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What can a National Park bring to Gotland?

A case study on Bästeträsk National Park in Sweden

Giorgia Alberti

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Abstract

The role of community participation in protected areas has long been debated. Sweden is in the process of establishing two new National Parks, of which one is located on the island of Gotland. In order to figure out the best approach to management of the area, it is important to listen to the residents. Through a qualitative study, I have therefore investigated whether residents would like to be included in the Park implementation and management, along with how the National Park could help Gotland reach its sustainability agenda by 2040. The findings show that communities are eager to be included in the National Park project, but also that Region Gotland should revise the way they address regional development.

Faculty of Science and Technology

Uppsala University, Visby

Subject reader: Gunilla Rosenqvist

Examiner: Ulrika Persson-Fischier

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

National Parks have long been used to ensure the protection of a certain area's nature and biodiversity (Higham & Inge Vistad, 2011; Mascia & Pailler, 2011). Moreover, in the past many National Parks were created only to keep nature 'untouched', with no regards for the people who had inhabited the areas for centuries (Vedeld et al., 2012). Most National Parks were also implemented with a Western top-down approach, which, especially for indigenous communities and minorities, meant that they were deprived of their livelihood from one day to the other, even though they had managed to cohabitate with nature for many years without destroying it (Almudi & Kalikoski, 2010). However, nowadays research is focusing on different management approaches, including those that advocate for community participation. Multiple studies have proved that when environmental protection and economic benefits are the only aspects considered, the locals will not bear a positive attitude towards the Park, thus hindering its conservation efforts (Holmes, 2013; Norgrove & Hulme, 2006). Locals that feel included and listened to in regards to the Park also foster more positive attitudes towards it and its protection, especially if the economic gains trickle back down in the adjacent communities (Daim et al., 2012).

Sweden was the first European country to establish not only one, but nine National Parks in 1909, and today the country is home to thirty Parks (SEPA, 2014). Currently, the Swedish island of Gotland is also in the process of establishing a new National Park in the north-eastern area of the region. The project for its implementation was approved in 2020 and is expected to last until 2025, when the National Park will be officially inaugurated (Region Gotland et al., 2020). In the area, there are many different stakeholders who have interests in the territory. The County Administrative Board on Gotland, in their Feasibility report on the future Bästeträsk National Park (2018), mentions that all stakeholders are being heard and constantly updated.

1.2 Problem area

As mentioned earlier, many National Parks have been created while encompassing residential or agricultural areas. Although in many countries the locals are often displaced with serious consequences for their livelihood (Vedeld et al., 2012; Pimbert & Pretty, 1997), Sweden usually takes a more careful approach, initiating dialogue with local stakeholders to make sure they are included in the process. This is true also for the Bästeträsk National Park, as seen in multiple public documents published by the County Administrative Board (2017; 2018). However, there have been complaints in other Swedish National Parks of stakeholders feeling that they are not included enough in directive decisions (Sandell, 2005). In its history, Sweden also has occasions

where locals were excluded from participating in the creation and management of Parks in areas coinciding with their territories. An obvious example are the Sami people, who have for a long time complained about being excluded from the benefits generated by the Park and being limited in their traditional livelihood activities, such as reindeer-herding (Gignoux, 2017). Similar issues have also happened with regards to forestry, as Keskitalo and Lundmark (2009) state. Therefore, it is important to find out what the stakeholders around Bästeträsk think of the National Park project and whether they have any input for its implementation.

Furthermore, Gotland is aiming to become an example of a sustainable society by 2040, as declared in the regional development strategy of Region Gotland, Vårt Gotland 2040 (2021). For this reason, it would be also interesting to consider how the National Park could contribute to the shift towards sustainable development on Gotland.

1. 3 Significance of the study

As the creation of the Bästeträsk National Park is an ongoing project, no literature on the destination has thus far been published. Some previous studies on areas that will be included in the Park are present (Anshelm et al., 2018; Örestig & Lindgren, 2017; Vestergren et al., 2019), however they focus on the conflicts that arose between 2005 and 2017, due to an application for a limestone quarry from a mining company. Therefore, this research might be of help during the creation of the National Park, and might provide some guidance on how to include locals and how to move forward with the implementation. It is also interesting to analyse if and how the Park's establishment will support and contribute to the regional development strategy adopted on Gotland.

Furthermore, while the creation of Bästeträsk is well documented in Swedish, the same cannot be said for English. This is another reason why this research could be useful for future studies: as the 'universal' form of communication for research, English could reach a wider audience and could bring international attention to this topic.

1.4 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to investigate what opportunities a National Park could bring to the Swedish island of Gotland in relation to the goals cited in the regional development strategy Vårt Gotland 2040.

The research question is as follows: What opportunities for sustainable development can a National Park bring to Gotland?

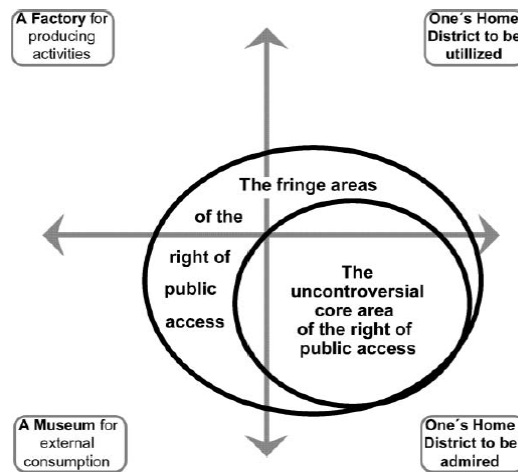
2. Literature review

2.1 National Parks

National Parks have, for a very long time, been the subject of many studies. It is difficult to estimate the global economic impact or the worldwide number of visitors as, often, the Parks have multiple points of access and entrance fees are not implemented. Schägner et al. (2016) have analysed a total of 449 National Parks in Europe, and estimated that the total number of visitors exceeded that of 2 billions annually, with an approximate economic value of € 15 billion. Furthermore, the National Park Service in the U.S. declared that, although visitor numbers dropped by 28% in 2020 due to the pandemic and its restrictions, the Parks still had 237 million visitors (U.S. National Park Service, 2020). Therefore, we can see that National Parks are of great importance not only to conservation efforts, but also to many countries' economies.

The role of National Parks has also changed during the years. Stokke & Haukeland (2018) mention that National Parks are no longer only nature protection areas, but they have become living or working landscapes. Puhakka & Saarinen (2013) also argue that, while National Parks and tourism were never considered as separated, in the last years they have increasingly been seen as useful tools to reach regional development, and economic and social interests have been more widely considered while planning. This way, Parks have the right to request funding in order to increase tourist numbers and create employment in the surrounding areas.

As Sandell (2005) states, four different eco-strategies can be identified when creating a National Park. The first strategy, called museum eco-strategy, calls for the land to be protected in order to conserve its original features for purely ecological, scientific or touristic reasons. The second strategy implies an active domination of the land, where facilities and activities are established in order to attract visitors. Active adaptation is the main characteristic of the third strategy, where the objective is to make visitors feel at home: the landscape is both admired from a cultural and aesthetic point of view, and utilized for activities such as hunting and fishing. Finally, the last strategy is that of passive adaptation, where visitors might engage in birdwatching, cross-country skiing, foraging and so on. This strategy is quite similar to the museum eco-strategy, but it lacks a deeper integration with the landscape visited. Further on in the article, the author compares the strategies for creating a National Park with *allemensrätt* (see Fig. 1).



[Figure 1. Public access and the different strategies for the creation of a National Park]

Allemansrätt, or the 'Right of Common Access', is a consuetudinary law that declares that everyone has the right to move in nature, to walk across someone's land and the right to camp overnight providing that no damage is inflicted to the location. People are also allowed to pick mushrooms and berries anywhere. Obviously, some limitations are present: allemansrätt does, in fact, not apply to private grounds, gardens, parks and croplands (Colby, 1988). An interesting point made by Sandell and Fredman (2010) is that allemansrätt could be an obstacle to nature-based tourism in Sweden. Since, for Swedish people, access to nature is considered a right, it could be hypothesized that local development based on nature tourism would not be profitable, as people would not be willing to pay for it. However, as Sandell and Fredman (2010) found, the Right of Common Access is mostly perceived as a benefit rather than an obstacle. However, the most common activities practiced through this right are hiking, fishing, camping and so on: therefore, nature-based tourism companies that provide these types of services tend to see it as more of an obstacle. A possible solution, as proposed by Sandell and Fredman, could be that these companies focus on alternative services they could offer, such as "lodging, food, guiding, equipment and safety that could be charged for" (p. 306).

2.2 Social perspective

National Parks are thought to contribute positively to people's health and well-being. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in its contents, underlines the importance of a healthy lifestyle where everyone has access to green areas (United Nations, 2015). Ramkissoon et al. (2018) declare that National Parks have been proven to give "psychological, health, sociological, environmental and economic benefits" (p. 345) to visitors. As an example, Buxton et al. (2021) have found that natural sounds, such as birdsongs and water, have a beneficial effect on multiple aspects of human health, such as "control over mind states, reduction in stress-related behaviour, and mental recuperation" (p. 3). Frumkin et al. (2017) published a commentary on all the

different health benefits that nature can bring, and found that nature may boost our immune system, it can make us more socially connected with others, it leads to increased physical activity (which, in turn, helps decrease other health risks such as obesity and cardiovascular diseases) and it enables people to breathe cleaner air compared to urban areas.

As Ramkissoo et al. (2018) state, people can develop emotional ties with the environment: therefore, National Parks create the perfect setting to build and nurture these ties. Furthermore, Yuksel et al. (2010) have declared that attachment to a certain location increases visitors' satisfaction.

For all these reasons, when creating protected areas around or close to where people live, it is fundamental to consult and include them. Having first-hand experience in living around the area, the residents might have developed close ties with the surrounding environment, and be aware of what the right course of action is in order to protect it from harm. Consequently, of particular importance is the inclusion of local knowledge during all phases of the National Park's creation. People who live in the surroundings areas are likely to have direct knowledge related to the land and on how to best preserve its biodiversity, along with knowledge on how the area is 'used' by visitors. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, conservation efforts tend to be more secure when the adjacent communities gain direct benefits from the Park's presence. Participation is therefore a fundamental step in the Park implementation process. Very interesting is also the point made by Buono et al. (2012), when they state that "Participation in itself is not sufficient. [...] it is imperative to answer the question who should participate and how?" (p.194).

Moreover, McCool (2009) mentions that to achieve success in coordinated management, it is important to have close contact with all the stakeholders involved. Daniels & Walker (2001), in their book "Working through Environmental Conflict: The Collaborative Learning Approach", theorize the existence of three different learning approaches in regards to participation. First-loop learning implies only a superficial change in the management, while with second-loop learning all the participants should gain a deeper understanding of each other's values and beliefs. However, the real learning process occurs in the third-loop phase, where a fundamental change in people's morality takes place, and this is what enables all the participants to truly cooperate with each other in order to reach a shared agreement. Of course, this requires continuous interactions among stakeholders.

Arnstein (1969) also provides a helpful example of the ladder of citizen participation: in this model, every step corresponds to a different amount of power that the citizens hold in regards to planning. The eight steps are manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, which can further be divided in non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. While non-

participation models are less common in Europe, tokenism consists of authorities who limit themselves to informing communities, encouraging them to speak up about their views on the management, but the citizens are then not granted any power to implement change. Therefore, the only true stage of citizen participation is the last one.

Of course, it is quite hard to keep track of all interested stakeholders and keep them informed and engaged in the Park formation. Some of the strategies that can be applied in order to reach true participation are partnership, networking and cooperation (Stokke & Haukeland, 2018). Wondirad & Ewnetu (2019) also suggest empowerment and power redistribution are important strategies when trying to enhance community participation.

Stokke and Haukeland (2018) mention that partnership is also fundamental for striking a balance between tourism development and protection of the environment, as participants working together can lessen conflicts. However, it is also important to bear in mind that community participation is not simply measured by how many jobs are created by tourism or whether the residents are having cultural exchanges with other nationalities: it is important to also consider how tourism provides better facilities for locals, if communities are empowered enough to influence decisions that might determine their livelihood and whether tourism provides incentives to protect the surrounding environment, among other aspects (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019).

It must be said that proving the effects of the tourism industry on communities is complicated. Potential social and economic benefits are often accounted for in literature (Strickland-Munro et al., 2010), but negative impacts can also emerge: for this reason, a community-based ecotourism model that is truly organised by locals, rather than external institutions, “significantly contributes to community livelihood by unlocking economic opportunities while simultaneously contributing to conservation efforts with no negative cultural impact” (Wondirad, 2019, p. 1060).

2.3 Economic perspective

As mentioned above, National Parks have an important economic impact. Thus, they are often used as a way to develop the surrounding area through tourism (Fredman & Yuan, 2011). Tourism, as stated by Wondirad and Ewnetu (2019), can bring many economic benefits such as establishment of tourism enterprises and new business opportunities, which in turn create employment opportunities for the residents and additional sources of income for the area. Strickland-Munro et al. (2010) mention that employment opportunities can be both direct, with locals hired in operations directly linked to the park, and indirect, with new economic impacts deriving from activities related to the presence of a park, such as lodging, shops, restaurants and so on. Fredman and Yuan (2011) also highlight the importance of the so-called “gateway

communities”: as many National Parks are located in rural areas, it is fundamental that local communities are included as they are the ones who tend to provide most - if not all - services for tourism in the area. In their case study research, Fredman and Yuan also state that it is important to consider the broader area where the Park is located, such as the region, as revenues will spread wider than just the adjacent communities.

On Gotland, the Bästeträsk National Park could provide a way for the island to promote the more remote and unknown areas, and not only Visby and its surroundings. Furthermore, Gotland has been struggling with seasonality for quite a long period, although nature-based tourism enterprises do not see it as a disadvantage (Svensson, 2020). Seasonality, as stated by Butler (1994), is “a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, and may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions” (p. 332). Visitor numbers on Gotland are substantial between the months of June and August, but outside of peak season many businesses and shops close down as there are not enough tourists. This has not only an effect on the economy of the destination, but also on its nature and its society. When the peak season of tourism is over, the area might struggle to maintain a sustainable strategy for development, as revenues from tourism are not present anymore. Employment decreases, as many of the seasonal jobs that were needed during the tourist season are not necessary anymore: this also leads to many local businesses closing for the season, further strengthening the idea of the destination as ‘seasonal’. Positive aspects of seasonality might be the restoration of the ecosystem after the stress caused by increased visitor numbers, and the off-peak season might also provide some rest for the local residents as they prepare for the next peak. However, negative aspects are not only present during the low season, but they exist during the peak as well, in the form of overcrowding, resource shortages (usually of water and electricity) and increased prices for goods and services (Martín Martín et al., 2020). Ferrante et al. (2018) summarise six strategies to address seasonality, namely: increasing demand during off-season periods, reducing demand during peak periods, redistribute demand between both periods, increasing the supply during the off-season, reducing the supply in peak periods and redistributing it from the high season to the low season.

Such strategies, research suggests, could be achieved through either ecotourism or rural tourism. Rural tourism, as stated by Martín Martín et al. (2020) is a form of tourism that calls for respect and preservation of the environment it is developed in, while providing a viable diversification of the economy. The authors also state that, if tourism is to be seen as the “tool for rural development” (p. 66), it is fundamental to ensure annual stability in order to achieve sustainable development.

Ecotourism especially has been seen as a great way to achieve sustainable development, as this type of tourism is said to promote “small-scale, locally owned, authentic, participative, and grassroots sustainable tourism” (Wondirad, 2019, p. 1048). Furthermore, as argued by Das and Hussain (2016), once revenues from ecotourism start propagating in the surrounding communities, unsustainable activities such as logging, fishing or, in the case of Gotland, mining, tend to diminish. However, ecotourism runs the risk of becoming just a marketing strategy if not applied conscientiously. Some elements that could hinder ecotourism are summarised by Wondirad (2019): “poor governance, a lack of political commitment, [...] inappropriate development models that overlook local contexts, inadequate strategic and operational competencies, endemic corruption, the absence of concerted stakeholder collaboration, and poor local community participation” (p. 1059). In light of what has been written in section 2.2, we can see how community participation is therefore fundamental to also reach economic sustainability.

However, one possible issue with generating revenue from the National Park could be tied to visitor spending. Day users tend to be the majority of visitors, but they also spend less than overnight stayers. One way to solve this issue would be to find ways to increase spending of day users, possibly through a broad range of services in the area that will encourage people to stay overnight and spend more time in the surrounding areas. Furthermore, when visitors are satisfied in their stay it is highly likely that they will revisit and possibly recommend a destination to their acquaintances (Fredman & Yuan, 2011).

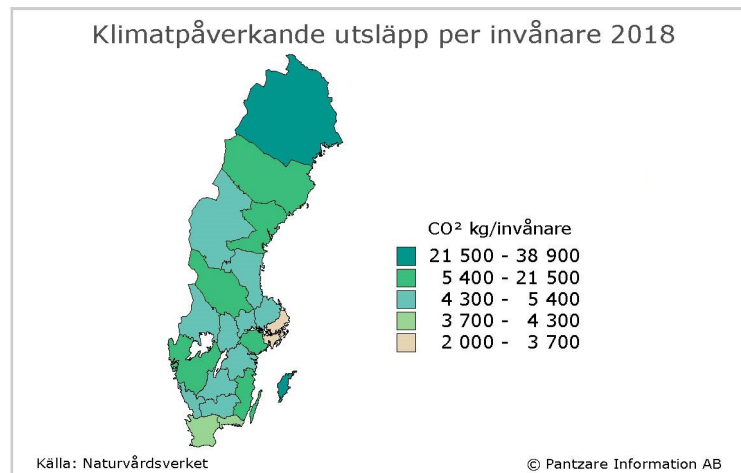
2.4 Vårt Gotland 2040

On the 22nd February 2021, Region Gotland adopted a new regional development strategy called “Vårt Gotland 2040” (Our Gotland 2040 in English). This development project has three main aims: to make Gotland into a safe and inclusive society with a quality of life for everyone, to be a role model in clean energy and the fight against climate change, and to be an innovative growth region with development power. As the plan is to reach these goals by 2040, consensus and collaboration are the most important steps in order to achieve them. Region Gotland also states that the strategy includes impact goals in order to follow the developments in the region and implementation, evaluation and learning forms.

The challenges mentioned in the project plan are related to climate, environment, participation, demographic issues, digitalization and competitiveness. Most of these issues could also be tied to the possible benefits that the National Park could generate.

First of all, one of the ways in which Region Gotland is aiming to reach sustainability is by reducing emissions that are affecting the climate. If we look at CO₂ emissions

from different regions of Sweden, in Figure 2, it is clear that Gotland has one of the highest emission rates all over the country (a total of 38891 CO₂ kg/inhabitant), together with the Norrbotten county.



[Figure 2. Map of climate-affecting emission per inhabitant in Sweden, 2018]

Such emissions are mostly due to the industries present on Gotland, in particular the mining industry, that is responsible for around 30000 CO₂ kg/inhabitant. While mining is, indeed, an unsustainable activity from an environmental point of view, it also provides jobs for many residents on the island, and it would be a struggle for them if they were provided with no alternative income if the mining industry gets halted. However, by establishing the Bästeträsk National Park, there is a high chance for it to generate alternative jobs, that could also be long-term as opposed to seasonal or short-term.

As the full report mentions, net zero emissions is a goal that has to be achieved through everyone's support and collaboration. Therefore, one of the ways the Region could reach the goal is by making the park accessible through public transport or other transportation alternatives, rather than promote car use.

Another issue mentioned in the strategy is the water scarcity issue: water resources on Gotland are diminishing and Bästeträsk lake is an important reserve. As tourism season approaches, Region Gotland is asking people to avoid wasting water (Region Gotland, 2020), and as climate change impacts the island the water supply will decrease even more (Region Gotland et al., 2018). For these reasons, it is crucial to ensure the protection of water sources around the area, including Bästeträsk. Additionally, considering that seasonality causes water shortages during the summer months, if Gotland is able to spread visitor numbers more evenly throughout the year, the risk of running into a shortage could be lessened. The supply of water is not only important for people residing on the island, but for industries such as agriculture as well, which is one of the few self-sufficient industries on Gotland.

As many areas in the developed world, Gotland is also struggling with an ageing population and a depopulation of rural areas. However, if the National Park manages to create attractive opportunities for employment and livelihood, it is possible that not only will young people stay on the island, but in-migrants from other parts of Sweden might also choose to move to Gotland. Moreover, if locals are included in the creation of the Bästeträsk National Park, it could rekindle a sense of community in those living in the area, further strengthening community ties.

Finally, Vårt Gotland 2040 underscores how the Covid-19 pandemic has brought light to the fact that Gotland is heavily dependent on tourism and should therefore try to enhance its self-sufficiency by relying on different sustainable industries, some of which could be locally grown food (that the island is famous for) and green companies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study area

The future Bästeträsk National Park will be located in the Northern part of the Swedish island of Gotland, and will encompass an area of around 10900 hectares, including a coastline of approximately three miles, as seen in figure 3. As for how the land is divided, cultivated land occupies around 300 hectares, wetlands occupy 700 hectares, forest occupies 7400 hectares, open land forms 1500 hectares and finally lakes compromise 950 hectares. Communities make up around 200 hectares, and the biggest community, Fleringe, had 64 residents as of 2016. In total, there are 250 km of roads.



[Figure 3. Provisional delimitation of the Bästeträsk National Park area]

Areas of interest consist of both natural attractions and cultural values. Many of the locations that will be included in the National Park are already under a protection of some kind. Most of them are currently nature reserves and/or Natura 2000 sites, like Bästeträsk, Bräntings haid, Grodde, Horsan, Vitärtskällan, Mölnermyr and Hoburgsmyr, forming an area of 3300 hectares (approximately 30% of the future National Park). Other 15 hectares are protected for their biotope, and the coast is a nature conservation area. The nature in the area is quite diverse, formed mostly by meadows, alvar fields, marshlands and wetlands. These have, for the greater part, been left untouched. The area is also fundamental for many red-listed species of both flora and fauna, and it is quite unique from a geological point of view.

As mentioned earlier, the area is also rich with culture. Not only are some museums and galleries present (such as the Blåse mining museum and Hau gallery), but the site is home to many historical remains. These remains are dated back to the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age and even Viking Age and Middle Age. Besides these burial

grounds and settlements, wrecks from boats that have sunk since the beginning of Gotland's development are well preserved and visible from Fårösund. In Fleringe, it is possible to see agricultural landscapes such as stone buildings, and the almost intact medieval Fleringe church. In Bläse, an old limestone mining site, the museum helps visitors learn about the lime kilns, the workers' living conditions, and it is also possible to take a short train trip on the old railway tracks.

In the area, there are several stakeholders, such as: owners of summer houses, permanent residents, visitors, military forces, mining companies, Ar research station, tourism industry and associations. The Army owns a shooting range site in Trälge, located in the north-eastern part of the area. Access is limited for 160 days a year; however, this area will not be included in the National Park. Limestone mining companies Nordkalk AB and SMA Mineral AB have both tried, in the past, to obtain a permit for mining in the area, in addition to the locations they already own (Storugns and Bunge Strå), however they were stopped by the implementation of the Natura 2000 area. The Ar research station, located between lake Bästeträsk and the Baltic sea, conducts research focusing on fish ecology in the area, in order to better manage Baltic fish stocks and reach long-term sustainability.

3.2 Research design

In order to find out how residents felt in regards to the National Park and how it might help the regional development strategy adopted by Region Gotland, a qualitative method was used. Interviews were conducted with a constructivist approach, which means that the main goal of this research is to discover the participants' views on the topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and the questions used were as broad as possible, in order to not stir the participants towards a certain answer. The focus of the interviews was on people's perception of the Park, the challenges and opportunities they thought it could bring to the island - if any -, and what they wished to gain from its establishment. In this situation, a qualitative method is therefore more effective in gaining deeper insight from a specific target group.

3.3 Data collection and sampling

Participants were found through help of my subject reader, Gunilla Rosenqvist. The people I was able to interview had direct interests in the area, either because they lived close to the future Park or because they were involved in associations that might benefit from the Park's implementation. In order to protect their privacy, I cannot explicitly state what their interests in the area are. Due to Covid-19, the interviews took place via Zoom in the month of May, and in total, 2 people were interviewed. The interviews were between 30 minutes and 2 hours long, and they were semi-structured, with a list of questions to provide a framework, but with enough freedom to be able to ask different questions based on each interviewee and the topics

debated with them. The interviews' audio was recorded through the help of a computer program, and during the interviews some notes were taken in Word. Furthermore, two interviews were conducted through email as the interviewees did not have enough time available to schedule a Zoom call, so in total 4 samples have been collected. Burns (2010) states that email interviews tend to be very similar to surveys, however they could be considered qualitative when such method is proposed by the interviewee and when there is an exchange of multiple emails with acknowledgement of the responses from the researcher's side (contrary to a survey). The email interviews I was able to do were of course not as in-depth as the Zoom interviews, but through an exchange of multiple emails with both parties I was still able to gather relevant data.

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed through Descript, and imported into Nvivo. The two answers received via email were copy-pasted into Nvivo similarly to the spoken interviews. The 4 samples were then analysed through thematic analysis, which is used to identify common patterns in the interviewees' answers and gain understanding of their views and opinions. The main themes that emerged after coding were environment, tourism, development, economy, sustainability, transport and society.

3.5 Ethical considerations

As with any research, ethical and philosophical considerations have to be stated clearly. Participants were given informed consent prior to the interviews. They were told what the purpose of this research was and the approximate length of the interviews (Mack et al., 2005). They were also told that participation was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw their consent at any moment. Participants were pre-emptively asked whether it would be possible to audiotape the interviews and they were assured that confidentiality would be kept throughout the whole study. Therefore, the names have been anonymized and any identifying information has been omitted unless otherwise consented to by the participants. In this specific study, I believe there were no threats of potential harm to the participants. However, to avoid any possible harm I refrained from asking questions that might cause psychological or social damage to the interviewees.

I also want to recognize that the way I will discuss the findings might be influenced by a personal bias determined by my values and beliefs. As an example, I am in favor of the National Park as it will provide (hopefully) a stronger environmental protection, and I was also against the mining industry, but after speaking with some interviewees my values shifted and I could see how mining on Gotland is a wicked problem, as there

is not one easy solution. However, I have tried to not let my views influence the questions I have asked.

3.6 Limitations

One limitation of the study is sampling, as the interviews collected were less than expected. In order to represent a wider group of people, I would have liked to interview people who were in the process of selling their own land to the state, but unfortunately it was not possible. Several people were contacted either via email or via phone to ask if they were interested in participating in the interview process, but only four people answered. This might have been due to Covid-19, unfamiliarity with English or just uncertainty as I was and still am a stranger to them.

Also, I visited the future National Park area while writing this thesis but was unable to meet anyone there that I could interview. Accessibility was also a limitation as I do not have a driving license or access to a car, and therefore had to walk to the area from Bunge and back (around 30 km in total), reducing the area I could visit and the possibility of multiple visits.

4. Results and discussion

The aim of the interviews was to find out in what ways the future Bästeträsk National Park could be of aid to Gotland in its transition towards a sustainable future, as stated in the regional development strategy Vårt Gotland 2040.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, I have decided to combine results and discussion to analyse the findings. By doing so, the data can be presented in a comprehensible manner and it will be easier for the reader to follow along.

Personally, I would add that every topic addressed in the interviews is intertwined, which is why it is difficult to divide it into arbitrary categories, but a single undivided section would have also proven too messy to convey the results effectively. Therefore, I have done my best in separating the following content in four different subsections.

a. Environment and accessibility

One of the main themes that emerged after coding the interviews was that of the environment, which contains topics such as water, protected areas, land, and access.

All the four interviewees agreed that the creation of the National Park was a positive fact. Moreover, all interviewees also agreed that the Park implementation could be a way to minimize risks of exploitation for the area, especially from mining and infrastructure. One interviewee affirmed that the mining industry would have no interest in safeguarding the environment, and the Park was therefore very important. It was interesting to discover, however, that one interviewee expressed disappointment regarding a different protected area, Slite Skärgård, which is less than 30 km away from the future National Park, but has not been included in the project. They mentioned that the projects to further protect that area have been in the works for more than 10 years, but the interviewee couldn't see any concrete progress. Furthermore, said interviewee also expressed scepticism towards the land encompassed by the National Park being owned by the state, as they mentioned that the current owners might have more knowledge and insight on their own land and property. Another interviewee mentioned both short-term and long-term effects that the Park implementation is presumed to have. For the short-term effects, similar to other interviewees, they mentioned an enhanced protection of the area's natural values. They also mentioned that the environment in the National Park would represent Gotland's unique nature and therefore complement the National Parks that are already established. For the long-term effects, they mentioned preservation and development of natural values.

One interviewee, when asked if they thought the Park creation was important, answered that it was fundamental in order to preserve and safeguard the water in

Bästräsk lake. As further stated by them, water needs to be the priority because without it, “the island will be inhabitable”, for all living creatures. As reported by the same interviewee, the National Park could and probably will bring additional benefits other than water protection, but they also mentioned that it might bring unwanted disruptions. For example, they mentioned that the soil is very thin, and therefore an increase in visitation could cause soil erosion with added damages. As I could observe during my visit to the area, fauna is very rich and diverse, and I was able to see many kinds of rare birds in just one day. Therefore, one might wonder how the disturbances from increased visitor numbers could affect the life of the animals living there (own thoughts).

“In my view, creation of Bästräsk as national park. It's because we need to save the water. We need to safeguard the water.”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Continuing on the water topic, the island of Gotland has been struggling with water scarcity for quite a while and, as one interviewee stated, the main reason for making Bästräsk into a National Park was preservation of the water source. As I am an outsider who has only lived in Gotland for a short while, I know of the water shortage issue but do not fully comprehend its extent during the summer. Therefore, it was very interesting for me to hear from one interviewee that they thought the water situation could be handled, even if tourist numbers were to increase due to the National Park inauguration. The interviewee however underlined the importance of communicating the water situation to both residents and tourists and helping people learn how to deal with the issue, as of course more people would cause more waste of water. They also mentioned that a shift in behaviour is necessary as Swedish people are usually used to having very good water sources, and that the role of Region Gotland is fundamental in making sure that the situation remains manageable.

Another interesting topic to discuss was related to accessibility and transport to the area. The County Administrative Board is planning to build a car park to facilitate access to the area. One interviewee stated that this could make the area more accessible for underrepresented groups, such as people with disabilities. As mentioned earlier in the Limitations section, public transport is not an option at the moment, since the buses only stop in Rute, Bunn, Bunge and Fårösund, which are quite close but not the most convenient spots to reach the Bästräsk area. When speaking with the interviewees, three of them actually mentioned that they were against the car park, and provided alternative ideas for transportation to the area. The following options were brought up:

- a) Development of boat transport, from the harbour in Slite to the harbour in Ar;
- b) Creation of a bus route from one of the neighbouring towns;

- c) Renting out electric bicycles;
- d) Extension of the old railway track in Bläse towards the National Park area.

"I want to stimulate the water traffic instead of the land traffic"

(Interviewee 1, 6 May 2021)

b. Society and community

The social aspect was, for me, the most interesting part to talk about in every interview. As one interviewee mentioned, "it's 40 old years saying we have the three pillars... There's three parts and social is always something that we have to deal with afterwards". That is also how I personally felt throughout my studies, so I tried to dig deeper into what the reasons for that might be.

One interviewee explained that, in their community, there is a sense of hopelessness regarding what people can achieve. They mentioned that this is due to the low quality of schools in Gotland, and also to what the people living here are taught and what they learn through society when growing up: that there are no choices, and possibilities are limited to certain options (such as being employed by multinationals or the government). Thus, people have no faith that they can achieve anything, and the interviewee stated that they tend to not see themselves as valuable and have no self-pride. One way through which that could be changed is by providing different choices for people, giving them the possibility to clearly envision what those choices are, and making sure that they are actually accessible by all.

Gotland has many possibilities for community development and participation, and by what I found out through the interviews, many locations in the North are now planning how to bring benefits to their communities. One of the towns, Lärbro, is working on trying to make it easier for residents to open their own businesses and to have people work together. Another solution that was proposed was that of creating an "umbrella organization", as a way to collaborate in finding strengths and weaknesses of the companies in the area, so that residents with different knowledge and skillsets can help each other. A similar concept was also mentioned by another interviewee, who stated that when people travel to the North of Gotland, it is positive for all the surrounding towns, as they all help each other out. In Slite, for example, there are cottages, a small hotel, a hostel, and many restaurants which, according to the interviewee, could benefit from the National Park.

One difficulty that was mentioned was the resentment that some workers bear towards the National Park project, caused by the revocation of the mining permit. However, if the residents see that there are tangible benefits that they can gain from the Park's implementation, it might strengthen community ties and rekindle hopefulness. It is fundamental, however, that those perks benefit everyone and that

they stay in the community. One interviewee was also very certain that the Park would strengthen the image of Gotland as an attractive place to live in.

"If we can do that, using the creation of the National Park as a hope for the future..."
(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Two interviewees also stated that they were very interested in collaborating with the National Park, and they would like to be included in future projects. However, as the Park implementation is still in its first stage, it was difficult to verify whether the stakeholders will be effectively involved in the project, as the County Administrative Board had not planned a strategy on how to include them yet. In relation to what I wrote in section 2.2, it was therefore hard for me to judge where the residents are located on the ladder of citizen participation proposed by Arnstein (1969). From what I could see, I believe that the stakeholders are still in the non-participation phase, but hopefully this will change in the near future.

One thing that emerged from every interview was that all of Gotland is intertwined. All interviewees recognized the importance of collaborating and working together to help each other out. This intertwining could prove useful in the process described by Daniels and Walker (2001), as it would make the cooperation and the reaching of a shared agreement easier. However, until the County Administrative Board starts interacting with all the stakeholders, it will be challenging to determine whether and how they are included. Going more in-depth on the topic of entanglement, one interviewee focused on how the northern part of Gotland is a small place (see quote below), and that's why they need to work together, especially as there are not many overnight places in the area (the interviewee mentioned Fårösund, Lärbro and Kappelshamn as the closest locations for overnight visitors). Another interviewee mentioned that Bläse also opened up to the possibility of overnight visitors.

"There's no distances here"
(Interviewee 1, 6 May 2021)

Finally, I would like to conclude this section with a wonderful extract from one of the interviews, through which the interviewee explained that on Gotland, the sense of being part of a community is not that strong.

"Now I try to argue wherever I am, that without culture, without people having a sense of a place where 'I live here, there's a reason why I live here, this is where my children grow up, and have their school and their festivities, and this is where my mother was buried, and this is where we can actually have a sing song together, or we have a theatre'... What we need is the culture to keep us together. Otherwise we don't stay. We all, we're lost. We're not a society."
(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

c. Economy and tourism

One interesting difference that emerged from the interviews was the different perception of overcrowding on Gotland: one interviewee stated that the number of tourists was already enough, and they did not wish for it to increase further, especially for the natural areas. They also mentioned that they were afraid more tourism would bring issues such as increased littering and waste, as is happening in other areas of Sweden (e.g. Kebnekaise). However, this interviewee did not believe that the National Park implementation by itself would enhance the likelihood of people visiting it. Another interviewee did not feel that there are a lot of tourists on Gotland, as they had visited places that were far more crowded. Furthermore, a third interviewee mentioned that increased number of tourists is one of the expected effects of the National Park. This interviewee mentioned that the National Park would strengthen the area as a destination, therefore benefitting the tourism industry, and it would also allow opportunities for more visitors to develop. We can therefore see that the opinions on tourism numbers on Gotland are widely different.

“It strengthens Gotland as an attractive place to visit”

(Interviewee 4, 4 May 2021)

One interviewee was also worried that the nature-based tourism companies would create a sort of theme park in the area, increasing mass tourism in the location.

“They're happy to create a Disneyland, and people will go there because it's there”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Three interviewees had ideas on how to tourism could help bring benefits to Northern Gotland specifically. As an example, one interviewee thought of developing so-called high-end or luxury tourism, which involves the delivery of luxurious services and products in a convenient and engaging way. Some examples of aspects that these tourists look for are high-quality food, personalized services, exclusivity, comfort, and professional staff. The reason why the interviewee wanted to develop this tourism was to protect the area from mass tourism, as they hoped instead to get fewer tourists that would be willing to pay more for the experience. They stated that they didn't wish to increase people's expectations of having numerous tourists, and were also wondering how to convince locals to participate in this strategy. Furthermore, through the interviews I discovered that two of the towns that the interviewees were from were actually collaborating on a project designed both for the locals, but also to try and bring a new type of tourism to Gotland, that could be year-round as opposed to seasonal. Another interviewee mentioned that in the town of Bläse, the guest harbour has been refurbished this year and they have also prepared pitches for motorhomes in anticipation of the Park's implementation. Remaining on the topic of transport, one interviewee mentioned that they were unsure of how the County was

planning to deal with the increasing number of caravans and motorhomes that visit Gotland, as they felt that increased transport by car should not be prioritized in the Park project. As mentioned earlier, in section 4.a, boat transport could prove to be a viable alternative, but the interviewee mentioned that due to the laws regarding boats on the island it is hard to realize such a project, and they wished for a change in regulations in order to make organizing boat tours easier, especially from an economic point of view. The interviewee who wished for tourism to not increase also mentioned that, in order to make bus transport cost effective, an increase in the number of tourists would be necessary, and thus it would become a trade-off between preserving the environment and running an alternative service to car transport.

A solution to the problems caused by an excessive number of tourists, proposed by an interviewee, was that of educating those that come to Gotland on certain sensitive issues, such as the water management and the importance of not damaging the fragile ecosystem. These communications would be about how Gotland is handling the problems and how visitors should behave. This could be done either on the ferry or as soon as people disembark, and it would have to be enforced for the residents as well.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the economic aspect was not the main focus of the interviews, as that is what I feel tends to be prioritized in different projects. One economic aspect that was mentioned that might not relate directly to tourism was that of housing on Gotland, but there was also a dichotomy here between one interviewee who did not believe that the National Park would worsen the housing situation, and another who thought that increased tourism meant that more people would be interested in buying houses eventually. All the interviewees recognized that many people who live outside Gotland invest a great amount of money into buying a house on the island, and the prices have therefore increased dramatically. Furthermore, many of these buildings remain empty during the low season, when interviewees have mentioned that they would like people staying all year round.

“And to you that come from somewhere, there's no problems to put 5 million to a house, but then you only stay here summer times”

(Interviewee 1, 6 May 2021)

d. Regional development and sustainability

As mentioned in section 2.4, the regional development strategy created by Region Gotland is meant to address issues such as climate, environment, community participation, demographic issues and more. With this research, I wanted to find out how the Park implementation could contribute to the goals set by Vårt Gotland 2040.

First of all, Gotland is planning to reach zero emissions by 2040, but the mining industry emits a high amount of CO₂. When mentioning this to one interviewee, they brought up a very interesting point. First of all, they mentioned that one of the mining companies, Cementa, is planning to reduce emission through use of electricity and other measures. However, as the interviewee stated, there is currently not a lot of research on what the alternatives to limestone and concrete could be. In a beautiful quote (included below), I feel that they summed up the issue quite clearly.

“The people at Cementa, they used to say, as long as we build Stockholm with concrete, we need to break the limestone.”

(Interviewee 1, 6 May 2021)

The same interviewee also went on saying that although there might be no Cementa or mining industry left on Gotland by 2040, there might be some other country where “the hole in the ground” will be.

“Who should be the polluter of the world?”

(Interviewee 1, 6 May 2021)

In section 2.4, I also mentioned that jobs created by implementing the National Park could provide an alternative to mining employment. However, after talking with one interviewee, I discovered that the workers have been asked whether they would be willing to become nature guides for the Park, but the interviewee felt that it was a disrespectful request especially when it came to higher positions in the mining industry, such as managers. Therefore, it is necessary to find a different solution to this issue. One thing that is certain is that locals are wishing for long-term employment, which tourism alone cannot provide.

“People would need to see tangible possible future work, future ideas, something for their kids to do.”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Another point the interviewee mentioned was the lack of standardization on Gotland when it comes to sustainability. They stated that they struggled to find measurements or economic support for businesses to become more sustainable, and stated that even hotels claim they are sustainable but lack any clear and explicit standard on how their sustainability is measured. Thus, this could hinder the accomplishment of the development plan, if not addressed.

Another way to reach zero emissions by 2040 is, as declared by the regional development strategy, reducing car transport by providing better public transport and sustainable alternatives. This brings us back to section 4a, where I mentioned the transportation methods that the interviewees proposed for the Park. On one hand, as I learned from talking with the County Administrative Board, there are plans to build

a car park in the area to accommodate increased traffic and visitors. On the other hand, Vårt Gotland 2040 is clearly stating that sustainable alternatives should be prioritized to reduce emissions. Therefore, it was hard for me to comprehend why the County Administrative Board would not plan an alternative to car traffic. The ideas proposed by three interviewees could thus prove helpful to both Region Gotland and the County Administrative Board. First of all, building a railway through the National Park starting from Bläse could facilitate accessibility, but since the soil in the area is very delicate further studies are required to verify if this is an actual possibility. The renting of electrical bicycles would not only help reduce emissions, but also bring economic benefits to the northern part of Gotland. The interviewee who proposed the boat solution stated that the County did not seem interested in investing in such a business when they brought it up, however it could prove to be a better solution than creating a car park. All interviewees also agreed that use of cars and similar vehicles (such as motorhomes) should be reduced.

“Now I think Nordkalk, that would be an excellent place to leave your car.”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Regarding the topic of water shortages on Gotland, the regional development strategy states secured access to water of good quality and quantity as an objective to be reached by 2040. When talking with an interviewee, they stated that a big part of the issue is due to the pipes, as they are not of good quality and, therefore, they are not efficient in preserving water. The interviewee also stated that changing the pipes would cost a great amount of money, but it is an important step to take on the way to making sure everyone has enough water, especially if Region Gotland is hoping to increase the influx of tourists thanks to the National Park.

Through the interviews, I could see that people are certain that there will be a change of attitudes regarding climate change and other pressing issues, brought about both by the younger generation and by the presence of Uppsala University on the island. I believe it would be very interesting if the Vårt Gotland 2040 strategy was willing to collaborate with Campus Gotland, especially for the students in the sustainability fields. This could also tie in with another struggle addressed by Region Gotland, that of depopulation as young people leave the island to live elsewhere. If the Region can find a way to make housing affordable and available throughout the year, both locals and international students would be able to reside on the island, counteracting the problem of an ageing population and bringing diverse knowledge to Gotland.

Another suggestion received from an interviewee was that of making sure both residents and local companies are included in the Park planning and management. This way, the interviewee stated, some difficult environmental issues could be addressed by all and that could create new ways of nature tourism. However, this

interviewee was also worried that the opposite would happen, i.e. that creating this National Park could bring to more exploitation of the surroundings.

“If we can use the creation of the National Park as a means of making this part of the island more known and its nature values more appreciated and more visible...”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

Finally, one interviewee criticized Region Gotland’s development plans as they claimed that, up until now, they have brought no change to the island. They also mentioned that a more holistic view of what development and sustainability are is necessary to move forward. Another interviewee, on the other hand, felt certain that the National Park would help fulfil some of the objectives for Vårt Gotland 2040, such as improved conditions for public health and outdoor life, and they were positive that it would generate appropriate management conditions for Bästeträsk and its surroundings.

“Gotland could be a place where you actually can be allowed to change your attitude.”

(Interviewee 2, 12 May 2021)

5. Conclusion

This study has tried to investigate how the implementation of the Bästeträsk National Park could bring benefits to Gotland and aid in the realization of the goals cited in the regional development strategy.

From the interviews I could see that people are eager to be included in the Park's creation and management, and they are also pleased that the environment around Bästeträsk will be protected, but I could also sense a certain scepticism towards the feasibility of Region Gotland's development plan. One evident conclusion is that the County Administrative Board should collaborate with the surrounding towns to find an alternative way of transport to the future Park. Another issue that must be addressed region-wise is how Region Gotland has been addressing regional development in the past years: I could feel that there is a degree of discontent in some people on the way development plans are executed.

If Region Gotland can focus on some of these aspects, such as dealing with complicated environmental issues (i.e. mining) and creating a sustainable living place with a better school system and affordable housing, I believe that many communities would thus thrive and be brought closer together. In light of what has been said, it is also of utmost importance that those who reside around the Park's area are included and listened to both during the implementation process and in the management of the Park once it is inaugurated.

6. Future research

Future research should focus on how Region Gotland implements the regional development strategy they have approved, and whether they will consider including stakeholders in their planning and execution, instead of adopting a top-down approach that seems to create discontent in some residents. In the matter of the National Park, future research should focus on how the County Administrative Board interacts with and includes various stakeholders into its project plan to ensure that community participation will be carried out. Furthermore, a study on whether creating the National Park will increase tourism numbers on Gotland would provide a good foundation for discovering what effects (both positive and negative) an increased tourist flow will have on the island.

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