

Differing Discourses of Development in the Arctic: The Case of Nature-Based Tourism in Northern Norway

Helene Amundsen

Abstract: Tourism is one of the pillars of the Norwegian national government's regional development strategy for Northern Norway and the government sees tourism as a sector with significant potential for job creation and income. National level strategies are taken up by national public bodies, and some funding has been made available to follow up the recommendations of the strategy. This article presents the various discourses on regional and local tourism development in Northern Norway based on analyses of documents, tourism marketing material, and interviews. One of the national aims for tourism development is creating sustainable rural communities to turn the trend of negative population growth and challenges related to economic restructuring. Analyses of tourism development and activities in two municipalities in Northern Norway show the distance between the perceptions of different actors on different scales about the tourism industry today, and its potential and direction for development. The considerable focus at the national level to use tourism development as a tool to sustain communities across Norway is evident through their project of national tourism routes. The local tourism actors are objecting to not being able to define the product that they are providing. Furthermore, local actors strongly object in the instances where the nationally defined needs of tourism hinder industrial developments that would provide much needed income to the local economy. There are clear discrepancies between the way in which the local tourism operates and plans on developing, and the national strategies and promotion of the region.

Introduction

Tourism is typically cited as the world's largest and fastest growing industry (e.g., Saarinen, 2003), and the Arctic is receiving increased interest as a tourism destination (Hall & Saarinen, 2010a). Consequently, tourism is perceived as an attractive source of income and employment in the Arctic regions. It is noted that "tourism is increasingly considered as being a tool for providing economic growth, employment and welfare in peripheries," but

simultaneously there are concerns whether new tourism developments can avoid the cycle of failure that many other places have experienced (Müller & Jansson, 2007a, p. 3). Northern Norway is by no means an exception to this increased focus on tourism development. The Norwegian government has expressed a renewed interest in development of Northern Norway, represented through the government strategies for regional development in which tourism is stated as one of the pillars (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, 2009). The national government frames the region as “Norway’s most important strategic focus area in the years ahead. Tourism has a natural place in this context” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 56). However as this article will show, there is an uneven spatial distribution of both economic resources and marketing when these strategies are put into practice.

There are two factors in particular that are instrumental in describing the challenges facing coastal municipalities in Northern Norway: demographic change with an aging population and out-migration; and economic restructuring with traditional livelihoods, such as fisheries, employing fewer people (Nyseth & Granås, 2007). These factors are not unique to Northern Norway and are similar to those described in, for example, Swedish mountain regions (Lundmark, 2005). These challenges can partially explain the increased focus on tourism development and the anticipated benefits.

As argued by Hall, the development and definition of place is intrinsically linked to tourism, as tourists and tourism actors define and recreate local communities in their image (Hall, 1997, 2003). In the context of local development, Nyseth and Granås (2007) discuss the new developments of place reinvention in northern communities, which are undergoing large changes in understanding and sense of place, especially due to the loss or weakening of the key industry in one-industry towns and municipalities. These reinvention processes are linked to tourism development, as new place images are used in tourism marketing.

This article focuses on discourses of tourism development in Northern Norway, with a particular focus on how the aims and objectives expressed in the various plans and strategies correspond with local perceptions and aims for local development. Fieldwork in two municipalities, Øksnes and Berg, which included interviews with local and regional tourism actors, informs the local perspective and discourses. These two municipalities were selected on the basis of their geographical locations on the ocean side of large islands, their similarities in landscape and culture, and their differences, especially with respect to available tourism facilities and services. The tourism industry within Øksnes municipality in Vesterålen is relatively developed with a variety of facilities and services. The tourism industry in

Berg municipality on Senja is relatively small, but is expected to grow due to the planned National Tourism Route along a large proportion of their roads. These two municipalities offer examples of nature-based tourism, different from fishing tourism, which has been somewhat covered in the Northern Norway tourism literature (Borch, 2004, 2009; Førde, 2009; Midtgard, 2004; Viken, 2001). Only one tourism business in the two municipalities provides fishing tourism.

The main conclusion in this article is that the focus on tourism development at the national level has had little effect at the local level; especially, the aim of ensuring sustainable rural communities has not been met. Furthermore, the discourses represented in the strategies at the national level do not correspond well with local discourses. Tourism could be an important future source of income and employment, but if there are large discrepancies between the various actors regarding the aim of tourism development and the product that should be provided, it is unlikely that the aim of achieving sustainable communities through tourism development will be met.

Tourism in Northern Norway

Northern Norway refers to the three northernmost counties on mainland Norway, and almost all of the area is above the Arctic Circle. Definitions of which areas constitute the Arctic vary, such as the areas north of the Arctic Circle, or determined by the treeline, or as areas of continuous permafrost (ACIA, 2005, p. 2). For the purpose of this article, the Norwegian Arctic denotes the three northernmost counties and Svalbard. The focus in this article is two municipalities within the counties Nordland and Troms.¹ Compared to other Arctic destinations, Northern Norway is easily accessible, through air, sea, or road, and the time and cost of travel are not prohibitive although Norway is seen as a high cost country to travel in. A majority travel by car, while both coach and cruise tourism are also common (Jacobsen, 2006). Although the extent of tourism facilities has increased, there is a lack of infrastructure to host large-scale tourism.

The tourism and outdoor recreation sector in Northern Norway is largely nature-based, and fishing, bird- and whale-watching, and hiking are activities the tourism industry offers. Cultural tourism linked to traditional nature-based activities is also important, for example, coastal fishing villages, museums in old industrial sites, handicrafts, and various festivals. Tourism and outdoor recreation is an important sector in Northern Norway, and accounts for 6.0% and 6.7% of total production for Troms and Nordland respectively, which is above the national average of 5.5% (Auno & Sørensen,

2009). Furthermore, when including direct and indirect impacts, the multiplying effect of tourist spending added an additional 30–40% output value to the economy (Dybedal, 2003). The numbers of visitors in these areas fluctuates from year to year, and the general trend shows increasing numbers of visitors since 2003, unevenly distributed throughout the region (NHO Reiseliv, 2009). During the period 2006 to 2010 there has been an increase in nights spent in tourist accommodations—9.9% in Troms and 8.9% in Nordland (NHO Reiseliv Nord-Norge, 2011). Senja is mainly visited by Norwegians (Jacobsen, 2006), whereas in Vesterålen around 50% of the visitors are foreign nationals (Jacobsen, pers. comm.). Tourists visit mainly during the summer season, which is a challenge to year-round employment among tourism actors. However, a growing number of tourists travel to the region during winter to experience the polar nights and the northern lights (aurora borealis). The increase in nights spent by foreign nationals from the 2005-06 winter season to the 2009-10 winter season was 71% (NHO Reiseliv Nord-Norge, 2011). Increasing tourist numbers during winter is a priority for tourism authorities, but currently these represent small numbers compared to the summer season. One way in which this is attempted is by marketing the region as the land of the northern lights comparable to the Finnish claim to Father Christmas (Mikalsen, 2009).

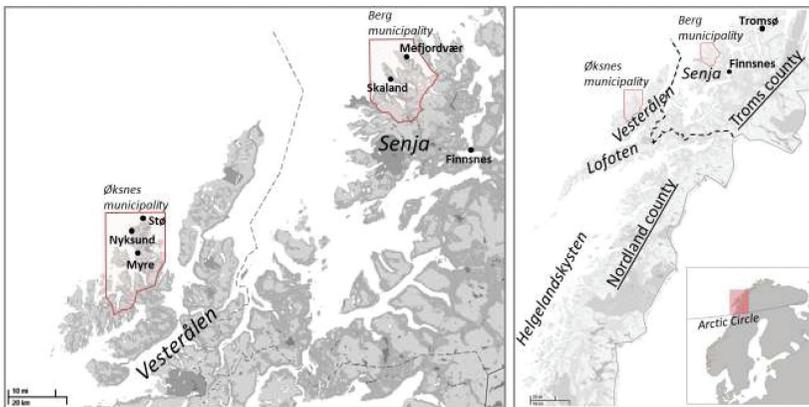


Figure 1. The left-side map shows the location of the two municipalities and some localities within them; the map on the right shows some of the Nordland and Troms counties and some places of interest within them.

Vesterålen is an archipelago north of the more well-known Lofoten islands, and has not had the same growth in tourism as the archipelago in the south, despite close similarities in landscape, culture, and history

(Kobro, 2010). Øksnes municipality has a population of 4,432 people and an area of 319 km² (Statistics Norway, 2011). Most people, approximately 2,850, live in the administrative and service centre Myre (Øksnes kommune, 2010a). Øksnes has two key destinations that are attracting a large number of visitors—whale-watching in the small fishing village of Stø, and the previously deserted fishing village of Nyksund. Local business people have invested in a whale safari at Stø and have been successful in attracting tourists to the municipality and the village. In Stø, locals have established a shop in the whale safari centre where they sell their own handicrafts and artwork to tourists. Nyksund was a deserted fishing village for thirty years, and has twenty inhabitants today (Øksnes kommune, 2010b). The village draws visitors for its location and specific history. There are three accommodation businesses, restaurants, a shop, a yoga business, art galleries, and a museum with concert venue. During the summer season an estimated 23,000 people visit the village, a significant volume for a village of twenty people (Øksnes kommune, 2010a).

Senja is a large island located north of Vesterålen connected by bridge to the town Finnsnes to the east, and with ferry connections during the summer to Vesterålen in the south and Tromsø in the north. The National Tourism Route on Senja, which is under development, will follow the western, outer side of the island and large proportions of the route go through Berg municipality. To date, two architecturally designed lookouts along the route have been built in the municipality.²

Berg municipality is home to 907 people in an area of 294 km², which gives a population density of 3 people per km² (Statistics Norway, 2011). The main focus for tourism in the municipality is nature-based activities, especially hiking (Berg kommune, 2004). Senja is marketed as “the fairy-tale island”³ partially attributed to the legend of the Senja Troll. The largest tourist attraction is thus an 18 m tall troll couple, which includes exhibits of local tales and performances for children (music performed by the Trolling Stones). The Senja Troll attracts 60,000 visitors during the tourism season (pers.comm.), which makes it one of the largest tourism attractions in the county. In the municipality there are four accommodation establishments with restaurants, and one combined gallery and tourism information centre that was recently established.

The municipality has a history of mining and a local interest group is working to establish a museum in the old graphite mine (Troms Folkeblad, 2010). Berg municipality has a growing number of tourists travelling through the municipality (as noted by interviewees), but is in the early stages of providing activities and services for tourists. However, being located along

one of the planned National Tourism Routes has secured significant and visible investments, especially the lookouts. More tourists are expected to travel along this route, both by car and bicycle, and this is expected to lead to an increased demand for accommodation and other services.

Tourism in both Øksnes and Berg, and elsewhere in Northern Norway, has traditionally been limited to the summer season, which means that employees in the tourism sector are not employed year-round, and hence many do not live in the municipalities throughout the year (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). Berg municipality has tried to initiate collaboration between the fishing and tourism industries, to encourage employees to work in tourism businesses in summer and in fisheries during its busiest period in the winter, but so far they have had little success with this.

Methods

The empirical material in this article is based on desk study, relevant documents and texts, and fieldwork in the two municipalities in Vesterålen and Senja. Field visits of altogether four months between June 2009 and July 2010, of which the longest field visit lasted one month in each municipality, gave the fieldwork an ethnographic character and allowed for participatory observation. An interview guide was used to ensure the same topics were covered in all the interviews. This research is part of a larger project on processes of change in the two municipalities, with a particular focus on the role of tourism. Interviewees were asked about tourism development, local perceptions of tourism, and their perception of the potential for tourism. The tourism actors were asked particular questions concerning their businesses, and about their relationships with other tourism businesses and with governmental bodies on all levels.

Interviewees were selected through a desk study by identifying key individuals in the municipality and, in particular, the tourism sector through printed and Internet tourism marketing material. The interviewees were contacted prior to our visiting the municipalities and they agreed to be interviewed. Further interviewees were selected through snowballing methodology; i.e., key individuals were asked to name others who would be relevant for us to meet. Interviews were either audio recorded and transcribed, or recorded by note writing.

In-depth interviews were carried out with altogether forty people in the two municipalities. The interviewees represented various professions and positions of responsibility within their municipality, such as local government officials; fishers; shop owners; representatives from the tourism

sector; chairmen of local sports, recreational, and civil society organizations; local investors; and individuals with strong local engagement. Specific tourism interviewees included the public officials responsible for tourism in the local governments and almost all tourism actors—twelve tourism actors in Øksnes municipality and three of four full-time tourism actors in Berg. Tourism actors here refer to those representing businesses listed in tourism brochures and promotion material. Some interviewees hold two jobs but are categorized as tourism actors for the purpose of this article, as they were interviewed in their capacity as tourism business owners.

Other sources of information include policy documents, project proposals and documents, statistics, two years of newspaper articles, and tourism promotion material both printed and online. An automated online newspaper search from September 2009 until June 2011 searched for keywords *turis** and “municipality” to cover news stories related to the municipalities in general and to tourism specifically. The documents and newspaper articles gave insight into recent processes of change and the relevant actors in the municipalities and developments in the tourism sector.

The data was analyzed with the help of the text analysis software QSR NVivo8 by coding according to themes. NVivo is a program that allows for structuring and analyzing text through coding, word frequency searches, and various visual and model presentations of the data. Responses related to changes in the municipalities and who and what act were grouped, coded, and analyzed. The interviews were reviewed for keywords and recurring themes through querying frequency, as well as coding according to themes that interviewees discussed, such as perceptions of tourism development and the local potential for tourism.

Actors Involved in the Tourism Development and Marketing Process

A variety of actors at all levels, national to local, are involved in developing and marketing tourism, as well as providing tourism services. At the national level, the responsibility for tourism is placed within the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and their strategy for tourism development defines the national focus for the sector (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). Tourism is noted as an important focus by two additional ministries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment. In total, nine ministries have tourism as part of their mandate and within their area of responsibility (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). Innovation Norway (IN) is a national and regional organization owned jointly by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the County councils. IN’s main role with respect to tourism locally is perhaps the *visitnorway* web portal. Another main task

includes promoting Norway as a tourism destination domestically and abroad. Of private organizations, the Norwegian Hospitality Organization (NHO Reiseliv) and their regional office in Northern Norway are the most important. They offer training and support for their members, and lobby the authorities on behalf of members.

The county governor offices and county councils provide infrastructure necessary for tourism. County councils can also take a more active role, exemplified by Nordland County and the Directorate of Cultural Heritage's project "Our Valuable Coastal Culture," which offered financial support to heritage restoration projects with tourism or cultural purposes (Riksantikvaren, 2010). This project funded a plan for development of Nyksund given its cultural heritage and importance for tourism in Øksnes municipality. The project allowed for business and property owners in Nyksund to receive funding for developing their businesses and facilities for tourism. The culture administration in the municipality and the museum in Øksnes were instrumental in securing funding for this project.

Regional tourism organizations are important for promoting the region. In an attempt to promote Northern Norway in a more comprehensive manner, the newly established Northern Norway Tourist Board (owned 51% by Finnmark, Troms, and Nordland County Councils with the remaining ownership distributed among actors) takes over responsibility from the regional tourism organizations, such as Visit Vesterålen and Midt-Troms Tourism Board. One destination organization that covers the whole of Northern Norway is thought to have the potential to create a stronger profile and marketing power for the region. The regional tourism organizations provide information material with details of available tourism facilities and activities. Their guides present accommodation, places of interest, activities offered, and selected events and festivals.

At the local level, the municipalities have the ability to support the tourism sector through facilitating local infrastructure, spatial planning, and including tourism development in strategic plans (Bjørnrå & Aarsæther, 2010). Tourism development is part of the strategy for local development in both municipalities investigated in this article (Berg kommune, 2004; Øksnes kommune, 2010b). Various local government bodies—including the culture department and the business department—are supporting the sector through funding for product development, marketing (e.g., on the municipal website), facilitating business development, and organizing or supporting festivals and other cultural events.

Tourism is currently a small, but significant sector in these two municipalities. It is expected to grow over the next few years, which

will provide income and employment. The tourism businesses in these municipalities are typically family owned and run, and are operating on the margin (noted by interviewees). The tourism sectors within the two municipalities are at various stages of development. In Vesterålen, the oldest established businesses have more than twenty years of experience, while there are fewer actors in Senja and they have less experience and few established networks for collaboration. In Vesterålen, a network of fourteen local tourism actors, of which five are located in Øksnes municipality, has been established with a common web portal (www.hildreland.no)—they promote each other to their guests and offer packaged tours to groups.

Discourses of Tourism Development

Discourse analysis provides a tool for differentiating various perceptions of tourism and of place. Narratives and discourses differ within communities and can be seen as social constructs of values and received truth claims (e.g., Castree & Braun, 1998; Cruikshank, 2005). Adger et al. (2001, p. 683) defines discourses as “knowledge regimes” and as “a shared meaning of a phenomena,” representing a specific way to understand an issue. As an analytical tool, discourse analysis highlights the variety of perceptions among the actors at different levels—national, regional, and local (Peet & Watts, 1996). Analyzing discourses includes investigating both context and content (Apthorpe & Gasper, 1996; Gottweis, 2003; Hajer, 1995). The context of a discourse is the environment or structure in which it is represented and the social relations emerging from it. Discourse analysis is taken to represent: “a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements, in the environmental arena no less than elsewhere.” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 8). Analyses of the prevailing discourses of tourism show a great variety in perceptions among local actors, as well as with the aims and objectives presented on a regional and national level. The content of the discourse is explored through analyzing policy documents and interviews with tourism actors. Discourses are represented through written and unwritten representations of tourism.

National Discourse of Tourism Development in Northern Norway

The main objectives of the national tourism strategy, listed below, frame the development of tourism in terms of a focus on the industry itself, on rural communities, and on sustainability aspects of Norway as a destination.

There are three main objectives of the national tourism strategy:

- Greater wealth creation and productivity in the tourism industry
- Sustainable rural communities through year-round jobs in tourism
- Norway—a sustainable destination. (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p.11)

The Norwegian government aims in particular to promote Northern Norway as a nature-based tourism destination. This is exemplified by the campaign “*Norway – powered by nature,*” aiming to sell “fresh and strong experiences in beautiful and pure nature, experiences of authentic local culture and life, and experiences that gives energy, harmony and richness” (Tuftin, 2008). In various government strategies, plans, and documents, there is an explicit focus on tourism development in Northern Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, 2009; Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). In the “Holistic management plan for the Barents Sea and Lofoten” (Ministry of Environment, 2006) it is noted that tourism is an important industry in the region (i.e., from Lofoten to the Barents Sea, which includes Vesterålen and Senja) with significant potential for development resulting in increased income and number of employees. Additionally, it is noted that the tourism in this region is dependent on the natural environment, particularly a clean one. Likewise in the specific tourism strategy, *Valuable Experiences* (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007), Northern Norway is especially noted as a geographical region of importance for developing the sector, and its attraction is “clean and fresh nature, a living coastal culture and opportunities for nature-based experiences” (p. 56). It is stated that the region has underdeveloped potential for tourism development, while recognizing that tourism in Northern Norway requires “more with respect to knowledge and accommodating than in other less weather exposed tourism destinations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009 p. 26, author’s translation).

One particular project relevant for tourism development initiated at the national level is the National Tourism Routes project, which is the responsibility of the Norwegian Public Roads Authorities (NPRA). Eighteen stretches of road have been selected as designated National Tourism Routes and are in the process of being developed with specific road standards and facilities for motorists such as lookouts. The aim of the tourism route project is to “make Norway a more attractive destination and strengthen businesses and settlement in rural areas” (www.vegvesen.no/nasjonale turistveger). Interestingly, the aims for the project go beyond creating facilities for tourists, to include settlement and business development in rural areas. This

emphasizes the strong focus at the national level to use tourism development as a tool for sustaining communities across Norway.

Local Level Discourses on Tourism

Plans for tourism development are included in the strategies for business development in both Berg and Øksnes municipalities, and tourism development is included in local development plans. The municipal strategy for tourism development in Øksnes is to focus on local food, nature, and the cultural heritage of their coastal culture (Øksnes kommune, 2010b). Similarly, Berg municipality has joined a project with the regional tourism office to mark hiking trails and set up information boards to make hiking more accessible. Despite the municipal focus on tourism, actors complained that “the politicians do not understand the importance of tourism. They believe tourism is positive and talk about it, but have few actions to show” (tourism actor, Vesterålen).

Tourism businesses in these two municipalities are small actors who experience that Innovation Norway (IN), the national authority for tourism, has little to offer them. Small tourism businesses seldom have the resources to write proposals for project funding, and often find that their business does not fit the call. One tourism actor stated that “I wish IN would provide more than grand words. They are good at marketing, but they cannot control the product they are promoting. If we close down, what do they have to promote then? A hotel, they have people who can sit in offices and write proposals and receives funding. We, who are running small businesses, are too small to be supported by IN” (tourism actor, Vesterålen).

Initiatives by IN are thus seen as irrelevant for many local tourism businesses. The marketing strategies of the local tourism businesses mainly rely on web-based marketing and booking, and representation within the regional tourism office’s information material. The local tourism actors find that they need support if Northern Norwegian tourism is to grow and develop into a business that fits with IN’s image and year-round undertaking. They find that this is not provided through the national marketing or other national measures. The reality for these small tourism businesses is operating at tight margins, and their main concern is with the practical issues facing the day-to-day running of their business.

The promotion of Northern Norway as an image of pure and largely untouched nature is in some instances at odds with planned and desired industrial developments. Along the planned National Tourism Route in Senja, the local power company and the municipality are planning a wind farm,

and the geological structures of the seabed was mapped by the Petroleum Directorate during the summers 2007–2009 to search for petroleum resources. However, landscape architects at the National Public Road Authority object to the developments on the grounds that they will obstruct the untouched landscape (public official, interview). Refraining from developing their power supply in the municipality because of tourism development would be unacceptable for local inhabitants. “We cannot prevent developments because of the status as National Tourism Route. The list of developments along the route that the National Tourism Route doesn’t want is long. One of them is a wind farm; another is reopening the nickel mine. But we cannot live off those who drive on our road. Some ideas are not connected with our realities here” (public official, Senja).

The majority of interviewees stated that they believe that people in the community are positive about tourism development, and some claimed that this was a change from a more negative view ten to fifteen years ago. Common concerns about tourism were that it is not possible to make a living from it, especially not as a year-round source of income. Secondly, people are concerned that a large growth in tourist numbers would take up too much space. Hiking is an activity that is promoted on Senja and a brochure of marked hiking trails and new hiking maps has been published (Midt-Troms Friluftsråd, 2010). This is expected to increase the number of hikers on the island, but also to ensure that they keep to the marked routes and leave other areas for the locals to enjoy. A typical comment among many interviewees was “People are welcome to come here to use and enjoy our nature, but we cannot let them have everything. Some areas we want to keep to ourselves” (entrepreneur, Senja).

The concern over tourism numbers was often brought up by interviewees in a comparison with the Lofoten Islands. The nature and coastal history of both Vesterålen and Senja are comparable to Lofoten but only Lofoten has a highly developed tourism sector, in the sense of both tourism facilities and volume. Some interviewees described feeling inferior to Lofoten’s tourism industry, in terms of quality, professionalism, and resources. Others described Lofoten as an example of undesirable tourism development, and they argued that the product that they could offer, of, as they saw it, more authentic experiences, was increasingly sought after by tourists. For one interviewee, tourist numbers in her village are beyond her acceptable threshold and she admitted leaving the village during the summer season. She called for a planned and restricted development of the local tourism, initiated collectively by the villagers, the municipality, and tourism actors.

The whale-watching business in Stø, a small fishing village of less than 200 inhabitants, has been highly successful, but there were some discussions over the number of tourists the village could possibly welcome without overwhelming the roads and services available. Interviewees in this particular village stated that they found it interesting to meet visitors from all over the world in their own village, although they insisted that fishing is the activity that matters in the village.

Hence, discussions concerning tourism development are intrinsically linked to livelihoods, history, and culture of the communities. Fishing is the main sector and main source of income for both municipalities, and they have a rich culture and history related to the coastal fisheries, which also forms part of the tourism product they can offer. However, as seen in other places, fishing tourism might be at odds with the tradition and culture of fisheries (Petrzelka et al., 2006; Viken, 2001). In the two municipalities there is only one business that targets fishing tourism specifically, and local fishers did not perceive this as a problem. During a visit to the fishing tourism business, a conversation with a group of foreign fishing tourists revealed that they had spent their ten days stay in the village fishing and sleeping. They admitted to not having ventured out into the village during their stay. In this example, the village provided the setting but was otherwise unimportant for the tourists, which has also been experienced at other fishing industry sites (Nordstrand & Johnsen, 2008).

There was a strong sense in both municipalities that fisheries should remain the main livelihood. One fisher stated: "Tourism is something we aim to develop, that's ok, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to blindly focus on it. Tourism is not the sector that will keep the wheels running here. Sometimes we hear that the fishers could earn ten times more if they took tourists out fishing. Well, that's possible, but I don't think so" (fisher, Senja). Several of the tourism actors interviewed had been approached for fishing tourism, but did not accept bookings. As one interviewee put it "I don't want them here as my guests. I'm afraid they'll destroy the buildings. And they represent something I don't agree with. I don't like that the fishing culture that I value is tarnished by people who come here and take those resources" (tourism actor, Senja). One major concern regarding fishing tourists was safety at sea and many tourism actors in these two municipalities did not provide rental boats for this reason. It was argued that the tourists did not have sufficient experience and knowledge of the local weather and sea conditions to travel out in small boats, and interviewees shared several examples of fishers preventing tourists from leaving the harbour when bad weather was approaching.

The major issue for the communities in these two municipalities are out-migration, and a more positive outlook may have consequences for migration and contribute to sustainable communities (noted by interviewees). Being proud of one's place is seen to be important for settlement, and increased tourism could contribute. One inhabitant stated that: "It was an eye opener for me when I realized that this is a place where tourists are willing to pay thousands of kroners to spend their holiday. We have everything we need for a great holiday here, a boat, a cabin, nature. I think everyone who lives here should think about this; to be a tourist in their own municipality to see it from a different angle, because we are so incredibly lucky to live here" (engaged individual, Vesterålen).

Discussion

One of three aims of the Norwegian national tourism strategy is to achieve sustainable communities through year-round tourism (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). This aim may seem somewhat naïve given that tourism research has, for a considerable time, pointed to the cyclical nature of tourism and the potentially-limited positive local consequences of tourism (Butler, 1990). However, the perceived economic and employment benefits of tourism development in peripheral regions is linked to a trend beyond Northern Norway (Müller & Jansson, 2007a), as well as to a general renewed focus on "reinventing the north" (Nyseth & Granås, 2007). This optimism is also starting to gain a foothold in the two municipalities where, until recently, tourism was not regarded as a sector with the potential to provide income and create jobs. Noticeably larger tourist volumes contribute to this change in perception.

Local perception of one's own place as nothing special in the context of tourism, coupled with an incomprehension that tourists would want to pay to visit their community, may be part of the reason for the limited potential that inhabitants expect from local tourism development. Interviews in this study show how the perception of place is slowly starting to change through the local development processes, and there is more pride in the community and the qualities it has to offer (Amundsen, submitted). As one interviewee stated: "There are some qualities here that we ourselves don't consider an attraction but which are special experiences for visitors, such as wind and waves." This does not imply that nature is unimportant to inhabitants, as interviewees noted the beautiful nature and expressed a strong attachment to place (op.cit.). However, there are differences in which aspects of nature tourists value compared to what inhabitants value (Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002). "Overabundance of natural beauty" has been used as an explanation

for why Norwegians in rural areas fail to see the tourist appeal of their own place (Hammer, 2008). For the two municipalities in this study, this could to some extent hold true. However, tourism volumes in Northern Norway are currently not at a level where every village can live off tourism, and furthermore, interviews with local actors show that a large-scale development of tourism is not what they want for their village. Hence tourism development needs to be balanced with other societal structures, industries, and identities, so that traditional livelihoods, cultural history, and sense of place are not lost in the process.

These two municipalities have historically depended on natural resources, particularly fishing and mining, which today are declining in terms of employment. The decline of the key traditional livelihoods is experienced in numerous communities in the North. Many villages and towns are built around one industry and are currently struggling with a restructured local and global economy (Nyseth & Granås, 2007). A recent study of a number of communities in Northern Norway analyzed why some communities survive and some perish (Førde & Borch, 2010). Through analyzing innovation and the role of the social entrepreneurs, they found that important factors are the establishment of networks and the combination of tradition and innovation as well as drawing on local nature and culture. In view of this, tourism is a growing industry that has not yet secured much employment but where there is an expectation of further growth. Although tourism does have both direct and indirect consequences for the local economy, the focus on tourism in small communities has not led to secure jobs in tourism (Müller & Jansson, 2007b).

The tourism sector is more advanced and has a broader range of facilities in Øksnes compared to Berg. This is also reflected in the structures that have been established to support local tourism. Innovation Norway has regional offices in all three counties in Northern Norway and keeps four employees in their Nordland office and two each in Finnmark and Troms. Particularly Lofoten, and to a certain degree Helgelandskysten, are household names and marketing resources are focused on these. This is reflected in tourism information material, level of available services, and available project funding.⁴ Hence there is an unequal power distribution between different destinations, exemplified by Nordland tourism strategy's failure to give much attention to Vesterålen (Vesterålen Online, 2010). This spatial differentiation may not in itself be negative, it could be positive that tourism development is concentrated in certain areas where the level of services can be high due to tourism volume, particularly relevant where there are small populations (Müller & Jansson, 2007b). However, if the second objective

of the national tourism strategy—sustainable rural communities through tourism employment—is to be fulfilled, a much larger number of villages and municipalities must benefit from the increased attention given to tourism development in Northern Norway.

The discourses on tourism development vary between the national and local levels. The division of responsibility between public bodies and the tourism actors may be part of the cause of the differences, as well as the already mentioned uneven spatial distribution of resources available, such as IN funding. The tourism industries in Øksnes and Berg municipalities are small- to medium-size businesses and have few, if any, links to policy development at higher levels. The policies developed at the national level and the marketing of their region are in many cases not in accordance with their own perception of place. Place identities are always contested, and whereas local place definitions are deeply embedded in past experiences, history, culture, tradition, and community (Cresswell, 2004), the definition at the national level is more linked to physical aspects such as nature, landscape, climate, and weather. Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2008) found that representations of place and ideas for local development created by outsiders or at the national level often meet local opposition because local people perceive this as a threat to their place and feel powerless faced with a nationally directed development. In this study, this is exemplified by the planned wind farm and criteria of the National Tourism Route on Senja, where industrial developments do not fit with the representation of pristine nature along the route. One interviewee stated that that this kind of development would demonstrate a forward looking community that focuses on modern sources of energy. Wind farms have become tourism attractions in other places where tourism facilities have grown as a consequence (Nash et al., 2007). Tensions between definitions of what should be offered to tourists and how local places should develop thus involves a range of perspectives and actors and it is likely that this continues to be a source of dispute.

Perceptions of how to develop tourism vary widely locally, both among various tourism actors and among the local population in general. Increased tourism development, as promoted by national actors, might not be what local people want at all for their communities, and this may well be the main reason for the apparent failure to meet the objectives set in national strategies. Additionally, the tourism sector is made up of a great number of actors with very different aims and ambitions for their business (Müller & Jansson, 2007a). One tourism actor stated that he was running a tourism business only to be able to live in the village himself and give others a place to stay while renovating their own homes in the village. Another tourism actor

stated that the one thing that would improve the running of the business was chartered international flights at the local airport.

The debates among both local communities and local tourism actors concerning tourism volumes and tourism activities show the importance of balancing the local sense of place with tourism products. The local coastal culture that, for instance, could be offered as a tourism activity does not translate through solely renting boats. Furthermore, local actors want to offer active villages that uphold both traditional livelihoods and necessary public services such as schools. And likewise part of the tourism experience for many tourists is linked to experiencing a vibrant village; otherwise the villages become spatial localities with no sense of place. The aim of sustainable communities is difficult to achieve through tourism development if public services are moved out of the villages. Thus, in the context of these two municipalities, tourism is part of local development and linked to changes in other local factors and conditions, particularly changes in public services and demographics.

Conclusion

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world (e.g., Saarinen, 2003), but it is also an industry with large fluctuations and where shifting trends could mean “make or break” for small businesses. Global economic fluctuations influence tourists’ ability to travel to expensive destinations such as Northern Norway. But as shown by the municipalities in this study, destinations are also affected by national structures and strategies that are designed to support tourism development. There is an uneven spatial distribution of available resources and it is also difficult for these small places to be promoted within national structures, which are organized top-down rather than bottom-up. These are important barriers for developing local tourism. Local actors are also worried that the balance between sustaining, developing, and innovating within their cultural traditions and the kind of tourism, activities, and volumes that ensue could lead to undesirable developments such as their perceptions of tourism in the Lofoten Islands.

Tourism has long been regarded a sector with much potential for increased employment and income in the periphery (Hall & Saarinen, 2010b; Müller & Jansson, 2007b); for Northern Norway this is expressed in numerous strategies found at the national to the local level (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007; Øksnes kommune, 2010a). Municipalities in Northern Norway are facing negative population growth and structural economic changes, and tourism is seen as one option to turn these trends. However, it is unlikely that tourism alone can make a large difference towards these

negative trends. The significant focus on tourism development in national strategies has had little effects in the municipalities. In particular, the national goal of ensuring sustainable rural communities is not met through the current tourism development.

There is a disconnect between national level strategies and aims for tourism development and local perceptions. The aims for tourism development among local businesses studied in this article are to ensure that their business provides a stable source of income through welcoming more visitors, improving their facilities, and expanding the activities they offer. Collaboration and networks among the businesses are beginning to form in Vesterålen and Senja, and are thus able to provide a more diverse product to tourists. The local governments welcome tourism development and hope that it will contribute to sustainable communities but are not active in developing the sector, as opposed to strategies of other municipalities in the region (Bjørnrå & Aarsæther, 2010).

The local tourism businesses are dependent on national tourism authorities for marketing their products. However, they object to too much control from the national level, especially given the mismatch of perceptions of the tourism product that is to be promoted. The national level represents Northern Norway as “clean and fresh nature, a living coastal culture and opportunities for nature-based experiences” (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 56). Place identities are always contested, and whereas local place definitions are deeply embedded in past experiences, history, culture, tradition, and community, the definition at the national level is an outsider view, associated with physical aspects such as nature, landscape, climate, and weather. The local tourism actors are objecting to not being able to define the product that they are providing. Furthermore, local actors strongly object in the instances where the nationally defined needs of tourism hinder industrial developments that would provide much needed income to the local economy.

Northern Norway has increasingly been the focus of national interest through the two national strategies for the region where the main stated objective is developing the possibilities in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, 2009). The national focus on Northern Norway has led to a debate over who gets to define the region and how it should develop, and tourism will be a part of these debates. The grand words of the strategic plans have led to some increased investment in industry, including tourism, but no large changes for the region have materialized from these strategies. The one large expected development in the region is petroleum development, and its implications for tourism are unknown. The future for municipalities in the

region in general, and tourism specifically, could be greatly affected by this industrial development. This article has not covered this topic, as it is yet unknown whether there is petroleum off the coasts of the two municipalities in the study, and there are great uncertainties regarding when a potential petroleum exploration will commence and how it will be organized (e.g., offshore or land-based facilities). As such, future research could focus on the relationship between tourism and petroleum development in Northern Norway in the context of definition of place and local socio-economic processes.

Author

Helene Amundsen is a research fellow/PhD student with CICERO (Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research) in Tromsø, Norway.

Notes

1. Hence the county Finnmark is not included in this study. Secondly, the High Arctic Norwegian destination on the archipelago Svalbard is also left out of the study.
2. www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/senja
3. For instance on www.visitsenja.no
4. For example, Our Valuable Coastal Culture, Nordland County Council initially funded projects located in Lofoten and Helgeland.

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