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Tourism and protected areas: motives, actors and processes

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SUMMARY

Following the paradigm shift in nature conservation policy towards the inclusion of local inhabitants in the planning and management of protected areas, tourism is emphasised as a means to achieve economic development in peripheral areas. Governance issues and the real impacts from tourism on development are thus often under scrutiny. This article focuses on the role of tourism in the political process of designating protected areas. How does the inclusion of the tourism argument affect designation processes? What kind of tourism is being promoted and how can it be conceptualised with regard to human views of the use of nature? An ecostrategic framework is presented to illustrate the essential land-use choices available. Three cases of protected area designation processes are used to address the issue of tourism: the failure of the Kiruna National Park proposal and the successful implementation of the snowmobile regulation area in Funäsdalen and Fulufjället National Park. The analysis shows that while tourism may increase local acceptance of protected areas, the power of this argument also depends on contextual and process factors.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important and increasing role in the economy of the Swedish mountain region, as in many other peripheral and rural areas all over the world. While the region's economy has traditionally been associated with farming, reindeer herding, forestry and mining, a decline in these industries has brought expectations regarding tourism to the forefront. The establishment of protected areas in this region is also important both for conservation of nature *per se* and for attracting tourists from various parts of Sweden and abroad. Nevertheless, many local actors instead perceive protected areas as barriers to development and recreation:

'... protected areas have for me mostly been ... a minor hindrance actually, because there have been special rules on whether I can work there or not. And I was banging my head against the wall when I started, when I spoke out and said that I will work with commercial tourism and I need a permission to do it in a national park. It took almost three years for me to get it.' An ecotourism entrepreneur working in the mountain region.

In fact, most current management plans for national parks and nature reserves in Sweden still ban commercial activities in these areas, and this has precluded the development of tourism businesses. The plans also restrict many activities that people

living close to the protected areas feel to be crucial, such as hunting, fishing and snowmobiling.

Currently, a new conservation paradigm is being introduced into the Swedish mountain region, first, by the adoption of binding international conservation demands and, second, by increased tourism into the region. These processes also fuel demands from the grassroots for the decentralisation of policy processes. About 65% of Swedes support self- or co-management of protected areas (Zachrisson 2006). The Swedish government has tried to accommodate these diversified demands in its new nature conservation policy, which emphasises the importance of protected areas for recreation and economic development, as well as local participation in the management of these areas (Skr 2001/02). Studies from the western USA and the UK have identified a positive relationship between regional development and national park establishment (Lorah and Southwick 2003; Moisey 2003; Frentz *et al.* 2004). In general, protected areas are increasingly seen as a tool for the development of peripheral areas (Machlis and Field 2000). Research in the Swedish mountain region suggests, however, that tourism does not have such great potential (Heberlein *et al.* 2002; Lundgren 2005; Lundmark 2005). These results are debated and the issue of tourism may still function as a door-opener to local communities by providing income opportunities which could facilitate processes of designating protected areas. This aspect has hitherto been overlooked, as analyses of the new conservation paradigm have so far concentrated on governance. More research is therefore needed to decide the potential of tourism in securing support for the designation of protected areas.

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of tourism in implementing protected area designations in the Swedish mountain region. The case study areas are two national parks and a municipal snowmobile regulation area. In particular, we asked the following questions: How has the inclusion of tourism influenced the designation processes? What kind of tourism has been promoted and how can this be conceptualised with regard to human views of the use of nature?

METHOD

This article is a synthesis of research undertaken by scientists from different disciplines, and is based

mainly on empirical material that has been or is soon to be reported elsewhere. The Kiruna (Sandell 2005a) and Funäsdalen (Zachrisson 2006, submitted for publication) cases are based on qualitative case studies including key informant interviews and documentary analysis (official documentation and newspaper articles). In the Fulufjället case, secondary sources are used to some extent (Wallsten 2003) together with quantitative visitor surveys (Fredman *et al.* 2005; Fredman 2006, submitted for publication). In this article, these data are approached using the two questions outlined above; it thus constitutes a joint effort to understand yet another aspect of the case studies. In addition, new data were collected with a focus group consisting of stakeholders involved in tourism and/or protected area issues in the mountain region (see Esselin and Ljung in this issue). The quotes in the article originate from this material, which was recorded and transcribed to give examples of how stakeholders support views and conclusions.

PROTECTED AREAS IN THE SWEDISH MOUNTAIN REGION

The Swedish mountains provide excellent opportunities for tourism and recreation in both winter and summer. For many Swedes, the mountain region is a special place (Fredman and Heberlein 2005); almost a quarter of adult Swedes visit the mountains each year for recreation and leisure (Heberlein *et al.* 2002). The many protected areas cover 24.4% of total land area in the region and are increasingly believed to have potential for the development of tourism. In a recent study of the Swedish population, Fredman and Sandell (2005) show that, for most Swedes, protected areas in the mountain region are important for satisfying the need for nature experiences. About 20% consider them *very important*, an equal amount *rather important*, and 36% think they are *somewhat important*. Visitation data from the same survey show that 6.5% of the adult Swedish population visited a national park in the mountain region within a single year.

Europe's first national parks were established in 1909 in the northern parts of the Swedish mountain range. Following the environmental debate of the 1960s, the national government identified several areas of national interest for nature conservation and recreation, many in the mountain region.

Their purpose was to serve as recreational areas for the general public, and to secure land for recreation and support the development of the tourism industry. A study of the motives for establishing protected areas in the Swedish mountain area from 1909 to 2003 shows that conservational and societal values have been quite equally represented over time (Eckerberg and Moen 2006). 'Landscape' and 'recreational' values are as frequently referred to as 'old-growth forests' and 'general ecological values'. Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, however, the motive to secure 'nature experiences' has strongly increased, while more aesthetic aspects have been downplayed. Since 1992, some criteria have been especially emphasised, such as 'educational values' and 'ecotourism', which indicates a widening view on the purpose of protection. Nevertheless, conservation values remain strong. Since the mid-20th century, the area of protected nature in Sweden has increased tenfold: today, Sweden has 28 national parks and about 2500 nature reserves. Recent changes in Swedish environmental policy imply increased recognition of social and economic values in (and around) protected areas (Skr 2001/02). Key components in this process are local participation, regional development (e.g. tourism), and recognition of outdoor recreation benefits (e.g. health, environmental education).

PARADIGM SHIFT AND NEW CHALLENGES

In the late 19th century, areas regarded as having particular scenic beauty or uniqueness began to be set aside for exclusive conservation. A world standard based upon strict nature protection and the prohibition of settlement and the exploitation of natural resources was established (Stevens 1997). While there was no place for local people, it was a different matter with tourists, who were welcomed in order to benefit from the refuge from the ills of civilisation (Colchester 1997). This confrontation policy has proved ineffective as a conservation measure in many aspects. It has evoked local resistance and has therefore been difficult to implement since strong monitoring mechanisms are needed (Nepal and Weber 1995; Ghimere and Pimbert 1997). Even in ecological terms, this policy has failed since biodiversity may even decrease when human interference (e.g. domestic animal grazing) is interrupted (West and Brechin 1991).

Since the end of the 1980s, local participation in the management of protected areas has been emphasised. Nature conservation is now supposed to be done with and for people, instead of the previous protection from people (Zachrisson 2004). A good illustration from the Swedish mountain region was the strategy shift in 1995 (Sandell 2005b) when a conventional national park designation process in Southern Jämtland was replaced by a proposal based on local conditions, initiated with the thematic regional synoptic plan as an arena for discussion. The new paradigm is informed by the concept of sustainable development which aims to combine ecological sustainability with socio-economic development (Hulme and Murphree 1999). In terms of nature conservation, this has included attempts to reconcile the interests of local communities with those of conservation by pointing to the economic benefits that could follow from tourism development promoted by protected areas. Protected areas can be of considerable value for nature-based tourism if designation brings recognition or increased tourism value and there is a regulatory framework within which tourism can be managed. Recreation and tourism can, in this way, be critical to fostering support for protected areas (Goodwin 2000; Staiff and Bushell 2004).

AN ECOSTRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

One attempt to integrate questions of conservation and development is the conceptual framework of ecostrategies (view and use of nature) that is briefly introduced here and used below for discussions of the empirical cases (for further references and presentation see, for example, Sandell 2005a). When a general conceptual framework for discussing conservation, place and landscape is sought, a dichotomy of domination versus adaptation with regard to human views and use of nature is often identified (for examples see Sandell 1988). A parallel division with regard to regional development has been suggested by Friedmann and Weaver (1979) using the concepts of functional and territorial development. A major effect of this approach, in many ways similar to centralised and decentralised systems, is that various aspects of social integration (politics, economy and culture) are brought into focus together with the human ecological issues.

From this, the ecostrategic framework is constituted as a four-field figure (Figure 1). The

Figure 1 The conceptual framework of four ecostrategies with regard to human relationships to nature and landscape (adapted from Sandell 2005b)

horizontal axis illustrates the dichotomy of functional specialisation versus territorial adaptation as points of departure for landscape perspectives – a basic choice between functional dependence on exchange with other areas and territorial dependence on the best use of local resources. The vertical axis illustrates the dichotomy of the strategies of active use versus passive contemplation of the landscape (i.e. a choice between utilisation and conservation). The different ecostrategies involve various crucial consequences in terms of democracy, environment, views of nature, outdoor recreation, local development, etc. Even though the different strategies may appear to be clear-cut categories in Figure 1, the reality exhibits tendencies and blends involving a greater or lesser degree of passive versus active landscape uses, and of functional versus

territorial strategies. The arrow in Figure 1 illustrates the paradigm shift in nature conservation policy discussed above.

CASE STUDIES FROM THE SWEDISH MOUNTAIN REGION

The Failure of the Kiruna National Park proposal

During the late 1980s, there was a debate about establishing a large national park in the high mountain area around Lake Torne, close to the town of Kiruna in northernmost Sweden. It involved two smaller existing national parks, a number of marked trails, mountain huts and the Abisko tourist centre, and would have been one of the largest

national parks in Europe (4360 km²). This area has been important for tourism since the beginning of the 20th century, and in 1976 it was included in the list of Sweden's 25 primary recreation areas. Tourism did not, however, constitute a major economic sector in Kiruna, which is primarily a mining community. Reindeer herding by Sami is another important activity in the area (Swedish EPA 1989; Sandell 2005a).

The main advocates for the park were the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the regional tourist organisation. National organisations involved in tourism, conservation and the outdoors also seemed to be positive. The objectives of the national park, as put forward by the Swedish EPA, were closely linked to touristic perspectives. It would give much larger groups of people the opportunity for genuine and first-rate experiences of wilderness-like nature, in an alpine topography with unexploited roadless alpine heaths and stupendous massifs. The Swedish EPA wanted to widen the traditional Swedish view of the national park concept, with inspiration from national parks in North America such as zoning, rangers and visitor centres. The ambition was to strengthen the area's legal protection against exploitation, but also to raise its status and visitor attraction value and to establish a coordinated administration that was locally based and thus generated jobs. The goal was a high degree of interplay between nature conservation and tourism development, including a tourist centre in Abisko with exhibitions, shops, and a cinema for 220 spectators.

However, resistance at the local level turned out to be strong, as local residents were afraid that their use of the area would be curtailed, in particular regarding outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting and snowmobiling. These perspectives were argued for in the local newspapers and at local meetings, in particular by the local hunting and fishing association. A petition, with more than 15,000 signatures, asserted that the establishment of a Kiruna National Park was a clear intrusion upon the right of public access. As Kiruna is traditionally a mining society, new employment prospects in the area of tourism and service were very unfamiliar for many. This, in combination with a tradition of local scepticism towards central authorities, e.g. due to previous tensions around the use of snowmobiles and the perceived linkage between the national park concept and a lack of local power,

led to the local opposition. It was clearly stated in the plan that reindeer herding would not be subject to restrictions but, even though generally maintaining a low profile in the debate, the Sami also appeared somewhat sceptical.

Even though the Swedish EPA organised public meetings in Kiruna and established a working group in which various interested parties were represented, there was such a clash of interests that the project could not be implemented. The plan for the national park was shelved for an indefinite period (which continues). In summary, it may be argued that there was a clash between basically very different cultural views (cf. ecostrategies above) of conservation and outdoor recreation represented by advocates and opponents. The combination of the tourism sector and the new national park proposed by the Swedish EPA as a possibility for the local economy was, to a large extent, perceived by local residents as irrelevant and representing a change in recreation habits.

The Funäsdalen Snowmobile Regulation Area

Funäsdalen is situated in the southern part of the mountain range, in western Härjedalen, and is a popular tourist destination, particularly for cross-country skiers. Increasingly, people also come for other winter activities such as snowmobiling, which has resulted in some conflicts. Cross-country skiers started complaining about the smelly exhausts and the noise of snowmobiles, and local landowners about damage to soil and plantations due to snowmobiles. In the early 1990s, the County Administration Board tried to regulate snowmobiling to solve these conflicts, but failed because of strong local resistance. Instead, a local process was initiated and most of the involved stakeholders – including tourist entrepreneurs, landowners, Sami reindeer herders and officials – were invited to participate. By the end of the 1990s, consensus had been reached on the need for regulations. The municipal snowmobile regulation area was formally established in 2000. The regulations state that snowmobiling is only allowed on trails after paying a fee, except for local inhabitants who may use snowmobiles to go to a previously agreed site. External funding of SEK 7.5 million assured the construction of an exceptional high-quality trail system (Zachrisson 2006, submitted for publication).

The issue of tourism is key to understanding the process in Funäsdalen, not least because the community is dependent on tourism for employment opportunities. Complaints from tourists were a major reason for starting the discussions on snowmobile regulations, and the active participation of tourist entrepreneurs, including snowmobile sellers and renters, was essential to change local attitudes. When even the snowmobile sellers were advocating regulations, snowmobilers who go out just for fun were convinced that something needed to be done. Their argument was that Funäsdalen should host both cross-country skiers *and* snowmobilers, and that regulation combined with a high-quality trail system would satisfy both groups. In this way, they wanted to develop the trademark and attractiveness of Funäsdalen even further. This also meant that they aimed to balance more commercial tourism (such as snowmobile safaris) with traditional outdoor recreation such as cross-country skiing.

However, tourism was not the only important issue in the snowmobile controversy; there was also the landowners' struggle for regulations and a piece of the tourism cake. They took an active part in the process and resolved legal issues, for instance whether the Swedish right to public access to both private and public land for recreation purposes also includes access by snowmobiles. The alliance between two of the strongest economic sectors in the area thus succeeded in convincing the local opposition of the benefits of regulation.

The designation of Fulufjället National Park

Fulufjället National Park is located in the southernmost part of the Swedish mountains. It was designated as a national park in 2002 with the purpose to essentially preserve, in an unspoiled condition, a southern Scandinavian mountain area with distinctive vegetation and great natural value. The aim was also to provide experiences of tranquility, isolation and purity for visitors in combination with making it easier for the public to experience the park's nature. Tourism was a key factor in changing resistance to national park establishment into a favourable local opinion.

The establishment of the National Park has been described by Wallsten (2003:227) as '... one of the best examples in Sweden of conflict management

involving local and national interests'. The success is assigned to an 'inside-out' process rather than previously used, and less successful, 'outside-in' processes (cf. the Kiruna case above). According to Wallsten, the latter process focuses on problems and regulations of park use, while the former concentrates on opportunities and benefits outside the park. Following a first phase, where a traditional 'outside-in' process was close to failure, the Swedish EPA initiated the 'Fulufjället surrounding project' that evaluated local conditions and then assessed the possible benefits of a national park. The loss to the local population (in terms of restrictions in use of the park area) was balanced against gains from park opportunities, many of which referred to tourism. Growing local acceptance was a basic reason for final approval of the park by the municipality (Wallsten 2003).

The realisation of Fulufjället National Park implied a number of tourism-related investments and concepts. Complementary infrastructure was developed, including a visitor centre, new trails, and improved signage within and outside the park. Unlike other national parks in Sweden, a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum framework (Clark and Stankey 1979) was implemented and communicated as part of the national park designation process. The management plan divides the park into four zones – the wilderness zone, the low-intensity activity zone, the high-intensity activity zone, and the development zone – with different directions and measures for exploitation and protection (Swedish EPA 2002). In this way, both demands for protection and wishes for certain recreation activities can be satisfied. In the year before and after designation, visitor surveys were conducted to guide the park management plan and further development, as well as to monitor changes in visitor characteristics, activities and impacts (Fredman *et al.* 2005, 2006). According to these surveys, park visitation increased by 40% following the designation. Parallel to the national park designation process, a tourism development project was also implemented with European Union funding. The park is now jointly promoted as one of the key attractions in the region. Fulufjället is thus considered by the Swedish government as a good example of how the conservation of nature can contribute to regional development (Skr 2001/02), and the Swedish EPA considers Fulufjället a model for future national park establishment in Sweden.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

First, it should be noted that the three cases can be placed along a time sequence, with Kiruna in the mid-1980s, Funäsdalen next in the early 1990s, and Fulufjället last at the end of the 1990s. The general context has undoubtedly changed during this period (as also outlined in the theoretical contextualisation section), which means that society's emphasis on tourism is much higher now than it used to be.

Using the conceptual framework of ecostrategies presented in Figure 1, the Kiruna national park proposal illustrates the conflict between the traditional 'museum' park perspective (here somewhat extended towards the 'factory' position through the interest in tourism investments), and the local opposition very much engaged in 'one's home district to be utilised', here through snowmobiles, hunting and fishing. The successful establishment of Fulufjället National Park could be interpreted as based upon a linkage between a modern zoned and tourism-oriented nature reserve, and an extensive development project with heavy investment in the surrounding region. Different ecostrategies could be fulfilled at different locations within the same area, and this, together with external compensation to the local society, made the proposal attractive. The same design was also at work in Funäsdalen where the regulations separate cross-country skiers from snowmobilers (a kind of zoning) and considerable investments to improve snowmobile trails were made in order to satisfy opponents. In this way, most tourists and locals could meet in the upper right corner of the conceptual framework (Figure 1) with the locals as legitimate regulators of how their home district should be utilised (here including new trails, bridges, etc.). Simultaneously, the more museum-like ecostrategy of cross-country skiers could still coexist, using other zones of the area. In other words, the perspective of 'functional specialisation' of the landscape (to the left in Figure 1) was decentralised and transformed to the local level in line with a more territorial development.

In all three cases examined here, tourism was part of the dominant ecostrategies employed to legitimise protection. Tourism was introduced by the Swedish EPA in both Kiruna and Fulufjället, while it was a more of a mutual process in Funäsdalen. The argument was primarily that the

protection would lead to increased tourism and, thus, local employment would be generated. In Funäsdalen and Fulufjället, the tourism argument played an important role in successfully confronting initial local protests, and protection measures could be adopted, while this did not happen in Kiruna. Hence, whether or not tourism was used as an argument, who introduced it, and for what purposes, cannot give a straightforward explanation of the outcomes of these processes, even though it is potentially important. The potential of a tourism argument is dependent on, or related to, some other factors.

This study shows three major aspects that might explain the outcomes of the three cases. First of all, the *local context of dependency* is important: what separates the failure in Kiruna from the two success cases is that the proposed national park would have been situated close to a town of 25,000 inhabitants that was primarily dependent on mining rather than tourism. Therefore, tourism did not appear as a necessary complementary source of employment as it did in Funäsdalen and Fulufjället, which are inhabited by about 2400 and 400 people, respectively, and where there are not many alternative employers apart from tourism enterprises.

'... there are also the locals' own needs for recreation areas and how they view these values. It is easier to understand this reasoning where they have their incomes secured anyway, such as in the mining areas. On the other hand, it is very difficult to understand this in many other mountain areas where the only possibility to make a living, except reindeer herding, is some form of tourism... You have to accept to make room for job creation... Accordingly, you buy that it is more important to create jobs and to get a good quality of the area than to have total freedom.' (A representative from the municipality of Härjedalen.)

The second crucial aspect is how the local population is approached and included in the process. In the Kiruna case, major advocates were external to the local community. As they did not invest enough effort in building a coalition with strong local partners in favour of the proposal, the different ecostrategies could not be united. It seems as though *multi-level coalitions* are key to success in this kind of processes: the local partners should not only represent politicians and minorities, but also include economically strong actors. The work to build such coalitions appears to be facilitated by a

transparent process where many local voices are heard, as indeed happened in Funäsdalen and Fulufjället.

This leads to the third central aspect, which is to realise that processes to designate protected areas must focus on how the area can be of value for local communities as well as for visitors, i.e. a *multiple-use approach* must be adopted. To promote tourism as a boost for local development and employment opportunities is only one aspect; it is also essential to find out how local residents already use the area and how they wish to use it in the future. If compromises can be found, win-win solutions can result. In the two success cases, the compromises implied capital investments in infrastructure and activities suggested by the locals:

‘... it can also be that the protection secures the conditions for this local activity and to preserve the qualities

of the area. Then you achieve integration between the need of protection and local development which means that the protection will not be perceived as something negative but as an important ingredient to create this development. (A representative from the municipality of Härjedalen.)

To conclude, this article has illustrated how different ecostrategies interact to create certain outcomes. It has also shown that tourism can be an important argument for increasing local acceptance for the establishment of protected areas, but is not sufficient on its own. How the tourism argument is perceived at the local level depends on the importance of tourism as a source of employment opportunities, whether there are strong and resourceful local advocates, and whether the process takes into account and supports local needs and wishes.

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