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Global Sustainable Strategies in the Local Tourism Industry

A study of how to implement sustainable tourism strategies

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Acknowledgment

This master's thesis has been developed from my interest in sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship. This interest has grown due to my previous background as a regional business and tourism developer. Nordhordland is my home district and became a UNESCO biosphere region in 2019, which inspired me to choose this topic. I want to thank the leader of the project, Kari Evensen Natland, who warmly welcomed my ideas for this master's thesis. She included me immediately on a study trip to Finland, where we visited a symposium for Nordic biosphere reserves. Then the process started quickly.

My background as a teacher in geography and tourism has inspired me throughout the process. Politics is also one of my daily obligations. This thesis explores my curiosity and interest in how international challenges can be incorporated into companies and local actions. Thank you to all the companies and organizations that have participated positively in the study. I am forever grateful for your contribution to this thesis.

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Abstract

This master thesis in Tourism Studies is about gaining a further understanding of sustainable tourism and implementing sustainable strategies in tourism businesses for a common political region, such as Nordhordland, the first UNESCO MAB reserve in Norway. The region is used as a political district for delimiting my research. The study's primary purpose is to improve the understanding of sustainable development in the tourism industry and how the industry implements such strategies. My research question deals with the implementation issue of Hall's Three Archetypes model of Implementation (Hall, 2009). It is divided into four underlying sub-questions to be answered: the perception of the term sustainability, how to balance the three pillars of social, nature and environment, and economics.

First, I look into how the term sustainable tourism is perceived among the involved stakeholders in the region. Secondly, I look into how the stakeholders put development measures into practice. The difference in the various stakeholders' focus is also part of the findings. The third underlying issue was the balance between ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Perspectives from both regional and local levels are evaluated.

Finally, the main question explored in this thesis is how sustainable policy is to be implemented in the tourism industry. These four leading issues are chosen better to understand sustainability within a region's tourism industry. Joint projects, such as in the MAB reserve as Nordhordland, are suitable ways of gaining collective experiences, innovation, and perception of the strategies.

The tourists' points of view are not included in my investigation, mainly to limit the size of the project. Further research on sustainable development among tourism stakeholders could include tourists' sustainability experiences while visiting a travel destination. This thesis encourages further knowledge about sustainability implementation in tourism businesses and political and entrepreneurial challenges for sustainable innovation in particular.

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Abbreviations:

UN: United Nations

SDGs: Sustainable Tourism Goals

UNWTO: The World Tourism Organisation

ISO: International Standards for Standardization

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

MAB: Man and Biosphere

UNEP: United Nations Environment Program

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

GSTC: Global Sustainable Tourism Council

NHO: Næringslivets Hovedorganisasjon/ the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise

EPI: Environmental policy integration

SMEs: Small and medium size enterprises

Front page:

Photos: Canoeing with Barnas Turlag Masfjorden, Baldersvågen, Masfjorden ® Torill Torsvik Størkersen,
17 Sustainable Development Goals ® United Nations

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Sustainability in tourism is a more relevant issue than ever before, as the issue of climate change and the "green shift" is increasing in public debates around the world. Sustainability is also an essential topic in the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism is defined as "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, 2017). This definition is adopted from the term sustainable development, launched in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission (Telfer, 2013).

Saarinen (2020, p. 16) puts forward "that sustainable tourism is not automatically the same as tourism developed in line with the principles of sustainable development." Sustainable tourism has been more attached to "green" or alternative forms of tourism, often small-scale or nature-based tourism. Saarinen claims further: "as long as it is taken to be so, then ambiguity and confusion will continue, and that there is a need to define the type of tourism being studied or developed beyond the catch-all of sustainable, is therefore crucial, if knowledge about the sustainability of tourism is to be expanded." These issues were the backdrop for this master thesis, and throughout the process, a changing era of sustainability in Norwegian tourism policy has been noticed. The new National Tourism Strategy 2030 (Innovation Norway, 2021b) has put forward a more broad and integrated sustainability strategy. Without taking the discussion any further here, the topic of this thesis includes a broad range of tourism stakeholders and conventional tourism, more than alternative tourism or responsible tourism.

The tour operator questionnaire of 2018 (Enger, 2018) noted that 80% consider Norway as a sustainable tourism destination, and the year before, the year of Sustainable Tourism, Norway was elected as one of the top ten sustainable tourism destinations in the world by the British journal Verdict (Verdict, 2017). As recent as the 28th of October 2021, Norway was rated as the second-best country to travel to in 2022, and the main emphasis is on providing the best sustainable travel experience (VisitNorway, 2021).

Therefore, and more than ever, sustainable tourism is being included on the political agenda and in research. Innovation Norway heads the program of Sustainable Destinations, a government development organization established in 2012 (Innovation Norway, 2018). Twenty-three regional destinations are, per May 2022, licensed as sustainable destinations in Norway, and nine are currently working towards such a title. More than 100 of the 356 municipalities in the country contribute to the program through the destination companies. However, a reasonable question is: Is this effort enough to be efficient for United Nations' 2030 sustainable goals? What about the stakeholders not included in the program? Is the conventional tourism industry on track to contribute to national and international goals? How is it for the tourism businesses to cope with the issue of sustainability? The picture is quite complex, with theories and political strategies that should interact combined with complex terminology. There is still much to explore and expand the knowledge in sustainable tourism.

United Nations' Sustainable Goals for 2030 were developed as part of a political agreement in Paris in 2015. Norway is being criticized for not having a holistic action plan for the 2030 SDGs (Sund-Henriksen, 2021). However, at least a white paper from the Ministry of Climate and Environment was presented in January 2021. It had an ambitious goal with a 50-55% reduction of emissions gas within 2030 and 45% of emissions not subject to quotas, such as transportation and agriculture. In June 2021, Norway reported on the SDGs. It was reported on the number of sustainable tourism destinations, implementation tools for monitoring the economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability, and the number of approved environmental certification schemes used in the tourism industry. Finally, a report from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development came in March 2022, an implementation plan of the National Sustainable Goals of 2030, and was recently accepted in the Norwegian Parliament, April 2022.

In 2017, UNTWO, the World Tourism Organization (a United Nations specialized agency), followed up the SDGs with "Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030." The primary purpose of this report was to target the tourism industry and implement the policy and the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, combining the SDGs and the ongoing work with sustainable destinations (UNWTO, 2020). This approach is also found on Innovation Norway's homepage (Innovation Norway, 2021a).

A national tourism strategy for Norway was published in May 2021 named "Big impact and small footprints" (Innovation Norway, 2021c). One of the main courses was the "green shift." The goals and direction for 2030 are to increase value creation, ripple effects, guest satisfaction, and attractive local communities and happy residents. At the same time, the carbon footprint shall be reduced. The goal for 2030 points out that "The development must be based on UN's SDGs and the Government's green shift goal" (2021c). Until this strategy document came, white papers were published, and Innovation Norway has been operating and networking amongst organizations within the sustainability of tourism development. A group of organizations within the tourism industry published 2017 a vision or a "roadmap" for sustainable tourism in 2030 and 2050: "Towards sustainable tourism" (Historiske et al., 2017). This document was not an official strategy but an official statement from the Norwegian tourism industry with a long-term perspective on the issue.

International and national intention and goals are stated, but what is the status of implementing sustainability in the real world of tourism businesses external to sustainable tourism destinations? Are such strategies implemented in the daily tasks and choices? Sustainable tourism has been studied more than any other tourism topic. However, investigating this issue in conventional Norwegian tourism businesses is a black box and quite interesting to me.

Sustainable tourism development and sustainable development in tourism businesses should be two sides of the exact cause, but they are not as we have learned (Saarinen, 2020). Sustainable tourism development has mainly been concentrated around tourism destination development in Norway and the implementation of sustainability towards their members and underlying businesses. Sustainability in tourism businesses in other destinations may have had a different approach, such as to match trends, value creation, and implement requirements of certification of organizations, such as "Eco-lighthouse," "ISO-certification," and "Eco-tourism," among others. These have mainly been focusing on environmental issues.

Through literature discourse, it has been discussed whether or not the tourism industry should be self-regulated (Williams & Montanari, 1999). Questions have also been raised as to whether the awareness of sustainability should be implemented through the tourists and the market, through entrepreneurs' value building, through government policy implementation, or a combination of these. Swarbrook (1999) stated as early as 1999 that "sustainable tourism is

perhaps an impossible dream." There continues to be a growing concern around the sustainability of the tourism sector and the limited growth (Fodness, 2017; Grössling et al., 2012; Hall, 2019; Saarinen, 2015 in (Rasoolimanesh, Ramakrishna, Hall, Esfandiar, & Seyfi, 2020). Sharpley (2020) discusses sustainable de-growth as an alternative approach to development in increasing concerns over climate change. On the other hand, UNWTO considers sustainable tourism a designed tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goals and benefits communities worldwide (Saarinen, 2020). I continue to find the dilemma rather crucial to sustainable development in general and tourism in particular if knowledge can illuminate challenges and opportunities.

All Man and Biosphere reserves listed on the UNESCO World Heritage are committed to working sustainably, and supposedly the tourism businesses are as well. In 2019, the region of Nordhordland was pointed out as the first and only MAB reserve in Norway and became a model region for sustainability. This program is an opportunity for the tourism businesses in this region to cooperate according to implementing sustainable strategies and goals.

The tourism businesses in Nordhordland are attached to the destination Visit Bergen, which has developed a strategy of becoming a sustainable destination. Bergen has, since 2019, attended Innovation Norway's sustainable destination program. The entrepreneurs in Nordhordland are most likely to be included in the process in the years to come. These two programs need to coordinate their activity.

1.2 The region of study - Nordhordland

Nordhordland is between Bergen and the Sognefjord, with seven municipalities, including Alver, Austrheim, Fedje, Gulen, Masfjorden, Modalen, and Osterøy. About 45.000 people live in the region. The landscape is hugely varied, from the coast in the west to the mountains of Stølsheimen in the northeast, with mountains reaching 1300 meters above sea level. Nevertheless, there are strong commonalities between the communities, and they have a solid historical and cultural connection to Bergen. The primary workplace in the region is the oil refinery at Mongstad with associated industries, with a total of 1000 employees (Region Nordhordland, 2021a). The industry area has become a center of growth since it was established in the 1970s, developed from a typical agriculture and fishing district. Tourism is

a limited industry in the region, with small and medium-sized enterprises targeting many local, regional, and international markets. The region of Nordhordland had its tourist board up until 2012, but this closed down after receiving limited funding from the municipalities. The tourism businesses transferred their membership to Bergen Reiselivslag, today Visit Bergen, the region's destination organization. Visit Bergen has a strategic goal of becoming certified as a sustainable destination in the next coming years.

1.3 The "Biosphere reserve" Nordhordland

The first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Norway, accepted in the United Nations program in July 2019, was the region of Nordhordland, including other surrounding areas of the municipalities Vaksdal, Øygarden, Vik, Voss, Høyanger, Askøy, and Bergen. The area covers a population of about 55,000 people and about 6,700 km². The Man and the Biosphere program, MAB, was established in 1971 to showcase an interdisciplinary focus on management and research of sustainable use of ecosystems and natural resources. In order to meet the challenges, it was decided to designate particular areas, according to certain criteria, that had specific responsibilities to find and test the relevant challenge for the future (M. Reed & Price, 2020). The University of Bergen represented Nordhordland in the research program and was an eager driver in the application progress. Together with Region Nordhordland, a regional development organization owned by the municipalities, the University of Bergen is also the main drifters of the program.

A Biosphere Reserve should be a model area for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2021). The word "biosphere" refers to all living organisms on earth. The environment in which they live is defined as: "A biosphere area aims to achieve a balance between taking care of nature and culture, advancing economic development and ensuring good social development through cooperation between local people, the public, the business community, and research/education," (UNESCO, 2021; Aall, 2020).

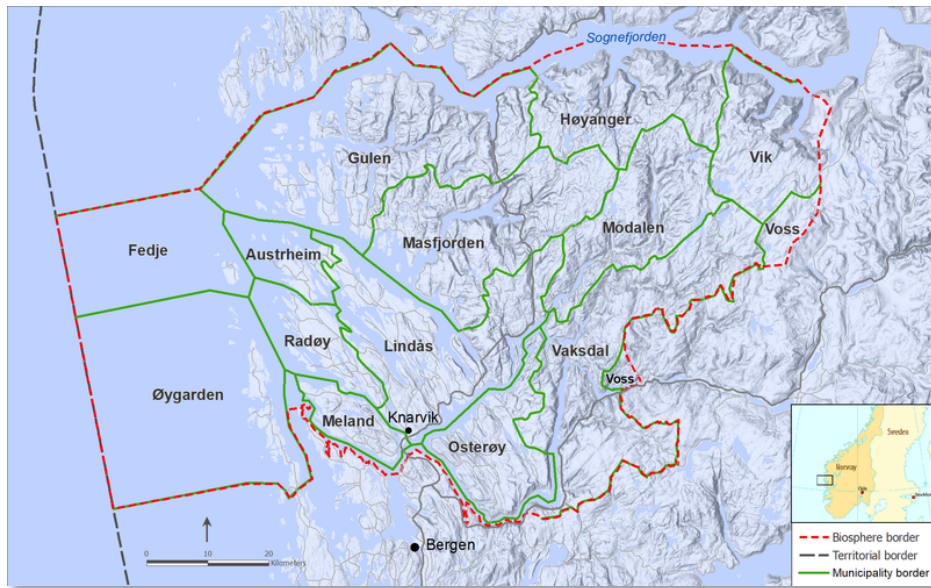


Figure 1 Map of the MAB Reserve Nordhordland

Nordhordland will use the status to work for a sustainable direction for social, cultural, and natural development in the area. Nordhordland Biosphere Reserve has chosen the following strategies and areas for sustainable development: 1. Vibrant communities, 2. Nature, environment, and climate, 2. Knowledge and learning, 4. Green Value Creation, and 5. Meeting places and communication (Nordhordland, 2020). Tourism projects initiated by the Biosphere Reserve process were "A taste of Nordhordland" and "the Wool route, " both aiming to develop sustainable tourism products in the region of Nordhordland.

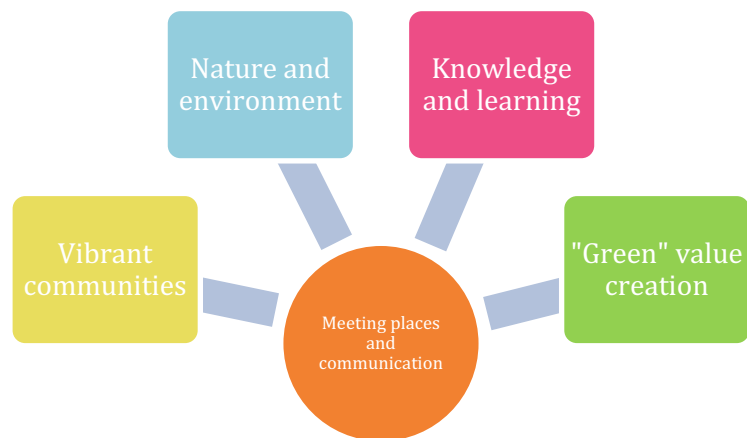


Figure 2 Strategies of the MAB Reserve Nordhordland, 2020

1.4 The aim of the project

My intention for this master thesis is to provide further understanding and knowledge about sustainability in tourism businesses put into a local and global political perspective of sustainable development. The local-global connection is of vital interest in this matter, but the operational level of local and regional actors is the focus of the investigation. One task is to include sustainable tourism development in a national plan. Another one is to put it into action with a local agenda. Since sustainable development was launched in 1987, sustainable tourism research and development have more or less been operating for more than three decades. So, is there a need for further investigation of this issue? I believe yes!

The project aims to allow a second thought and look at the issue of sustainable development in the tourism business. How far has the implementation of sustainable strategies come along? What are the challenges of putting vague and diffuse strategies into practical action and choices? Does the process need to fasten up? In order to have common strategies and goals, there also needs to be a shared understanding of what sustainable development is to move in the right direction? My intention of this master thesis is to highlight these issues with a local approach by asking stakeholders operating in the same regional space about their perceptions, practices, and motivations. Using Nordhordland as a district of the study helps me frame a common platform for the local tourism entrepreneurs and regional development stakeholders.

Many issues can, of course, be investigated and discussed as part of sustainable tourism development. My investigations are of the superior kind to gain more understanding and knowledge about sustainability in the tourism industry. The complexity of the term sustainability can probably be perceived in many different ways, but is it possible to find a common perception? Furthermore, is this a challenge? After that, how is this perception turning out in practice? If action is complex, reaching the goals will be even more challenging. How can a MAB region contribute to such an implementation? The complexity cannot be answered fully, but I will try to make a status of the course needed. I hope the project can provide further knowledge and insight into the topic and reflect upon the process and the system of implementation of sustainable strategies in the tourism industry.

1.5 Research question

As I claimed, my project aims to gain further knowledge about "sustainability in the tourism industry" and implement the world's sustainability goals. Through national plans, regional plans, destination plans, and down to each CEO and employer in the tourism businesses and tourism development organizations, sustainability can be experienced as a complex and challenging task. The complexity is also about balancing sustainable development's economic, social, and environmental contexts (Aall, 2020). Implementing sustainable strategies in the tourism industry summarizes the research process and answers the research question. However, the operational focus is on the ongoing implementation process at a local and regional level of stakeholders belonging to a Man and Biosphere reserve or a destination attending a national program for sustainable destinations (Norway, 2019). The market reports an increase in the demand for sustainable products. The sustainability and entrepreneurs must also be trusted in the market and the destination or the region. My research question is therefore deducted to:

"How can sustainable tourism strategies be implemented into local tourism businesses?"

This central question is the research question the project aims to answer, but divided into four underlying areas:

1. A common perception of the term sustainability.
2. Sustainability showed in own practice.
3. The balance between ecological, social, and economic sustainability.
4. How a MAB region can work with sustainability among stakeholders and tourism businesses.

These underlying issues are based on findings from the literature and will frame the content of the main issue, implementation. In order to practice the term correctly, you first have to understand the term, but what is theoretical and practical right when choices are to be made? How do those on the ground level implement such a complex term daily with an industry founded on cooperation? The literature demonstrates a frustration around understanding the diffuse term and how to understand best and implement the good "sustainable" practice. Is this best achieved through indicator measurement or its own self-regulated and well-

intentioned practice? Or is it by incorporating strategies and global goals? The research question is, therefore, formulated further into these four underlying questions:

1. Is there a common perception of the term sustainability?
2. How is sustainable tourism best understood in your practice?
3. How to balance ecological, social, and economic sustainability?
4. How can sustainable policy thinking be implemented in the tourism industry?

1.6 Structure of the thesis

After having introduced the research question and the background for the thesis` topic, I here present the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: The theoretical framework forms the base and the guideline for the methodological choices for the project. The literature review presents and discusses the framework for the four underlying issues of the research question, namely 1) the term sustainability, 2) have to practice sustainability in the tourism industry, 3) the balancing and relationship between the three areas in the sustainable development model and finally, 4) the implementation of sustainable strategies and goals.

Chapter 3: The methodological section, which also includes methods and ethics, explains the research design, as well as presents the process of choosing the district, the informants, the structure of the interview guide, the method of how the interviews were conducted, and how incoming data was structured and to be analyzed.

Chapter 4: The finding and analysis chapter presents a selection of statements that represent the answers' content. The findings are put in context and explained in discussions related to the four underlying research issues named above, reflected upon the literature review in chapter 2.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, I discuss the analysis of findings, in the light of literature, and to answer the research question.

Chapter 6: The conclusion summarises the main findings according to the research question.

Chapter 7: A reflection on my work and suggestions for further research can be found in the last chapter.

2 Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 The global policy of sustainable development and the tourism industry

Since the early 1990s, sustainable development has been the prevailing paradigm of tourism policies, planning, management, and research. This term was founded on Brundtland's report "Our Common Future" in 1987 (Bianchi, 2004). Later, one of the main criticisms relates to the difficulties of transferring the principles of sustainable development into a single sector, such as tourism (Sharpley, 2000). Sustainable Tourism could, even less, be understood as a sector that operates in line with sustainable development principles, seeks inter-and intra-generational equity, and adopts a holistic and ethical approach to development based on ecological, socio-cultural, and economic principles (Butler, 2011). Torres-Delegado and Saarinen (2014) suggest that such aims represent a considerable challenge to this and any other sector operating within the global-local nexus.

A paradox that presents itself is that the issue of climate change and the "green shift" has increased in public debates and research at the same time as the tourism industry has seen experienced strong economic growth. Since 2000, international arrivals have increased from 674 million to 1,5 billion in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The pandemic has reduced the numbers. Nevertheless, a consequence of the increasing number of flight arrivals is the environmental footprint. Khan et al. (2020) argue that economic growth supports tourism development, that tourist arrivals have a significant positive impact on energy consumption, capital investment, and CO₂ emissions, and that environmental pollutant causes adverse effects on tourism in return.

On the other hand, Qureshi et al. (2019) have examined the relationship between international tourism indicators, air pollutants, and ecological biodiversity and pointed out the need for sustainable tourism infrastructure that conserves our natural environment and reduces climate variability across the globe. OECD's threshold of 1,8 billion tourist arrivals by 2030 is likely to be exceeded (OECD, 2020, p. 18). There is an increasing concern about sustainability in the tourism sector and the limited growth (Fodness, 2017; Grössling et al., 2012; Hall, 2019; Saarinen, 2015 in (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020)).

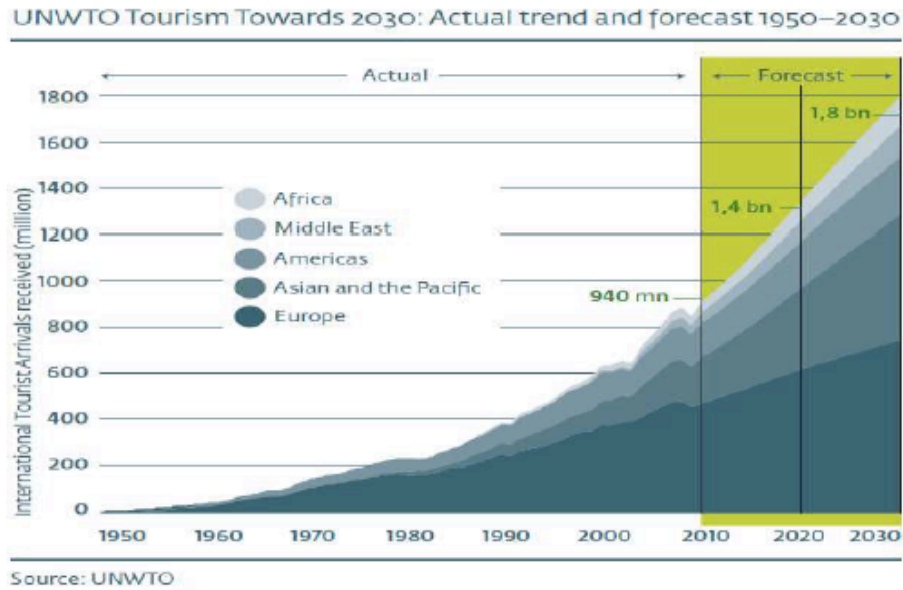


Figure 3 UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030: Actual trend and forecast 1950 – 2030

Saarinen (2013) puts forward that while there is an urgent need to incorporate sustainability into tourism, there will also be a growing frustration among academics that tourism as a private-driven enterprise relates to the ideals of sustainable development. Sharpley (2020) argues for a sustainable de-growth that includes travel to the destination as part of sustainable tourism development. In October 2021, the UNWTO (2021) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused an 85% reduction from 2019 to 2021. How fast the industry will recover, and to what extent, is left to see.

Different milestones have been marked within sustainability development, and the UN's policy agreement in Paris in 2015 with 17 sustainable development goals for 2030 was the main one. The goals were also divided into 169 specific targets (United Nations, 2015b) and were an action plan for all countries (United Nations, 2015a). The targets are poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. Further challenges towards 2030 include reaching these targets. While some are relevant to the tourism industry, some are less so. Others are relevant to developing economies, and some to industrial countries. Nevertheless, the challenges for the environment and the world's population are common. UNWTO, United Nations' specialized agency, published a report for the tourism industry to implement the SDGs in the International Year of Sustainable Tourism

for Development in 2017, "Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030".

2.2 National and county-wise sustainability tourism strategies

In May 2021, Innovation Norway presented the new tourism strategy for the Norwegian Government (Innovation Norway, 2021c). As one of the main drives, the "green shift" is central in the new strategies and measures for development to 2030. Measures for 2030 are pretty ambitious with the vision of "big impact low footprint." The goals for 2030 are to increase value creation, ripple effects, visitor satisfaction, and get attractive communities with happy residents. Additionally, the strategy also demands a similar reduction of our carbon footprint (2021c, p. 48). It also says that development must be based on the SDGs and the Government's green shift goals. All measures in the plan illustrate how they contribute to SDGs. Sustainability is, therefore, unlike before in governmental white papers, mentioned throughout the document and integrated more or less in the 23 measures.

The document confirms that the Sustainable Development Goals are being integrated into national and international legislation and regulations and will provide a platform for the tourism industry. The strategy aims to contribute directly to six Sustainable Development Goals, such as numbers 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 17 (Innovation Norway, 2021c, p. 11).

Innovation Norway's labeling of Sustainable Destinations, see 2.4, was already established in 2011 and is still a tool for destinations to develop and monitor sustainable tourism. The former director of VisitNorway, Bente Bratland Holm, proclaimed that it will still be a comparative advantage to be certified as a sustainable destination at a regional tourism conference. (VisitBergen, 2021).

In strategies and measures, a reinforcement of destinations is noted by inviting ten pilot destinations to develop models for organization and interaction. The strategy proclaims the importance of destinations by the measure destination 3.0. Sustainable development is central: "Destinations have an extremely important part to play in the successful and sustainable development of the tourist industry of tomorrow, and this requires effective and forward-looking organization and interaction at a local level" (Innovation Norway, 2021c, p. 65).

Nothing less than eight ministries are making premises for the Norwegian Tourism Industry. In helping to implement the strategies in tourism businesses, one of the measures is to establish a coordinating function, both political and administratively. Nevertheless, the strategy also says who is in charge of implementation: "Regional Development in the counties authorities should provide follow-up strategies, providing guidance and highlighting ambitions" (Innovation Norway, 2021c, p. 70).

In March 2022, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development presented an implementation plan of the National Sustainable Goals of 2030. It was accepted in the Norwegian Parliament after that. A Sub-goal is about "promoting a sustainable tourism industry that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. The authorities and the Norwegian tourism industry collaborate for more sustainable development over time. The industry must be financially profitable and add value to local communities without compromising the environment" (Ministry of Local Government, 2021, p. 79). Another sub-goal is sustainable use and production (One Planet Network) in the tourism industry. Sub-goal 12B is about developing and implementing methods to measure the impact of sustainable tourism. Since 2008, Innovation Norway has worked to mark destinations as sustainable. The travelers who meet the brand's requirements make a significant effort to measure various parameters that indicate sustainability. The development in these parameters determines whether the destination receives a renewed label after three years or not (Ministry of Local Government, p. 121).

The County of Vestland has developed scenarios for the tourism industry in the county. Highlighted strategies are similar to the main national strategies: "green shift," better interaction, and getting tourists to stay longer when visiting. The national strategy also proclaims local authorities' role in establishing a tourism-related knowledge platform for those working with tourism activities. The regional strategies contribute to implementing both national strategies to local authorities.

What about the industry and businesses? Gössling et al. (2010) show that accommodation (21%) and transportation (75%) are responsible for the CO₂ emissions in the tourism industry. The strategy "Green travel" has a goal of "Greater value creation with less of a footprint thanks to seamless green routes to and around Norway" (Innovation Norway 2021c). For Vestland County, this is a welcomed strategy due to the significant investment in electric

or hydrogen boats and buses. Tourism businesses in Vestland might provide 0-emission travel in a couple of years, with cycle and electric cars. The cruise industry also needs a "green shift" and is more than ready for technological innovations. Activities have 4% emission, and to become a 0-emission county in 2030, as Vestland claims, activities need a green shift and become sustainable in an environmental way.

2.3 Definition of sustainable tourism development

Sustainable development is described as a situation where one "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The definition has been extensively used in various ways and settings, and interpretations have depended on place and context. It has become a form of ideology and political catchphrase depending on the context of its use (Saarinen, 2020). Sustainable tourism is also seen as an instrument to maintain and create new economic activity and employment by government and authorities, leading to local and regional development (Saarinen, 2020; UNWTO, 2017).

Since the 1990s, sustainable tourism has been presented as ecotourism, responsible tourism, and alternative tourism to match market demands. However, as the climate changes, it affects the tourism industry differently. The market trends change, the CO₂ footprint is to be counted, and the demands for "green travel" and sustainability in the tourism industry are increasing.

Based on sustainable development, the World Tourism Organisation (1993) defined sustainable development of tourism as "the needs of present tourist and host regions shall be met while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future." Further on, they claim that; "the connection between tourism and sustainable development can be seen as the production and consumption of tourism, which positively and negatively impacts the localities and environment."

In 2005, the United Nations Environment Program and the World Tourism Organisation made a definition of sustainable tourism (Saarinen, 2013), which has been interpreted, discussed, and criticized for one and a half-decade: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the need of visitors, the

industry, the environment, and the host communities" (UNEP, 2005). They added that "a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability" (UNEP, 2005; Aall, 2020). As tourism was considered an instrument for sustainable development, the tourism industry focused less on increasing global travel transportation. The impact on the environment is often covered up under ecotourism and green travel (Aall & Teigland, 2001).

Sustainable tourism has of late been increasingly connected with the SDGs of 2030. The UNWTO report of 2017 contributed to 5 core pillars of why tourism works for development (Saarinen, 2020, p. 4): 1) Sustainable economic growth 2) social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction; 3) resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate, 4) Cultural values, diversity, and heritage, and 5) mutual understanding, peace, and security. Saarinen (2020) points out that the interpretation of these reasons becomes problematic as there seems to be a confusing relationship between the development of an idea and a framework. Growth emphasizes the target, with all potential conflict with some of the other SDGs, such as goal 13, climate action.

UNWTO also conducts tourism destination development, which requires a holistic approach to policy and governance to determine a network of stakeholders' coordination, collaboration, and participation. It further states, "directive effectiveness, determined by institutional skills and resources that support how processes are conducted to define goals, search for solutions and opportunities for relevant stakeholders, and provide tools and means for their joint execution" (UNWTO, 2017). In this sense, UNWTO supports its members (countries) in their efforts to develop efficient governance models.

2.4 Sustainable Tourism Destinations and perception of sustainability in tourism businesses.

In Norway, sustainable tourism was first made relevant in the tourism policy of 2007, being one of the three leading tourism development strategies. These strategies were a starting point closely followed by Innovation Norway and NHO Tourism and their ten principles of sustainable tourism destinations, as seen in table 1 below. The principles relate to the

balancing model of nature, culture and environment, social values, and economic sustainability (Innovation Norway, 2019).

The ten principles were made to form the basis for a certification process of tourist destinations. The program has, since 2014, seen 21 destinations certificated as sustainable. Further, nine destinations are in the process of gaining certification (Norway, 2021c). The standard is also approved by GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) as a national standard for sustainable tourism. The standards are also connected to the SDGs, specifically goals 8, 12, and 14. Goal 17 is also an important goal to achieve sustainable development in tourism (Ibenholdt, Hanne Toftdahl, Bruvoll, Grorud, & Haavardsholm, 2016).

Preservation of nature, culture, and the environment	Strengthening social values	Economic viability
<p>1) Cultural wealth</p> <p>To respect, develop further, and highlight the local community's Historical heritage, authentic culture, traditions, and distinctiveness.</p> <p>2) The physical and visual Integrity</p> <p>Preserving and further developing landscape qualities, both for the city and built, so that the landscape's physical and visual integrity is not degraded.</p> <p>3) Biodiversity</p>	<p>5) Local quality of life and social values</p> <p>They are preserving and enhancing the quality of life in the local community, including social structures, access to resources, facilities, and every goods for all, and avoiding any form of social degradation and exploitation.</p> <p>6) Local control and engagement</p> <p>To engage and empower local communities and stakeholders concerning planning, decision-making,</p>	<p>9) Economically viable and competitive tourism destinations through local value creation</p> <p>Ensuring the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations in a long-term perspective by maximizing tourism's value creation in the local community, including what the tourists leave behind and values locally.</p> <p>10) Economically viable and competitive tourism companies</p>

<p>To support preserving natural areas, wildlife, and habitats and minimize destruction.</p> <p>4) Clean environment and resource efficiency</p> <p>Minimizing tourism companies and tourists' pollution of air, water, and land, including noise, and minimizing the generation of waste and consumption of scarce and non-renewable resources.</p>	<p>and local tourism development.</p> <p>7) Job quality for tourism employees</p> <p>To strengthen the quality of tourism jobs, directly and indirectly, including wage levels and working conditions without discriminating by gender, race, disability, or other factors.</p> <p>8) Guest satisfaction and safety and experience quality</p> <p>To ensure safe, satisfactory, and enriching tourism destinations through local value creation</p>	<p>Ensuring the viability and competitiveness of tourism companies in a long-term perspective.</p>
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Table 1 10 principles of sustainable destinations, Innovation Norway

The principles have been criticized for not including a separate principle concerning climate change (Aall, 2020). However, through the process, the destinations must satisfy 41 criteria and 104 indicators, in which concerns related to climate change are addressed. In 2012, a new tourism strategy, "Destination Norway," was launched, ensuring the sustainability of the tourism industry as an all-encompassing strategy for tourism development (Aall, 2020). In 2017 the government put forward a white paper about tourism, "Experience Norway – unique and adventurous." This time with the goals of increased value creation and economic growth, but sustainability. "The tourism industry has to participate in a development that promotes environmental, social and economic values" (Aall, 2020). The white paper provided a

discussion of whether transportation should be included in the assessment of sustainable tourism. Interestingly, measures against cruise lines were mentioned, but not towards airlines, despite airlines having higher emissions than the cruise businesses (2020).

The overall sustainable tourism strategy was later followed up with a "roadmap" towards sustainable tourism in 2030 and 2050, "Towards a sustainable tourism," presented by the leading tourism organizations in 2017. "In 2030, Norway will have consolidated its position as one of the world's preferred destinations for sustainable natural and cultural experiences that are a journey worth in an intact natural and cultural landscape. Transport to and from your destination should be as climate and environmentally friendly as possible. In close interaction with the public and other sectors, the tourism industry shall search for and inspire low greenhouse gas emissions, provide local food specialties, and be the hallmark of green value creation. Tourism should target selected groups based on "high yield - low impact," i.e., high returns and low environmental impact (Historiske et al., 2017). In this statement from the industry itself, the challenges of emissions from the transport sector are very much included. A new tourism strategy for tourism development was recently published in May 2021. It remains to be seen how sustainable development is to be implemented further in the tourism businesses (Vestland County, 2020).

While there is no joint sustainable developed program for the entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, there are many suggestions (Jarvis, Weeden, & Simcock, 2010). Nevertheless, a national program, "Eco-lighthouse," structures and brands parts of the branches as hotels, restaurants, museums, and similarities. There are also guidelines for the UN's sustainable development goals for local cities and communities (ISO, 2016-2019). ISO is developing standards for tourism businesses (International Organization for Standardisation, 2019). The tourism destinations that join the program for sustainable destinations include indicators for businesses as well (InnovationNorway, 2017)

Entrepreneurs in Sustainable destinations are committed to having measures to ensure they act sustainably. One hundred and eight indicators reflect and measure sustainability to maintain the criteria for certification.

2.5 The interpretation of sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism has to be practiced within all forms of tourism in all types of destinations. It requires informed participation from all relevant stakeholders and strong political leadership to ensure broad participation and consensus building, according to UNWTO (2013). Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process, and it requires constant monitoring of impacts and introducing the necessary preventive and corrective measures whenever necessary (2013).

Jarvis, Weeden, and Simcock (2010) look into the benefits and challenges associated with the adoption of sustainable tourism certification in West of England, UK. The paper further explores the potential marketing and branding opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs provide recommendations regarding how a regional organization, such as South West Tourism, can encourage local businesses to join a national certification scheme. Pride M. and Reed M. (2020) have a biocultural point of view, looking into how MAB-reserve can be managed and how to share the acquired knowledge between the MABs. On the other hand, Lyon A. and Hunter-Jones P., and Warnaby G. (2017), have found that "seeking sustainable development in biosphere reserves is problematic when distinct ideological differences between active stakeholder groups and power relations are unequal." It is also noted that "differentiating between values and perceptions of different stakeholder types is important to how tourism can contribute to sustainable development."

Aall (2020), on the other side, points out that the international definition of sustainable tourism is to achieve the balance between the environmental, economic, and social aspects, while several stakeholders in the tourism debate in Norway are treating sustainable tourism as three integrated dimensions. In this case, the art of balancing may disappear. For example, the increase in profitability can be perceived as sustainable, while the definition from the WTO must be viewed according to negative environmental consequences before sustainability can be achieved. Torres-Delgado (2014) also argues for the goal of parameters for measuring and controlling the effect as a monitoring tool for sustainable tourism development.

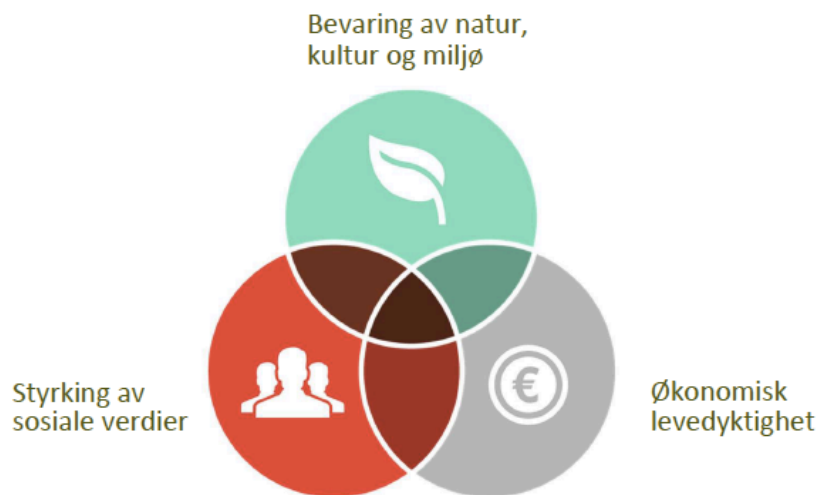


Figure 4 Model for sustainable tourism development, Innovation Norway

2.6 Biosphere reserve as a model region for sustainable tourism development

The MAB program is an "intergovernmental scientific program that aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments. It combines the natural and social sciences intending to improve human livelihoods and safeguarding natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable" (UNESCO, 2021). The Network of Biosphere Reserves currently counts 714 sites in 129 countries worldwide. A Biosphere Reserve aims to be a living example of a learning site for sustainable development with three integrated functions, these being 1) conservation, 2) development and 3) logistical support for training, research, and education, especially concerning climate change (UNESCO, 2021). The practitioners, scientists, and governmental representatives responsible for managing these seek to demonstrate how to pursue biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, justice, and equality.

The UNESCO's "branding" requires a development towards being sustainable. The topic is relevant to tourism development locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. Businesses' marketing and tourism activities and experiences must be incoherent, especially regarding shared understanding, communication, and trustable sustainability practices within the MAB

reserve. Ferreira et al. (2018) discovered a challenge among MAB reserves in fulfilling the designation criteria. They revealed four categories, inputs, context, process, and outcomes, and 53 sub-categories of factors that helped effectively lead an active biosphere reserve (Ferreira et al., 2018).

2.7 Governance and implementation of sustainable tourism

Implementation is defined as how policy is translated into action (Hall, 2009). This policy is often divided between private and public implementation or a combined public-private dimension. Privat-public combination is significant for tourism, such as national and regional tourism development and marketing organizations (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). Further, implementation can broadly be categorized into three main approaches: "top-down," "bottom-up," and "interactive.", Figure 5.

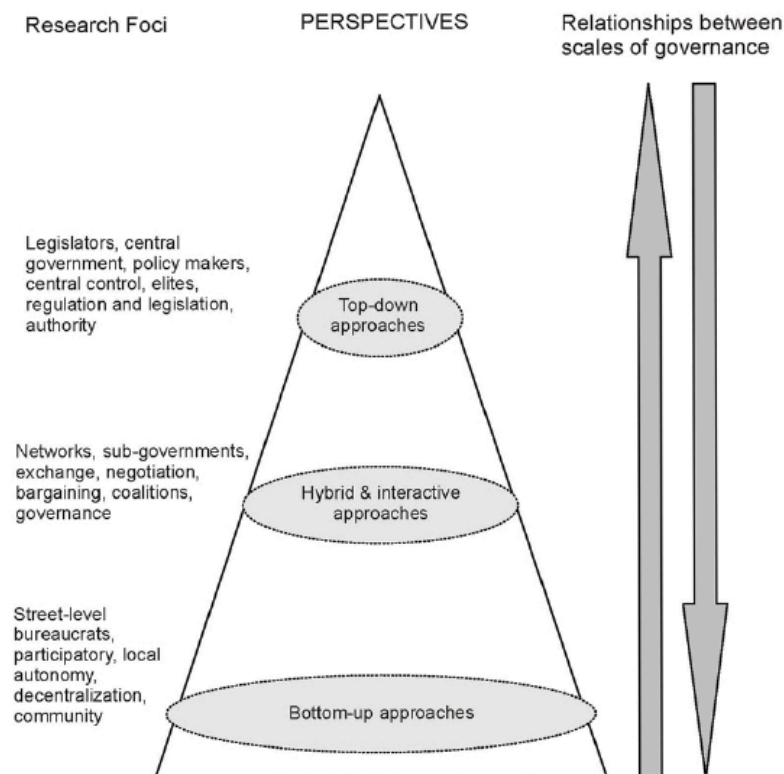


Figure 5 Three Archetypes model of implementation (Hall, 2009)

The top-down approach describes a policy hierarchy in which policies are introduced at the "top" by decision-makers in central governments, then implemented by those at the bottom of

the hierarchy, and governed by an elite (Hall, 2009). The model is criticized as policy-making, in reality, does not occur in a vacuum but is affected by conjunctions and a range of other policies (Hall, 2009, p. 240).

The bottom-up approach emphasizes that policy, legislation, and regulation developed by those at the top are loosely connected to the ground level regarding stakeholders' behaviors and motivation for implementation. This approach has considerable resonance with the community dimension of tourism planning and the consequent emphasis on public and stakeholders' participation, even though the bottom-up archetype's perspective cannot be separated from policy formulation (Hall, 2009).

The third approach is described as having hybrid or interactional perspectives that emphasize the complex process of negotiating and bargaining between policymakers at all levels. The policy and planning process are named into different configurations of networks, ranging from highly- integrated stable policy communities with relatively small numbers of members to a relatively large number of members. (Rhodes, 1998 in Hall, 2009, p. 241). Rhodes suggests that policy networks are characterized by: 1) interdependence between the organizations involved, 2) continual interaction between the membership that exchanges resources and negotiates shared purpose, 3) interactions that are governed by the "rules of the game" and that develop trust, 4) a significant degree of autonomy from state intervention (Hall, 2009).

Based on this model, it is obvious to implement the SDGs and UNWTO's sustainable tourism strategy into the top-down approach. In contrast, the National Tourism Strategies 2030, Innovation Norway's sustainable destination program, and NHO's roadmap result from interactive implementation progress. An argument to support this is that Innovation Norway, which had the mission of preparing the strategies, included many stakeholders and organizations (Innovation Norway, 2021a).

Aall et al. (2015), who has examined the environmental policy integration, EPI, in tourism settings, argue for using the EPI approach to implementing sustainable tourism strategies. An EPI approach consists of three or four levels, cross-sectoral integration, and has its success as a result of "inclusion," "consistency," "priorities," and "reporting." Aall et al. argue further that EPI is a highly relevant strategy for implementing policies around sustainable tourism

and named four areas where EPI could be used as a tool to manage sustainable tourism:

1. Governing destinations going from promotions to protection
2. Including factors outside the destination as transportation to the destination
3. Local-level policy implementation is efficient as the local government has specific control over sustainable issues within their areas.
4. Counteract the fact that there is different awareness of environmental considerations, especially concerning different balances of power in politics.

Further, this is explained by "a need to have an overarching framework and principles in place and operating effectively at an international or national level to guide if local-level policy implementation is successful (Aall et al., 2015). Using EPI as a vertical framework would promote inclusion and consistency" (Laffery and Knudsen, 2007 in Aall et al., 2015), 4) to ensure implementation in a broader context of sustainable tourism, considering a power-related policy.

Destinations applying for sustainable branding need an integrated policy to achieve certification. Therefore an EPI approach in these cases could be a "potent system" of implementing and evaluating the outcome of sustainable strategies. However, what about those destinations that do not apply for the sustainable destination program? Mosedale (2014) points out that "there is a widely shared view that the industry can contribute to sustainable development, but to do so requires stronger external regulatory measures beyond the industry's self-regulation."

2.8 Theoretical summary and research model for the project

The theoretical issues on which I build my research project are used to develop a simplified research model for implementing sustainable tourism strategies. According to Sustainable Destination Program, international strategic needs to get implemented and integrated into national plans, regional plans, destination plans, and business plans, as we have seen the sustainable tourism goals, from UNWTO to Innovation Norway. We have also learned how the UN's SDGs have been integrated into the Sustainable Destination Program afterward. UNESCO's program for MAB reserves had sustainability as a core issue since the start of the program, and the SDGs natural was integrated with the program. Nordhordland MAB reserve

has always integrated the SDGs as a basis for their strategic plan, even though the application progress started in 2011. The strategies of the MAB Nordhordland came in 2020 and can be characterized as reconciling the top-down and bottom-up frameworks (Hall, 2009, p. 237), Figure 5.

I have used Hall's classical implementation model as a starting point of the investigation. I will discuss using the vertical approach as a possible tool, depending on the research findings. The research will cover data from "the field" between regional and local levels, but the context includes strategies from the top level.

We have learned that the perception of the term sustainability can be fuzzy and that monitoring sustainability can be done through indicators of the sustainable destination program.

A MAB reserve is both a model region and a "learning" region. Implementation of the new national tourism strategies in October 2021 started by facilitating a regional tourism conference for local businesses and other stakeholders (VisitBergen, 2021). International strategies, such as the SDGs, were already implemented in local and regional planes, but how is it for a model to implement sustainable strategies into practice? Nordhordland is not yet a region belonging to the monitoring program of sustainable tourism destinations, so the practical implementation remains to be seen over time.

Developing new national strategies was a broad involvement from businesses, destination companies, and other stakeholders. It can be characterized as a hybrid approach but bound to other national commitments, such as climate commitments. The tourism strategies for the County of Vestland are in progress to be finished and have a framework of a hybrid approach. The strategies for Region Nordhordland are based on both a hybrid process with international regulations, a high degree of "bottom-up" approach, with broad involvement of public meetings in the process (Region Nordhordland, 2021b).

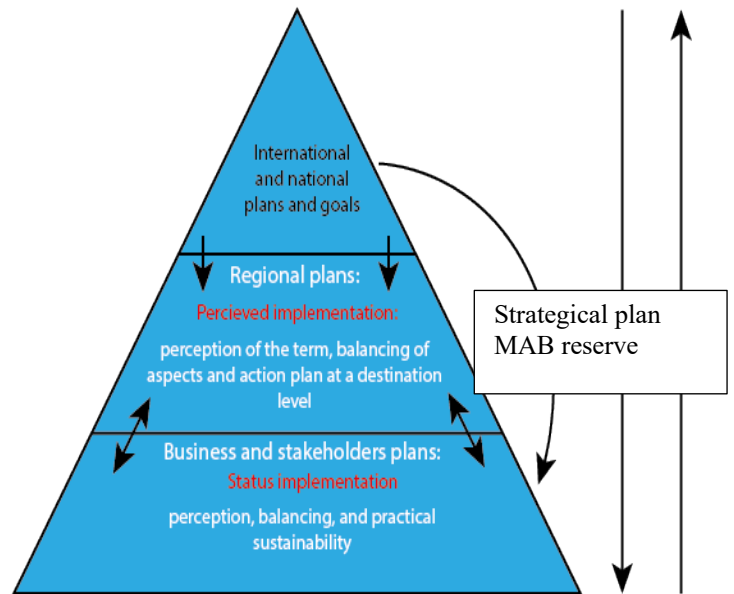
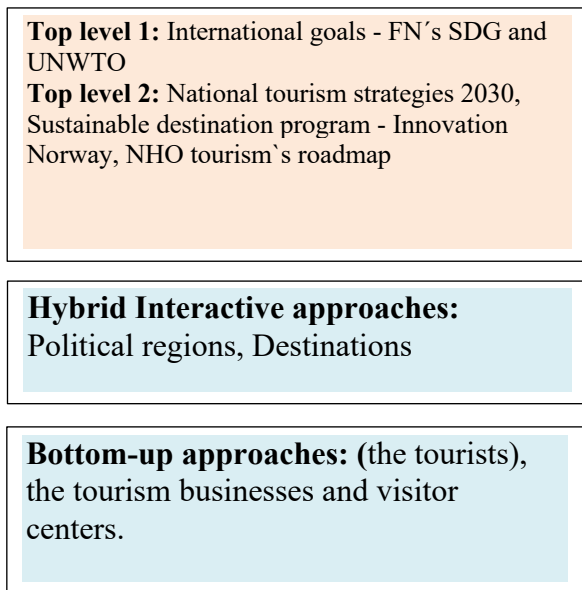


Figure 6 Sustainable Strategies Implementation model I

3 Methodology and methods

The research question: "How can sustainable tourism strategies be implemented in local tourism companies?" was the starting point for preparing and shaping the research design. Throughout this chapter, I will argue for the choices that have been made around methodology and methods, which can shed light on the research findings. As previously discussed, the issue of the thesis is further divided into four underlying central themes that explore sustainable tourism development. These four questions are explored by interviewing managers/ business owners and tourist developers in a joint region. Finally, the summarised information might explain further how sustainable development in the tourism industry can occur.

The underlying questions can be explored with a social science approach, where social contexts and constructions are highlighted, and we acquire more knowledge based on these. Such an approach involves relevant people with meaning, thoughts, and actions in a given context. The participants in the study are managers in tourism companies and central people in tourism-related development organizations. The context is the companies and organizations they work in and the Nordhordland region as a MAB reserve, with its culture, nature, and social relations. The reality is local and specifically "constructed" among the tourism sector in Nordhordland but further interpreted in the light of national and international sustainability goals and strategies.

3.1 Ontology, epistemology, and methodology

In a socially constructed world, as constructivists see it, the world is created by humans, who have evolved as a result of human interaction with society, through history, in the form of ideas, and through language use (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, pp. 180-186). The ontology of a constructivism paradigm is more "associated realities," where the constructions are not valid in an absolute way. The constructions can change as the researcher/designer acquires more sophisticated information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Further, they claim that "the realities" are local and specific, individually or in groups, and relate to the history and previous research. "The realities" are also a part of a whole and must be seen in the context of the people involved, ongoing interactive processes, perceptions, and actions.

The study aims to gain further knowledge about implementing sustainable development in the tourism industry. A constructivist approach to research is the most sensible way to describe society. However, this is to learn more about the complex research question and the four underlying questions. They are formulated as follows:

1) Is there a common perception of the concept of sustainability? 2) How is sustainable tourism best understood in one's practice? 3) How is a balance between the aspects of ecological, social, and economic sustainability best achieved? Furthermore, 4) How can sustainable political thinking be implemented in the tourism industry? The purpose of answering these underlying questions is to understand the leading research question based on new and established knowledge.

Epistemology is subjectively positioned as I interpret the findings I examine as a researcher. As a tourism industry representative, I searched for a diverse representation at a business and regional level, mainly to examine the implementation of the term sustainability and the common perception.

The representation of tourism businesses and development organizations were managers and central staff members. People in leading positions were the object of investigation because these have the primary responsibilities to front goals and expectations in an organization. Furthermore, the findings were created together, as Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 111) put it: "The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively connected so that the "findings" are created when the investigation continues" and "the process aims to explore knowledge to gain a further understanding of sustainability among tourism companies and stakeholders, and implementation of the concept of sustainability."

As the findings are created together and interpreted through the researcher, a hermeneutic and dialectical way of collecting data/information is a natural choice. This art of interpretation and the constant movement between the whole and its parts is called the "hermeneutic circle" (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p. 188). The interpretation itself is characterized as the "other hermeneutic" level, where social analysts are part of the social world they analyze (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p. 189). An exploratory research design, such as constructivism, is the best way to illuminate the problem I present. On the other hand, Maureen Reed points out that

"sustainable science is an activist science - normative and pragmatic" in her article "Contributions from UNESCO's human and biosphere program and biosphere reserves" (2018). I had this in mind while exploring sustainable tourism in the MAB reserve in Nordhordland. An explorative paradigm, such as constructivism, is still preferred in this case, as long as "no final agreement has been reached among proponents about their definition, meanings, and implications" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).

3.2 Reflexivity and interpretive position.

Reflexivity has been defined as "the researcher`s critique of their influence on the research process and is recognition of, and accounting for, power and trust relationships between researcher and participants" (Hall & Callery, 2001 in Killion & Fisher, 2019, p. 21).

According to the complex theme and the compound research question, a reflexivity approach and an interpretive position is needed for this research, where the underlying questions overlap. The context in which the information is said is also a vital issue.

There are different uses for reflexivity in the literature, as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) present. It can be the complex relationship between processes for knowledge production and the different contexts in such processes, as well as the involvement of the researcher. Furthermore, as a researcher, I must be aware of how different linguistic, social, political, and theoretical elements are woven together in knowledge development, where empirical material is constructed, interpreted, and written (Alvesson, 2010). Knowing the region and most of the objects of study, I had to be mindful not to overinterpret the dialogue and the data I collected. For example, I needed to use more explorative questions to understand better the context of what the objects were conveying and not allow myself to presume anything. One informant was trying to explain how the logistics of the delivery of local fish needed to go via Bergen, thereby creating and using more CO2 emissions due to the number of deliveries not being "economically" big enough (2TB). I would not have understood this without asking for further information and clarification.

Nevertheless, understanding the context assisted me in better interpreting the data. Killion and Fisher (2019, p. 22) argue that "being reflexive allows the investigator to acknowledge,

recognize and accept an understanding of the issue and ultimately the production of knowledge." The example of fish delivery showed this.

Being a reflexive investigator, I needed to learn about the Nordic networking group for MAB regions. To understand this context, I joined the MAB conference organized by the Nordic SHAPE network on Ecotourism alongside the leading team of the local project. It was a crucial issue to understand the framework for the MAB reserves and how MAB-Nordhordland worked with sustainability and sustainable tourism. The knowledge gained at the conference was beneficial in understanding how a research-based and yet practical approach to the biosphere reserves was used as a standard method. There were professionally based discussions in a learning-based network. I found it particularly interesting to experience the importance of learning from each other. The conference took place in Finland in February 2020 and contributed to my understanding of the MAB-based system and culture. The learning was also crucial to interpreting the context of activities, processes, and dialogs in the MAB reserve Nordhordland.

3.3 Axiology - values and ethical considerations

Many ethical issues were considered during the research process. Most of them were about my integrity as a researcher, which needed to be discussed and clarified. One concern was related to earlier professional relations with some of the objects involved in the study. It could have both positive and negative effects on the outcome. Conversely, the objects may have felt more comfortable being interviewed by someone they knew and were at ease when talking with me.

On the other hand, there was a risk that I could misuse the object's trust as a researcher. However, a promised quote check might have relaxed some of those who did not know me. I think the conversation flowed better in the cases where I knew the informants. Striving to be present formally and all treated the same way in the interview situation contributed to the excellent quality of comparable data. I was particularly mindful of not making assumptions in my interpretations to accommodate this. Throughout the interview, the strategy for encountering that was to allow the informants to talk until they had finished what they wanted to say. Afterward, I later listened to the interviews multiple times if I were uncertain of the

interpretations. The respondents also got the interview guide (Appendix III) to prepare their expectations. When an object met less or was not prepared, I spent more time informing the object about the issue's core to ensure they were prepared for the interview.

The quote check was done at the end of the project, and unfortunately, it was seven months after the interview was conducted and therefore challenging for the informants to remember. Nevertheless, they could verify their quotes and the context they were taken out of and add to or withdrawn in the project. The consensus document (APPENDIX I) was presented as the interview was made and when the interview was completed.

A second issue was that I knew the region quite well since I have lived there most of my life. I am also a local politician and knew some of the processes of MAB revenue and tourism businesses quite well. Therefore, I had to be aware of not having biased attitudes during the interview and when interpreting the data. I also had to be aware of the power relation during the interviews. That being said, I experienced a normal and agreeable conversation about the issues with all informants. However, this experience has given me further insight into the regional tourism industry.

Ensuring that the data is anonymized is also an essential aspect of the ethical considerations of the study. Those objects who wanted to read the findings and the paper were welcome to do so. They could also withdraw at any time. Ensuring the confidentiality of all objects, statements, and business information were essential to my study's integrity. Data that could identify the respondents was not used as it was but transcribed so that it was impossible to trace.

The informants also provided consent to participate in the study before the interviews and provided the necessary information to feel prepared. However, this allowed them to understand better the research questions' complexity and a more profound understanding of the topic they might need to have in advance. The informants had few rewards to gain by participating in the research project, and some were merely satisfied that someone thought their views were important. It is to notice that none of the informants replied "no" to becoming a participant in the research project.

3.4 Qualitative methods and in-depth interviews

My intention in gathering the data was not to generalize as in a natural-based study (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p. 136) but to gain further knowledge of the term "sustainable tourism" and how tourism stakeholders perceive and practice sustainability at their destinations. I, therefore, chose interview-based research with semi-structured questions, to which the informants were encouraged to express their understanding of each issue. The questions were constructed so that they became a framework for conversations. Some of the questions I chose were to the point of the issue, while others aimed to capture context information. The purpose of the qualitative method in the study was to obtain in-depth information while maintaining a natural and comfortable conversation about a complex research question on a blurred topic. The interview guide served as a frame throughout the interview process. Nevertheless, ensure that every issue was covered and enough information was provided.

The interview guide was based on the previously discussed research questions and the literature review and divided into four sections related to the underlying questions to analyze the findings best. These also made the starting point of the sectoral coding: 0. Description and grouping of the informants of tourism businesses and regional development organizations, 1. The respondent's perception of the term sustainability, 2. motivation to put into action/ practice, 3. balancing between economic, socio-cultural, and ecological, and 4. Corporation and implementation of sustainability.

Additionally, I wanted to cover 5. The impact of the corona pandemic to ensure I maintained a holistic and relevant picture, but this was not included in the analysis process. The interviews lasted from 23 minutes to 2 hours, with a mean of 51 minutes, and were transcribed into 105 pages, covering eight interviews.

3.5 Choice of informants

The informants I chose for the project were participants I thought could answer the research question best. The choice was made based on the answers provided for the principal and underlying research questions and whom I felt had the most to offer for the qualitative research data. Due to the specter of sustainability in ordinary tourism businesses, I chose the

companies based on diversity and type of organization. It was also necessary to have informants from both "business-level" and "regional development-level" due to the implementation of sustainable strategies.

I then chose five managers from the "business level" and three key persons from the "regional development level." The reason for asking more business leaders than people from the development organizations was related to the inherent differences between tourism companies. I chose informants from different businesses, including one eco-certificated farm/tourism business, one coastal resort with accommodation, one mountain resort with accommodation, one nature-based farm/museum/ visitor center, and one culture-based museum/visitor center. Representatives from the "regional level" were chosen from three different organizations, all more or less related to tourism development. The organizations were from the MAB reserve project, the destination company, and a regular business development company. I was delighted that the three critical informants from three different organizations wanted to participate in the research project. I felt I had a good representation of the industry regarding level, geographical diversity, and company type, with private and private-public companies included in the study.

Once the interviews were completed, I concluded that I had enough data. There was always an opportunity to gather further information from the participants later, but this was not needed. My research question had been sufficiently answered through my interviews, and I did not need to search for more information and informants.

An overview of informants:

Informant	Level of management: RD=regional development organization TB=tourism business
1RD	Key person in Regional development organization
2TB	Manger of local tourism business
3RD	Key person in Regional development organization
4TB	Manger of local tourism business
5RD	Key person in Regional tourism organization

6TB	Manger of tourism business
7TB	Manager of museum/ visitor center
8TB	Manager of museum/ visitor center

Table 2 List of informants

3.6 The interview guide and consensus formula

The questions were formed to cover all the themes in the interview. However, my intention in making the interview guide was to make a natural and suitable framework. The informants could easily and trustfully open up and give me a snapshot of their sustainability work in their organizations. Deciding on questions about an abstract topic was not an easy task, and it became vital for me as a researcher not to stick strictly to the interview guide. It was more or less used as a checklist to ensure all themes were covered. It was essential to let the participants speak out and finish their thoughts. Their perception of the terminology was the most challenging question for the informants. However, it provided them with an opportunity to explain their interpretation of the term.

The questions formulated in the interview guide, appendix III, were not initially organized thematically but more designed to get an excellent informative conversation about sustainability in own organization. It was designed in such a way in order to start the conversation in more general terms, like a "warm-up" activity, and then follow with a more detailed conversation around the issues. After gathering the information, it was categorized into four themes. In the end, I considered whether the informants could supply further information about the issues, which helped ensure that everything was covered.

The interview guide`s questions were instrumental in helping me keep the conversation on track during the interviews. The guide was not modified throughout the process. Having such a detailed interview guide was also very useful for the informants to prepare for the interview and provide answers to such a complex topic. The term sustainability is comprehensive and difficult to operationalize. Therefore, examples linked to the questions helped concretize the question. The interview guide was a necessary tool, and a big help, in getting me qualified empery to the research (AppendixIII).

3.7 Interview situation and data collection method

Ideally, I wanted to meet and interview the objects in person, but due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the national shut down in Norway, I had to do the interviews in Teams to collect information. The invitation was sent to nine persons, and eight responded positively. Several mentioned that they wanted to participate because it was a critical and exciting issue, and they wanted to contribute to the discussion. The ninth object did not respond to the invitation. The interviews were planned five to nine days before they were conducted to prepare the informants. It also allowed me time to research the relevant business and organization through home pages, brochures, and other secondary sources. I knew five informants, not personal friends but from previous professional encounters. I did not feel this affected the interview situation negatively, but rather the opposite.

Conducting the interviews via teams worked well as the informants were used to communicate through computer technology, and the video pictures and the sound recordings were quite good. We had to reconnect the communication on three occasions to improve the connection. However, this was not experienced as a problem for me or the participants. The conversations were recorded as sound files and then transcribed by an online word application at office.com. The text in the transcribed files was then manually improved by me as a researcher into understandable sentences and then translated into English by the same word application. The Norwegian transcribed text was read, coded, and analyzed without disturbing the underlying meaning and interpretation. Once the project was completed, all the recorded files were deleted. During quote checking, I had to verify the word's meaning a couple of times.

To emphasize differences, contrasts, consistency, and similarities, I systematized the statements into groups based on the four themes; perception of the term, sustainability in practice, balancing ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability, and implementation of sustainability into business. For other issues, such as marketing and market communication, green-washing was used to gain more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the context. However, this ensured that everything necessary concerning sustainability in tourism businesses and development organizations was covered.

3.8 Coding and systemizing data

I used color codes to systemize the data into an understandable statement for answering the research question to underline statements and information that revealed the issue. Also, statements that reflected the four operationalized questions of perception, sustainability in practice, balancing between environment, socio-cultural and economic sustainability were coded. Finally, the implementation of sustainability in the tourism businesses was collected. The interpretation of the information was tried to do as objectively as possible. However, the interpretation was colored by the context and subjectivity of a researcher. Some of the statements, such as those related to overlapping questions, could be answered to more than one underlying question. In these cases, I used various multiply colors to highlight this. The statements and sentences were then organized into a formula with codes, referring to the issues deducted from the research question. The color codes helped me get a good overview of all the collected data, which turned into 115 pages of English transcribed interviews.

3.9 Reflection of the methodology and methods

Throughout the project, I learned that the quality of the informant makes for quality data. However, this was the most successful part of my project. All the participants I wanted to interview said yes, which made the quality of the information excellent. Since my research question was not easy, I was delighted with the outcome. I did not predict how relevant the research was at commencing the project. During the project, the MAB reserve, together with the destination company, Visit Norway, and a local business organization, arranged a conference where these issues were on the agenda; to implement the new national tourism strategy 2030.

A disadvantage of choosing a qualitative approach for the data collection was that the findings are based upon eight informants' reality perceptions. I did not have representatives from the transport sector available to me during the project. Also, other tourism suppliers could have been included, but then it would have been too complex. Some of the informants included issues and challenges from this sector as well. "The tourist" was left out of the research but considered a general market trend to a small extent. This exclusion was done to limit the research project.

If I were to repeat the project, I would have asked the participants whether they had thought about the questions in advance or not. Most of them said they had read it, but I did not confirm this with a specific question. The consensus letter was read and understood by all participants, and some asked to remain anonymous. The interview guide and consensus formula were approved by the NSD registration organization and then explained to the informants. Finally, the informants got the opportunity to read and confirm their statements before publication.

4 Findings and analysis

This section will present the findings from the empirical research among tourism businesses and development organizations in or connected to Nordhordland. The results will be given for each underlying issue, intending to reveal the main research question, "**How to implement sustainable tourism strategies in local tourism businesses?**" The underlying issues are 1) "how is the perception of the term sustainability?" 2) "how to practice sustainability in own organization?" 3) "how to balance between the aspects of ecological, social, and economic sustainability in business and society?" and 4) "how can a MAB region work with implementing sustainability among stakeholders and tourism businesses?"

Two levels of management present the field of research, according to Figure 6 in chapter 2.8. The chapter puts forward the findings of the informants' perception, practice, and implementation of sustainability in the tourism businesses.

4.1 Perception of the term sustainability

Sustainability appears in many different ways for a country, a region, an industry, a business, or a person itself. It has many different meanings and perceptions and "performs" in many different and complex situations, as explained in Chap. 2.4. As sustainable strategies are put forward in the tourism industry, a common perception could be preferred. A definition might give a helping hand. As we learned in chapter 2.3, the term "sustainable development" can be a challenge to interpret commonly, in any case, when it is perceived as a "fussy" concept (Wall, 2007, p. 8). Wall also claims that "there can also be a value to a fuzzy concept" as "it allows many different interests to sit at a common table with the potential for exchange views and learning results from it." This issue will be discussed more inbunded in the next chapter.

The question of perception of the term sustainability was based on the definition of sustainable development: "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The definition was not presented with the question asked in the interview situation to not predict any perceptions by the informants. UNWTO (2017, p. 15) defines sustainable tourism development as "the needs of present tourists and host regions shall be met while protecting and enhancing opportunities for

the future." They claim further that "the connection between tourism and sustainable development can be seen as the production and consumption of tourism, which positively and negatively impacts the localities and environment." This perspective is also needed to have in mind discussing the perception of sustainability in the tourism business. Before that, and in this chapter, the findings of perception will be summited, analyzed, and presented as collected.

The question asked about the perception of sustainability was intentionally open-minded: "What do you understand with the concept of sustainability?" The question made the informants freely articulate their perceptions and what they first thought when mentioning the term. As a researcher, I did not know what to expect from answers to this question. After analyzing the given information and actual statements in the comparison table, as shown in Table 3, it was interesting to see any "patterns" or common challenges in their understanding and knowledge of the term. Also, what the informants associated using the term, was included.

First, it was clear that the informants focused on running the businesses. Secondly, and in terms of sustainability, the focus of this case was very different. Some thought they were already running completely sustainable, while others had not thought about it. Some had thorough action plans, which was common among the representatives from regional development organizations. Others had a holistic perspective on how this should be anchored locally and implemented. The regional informants described natural, social, and socio-economic sustainability with different models. Some businesses, not all, put their thoughts into a global perspective. Based on the representation, the businesses and organizations can be put into a modified implementation model, as shown in Figure 7 below.

After putting all the statements into a comparison table, the division of the groups was derived. Statements became characterized into three groups: 1. Overall thinking → acting local, 2. acting local, and 3. acting local → overall thinking.

Overview findings/ analysis: Perception of the term sustainability: "What do you understand with the concept of sustainability?"	
Groups:	<i>Quotes and research notes</i>

Group 1: Overall, thinking → local acting	
RD1	"When I think of sustainability, I think first, and foremost sustainability for the earth and for the planet we live on, but also the societal and that is where I think it is essential to bring in the grassroots commitment and the ownership of measures that we are putting in place in Nordhordland. They should be suitable local measures then. And with the economic aspect of it..., there are many considerations to take. I think of sustainability as a big whole. That makes it difficult to work with, having everything always based on sustainability, because there is no correct solution."
RD 3	"I think it is about how I live, not being in such way that my children have deterioration living standards."
RD 5	"I get a little blind looking at all the indicators (for sustainable destinations), but it is about the three pillars of natural, social, and economic sustainability. Within there, it is a lot. However, I just want to add that the meaning is that we should contribute to good social development, both for our part and society."
Group 2: Acting local with a global perspective	
TB 7	"For me, sustainability means making good choices. However, sometimes you must take the least evil. You must develop further, but then it must be in a way that does not harm it. We are very keen to reach the concept of sustainability, and we have selected four sustainability goals through our networking organization."
TB 8	"Then we are back to nature and self-savage. Our mission statement is to use knowledge from the past to shape our future with the truth. We have worked very much in the past year on these UN`'s sustainability goals, such as number 12 about sustainable production and consumption. For example, we use a lamb many times in the production; 1. To keep the landscape, 2. to use in dissemination and education,3. As local wool products 4. And the meat in the restaurant."
TB 4	"For me, sustainable means living sustainably and being a missionary showing how to live with a small footprint. Further, it also shows how to make small emissions, no food disposal, reuse, buy quality products, no driving, and no building internal roads at the farm. There needs to be quality in experiences that counteract consumption, use wool, so you do not have to wash, minimizing waste and teach the tourists about waste and energy. Being self-sufficient on the ecological farm."

Group 3: Acting local	
TB2	"You can use it more than once to have the recycled economy, which is so much talked about. Except that food can only be consumed once, the rest of our operating assets are reused. Then I realize that we must be careful with what can harm nature and harms people. All you can use several times is sustainable, yes. I do not know that was right."
TB 6	"Leave nature as it is. No footprint. "

Table 3 Grouping of findings and analysis - perception of the term sustainability

Group 1 belongs to "Hybrid interactive approaches" (1RD, 3RD, and 5RD), and group 2 (4TB, 7TB, and 8TB) and group 3 (2TB, 6TB) to the "Bottom-up approach." Group 2 is different from group 3 by adding a global perspective to their perception, as shown in Figure 7.

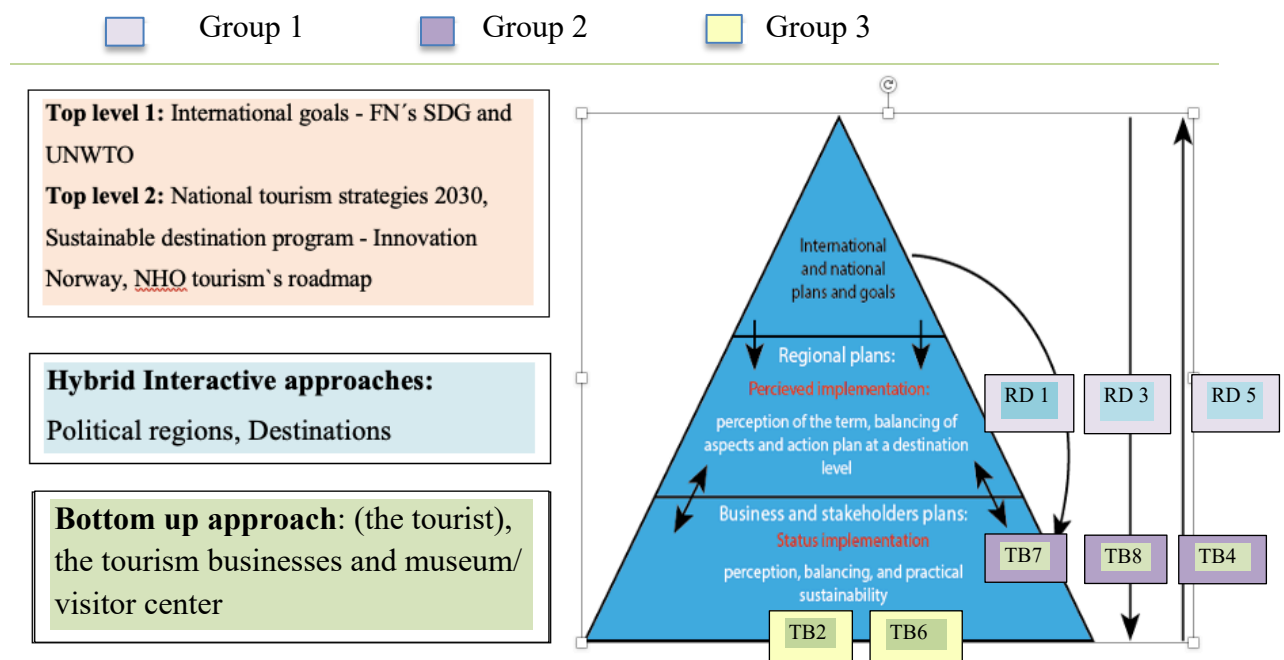


Figure 7 Sustainable Strategies Implementation model II

The information given from the regional stakeholders' point of view was expressed thoroughly and put into a global perspective. One informant said it like this: "I think I have a wide perspective, in such a way the sustainable development goals have defined it. Namely, you must think overall in society" (...) "You should think of natural resources and nature as a

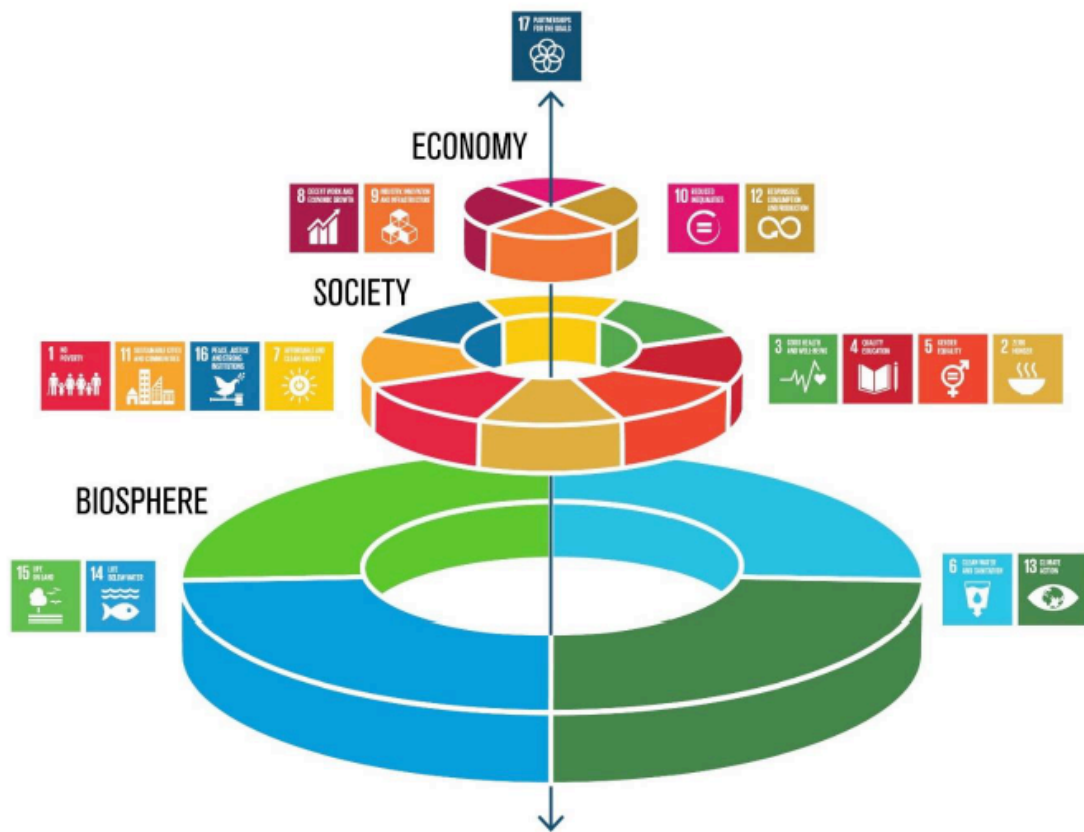


Figure 8 UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Stockholm Resilience Centre 2015

UN's SDGs are visualized through the model from Stockholm Resilience Centre, divided into three levels: biosphere, society, and economics. The model also implies that economics and societies are embedded parts of the biosphere.

The informant said:

Nature is the basic in understanding the term correctly and the foundation for sustainable goals. When I think of sustainability, I think of the earth, the planet we live on, and society. The local commitment and ownership of projects we are putting in place in Nordhordland [...] There are many considerations, with many options and thoughts. There is no right way to do it, and therefore it is quite a challenge to work with, upon which everything else is based. It is a problematic term for which no one has a solution. (1RD)

The informant is apparent that this term is not easy to perceive or act too. Sustainability has no easy and pointed solution, which is a challenge, even though there are models, strategies, and action plan to lean on.

Other regional informants are more philosophical and closer to the definition of the term: "I think it is about the way I live, which should not be in such way that my children got a degraded living standard. It is all about the use of resources." (3RD) This perception of sustainability is nothing else than concrete and bounded, with similarities to WCED's definition of sustainable development. Another informant from the regional level is more reflective of their executive practice:

That is a good question. You get a little blind when you sit and look at all these indicators, and you are supposed to work on specific indicators. However, the three pillars are natural sustainability, and then it is social sustainability, and economic sustainability. It is on these three pillars that the work is based. Within that, there is quite a lot. However, for our part and the society at large, we should contribute to good social development. (5RD)

The expression shows that the term is complex, and "a lot" can be put into it. Narrowing tasks makes one blind too and makes the informant sometimes "loose" perspectives. However, the perspective is there.

One business informant focused on what she could do as part of the solution. She put it like this:

There is a sustainable choice in everything, in what you are eating, doing, and developing. Using degradable or ecological self-produced food is the best, and it is possible, but it takes more time, is less efficient, but has a better quality. (4TB)

For businesses not daily dealing with the issue or are not coherent with other work with sustainability, no special attention is paid to it. A nature-based tourism business was concerned about the informant's point of view: "I have not considered it that well, but I think the nature should be as it is and leave no footprints." (6TB) One manager tells me that "this,

we are very concern about, and we have chosen 4 SDGs to work for in the organization."
(8TB)

Another tourism business informant said: "We should not consume, but save resources for future generations." (7TB) She goes on:

Sustainability means making good choices, and I know many people like that, not using disposable items and stuff like that. However, I think it is so much more of the term than that, that we need to have an attitude that one can make these choices, which makes us do well. We are going to have generations to come, too, right? And then, however, we cannot demand and expect everyone to use only wool for all purposes because we live in a modern world. The development we are making should be sustainable, but it also means that there are good choices for the environment, descendants, us here and now, and of course, social development. I mean, we cannot stop it completely. However, we still have to deal with the fact that we cannot use up the things. We have to make sure we do not use up all the resources. We have to have a way to take care of it. (7TB)

The statement can be understood as the choice someone has to make, which must be founded on an attitude not to consume. The following statement appears as a philosophical twist:

If you believe in sustainability, you would have to keep several thoughts in your head at once, one short perspective and one long-term perspective. According to transportation, we do not solve that today. The world will look different in the future with different and greener transportation solutions. (1RD)

As we can see, there are many positive attitudes towards sustainability in own organizations and businesses. However, it is to notice a different focus, different perspectives, or approaches to the term and its perception. Many pointed out that the nature nearby and local culture are essential resources for tourism development in Nordhordland. "We shall use knowledge from the past to shape our future. What is so important from the past, that we do not lose on the way into the future." (8TB)

One informant was also worried that the term could be worn out and lose substance and contents: "The term is worn and worn expression true, but it was maybe a period, but now I feel it now in a way one has recaptured it." (7TB)

To summarize, It is pretty clear that the term sustainability and sustainability in tourism is perceived more or less as philosophical expression. It is complex and an unachievable goal far in the future. Those who focus on sustainable issues daily or continue working with much attention might have a more holistic and transparent perception of the term. These were both businesses and regional organizations. All informants understood the use of resources for the future generation. On the other hand, there was a different approach focus between the tourism businesses and the regional organizations, as shown in Figure 7.

4.2 Sustainable tourism in practice

How to have a practical approach to the term was a concern among many informants. Additionally, it is also a complex issue but very central considering implementation. Six questions in the interview guide were illuminated to cover the issue of practice, which are as follows: 1. How do you experience the task of putting the concept of sustainable development into practice?, 2. To what extent do you or your company/organization have the motivation to develop sustainable tourism products? 3. Are you working specifically to make your company or organization look like a sustainable player? Concerning marketing communication and reputation building? 4-6. Tell us how your company works with environmental, economically, and socio-culturally considerations from a sustainable perspective? (Appendix III) An overview of systematic and non-systematic sustainable practice is shown in Table 4 below.

After finishing the interviews, the findings showed a spread of data from non-systematic and non-strategical about the issue, to being certificated businesses as in "eco-lighthouse" and as eco-tourism business, and having strategical plans systematic working with sustainability. For some informants, sustainability was an essential and natural part of the business operation: "It is what I do, and therefore easy to get certificated." (4TB) For others, it was not, or to a small degree: "No, we do not have that kind of green certificate where we do not have. We are approved, of course, to get a smile from the food safety authority that controls us purely like

that technically." (2TB) For others, it was not: "this (sustainability), I had not thought about before you asked." (6TB)

In addition, two managers put forward that they did not have a business plan for the issue. However, they stated that they thought they were operating sustainably: "Our activities are green, we use local fish and meat if we can, and follow governmental regulations according to sewage, grease suction, and garbage selection." (2BT) Interpretation to notice here, I believe that "low-hanging fruits" might also affect sustainability, even though they are not written in any plans.

Other informants were concerned about the nature and land use in the area, in such ways as: "..being disturbed" (1RD), "building down (the nature), and with all the windmill plans in the area" (6TB). Others put it like this:

Norway is a nature-based destination, isn't it? Moreover, it is mainly about balancing those considerations to take care of the resources we have for future guests and residents so that we do not degrade the experiences and maintain financial sustainability over time. (5RD)

Some informants also said that it might be possible to do more for the environment. However, a framework for doing this is necessary, with the program's help from the destination program or the Biosphere program. Two of the companies work in their network systematically toward picked SDGs. One business was "producing sustainable activities focused on local activities" (8TB). Among others was recycling and a more extended stay at the place expressed like this:

We work primarily with sustainability target number 12, and we want to contribute to knowledge that allows us to make sustainable choices in everyday life. That is somehow what we will contribute and then help people with the knowledge and expertise to fulfill. Moreover, there is a lot of the biosphere mantra about making sustainable choices in everyday life, and we will use that as this school escape concept with fellow students. (7TB)

Many the tourism businesses talked about the MAB reserve as a suitable frame for cooperation projects, such as *the Wool-route*, *A taste of Nordhordland*, and *Producers meet*

salesmen, where local food producers and craftsmen are in focus, as well as through the destination company.

This is what we have with the Wool route when we think about tourism. It is a project that matches the idea and cooperation from work on the Wool-week. The destination company marketed this like that before the corona struck. (4TB)

It appears from the empery that self-regulation can be a difficult way to go. On the other side, managers' impact, adjustment, and market adaption are the basis of framing their sustainable strategies. Those who have a program for operating sustainability in business seem to be more comfortable acting sustainably. Two of the three regional development organizations had sustainable strategies implanted in their business plans:

Yes, we are working on the plans we have made in extensive involvement from both industry and community life, the district associations, and the municipalities. It is a destination strategy and an action plan for sustainable tourism development. It is part of the certification of Innovation Norway. I can also say that we have a business strategy revised in 2019, which is on the agenda. (5RD)

Transportation is an issue of sustainability, which the businesses and organizations experience have little impact on the issue in many cases. On the other hand, some can be done as buyers of services for groups. For individuals, it is more complicated.

When we look at how we travel around, it is by car. We do not have efficient public transportation, or other means of transportation, which allow us to make a round trip by bus, for example, which would be more sustainable. Furthermore, we have a long distance between places and attractions, so we cannot plan for a bike ride. However, we think we can still develop this locally and do local businesses and attract good sustainable products. (1RD)

Travel life includes that you have to travel a place. For example, this region has a significant advantage, a short way to the city. Furthermore, I think we have such a resourceful lot of good untapped potential. However, I believe we have got a transport-wise in there, of course. However, there is nothing special about this region.

It applies to many district municipalities. We cannot take away the climate and cannot take away our geography. (3RD)

.. and then they come here, and they leave Copenhagen, Paris, Brussel, and stuff – on a long weekend, for example, and come to Norway to be here four days. Then it comes to me. That was not quite what I was thinking. You should get them on longer trips and such. First, they travel by plane and stuff, rental car, and so forth. However, I think it is better to stay with me instead of staying in a hotel in the city. Eating food, not eating and leaving it on the plate! –that is a help thinking so. (4TB)

For our part, emigration is actual, so Americans are a group that comes to us. That applies, for the sake of saw, long-haul by air and of course there will be planes, or so they come by cruise ship. I know there is a good deal that does not want the cruise tourists, but we still have to accept them, but we have to do it in the best possible way. We want people to come in smaller groups and not those who are not interested and none that is only part of a scheme because everyone should do this. Before the corona struck, a tour operator had drawings and plans ready for electric boat transport. We were in dialogue according to group arrangements. I think they got bankrupt. Some cruise operators now work with these green buses and are getting at least a greener way of operating. (7TB)

On the other side, we were also some of them optimistic according to technological developments within the transport sector: [...] there is hydrogen coming and so on. That will be the time we will see if we can at least make the energy on the boats sustainable. A cruise is a journey form that has established itself and will not disappear. I would think because people want to travel that way. And then it is the case when we travel that way. You do not travel to the same destination and not over ten countries simultaneously, except for the Mediterranean sea, but it could be a local way of travel. (5RD)

	Certificated as "eco lighthouse", eco-tourism business, "grastust" and others	Working systematically towards certification or SDGs	Not an ongoing plan, but has motivation for working sustainably.
Tourism businesses/ stakeholders	1	4	3
	Are joining joint regional projects of sustainable tourism project	I think this is an excellent way to achieve sustainability in a region to develop tourism	I have not thought about it
Tourism businesses/ stakeholders	6	6	2

Table 4 Systematic practice of sustainability in businesses and organizations

The findings show that those who had been/are in a project initiated as a sustainable tourism project at a regional level were an excellent way to work commonly with sustainability. Additionally, according to transportation emissions, there are some national issues that the businesses are related to operating sustainably.

4.3 Balancing ecological, social, and economic sustainability

Aall (2020) points out that Innovation Norway is working with ten principles of sustainable tourism, within the area of 1) nature, culture, and environmental, 2) social values, and 3) economic sustainability, which works separately, while the definition from UNWTO (2021) suggests the importance of balancing between the three aspects. An analysis done by Vestlandsforskning also shows a difference from intention to the outcome of sustainable tourism policymaking, from national to local integration. Economic consideration was prior in the local perspective (Modernisation, 2021; Aall, 2020, p. 94). To answer the research question **how to implement sustainable tourism strategies into tourism businesses?** it was an underlying issue to ask how the balancing appeared in practice. The informants were asked explicitly about this in the interview, even though it is quite an abstract question: "UNWTO

defines sustainable tourism by achieving a good balance between the environment, economy, and socio-cultural development. What challenges do you think your company/organization has to balance those three issues?"

The findings show that some informants thought this was difficult to answer. After some thinking, the answers came, and the tourism businesses brought the economy as the most challenging and prioritized issue. Several pointed out social sustainability to be the easiest because Norway is a well-functionalized society with good regulation. It was underlined that, of course, also could become better. One suggested that the economy could be the driver for nature and the opposite:

Yes, it is hard to say which one is more emphasized than anything else then. It is about balancing, but my opinion is, or my subjective opinion, that the social aspects have an excellent welfare society in many areas. Of course, we also have a lot to improve on. I guess my opinion is that it might be natural to be emphasized to a greater extent and justified with the economic aspects then. It is the nature prior to the economy that has the most focus? Not necessarily, more I would rather say that nature is a driver of the economy and vis-a-verse. (5RD)

Another regional informant expressed this: "Difficult to answer, but generally, the industry has a marginal economy and most focus on costs. Nature is often losing the battle." (1RD)

The economic issue is the most important, and the personal staff must manage stressful seasons, summer mostly, and dull periods, like in the wintertime. It should not be challenging to balance, but we need to have skilled personnel, which can be difficult. However, we manage to pay them 20-30% more wage than competitive businesses. It has taken time to get good people working for the company. (2TB)

"The economy is vital to district businesses, but some tourism businesses and cafés pick up most of their customers from the local area. So it depends on how you earn money." (3RD)

No, it is not difficult to balance the three aspects, but it is difficult to get a sustainable economy, but then I am as sustainable as possible. However, I have adjusted the consumption after the income, so yes, I am economically sustainable. However, I am

still developing the business .. but yes. I think so, which I find difficult for people to come here by car. (4TB)

It is difficult to tell, but the social aspect is quite well taken care of, and we are a nature base destination, and the economic aspect must be balanced towards this. Norway is a nature-based destination, so we need a take care of those resources for future tourists, so the experience does not deteriorate. Nature is a driving force for economic sustainability over time. For example, it has been chiefly discussed towards industry expansion, such as discussion about windmill building. (5RD)

"Do not work systematically in the business, but it is inside us to take care of the environment. However, this has been no focus." (6TB)

Difficult to balance because there is always demand for income and the use of own produced meat. The resources are used three times, nature-base, waking in the landscape, emissions, and meat. That is entirely sustainable, but it is a more expensive way. (8TB)

According to governmental system regulations, the social aspect is well being taken care of. So is also the local environmental issues, but areal conflicts are a repetitive discussion. It seems like it is easier to talk about each aspect separately than measure it and consider the balance between them.

4.4 Stakeholders` awareness of sustainability and implementation in own business.

One initial question to the informants was how they work with sustainability in their organization. Findings show different awareness by the stakeholders towards sustainability, such as from one who worried about how to compost the orange peel containing the pesticide to another stakeholder who had not had any thoughts about sustainability before it was asked. Other businesses had started implementing chosen and prior SDGs to work within the organization, finding practical cases to make it visible.

Two informants believed that the business operated entirely sustainably compared to other industries, such as using local food delivery and other local business founded on natural resources. A healthy economy is a must, and two mentioned that the workforce is well-regulated in Norwegian society. Therefore social sustainability in the businesses was a well-regulated task.

The findings show both different attitudes and prior thinking towards sustainable development among the tourism businesses, with quite some diversity of awareness. Regional developers work with sustainability internally in their organization in more or minor degrees, like certification as "Eco-lighthouse" or similar. However, they work with other businesses and actors in the region with a more holistic attitude through different projects. The Wool route is of such matter. The project was directed toward tourists and organized by several actors. On the other side, managers in tourism businesses are more focused on their organization and own market options. Two of 5 businesses were certificated or were working towards such certification. A beginning of awareness, one might say.

One of the questions to the informants was about how they work sustainability and if they had an ongoing sustainability project together with other businesses. Some worked systematically in their networking organization, but several mentioned the MAB project as a joint project. Sustainability was a framework, especially according to the sustainability of the region's culture. Some businesses call for even more joint projects about this issue.

Market communication and sustainable development motivation were also questions bound to the MAB reserve project.

As long as customers and guests demand sustainable products, it will be a matter of course as a premise in development, so that if business players want to be part of that journey, you have to change. (5RD)

Many travelers come by air, and no doubt there are some challenges with the way you get to destinations and adventure offers then, which has to change. One of the things that we focus on is increasing the period of residence once you have left. I think the vast majority agree that people will keep traveling unless it has been banned or is too expensive. Then people will have both shelters and need to travel. So it is all about the

industry to facilitate the best and most sustainable journey possible when you are first traveling. Nevertheless, I have not perceived the very great discussion in our industry. (5RD)

Large companies and company groups tend to have a more structured approach to sustainability than others because they have more resources. However, to a lesser extent, smaller businesses in the market have a third-party certification. (5RD)

4.5 Impact of the corona pandemic

The corona pandemic escalated at the beginning of 2020 and through 2021. Society was locked down with heugh travel restrictions, and the economic issue was quickly an issue for the tourism businesses. It became tricky as the market suddenly stopped.

Gössling et al. (2010) point out that "the COVID-19 crisis could be seen as an opportunity to reconsider the tourism's growth, and question the logic of more arrivals implying greater benefits."

The research was done in the middle of the pandemic. Therefore, the essential question was to consider how the pandemic has impacted the sustainable work in the tourism industry.

For the Nordhordland Biosphere Region, the COVID-19 pandemic came quite inconvenient. Every project which had started had to stop. One informant said: "The COVID-19 pandemic gave the organization much spare time and enabled them to work throughout with the sustainable monitoring system. Others mentioned that sustainable tourism projects took more time to implement because of the pandemic. One said they could not do the sustainable project because they had no visitors coming.

How the pandemic impacted the sustainable work in the tourism businesses was indifferent. The arrival numbers had a crack and impacted the emissions (Gössling et al., 2010).

The Norwegian tourism industry experienced, during the summer season, that many Norwegians traveled to native destinations during the pandemic. The pandemic, despite

difficulties, was a positive boost both for the internal tourism economy, the environment, and social sustainability.

Gössling et al. (2020) point out the possibilities of a more sustainable post-pandemic tourism sector, as the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has held an important message regarding the resilience of the tourism system. The crisis of climate change has the potential to be even more devastating.

5 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the research. The sub-issues, perception, practicing, balancing, and implementing, will be successively and section-wise discussed throughout the chapter and summarised at the end. The research question was: "***How to implement sustainable tourism strategies in local tourism businesses?***" The sub-questions were: 1) Is there a common perception of sustainability? 2) How to understand sustainable tourism in own practice, 3) is it a good balance between the aspects of ecological, social, and economic sustainability? Moreover, 4) how can sustainable policy thinking be implemented in the tourism industry?

5.1 The diverse and challenging term sustainability.

The term sustainability in the tourism industry has a history from the late 1980s; as Saarinen (2020) points out: "the definition has been tremendously varied usage and varying interpretations in another context and has become a form of ideology, political catchphrase and depending on the context, in which is being used" (Richard W. Butler, 1999, p. 10). The research shows that this can further be verified in a way. The perception of the term sustainability is fuzzy, both in the form of "sustainable development" and "sustainable tourism."

Analyzing the findings according to the overall question, it was interesting how the informants expressed their perception of the term. Some were philosophical (3RD), some were practical (2TB, 7TB), some were missionary (4TB, 8TB), some were "not attending" (6TB), and some were motivators (1RD, 3RD), and different perspectives were uncovered along. More roles might have been discovered, but they show different perceptions and perspectives. The catchy political phrase from 1999 has, in 2021, turned into reality and handling for today and the future, but the term sustainable tourism still has many sides.

On one side, a broad term such as sustainability would suit a person, a business, a region, or a state to turn it into practice in a suitable way. On the other side, a common perception of the contents of the strategies might help the efficiency of working towards a sustainable tourism destination. At least the actors have a common perception of what the content of such a term contains. For a destination or region such as Nordhordland, common sustainable development

strategies through the frame Biosphere Reserve Program are a tool to commonly understand the terminology and develop a sustainability project in the way they perceive it. The findings show various perceptions of the term sustainable tourism. It is essential to be aware of differences when shaping common strategies when that is said.

The findings show further that the informants also had different perspectives, as suggested in Table 3. The groups are suggested based on their point of view and their experience working with sustainable tourism. Regional organizations have a global-local perspective, which can be explained by more systematic and strategic plans and closer communication with national and international organizations. Their practice does not directly affect a region's environment, nature, or social sustainability. They argued that these organizations had not yet taken into use the certifications system in their organizations. Moreover, their intention of becoming a sustainable tourism region is to make the industry come in that position and that they can be a guideline on the way. Therefore, the commitment is a Biosphere Region or a sustainable tourism destination.

In section 4.1, I argue for the different perspectives. The businesses could be divided into two groups; one with a local-global perspective and one mainly focusing on own and local acting and operationalizing sustainability. On one side, you can say that some businesses have implemented global and national strategies more than others and that motivations for such acting differ.

To build a sustainable tourism industry, the perception of the term would be crucial to the business's attraction, integration, and management (Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013). As Waligo et al. put forward in their case study from Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project, "As it becomes increasingly important for stakeholders to participate in sustainable tourism, the need to develop communication strategies that can help stakeholders understand the concept becomes a primary concern." A consequence of different perspectives is to be aware of this while implementing sustainable strategies and practices in a regional project and own businesses. The common perception of respect for differentiation of perceptions might be necessary for regional inclusiveness in sustainable strategy implementation.

A simple illustration can show these opportunities or challenges to summarize the perceptions and perspectives analyzed by the findings.

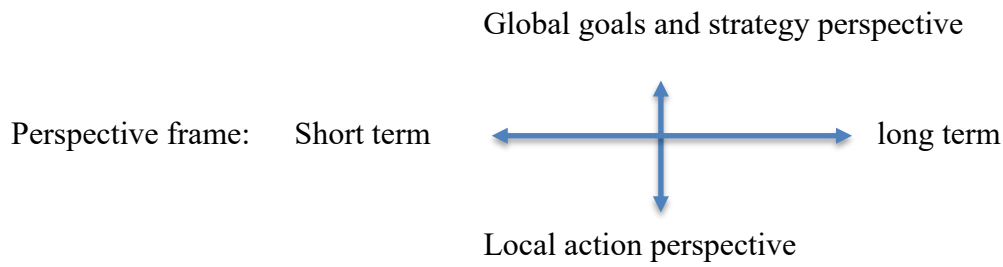


Figure 9 Frame of perspective when putting strategies into action

The discussion of the perception and perspective leads to the final debate on implementing global sustainable strategies in tourism businesses. On one side, a stakeholder needs to act locally with their own operational goals and measures, and on the other hand, they need to know the importance of future consequences. A global perspective is of advantage in understanding the future. The perception of the term can be drawn in many directions, and concretization of the term sustainability is therefore vital.

The term itself may have an approximately broad and "common" perception. All of the informants talked about the consumption of resources now and reduced for future generations, tourists, or communities. The resource is a vital "ingredient" in any tourism product. Traditionally, resources such as nature and culture have been highlighted in sustainable tourism. However, there is so much more to it, such as human resources, skills, knowledge, economic skills, entrepreneur skills, our way of living, taking care of our democracy, educational institutions, and managing biodiversity and the environment. The list is inexhaustible and should be summarized with a triple bottom line by the businesses and the community (Nygaard, 2019). According to Table 1 and Figure 4, it is not "a thing" you cannot put there? The figure is an illustration that helps us picture what sustainable development is. Table 1 is more concrete and gives a helping hand to the tourism destinations that intend to operate sustainably. When that said, all of the informants expressed it their way.

Tourism, in itself, is a pretty complex subject. Some of the value chains you control as a business, some not. You are pretty dependent on what the industry thinks and perceives when sustainability should be integrated into the tourism sector. The findings in the research showed that the more operationalized and practical the concept was acquired, the better the

understanding of it and activated it was. You can say that there are grades of how much such a term is perceived or implemented. The findings in Table 4 show that some stakeholders need more time than others and that businesses have different needs, skill resources, and economies. That, of course, the progress will depend on.

5.2 Discussion about practical sustainability in the tourism businesses

Developing standard sustainable tourism products in a region is an excellent way of helping each other by doing it the right way. But, what is the right way to work sustainable in practice? As the finding showed, one are doing sustainability as a living standard along with certifications program. Some operationalize SDGs through a project in their organizations and network, while some think they are quite sustainable or haven't considered it. The findings show that the businesses are in different stages of involvement according to the implementation of sustainable strategies, 1. Attracted to the perceive value of implementation, 2. Integration of sustainable objectives and opportunities, and 3. Management (Waligo et al., 2013). There are several directions to become a sustainable enterprise. Several program can fit, such as Eco-tourism, Eco-lighthouse, Iso-certifications, Green Key, Fair Trade, Svaneriket, Grüne Punkte, Blått Flagg and others. Common for them all, is that they have attributes for sustainability, which they are measured for (Norway, 2022; Nygaard, 2019, p. 103). Alternative to official programs, is to form own business plan to become sustainable. Business are also quite different, but a certification plan could be of guideline in working sustainably.

Innovation Norway's sustainable destination program is the program for 23 Norwegian tourism destinations. A central question to ask, is this enough effort to reach the 2030 goals? NHO Reiseliv is a business and networking organization tourism businesses. They have established a climate accounting, which monitors the climate situation. But sustainability is so much more than that, as Table 1 page 25 - 26. To implement national strategies, the government established a selection to put a broader view at sustainability implementation through the everyday work by the destination companies. On one side, you can say that it is that businesses are responsible for working more sustainably.

Tourism destination are the tool for national authorities through the Innovation Norway program to implement sustainable strategies. With not more than 23 destinations certificated, one can ask if this is enough for the total national engagement.

Maybe a political region claiming sustainable strategies, such as Nordhordland with the Biosphere program, can be a way to go as well. If all destinations are marked sustainable, than it is nothing? I would say no, because there are very useful monitoring tools in that program. But there can be different directions to the same goal. Some actors operationalize their SDGs strategies into good sustainable practice, pointing out that this is good help. Some have not been busy thinking about it, "have so much else to do", and resources are not available and not to prior, but could we do it together it is much better. This is the by Waligo et al. named as "stakeholders recognition capacity", when developing stakeholders engagement strategies (Waligo et al., 2013, p. 349).

Maybe we could brand it also, with MAB reserve? It is also important to keep the trust in the market. No one of the businesses was concerned about being perceived as "greenwashed," "I think it is rather the petrol industry that needs to be greenwashed." The motivation to practice sustainability was also high, but choices could be expensive, time-consuming, or personal needed.

One business put forward that the regulations in Norway are so good that businesses work sustainably. However, on the other side, other businesses claim that regulation makes them build functionalities that they do not need and do not want but are necessary to universal requirements. That is not sustainable environmentally, but maybe socially. There is no allowance for dispensation in this case. Some authors claim that sustainability should be self-regulated, but in my empery, the primary attitude is to get a helping framework to do sustainability in practice. This is supported by Waligo et al. (2013) who discuss a hand-holding procedure to implement sustainable strategies into tourism businesses. However, it has also to do with attitudes and sustainable daily choices. Some complicated matters are to notice, such as transportation; more manageable, but then more expensive and time-consuming.

As a researcher, I had to repeat the question and explain it in two cases. For those working with concrete SDGs, certification, or indicators according to destination certification, the

research showed that this was clearer to perceive, convey, and work in a practical and tourist-experienced way. Such practice was exemplified with the school escape concept by 7TB and paths in the landscape by 8TB. One certificated business had named its concept "rural time travel" and all of the offers' value chains were optimized for sustainable thinking and practice. That shows that it is possible to put a term and a strategy into action. As an informant said, "it is a way of living, " a "lifestyle": "I try to be self-sustaining, and then the value chain is quite circular." (4TB)

"What often makes more environmentally friendly solutions maybe costs a little more money, and we see that some people like that. We have an example with electric mousetraps. They cost 3 - 4 times more. So we get the discussion then." (8TB)

Tourism developers at the regional level are more conscious of the three-dimension definition than those operating at the institutional and business level. They were more concerned about the environmental and natural impact. It is difficult to emphasize the term's holistic and climate-change issue working with strategic development when operationalizing sustainability. It is more challenging to think practical and operationalized. Cooperation on both levels might be the optimized option to understand it better. Two of the actors cooperated with SDG's goals and were quite clear about what to work with and how to understand sustainability in their tourism business. One was certificated on behalf of ecological operations and attitude in practice, and therefore the normal in that business. Others pointed out that the practice is sustainable in such a well-regulated Norwegian society. Some pointed out that getting tourists from Paris by plane, or German fishing tourists by pollution cars, is no sustainable tourism practice. The pandemic has changed the tourist's attitude, which is more and more concerned about sustainability in the tourism industry. The green shift has come to the tourism industry, but the politic of the international tourism industry has to become adjustable to the UN's sustainable development goals. The literature shows that this is a challenge for the industry.

5.3 Balancing ecological, social, and economic sustainability

Aall (2020) points out that Innovation Norway is working with ten principles of sustainable tourism, within the area of 1) nature, culture, and environmental, 2) social values, and 3)

economic sustainability, Tabel 2, which works differently from how the definition to UNWTO and UNEP (2005, p. 12) do. They suggest that balancing between the three aspects is essential: "It is important to appreciate that these three pillars are in many ways *interdependent* and can be both *mutually reinforcing* or in *competition*. Delivering sustainable development means striking a balance between them." Aall (2020) further claims that the economic aspect is a remedy for achieving the basics of sustainable livelihood, ecological and social. Therefore balancing, as a part of the research question, was an under-issue. Many business informants mentioned economics as a critical pillar for development, "as long as the industry has a marginal economy," one informant said. Nevertheless, on the other side, it is about how you earn money, not at the expense of nature or the social conditions. A concretization and a raising impact awareness for businesses and destinations need to be discussed individually and commonly. Implementing sustainable strategies would be the way to go. However, how to do that in a good way? This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

A result of this is that economic development can be seen both as sustainable and not (Aall, 2020). For a district like Nordhordland, with no developed mass tourism, the focus seems to manage to be economically sustainable, and almost only that. That was expressed by many of the informants. As the findings show, nature and social sustainability are more taken for granted. Nature is almost taken for granted as long as scenic and diverse landscapes surround us with heather, coast, fjords, and high mountains. On the other side, nature is the basis for tourism development. As one informant said: "Suddenly all the high mountains plateau had big windmill plans. Such impact is not suitable for sustainable tourism destination development.

Aall also criticizes Innovation Norway's program for not concerning greenhouse gas emissions. The findings show that this is a difficult task, of which the tourism businesses are not concerned enough. However, they are concerned about environmental pollution and its effect on climate change. For tourism development, the economic foundation has a strong sense of having the lead attention, and that economy goes at the expense of nature. It is also claimed that nature often loses in area cases, even though tourism mainly depends on nature exposure.

Based on the findings and above discussion, a goal achievement in sustainable business development should be more focused on achieving the balance between the three pillars. It is the balance in itself that secure the proper development.

5.4 Implementing sustainable tourism strategies into tourism businesses

Brendehaug et al. (2017) investigated how sustainability may be integrated into tourism planning in Sogn and Fjordane, as the policy strategy on sustainable tourism in 2015 shifted from a sector approach to an integrated approach. Findings showed that sustainable tourism was partially integrated, with a high degree of sector organization. It had a weak structure of overall tourism policy integration. Last, the discussion of the implementation of sustainable tourism policy: "integration of sustainable tourism has been stimulated by national horizontal integration, bottom-up integration prepared by institutional changes, public participation and by active use of the municipal system of planning." It is interesting to have this in mind discussing the implementation process of sustainability in the sector of tourism itself.

The definition of *implementation* is the process of moving an idea from concept (policy) to reality in business (action) (Hall, 2009). Implementation refers more to the building process rather than the design process. The strategies of the Biosphere Region Nordhordland are discussed as a hybrid interactive approach that includes meeting with tourism businesses and others and negotiating how to put priority inputs into a strategic plan (Nordhordland, 2021b). As mentioned in Chapter 1.3, the region has developed a strategic plan. Nevertheless, some were still uncertain about the program's content: "Funny that you asked because we discussed that. How can the companies know how to use the program when we did not know exactly as supervisors? Here we have a pedagogical challenge."

All informants were motivated to work with sustainability issues in their organization. However, not all had come to the implementation level to have it in their plans or being certificated sustainably: "Yes, we have the motivation and have done very much, but not specified in the document." However, safety rules are in place." or "It is so strongly woven into everything we do, so it lies in our spinal cord." Other is certificated and experience being sustainable is an easy task.

The research also covered stakeholder engagement in the sustainable development project, where many informants mentioned different Biosphere projects as relevant for their engagement within the frame of sustainable tourism. "Of course, we have been involved in that biosphere info and work meetings, in such networking groups." Several pointed out the Wool route and the local food-producing project – "the Taste of Nordhordland," as excellent projects to start working with sustainable issues. One said: "It is about the tourism project, the Wool-route, where we started working together in a bigger area with other stakeholders and coordinated by the Biosphere administration and project leader from VisitBergen Unfortunately, it stopped then the corona struck." (8TB) Even though the project stopped, there is the willingness to enter them again: "Then we are a part of the Biosphere reserve, which affects all of our departments. Therefore, it is essential that we are invited into the work of the Biosphere program and how we should bring it on in the future." (8TB)

Several studies have uncovered different challenges in implementing sustainable tourism policies in different countries (Albrecht, 2017; Muangasame & McKercher, 2015; Waligo et al., 2013). The findings show challenges here as well, with capacity, economic and organizational, bureaucratic, and pedagogical issues. These challenges can differ depending on one's business and what kind of tourism district or destination one belongs to. The challenges need to be identified, pass the obstruction, and become more balanced in sustainable development. A joint tourism project could be a suitable frame for implementing strategies. The perspective of one group with the hybrid interactive implementation approach, TB7, TB8, and TB4, learning their perspective as "acting local with a global perspective," is argued to be the ideal process of reducing the gap between sustainable tourism strategies and sustainable tourism businesses. Nevertheless, a standard sustainable policy must be communicated through practical projects and cases. A tool for measuring the achieved status for the region might be by using the developed indicator measurement by Innovation Norway for sustainable destinations (Norway, 2017).

6 Summary

This thesis has investigated and discussed the process of becoming a sustainable tourism industry in Norway through a political region as the MAB reserve Nordhordland is, along with the developing and monitoring sustainable destination program of Innovation Norway. Much research has been done on sustainable tourism over the last three decades. For implementing sustainable strategies in tourism businesses, increased attention is recognized from different perspectives. Still, there are issues to uncover. The concern of this thesis was to investigate the gap between the strategic and operational levels of putting sustainable strategies and goals into action. Underlying issues investigated were perception of sustainability, putting it into practice, and balancing the sustainable pillars. The political region of Nordhordland is the investigation area.

In December 2020, United Nations General Assembly recalled the outcome of the 2005 World Summit Outcome and reaffirmed the resolution 70/1 of September 25th, 2015; "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, bypassing a Resolution 75/229 Promotion of sustainable tourism." (Nations, 2020) Torres-Delegado et al. (2014) claim that sustainable tourism development is determined mainly by SMEs and local destinations. The thesis aims to enlighten the gap between international and national sustainable tourism strategies and how this is operationalized and taken into action by regional and local stakeholders. The case of the investigation was the first MAB reserve in Norway, Nordhordland Biosphere Reserve, to which the program requires strategies containing sustainable thoughts and action.

The policy-action relationship is explained by C. Michael Hall (2009) using the archetypal approaches to implementation and implications for tourism policy. The hybrid and interactive approaches and networking, sub-governance and the bottom-up approach, and street-level and local autonomy are the ideals of communication and action plans within a relationship between two levels that must work together. Using qualitative research for the investigation and in-depth interviews among eight stakeholders in Norhordland enabled me to enlighten the research question. As a researcher, I used a reflexive and interpretive position to analyze the findings in the context to which they belonged. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg put it, the researcher needs to know the complex relationship between knowledge production and the different context in such a process. The findings cover the MAB reserve Norhordland and are

not to be generalized. Nevertheless, other political regions that want to systemize the implementation of sustainable tourism strategies can learn some of the challenges from this study.

When implementing sustainable strategies in the tourism industry, one might consider a gap between local and regional stakeholders' perceptions of what sustainability is or should be about. Also, a difference among the businesses is expected as well. Indifference does not need to be a problem, but in making common development strategies in sustainable tourism plans or projects, it is necessary to know a common perception.

Putting sustainable strategies into the right choice of action is the primary goal. There are many ways of monitoring the industry's practice. As the region of Nordhordland is submitted to the destination VisitBergen, the investigation covered Innovation Norway's Sustainable Destination Program. The program is suitable for sustainable practice management of concrete indicators in the industry. Sustainable innovation project it is less efficient. Stakeholders that use other certifications programs, like Eco-tourism, Eco-lighthouse, and others, are more into systematic thinking of sustainable practice than others. Such certification programs are an excellent supplement to the destination program. The certification programs are also an efficient way to communicate the sustainable action of the business and the destination. How to make good choices for sustainability is an adequate issue the stakeholder put forward.

Carlo Aall (2020) forwarded the importance of balancing the three pillars of sustainable development, which also is specified in the UNWTO's definition of sustainable development. The art of balancing is complex, and different challenges occur. Especially economical prior to natural and social issues is a task. Social issues are most actual with over-tourism, to which Nordhordland is not challenged. Social sustainable issues are in the businesses well-regulated in Norwegian society. For that business who are certificated, is signal given of not having issues of balancing sustainable pillars. Nevertheless, the issue is essential, and the triple bottom line needs to balance.

The main research question was **about implementing sustainable strategies in the tourism industry**. The comprehensive analyses of content and context led to the suggestion of using joint local projects with sustainable ideas and practical action to lift forward sustainable

development in the tourism industry. Successful joint projects such as the Wool route and the Taste of Nordhordland as part of the sustainable strategies were forwarded among several as an excellent way to implement strategies. By doing such projects together, innovation becomes a bonus and a positive result.

A critical view of the destination program is that only 23 destinations in Norway are certificated as sustainable tourism destinations. The process is going too slow. Meanwhile, how other destinations can work is discussed throughout the study, and suggestions and best cases are to be found.

The MAB program is a suitable framework for working with sustainable tourism projects, but there is little communication about the program's content. With a more substantial and more straightforward strategy formulation, operationalized and put into a concrete action plan, the issue is entirely in a different light. Those stakeholders who are operationalizing SDGs in their own business and network are much more conscious of how the MAB program can utilize common challenges.

7 Reflections and suggestions for further studies

Implementing tourism strategies for sustainable development has been an exciting journey and an interesting theme to investigate. It is a broad theme, but no less important. I would have liked to go further, but the frame of the master thesis could not allow that. If it were to go further and expand the horizon, I would recommend a combined investigation of co-creation in the networking of innovation in the case of sustainable tourism. Taking care of culture, nature, traditions, and local quality of life and keeping the consumption and economic responsible might be perceived as less expanding. The green shift demands much innovation, especially for the transportation sector and new technologies, but for so much more. Innovation in the economy, with circular economy and ways of sharing travel consumption, are all issues to be investigated.

The corona made the world tourism economy experience how the global travel might need a rest, also some local travel struggling with over-tourism. UN expects more than 10 billion people in 2100. Social science will need to consider *fair travel* without discussing it much further here. For example, should travel be rationalized for the industrialized countries. or the amount of traveling pr year pr lifetime, and so on? Some area can cope with quite a lot more tourists, such as Nordhordland. How to benefit from the fact that most tourists are drawn to popularities and where other tourists travel could be an interesting case.

Sustainable tourism research might expand more in the research position of the quality of value cocreation in travel-quiete areas. The movement of Cittaslow (slow food) in the 1980s could be of such interest. Two Norwegian cities have joined the international organization. Should travel be regulated, or should market live its own life? What does it do to the metropolitans on which income from tourism depends? Degrowth has been discussed in research for some time, but less how the constructed phenomena of *fair tourism* should be. Research needs to be in a leading position to question such issues.

This thesis's limitation or challenge has been the global-local nexus and keeping the investigation of such a complex agenda into quality research. It has, nevertheless, been quite interesting to raise global questions and experience local businesses' challenges in those matters, both ethical and economic. Why should they welcome tourists from the other side of the world? If they do not do it, others do. One business talked about making good choices.

However, what is a good choice? Only welcome local Norwegians? As humankind, do we live a respectable global life together? War and pandemics is a threat to global travel. Has the time for local and slow travel come? The green shift might give us a new way of living unless new technologies and new energy production save our free and unregulated travel experience.

During the COVID19 pandemic, local and global tourism was discussed in the media quite a lot. Moreover, I think the industry had a significant opportunity to show what type of industry they want to be also. This chance is soon gone.

My reflection upon the writing process is that I would have liked to write the thesis in my native language and be able to express the meaning more appropriately. Additionally, having the interviews in Norwegian and then translating them into another language, the substantial or the meaning can be lost. The language issue has been the most challenging part. Secondly, the broad theme was quite challenging as well. If I were to write to thesis again, I would only concentrate on a narrower topic of sustainable tourism strategy implementation. Nevertheless, the issue could have lost the complexity and the context in which it needs to be discussed.

It has been a fun journey, and I hope my interest in the subject of *sustainable tourism politics* will increase from here.

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Appendices

Appendix I Information letter to the respondents

Til reiselivsaktører i Nordhordland biosfæreområde.

Førespurnad om deltaking i undersøking vedkommande masteroppgåve med tittel: "Sustainable tourism and stakeholder`s sustainability"

Førespurnad om deltaking:

Dette er ein formell førespurnad om du kan tenke deg å delta i undersøkinga eg skal gjere om bærekraftig reiseliv, då som grunnlag for masteroppgåve. Som eit ledd i utdanninga «Master in Tourism Studies» ved Universitetet i Tromsø, campus Alta, skal eg gjere eit forskingsarbeid i høve oppgåva. Det vil seie at UiT Norges arktiske universitet ved institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier, er ansvarleg for at prosjektet held forsvarleg kvalitet. Kontaktinformasjon til både meg og rettleiaren min finn du til slutt i dette skrivet.

Bakgrunn for prosjektet og tema for undersøkinga.

Som eit ledd i utdanninga, skal eg gjennomføre eit forskingsarbeid og skrive ei masteroppgåve basert på den, vurdert opp mot eksisterande teori på området. Tema for oppgåva er bærekraftig reiseliv, og intensjonen er å lære meir om korleis bæregrepet «bærekraftig reiseliv» vert oppfatta i næringa og blant dei som jobbar med bærekraftig reiselivsutvikling på eit reisemål. Konkret har eg avgrensa studiet til å omfatte den fyrste UNESCO Man and Biosphere regionen i Norge, Nordhordland, der bærekraftig reiseliv er satt på dagsorden og er ein sentral del av utviklingsstrategien for området. Felles for alle interessentane som vert intervjua, er at dei er ein aktør i reiselivet tilhøyrande i biosfæreområdet Nordhordland, og har interesse for å dele si oppfatning om omgrepet «bærekraftig reiseliv» og korleis det påverkar det daglige arbeidet med bærekraftig utvikling i området. Omgrepet er vidt og famnar om mykje, derfor ynskjer eg å sjå nærare på om det er ei felles oppfatning om korleis eit slikt omgrep blir konkretisert av ulike reiselivsaktører. Funn vert så diskutert opp mot teorien om temaet. Dette finn eg svært spennande å finne ut av og lære meir om. Bonus for prosjektet, er om det også kan vere ei støtte til vidare utvikling av bærekraftig reiseliv i Nordhordland, men er ikkje eit sentralt tema i oppgåva.

Kva inneber det for deg å delta i denne undersøkinga?

Eg har førebudd ei rekkje spørsmål som eg ynskjer å stille deg, og dei vil i utgangspunktet vere dei same for alle informantar. Desse vil du få tilsendt på førehand. Det er spørsmål som gjev deg høve til å svare så ope som mogleg. Eg ynskjer å lære om din kunnskap og erfaringar når det gjeld operativt reiseliv og dei bærekraftige dimensjonane i både di bedrift eller den organisasjon du tilhøyrrer. I tillegg ynskjer eg å undersøke korleis strategiarbeidet for heile regionen innan bærekraftig utvikling blir oppfatta, ut frå definisjonen «bærekraftig reiseliv», jmf. UNWTO, World Tourism Organisation, og program for bærekraftige destinasjoner av Innovasjon Norge. Intervjuet vil kunne vare i omlag 30- 60 minutt og det vert lagra som lydopptak på ekstern disk og sletta etter ferdigstilt prosjekt. Intervjuet vert så transkribert, skrive om til tekst, for så å nyttast i samanlikning med teori eg har lese på temaet. Alle opplysningar vert anonymisert. Eg vil kontakte deg pr. telefon for å finne passende tid for å snakke saman. Intervjuet vert gjort fortrinnsvis via Teams eller telefon.

Personvern.

Alle opplysningar du gjev er det først og fremst eg som har tilgang til. Det kan vere at også rettleiar Kristian A. Ellingsen ynskjer å ta ein kikk på noko av materialet. Likevel, all informasjon vert halde konfidensielt og rettmessig handtert i høve til nasjonale reglar for personvern. Eg må kunne gjengi enkelte sitat i oppgåva, men dei vert då anonymisert, og vil ikkje kunne sporast tilbake til deg som person. Ved prosjektet sin slutt vil alle data bli sletta.

Frivillig å delta.

Det er frivillig å delta i undersøkinga, og ynskjer du å avslutte eller trekke deg frå intervjuet, så står du heilt fritt det det, når det måtte vere. Du treng heller ikkje ha ei grunngjeving for det. Alle opplysningane dine vert då sletta. Om du finn brot på det eg har sagt, så har du full rett til å klage oppgåva inn til Datatilsynet. Ynskjer du å lese oppgåva før publisering, så er du velkommen til det òg.

Prosjektslutt er satt til 31. juli 2021 og når oppgåva er godkjent vil alle data, lydfiler, transkribering og personlege data verte sletta.

Studiet er registrert i NSD – Norsk Senter for forskningsdata AS. Prosjektet har referansenummer **774885**. Du kan sjølv ta kontakt med NSD vedkommande spørsmål til deira vurdering av prosjektet. Dei kan kontaktast på epost; personverntjenester@nsd.no eller på tlf. 55 58 21 17.

Takkar så mykje for at du tok deg tid til å lese dette, og så håpar eg at du har lyst til å gje ditt viktige bidrag til undersøkinga i prosjektet.

Med vennleg helsing

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Appendix II Form of consent

FORM OF CONSENT – SAMTYKKESKJEMA

Masteroppgåve: Sustainable tourism and stakeholder`s sustainability

Intervjuansvarlig: Torill Torsvik Størkersen

Prosjektrettleiar: Kristen Albert Ellingsen

All informasjon og opplysningar som vert referert i oppgåva, vil verte anonymisert. Ved sitat som vert referert, vert teksta som «respondent 1», «respondent 2», osb.» Det skal ikkje vere mogleg å kjenne att personopplysningane i oppgåva.

Du samtykkjer i at intervjuet vert tatt opp som lydopptak og at informasjonen som vert gitt, berre vert brukt som informasjon til denne masteroppgåva. Alle lydopptak vert berre til brukt til dette formålet og for studenten. Etter at masteroppgåva er levert og godkjent, vert alle lydopptak sletta. Alle spørsmål som blir stilt er med formål om å bidra til masteroppgåva, som er omtalt i meir detalj i informasjonsskrivet som høyrer til samtykkeskjema.

Om du ynskjer at noko skal leggest til, så noter gjerne her:

Du kan når som helst trekke deg frå intervjuet/undersøkinga.

Eg, Torill Torsvik Størkersen, takker så mykje for tida di og bidraget ditt til dette arbeidet. Eg skal handsame informasjonen med den største respekt.

Sted og dato

Eg samtykkjer:

Informants

Appendix III Interview Guide

INNLEIING/BAKGRUNN	
Spørsmål 1	Kan du fortelje litt om deg sjølv
Sondering	Namn, alder, bustad
Spørsmål 2	Kva type bedrift/ organisasjon høyrer du til?
Sondering	Overnattingsbedrift, opplevingssenter, kulturinstitusjon, transportbedrift, museum, destinasjonsselskap, regionalt utviklingsselskap
Spørsmål 3	Kan du fortelje litt om korleis bedrifta di/ organisasjonen arbeider med berekraft eller berekraftig utvikling?
Sondering	Fortel eller forklar di praktisk tilnærming av omgrepet bærekraftig reiseliv. Presiserer at dette er eit anonymt svar.
Spørsmål 4	Deltar bedrifta di/ organisasjonen din i berekraftige utviklingsprosjekt saman med andre bedrifter eller i regi av destinasjonsselskapet? Fortel.
	Fortel om engasjementet i bærekraftige reiselivsprosjekt du/ bedrifta deltar i.
TEMA	
Forståinga av omgrepet berekraft i reiselivssamanheng.	
Spørsmål 5	Kva forstår du med omgrepet bærekraft?
Sondering	Fortel det du ynskjer i forhold til dette omgrepet/ temaet, og utdjup.
Spørsmål 6	Korleis opplever du «oppgåva"/utfordringa med å sette omgrepet berekraftig utvikling ut i praksis?
Sondering	Fortel det du ynskjer å fortelje, utdjup gjerne.
Spørsmål 7	I kva grad har du/ bedrifta di/organisasjonen din motivasjon til å utvikle berekraftige reiselivsprodukt.
Sondering	Fortel litt om det..
Spørsmål 8	Jobbar du konkret med å få bedrifta di/ organisasjonen din til å framstå som ein bærekraftig aktør? marknadskommunikasjon, omdømmebygging (Norway, 2021b)
Sondering	Korleis?
Spørsmål 9	WTO definerer bærekraftig reiseliv som det å balansere mellom tre sjølvstendige aspekt ved reiselivsutviklinga: miljøomsyn, bærekraftig økonomi, og sosiokulturelle forhold. Klarer di bedrift/ organisasjon å handtere ein slik balansegang? I så fall korleis?
TEMA	
Berekraft - balanse mellom miljøomsyn, økonomi, og sosiokulturelle forhold.	
Spørsmål 10	Definisjonen på bærekraftig utvikling, er at utviklinga imøtekjem behov i dag, utan å øydeleggje moglegheitene for at kommande generasjonar skal få dekkja sine behov. Fortel korleis di bedrift arbeider med miljøomsyn, i et bærekraftig perspektiv.
Sondering	Deltar de i nokon form for miljøsertifisering? Miljøfyrtårn, Svanemerket, Green Key, Reise Grønt. Iso sertifisering, Biologisk mangfald, avfallshandtering etc.
Spørsmål 11	Fortell meg korleis di bedrift arbeider med økonomi, i et bærekraftig perspektiv?
Sondering	Er lønsemda god? , soliditet og investeringsmoglegheiter? Likviditet? Arbeidskapital?

Spørsmål 12	Fortel korleis di bedrift arbeider med sosiokulturelle forhold, i et berekraftig perspektiv?
Sondering	Berekraftig arbeidsstokk, liten turnover, særleg kompetanse, langsiktig arbeid m. HMS?
Sondering	Nøgde gjester?
Spørsmål 13	WTO definerer berekraftig reiselivsutvikling, med det å oppnå en god balanse mellom de tre områda miljø, økonomi og sosiokulturelle forhold. Kva for nokre <u>utfordringar</u> meiner du og di bedrift/organisasjon har med å balansere mellom dei tre områda på ein god måte, om det er nokon?
Sondering	Fortel kva du meiner om det.
Spørsmål 14	Har koronapandemien påverka arbeidet med bærekraft i di bedrift/ organisasjon på nokon måte?
Sondering	Det vere i høve miljøomsyn, bærekraftig økonomi, sosiokulturelle forhold.
TEMA	AVSLUTTANDE
Spørsmål 15	Er det noko du ynskjer å legge til som me ikkje har pratet om når det gjeld berekraftig reiseliv og berekraftig utvikling?
	Tusen takk for at du stilte opp til dette intervjuet, og eg lurar på om eg kan ta kontakt igjen om det er svar som eg finn at du gjerne må utdjupe meir for meg?