INGO project

WP 3: Tourism

Brief I

May 2018

Dalarna University working group:

Susanna Heldt-Cassel

Ioanna Farsari

Eugenio Conti

This Brief provides information on the preliminary findings so far by Dalarna University Work Group for WP3 INGO project. The purpose of this report is to inform and disseminate achievements up to now.

For more information you may contact Susanna Heldt-Cassel shc@du.se

---

Some info about INGO project and Work Package 3: forest-based experiences

Forest-based tourism and recreational activities is an area of growing importance globally but also in Nordic countries where an increasing interest in the recreational value of forests can be noticed. Nevertheless, forest and park managers should be provided with tools and knowledge to develop viable products. In spite of the growing research in the field, very little is known regarding the **visitors to Nordic forests** and more particularly international visitors who is a fast-growing segment in Nordic tourism. WP3 will develop new knowledge about the **experiences of international visitors in Inner Scandinavia** as well as **new business models** for tourism business in the area to develop sustainable products. More specifically, it will examine:

- How tourists experience forests, how value is created in that experience, and how are they mediating this experience?
- What is the role of Mobile and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in these experiences?
- How are tourists relating to the place (forest) they are visiting? How are forest experiences related with place attachment
- How can business develop sustainable products based on the forest resources?

The first three questions are being worked by Dalarna University and the last one by Högskolan in Innlandet. Case studies will be in **Fulufjället** forest in Sweden and Norway and **Trysil** in Norway. The developments to attract international tourists in the area, together with on-going projects for the development of nature-based tourism in the region make them particularly interesting to study.

The pilot research

The current, pilot phase of the research is based on the analysis of photographs and accompanied text posted on Instagram by International visitors in Swedish forests. First, photographs are analysed to reveal what the visitors depict in their posted photographs. At a next stage, users are contacted and interviewed using Direct function on Instagram to get a more thorough understanding of their experience. Up to this stage, posts written in English, German, French and Dutch have been analysed.

What we look at when analysing the posts on Instagram are:

- the photographs themselves (ie. what do they depict, what message do they convey);
- how users explain their own experiences (in private communication with the researcher)
- the text accompanying the photographs, and
- the profile theme/tag from the user under which each entry is posted

All the above allow a better understanding of how individuals actually experience forests; of the role of Instagram in mediating the experience; and ultimately how is value created in forest-based activities.

Some preliminary findings

What the users depict in the photos

- The landscape. People may appear on these pictures or not
- Single trees
- Wildlife
- Hiking activity. Occasionally the activity can be depicted in relation to an achievement, such as, standing on the top of a rock, or posing next to the waterfall
- Dog and/or dog owner(s) in the wilderness
- Group picture with forest in the background
- Gears, tools, or car, that suggest an activity or the arrival/beginning of an experience

Interestingly, the pattern shown so far is very different from the one normally seen on Instagram in general and for other kinds of experience: for instance, almost no selfie picture is present.

How users having posted pictures of "Landscapes" explain their experiences in forests

Nature in contrast to daily urban life

Interviewees discuss their experience in nature as a detox form daily, stressing, urban life; an experience in a context of peacefulness and genuine beauty. They describe it as a re-connectedness to nature and to primary elements, a detoxification and a differentiation from daily life.

> "sometimes, we are so busy in our everyday life and we forget to look around and see how beautifully made our world is. The beauty of nature is fee, but maybe sometimes we give more importance to other more material and expensive things."
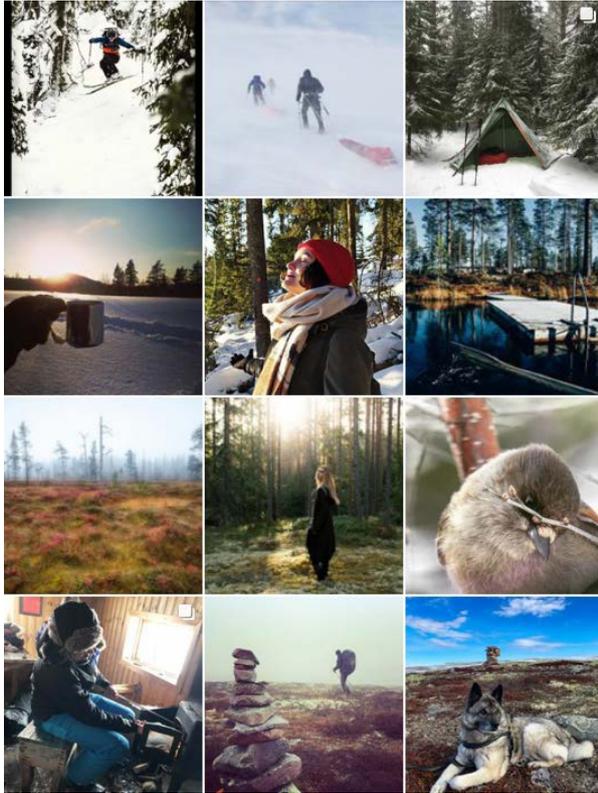
Nature as a goal for the "other", the different, the genuine.

The natural landscape emerged as a place directly connected with genuine emotions. These emotions are related with something "other" than the usual environment experienced at home, and described with words that refer with *isolation*, *silence*, *contemplation*.

"It is important to disconnect and admire the moment, to cherish the beauty around us. And the simple things, authenticity."

Why users post on Instagram photos of their experience

As some of the users have explained, Instagram is seen as a tool "*keep memories*" "*on which to reflect*" and "*to digest the experience*".

✓ What is revealed from these findings is the role of Instagram, and consequently the social media, as a tool which mediates the experience. The experience continues after the actual visit and that adds value to the visit itself.
✓ More knowledge is needed to understand this phase of the experience in order to be able to offer sustainable, rewarding and highly satisfying experiences which even serve as 'ambassadors' and a powerful marketing tool.

The texts accompanying their pictures: meanings and communities of value

Users often use short text to emphasise the meaning conveyed with the picture. For instance, colours are mentioned when the focus should be on the colours, as well as words such as "zen", "calm", "for free", to denote how the users themselves relate to the picture.

"It was more of a way to communicating what makes me not stressed and tranquil. […] to some extent, "zen" represents me: I am a spiritual person, I practise yoga, I love nature […] that trip in the mountain was intended to de-stress both me and my brother"
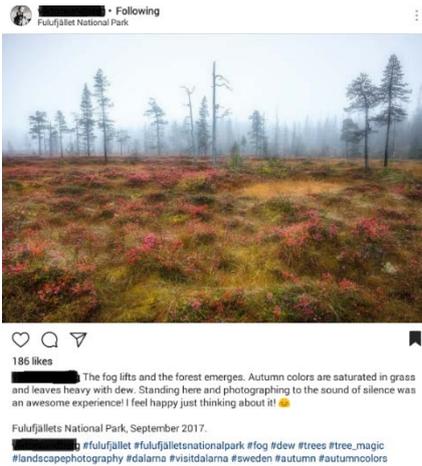
In other words, text and hashtags helps in clarifying the object, its meaning and value for the user. Hashtags are used to attempt at connecting with a larger community of value, which the users think is able to share the same feelings and meanings.

"I picked hashtags connected with the objects of the pictures, therefore with everything connected with nature, trees and silence. […] to communicate, to understand or see is others as well see and feel what you do"

✓ What is revealed from these findings is once more the importance of Instagram as a powerful tool in communicating values within groups of users who share similar values and its role in influencing
✓ A connection to the landscape is expressed that stays in the collective memory of the group.
✓ In this way, experience continues, evolves and is communicated after the actual visit.

Profile themes

Several participants try to convey one or more "themes" to create and communicate a profile identity, which is made of "moods", conditions, as well as "aesthetical patterns". In this way, the meaning of places come to be **renegotiated** to fit with the overreaching theme, a value of the experience which is 'different' and 'comes after' the experience itself.

✓ This suggests that tourism places are dynamic, fluid, not isolated, and renegotiated.
✓ Understanding of forests as a setting for tourism experiences, is constantly changing even for the same visitor, as a result of their own trajectory but also of what they see in other social media users.

Conclusions

The preliminary findings so far, suggest that the combinations of picture and text posted by users of Instagram, reveal similar experiences of nature to those found in other settings. That is that nature is seen as having an internal value or nature as a setting for something of value, may it be an activity, a sensation, or being part of a group. The experience of a forest is a dynamic one, constantly changing based also on social media interactions.

NATURE WALK
Talking Trees -Indigenous Walking Tour
198 kr DKK per person
★★★★★ 21