New challenges for managing sustainable tourism in protected areas: An exploratory study from a landscape perspective in Sweden

Daniel Laven *
[ daniel.laven@miun.se ]

Peter Fredman **
[ peter.fredman@miun.se ]

Sandra Wall-Reinius ***
[ sandra.wall-reinius@miun.se ]

Keywords | Sustainable Tourism, Protected Areas, Landscape, Sweden.

Objectives | This study explores issues that result from the intersection of a landscape perspective - as articulated in the European Landscape Convention (ELC) - with contemporary approaches to managing sustainable tourism in protected areas in Sweden. Within this context, this study focuses on how a landscape perspective may affect:
1. Destination development in a protected area context
2. Key implementation actors responsible for implementing the ELC with respect to protected areas in Sweden
3. The delivery of services to protected area visitors and the quality of the visitor experience.

Methodology | This is an exploratory study of key implementation actors associated with the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and sustainable tourism management in Swedish protected areas (See Figure 1). Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling techniques are used (the interview protocol is presented in table 1), and interview data are analyzed for themes and patterns. The development of landscape-oriented approaches like the ELC will have important implications for management of outdoor recreation at destinations like parks and protected areas. For example, the convention calls for substantial levels of public engagement in defining landscape values and boundaries while also invoking the ‘subsidiary’ principle, whereby landscape issues must be addressed in concert with the population most impacted (citations). What happens when, in the same geographic space, values from a protected area visitor perspective differ from values from a landscape perspective? What happens when landscape and protected area boundaries differ? What forms of governance will be used to integrate a landscape perspective into protected area management? Using Sweden as an example, this research explores emerging issues that result from the intersection of a landscape perspective – as articulated in the ELC – with the contemporary notion of sustainable tourism management in parks and protected areas.

Main results and contributions | Data collection is currently underway and will be completed by March 2012. However, since the European Landscape Convention (ELC) was ratified in Sweden in 2011, we anticipate that this study
will help establish an empirical foundation to inform ELC implementation in Sweden as well as future research looking at landscape and tourism issues from a protected area context. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the associated snowballing sampling strategy, data collection has taken longer than anticipated and is still underway. Consequently, we are able to only offer preliminary findings from the data collected thus far.

Keeping this limitation in mind, the following themes have emerged:

– At the present time, Sweden has no policy to guide management of “landscape” as an integrated, multi-sectoral phenomenon. Consequently, land use and landscape management occurs primarily through the specific interests of specific actors pursuing specific objectives at specific moments in time (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency; National Heritage Board, National Forestry Board, Transportation Authority, Agricultural Authority, Authority for Regional Development, ETC.). This, in turn, results in a fragmented and discontinuous approach to management of landscape.

– There is scepticism among some key actors about the viability of managing for something as “nebulous” as the construct of landscape. For example, several study participants expressed concerns that if landscape applies to all landscapes and can be defined in infinitely different ways, how can it be “objectively” managed? What, exactly, is to be managed? This issue recalls Wildavsky’s (1973) famous question, “If Planning is everything, maybe it’s nothing?” which can be translated into this context as, “If landscape is everything, maybe it’s nothing?”

– Despite the challenges of implementing a landscape-oriented approach, several studies participants identified a strong sense of opportunity with such an approach. For example, one manager of an internationally recognized protected area commented on how the ELC will help amplify their existing approach to sustainable development. According to this study participant, it is precisely because of the ELC’s holistic approach to managing landscape that creates new and previously un-envisioned opportunities.

**Limitations**

The exploratory nature of this study requires the use of qualitative methods. Consequently, study findings will not be generalized beyond the sample population. In addition, because the European Landscape Convention was ratified in Sweden less than one year ago, it is unlikely that all study participants will fully grasp the intent of the convention or its implications for sustainable tourism management in Swedish protected areas.

**Conclusions**

Although data collection is still underway, we will preliminary conclusions from our available data are consistent with existing research suggesting that conflict can be an important barrier to fully developing outdoor recreation opportunities in national parks in Sweden (Zachrisson et al. 2006; Wall-Reinius 2011). Not surprisingly, findings from such studies are consistent with the experience of protected area managers. For example, during a recent Natursvårdverket workshop on mountain protected areas, many different types of conflict (e.g., between different user groups, visitors and local residents, institutional conflict, etc.) were identified as issues requiring on-going management. Moreover, Sweden ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2011, which has the potential to further complicate protected area management because of the way different stakeholders interpret the ELC’s notion of landscape. Perhaps Jones and Stenseke (2011) summarize these challenges best in their recent book on the convention:

“All in all, the ELC contains a number of innovative features compared to earlier approaches to landscape. It provides a new definition of landscape. It applies to all landscapes, not just selected ones, and underlines the diversity of landscapes as a value. It emphasizes that landscape is not an exclusive field for scientific and technical specialists but the concern of everybody, and advocates an enhanced role for public participation in landscape issues. It highlights the principle of subsidiarity, requiring that landscape matters should be dealt with as closely to the affected population as possible.” (p. 5).

The centrality of the conflict issue along with preliminary findings from this study raise the following question: Can landscape move us beyond conflict in developing tourism development in protected areas in Sweden? We propose that future research should explore this question by adding and testing a landscape variable to Manning’s (2011) expanded crowded model (Figure 2). This next phase of research should focus on a series of implementation stakeholder interviews and visitor surveys to test the extent to which a landscape variable is linked with in an improved “servicescape” as a possible response to conflicts with tourism development in and around protected areas in Sweden.
References
Wall-Reinius, S., 2011, Wilderness and culture: Tourist views and experiences in the Laponian World Heritage Area, Society and Natural Resources.