. The food rhythm was a strength of the group. Many of the participants also paid special attention to the amount and quality of sleep during the process: they went to bed a little earlier and experienced that they were increasingly cheerful every morning. Some participants still experienced challenges in getting adequate and high-quality sleep. The average of the stress meters after the coaching process was relatively the same as in the initial measurement. Clearly, the many participants in the group were busy. According to the *BrainID® Mapping*, the biological age of the brain became younger by an average of 1.9 years during the process. Society's recovery from the pandemic-related isolation back to normal was seen in the results as a positive change in the sociality dimension of the participants.

In addition to physical activity, nutrition, and sleep changes, the process resulted in tools for strengthening leadership and maintaining well-being at work in future changes. According to the feedback given by the participants, the meetings with coaches were considered useful for enhancing the participants' well-being. The participants in the process appreciated the genuine interest of the coaches in promoting their well-being. Implemented during the aftermath of the pandemic, the process was almost entirely remote, and online communication tools were used. The feedback highlighted that it would have been beneficial to include more face-to-face coaching meetings during the process. In-person meetings would also have strengthened the group spirit among the participants. Coaches provided the participants with

insights into identifying and supporting their well-being. The insights gained during the coaching were related to identifying strengths and thus awakening the participants to consider the possibilities for a future career, for example, by understanding what kinds of work tasks they want to do in the future.

The yearlong process required commitment from the participants. Some participants would have liked to complete the process on a tighter schedule. On the other hand, it takes time to develop well-being comprehensively and see the visible results of the small changes in one's daily routines. According to the feedback provided by participants, they found solutions for developing their physical and psychological well-being amid a busy workday. Various small actions related to well-being at work promoted the well-being of the participants and the well-being of the team and cooperation network. For example, these small actions have resulted in better communication with the group and increased the participants' awareness of being present and available for team members.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The best practice described in this chapter was the coaching process combining psychological and physical well-being activities supported with information provided by different surveys and measures. The coaching process supported the personal development of those working in managerial-level positions or entrepreneurs in Lapland. For example, the coaching provided information, tools, and solutions for managing diversity. Increasing the resilience and readiness of the participants for change played a key role in the process. At the same time, the participants were given tools for strengthening their self-assessment skills for a reflective work approach.

The coaching responded to the industry's challenges by supporting psychological and physical well-being, developing leadership skills, and strengthening the participants' resilience and capacity for renewal during change. The state of well-being was not only based on self-observation; the progress could be measured and proven by measures. The tracker gave support and provided explanations behind feeling particularly well or not. With better self-awareness, the managers could lead themselves better and report better performance in their work. Becoming aware of one's own way of thinking and acting helped to realize opportunities to develop a personal leadership style and practices in a team or work community. The process gave the participants the keys to assess and foster well-being amid changes in an operational environment.

The lack of employees was named as one of the biggest challenges in the everyday work of managers and entrepreneurs in the tourism and service industry. This case helps to understand that the well-being of the managers and entrepreneurs does not only result in the well-being of the management, but also positively impacts the whole working community. According to the participants' reflections, social responsibility plays a crucial role for them, and the well-being of the work community is taken care of, even at the expense of their own well-being.

During the process, it has become clear that changing the daily routines and development of well-being cannot be fast-tracked, since the process takes time, and the results might not eventuate in an instant. The results of this kind of process can still lead to better outcomes in management, the image of the tourism field, and employee experiences. Supporting managers' well-being as a more practice can be seen as a way to promote socially sustainable tourism management. In this sense, the case also shows the connection between the daily practices and well-being of the managers and socially . The impact of COVID-19 had practical implications on the manager's daily work, which can be seen in this chapter as well. As the pandemic closed doors for many tourism companies, the managers were the ones to carry the consequences as the employees had to be let go, and at the same time, those who could stay were under constant pressure.

While there have been examples that position the employees as a part of the discussion concerning social sustainability in tourism, the supervisors and management, in general, are left marginal, even though they play an important role in taking forward social responsibility and are responsible for the employees' well-being. In this case, it can be seen that including the well-being of the managers and entrepreneurs in the discussion can broaden the perspective. The managers see social sustainability as an essential aspect of sustainability work and enhancing their capability to take care of themselves can positively impact the whole working community. Further research is needed to understand better the impact of manager or supervisor-level well-being on social sustainability in tourism. However, in this case, it could be seen that this kind of approach can support the transformation towards socially sustainable tourism in the long term.

The statistics provided at the beginning of this chapter should help the reader understand the changes that impact tourism employment. Statistical information makes it possible to anticipate future challenges and react to them. It also helps to make visible the benefits of tourism, such as work and livelihood. Yet, statistics do not describe everyday reality, i.e., how the

environmental changes are reflected in the daily life of the workforce and managers. Therefore, the development of socially responsible tourism requires a helicopter perspective, meaning a broader perspectives, but also mundane practices. This way, socially responsible tourism can be developed in dialogue between these perspectives.

The coaching process was implemented together with experts from the Lapland University of Applied Sciences and LovelyLife well-being coaches. The coaching process can be implemented as a concept of LovelyLife Ltd (2023) or with tailor-made modifications.

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Theme 2

The importance of effective cooperation in responsible tourism

The second part of the book emphasizes the importance of collaboration in the development of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism requires active cooperation, with all stakeholders involved in tourism development within a destination taking responsibility for actions and the development of tourism. National parks are typical focus in stakeholders' co-creation.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN THE CASE OF HJALTADALUR TRAVEL LTD

Gústaf Gústafsson, Hólar University

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT

This case explores the theory and practical implementation of responsible tourism based on the Cape Town and Kerala declarations (Declaration, 2002; Goodwin & Venu, 2008), within the context of *Hjaltadalur Travel Ltd.* (HT). HT is a rural micro hospitality business in Holar. Holar in Hjaltadalur is a small university village and campus in the North of Iceland, and its population is about 100. Holar has been an important centre of culture and learning throughout the centuries and became the Episcopal See for North Iceland in the year 1106. Holar is about a 25-minute drive from Saudarkrokur village and an hour and a half from Akureyri, the main town in the North of Iceland.

Holar is one of the most famous historical sites in Iceland. It was the capital of the North for over 700 years and well-situated close to the largest import and export harbour in North Iceland at the time, located in the estuary in Hjaltadalur. Today, tourism in Holar consists mainly of hospitality in HT's accommodation and a restaurant. Main attractions include the iconic Holar Cathedral, the oldest stone church in Iceland. Nyjibaer (e.g, New Farm), an old authentic turf farm built in the 18th century, is also an attraction and the Historical Centre of the Icelandic Horse. Holar and the surrounding area are popular destinations for hikers and nature enthusiasts.

HT was established to replace a non-profit organization owned by Holar University (HU). The non-profit organization was formed in 1996 to provide hospitality services but had accumulated high debts, could not acquire necessary licenses, and was therefore legally non-operational. When COVID-19 hit in early 2020, its services were discontinued. It was decided that a new approach would be needed to secure the services demanded by the university settings. A researcher and part-time lecturer at HU and was asked to help recover the situation.

As a government institution, HU cannot form a legal entity. Those proceedings would require a legislative process. At that time, the situation was a crisis. HU could not operate necessary services such as a cafeteria or provide short-term accommodation for staff and students. Trust in the

HU-owned hospitality business in Holar was minimal, and locals criticised it negatively.

A straightforward solution was suggested, in which a private enterprise would be established, governed by a board of HU staff to provide transparency. This solution was meant to be temporary, transiting the forecasted weeks of COVID-19. COVID-19, however, lasted more than a few weeks, and HU extended the contract until the end of 2025. At the same time, the researcher was offered the position of Adjunct at the HU Rural Tourism Department.

HT's main objective is to provide a variety of services that accommodate the needs of the stakeholders, based on a service contract with HU. This includes running the cafeteria, providing services for events, workshops, conferences, and graduations, as well as providing short-term accommodation for staff, students and guests in 17 cottages and apartments in Holar village. HT also operates the restaurant *Kaffi Holar* during the summer months.

The main stakeholders identified in this case are the locals of Holar and the surrounding area in Hjaltadalur, HU staff and students, the Icelandic State (HU is a government institution), the church, various local organisations, the Municipality of Skagafjordur and guests.

SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sustainable development (SD) is one of the main focal points of contemporary society due to the state of our climate, ecosystems, and populations. The United Nations (UN) summarise this in its SD Agenda (UN, n.d.b). SD is generally associated with the Brundtland report (Brundtland, 1987) and further revised in Agenda 21 of the UN conference in Rio in 1992 and the 2030 Agenda in 2015. For hospitality and tourism, *Sustainable Tourism* (ST) has a predominant role, focusing on the triple bottom line of economy, society, and the environment with the added fourth dimension of institutions, as further suggested in the 2030 Agenda (UN, n.d.c).

ST is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as *"tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"* (UN, n.d.a). UNWTO promotes responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism and advocates responsible tourism towards economic growth, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability (UNWTO, n.d.). However, many have suggested that there is a need for more responsible modes of production and consumption than the sustainability

concept includes (Budeanu, 2005; Butler, 1999; Cohen, 2002; Frey & George, 2010; Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Mowforth et al., 2008; Murphy & Price, 2005; Spenceley, 2005, 2018; Stanford, 2008), and responsible tourism is one such suggestion.

Responsible tourism can be described as a tool towards more sustainable practices and is often portrayed under the flag of Goodwin's *"Better places for people to live in, better places for people to visit"* slogan (Goodwin & Venu, 2008). There remains a degree of uncertainty among stakeholders about the definition and terminology of responsible tourism, and many have devised their own definitions, but at the same time, responsible tourism has been a powerful unifier among stakeholders (Burrai et al., 2019; Mondal & Samaddar, 2021). Responsible tourism has also been described as *the best that can be done at the time*, a tool towards more sustainable practices (Goodwin & Font, 2012).

As suggested, there should be more certainty about the definition and terminology of responsible tourism This also applies to the use of definitions interchangeably and often needing more precision. Additionally, Burrai, Buda and Stanford (2019) point out that even though responsible tourism has been a powerful unifier (Leslie, 2012; Mihalic, 2016; Spenceley, 2008; Weeden, 2013), its critical conceptual considerations still need more thought. Furthermore, they suggest that the ideology inadvertently and implicitly sustains the mechanism of modern global capitalism or "neoliberalism", which would need to reinvent itself through more moral production and consumption. This reinvention would be through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, academics have argued this framework has the explicit goal of implementing contested neoliberal policies (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017; Weber, 2017).

Researchers have questioned if it is indeed possible to achieve sustained, inclusive, and economic growth within the framework of such a mechanism (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017). Higgins-Desbiolles (2010) argues that the market-based neoliberal system, its culture, and ideology of consumerism are inherently unstable. With the above in mind, the researcher suggests that sustainable tourism and, subsequently, responsible tourism are complex issues, defying complete definitions with no final solution.

APPROACH TO THE CASE

Due to the attributes of the case, and that the researcher is involved in the process and has direct engagement with the case, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was selected as an approach, focusing on qualitative research methods. Its core components are the socially constructed interests and

needs of the community in which the case is situated, giving voice to the goals and problems that exist in order to improve the situation. PAR has been defined as a ”participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in a pursuit of worthwhile human purposes” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

PAR is considered to be beneficial when a study aims to gain a deep understanding of forms of collaboration and to create a collaborative climate by planning actions with local stakeholders (Robson & Robson, 1996). However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of such an approach. Even though it might improve a given situation, it most certainly will not overcome all barriers to implementing responsible tourism, and solving one problem might cause another. Therefore, PAR is a cyclic process based on observation, action, and reflection (Crane et al., 2008; Kindon et al., 2007). Since one ”solution” can create another problem, the cyclic attributes of PAR are particularly fitting to address such *wicked* problems.

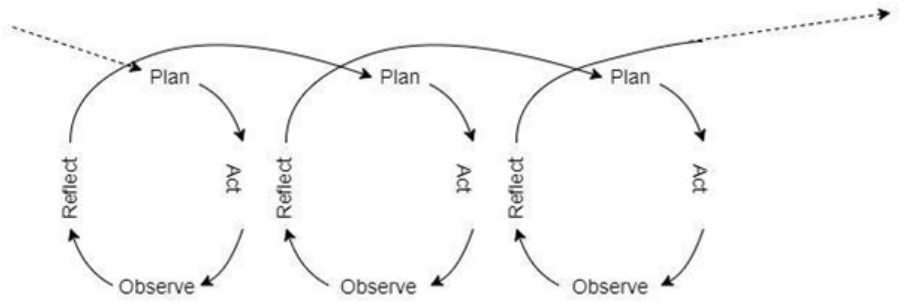

Figure 1. Typical cyclic process of PAR research

Wicked problems are problems that resist usual attempts to resolve them. The problems themselves are not morally wicked, as the name would suggest, but their nature can be since they cannot be solved with traditional modes of inquiry and decision-making (Brown et al., 2010). Scholars have defined wicked problems as complex issues that defy complete definition with no final solution because any resolution generates further issues (Brown et al., 2010). Solutions to such problems are not good or bad or true or false but *the best that can be done at the time* (Brown et al., 2010; Rittel & Webber, 1973), and this is has an interesting correlation with responsible tourism. The concept has been reported as widely used in the sustainability literature but

lacks a firm theoretical and conceptual base (Lönngren & Van Poeck, 2021; Turnbull & Hoppe, 2019). Others have found it helpful to highlight limitations while addressing complex societal and environmental problems (Lönngren, 2017; Xiang, 2013).

In this case, the implementation of responsible tourism behaves similarly. Once one obstacle has been overcome, a new one appears. Societal issues are often categorised as wicked, and inherently, introducing responsible tourism adopts such qualities due to the nature of the operation. Signing a contract does not necessarily mean that the contract will be honoured or that derived issues will impact the operations positively. Success does not always bring about a positive attitude. People representing stakeholders come and go, and each person has different views and opinions. Power balances can be uneven, and corruption can influence and bring about new obstacles. Stakeholders can have agendas that are only sometimes apparent. Problems can be challenging to define and identify, but not all are. Some are just so numerous or nearly impossible to tackle for small entities that, combined, they become wicked.

One proposed way to tackle wicked problems is the use of *”transdisciplinarity”*, which refers to a collective understanding of an issue, implying personal, local, strategic, and specialised contribution to knowledge (Brown et al., 2010). It is important to note that the term ”transdisciplinarity” is to be distinguished from the more common term ”interdisciplinarity” and even ”multidisciplinarity”, which are a combination of specialisations for a particular purpose. A transdisciplinary approach goes further to include all *validated* constructions of knowledge, their worldviews, and methods of inquiry, enabling it to even develop into a disciplinary of its own (Brown et al., 2010).

The transdisciplinary approach could enhance the implementation of responsible tourism, which highly focuses on local communities, validating local knowledge by collaborating with local stakeholders through various projects, resulting in the co-creation of knowledge by employing qualitative methods such as researcher experience, interviews, focus groups and community meetings. The researcher suggests this as a crucial point when regarding the properties of responsible tourism. The Cape Town Declaration endorses such views by stating that responsible tourism takes many forms, and that different destinations and actors have different priorities. However, this can also undermine the qualities of responsible tourism if stakeholders use these terms interchangeably and without precision. Therefore, a theoretical and practical framework is vital to increase SD. Using transdisciplinary methods looks inherent to responsible tourism since one of the main themes

is integrating local knowledge and a collective understanding of issues, which matches the concept of a transdisciplinary approach.

The researcher suggests that by using PAR as an approach and transdisciplinary inquiry methods to validate knowledge, adhering to the properties provided by the Cape Town and Kerala declarations while implementing responsible tourism in the context of the case could result in theoretical and practical knowledge that can provide valuable insights into the drivers of and barriers to the implementation of responsible tourism.

This case aims to better understand the concept of responsible tourism and the problems that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face when implementing responsible tourism practices. This case addresses some of the issues raised by researchers in a novel way by attempting to validate local knowledge using transdisciplinary methods and categorising the problem as wicked. Such a method attempts to overcome issues cyclically and gradually, acknowledging no final solutions.

A PRACTICAL ATTEMPT TO APPLY RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRINCIPLES

The decision to implement responsible tourism was inherent to *Hjaltadalur Travel Ltd.* (HT), given that the Holar University (HU) Department of Rural Tourism research policy emphasises sustainability and responsible rural tourism (HU, n.d.). Due to the strong relationship between HT and HU, an opportunity was seen to use HT as a living lab for the teachers and students in the department. Limitations to the concept of responsible tourism are acknowledged, and there needs to be more clarity on the meaning of the term. However, when deciding on the practical implementation, seven principles were used as a starting point, based on the Cape Town and Kerala declarations, due to the declarations widely accepted role as a common denominator (Goodwin & Venu, 2008).

The seven following principles were addressed, and possible actions were strategized. A question was devised as a precursor to every major business decision: *Will this action benefit the local community?* The standpoint is that this question incorporates the triple bottom line of sustainability in that negative impacts do not benefit responsible tourism or SD. Another critical step was to map out local stakeholders and their relations towards the business. Each identified stakeholder was approached where the situation was explained, and cooperation was suggested, such as holding an art exhibition, planting trees, starting a focus group or research partnership, or raising funds.

PRINCIPLE 1: ”MINIMIZE NEGATIVE ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND SOCIAL IMPACTS AND MAXIMISE POSITIVE ONES.”

This item includes general day-to-day business operations such as tackling food waste, general waste management or chemicals for cleaning. This is a vast subject and constantly changing. As an example, a non-profit pub and microbrewery is operating at Holar. Most of the members are staff and students at HU. HT serves wine and beer and might consider the pub a competitor. Instead, HT adjusted its operating hours and product availability to accommodate the non-profit and suggested offering locally brewed beer on the menu with selected items during tourist season. This plan of action has resulted in projects of cooperation where all stakeholders benefit. Recently, the pub started bottling beer for Kaffi Holar to sell, and the two cooperate at the annual Holar Beer Festival, where HT provides accommodation, staff meals, and sponsors prizes.

PRINCIPLE 2: ”GENERATE GREATER ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE AND ENHANCE THE WELL-BEING OF HOST COMMUNITIES, IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS AND ACCESS TO THE INDUSTRY.”

HT has approached all these items in some way. For example, hiring locals when possible, paying above the minimum wage, introducing funds to help with staff housing, directly supporting local stakeholder groups and helping with access to the industry for local tourist guides. HT follows all labour contracts, laws and legislation to the letter and encourages all staff to contact their respective labour unions for information on their rights and benefits. HT offers to pay for Icelandic classes for non-Icelandic speaking workers.

PRINCIPLE 3: ”ENGAGE LOCAL PEOPLE, ALONGSIDE OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND LIFE CHANCES.”

This item has proven to be one of the barriers where HT is seen as least successful, partly due to ethical considerations but also due to more practical reasons. It is difficult to identify what specific business decisions affect the lives and changes of locals. Operating the only hospitality business in Holar certainly affects Holar as a tourism destination. Engaging in projects that could create knowledge regarding this item, such as community meetings, focus groups or related inclusive activities where the destination is addressed,

needs broad stakeholder participation. This broad stakeholder participation has proven elusive for various reasons, including stakeholder attitudes and unbalanced power relations.

PRINCIPLE 4: ”ENSURE THAT TOURISM, THE INDUSTRY, AND THE CONSUMERS, MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THE WORLD’S DIVERSITY.”

This item is no small task; still, every bit counts. For example, HT has introduced food experiences based on local cultural heritage, where significant historical events are emphasised. Further, there is a project underway to use the restaurant walls as a historical record of the history of Holar, where the focus will be on informing locals and guests. Participating in re-introducing wetlands and forestry has been explored and awaits a timely launch.

PRINCIPLE 5: ”PROVIDE MORE ENJOYABLE, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES FOR TOURISTS THROUGH MORE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL PEOPLE AND ENSURE THEY GAIN A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.”

This item has multiple touch points and is heavily based on ”moments of truth” in hospitality (Barrows et al., 2011). Further, item two is an essential factor where local or long-term staff can enhance the tourist experience. The researcher has worked in Kaffi Holar as a cook, waiter, and receptionist for three years and has witnessed guests remarking on multiple times that he was the first local they had met on their trip to Iceland. Several methods were used, such as taking the time to talk, storytelling and various other ways to support item five that *only* requires the most valuable resource: *time*.

PRINCIPLE 6: ”PROVIDE ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DISADVANTAGED.”

As for Kaffi Holar, there is access through HU to the restaurant area. However, the accommodation units, unfortunately, do not have access for the disadvantaged. HT must rely on the owners of the facilities to accommodate this point, but such a change has yet to be agreed on or planned for, even though requests have been met with understanding.

PRINCIPLE 7: "ENSURE THAT TOURISM IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE, MUTUALLY REWARDING, ENGENDERS RESPECT BETWEEN TOURISTS AND HOSTS, AND BUILDS LOCAL PRIDE AND CONFIDENCE."

This point is viewed to be based on staff training and quality processes. Many books have been written about cultural differences and their importance to tourism and include a chapter or two about the issue. During the researcher's time in Holar, he has been confronted with various views, ranging from xenophobia to conspiracy theories. Mutual respect and understanding are qualities that are both plentiful and, at the same time lacking, but very difficult to change. SMEs have perhaps a limited practical role regarding the last point due to their size and various other reasons, except perhaps making sure that they are not vice versa.

CASE DISCUSSION

The study is based on earlier research, which supported the findings that SMEs in tourism lack vital resources, including skills, experience, and time to engage in responsible tourism (Carasuk et al., 2016; Frey & George, 2010; Gústafsson, 2020). The study also found factors such as policy to be an influence that could limit SMEs resources and negatively impact perceived norms, reducing the likelihood of implementing responsible tourism (Gústafsson, 2020).

Even though there may be a positive attitude, the willingness of tourism managers to commit resources to changing management practices seems to seldom follow (Butler, 2015; Frey & George, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014; Merwe & Wocke, 2007). Furthermore, efficacy is elusive and implementation in practice remains difficult (Mondal & Samaddar, 2021). It is further suggested that attitude does not always lead to change (Frey & George, 2010; Sirakaya, 1997). Frey & George (2010), Porter & Kramer (2006), Spenceley (2007) and others also point out that behaviour change, although necessary, has been limited.

The approach taken has provided various results. However, as wicked problems tend to behave, it has produced new problems and barriers. The implementation process has improved the situation; the hospitality business is operating legally, making a profit, and stakeholder groups have benefited directly and indirectly from the business.

The development process has allowed for opportunities for cooperation where more conventional approaches might not have, but at the same time, this has demanded resources which could have been used more productively

in the short-term towards increased profits. It is also important to consider that COVID-19 has had a dramatic and lasting impact on the development process of this case due to high uncertainty and severely reduced income opportunities.

The researcher suggests that stakeholders hold varying views on the case. Even though responsible tourism is generally viewed positively, not everybody agrees with its priorities or emphasis. Uneven power balances and issues related to complex social relations and networks, like those reported by Koens & Thomas (2016), have played an important role in the development process and might be the deciding factor of success or failure. One of the main issues regarding the case is the high dependency of HT on HU, which is by far the largest client. During the case period, the ministry appointed a new rector, and HU renewed the institution's whole administration and support staff and introduced radical policy changes. In the case of Holar, there has been a clear improvement in the situation, but success does not guarantee a stakeholder's positive attitude.

Responsible tourism is a tool towards a more sustainable community. Community issues are group projects by nature and are more likely to be resolved in a participatory manner. By identifying vital issues in cooperation with stakeholders, SMEs are more likely to be successful in behaving sustainably. Like any "solution" to a wicked problem, responsible tourism is the best that can be done at the time.

CONCLUSION

By seeing responsible tourism as a continuous, inherent, core way of running a business, the researcher has gained an increased understanding of the issues involved and identified new barriers. Responsible tourism is a collaborative effort, and it is crucial to map out different stakeholders and reflect with them on the issues involved and action to be taken. SMEs must rely heavily on networking, other stakeholders, and outside influence to be successful in the implementation process.

It is vital that stakeholders take responsibility and show interest. The subtle yet significant role of stakeholders, complex social relations, and uneven power balances are things that have shown to be of vital importance. It is suggested that SMEs are less likely to invest resources and make long-term decisions that consider stakeholder views if such actions are met with little understanding or enthusiasm by the stakeholders.

Responsible tourism needs to be at the core of the business and the first question regarding every business decision. A cyclic approach is needed,

where observation, action, and reflection in cooperation with others are a part of everyday business. By viewing responsible tourism as a participatory project, SMEs can gain access to important information about complex issues and solutions.

A theoretical framework of responsible tourism and PAR methodology has resulted in an approach that might be more successful in the long run and provide increased benefits for the local community. Not least because the implementation of responsible tourism is like PAR, a cyclic process: Do not try to solve all problems at once, or once and for all. One solution will likely generate another problem.

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THE SUSTAINABILITY SCHEME OF VÄSTERBOTTEN: ADJUSTING GLOBAL CRITERIA FOR LOCAL RELEVANCE AND CROSS-SECTORAL COMMUNITY CREATION

Kajsa Åberg, Region Västerbotten

TRUST AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN A NORTHERN REGION

The possibility to adapt a global initiative to local conditions may serve as a way for actors in areas with limited resources to access knowledge and networks needed to forward their efforts in sustainable tourism development. This chapter describes and discusses how the global criteria system of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has been adapted and put into practice in the Swedish region of Västerbotten by the regional tourism organization Region Västerbotten Turism (RVT). The process has resulted in a work method that aims at strengthening aspects of sustainability in private firms, collaborative destination organizations (DMOs) as well as in municipal work. In addition, the initiative has created a cross-sectoral community of engaged actors. Due to the successful implementation, the indirect effects and potential of tourism activities have been recognized and added to the discussion on regional development in a broader sense. This also contributes to the ongoing debate concerning the challenges of attracting a competent workforce to this expanding industrial sector. A key factor in this critical review is the use of the concept of trust as an explanatory element in tourism planning and development collaborations, a perspective introduced by Nunkoo and Smith (2014a), and Costa and Lima (2018). The chapter also addresses the changing role of regional development organizations (Åberg, 2020) and aims to identify pivotal aspects in the process, to provide guidance for initiatives where global standards may be used to create local relevance and cross-sectoral communities.

Responsible tourism is here addressed as a way to embrace not only all aspects of sustainability—environmental, economic, social and cultural—but also the motives and leeway of individual actors engaging in it, be it through active participation or more unintentional association. According to this approach, responsible tourism allows for a more holistic view on how tourism

affects a society on the receiving end of the tourism system. The broader the boundaries are set, in terms of geography as well as actors included, the more attitudes are captured, ranging from the private firm's potential for revenue, to a public sector's cautionary attitude to commodifying common assets such as areas of protected nature. The complexity created by this holistic take puts pressure on the handler, in this case the development organization within the regionally elected public sector, Region Västerbotten (RV). However, this illustrates what the global network the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) describes as a pivotal distinction between responsible and sustainable tourism: the need for responsibility to be managed in order for aspirations in sustainability to be realised (ICTR, 2023). The operationalization described in this chapter shows how such responsibility may be put into practice by a designated public actor. Assignments and expectations on such actors in relation to tourism have evolved during the last 50 years, going from marketing of publicly owned facilities to safeguarding from negative effects and strengthening structures to increase the shares of revenue that stay within the local economy. Åberg (2020) reasons on how the accumulated work tasks mirror how Jafari (1990), complemented by among others Airey (2004) and Coles, Hall and Duval (2005, 2006), describe how insights into the nature of tourism have evolved from advocacy to cautionary to knowledge based.

The increased awareness of tourism's complexity and wide-ranging impacts advocates the need for planning that is based on scientific reasoning as well as local influence. This prescribed combination of operational and academic knowledge is at the core of the current predominating view on sustainable and responsible development. In a European context it can be found in theoretical models as well as promoted in practice through the prerequisites for EU funding from regional development programmes (Flagestad & Hope, 2001; von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2003; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Lemmetyinen, 2010; EU, 2023). Even when sustainability is not an explicitly stated aim, cooperative relations between actors are needed for destination development to be effective even in areas with a dominant destination organization (Costa & Lima, 2018). This has led to a plethora of tourism-supporting collaborations between commercial and public sector actors of varying permanence (Dredge, 2006; Boesen, Sundbo & Sundbo, 2016). The issue of initiating and establishing collaborations however holds more aspects to be scrutinized than the number and identity of involved actors, as it has been found that private entrepreneurs claim that a lack of support from the public sector is their main obstacle to carrying out initiatives for sustainability (Jarvis et al, 2010; TVV, 2015).

The case presented in this chapter builds on the literature introducing the concept of trust as an explanatory element in tourism planning and development collaborations (Nunkoo & Smith, 2014a; Costa & Lima, 2018). In the context of setting up and maintaining partnerships where power and or financial benefits are expected outcomes, trust is fundamental to uphold commitment, and as such results are often slow to appear, and stakeholders may lose interest if they are not convinced about the effects of the process (Nunkoo & Smith, 2014a). In the tourism development literature the term trust can be found to relate to a willingness to balance between relying on one's own strength and participating in collaborations where each actor must await positive outcomes of others' intentions or behaviours (Östhol & Svensson, 2002a, 2002b; Clarke & Raffay, 2011; Nunkoo & Smith, 2014b). By sharing resources related to the economy and knowledge, each actor may enhance their return on invested assets as collaborative advantages that would not be attainable through the actions by an individual are created and the partnership may with time evolve from an exchange of readily available information into full collaboration (Deakin, 2002; Svensson et al, 2006; Glasbergen, 2011; Åberg & Svels, 2017). Nunkoo and Smith (2014b) claim to have identified a lack of tourism research into the aspect of trust. Based on their reasoning, there is a useful analytic perspective to be found in the relation between trustor and trustee as a starting point for discussing how the collective is a trustee with a shared trust in the common aim and purpose of the collaboration itself. This more utilitarian perspective is suggested here for scrutinizing and discussing the case described in this chapter. The perspective builds on findings in studies, claiming the strength of unanimity for a shared aim is an explanatory factor to the efficiency and the participants' perceived relevance of the collaboration (Costa & Lima, 2018).

The Swedish region of Västerbotten is a suitable illustration of a northern area where public sector strategies have identified sustainable tourism development as a tool for regional development (Regeringskansliet, 2021; Region Västerbotten, 2021). This is not least evident by the regional development organization having a department focusing on the matter to address the potential for job creation and service distribution in less populated rural areas. However, most tourism activities and numbers are found in the cities along the coast and in developed skiing destinations in the mountainous areas rather than in the vast, sparsely populated inland region (Lundmark & Åberg, 2019; Carson et al, 2020). According to calculations for the year 2021, the tourism sector accounts for 3.7% of Västerbotten's total GDP and tourism employment is estimated to account for 2.9% of total employment, equating

to 3,815 jobs (Oxford Economics, 2023). As a relatively minor sector in terms of jobs and direct economic effects on the regional level, the impacts need to be assessed in relation to local conditions. Commercial guest nights in the region reach close to 2 million per year, whereof one third are international and of those more than 55% originate from the neighbouring country Norway (RVT, 2021). There are also a high number of second homes in the region, predominantly owned by Swedes and Norwegians. All these aspects taken together, the tourism sector in Västerbotten has been a steady and reliant aspect of the economy, catering for visitors and inhabitants alike. The sector received new attention as other sectors started gaining ground in what has been labelled ”the green revolution of industries”, predicting up to 25,000 new jobs being created in the northern part of the country during a 5-year period, starting in 2021 (Vattenfall, 2021). In the discussions raised, the tourism department gained new attention and in the regional tourism strategy presented in fall 2022 it stated that the attraction at the core of their work could be seen to affect tourists as well as new inhabitants and investments (RVT, 2022).

Forecasts of increased interest, paired with a general understanding of the irreversible damage tourism may cause in terms of ecological, sociocultural, and economic effects, made the tourism department of the regional development organization approach the UN-initiated global organization Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in 2015 to learn more about the system of sustainability criteria they were establishing. This was the start of the sustainability initiative and work method named the Västerbotten Experience (VX), which in January 2023 had gathered municipalities, DMOs, and 95 private firms in a regional community of engaged actors. The initiative is not a certification scheme but rather an internal working method that addresses operations on the individual as well as on communal level. The material presented here is based on relevant literature and input from regional stakeholders together with the author’s critical reflections that to an extent are provided through professional engagement in the organization behind the initiative. The author has however not played an active role in the operationalization of the VX, and thus has been able to keep a distance that allows for an analytical view on the process.

ADAPTING A GLOBAL SYSTEM TO LOCAL PRECONDITIONS

The case illustrates how a public sector actor can design and establish a working method based on global standards that is applicable on a local level as well as simultaneously enhancing long-term cooperation on the regional level.

It thus addresses two vital challenges in collaborative destination development with the ambition of strengthening responsible, sustainable tourism among local engagement and strategic actors. First, this involves the longevity needed for stable structures to evolve in a sector used to short term, externally steered working methods. Secondly, it addresses the need for collectivity among the stakeholders through shared aims and methods despite their different structures and raisons d'etre.

The longevity or long-term perspective needed for the holistic, multi-actor approach to evolve has not been a prioritized aspect in the set-up of collaborations funded for example by EU funds with the duration and content decided on in advance. The advantages created by consolidating and maintaining cooperative relationships may not be visible during the duration of a project and hard to trace back to being a result of a specific initiative. This has created project fatigue among actors increasingly reluctant to invest their time and efforts. Potential returns on investment thus need to be communicated in a way that meets the interests of the targeted group, such as small businesses with scarce resources in time (Cao & Zhang, 2010). The collaboration presented here started as an externally funded project aimed at increasing sustainable operations among entrepreneurs. Through a strategy of continuation, it was allowed to evolve into a permanent feature of the public development organization. The case may thus serve as a point of departure for discussions and planning as well as for building analytical perspectives to be used in evaluations of initiatives.

The second challenge addressed here relates to the division between private and public sectors. Whereas the public sector has long-term strategies to steer their actions and needs to follow guidelines for democratic transparency, private actors prioritize shorter time frames and motives that are less collective (Hastings, 1996; Dredge, 2006). The case discussed in the following allows for an approach where the collaboration has evolved through time, led by the public sector actor but with transparency towards other organizations. The threshold between structure and operations has thus been lowered to influence the process, creating engagement. The initiator, RVT, had the ambition from the start to find a model where all kinds of actors could participate, irrelevant of their location, size, or sector. Due to the relatively small number of stakeholders and variety in products—ranging from skiing hot spots to small-scale activities in the woodlands—the collaboration needed to be based on a concept that was possible to adapt to regional as well as local circumstances. At the same time, it needed to be quality proofed and well-known in order to attract engagement. GSTC was in the process of finalizing

a system of criteria for sustainability in tourism operations that would be applicable for firms and destinations alike, an approach that aligned with RVT's ambition of building a communal system rather than promoting individual initiatives. This was later confirmed as a strategically wise decision also from a business communications view, as the national marketing organization Visit Sweden reported that from a consumer's perspective, sustainability efforts on the communal and destination levels are more attractive than those performed by individual firms (Visit Sweden, 2023).

BUILDING A CROSS-SECTORAL COMMUNITY THROUGH CONTINUITY

By the year 2002, more than 100 global sustainable tourism certification schemes had been established and at one point more than 50 eco-labels were running in Europe (Jarvis et al, 2010; Grapentin & Ayikoru 2019). The United Nations (UN), responded to this emerging plethora by initiating the development of GSTC, an overarching, global organization that was to create a set of quality proofed criteria addressing aspects of sustainability that could be used by actors of all sizes and locations, incorporating the UN-led globally accepted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The organization has since established a system where GSTC manages the criteria and provides international accreditation for certification bodies who then assess operations in accordance with the criteria. The assessment involves a cost that is connected to the certification bodies, not GSTC (GSTC, 2023).

As a regional, public-sector organization, RVT had an overarching task in terms of enhancing the sustainability within tourism development in the region, underlined by the obligation of all public actors in Sweden to work in accordance with the SDGs. The actions and strategies produced, needed be accessible and relevant in as many different contexts as possible to reap the potential found in tourism for the regional development at large and to hinder negative effects. The aim was to create a Västerbotten-specific structure where firms, municipalities, and DMOs could come together to take steps forward. The GSTC criteria system met the two vital requirements set by RVT in their initial plan: a model that would be clear and straightforward, and that would be fit for use on several organizational levels simultaneously.

The first phase initiated the idea of creating a work method where RVT used the criteria structure of GSTC in consultative meetings with individual firms and DMOs. The activity was performed as a project running in 2015–2018, partly funded by the EU structural funds to employ a person who would

work closely together with the regional head of the tourism department in approaching and engaging the participating actors. Both the regional head and the project leader had documented experience in sustainability initiatives and destination development. The sessions were found to provide the firms with advice and coaching related to their efforts to operate sustainably, based on the combined resources of knowledge held by the two officials. A pivotal insight during this phase was that RVT accumulated insights into needs, potential, and developmental challenges not only within the individual firms but also on a collective level. There were at the time five DMOs running in the region, structured as membership-based organizations as well as municipally owned companies, and all took part in the activities within the project.

The working method consisted of a sustainability analysis session scrutinizing the actor's operations and included setting up an individual sustainability policy. RVT summarized the session in a report with suggestions for measures which were sent to the actor for response. The session was set to be repeated every two years to follow up on previous issues and identify new challenges and possible solutions as well as to find good examples that could be shared with other actors. The working method was thus a circular model for assessment, dialogue, compilation, evaluation, and recurrence.

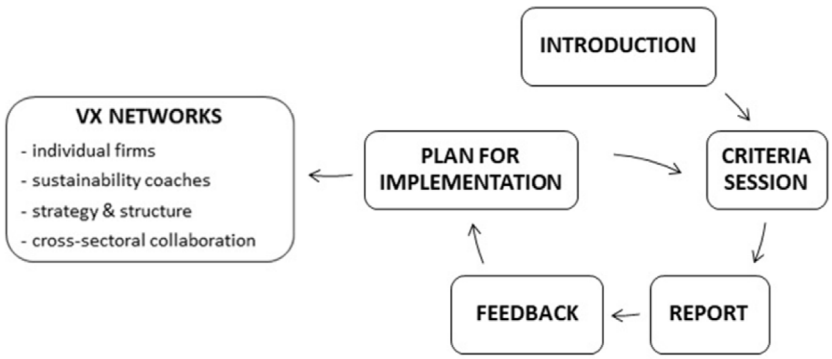

Figure 1. Circular VX-model (source: author).

By the time the first project was finalized, RVT had designed and applied for a subsequent one where the term Västerbotten Experience (VX) was presented. A symbol with the letters VX was designed and communicated to identify and

signal engagement in a more responsible take on tourism development. The purpose was for internal use to connect actors in different spheres with each other. This project, during 2018–2020, focused on strengthening the quality of nature-based tourism products and infrastructure while the process of refining the working method continued. The GSTC criteria were complemented with a fifth, Västerbotten-specific, set of criteria to increase the connection to regional circumstances. Due to its global applicability, the original criteria include aspects regulated through Swedish legislation relating to aspects such as workers' rights. The fifth set accompanies GSTC's four pillars of sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts and environmental impacts and addresses, among other things, tourism's role in the presence of the indigenous Sámi population, as Västerbotten is in the cross-border nation of Sápmi (the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sámi people). The added criteria relate to contact with local actors regarding physical presence in reindeer herding areas as well as acknowledging the Sámi elements of the resources found in local nature and culture.

The starting point of the VX working method were the individual sessions aimed at implementing a common understanding and language regarding aspects of sustainability and responsibility. As the acceptance and enthusiasm grew, the working method was developed to contain three networks, all initiated and managed by RVT. One is primarily for the firms, who meet regularly in digital meetings to share information and discuss issues of common interest. A second network consists of sustainability coaches who perform criteria sessions. They are representatives from the DMOs, trained by RVT in the GSTC and the VX criteria system. This way of forwarding knowledge was considered important by all involved actors both to increase and spread knowledge and to meet the increasing interest from actors who wanted to engage in the working method. In the third network, representatives from municipalities and DMOs meet with the head of RVT to discuss strategic issues. This forum has resulted in a new marketing initiative where actors in the whole region join forces to communicate products to an external market. VX is a feature in this context but as mentioned earlier not used as a marketing symbol.

CONCLUSIONS

During the years 2015–2022, three aspects evolved within the process of creating the VX working method that, based on the literature referenced in this chapter, can be said to have been pivotal to its establishment among actors in the region.

First, the initial idea to approach DMOs and private firms was extended to also include public actors and specifically the municipalities. Whereas sessions with firms are performed by any of the trained coaches, the municipality sessions are held by the head of RVT and involve the municipal head together with selected representatives from municipal departments handling issues such as spatial planning, business development and strategies. Here, GSTC's elaboration of criteria into the two sets suitable for firms and destinations respectively, was useful as a starting point for the model by showing the adaptability of the criteria. By 2022, the municipalities had accepted VX as a tool for enhancing their sustainability in tourism-related aspects, either through individual sessions, as parts of the collaboration in a municipality owned DMO or by agreeing but not having the resources to start the process. This inclusive approach meant that actors on different levels and in different sectors were involved in the same process of finding an efficient working method and approved of the same approach to sustainability and how the complexity could be handled in practice. A shared understanding of the purpose builds common values and collaboration rather than competition between actors, thus creating trust and efficiency as well as potential for learning from each other as the common good is explicit in the collaboration (Costa & Lima, 2018; TVV, 2019).

Secondly, due to the overall interest and engagement in VX, RVT decided to structure their operations in a way that allowed for permanent staff resources to engage solely in the continuation of the VX working method. In a department of three permanent positions, this meant a re-prioritization that illustrated the department's trust in the working method and its results. In terms of creating commitment, this led to all actors seeing their own efforts as part of a lasting initiative where they could expect returns on the invested time and effort. This aligns with how the communication and design of structures must consider the concrete needs of the receiving party to efficiently show the expected benefits and underline the win-win nature of the cooperation, especially in the context of elusive themes such as sustainability (Villarino & Font, 2015; Costa & Lima, 2018).

The third aspect that has contributed to the development, despite being opposite to general initiatives for sustainability efforts, is the fact that the working method is not a certification nor an assessment scheme that requires financial resources. VX is offered free of charge, giving actors direct access to knowledgeable coaching and a network with potential strength. Studies have found that financial costs are one main reason for firms not to join a sustainability scheme, followed by expected high levels of bureaucracy and

lack of clarity in what to expect in return (Jarvis et al, 2010; Dunk et al, 2016; Buunk & van der Weerf, 2019). In addition, although measures taken to reduce environmental impacts are often found to lower costs such as for electricity and fuel, that aspect is not sufficiently well-known to encourage engagement for investments (Jarvis et al, 2010; Dunk et al, 2016; Costa & Lima, 2018). RVT has communicated the low thresholds into the collaboration and been clear in underlining the long-term nature of the effects. No focus has been put on marketing advantages, rather the opposite by repeatedly stating that the VX symbol is not to be used as a sign of any certification.

The VX initiative is a process which is still running. The working method has proven to be an efficient tool for enhanced sustainability in the operations of firms, municipalities and DMOs, in addition to creating a platform that materializes the concept of responsible tourism, as defined in the introduction. In retrospect and planning for its future, the regional organization that initiated, established, and led the evolution of the working method has applied a reflective stance and critically assessed the process. This has been done to enhance the benefits in the own region but also to boil down the eight-year process into a clear, transparent, and more universally applicable model. The reason for this is that the actors have been asked by other regional and national actors to share their recipe for a multi-actor working method for a more sustainable, responsible development of tourism. They were also asked to present the VX system to the wider audience of GSTC members and partners at the global conference arranged by GSTC in 2019. Likewise, RVT invited the CEO of GSTC, Randy Durband, to keynote at the first VX conference arranged in 2022, attended by actors from all over Sweden.

There is a belief in the applicability of the working method both among practitioners and on strategic levels. According to the involved stakeholders, the crucial point that allowed for this development has been the continuity experienced from the stakeholders' perspective. Having a public sector actor taking the lead may also have had a major impact on the progress as the political, administrative system in Sweden aligns with the findings of Bramwell and Lane (2011), that initiatives of a collective nature as well as longer-term strategies related to social and economic development are expected to be found in the public sector. In addition, it complements the understanding of it as something that is operationalized with agency. The governmental and knowledge-based nature of RVT may also have had a safeguarding function in the novel inter-organisational cooperation where all stakeholders needed to accept the behaviour of others and trust in their motives and competence, in this case not least trust RVT as initiators and managers, an aspect discussed

by Das and Teng (2002). Linking back to the claimed crucial impact of trust in cooperation, a certain level of trust can be given to a public actor due to the democratic system. However, trust is an elusive element with multiple interpretations and is hard to assess. According to Nunkoo and Smith (2014b), a possible measurement is found in the behaviour of involved actors. In the case of VX, the decision to engage in the context or not would serve as a point of measurement. Judging from the level of engagement in all sectors and even outside of the region, one may claim that the level of trust in the working method is high. This may also be interpreted as a matter of reciprocity as there is a strength in numbers and the initial aim of including all actors may simultaneously be seen as a tool to achieve it.

The VX method has been welcomed by the GSTC as an illustration of how the globally applicable system with set criteria can keep its relevance and even become more useful when paired with local initiatives. This has led to an increased interest in GSTC among the regional actors, some of whom have joined as members and had staff attend courses in sustainable tourism held by GSTC. In this way, a cross-sectoral community is created that transcends borders of all kinds, leading to a more holistic understanding of responsible development.

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SOUTHERN KONNEVESI: DEVELOPING A NATIONAL PARK DESTINATION THROUGH COOPERATION AND AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

Rositsa Röntynen, Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND MANAGEMENT OF FINLAND'S NATIONAL PARKS

The first national parks in Finland were established in 1938 as protected areas on state-owned lands. Describing the early development of Finnish national parks, Perttula (2006) observes that nature has ever since been seen as a part of national cultural heritage and a resource for recreation, economic activity, and scientific development. In 1956, Central Finland's first national park was established. According to Perttula (2006), up to the 1970s, the national park network was considered insufficient and non-representative regionally, which led to further expansion and seeking of effective management models. In the beginning there was little regulation on how to manage a national park and what kind of services to offer to the public. In the 1970s there was a shift from the establishment of strict nature reserves towards national parks, which were seen as not only benefitting nature but well-being as well. As of the beginning of 1980s the US national park management model was adopted, requiring a management plan for every park, including the harmonized objectives of nature preservation and recreation (Perttula, 2006). This model has resulted in well-established strategic management and responsible practices with implications not only for the field of nature conservation but also for regional development and tourism.

In the present day, there are 41 Finnish national parks (National Parks, 2023), governed by Metsähallitus, a state business institution managing the state-owned land and water areas, so that the benefits for Finnish society are maximized (Metsähallitus, n.d.a). As one of its tasks Metsähallitus (n.d.c) identifies using managing, and protecting these areas "sustainably and reconciling the different goals of owners, customers and other stakeholders", which incorporates both the ideas of sustainability and cooperation.

The typical services provided by Metsähallitus to national park visitors include providing marked hiking routes, nature trails, campfire and camping sites, shelters, huts, and customer service (National Parks, 2023). The increase in national parks visitor numbers was a long-term trend even before COVID-19 (Metsähallitus, 2022; Konu et al., 2021). To maintain the satisfaction of visitors Metsähallitus complements its own services by maintaining a network of enterprises and organizations, which, by cooperation agreement, offer services in each park and are committed to the principles of sustainable nature tourism (Metsähallitus, n.d.b).

Southern Konnevesi National Park was established in 2014 (Laki Etelä-Konneveden kansallispuistosta 661/2014) as Finland's 38th national park. In the consideration of whether it should be a strict nature reserve or a national park, the intention to serve tourists was already noted (Yle, 2013). In Central Finland, Southern Konnevesi was the fifth established national park (Nykänen, 2018). Since then, the number has dropped to four due to administrative changes of the territory of the province (Väänänen, 2021). In the other province to which it belongs, Northern Savo, there are two national parks (National Parks, 2023). Since 2015, the park has been steadily the most popular in both provinces (Keränen & Mikkola, 2016; Luontoon, 2023).

Responsibility through cooperation and stakeholder involvement

National parks have a wide range of positive effects, both on the health and well-being of visitors, on the diversity and preservation of nature and culture, and on the local economy (Erkkonen, 2018; Ministry of the Environment, n.d.), thus they contribute to ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. This study focuses on cooperation as a responsible practice, maximizing the benefits and minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity.

Responsible tourism aims to make destinations better places to live in and visit (International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002). Incorporating actions in favour of all pillars of sustainability (economic, socio-cultural, and ecological), responsible tourism necessitates a wide range of practices, many of which could be enabled or aided by cooperation, as stated in the Cape Town declaration (2002), e.g., multi-stakeholder involvement, access of local community to resources and benefits of tourism, public-private partnerships, optimal use of resources, accessibility of tourism services, preservation of cultural and natural heritage, etc.

Cooperation in nature-based tourism entrepreneurship

Cooperation is ”a process of joint decision-making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain” (Gray, 1989, 227). In tourism, a key reason for cooperating is the formation of a competitive advantage of the destination by linking the competence and resources of single actors (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993).

The growing popularity of nature-based tourism urges an examination of the quality of tourism services. The needs of nature tourists have changed towards a safe and high-quality service. An easily accessible and experiential trip requires accommodation and transportation in proximity to the nature site, equipment rental, and catering services (Lassila, 2019). Tourism trends, many of which are driven by the customer, demand shifting towards sustainability, including multiple-destination tours, sharing economy services, live-like-a-local tourism, digital platforms, augmented reality, longer-stay trips, and camping accommodation (Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2019). The increase in nature-based tourism service demand and competitive pressure have emphasized the importance of customer-oriented operation and flexibility, which can only be achieved by cooperation. Tourism companies mainly operate in networks due to the nature of the industry, i.e., to provide an uninterrupted service chain (Lassila, 2019).

According to Lassila (2019), the most important factors of nature-based tourism entrepreneurship are the love of nature and the nature-related hobbies that can be combined with entrepreneurship, reinforcing the perception that nature-based tourism companies are mainly hobby and lifestyle entrepreneurs. Nature-based tourism entrepreneurs see networking and cooperation as important, but partners are mainly seen as customers and service providers, as well as a resource pool (e.g., exchange of equipment), while cooperation on a strategic level is rarely mentioned. Cooperation is based on knowing the partner and on trust, and personal chemistry must work in a network (Lassila, 2019).

Stakeholder involvement in tourism

Stakeholder involvement is a popular and widely used method in development. The participatory approach is the cornerstone of responsible development. Tourism offers compelling opportunities for stakeholder participation, as it comprises of a wide range of stakeholders (Wanner & Prönstl-Haider, 2019).

Stakeholders can be any group or individual that can influence the achievement of the organization's goals or are affected by them (Freeman, 1984, 46). Tourism stakeholders include representatives of the tourism industry, tourists, local communities, administrative bodies, non-governmental organizations, experts, etc. (Reed et al., 2009). Tourism as an industry is fragmented (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). It is often not easy to define a business as a tourism company, because the demand for its services may be divided between the local population and tourists (Lassila, 2019). This is even more complex because companies often operate in multiple fields simultaneously (Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2014) or offer different services, e.g., seasonally. The networking of tourism's versatile stakeholder groups, also other than the service providers, calls for better understanding their roles in tourism.

Stakeholder involvement has both supporters and opponents: while some see it as the promotion of active citizenship, avoiding conflicts of interest and improving community spirit, others criticize it as tokenism and staged sustainability (Wanner & Prönstl-Haider, 2019).

An ecosystem approach in tourism

Cooperation is often associated with networks. A network describes complex interactions and ties in a community (Scott, Baggio & Cooper, 2008). In a sociological context, a network is a specific type of relations (building a net) linking defined sets of persons, objects, or events (nodes, actors) (Mitchell, 1969). According to a more recent business-oriented definition (Kola et al., 2020), a network is a contractual relationship between a finite number of actors, whose action (e.g., supply, distribution, subcontracting) is predefined and legally bound in time, quality, quantity, performance, scope, etc. Networks are found to be particularly relevant in the service industry. In tourism, namely the aspects of interconnectedness and cooperation are crucial for the creation of the tourism product (Bjork & Virtanen, 2005; Pechlaner et al., 2003; Tinsley & Lynch, 2001). Networking in tourism is also beneficial for sustainability, as the industry relies on a multitude of small-size actors, who would be unable to accomplish the balance of sustainability in isolation (Halme, 2001). Scott, Baggio, and Cooper (2008) also point out that by networking tourism compensates for its fragmentation, and cooperation is the main reason for the existence of networks. The relations in a tourism destination, however, are not only transaction-based and contractual, thus cannot be entirely explained by network theory.

Moore (1993) defines a business ecosystem as ”an economic community supported by a foundation of interacting organizations and individuals—the organisms of the business world”. In contrast to a hierarchical organization, an ecosystem is a complex structure consisting of various stakeholders—service providers, customers, subcontractors, authorities, financiers, suppliers, etc. (Moore, 1998). It is a self-organizing community formed partly intentionally and partly coincidently (Moore, 1998), where connections between actors are loose and complex (Iansiti & Levien, 2004).

Through interaction and shared values, the ecosystem creates added value for each actor. According to Ogulin (2014), the capabilities of the ecosystem are determined by the combination and strength of strategies, information, process know-how, skills and incentives shared in the network. Since there is no hierarchy in the ecosystem, it is difficult to choose who makes the decisions. Usually, the ecosystem has a leading company that is larger or stronger than the others and due to its position sets the rules of the game while others follow (Moore, 1998; Selen & Ogulin, 2015).

Although networks and ecosystems share many characteristics, the specificity of the ecosystem is in the spontaneous, informal, and flexible participation of actors, and the added value produced for each actor in addition to the competitive advantage for the destination. Due to its versatile, complex structure, the tourism industry can function as an ecosystem. Selen and Ogulin (2015) state that the understanding of the tourism value chain needs to be expanded, because the tourist destination operates in a unique combination of interconnected factors, i.e., an ecosystem that includes, in addition to tourism industry intermediaries and partners, various stakeholders such as authorities, visitors, and the natural environment. Tourism ecosystem is most often mentioned in the context of a destination with a larger leader, usually hotel, destination management organization (DMO), or travel agency, and in the sense of the digitalization of the tourism industry (smart tourism ecosystem), where digital technology supports knowledge exchange (e.g., Baggio & Chiappa, 2013; Jovicic, 2017).

Companies, associations, public bodies, and other actors in tourism adopt different roles depending on the situation and their interaction with each other: partnering by complementing each other’s services, subcontracting by strengthening each other’s resources, and competing by sharing the market for a certain service (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). When cooperation and competition occur simultaneously, the phenomenon is coopetition (Luo, 2004). This describes well the relationship of actors in an ecosystem where the operation is non-linear (Selen & Ogulin 2015). Coopetition also relates to

generating added value in the ecosystem. Kylänen & Rusko (2011) emphasize that coopetition is not always a deliberate and planned part of strategic decisions, but sometimes it arises impulsively and unplanned.

CASE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The case of Southern Konnevesi National Park is important because of the systematic and strategically planned way in which services were developed through cooperation and broad stakeholder involvement. In contrast to many national parks which have existed for decades and need to adjust their tourism functions to the sustainability requirements of the present day, this destination in the heart of Finland had the unique chance to start its tourism development from scratch, using the principles of responsibility as its fundaments. The lessons learnt could be applied as described or modified to the context of other emerging or rediscovered tourism destinations. However, first they need to be recorded and presented, as little public documentation from the early years of Southern Konnevesi tourism development is left that withstands the passage of time. The writer of this study had the privilege to not only witness but be directly involved in the development and is thus able to describe the process from a participant observation perspective.

With its short history, Southern Konnevesi can serve as an example of a success story in many ways. This success is largely the result of an ambitious vision and long-term, persistent development work dating back to times before the establishment of the national park.

The development path of Southern Konnevesi has been marked by multiple layers of opposing duality:

- Geographically, Southern Konnevesi is part of Finnish Lakeland. It carries the name of Finland's 23th largest lake, Konnevesi (Sisä-Savon yhdistys, n.d.), which is divided in two, Southern and Northern Konnevesi. On its eastern side, the park offers forest hiking options and rugged hill landscapes on the mainland, while on its western side it is situated in the lake archipelago and suitable for water activities. It is important to note is that the name of the national park is given after the lake and not the Konnevesi municipality, although this similarity brings some image benefits to the municipality in question.
- Administratively, the national park is situated in the borderlands of two municipalities, Rautalampi and Konnevesi, and two provinces, Northern Savo and Central Finland, whose institutions

are responsible for its governance — together with Metsähallitus. This brings many, often opposing patterns of maintenance, funding, and development into the equation. Notably, historically, Konnevesi broke away and became independent, first from Rautalampi parish in 1919, and then from Rautalampi municipality in 1922. This was largely because of the long and difficult journeys to church and the insufficient benefit from the municipality fees (Niskanen, 1976; Kärkkäinen, 1976). Ever since, the municipalities have been involved in a manifold neighbourhood rivalry, which only became accelerated by a third entity, Metsähallitus, which entered the administrative scene of the region in the context of the newly established national park.

- Culturally, the national park belongs to two distinct areas. Central Finland is connected to the Tavastian people who have historically inhabited the area, but it has a rather weak Tavastian identity. Northern Savo strongly identifies with the Savonians and cherishes their culture. These differences, almost invisible to the visitors' eye, especially internationally, in contemporary times rely to some extent on stereotypes but can impact the cooperation between the actors of both regions. Savonians are seen as talkative and socially indirect (Nupponen, 2011), thus one should be careful when communicating or negotiating with them. Tavastians, on the other hand, are considered prudent, reliable, enterprising, and persistent (Junttila, 2003).

Being on the borders between two municipalities and two provinces, and two culturally different peoples meant at its worst that neither side automatically took responsibility for the development, but at its best that both sides perceived Southern Konnevesi as "our national park".

Unlike many other Finnish national parks, Southern Konnevesi does not have a history as a hiking area, and all the infrastructure and services had to be developed from the ground up. Metsähallitus brought its own values, e.g., in terms of sustainability and cooperation, but also strengthened the resources and investments of the small rural municipalities for nature tourism infrastructure and applied its well-established responsible practices to the area. Southern Konnevesi was established as a modern national park with the potential to remove the stereotype of national parks as sole hiking grounds, which mainly derives from the fact that Metsähallitus only owns the lands, not waters. In fact, its archipelago side was assumed to hold stronger

potential for services and activities, as it is not as accessible as the mainland part. However, preliminary research indicated that prior to the national park foundation, nature-based tourism entrepreneurship was minor and needed a boost in terms of cooperation, infrastructure, and competence development (Rautalammin Kunta, 2015).

With the establishment of the national park the realization came that Metsähallitus' Care and Use plan (Itkonen et al., 2016) alone was not enough, but strategic work needed to be done in the spirit of cooperation and by defining common goals to realize the full regional economic potential (Rautalammin Kunta, 2015). In Southern Konnevesi, a bigger picture was considered—not just a national park, but a tourism destination. The national park visitor expenditure brings about 10 euros on average to the surrounding area for every euro invested in the park, but if the national park is in a broader tourism region, the benefit is higher, amounting to 14 euros (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2019, 14). There were further reasons for taking into consideration a wider area and building a wider network:

- Most of the tourism services in Southern Konnevesi are located or take place outside the national park, for example cabin accommodation, restaurant services, cruises, paddling, fishing. Without high-quality accommodation, the local nature-based tourism can only rely on day trips. Additionally, the national park does not incorporate aquatic areas.
- In the area of the core municipalities there are other valuable natural sites in addition to the national park, for example the Route of Seven Rapids and Häähninmäki, which complement its offerings as a periphery of the ecosystem.
- The landscapes are equally valuable and beautiful and all of them can be utilized in tourism but the difference between them is in the ownership of the land, as national parks can only be established on state-owned land.
- The municipalities wanted to retain their decision-making role in the development and management of tourism in their own region.

Developing a common broader destination meant that the opposing duality needed to be neutralized. However, some disagreement was evident even regarding the name and brand. While the name of the national park was established by law, some referred to it by various unofficial forms (Konnevesi National Park, the National Park of Rautalampi, the Rautalampi Konnevesi

National Park, Rautalampi Southern Konnevesi National Park, Enonniemi Southern Konnevesi, or the Kalaja Area), as some local actors considered the name Southern Konnevesi giving unequal marketing benefits to the municipality not mentioned in it, Rautalampi. A ”VisitKalaja” tourism enterprise association was established in an unsuccessful attempt to set a different name to the broader destination and satisfy those unwilling to identify with the name of the national park.

The development of tourism was implemented in a more planned manner when the Rautalammin – Konnevesi Nature Tourism Master Plan (Anttila, 2016) and investment plan were created for the destination. The master plan was a strategic instrument which ensured the responsible development of the destination by setting common goals, identifying key actors, and dividing the responsibilities. Various local and regional groups were involved in the planning process—entrepreneurs, developers, officials, but also ordinary residents, village associations, clubs and schools, research institutes, etc. (Rautalammin Kunta, 2015). However, cooperation still needed to be established as a daily rather than event-based practice, through extensive networking and facilitation, which would eventually remove the stereotypes and foster consensus between tourism actors on the one hand, and tourism and the rest of local community on the other.

CASE DISCUSSION

Many challenges were undertaken and resolved through the systematic work and common will in the area. Next, a few of the best examples in terms of responsible practices are discussed.

PROJECTIZATION AND PUBLIC INITIATIVE

The development work in the first years after the establishment of the national park was implemented through a series of development and investment projects, based on the master plan. The most significant development projects were as follows:

- The Rautalampi–Konnevesi nature tourism coordination project, 2015–2018. This umbrella project contained 22 separate work packages, ranging from networking, development of the nature tourism service chain, and establishment of cooperation models (for tourist information centers, increasing of official boating routes; with

educational institutions, potential farm accommodators, water-owner trusts, landowners) to launching of further projects.
- The Intriguing Landscape project, 2016–2018. Parallel to the coordination project, this project aimed at increasing the local competence in tourism through training, seminars, benchmarking visits, and at a unified presentation of the region in fairs, brochures, publications represented by tourism actors.

The investment projects undertaken by both municipalities and Metsähallitus complemented each other in the establishment of the region's consistent face and infrastructure of consistent quality, each functioning within its administrator's specific jurisdiction (Figure 1). Development of infrastructure was the starting point of nature-based tourism in the area. It provided accessibility and safety. The infrastructure of sites surrounding the national park served as a prerequisite of more responsible, longer stays in the area, minimizing negative impacts to nature. Moreover, cultural sustainability was considered as local history and tradition were incorporated in elements of the infrastructure.

The total cost of all projects was about 2.5 million euros, nearly 60% of which being public funding. This would not have been possible without the cooperation between both municipalities and Metsähallitus with these organizations' strong connections to regional and national funding institutions. Moreover, the projects served as a forum for all tourism actors to meet and cooperate.

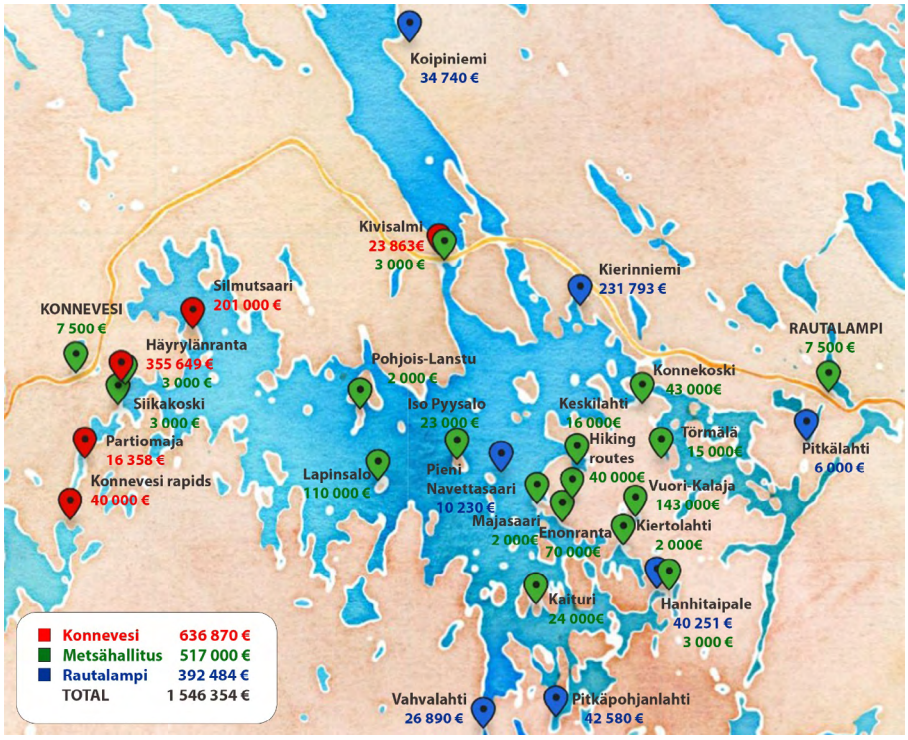

Figure 1. Public investments in infrastructure in the Southern Konnevesi region 2015–2018. Konnevesi and Rautalampi developed the surrounding sites, while Metsähallitus oversaw the infrastructure of the actual park. Figure based on the Rautalampi–Konnevesi nature tourism coordination project (adapted to English).

The main goal of the development projects was to build the tourism cooperation of Southern Konnevesi. Actors from the core and neighbouring municipalities were equally involved in the activities. These included companies, institutions, associations and individuals, as well as accommodation and activity providers from the core of the tourism ecosystem, in addition to transport, restaurants, museums, galleries, media platforms, tourism industry services from the ecosystem periphery (Figure 2). Participants represented ten municipalities in Central Finland, seven in Northern Savo, and three additional localities (Bliznakova, 2018).

From the perspective of responsible tourism goals, it was crucial to involve not only organizations' representatives but also individuals, in order to:

- inform locals about tourism development and include them in decision-making,
- foster entrepreneurship values and reveal their potential by increasing competence and social capital,
- create a basis for authentic, live-like-a-local services in the destination.

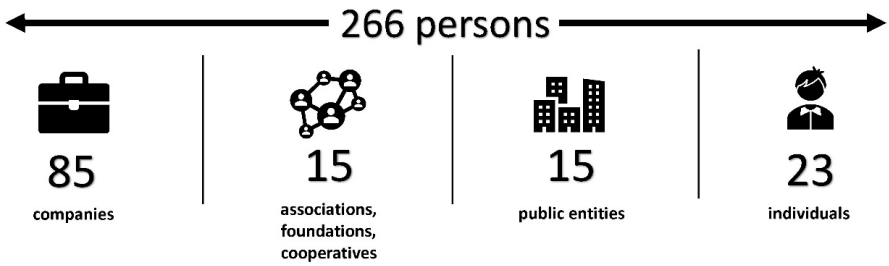

Figure 2. The network built by the Intriguing Landscape project (adapted to English).

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Public-private partnerships were facilitated for better service efficiency referring to both gates of the national park, Törmälä and Häyrylänranta, are examples of this.

Since 2017, the privately owned Törmälä center on the mainland side of the national park has snow ploughed the forest road to the national park to make trails available in winter. The road is not under Metsähallitus' jurisdiction; thus this complements the services of the park. Metsähallitus in turn communicates effectively about the road condition through its own channels.

The harbour of Häyrylänranta is the entrance to the archipelago side. It is owned by the Municipality of Konnevesi, which, at the time of national park's establishment, conceded it to three enterprises: one in charge of harbour and camping services, a restaurant and catering service, and a cruise provider. The division of functions was reasonable according to companies' expertise, but they still needed to cooperate with each other and the municipality, for

event organizing, environmental certifications, and marketing. For example, in 2018, Häyrylänranta received the Roope sustainable port certificate as a joint accomplishment.

INCREASING COMPETENCE: OPENING THE GATES OF MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

The efforts towards building competence in nature-based tourism in Southern Konnevesi were mainly project-based and included topical training, seminars, and benchmarking visits.

Training was based on the detected and communicated needs of participants, mostly focused on digital marketing. Local actors not only revealed the potential of digital tools for tourism but also became connected to the tourism tech industry, adding up to the ecosystem periphery. Other areas reflected in the training and seminars were sustainability and environmental certification, by which tourism actors were informed of the possibilities for taking concrete responsible action. Seminars connected the actors, both internal and external, to the destination, representing both tourism services and suppliers to the tourism sector.

Benchmarking visits were crucial for the cooperative formation of the new destination. By visiting successful domestic (Koli, Sea Lapland) and international (Iceland, Bavarian Forest) destinations, tourism actors worked intensively to network with each other, with national and international partners, and to realize their own role in tourism in terms of service supply, competitiveness, destination organization, etc.

JOINT MARKETING: A PRACTICAL EXERCISE IN COOPERATION

In the first years of development, with the absence of a DMO, marketing efforts were coordinated either by public actors — the municipalities or Metsähallitus — or by their subordinate development projects and could be described as joint marketing by tourism actors. The purpose was to foster a cooperation culture in which these actors would be able to conduct marketing activity without the intervention of public bodies.

Some of the intended marketing products, i.e., weekly programmes, brochures, and publications did not require much cooperation in preparation but a common state of will. The final products, however, presented the destination as consistent and logically organized. Other marketing measures,

e.g., the production and piloting of product packages and participation in travel fairs, required close and direct interaction between the actors.

THE STORY OF SOUTHERN KONNEVESI: A VIDEO PROJECT WITH BROAD STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

In 2018, a tourism marketing video was created for Southern Konnevesi (Röntynen, 2018). This was not an impulsive act but a product of long preparation and manifold stakeholder involvement. The story presented in the video was created in a storification workshop where tourism entrepreneurs identified the significant elements which could be used for tourism marketing of Southern Konnevesi — both from the destination and enterprise perspective. External actors were recruited to film and edit the video, but the production was implemented in cooperation with locals. The translation into English was done by a nature tourism entrepreneur who was also a professional translator. Background supporting services such as kayak rentals, boats, accommodation, and food were acquired locally. Local guides were involved to navigate the production in and around the national park. The video participants all came from the local community. Historical church boat scenes were filmed with a local hunting club who contributed to the production with authentic costumes and equipment.

For the participants, the filming of the video was an unforgettable national park experience. Moreover, the local companies and individuals involved got a sense of belonging to the practical development and understood its purpose and dimensions better. By the time of its release, the video had become a symbol of unity in the name of ”our national park”.

COOPETITION OF ONE-MAN ENTERPRISES

As the national park was established, the existing service providers did not know each other and regarded each other as competitors. The previously unthinkable cooperation between similar service providers emerged gradually — partly a result of networking, but also due to the growing demand. Typically for Finnish nature-based tourism, most of the pre-existing and new-emerging companies were one-man lifestyle enterprises with limited time and equipment.

Kayaking, one of the most popular activities in Southern Konnevesi, is an example of coopetition as a responsible practice. There are several kayaking companies, but each of them only has limited capacity. As the customer maps

kayaking services online, companies compete via their digital visibility. During the high season, however, the same companies join forces to serve larger groups or recommend the service of another operator, closer to the customer, to minimize operating costs and the environmental impact. Moreover, these same companies have more than kayaking activities, for example they may offer tour guiding, fishing, diving, etc., so in other situations they complement the service chain instead of competing. Similar coopetition has been observed between fishing activity businesses.

RESULTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

As a result of the development work, the foundations of a consistent destination were set. In terms of infrastructure this was done through consistent style and quality, ensuring physical and cultural accessibility, and safety in tourism. A better accessibility of tourism services was also accomplished by the joint marketing of local actors and their increased presence on digital tourism platforms. Local interest in the tourism business emerged, encouraging involvement and entrepreneurship: ten new tourism-related businesses were established in Rautalampi and Konnevesi in 2016–2018 (Hyvärinen et al., 2018); companies from neighbouring municipalities expanded their services to the core area of the national park; and companies' tourism and business expertise increased. Furthermore, short service chains were established. At the end of 2018, tourism actors reported an average of five and up to 20 new partners, mainly based on mutual trust (Bliznakova, 2018).

The duality was recognized as a kind of superpower. In a shift of attitude, the Kivisalmi strait stopped "dividing" and started "uniting" the municipalities, provinces, landscapes, and peoples. The possibilities for public funding increased manifold because it was possible to apply for it from two and allocate it to two different provinces. Local tourists also started arriving from two regions and two urban centers, Jyväskylä and Kuopio. Southern Konnevesi became one national park with double the networks and experiences.

The systematic development effort described in this paper was interrupted, first by the end of the major development projects, and later by the global events of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the following wave of inflation. At the end of 2018, the first implementation stage of the master plan ended. By then, some of the targets, such as visitor numbers, had clearly been exceeded. For example, 30,000 visitors were anticipated in the whole destination annually by 2020, but this number had been reached in 2018 regarding the national park alone. Many of the measures

in the master plan were, however, not implemented yet. It was clear that the strategic development needed to continue but the plan needed an update, which was done almost two years later (Tulla, 2020). In it, cooperation plays an equally significant role, however the following global events incapacitated development efforts and cooperation in multiple ways, and tourism is still struggling to recover, thus the plan's measures remain unimplemented.

Contemporarily, Southern Konnevesi does not appeared as united as in 2018. Metsähallitus maintains the basic services and the official communication channels of the national park as well as the network of enterprises. Visit Konnevesi is the responsible DMO in Konnevesi, established as a public-private partnership (Visit Konnevesi, n.d.), while the Municipality of Rautalampi maintains similar functions on the other side, focused strongly on the national park (Etelä-Konnevesi, n.d.). One reason for this is the difficulty for one side's marketing message to be accepted by the opposite side's regional marketing, and it seems that the coopetition between Finnish provinces is not that well-functioning.

CONCLUSIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Despite the rapid development and achievements, in the first years of development Southern Konnevesi was heavily criticized for not being able to self-organize into a tourism association or a DMO that would steadily coordinate the region's tourism and take responsibility for marketing and sales. Although the need for coordination is undeniable, it is also worth looking in the bigger picture—instead of cooperation in networks and service chains, a more flexible business ecosystem approach has been adopted, allowing the entrance and exit of actors depending on common value creation. The dualization of the ecosystem core by region could also be seen as a resilience measure and adaptation to crisis times, making the circles smaller and more easily manageable while maintaining the unified goals of the destination as a concern solely of the coordinating bodies. Southern Konnevesi's business ecosystem is evolving through a new round of innovation.

The jointly accepted values do not yet mean that all the actors recognize their role in the ecosystem. Often, even those operating in the tourism cluster do not consider themselves tourism actors or are not perceived as tourism actors when considering funding. Developing their operations and making them visible affects the entire tourist destination. Public actors, such as municipal decision-makers or officials, do not always recognize the importance of tourism in their own activity or as an influence on their decisions. Common

problem areas can arise from organizing waste management, accessibility, and launching development projects, among other areas. Local associations and clubs do not fully understand their potential for tourism cooperation as resource complementors and promoters of local culture, according to the live-like-a-local principle. Travellers do not always consider themselves influencers, but their publications on social media cause an echo both in the behaviour of other travellers and in destination planning. A better understanding of these roles would improve the functioning of the tourism ecosystem, ensuring the access and involvement of core and peripheral stakeholders, subsequently leading to their conscious responsible actions.

Notably, the building of cooperation takes time. The newly established practices have little chance of success without coordination. The ecosystem as a spontaneously emerging structure cannot be built by force but its participants could be steered in a responsible direction by increasing the awareness of each actor's role and of the possibility to participate. Thus, it is too early to remove the public factor which holds the key to consistent strategic development and the know-how for coordination. Both municipalities and Metsähallitus will be needed in the future, too, as a driving force of the ecosystem otherwise relying on equally small and vulnerable actors.

Overall, the described case shows how cooperation among versatile stakeholders can be instrumental for the development of a nature tourism destination. By bringing together public actors, local communities, and businesses, and adopting an ecosystem approach, the interconnectedness of different aspects was recognized, considering sustainability aspects of tourism, and seeking balance that benefits everyone.

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NEGOTIATING RESPONSIBLE ACCESS TO NATURE: THE ROLE OF NATURE PARKS IN THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN LOCAL CITIZENS, LANDOWNERS, AUTHORITIES, AND USERS

Astrid Laura Dam, Roskilde University – Keld Buciek, Roskilde University

INTRODUCTION

As the impact of tourism on natural environments has become ever more apparent in recent years the question of how to manage access to nature in a respectful way and not least how an increasing number of visitors into natural areas can best be handled has come forward with increasing intensity. Responsible tourism is based on the principles of sustainability, which involve the conservation of natural resources as well as the promotion of local communities affected by tourism. In nature parks, responsible tourism involves practices that minimise the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities, while promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. It is not easy, however, to achieve a useful and fruitful balance between considerations of use and considerations of protection in nature parks. This applies not least when dealing with different interests between outdoor life actors, local citizens, and local landowners.

In a Nordic context, with Denmark being a noticeable exemption, the concept of the right to roam (*allemandsretten*) lies at the core of outdoor living (*friluftsliv*) thus ensuring a more liberal access to nature (Kaltenborn et al., 2001). Historically, with its strong emphasis on private property rights and land ownership, Denmark has not embraced this liberated perspective of outdoor living on privately owned land. Consequently, Denmark lacks a legally or culturally integrated right to roam. Access to nature in Denmark is stipulated in the Nature Conservation Act and the Road Act. In general, the public has the right to trek by foot on all roads and fixed paths, regardless of whether these are public or private, but it is only permitted to trek off paths and roads on public land (Højring, 2002). This staunch dedication to private land ownership has affected the ability to develop responsible access to nature within the country. In Denmark, more so than in its Nordic counterparts, access to nature relies on voluntary and non-binding agreements with private landowners. However, the nature of these voluntary arrangements

introduces considerable uncertainty regarding the stability of infrastructure such as trails, as landowners can withdraw from agreements, leading to the closure of established trails and other outdoor initiatives. Moreover, local apprehensions about mass tourism and biases against opening up land for public use deter landowners from participating in these agreements in the first place. This unstable infrastructure, which is based on voluntary agreements with landowners, creates an unsustainable situation which is ultimately detrimental to a responsible use of nature.

The concept of outdoor living is based on the right to roam, which entails free and responsible access to nature. Alongside this right exists the *duty* of roaming (*allemandspligten*), which places an obligation on visitors to care for nature and private land and leave no trace (Ahlström, 2008; Sténs & Sandström, 2014). The right to roam can significantly impact local economies by promoting outdoor recreation and nature tourism (Maller et al., 2006). However, it can also spark controversy, particularly in areas where landowners perceive their property rights to be violated. Conflicts can arise between outdoor enthusiasts, landowners, and other stakeholders, not least because visitors often expect Nordic-style access to nature (the right to roam), but Danish conditions may not align with these expectations. Unrealistic hopes for similar outdoor use as in our neighbouring countries often result in disappointment.

This chapter shares best practice from the Danish research and development project ”New Paths in Nature Park Åmosen” (2019–2023) that has worked to develop responsible access to nature in a nature park almost solely consisting of privately owned land. The chapter explains the processes and shares successes, failures, and pitfalls when it comes to working together with municipalities, local citizens, and private landowners to create better public access to nature in a way that supports responsible nature tourism. Responsible access to nature must encompass more than just access that considers nature preservation and protection, although this is a crucial element. In a Danish context it must also address the right to private property and explore ways to strengthen voluntary agreements with private landowners to establish a more stable foundation for outdoor living and the associated nature tourism. Achieving this goal necessitates the involvement of various local stakeholders, including private landowners, local citizens, and municipalities.

CASE PROBLEM STATEMENT

We will first present the case, and on that basis extract some highlighted problems for further discussion. Our case area (Skellingsted outdoor area) is located within the framework of Naturpark Åmosen (see Figure 1), which is an 8,500 hectare nature park located in the western part of Zealand, Denmark. The nature park is certified under the ”Danish Nature Parks” certification scheme, which is run by the organisation for outdoor life in Denmark, the ”Danish Outdoor Council” (*Friluftsrådet*). The nature park stretches across three municipalities on land that is owned by a total of 900 private landowners. An important premise for understanding the roles of Danish nature parks are the following three elements: 1) the nature park does not own land, 2) the nature park has no authority, and 3) the nature park is not a political entity.

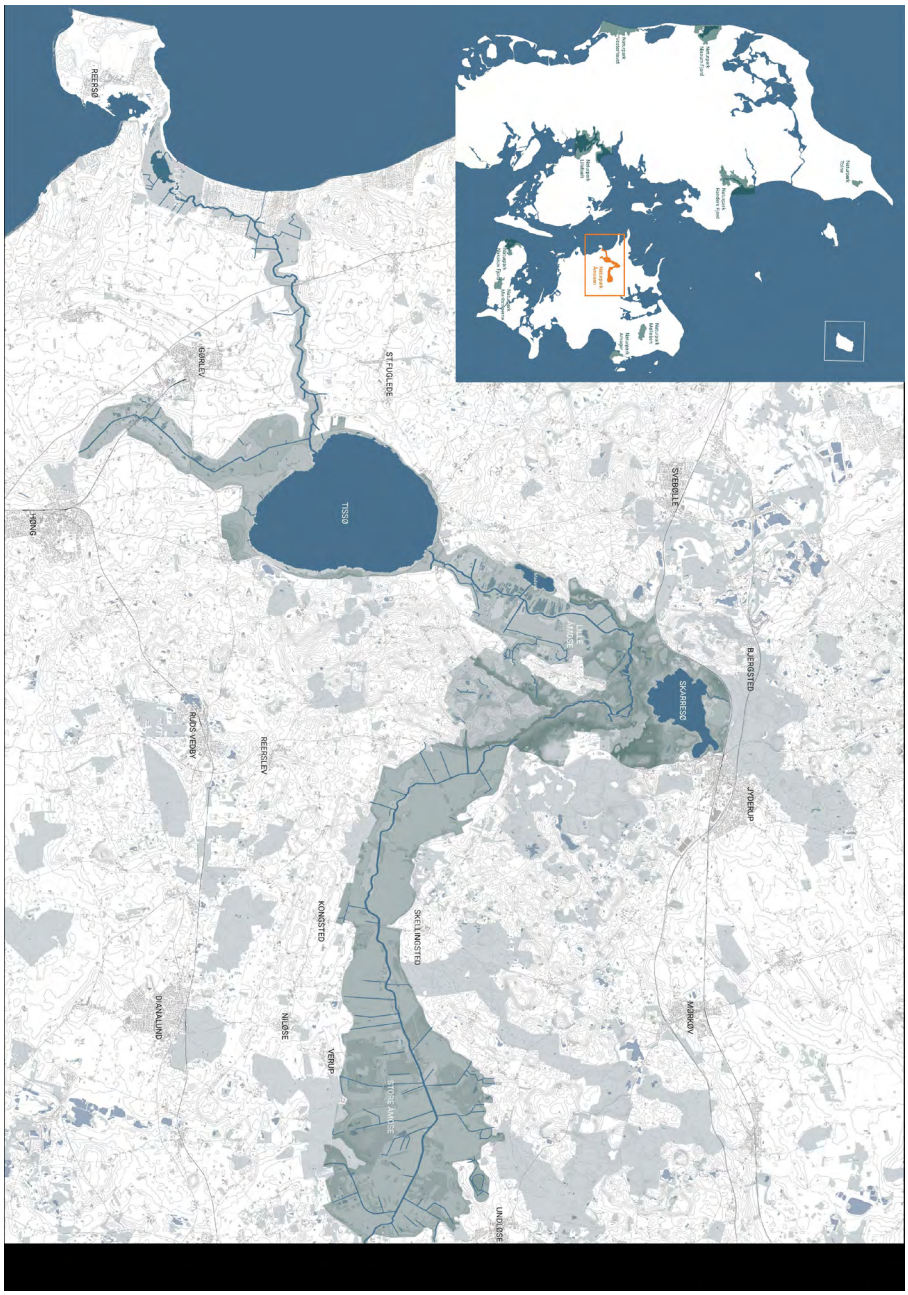

Figure 1. Map of Naturpark Åmosen with a reference map of Denmark.

The chapter deals primarily with the role of responsible tourism which relates to the planning and establishment of the framework supporting responsible nature tourism in the area. In our view, ”responsibility” draws on an understanding of the concept of sustainability as consisting of ecological, economic, and social sustainability, and we bring this division into our understanding of responsible tourism. It is social sustainability in particular that will be addressed when discussing the negotiation for responsible access to nature, as the case will reveal how successfully implemented responsible access to nature in areas mostly consisting of privately owned land is highly dependent on social relations between local actors: local private landowners, local citizens, and the local municipality.

SKELLINGSTED OUTDOOR AREA

Skellingsted Outdoor Area (Skellingsted Friluftsområde) is an area of 21 hectares in NPÅ (figure 2) owned by the local municipality. The area is a former landfill now converted into a recreational outdoor area. The municipality has laid out biocovers on the area to control the discharge of gas from the former landfill underground, which forbids digging in the area thus limiting the development potential of the land. An agreement has been made between the municipality and a group of local enthusiasts who take care of the area, for example by keeping the paths clear.

Figure 2. Map of the case area.

In addition to this, the locals have drawn up a project description with their visions for the area, including setting up certain facilities and creating more formal paths marked with wayfinding and information posts. A parking lot, shelters, toilet, water tap, tent pitch, fire pit and informal footpaths have been established in the area so far. The area is surrounded by private landowners who have land attached to the river, Åmose Å. The public area is regarded as a starting point for the development of responsible access to nature from which the locals also want to establish marked paths down to the river via existing field roads thus connecting the public area of Skellingsted with privately owned land (Figure 3). Though much of the land surrounding the area is accessible via existing paths, the local activists are not allowed to formalise the infrastructure with wayfinding signs, benches or information posts as well as drawing maps and creating brochures without the permission of the individual private landowners.

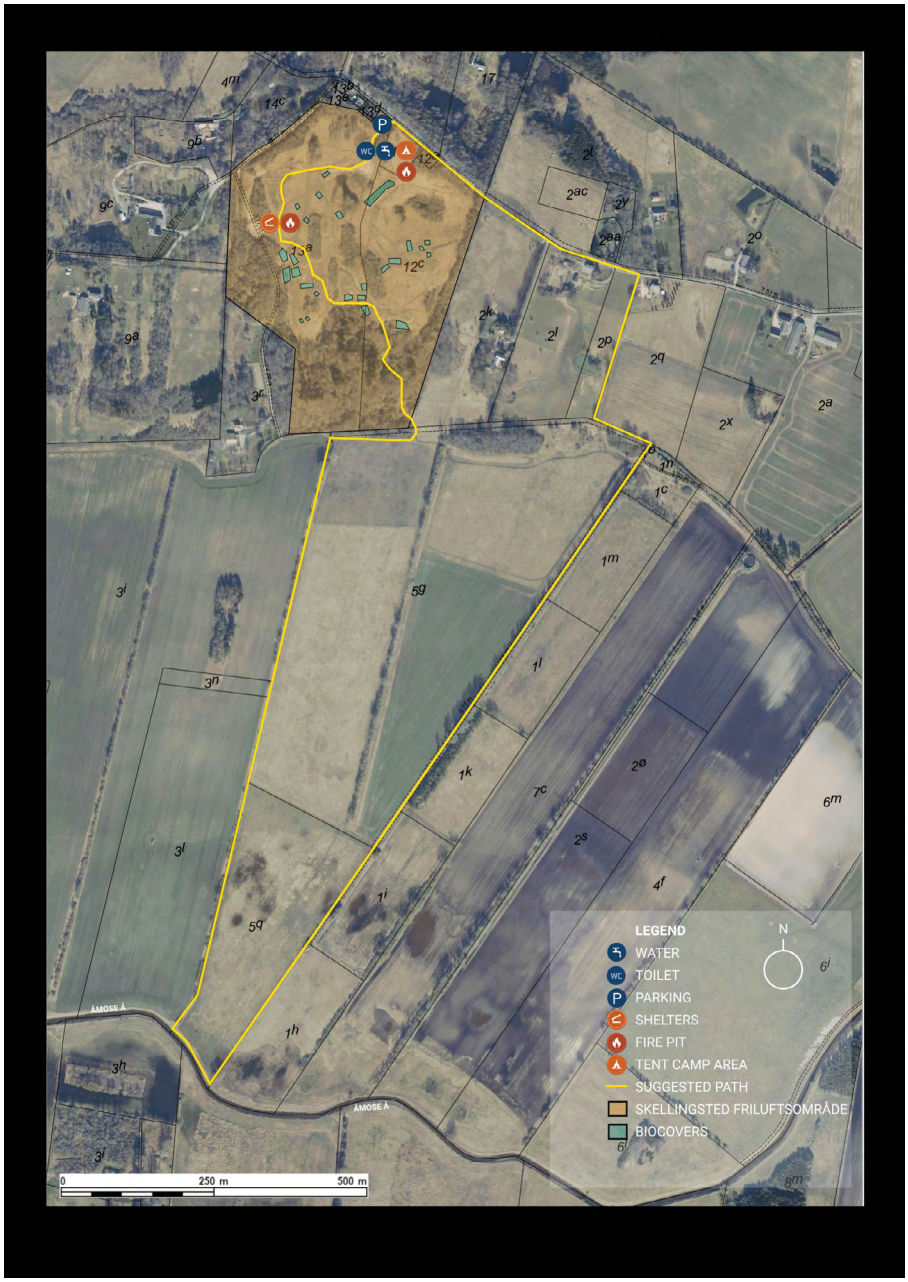

Figure 3. Map of the case area including connecting land and suggested path.

Naturpark Åmosen has identified Skellingsted outdoor area as an excellent location for developing responsible access to nature by strengthening the existing infrastructure and facilities. Economically the locals have the support of the municipality who are willing to cooperate in fulfilling the locals' visions. In terms of social sustainability, the visions are anchored and driven locally. Ecologically, the area has previously been affected by human activity (in local parlance the area is still called "the landfill") and therefore has real capacity for human activities without too much disturbance to nature.

One could therefore be led to believe that, based on such good conditions, there would be a strong basis for succeeding in facilitating outdoor living in this area in a responsible way. However, the project is not a success, as the local enthusiasts have not been able to fulfil their vision. It is somewhat a paradox that the local enthusiasts, despite the perfect conditions for creating responsible access to nature in a Danish context, have not been able to achieve what they hoped to do. In the following we will examine why this is and discuss some of the central challenges linked to the relationships between the actors involved and what we can learn from this case.

CASE DISCUSSION

The development of responsible access to the Skellingsted outdoor area is a joint effort between local enthusiasts, the municipality who owns the area, the surrounding private landowners, and the nature park. In fulfilling the visions of the local enthusiasts and successfully implementing responsible access, several challenges arose in the dynamics between these actors. The relationships in focus are 1) the relationship between the local enthusiasts and the municipality, and 2) the relationship between the local enthusiasts and the private landowners. Within these relations, the role of the nature park is revealed.

OUTDOOR LIVING FACILITIES: BETWEEN LOCAL ENTHUSIASTS AND THE MUNICIPALITY

The municipality has granted a conditional right of use to the area, so that the local enthusiasts have a free framework to develop facilities for outdoor life as long as they do not dig into the ground and destroy the effect of the established biocovers. As mentioned before, the area has been provided with facilities to encourage outdoor living. These facilities were provided by the municipality to meet the wishes of the locals who in turn maintain the area by

mowing paths in the grass and ”keeping an eye on things”. The placements of the facilities were limited by the municipality’s need to protect the biocover mechanism in the area making it impossible to dig foundations on most parts of the land. According to the locals, the shelters have been placed too far away from the constructed toilet, which is located in the only area of the cattle where excavating is permitted.

The decision to place the facilities in the area without engaging with the project description of the local enthusiasts has led to the local enthusiasts rejecting the facilities, and the relationship between the two actors has turned sour. The locals feel left out of their own project, and they do not feel that the municipality has listened to them or understands their vision—they feel run over. Conversely, the municipality perceives the voluntary group as indecisive and too slow; the money for the financing of the facilities was about to expire, so the municipality made a decision to have shelters built within the constraints of the biocovers, but without further involving the local group.

With the facilities not being anchored locally, the social sustainability of the project is reduced and the responsibility of implementing the facilities successfully into the outdoor area has become unclear. To the municipality, the facilities have been generously gifted to the locals and are expected to be included in the locals’ maintenance schedule. To the locals, the municipality appears to be simultaneously too sloppy and too technocratic, too passive, and too intervening (another paradox).

However, there is a dependency between the authorities and the locals; the locals must have the municipality’s support to be allowed to run their project and the authorities rely on the locals for ongoing operation, supervision, and maintenance. The locals’ rejection of the municipality’s contribution is therefore problematic for the development of facilities that can actually support the desired outdoor life vision, which both parties are working towards. This tension is one of the key factors why the area remains unsuccessful.

To ensure progress, the nature park had to smooth out the disagreements between the two parties through a mediating role and take over the negotiating role with the municipality in order both to spare the locals from having to communicate with the municipality (”the intervening” part) but also to spare the municipality from having to communicate with the locals (”the slow” part).

THE CHALLENGES OF MARKING PATHS: BETWEEN LOCAL ENTHUSIASTS AND LOCAL LANDOWNERS

In addition to the small, informal paths mowed on the public area, the local enthusiasts wish to mark paths beyond this area and to the river, Åmose Å, to create a longer route combining public and private land. The concept of a marked path formalises the path and helps highlight not only the path in the landscape, but also the locals' volunteer work in the area thus strengthening local ownership. By marking the route in the landscape and on maps, the paths also gain a higher degree of permanence and can therefore be marketed to desired user groups, for example institutions, scouts, nature tourists, etc. This is helpful considering the lack of the right to roam in Denmark, which results in visitors preferring to visit natural areas with marked paths in fear of angry landowners. For the local enthusiasts, their vision for the area is realised at the intersection between the very construction and operation of the facilities and the actual use of the facilities by the intended target groups.

The immediate challenge here was to obtain permission from each private landowner to set up wayfinding on their land. This requires voluntary agreements between the local enthusiasts and the private landowners. Though it is also in the interest of the nature park to construct a marked path, the negotiations for permits to set up wayfinding on private land was outsourced to the local enthusiasts. The advantage of outsourcing the negotiations was that the local activists have extensive local knowledge and know the landowners' temperaments and have knowledge of internal relationships. In contrast, the nature park may appear as an authority to the private landowners despite the park having no actual authority, making them more reluctant to cooperate. Outsourcing the negotiations was therefore a way to provide a sense of security among the private landowners who were then communicating with their neighbours as some of the local enthusiasts also owned land included in their project.

The role of the nature park in this context was to guide and equip the locals to carry out successful negotiations. The nature park representatives facilitated workshops: there the local enthusiasts people mapped potential paths based on their local knowledge on private landowners. It was confirmed the group would not waste time on landowners they already knew as hostile to setting up wayfinding. This does not guarantee a conflict-free process, but often neighbour-to-neighbour communication will be more effective than mediation through actual or perceived authorities (e.g. the municipality or the nature park).

However, a number of relevant landowners had from the beginning refused to participate in creating a marked path connecting the public area to the river through privately owned land. Some of their justifications are based on prejudices. Prejudices that, among other things, relate to the behaviour of guests in nature; that marked paths will automatically lead to them being overrun by visitors and visitors leaving unimaginable amounts of waste and generally destroying the surroundings. With other landowners, reference is made to bad experiences with people who do not keep their dog on a leash. Some landowners go so far as to put up illegal signs intended to scare people off their land.

What we see here is that the Danish strong emphasis on private property rights in combination with a lack of right to roam means that (otherwise legal) access to nature is challenged. This, in combination with the fact that many visitors do not know the access rules at all (including the fact that they can legally ignore unregulated signs), means that most visitors prefer to be told where to go. Being aware of this is part of the reason that the local activists put so much emphasis on having paths established with a degree of permanence so that it would be possible to communicate the access clearly to the public.

It is in this context that the nature park has an important role when considering the paths in and around the Skellingsted outdoor area as part of the greater nature park geography. It calls for strategic planning of the infrastructure, which concerns both the marking of the paths in the landscape with poles and on maps with lines and the specific facilities (toilets, water posts, shelters, etc.). The nature park is an organisation that, through its cross-municipal setup, is given the responsibility of meeting the demand for designated nature experiences and thereby managing the pressure of visitors in a meaningful way.

To the nature park, the marking of paths in the landscape is therefore necessary in order to 1) direct the visitors to where nature and the locals have the capacity to accommodate a greater number of visitors, and 2) to formalise the voluntary work of the locals to establish an actual recreation area, which through the formalisation would motivate them to maintain the trails. In relation to the nature park's aim to develop responsible nature tourism, it is central that the wish for marked paths comes from local citizens themselves, since their motivation to care for the area is tied to the visitors' enjoyment of using the facilities.

We also learned that among the group of local volunteers there was a widespread desire to "educate" or "instruct" visitors in how to behave in

the area. In general, it is the case in Denmark that the lack of common and culturally accepted right to roam principles, and corresponding obligations to take care of nature (the aforementioned duty to roam), often leads to the formulation of local ”rules of order”. Such rules are written on information boards and put up near the facilities in addition to the marked trails, instructing people where to walk. Although there is no evidence that visitors to Danish nature areas in general behave inappropriately, local discourses are often developed that have this as a focal point. It is not only the landowners who are prejudiced. Such prejudices also thrive among the local enthusiasts.

There is very little evidence that these measures work. Partly because it is unnecessary, as most users know how to deal with rest areas, rubbish bins, shelters etc., and partly because such restrictive educational injunctions have a tendency to engender defiance (see Brehm,1981; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Brame,2014). Although in some places it makes good sense with signage (e.g., in vulnerable and erosion-threatened dunes) it is generally a bad idea to have rules that only apply to specific locations. It could, among many other things, lead to a form of self-appointed policing of publicly accessible areas which could create more conflicts than the initiative aims to reduce.

What we found, however, was that the act of putting up rules of order was a way for the locals to soothe prejudice against visitor behaviour and increase their sense of ownership of the area. From this perspective, the NPÅ must consider if putting up locally produced rules of order is a valuable response to the local enthusiasts’ immediate rejection of the facilities put up by the municipality.

IN SUMMARY

Let us sum up our main findings from the case in brief general terms, with supporting research added, before we discuss the challenges more generally. Five important themes were found in the case when examining the different relationships between the involved stakeholders:

1. Local knowledge: Local citizens possess valuable knowledge about the natural environment, cultural heritage, and social norms of the area. Their input helps ensure that (the trail) development plans align with the values and needs of the community and minimises negative impacts on the local environment and culture (Bjerager & Bürger 2013).

2. Community engagement: Involving local citizens in trail development can foster community engagement and local ownership. When residents feel that their perspectives and needs are being considered, they are more likely to support and promote the trail and facilities, which can result in greater visitor satisfaction and economic benefits for the community (Hewlett & Edwards, 2013).

3. Responsible sustainability: Developing trails in a responsible and sustainable manner is crucial for preserving the natural environment and ensuring that the trail remains enjoyable for future generations. Local citizens can provide insights into the area's ecology, wildlife, and vegetation, and help identify sensitive areas that should be avoided during trail construction, implementation, and use (Holden, 2016).

4. Local residents can potentially play an important role as guides or communicators of knowledge about nature in nature parks. It has been shown in many other contexts also that local volunteers are happy to undertake such functions (Kristensen et al, 2019). Educating people about the importance of nature and the need to preserve it is often mentioned in the literature (Harris, 2012). However, being pedantic towards others often backfires, and should be avoided. General awareness campaigns and outreach programmes on the other hand can help to raise awareness of responsible outdoor recreation practices.

5. Conflict resolution: Involving local citizens in trail development can help prevent conflicts between visitors and landowners. It can also create a sense of shared responsibility for the trail, leading to better maintenance and protection of the trail and its surrounding environment (Nepal & Weber, 2012).

THE ROLE OF NATURE PARKS

The case of the Skellingsted outdoor area highlights key challenges when aiming to create responsible access to nature in areas with a high degree of privately owned land and a limited legal and cultural right to roam. It is

interesting to contemplate what we can learn from this case in a broader sense and what the role of nature parks is. As the effect of tourism on our environmental surroundings has become ever more evident in the last 20 years (Holden, 2016; Wolf et al., 2019), the problem of how to lever the growing number of visitors into natural areas has become ever more important. This is especially evident in countries with a high number of residents per nature area, either due to a dense population (e.g., in the Netherlands) or due to scarcity of natural areas because of intensive agricultural and forestry land use (e.g., in Denmark). In the case of Denmark, almost 60% of the entire land area is devoted to privately run agriculture or forestry (Arler et al., 2015), which limits and thus pressurises access to nature despite a growing desire amongst the mostly city-dwelling population to access nature recreationally (Kristensen et al., 2019).

In accordance with the Danish Outdoor Council, the purpose of nature parks is to ”ensure long-term planning and development of nature, culture and outdoor life in interaction with rural development for the benefit of settlement, tourism, and business in the nature park”. This purpose can be viewed a symptom of the increasing focus on nature tourism as a strategy for development in rural municipalities, as the relocation of industries abroad and the centralization of agricultural and food production in recent decades have opened new potential for the use of abandoned areas (Fritzbøger, 2009; Kristensen, 2019).

As a prerequisite, responsible tourism in nature parks has the need to balance tourism development with environmental conservation and social responsibility. By adopting responsible tourism practices and working with local communities, it is in principle possible to ensure that nature parks continue to provide a range of benefits, including conservation of biodiversity, economic benefits for local people, and opportunities for visitors to experience the natural world in a responsible and sustainable way. As we have seen, however, that balance has been difficult to ensure when developing better access to nature in a natural area almost solely consisting of privately owned land. However, the fundamental problem is that by leaving nature policy initiatives to volunteers and to organisations without authority, there is a risk of working against the goal of more sustainable and responsible ways of accessing nature.

Allow us to repeat 3 important conditions for the work of nature parks: the nature park is neither an authority nor a body of governance despite cooperating with local municipalities. Naturpark Åmosen does not own any land in the area. Naturpark Åmosen is not a political modus (in the sense of

politics defined as who gets what when and how). In combination it is these three conditions that create what we have termed a vacuum of governance (*myndighedsvakuum*), that constrains the nature park to a primarily mediating role. The mediating role has on the one hand the advantage that it does not simply facilitate or dictate development, but rather outsources ownership to individual actors through voluntary agreements. On the other hand, it is limited to which and how large projects the park can undertake. This can locally and nationally create a certain impatience with regard to the results in relation to both responsible nature-protection and the development of facilities supporting responsible outdoor living. Having the principle of voluntarism at its core forces Danish nature parks to collaborate with many different actors to accomplish the multifaceted purpose of nature parks, which requires a reasonable balance between protection and use. However, due to the voluntary involvement of many different private landowners, many conflicts arise when working with these themes, particularly when it comes to activities on privately owned land.

In practice, this means that the nature park rather than an authority or landowner can be described through the figure of a *creative midwife*, which can be a helpful analogy to describe the role of nature park management in facilitating positive relationships between private landowners, local citizens, and local municipalities. A midwife is someone who helps bring new life into the world. Similarly, the nature park management can act as a facilitator and mediator in the making of new facilities to support outdoor living and fulfil their purpose as a nature park.

Just as a midwife provides support and guidance to the parents, nature park management can provide support and guidance to landowners, locals, and municipalities. They can act as a neutral party, helping to mediate and bridge any gaps in communication or understanding and encouraging collaboration between the various groups. This might involve facilitating meetings or workshops where landowners, locals, and authorities (e.g., municipalities) can come together to discuss their respective needs and concerns. By acting as a creative midwife, the nature park management can help bring new relationships and partnerships into the world, fostering a sense of connection and stewardship for the natural area, community, and residents. In other words, the fruit of the nature park does not belong to the nature park (like the child belongs to its parents), rather it belongs locally to the private landowners, local citizens, and municipalities.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed the relationship between the private landowners, local enthusiasts, and municipalities in the case of the Skellingsted outdoor area in Naturpark Åmosen, Denmark, when it comes to negotiating responsible access to nature successfully.

The relationship between the municipality and locals is characterised by a lack of communication and dissatisfaction with the municipality's investments and reliance on volunteers. This results in the locals rejecting the efforts of the municipality who in turn risk losing essential resources among the locals, who help maintain the area. The locals and private landowners have differing views on marketing the area as a recreational destination with landowners fearing an overabundance of guests. Prejudices about visitor behaviour exist among both landowners and locals, which complicates the marking of formalised paths in the case area. The volunteering aspect of the agreements between the two parties puts much of the future of the locals' project in the hands of the private landowners, who can easily pull out of agreements to put up wayfinding or simply never agree to such measures.

Our discussion highlights the challenges faced by different stakeholders in creating responsible access to nature. Our case highlights the need for better communication and collaboration between the municipality, landowners, and locals to manage the area effectively and meet the needs of all stakeholders. We used the analogy of a creative midwife to describe how nature park management in theory can act as nothing but a mediator between municipality, landowners, and locals, facilitating communication and collaboration between the groups to ensure that their interests and goals are aligned.

The way the Danish nature park system is composed, framed by strict private landownership and being dependent on municipal partnerships, makes it difficult to use nature parks to promote increased and responsible access to nature. On the other hand, there does not seem to be good alternatives. A perspectival last remark could be about whether nature parks are actually an appropriate tool for achieving responsible access to nature in Denmark. On the basis of the case we have dealt with here, there could at the very least be reason to question the nature protecting and promoting effect of nature parks. However, a further in-depth exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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CREATING A NETWORK FOR NORDIC REGENERATIVE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF A PILOT PROJECT

Jessica Aquino, Hólar University – Magdalena Falter, University of Iceland – Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir, Icelandic Tourism Cluster

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT

The disruptions to tourism brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the inherent vulnerability of the tourism industry and its intrinsic connection with the community, the environment, and tourism's dependence upon favourable external factors. Post COVID-19 travel has seen an increasing upward trajectory regardless of ongoing global challenges. Although tourism was halted temporarily during the pandemic, travel has resumed with even greater force as though COVID-19 never happened. Nevertheless, there is a growing discussion on rethinking tourism towards more sustainability post COVID-19 (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Mathisen et al., 2022; Sheller, 2020) or even beyond sustainability towards a new paradigm (Ateljevic, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022; Gibbons, 2020; Pollock, 2019). Although the call for a paradigm change within the tourism industry has been gaining voice, it might seem that this voice has lost some resonance as the industry forges ahead post-pandemic. However, there is a continued presence of a growing number of tourism stakeholders who realize the necessity of a new approach to developing the tourism sector for the Nordic countries that acknowledges the interwoven web that is human society and our natural environment.

This chapter aims to describe the approach used in creating a network to better understand local voices on what Nordic regenerative tourism could look like. Therefore, we refer to a case based on the Nordic Regenerative Tourism (NorReg) project, which is a pilot project aimed at developing and providing relevant and accessible tools for the development of regenerative tourism practices in the Nordic countries. The first phase of the project was completed in December 2022. The Nordic countries have a long history of cooperation; and sustainable tourism is an acknowledged emphasis within that cooperation. However, further efforts need to be made to continue effective communication and research on the Nordic experiences of responsible tourism management. The main beneficiaries of the NorReg project are local small and micro-sized

enterprises (SMiEs) in rural countryside communities with a focus on outdoor adventure and nature attractions. We used a peer-to-peer approach to foster collaboration and co-learning. Regional destination organizations participated as regional stewards, while academic partners were recruited to participate in building a joint understanding of a Nordic model of regenerative tourism, and to evaluate possible relevant metrics and measurements. The objective of the project is to establish operational tools for businesses that want to adopt relevant, accessible, measurable, and participatory practices that visibly contribute to the regeneration of their resources within their community. In this first phase of the NorReg project, the methodology of the approach has been pilot tested with an emphasis on defining common place-based approaches to initiate regenerative tourism. Our aim was to test-run training workshops for business operators and explore citizen science projects aimed at fulfilling our visitors' quest for giving back to the communities and environments they visit. This chapter describes the overall outcomes of the first phase along with lessons learned and as a discussion of future work.

Specifically, it describes a series of workshops conducted throughout 2022 and interviews conducted with SMiEs and DMOs during the project's final workshop in Malmö, Sweden 28–30 November — representing a voice within the Nordic tourism industry working towards a more responsible tourism practice. Furthermore, we also describe the methodology of the NorReg project and some common place-based approaches to initiate and develop an understanding of the concept of regenerative tourism within the network.

CO-CREATION FROM A REGENERATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In their case study, Mathisen et al. (2022) see the evolution of regenerative activities within a learning process — learning from nature and then passing this knowledge on — referring to co-creation as an essential requirement of regenerative tourism. It is increasingly important to find ways of co-learning together to find solutions involving all stakeholders (community, tourism operators, visitors, wildlife managers, and academics) (Aquino et al., 2021). This leads to a holistic co-creative process that involves 'human and more than-human agencies' (Höckert et al., 2022) for an improvement within the community. In this regard Pollock (2019) uses the metaphor that we all should act like 'responsible gardeners.' Boluk and Carnicelli (2019) describe collaborative and co-learning as finding solutions together leading to knowledge creation that challenges dominate discourse, practices, and

ideologies. This shift in thinking leads to actions and practices that ”address contemporary power imbalances and injustices in tourism by focusing on and empowering local communities” (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022a, p. 1). Higgins-Desbiolles and Bigby (2022b) argue that labelling communities as tourism destinations does a disservice by de-localizing them and does not acknowledge that they are places of great value to locals. Rather, localizing tourism helps to shift power to locals while rethinking tourism's process and purpose.

Mathisen et al., (2022) further stress that regeneration happens in a ”collective endeavour, underpinned by good relations and a shared understanding of the values that influence the well-being of all” (p. 8). It is important to acknowledge that tourism entrepreneurs are driven by different motivations and underlying values for being involved in the tourism industry, and that similarly both local and visitors will have different understanding of the environment and of management actions for tourism development (Aquino et al., 2021). Working together helps to understand these underlying values and can contribute to increasing knowledge and awareness for regenerative practices. Within the Nordic context, it is often the small (or micro-sized) tourism entrepreneurs who significantly contribute to positively shaping their communities (Atladóttir et al., 2023).

NorReg developed a network for co-creation of the Nordic concept of regenerative tourism in a twofold approach. First, participation and broad involvement was one of the main principles identified in the NorReg project through a peer-to-peer approach and fostering sustainable tourism through networking and embeddedness. The aspired goal is to scale this involvement to various levels. Besides a transparent local network between individuals and tourism businesses, the project aims to foster co-creation between locals (SMiEs, DMOs, and academics) and visitors. Second, we address co-creation as a community-based participatory research approach (CBPR). From this perspective, CBPR utilizes co-learning and capacity building among researchers and partners (Johnson, 2017). In our role as researchers, we focused on the larger impacts of place-based and individual awareness. By understanding the place-based characteristics and underlying values, we lay the preconditions for regenerative actions. By combining research with practice, we aim to gain an in-depth understanding of how to implement regenerative tourism best from a local perspective.

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM THROUGH NETWORKING AND EMBEDDEDNESS

Networks are social constructs that describe the various actors involved and their relationships between each other (Albrecht, 2013). Dredge (2006) defines networks as ”sets of formal and informal social relationships that shape collaborative action between government, industry and civil society” (p. 270). To foster sustainable tourism development collaboration between tourism stakeholders is imperative (Albrecht, 2013; Dredge, 2006; Hall, 2011). However, a lack of understanding at the governmental level has been identified of the potential positive effects of networking on tourism development (Albrecht, 2013). Research on network effects in sustainable tourism development is still underrepresented in the current body of tourism literature.

Tourism collaborations and networks positively affect the performance of the tourism business by fostering interorganizational knowledge exchange (Van der Zee et al., 2015). Knowledge transfer contributes positively to a destination’s innovativeness and competitiveness (Albrecht, 2013). In terms of local knowledge creation and exchange, the discussion on tourism lifestyle entrepreneurship has increased in recent years (Ateljevic et al., 2000; Bredvold et al., 2016; Dias et al., 2021; Margaryan et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2009). Tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs play a vital role in destination development and network effects due to their place attachment and their closeness to the local community. For example, they often have access to local knowledge that is not accessible for actors not involved in the community.

An entrepreneur’s involvement in a community network is referred to as ’embeddedness’ in a community (Akgün et al., 2010; McKeever et al., 2014; Uzzi, 1996; Wen et al., 2021), which describes the entrepreneur’s inclusion in a social construct that can positively or negatively affect their access to social or economic resources (Granovetter et al., 1985; McKeever et al., 2015) such as local knowledge. Being embedded in a community is often referred to as the formation of informal cluster or cliques, where actors form their own value systems (McKeever et al., 2015). Discussions on embeddedness are broad, ranging from economic and social to community-centred perspectives. In the framework of this chapter, we refer to this concept to highlight the benefits of informal networking on sustainable tourism development. Trust between the community participants is thereby essential (Akgün et al., 2010). McKeever et al. (2015) describe community embeddedness as the interaction of individuals in both social and economic contexts. In regard to community development, this establishment of internal community guidelines has parallels

to the discussion on social capital by Putman (1992). Here, it has been argued that focussing on social aspects of community wellbeing, instead of economic growth, could counter some of the negative effects of capitalistic exploitation, which often happens in tourism (Aquino, 2022). Especially in the context of the rural tourism businesses, the level of an entrepreneur's local embeddedness and their contribution to sustainable business practices has been emphasised (Akgün et al., 2010; Kibler et al., 2015; Wen et al., 2021).

Margaryan et al. (2020) see a vital role in small and micro-sized tourism businesses and lifestyle entrepreneurs to rethink tourism towards a model of sustainability that involves both a flourishing tourism industry and healthy local community development. The degree of an entrepreneur's sustainability is often related to the extent of a business' dependency on the local, natural, and social resources. Hence it could be argued that the level of a tourism entrepreneur's local embeddedness is directly related to the likelihood that they foster sustainable behaviour through their businesses. However, concrete knowledge about entrepreneurial activities that positively impact tourism sustainability is scarce. For example, the academic literature usually explores the dynamics of tourism entrepreneurship separately from the social setting they are connected to (Wen et al., 2021). In the next section we will describe the importance of understanding regenerative tourism within a Nordic context and how the NorReg project contributes to this discussion.

CASE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concept of regenerative tourism is influenced by regenerative agriculture (Becken & Kaur, 2022), regenerative design (Lyle, 1994; Owen, 2007), regenerative development (Bellato et al., 2022), regenerative economies (Andreucci et al., 2021; Pollock, 2015), and regenerative thinking (Gibbons, 2020; Pollock, 2019); along with indigenous approaches to wellbeing and worldviews (Major & Clarke, 2021; Matunga et al., 2020; Mcenhill et al., 2020). Since COVID-19 there has been more reflection on the way we think of tourism to '(re)establish nature connectedness' and restoration (Becken & Kaur, 2022; Hussain, 2023; Lupton & Samy, 2022). However, many argue that regenerative tourism has evolved because of the inadequacies of the concept of sustainable tourism to minimize the negative impacts of tourism (Villa & Šulc, 2021).

At its core the discussion on the topic of regenerative tourism is not new and connects to discussions on sustainable and responsible tourism that have been ongoing since the 1990s and even earlier. Sustainable tourism is rooted in finding a way to counteract the mass tourism that arose in the late 1990s

and the related exploitation and uncontrolled growth. The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as: ”Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, n.d.).

The focus on the needs of the industry has been heavily criticized and various researchers have addressed how this has changed the definition of sustainable tourism to one which supports mass tourism and green washing instead of actually instigating positive change (Saarinen, 2021; Sharpley, 2020). Hence, the focus has shifted to responsible tourism which draws on neoliberal approaches by empowering individuals to ’be’ the change and act sustainably according to ethics and social norms. This moral sustainability is based on the assumption that tourists, as well as operators, behave responsibly. Saarinen (2021) discusses how the question of what or what not is responsible, however, is a subjective assessment that varies between individuals. Furthermore, tourists are taken by the moment and tend to take ’a break from their daily life’ when travelling which can also include their value bases in terms of responsibility.

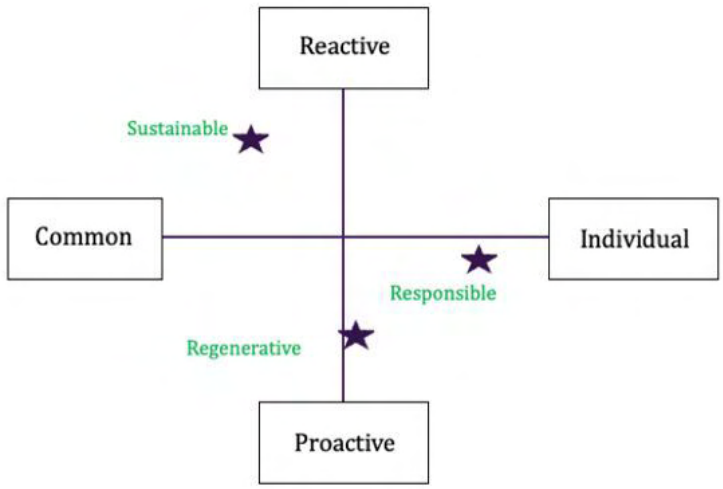

Figure 1. The evolution of the concepts sustainable, responsible, and regenerative. Here regenerative tourism is seen in relation to sustainable and responsible tourism placed within common to individual responsibility and reactive to proactive management (used with permission, Atladóttir et al., 2023).

Both approaches—the rather reactive top-down management in sustainable tourism compared to the proactive bottom-up management in responsible tourism—reached their limits regarding actual implementation in tourism practices within the context of giving back and regenerating depleted and tarnished resources. Public intolerance concerning the effects of tourism on nature and communities has increased as international travel has increased (Pollock, 2019). Furthermore, challenges linked to tourism are increasingly perceived as universal (e.g., climate change, overcrowding, lack of responsible management). There has been a call for a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness and common effects of human actions, while also realizing the importance of meaningful individual responsibility. This has led to the conceptualization of regenerative tourism as we describe here.

The concept of regenerative tourism is an approach that extends the proactive management of responsible tourism and has become prevalent within both academic and industry discourse, providing opportunities for meaningful tourism development and management within a responsible framework (Aquino et al., 2021). Dredge (2022) sees regenerative tourism as an approach that aims to instigate positive change while engaging respectfully with the challenges and chances caused by travel and tourism. At its core the goal of regenerative tourism is to positively affect and give back to local communities and places, but also to the tourists themselves.

Regenerative tourism is community focused—it calls for self-empowerment of industry actors and stakeholders, while adopting a holistic world view, where stakeholders all play a role and affect outcomes (Nilsson & Aquino, 2021). Within the regenerative tourism movement there is a clear emphasis on gaining understanding of place-based, community-centred, and environment-focused approaches and solutions (Dredge, 2022). The ”one-size-fits-all” assumption is rejected and each region, even each SMiE within their region, adopts solutions that fit them individually—while, simultaneously, engaging in dialogue with other regenerative stakeholders from which to learn. Within regenerative tourism, universal solutions, tools, and operational structures are not the norm. However, all actions are interconnected and thus a collective, harmonised process is needed for a balanced development of human endeavour. There is an understanding of the need to contribute within the group towards co-sharing knowledge, toolboxes, and experience, thereby strengthening each companies’ contribution to the community and nature. It is important to understand tourism within a Nordic context. For example, many Nordic communities are in sparsely populated regions and the prevalence of SMiEs among regional tourism stakeholders calls for understanding and adaptation

to specific needs, challenges, and relevant approaches towards sustainable, responsible, and regenerative practices.

CASE DISCUSSION

NorReg was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers through the Icelandic Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs. The Icelandic Tourism Cluster led and administered the project on behalf of the ministry. Regional organizations (or DMOs) from Iceland, Norway, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Sweden partnered within the pilot project. Each DMO recruited up to three SMiEs as active participants. At the time of writing this chapter the project consists of five DMOs (with Danish representatives joining in 2023, while Greenland dropped out), nine SMiEs, and nine academic participants. The discussions and work within the project were conducted mainly through virtual meetings and workshops, focusing on different deliverables and aims. Common platforms were activated (Facebook and Google Drive) and an introductory website was designed (see www.norreg.is).

Building a joint understanding of Nordic regenerative tourism focused on gaining a common vision of its meaning from the participants and how we (within our own community) might benefit from its adaption into our tourism practices. The NorReg group worked towards defining a common vision and priorities. Working from the understanding that regenerative tourism is a new and emerging concept within tourism development we wanted to focus on a holistic, place-based means of planning for destinations—which would also use the general approaches and solutions central to sustainable tourism. The approach used for NorReg was based on a collaborative effort that acknowledged the need for a common understanding of concepts, a shared vision, and principles. Therefore, a co-created vision statement was determined to be an important first deliverable of the project. This vision statement was designed collaboratively through workshops and online meetings in the first year of the project. Furthermore, it was determined that the vision statement should be re-evaluated periodically to revisit its relevance as our knowledge and experience deepens.

The NorReg project use a participatory action research (PAR) method to gather information. A participatory approach is distinguished from other approaches because it is collaborative and seen as research that is 'by' and 'for' communities (Stewart, 2018). It acknowledges that people have strengths and assets and is the foundation for a research study that recognizes co-learning and capacity building among researchers and partners as integral

components to the process of research (Johnson, 2017). Participatory research understands the power that researchers have and the potential of disempowering communities if researchers address community issues in a consolatory rather than a more equitable, collaborative approach. The solutions and actions developed through PAR are relevant, responsive, and sensitive to local concerns because they happen within the context of the community. Furthermore, a bottom-up strategy, which was seen as more inclusive, was used to ensure the involvement of the main beneficiaries, the SMiEs. To gain a clear understanding and define the project vision and basic objectives, four workshops with participants were conducted.

The project management team's role was to introduce the thematic content that helped to guide the input throughout the workshops. The participants were given semi-structured and open questions for discussion and randomly assigned to virtual break-out rooms. The meetings were video recorded with permission and shared using Google Drive. The management team also transcribed notes and shared them with the participants. A Facebook group was established where we could share ideas and post short communications with each other. Overall, there were four workshops:

- Workshop I: NorReg Kick-off. This was our first workshop with the aim to introduce the overall project goals and establish rapport within the group. The project outline, methodology, and approach were described. This workshop provided insights into the participants' expectations and what they would like to gain from the project.
- Workshop II was one of two co-creation vision statement workshops. The aim was to guide the participants to focus on regional strengths and challenges regarding local communities and the environment in relation to tourism. This workshop gave insights into topics that were most meaningful for the group overall.
- Workshop III was the second of the two co-creation vision statement workshops. The aim was to develop a shared project focus, draft a vision statement, and designate project priorities.
- Workshop IV was a face-to-face meeting with all the NorReg participants in Malmö, Sweden. Here we reviewed the work that was conducted throughout the year and met with the DMOs and SMiEs to discuss how we could move forward. We also had presentations by practitioners, researchers, and three international authorities on regenerative tourism.

The first three workshops provided a platform for developing a common vision and understanding of regenerative tourism in the Nordic context. In the initial phase of the definition process, together we discussed a basic understanding of what the concept of regenerative tourism meant to the participants individually, and then together as a group. We asked the participants to visualize keywords they felt described regenerative tourism in the first workshop (Figure 1). The following vision statement and defined project priorities are based on the outcome of the first three online workshops:

Nordic regenerative tourism invigorates communities and fosters landscapes by ensuring that locals and visitors gain satisfaction from its success. We contribute to the revitalisation, re-energising and wellbeing of our environment, our neighbours and ourselves. Through principles of regenerative tourism, we are empowered to work with our communities and natural environment in balance with the unique and wonderful characteristics of our home region (Atladóttir et al., 2023, p. 23).

Figure 2. Initial understanding of the concept of regenerative tourism among the NorReg participants 2022 (used with permission, Atladóttir et al., 2023).

Figure 2 visually represents the key words used to describe regenerative tourism; however, we intend to revisit this reflection to see whether through our experience together our understanding of what regenerative tourism is might change. Overall, the group felt that the knowledge gained from the NorReg pilot project highlights the tremendous potential regenerative tourism for destinations and SMiEs within the Nordic Region.

In November 2022, workshop IV was held in Malmö, Sweden in connection with the open NorReg seminar, during which many of the participants met for the first time face-to-face. The seminar brought together 100 participants from the Nordic countries, as well as 300 people who participated virtually from Nordic countries, Australia, Spain, and Britain. Among presenters were three well-known international specialists on regenerative tourism: Anna Pollock, founder of Conscious Travel; Dr. Dianne Dredge, Director of the Tourism CoLab; and Elke Dens, Global Director of Programs at the Travel Foundation. Below are the main results of NorReg 2022:

- A common understanding and definition of regenerative tourism practises.
- A shared vision statement for Nordic regenerative tourism which includes three main principles that were identified. These main principles are, people, environment, business.
- An academic group was established to further discussions in academia. The academic group is made up of people from Nordic universities and research organizations from a variety of disciplines. The group hopes to foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research which focuses on exploring methods to evaluate tourism impacts (of the natural and social landscapes) and community wellbeing within a regenerative tourism paradigm. The group further aims to positively impact the discussion on Nordic regenerative tourism on an academic level by publishing research results in relevant journals.
- Support for implementing regenerative initiatives among participating SMiEs the First MileTM methodology (Nikolova, 2022) was adopted. This methodology uses behaviour change strategies that help guide visitors toward more sustainable options during their travels. The workshops helped to define main themes that the SMiEs were interested in developing further for their companies for sustainability. The DMOs and academic group supported the individual companies in taking the first steps towards regenerative practices. The results show a need to adapt support measures to the realistic time factors that govern SMiE operations.

- Within two workshops the concept of citizen science was introduced and to initiate work within the SMiEs on the development of cooperative projects within each region. Citizen science is a collaborative effort that involves researchers (both professional and amateur), local communities, and visitors who conduct research in a scientific method (Schaffer & Tham, 2019). Projects based on citizen science methodologies can provide deeper experiences for visitors when offered as participatory visitor activities at places and destinations (such as national parks or within communities). Through these means, a deeper sense of involvement and engagement with the ”resources” that tourism experiences are based upon is offered, thus fulfilling visitors’ wishes to ”give back” to the region and people visited.
- The theory for using citizen science as a tool for regenerative tourism is based upon the affinities between the two approaches; and the need to provide knowledge-based foundations for environmental and community-based regeneration to ensure relevant and meaningful contributions from tourism. It calls for extensive, peer-based dialogues, grounded in a deep knowledge of the individuality of the place involved, while utilising previous general and place-based knowledge gathering. Thus, academics and locals need to be involved from the start in an egalitarian way—drawing knowledge from each other’s backgrounds and experiences. In this pilot phase of the NorReg project, the emphasis was on learning about citizen science and adapting the ideology to the realities of operations, as well as mapping, exploring, and defining future opportunities for local project development. Efforts exploring the practice of citizen science in the Nordic regions are ongoing with the NorReg participants by engaging their community and natural surroundings, and by formulating research questions, along with discovering ongoing scientific projects in the region that SMiEs can join. These efforts are supported by the local DMOs and academics of the project.
- Lessons learned for future project design include complex stakeholder engagement management issues, calling for innovative project design, and creative thinking approaches. Additionally, the need for local leadership and support is emphasised in the continued project design, with the overall project leadership providing umbrella support, coordination, and theoretical input to local solutions.

FURTHER ANALYSIS OF THE FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOP IN MALMÖ, SWEDEN

Qualitative data from the NorReg participants was gathered in Malmö in November 2022 to gain deeper insights into the perspectives of the various NorReg participants. This chapter details a further analysis of the findings reported in the NorReg Final Report (Atladóttir et al., 2023). Of the total project SMiE participants, about half participated in the seminar in Malmö. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants from the group—five were SMiE owners and managers along with two DMO representatives. The aim of these interviews was to gain insights into the hopes and expectations the interviewees had when they first heard about the NorReg project and what regenerative tourism practices imply for them within the framework of their own business or institution. Based on that, we asked how they hoped to make use of the project in their own work and what tools they required.

The representatives of the DMOs pointed out how they face similar challenges despite the regional differences between the participating countries. They expressed that they felt empowered to achieve the goals of the NorReg project as it provided them with a valuable chance to exchange experiences, best-practice examples, and the opportunity to learn from each other. For example, one participant said: ”We exchange experiences and results and then take that result into the networking package. We can find our own ways to reach the overall goals of the work package,” (DMO representative, Sweden).

Additionally, the participants ranked the collaboration with the academic group from the very start of the project as a positive strength and contribution to the project. Most of the participants had actively applied sustainable practices in their daily work before they had joined the NorReg project. Through the project they gained access to a like-minded network of people.

Many of the interviewed participants pointed out the importance of learning and developing tools—based on academic work—that could further help them to increase their level of sustainability in their daily work. For example, one participant noted: ”I feel we are part of something big and important for future tourism development in the North Atlantic. Developing tools for regenerative tourism is very important, and to be able to involve the local community and test the tools, we need more time, at least 2–3 years,” ”Business owner, Faroe Islands).

Both the SMiEs and the DMOs who participated in the interview agreed that establishing a regenerative framework requires time and ongoing networking,

despite the perceived value and benefits they experienced within the pilot project. During the workshop in Malmö, all the participants pointed out the imperative of continuing the work of the NorReg project over a longer period. Although the SMiEs were the main beneficiaries of the project, during the interviews it was revealed that the participants recommended an even stronger focus on local tourism businesses and the inclusion of further SMiEs in future work of the project.

For example, one participant said: ”We need more local SMiEs! A group of people working together. More SMiEs are important to get this local ownership,” (DMO representative, Lofoten, Norway).

While another participant noted: ”I have been working on sustainable tourism for 25 years now. So, I was really happy when I was told about the idea of what NorReg was and that they wanted the small companies to take part because I really think we need that development,” (SMiE owner, Faroe Islands).

During the final discussion at Malmö which included all project participants who attended the final workshop, it was agreed that to achieve a real change within the tourism industry the focus must shift from top-down management towards bottom-up approaches with local solutions within the tourism businesses—with support by the local DMOs and academics. The participants emphasized how the milestones set in the NorReg project mirrored their own business goals and desires to understand the regenerative tourism concept. Furthermore, the SMiEs stressed that they saw the value of NorReg as a way to gain knowledge about regenerative practices, and to test theories in practice at the local level. All partners in the project (DMOs, academics, and SMiEs) agreed on the importance of developing and understanding regenerative tourism practices within a Nordic context. They pointed out that to increase understanding of this concept, together as a group, we need to share our capacity and support each other. The cumulation of all the workshops throughout the year helped to identify tools, understand the project methodology, and research a system of measurements to be able to implement regenerative tourism as a practice.

On of the participants aptly expressed this view, saying: ”The tourism sector is integrated into the peoples’ lives, so we really want to build on the premises of the people who live there. And that is not always easy but that is the way to go. For our guests and for our region,” (DMO representative, Iceland).

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the project was successful in developing training and tools on applicable place-based initiatives focusing on how communities can be empowered to contribute to the regeneration of a place—encompassing nature and communities. The process of co-developing the NorReg project helped to build a network of active participants who are interested in taking the responsibility for further building a community of Nordic tourism stakeholders and nurturing regenerative tourism through capacity sharing. The pilot project showcased the perceived potential of fostering regenerative tourism practices through close collaborations with SMiEs, DMOs, and academics which led to the co-construction and implementation of tools for the responsible management of tourism.

The focus on SMiEs was welcomed by the participants and revealed the need for adopting holistic approaches. Ultimately the NorReg project revealed that it is important that local communities are included in all tourism development initiatives (Atladóttir et al., 2023). Through the project the group could touch upon potential ways to use regenerative approaches with current responsible tourism practices. In particular, the incremental behaviour-based First Mile approach was of interest to the SMiEs, as they often lack resources and time to feel able to participate in meaningful ways within larger scale sustainability approaches. Within the citizen science context, participants were interested in the participatory possibilities for visitors and locals alike, but seemed intimidated by the concept of science as something they could participate in. This implies a need for re-conceptualising the word ”science” itself and a valuable call for academics to increase efforts to open avenues for interactive dialogues at all stages of research design, practise, and interpretation.

In the next phase of the NorReg project, the tools and approaches that have been co-developed in the pilot year will be actively tested within the participating countries in the next two years (2023–2024). The goal is to focus on strengthening the local structures through exchange and learning within the NorReg network. Furthermore, it was decided that NorReg should further explore the understanding of regenerative tourism within a Nordic context while continuing the development of tools and gathering best practice case studies among the participating regions. This will help to continue the path towards regenerative tourism practices in regional destinations, strengthening local structures and collaboration, and adopting regenerative and innovative tourism operations through focusing on local place identity.

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REFLECTIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Petra Blinnikka, Jamk University of Applied Sciences – Åsa Grahn, University of Stavanger – Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, Icelandic Tourism Research Centre – Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

INTRODUCTION

This book comprehensively explores diverse aspects of responsible tourism, ranging from the introduction of innovative educational models to the implications of global sustainability initiatives at the regional level, and the enhancement of access to nature.

Initiated by the ICRT Finland network in spring 2022, this project highlights the importance of Nordic cooperation. The Nordic countries share not only a similar ideology but also hold collective aspirations for advancing sustainability in tourism. As affirmed by the Nordic Council of Ministers (2019), all Nordic nations are deeply committed to sustainable development, evident in their adherence to the Paris Agreement of 2015 and the integration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030, into national policy frameworks. Sustainability, social cohesion, green growth, and measures to combat climate change are intrinsic pillars of Nordic cooperation, encapsulated within the Nordic Council's Vision 2030.

Despite our region's allure as a perfect get-away for tourists, with its beautiful four-season natural landscapes, the urgency of safeguarding our pristine natural resources for future generations, amid rapid climate change (four times faster than in other regions) necessitates the Nordic countries to take proactive measures.

Therefore, this book project aims not only to gather various aspects and best practices of responsible tourism in the Nordic countries but also to foster enhanced cooperation within academia on responsible tourism issues.

The chapters explore cases related to various aspects of responsibility in tourism with a particular emphasis on two themes: 1) competence development and the role of an individual in responsible tourism and 2) the importance of effective cooperation in responsible tourism

In this summary, we reflect on the themes raised in the chapters and suggest actions for the future. By learning from the best practices presented, we seek to contribute to the enhancement of our knowledge of responsible tourism and strengthen sustainability within the industry.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIRST PART OF THE BOOK WITH THEME: COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL IN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

It is abundantly clear that education and competence development stand as foundational pillars for the advancement of responsible tourism. Without a deep understanding of how tourism impacts destinations and its qualities (nature and people), alongside the strategies needed to minimize the negative effects while maximizing the benefits, effective action becomes elusive. This resonates deeply with the global sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030 by UN, where quality education is paramount among the seventeen objectives. Given our unique individual learning abilities and preferences in service utilization, it is evident that we require varied types of services. This aspect of diversity was highlighted in both Helene's and in Rositsa's chapters, where education and the utilization of models were the focus. These models were not just theoretical constructs; they were tailored to individual understanding, offering personalized learning pathways based on specific needs and digital tools.

Furthermore, tourism is a volatile industry that is constantly faced with new challenges, and the need for continuous education has emerged as a cornerstone. Helene's case illuminated the importance of fostering positive attitudes and motivations among tourism stakeholders embracing inclusivity and responsibility. However, the chapter also sheds light on a critical gap: the limited knowledge surrounding the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities, resulting in barriers to developing universally high-quality experiences for all.

"The Steps Towards Responsible Tourism" educational programme exemplified the evolving landscape of education in our digital age. This case ambitiously aimed to provide accessible education for a broad range of tourism actors. Through online platforms, it offered flexibility and relevance, enabling entrepreneurs to update their knowledge base at their convenience. However, to develop this further, it will be important to tackle the practical shortcomings.

While Rositsa's project successfully delivered a flexible and accessible responsible tourism education curriculum, it also revealed fundamental challenges: the limited understanding of concrete actions at the individual level, which are pivotal for responsible tourism. Although, while universities responded by launching industry-aligned curricula, individual stakeholders failed to grasp the urgency of enhancing competencies in competencies. As we chart the course forward, it is imperative to evaluate the pros and cons of the asynchronous nature of an online curricula. While flexible, it

has also presented imbalances in student interaction, necessitating careful consideration in future implementations.

Throughout the chapters, we reaffirmed the vital role of stakeholder involvement in discussions surrounding responsible tourism. Yet equally important was the recognition that every individual possesses the agency to effect change and contribute to the greater good. As consumers become more informed and aware, they not only benefit from increased knowledge but also play a pivotal role in shaping responsible tourism practices, thereby fostering a more sustainable future for all.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SECOND PART OF THE BOOK WITH THEME: THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COOPERATION IN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Throughout the chapters, it became apparent that responsible tourism cannot thrive in isolation; it requires the active engagement and collaboration of all stakeholders across various levels of the tourism industry.

The case studies presented in the book shed light on the multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with cooperative efforts in responsible tourism. Gústaf's exploration underscored the importance of addressing all the stakeholders involved in the tourism ecosystem. To learn and understand which stakeholders are or should be involved is of great importance to effect meaningful change. Moreover, Kajsa's insights highlighted the importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to implementing responsible tourism initiatives, emphasizing the involvement of multiple stakeholders for success.

The pivotal role of tourism support systems emerged as a recurring theme throughout the chapters. We recognized the essential role of stable tourism support systems in ensuring the sustainability and longevity of responsible tourism development. The case presented by Rositsa further illustrates the importance of a public factor that facilitates a consistent strategic development and the know-how for coordination. Her chapter underscores that the ecosystem, as a spontaneously emerging structure, cannot be built by force. Instead, its participants can be guided towards responsible practices by increasing awareness of each one's role and the possibility to participate. This emphasizes the significance of fostering a supporting environment which encourages stakeholders to engage actively in responsible tourism initiatives.

Astrid and Keld further describe how social relations between local actors such as local private landowners, local citizens and the local municipality play a crucial role in the development of responsible tourism. Their chapter

uncovers significant communication gaps between the municipality and locals, leading to reliance on volunteers and potential resource alienation. Conflicting perspectives on marketing the area exacerbate tensions, emphasizing the need for improved collaboration among the stakeholders for effective area management. This again underscores the crucial role of collaboration, strategic development, and effective coordination between different stakeholders in fostering responsible tourism.

THE FUTURE OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Looking ahead, we acknowledge the importance of collaborative networks in advancing responsible tourism practices. The ICRT network, as evidenced by the chapters in the book, serves as an invaluable platform for facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration. Leveraging this network can facilitate the dissemination of innovative models, such as the online education concept, to other countries, fostering broader adoption and impact.

However, there remains a pressing need for further collaboration across various fronts. Collaborative efforts in events, publications, and co-research projects are essential for addressing shared concerns and optimizing resource allocation for sustainable development initiatives. Sharing research findings and best practices among the Nordic countries not only prevents the repetition of mistakes but also enhances the efficiency of sustainable development efforts.

As the Nordic countries prepare for the anticipated rise in international tourism, the lessons learned from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis take on added significance. These lessons underscored the importance of prioritizing security and safety in tourism practices while also highlighting the need for on-going collaboration and knowledge-sharing to drive meaningful progress in responsible tourism. Through concerted efforts and shared commitment, we can pave the way for a more sustainable future for all.

In conclusion, the collaborative efforts and knowledge-sharing initiatives outlined in this book not only advance the responsible tourism industry debate, but indirectly, and perhaps not always outlined, all of them hold the potential to positively impact the lives of the local populations in the destinations. As Harold Goodwin aptly puts it, ”Responsible tourism is about using tourism to make better places for people to live in, first; and second, better places for people to visit”. This perspective highlights that Responsible Tourism is not solely about preserving destinations but also about fostering vibrant and

sustainable communities. Through our collective commitment to the Nordics, we aspire to develop the Nordics into a region that prioritizes the well-being of its residents while also offering enriching experiences for visitors, again reflecting the true essence of responsible tourism.

To end, this book has maintained a ”best practice” focus, aiming to leverage insights from successful implementations to guide the Nordic region towards responsible tourism development. However, to ensure that these best practices are effectively implemented, and to steer the Nordic region in the right direction, research is crucial. Importantly, this research needs to be communicated to all relevant stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem. Future research should prioritize community engagement and empowerment, (responsible) tourism education and awareness and policy analysis and advocacy. By bridging research and practice, we can continue to advance responsible tourism practices and promote sustainable development in the Nordic region and beyond.

AUTHORS

Petra Blinnikka: Senior lecturer, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Petra has worked as a project manager in several tourism development projects, mainly focusing on responsibility and sustainability issues. She is a founder and coordinator of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism in Finland and has been working within responsibility issues in tourism at the local, regional, national, and international level.

Åsa Grahn: University of Stavanger (UiS), the Norwegian School of Hotel Management

Dr. Åsa Grahn (PhD) is Associate Professor at the University of Stavanger, Norwegian School of Hotel Management, Norway. With a breadth of experience in both the practical and academic realms of hospitality and tourism, she has gained a rich expertise in teaching, research, and industry engagement. Dr. Grahn's prior research has centred around sustainable and ethical tourism consumption. Currently, she is engaged in studying tourism practices within destinations, with a specific focus on regional collaboration, particularly within the realm of social responsibility. Through her teaching and research, Dr. Grahn aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping responsible tourism practices. Additionally, she serves as a reviewer for various academic publications, including journals, edited books, and conferences.

Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir: Icelandic Tourism Research Centre

Guðrún Þóra is the Director of the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre (ITRC) and has a lot of experience in teaching and researching tourism. Her research interests have focused on tourism in rural areas with a particular focus on destination development and tourism impact on community development.

Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen: Principal lecturer, Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen's main area of teaching and development work is entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism business with a linkage to research. She was a co-editor of Jamk's publication "Special Issues of Responsible Tourism". Whenever new forms of responsible tourism are a concern, for example ethically managed voluntourism, Minna is typically involved in the new openings. Currently she works for a research project about sustainable transformative tourism experiences.

Rositsa Röntynen (MSc), Lecturer in tourism and hospitality in the School of Business at Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Finland, and PhD candidate at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar", Bulgaria

Rositsa Röntynen has worked in research, development, and innovation, leading various projects in the field of Responsible Tourism, including voluntourism, cultural tourism, nature-based and community-based tourism. She is also coordinating Finland's nationwide Steps Towards Responsible Tourism curriculum. Email: rositsa.rontynen(a)vfu.bg; rositsa.rontynen(a)jamk.fi

Kajsa Åberg: Region Västerbotten, Regional Development Organisation Västerbotten

A habitual explorer of tourism and destination development from different perspectives. Currently working as a public sector strategist for sustainable development in northern Sweden and an appreciated speaker on topics related to competence, sustainability, and storytelling, Kajsa is also active within academia and holds a PhD in human geography from Umeå University. Her engagement in responsible tourismduring her years of running a tourism business in a natures reserve on an otherwise desolate island where she explored ways to milden the traces of human activities and founded a lighthouse museum consisting of the waste left behind by previous inhabitants.
Email: kajsa.aberg@regionvasterbotten.se

Astrid Laura Dam (MSSc): Project Leader, Naturpark Åmosen

Astrid Laura Dam's interests lie in the management of natural areas and collaborative relationships between public entities, private landowners, and local stakeholders. She possesses expertise in establishing facilities for responsible nature tourism in fragile natural areas and local communities.
Email: Aldj@ruc.dk

Keld Buciek (PhD): Associate Professor, Roskilde University

Keld Buciek's interests revolve around the manner in which nature is integrated into identity-political projects of various kinds, including the utilization of nature to advocate for specific societal arrangements. Keld has previously delved into the impact of tourist culture on vulnerable societies in the developing world.

Gústaf Gústafsson: Adjunct at the Rural Tourism Department at Hólar University

Gústaf Gústafsson received his master´s degree at Leeds Beckett University in Responsible Tourism Management and is working on his PhD at the same institute. Gústaf Gústafsson is a teacher and researcher with over 20 years of experience working with events, tourism, and hospitality in the private sector. His research interests are responsible tourism management, marketing and participatory action research.

Helene Maristuen: Associate Professor of Tourism, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Developing work within responsible tourism: Helene Maristuen is a project leader within sustainable tourism development and has worked with one of the first destinations in Norway which achieved the standard as a sustainable destination. The work included developing criteria and indicators that should be covered by the destination within nature, culture, environment, social and economic sustainability and to make sure the destination achieved it. Email: Helene.Maristuen@hvl.no

Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir, Project leader, Iceland Tourism Cluster

Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir is the former Director General of the Icelandic Tourism Board, former Vice-President of the European Travel Commission responsible for sustainability advocacy and has worked as Director of Destination Management within large tourism development projects in Saudi Arabia. Since 2022, she has led the Nordic Regenerative Tourism project, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, on behalf of the Iceland Tourism Cluster.

Jessica Aquino, Associate Professor, Department of Rural tourism, Hólar University

Dr. Jessica Aquino is an Associate Professor at Hólar University and an Academic Fellow to the Teaching Academy of Public Universities, Iceland. Her research interests are in placed-based pedagogies, community development; sustainable tourism and responsible tourism practices. Jessica leads the Nordic Regenerative Tourism research group for NorReg and is the corresponding author. Email: jessica(a)holar.is

Magdalena Falter, PhD, Faculty of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland

Magdalena is currently finishing her PhD, addressing how to rethink current tourism development by exploring the interplay of tourism entrepreneurship and digital innovation, where she sheds light on potential approaches to foster degrowth. She is a member of the administrative team for the Nordic Regenerative Tourism project.

Mari Angeria, Senior Lecturer, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, PhD candidate, University of Lapland.

During recent years, Mari Angeria has specialised in research and development of the phenomena related to the tourism workforce and employee experience.

Anu Harju-Myllyaho: Senior Specialist, RDI, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, PhD candidate, University of Lapland

Anu Harju-Myllyaho has long experience in the field of tourism. She specialises in inclusive tourism research and tourism futures research, which she sees as key aspects of sustainable tourism development.

Pasi Satokangas, Specialist, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, PhD candidate, University of Lapland

Pasi Satokangas has been working for eleven years in tourism research and development. He has specialised in the economic impacts of tourism and tourism safety.

Janne Liburd: Director, Center for Tourism, Innovation and Culture, University of Southern Denmark

Dr. Dr. Janne J. Liburd is Professor of tourism and the director of the Centre for Tourism, Innovation and Culture at the University of Southern Denmark. By ministerial appointment, Janne served on the National Tourism Forum, charged with developing the first strategy for tourism in Denmark (2015-2018). She was the Chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Wadden Sea National Park board (2015-2024). Her research interests are sustainable and regenerative tourism development, protected areas, and tourism higher education.

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Jamk
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PO BOX 207
FI-40101 Jyväskylä
Finland
Tel +358 20 743 8100
Fax. +358 14 449 9694

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The Nordic Countries share common values and a similar culture and have all demonstrated increased commitment towards the development of sustainability. The goal of this publication is to present responsible tourism cases conducted in Nordic countries to share experiences and create learning opportunities for tourism stakeholders throughout the entire tourism value chain: entrepreneurs, tourism officials, DMO's as well as tourism academics and students.

The cases presented in this publication were collected as an open call during autumn 2022 and were double-blind reviewed by the editorial team of the book. The book project was initiated by the ICRT Finland network and was implemented in fruitful Nordic cooperation.

The chapters explore cases related to different aspects of responsibility in tourism especially focusing on two main themes: 1) competence development and the role of the individual in responsible tourism and 2) the importance of effective cooperation in responsible tourism.

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