

Introduction

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Fascination with nature and the environment has been expressed throughout human history, long before leisure and tourism entered the scene (Sörlin and Warde, 2009). But much of the early tourism, such as the eighteenth-century conquests of the European Alps, salmon fishing in Norwegian rivers or trophy hunting in Africa, clearly had nature experiences as a key pull-factor. Since then tourism has emerged as a major activity in contemporary societies, but despite growing attention within academia and the broader public and private domains, it remains far from fully understood. Tourism involves numerous players and institutions causing multiple effects, both positive and negative, on host, transit and generating regions (Tribe and Liburd, 2016).

Nature-based tourism (NBT), the topic for this book, is framed and flavored not only by the socio-economic conditions of the region where it occurs, but just as much by the natural resources and the opportunities to make use of them in a tourism context. From the tourist's point of view, nature can be viewed as a setting providing experiences and wellness, while requiring mental and physical exertion (Prebensen and Chen, 2017). From the business perspective, nature is where experiences become tradeable products through processes of commercialization (Margaryan, 2017). The many close connections between nature and local communities also make those communities key stakeholders in the NBT production system (Fredman and Tyrväinen, 2010). Hence, tourism as a phenomenon can be considered a system of interlinked parts and the scholarly body of knowledge described as a mosaic (Laws and Scott, 2015).

THE STUDY OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM

The appearance of tourism as a legitimate subject in academia is a relatively recent development, and tourism scholars often identify themselves with “learning outside of established disciplinary agendas” (Coles et al., 2006). As a result, they build knowledge on new theory and methods in addition to applications within the established scientific disciplines, such as geography, sociology, anthropology and economics (Fuchs et al., 2014). Many scholars in the NBT field also have backgrounds in applied natural sciences, such as natural resource management, ecology and forestry. This is understandable given

that NBT has emerged as another anthropocentric use of natural resources, both competing with and supporting other types of land use, such as forestry, fishery and nature protection. Therefore, the study of NBT also takes us to the crossroads between the natural and social sciences.

Understanding the interactions between tourism and the natural environment is just as much a social investigation, to be understood through social science disciplines, as it is a study for the natural sciences. It is therefore important to reflect upon different philosophical perspectives and how they can shape the choice of methods and affect interpretation, communication and application of results (Moon and Blackman, 2014). This includes how the ontological position (the researcher relationship with reality) can influence the nature of research, and how the epistemological position (how we acquire information) can support the legitimacy of knowledge. Reviews of previous research in NBT (e.g. Elmahdy et al., 2017; Godtman Kling et al, 2017; Øian et al., 2018) clearly show a need both for quantitative “post-positivist” approaches, where multiple methods are necessary to identify a valid belief, as well as for critical qualitative approaches.

Yet another feature of the NBT inquiry is the absence of a universal operational definition. NBT can include tourism described with many different labels – such as nature tourism, wilderness tourism, adventure tourism, environmental tourism, wildlife tourism, geo-tourism, outdoor tourism and ecotourism. The lack of a universal definition is problematic when it comes to measuring and researching NBT consistently. A review of the NBT literature by Fredman et al. (2009) identified four recurrent themes in NBT studies: (i) visitors to a nature area, (ii) experiences of a natural environment, (iii) participation in a nature-related activity, and (iv) normative components, such as those related to sustainable development and local impacts. Drawing from this and the official definition of tourism by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2010), nature-based tourism can be defined as “activities by humans occurring when visiting nature areas outside one’s ordinary residence”, from which follows that “the NBT industry represents activities across different sectors directed to meet the demand of nature tourists” (see also Fredman and Tyrväinen, 2010). This represents a “minimalistic” and “descriptive” definition of NBT because it applies a minimum number of restrictions and has no normative component. As such, it is suitable for many of the studies included in this book. However, in some cases one might want to limit the scope of the data collected to certain locations, activities and/or behavioral parameters. One such context is studies of sustainable NBT that are typically guided by normative criteria regarding tourists’ behavior.

Sustainable Nature-based Tourism?

Once we add criteria to guide operations in a more sustainable direction, it makes sense to talk about sustainable NBT or, perhaps better, sustainable NBT *development* since sustainability is not an absolute condition. According to the UNWTO, sustainable tourism development is “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, 2020). Principles for sustainable tourism development may imply, for example, contributions to pro-environmental initiatives and environmentally friendly modes of transport and/or consumption of local products, and they often will be operationalized through a certification or labeling scheme. Perhaps the most common version of sustainable NBT development is eco-tourism, further described in several books (e.g. Wearing and Schweinsberg, 2019), journals (e.g. *Journal of Ecotourism*) and numerous scientific articles.

There are good reasons to expect tourists’ choices to be increasingly influenced by sustainability considerations in the future (Elmahdy et al., 2017; Øian et al., 2018). Sustainability in tourism has become firmly established in tourism policies, strategies and research (Saarinen, 2006), and the sector can be credited with moving quickly from an initial focus on economic benefits to a position of recognizing its wider sustainability implications (Budeanu et al., 2016). However, the tourism sector is struggling with the many challenges associated with impact from travel on climate (Aall, 2014; Scott et al., 2012) and a growing number of settings experiencing “overtourism” (Øian et al., 2018). In this respect, NBT is of course no exception, and given that many destinations are in rural districts, peripheral to major markets, the challenges might be even greater for this part of the tourism sector.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is also likely to impact the future sustainability agenda of NBT. Political responses to the virus outbreak caused dramatic changes to global travel, and restrictions on border crossings and the shuttering of communities virtually eliminated the tourism economy in many regions (Goodwin, 2020), while local and domestic recreation seem to flourish where opportunities are available (Venter et al., 2020). However, maybe such a crisis is also an opportunity to select a new direction and move forward by adopting a more sustainable path for the tourism industry – towards a greener and more balanced tourism that has better adaptive capabilities against future shocks (Brouder, 2020; Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020).

FROM PLACE-BASED NATURAL RESOURCES TO VALUE-ADDED EXPERIENCES

This book provides a comprehensive study on nature-based tourism in a Nordic context, using Norway as the main locale for investigation. In a global perspective, the Nordic region is one of the prominent destinations among tourists looking for nature-based activities and experiences. Much of the region also shares long traditions of outdoor recreation practices (*friluftsliv*), including the right of public access, which influence opportunities for NBT today (Sandell and Fredman, 2010). Hence, NBT in the Nordic context calls for an integrated approach to managing resources for both outdoor recreation and development of commercial experience products. More importantly, resources in the NBT sector are critically linked both with very specific properties (e.g. single places, animal species) and with landscape-level structures (e.g. ecosystems, land-use history). Place-based natural and cultural resources embedded in the landscape serve as a meeting place between visitors and local communities, causing potential for both synergy and conflict depending on the nature of interaction and the power of actors. The landscape is also a setting where the consumption of the tourist product takes place and can accordingly be considered a servicescape or experiencescape for NBT (Margaryan, 2017). NBT demand is increasingly becoming diversified due to social, technological, economic, environmental and political changes in society (Elmahdy et al., 2017), mirrored through changes such as increased sportification of activities, facility development in natural areas and online commercial services.

There are many types of stakeholders in the NBT sector, but firms are certainly central when it comes to the provision of value-added experiences. Knowledge about innovative products and business models will support the level of professionalization in a sector where entrepreneurial success is highly knowledge driven (Løseth, 2014). Hence, understanding NBT's potential for innovation and sustainable regional development goes beyond the level of individual companies. It calls for a broad integrated approach where the dynamics of resources (nature, culture, landscapes, infrastructures, etc.), markets (supply and demand, customer segments), organizations (networks, management and entrepreneurs) and products are all evaluated. We have therefore organized this book into five parts focusing on (I) Nordic and international perspectives on nature-based tourism, (II) place-based resources and local communities, (III) market dynamics and segments, (IV) firms, creativity and innovations, and finally (V) value-added experience products. Such an approach contributes to understanding sustainable development not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to think innovatively in union with nature for future generations (Carayannis et al., 2012).

The BIOTOUR Project

Several of the chapters in this book are based on data from the Norwegian research project BIOTOUR: *From Place-based Natural Resources to Value Added Experiences: Tourism in the new Bioeconomy*. The aim of this project was to research and disseminate key conditions for future development of NBT in the Norwegian bioeconomy that contribute to business innovation, community resilience and sustainable use of resources. Norway is geographically located in the center part of the Nordic region and embodies many of the typical features that brand NBT in this part of the world. The mountainous western Norway has Atlantic maritime characteristics, southeastern Norway is at the fringe of the forested taiga (boreal) region extending to the east and the northern parts represent true arctic environments. Hence, from a geo-physical perspective, knowledge derived from the studies in this volume is transferable to other similar places, beyond the specific cases where data are from (see Chapter 1 for an overview of nature-based tourism in the Nordic context).

To reflect the Norwegian/Nordic context described above, the BIOTOUR project collected data in three significant NBT settings (Figure I.1) – the coastal mountains and fjords (Hardanger region), the boreal forest (Trysil region) and the arctic north (Varanger region), which are each briefly described below.

Hardanger is widely known for its mountains, glaciers, waterfalls, fjords and fruit farms. Large volumes of tourists visit the area through organized sightseeing tours or as individuals, and there is an increasing supply of more adventurous activities such as hiking, skiing and mountain tours. Hardanger is primarily a summer destination. Locally produced food, cider and festivals also attract visitors to the region. More recently, Hardanger has become famous for the “Trolltunga rock” (the troll’s tongue), a rock formation 700 meters above a lake which has gained iconic status due to wide circulation of tourist-generated photos on social media, attracting almost one hundred thousand visitors in 2018. Access to the Hardanger region is primarily by road, but access via speed ferries and cruise ships is also possible. Travel time from Bergen, the second largest city in Norway, is about two hours. Besides tourism and agriculture, the region is known for its vibrant communities, metal processing and hydroelectric power generation.

Trysil represents the forested eastern parts of Norway with vast coniferous forests, low-alpine mountains and wide-ranging river valleys which extend into Sweden. The Trysil mountain hosts one of the larger downhill ski areas in Scandinavia, which nowadays also focuses on the summer season and biking. The Trysil river has for decades been a popular summer destination for anglers fishing primarily for grayling and brown trout. Located only a three-hour drive from Oslo, Norway’s capital and largest city, the area has extensive lodging with several hotels and more than 6600 second homes. An international airport



Source: Reidun Ertzeid.

Figure I.1 Map of the Nordic region

was opened in 2020 just across the border with Sweden, serving both Trysil and the nearby Swedish mountain destinations Sälen and Idre. Forestry previously was the major source of income for this region, but tourism and other service sectors have become the dominant source of employment.

Varanger is the northeastern outpost of Norway and the Nordic region, bordering Russia to the east and the Barents Sea to the north. Located about three degrees north of the Arctic Circle, this region represents a true arctic environ-

ment with unique geology, vegetation and wildlife. Most of the Varanger peninsula is protected as a national park, established in 2006. Varanger is primarily a spring and summer destination popular for kiting (on snow), freshwater and saltwater fishing and other special interest activities. In recent years, Varanger has developed into a successful birding destination. One of the highlights for birders is the Hornøya island just outside Vardø, a relatively easily accessible bird-cliff where a range of endangered seabird species nest. Communities are small and spread out along the coast. The famous Hurtigruten cruise ferries along the coast of Norway stop in the two major towns of Vardø and Vadsø. Access from the capital Oslo is by air, unless one makes a 25-hour road-trip through Sweden and Finland. The population of Varanger has diverse ethnic composition, including *Kvens*, an ethnic minority of Finnish ancestry, and the indigenous *Sami* people.

SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The focus of this book is primarily on the tourist destination and interlinked local communities, the locale for tourism production and consumption. While some of the chapters extend beyond this, such as those looking at international trends, commodification and mobile applications, we put less emphasis on travel *to* and *from* the destination. The rationale for this is that we want to focus our inquiry on the special features of the NBT production system, while analyses of travel behavior and transport systems partly follow a different path outside the core of the NBT product. This also applies to environmental impacts from travel to and from NBT destinations, which we touch upon in Chapter 9 but otherwise are outside our examination.

All the empirical studies included in the book were undertaken before COVID-19 spread around the globe. At present (November 2020) it is impossible to predict the long-term effects of COVID-19 on tourism. Things may go back to business as usual, or we might see a very different future. However, there are reasons to believe that some of the special features of NBT, such as being outdoor oriented and small scale, could be major advantages in several future scenarios. Effects from COVID-19 are further discussed in the chapters about international trends and community resilience, as well as in the concluding chapter.

The book is written for undergraduate and graduate university programs in tourism and related study fields (e.g. geography, planning, service management, hospitality, outdoor recreation) as well as natural resource-oriented programs with a human dimension orientation (e.g. forestry, fisheries, natural resource management, protected area management). We also recommend the book for policymakers, practitioners and other professionals in the

above-mentioned fields. In the sections below we briefly outline the content of each chapter as they appear under the five parts.

Nordic and International Perspectives on Nature-based Tourism

In Chapter 1, *Nature-based tourism in a Nordic context*, the authors present key features of tourism in Norway, Sweden and Finland, including a discussion about the transformation from extractive to service-oriented economies. The chapter looks at the demand and supply of NBT products, the relationship with nature conservation, public access to nature and how to manage impacts from nature-based tourism. Chapter 2, *Trends in nature-based tourism*, reports results from a comprehensive literature review on megatrends that affect NBT. It also includes results from an online panel survey with experts from five countries who were asked to forecast the most prominent NBT trends using a ten-year perspective. The chapter concludes that issues related to sustainability, health and well-being, increased specialization and segmentation are the most noticeable expected trends in NBT.

Place-based Resources and Local Communities

Chapter 3, *Frameworks to understand natural and cultural resources in nature-based tourism*, assesses natural and cultural resources in development of NBT by applying two different analytical frameworks: social-ecological systems (SES) and landscape resource analysis (LRA). Applied to two case studies, the analytical frameworks contribute to better understanding and utilizing natural and cultural resources in NBT, where in-depth knowledge about local relations to nature is a necessary condition. However, many peripheral municipalities are struggling to keep the local economy at a viable level while at the same time being highly attractive as tourist destinations. In Chapter 4, *From tourist destination to local meeting place: enhancing visitor experiences and social resilience in rural communities*, studies from two Norwegian case-areas indicate that social and cultural entrepreneurship can support community inspiration, optimism and creativity. Based on literature review and empirical findings, the authors suggest that changing the tourism sector's perspective from "destination" to "place" may support social resilience in the long term. Adaptation to change is one of the greatest challenges facing society today, and community resilience is an important framework for understanding how communities thrive in the face of change. In Chapter 5, *Nature-based tourism and community resilience*, we therefore provide an overview of the contribution of NBT to community resilience. The authors conclude that this contribution can occur within or across economic, social and environmental dimensions. In Chapter 6, *Planning the tourism landscape across protected*

area borders, the aim is to discuss experiences with spatial planning across protected area borders in order to facilitate NBT that is sustainable with respect to the environment and affected communities. The study reveals a rather limited level of integrated planning practices across protected area borders. New trends related to delegation of management responsibility of protected areas, introduction of branding and visitor strategies for national parks, and the emergence of regional parks have only to a limited extent improved integrated planning in order to facilitate NBT and community development.

Market Dynamics and Segments

The demand for NBT experiences represents a diverse set of activities and motives, and the market has over time become increasingly globalized and diversified. Chapter 7, *Characteristics of different nature-based tourism activity markets*, provides a framework for understanding and analysing current and potential demand for NBT products. Data from a national summer season survey reveal affinity towards, and participation in, NBT activities for different segments among foreign visitors to Norway. Landscape experiences, sightseeing and nature photographing are dominant activities, but they are often linked to physical activities, of which easy walks and hiking in mountain and forest areas are the most common. Packaged tourism products provide several advantages for both tourists and service providers, but package planning, development and management require knowledge about the increasingly diversified demand for NBT products. In Chapter 8, *Nature-based tourism package choices: a comparison across birdwatchers, mountain bikers and hikers*, the authors compare package attribute preferences from discrete choice experiments across three activity segments: birdwatchers in Varanger, mountain bikers at Trysil, and hikers at Trolltunga rock in Hardanger. Findings indicate package preference heterogeneity across and within the activity segments, and they provide a knowledge base for managers to make decisions on types of tourism products destinations should offer to increase economic and environmental sustainability in rural areas. In Chapter 9, *'Good', 'bad' or 'ugly' tourism? Sustainability discourses in nature-based tourism*, diverse discourses on sustainability in NBT are discussed from the perspective of three different markets. By drawing on illustrative examples from the inland region of south-eastern Norway, the authors explore practices that incorporate the tendency to assess sustainability using too few parameters, leaving out wider aspects related to the complexity of sustainable development in NBT. It is concluded that even the current turn from maximization to optimization strategies still may result in "quick fix" solutions, which may bring about new paradoxes and dilemmas related to sustainable development in this business sector.

Firms, Creativity and Innovations

In this section, different aspects of the supply side of NBT are studied. Chapter 10, *Characteristics of nature-based tourism firms*, examines NBT firms based on data from a nationwide survey in Norway. Through cluster analysis the authors identify three types of firms: guided activity firms; hospitality facilitators that combine accommodation with angling and hunting license and self-guided activities; and activity package firms that offer comprehensive packages with combinations of activities, accommodation, food and transport. Although there are many different motivations for being in the NBT business (such as sustainability, lifestyle and income), profit and growth are not among the main motivations. NBT firms meet the demand for experiences in nature by activating resources, and, in this process, interactions with other actors and stakeholders are important. In Chapter 11, *The importance of interactions and networks in the nature-based tourism industry*, the authors find that interactions with other tourism firms, customers, local groups and organizations benefit product development and deliveries, customer relations, capability development and network connections. The importance of interaction may vary with the phase of the business development and firm size. Local culture, business traditions and the existence of local tourism organizations also influence the importance and potential for interactions. Yet another important feature for success of the NBT firm is creativity, and in Chapter 12, *Creativity and innovation in nature-based tourism: a critical reflection and empirical assessment*, the authors discuss the notion of creativity as it is used in classical and neo-classical economics and by its ancient predecessors of economic thinking. Findings gained from data of a nationwide survey in Norway reveal that the sector is dominated by lifestyle entrepreneurs characterized by motives and creative practices grounded on a fruitful combination of human- and business-centered goals and a responsible use of local resources. Policy implications and an agenda for future research are outlined in the conclusions. Commercial mountain guiding is a narrow but growing niche of the NBT industry. Through a qualitative approach Chapter 13, *Commercial mountaineering, Norwegian friluftsliv and the gradual march of commodification*, analyses how the niche is shaped by changes in outdoor cultures, by the ups and downs of the national economy, and by the juridical frameworks regulating the industry. While commercial mountain guiding occurs worldwide, it is argued that the role of national and regional conditions in product and practice development should not be underestimated.

Value-added Experience Products

In the final part, the focus is on the NBT product and how different values are created through experiences. Products are complex constructs delivered to satisfy increasingly diverse expectations from tourists, which is typically achieved by offering a mix of services. In Chapter 14, *The nature-based tourism product*, the authors propose a two-layer model where the core inner layer of the NBT product includes primary experiences, which, together with the place, the activity and the provider's dedication, form the product foundation. By combining this inner layer with the value-generating elements in the outer layer, this model provides an approach to better understanding the value-adding experiences upon which most NBT products depend. Many NBT products also benefit from mobile applications that can add value to major aspects of the travel process, including planning, documentation and sharing of experiences. In Chapter 15, *Facilitating smartly packaged nature-based tourism products through mobile CRM applications*, the authors provide an exploratory assessment of existing mobile apps designed for outdoor experience facilitation. By doing so, this chapter provides both theoretical and applied insights into the capacity of mobile technology for smart packaging of NBT products. In Chapter 16, *Fantastic, magical and grandiose: nature's role in event design*, the authors look at the role of nature in special events and the ways event managers integrate nature in the event design. Findings suggest that nature evokes positive emotional response, enhances the overall event experience, facilitates socio-cultural community, encourages educative and introspective experiences, and provides uniqueness to the event. The authors argue that actively integrating nature into the event design can be key to authentic, unique and transformative event experiences. Visual elements of the experience setting also play a vital role in tourism and special events. In Chapter 17, *Visual staging of nature-based experiencescapes: perspectives from Norwegian tourism and event sectors*, the authors therefore focus on the way NBT is visually staged by looking at a sample of images collected from the websites of NBT firms and events. Three main avenues of nature experiencescape representation are discussed: nature as a view, nature as a self-testing ground, and nature as a hedonic space. Reinforced by circulation of images of "typical" and "iconic" Norwegian nature, suppliers tend to stage their products according to a well-established tradition of nature representation. Finally, in Chapter 18, *A Nordic perspective on wildlife tourism experiences*, three different Norwegian wildlife tourism experiences are studied. The authors compare participant characteristics, motivations, degree of specialization, satisfaction and loyalty to the activity/destination among birdwatchers, anglers and musk ox safari tourists. The importance of the activity for visiting the destination was high for all, but least important for anglers, and highest

for birdwatchers. Birdwatchers and anglers were relatively specialized in the activity, while musk ox tourists were not specialized and could be considered novice generalists. The results confirm that wildlife experiences vary in importance for different types of tourists, at different destinations and for different wildlife species.

A Note about the Road Ahead

As this book was being finalized, the COVID-19 virus brought tourism in much of the world to an abrupt stop. However, during the pandemic we observe more people spending time in the outdoors close to their homes, reflecting an inherent desire for nature-based experiences and the physical and psychological benefits those experiences provide. This fundamental demand for nature-based experiences supports our belief that NBT will continue to be important for visitors, businesses and societies also in the future.

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