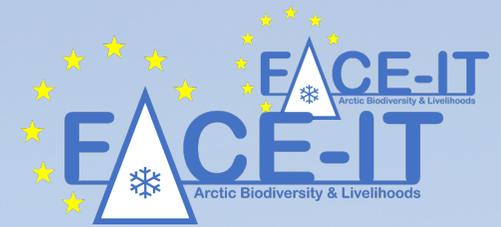


Governing unruly tourism growth in Svalbard



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AAG, 2023

Outline

- Context
 - Environmental and tourism governance Svalbard
 - Arctic tourism development
- Framework
 - Precautionary principle
 - Devices for governing boundaries
 - “Socionatures”
- Conflicting narratives for Svalbard



CASE STUDY: ISFJORDEN

Main focus on Longyearbyen

Population of around 2400 people



Photo: Halvor Dannevig

Svalbard is rapidly undergoing multiple unruly changes

Affects nature, communities and tourism industry



Climate change impacts ecosystems and society



Rapid tourism growth



Local sustainability transition is ongoing in Longyearbyen



Regulatory changes affect residents and tourism industry



Photo: Ragnhild F. Dale

Tourism and 'wilderness' in Svalbard

- Tourism is part of the Norwegian government's long-term plan to secure Norwegian settlements in Svalbard (alongside research and education)
- Another key priority is the preservation of the area's unique natural wilderness
- Regulations prioritise preserving wilderness over enabling tourism



s Asia Australia Middle East Africa Inequality Global development

Mission: Impossible for Tom Cruise as Svalbard blocks helicopter landings

Film producers drop attempt to obtain permission for dozens of flights on Norwegian archipelago



Advertisement



Photo: Ragnhild F. Dale

The precautionary principle (PP) and tourism governance

- Precautionary principle should be employed where risk and uncertainty are high – but there still are some scientific facts (Van der Slujs et al., 2005).
- Svalbard Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) is based on PP.
- E.g threshold levels for potential harmful activities or substances is often set high on the basis of the PP until more knowledge is found.
- Threshold levels is a key device for governing socionatural boundaries – translating meaning and legitimacy between the domains of science and policy (e.g Star & Griesemer 1989).
- In Svalbard – lack of scientific ecosystem knowledge relevant for tourism governance is used to justify restrictive tourism policy by reference to the PP (Nyseth & Viken 2015).

The importance of narratives in governance & adaptation

- Narratives are “(..) the stories through which people share their experiences, make sense of their actions and perceive their place in the world”
(Paschen and Ison, 2014; Karlsson and Hovelsrud, 2022:5)
- Narratives shape people’s way of seeing, being and acting in the world, and thereby their preferences and beliefs of how the land- and waterscapes should be governed.
- Narratives also *shape futures* – they are part of communities’ ideas of what is possible to imagine as a viable future, and what kinds of regulations and governance responses they see as necessary and acceptable



Photo: Halvor Dannevig

Development of tourism in Svalbard

- Small number of cruise tourists in Svalbard in the early 1900s
- Increased tourism from 1990s onwards – gradually becoming a major part of the economy
- Tourism activities include hiking, dog sledding, snow mobiles, longer and shorter boat trips, wildlife, cultural activities, skiing, & more
- Less ice = more opportunities for boating activities
- Highest growth in smaller «expedition» cruise tourism vessels (<500 pax).
- Longyearbyen, Svalbard had close to 50.000 visitors on cruise ships in 2018. – 75.000 expected in 2023.

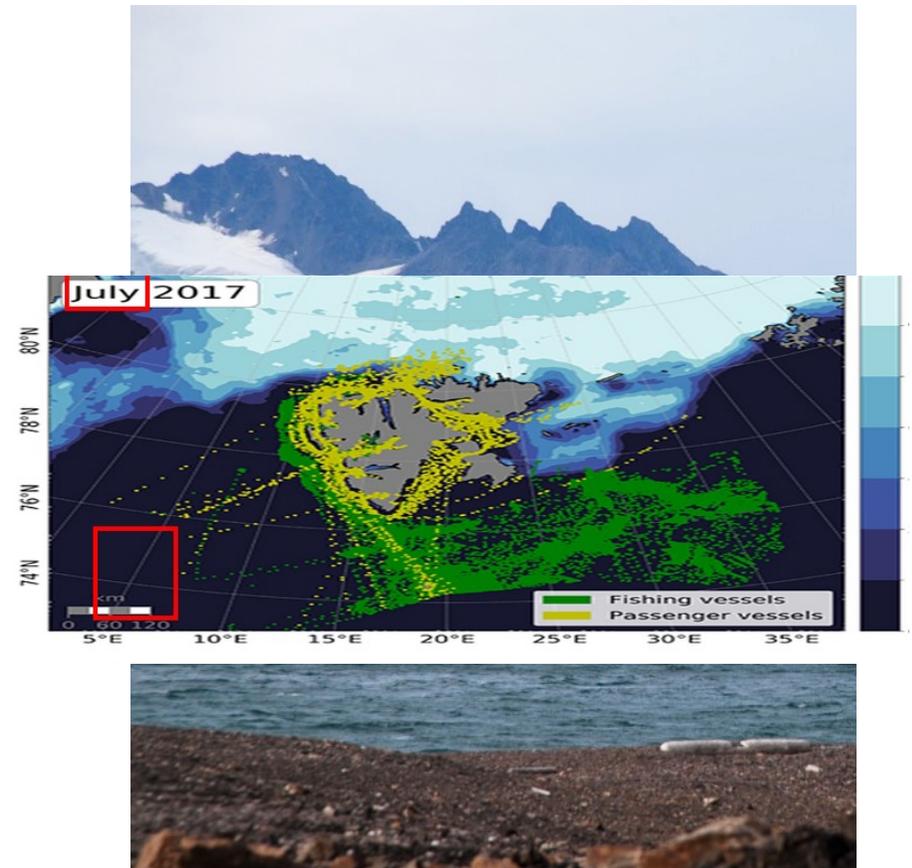


Photo: Halvor Dannevig

New regulations and legislation of environment and tourism activities to deal with 'unruly' tourism development

Proposes:

- A mandatory guide certification scheme
 - A reduction in expedition cruise vessel size from 500 to 200 pax
 - Limiting disembarkment sites to 19 (from around 75 today).
 - Prohibiting crossing of a number of frozen fjords with snow mobiles
- *Massive lobbying campaigning against this from the expedition cruise industry and Visit Svalbard*
 - *Local population do not want tourism to increase more than the local community can handle*
 - *Responses to the proposed regulations show different perceptions of what the future of tourism in Svalbard ought to be*



Photo: Halvor Dannevig



Marsjerte mot innstramminger i Longyearbyen

De 200 faklene ble revet bort omtrent før arrangementet var i gang. Flere hundre personer demonstrerte i dag mot høringsforslagene som vil påvirke Svalbard.



Flere hundre personer gikk i fakkeltok mot innstramminger i Longyearbyen tirsdag kveld.

Siri Åbø Wiersen

**«Marched against stricter regulations in Longyearbyen»
*Svalbardposten 16.Nov 2021***

Perceived tourism impact on environment

Tourism actors:

- Wildlife sightings an important part of tourism experience, but not the main content of a tourism product
- Land-based tourism have minimal impact on wildlife, follow guidelines.

Environmental authorities:

- Too much boat traffic is not compatible with preserving «wilderness», even if traffic is not harming wildlife
- «Unserious» tourism actors are taking tourists too close to wildlife

«My impression is that the wildlife in Svalbard has become extremely more rich the last 20 years.»

«Before we did not see whale in the Isfjorden, now you cant go on a boattrip without seeing one.»



Photo: Halvor Dannevig



Photo: Grete K Hovelstrud

Perceived tourism impact on environment (cont.)

«I was afraid of all the changes we are seeing. It can't continue like this, with 100 ships in this area each summer»

«There is no wilderness anymore in Svalbard, not in the true sense of the word. I have been at countless trips and expeditions around Svalbard, alone and with others, and I have never been left alone. I have been on kayaking trips, perhaps a 100 kilometers away from Longyearbyen, and then suddenly there is a cruise ship there with 5000 passengers, that are about to disembark to the campsite we are using.»



The archipelago's head of environmental protection, Kristin Heggelund, told NRK that the aim was to maintain "an almost untouched environment".



Photo: Halvor Dannevig



Photo: Grete K Hovelstrud

Visions for future Svalbard

- **Wilderness-like nature seen as the foundation of the nature-based tourism on Svalbard**
- **All actors agree tourism must be regulated to be sustainable, but government, tourism industry and local populations have different perceptions of what an ideal future for tourism in Svalbard should be**
- **These perceptions overlap and differ in their notions of Svalbard's future;**
 - **what measures are necessary to protect Svalbard's 'wilderness'**
 - **how strict regulations on tourism numbers, landing sites and restriction of access to particular areas should be**

<< After 2019, also the industry saw that one can't be a travel destination alone, then it's more like a display, and not a place you have a relationship to. So I think you need diverse industries (...) to contribute to a stable family society that the authorities want, right. How to create such a stable family society? It's challenging, and the environment is another filter to sift it through.>>

Summing up

- Official narrative is the only one reflected in new regulations & no negotiations over application of PP
- Conflict could have been reduced by reflecting multiple narratives in definition of boundary objects (thresholds).
- Its application – and associated boundary objects (threshold levels), is excluding other narratives and associated values and knowledges.

QUESTIONS?

THANKS FOR LISTENING



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Photo: Ragnhild F. Dale

BalancingAct



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