

Balancing Local Interests and National Conservation Obligations in Nature Protection. The Case of Local Management Boards in Norway

Professor Sissel Hovik, Department of public management, Faculty of Social Sciences, Oslo and Akershus University College. P.O.Box 4 St.Olavs plass. 0130 Oslo. Norway.

Tel: +4767238236.

e-mail: sissel.hovik@hioa.no

Associate professor Eirin Hongslo, Department of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning, Norwegian University of Life Sciences. P.O.Box 5003, 1432 Ås, Norway

Tel: +4767231224

e-mail: eirin.hongslo@nmbu.no

Abstract

In 2010 Norway introduced local management of national parks and other large protected areas. Boards comprised of local politicians are delegated extended powers in the management of the protected areas. This paper examines how this system of local management deals with the conflicting dimensions of local interests versus national obligations and conservation versus use. The study is based on data from surveys to protected area board members and other actors involved, and on case studies in two protected area. The main finding is that the boards, accountable to central government but comprised by politicians accountable to the local voters, aim to balance local interests and national obligations, and conservation and use. Popular involvement and anchorage is, however, weak, due to lack of mobilization and transparency. Furthermore, formal restrictions hindering the boards to deal with local economic development could make the boards less attractive for the local political leadership.

Key words: Decentralization, nature conservation, nature protection management, Norway.

1. Introduction

Protected area management faces two main challenges concerning the vertical distribution of power between different levels of government and the horizontal distribution of power between different interests. The first challenge is balancing local participation and management and the national obligation to fulfil biodiversity conservation. The second is balancing sustainable use of resources versus biodiversity conservation (Sandström *et al.* 2008a; Hovik *et al.* 2010). Previous studies show that different types of conservation management balance these concerns differently. Traditional top down nature protection management tends to give priority to national obligations and conservation concerns defined by experts at the expense of the interests and concerns of local communities and user groups (Lane and Corbett 2005; Zachrisson 2009a; Gimere and Pimbert 1997). Community-based, bottom-up management on the other hand, tends to give priority to human development at the expense of biodiversity goals (Zachrisson 2009a, 11; Bradshaw 2003; Brandon *et al.* 1998).

In Norway, nature conservation has been marked by a lasting conflict between local actors and central government (Reitan 2004; Hovik and Reitan 2004; Daugstad *et al.* 2006; Overvåg, *et al.* 2015). To close this conflict the government launched a reform in 2010 that introduced local management of national parks and other large protected areas in Norway. Protected area boards, comprising mayors or other prominent representatives of local and regional councils, and where relevant representative from the Sami Parliament, are delegated extended powers (Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012; St. prp. No. 1 2009-2010). The boards are directly subordinated the Ministry of Climate and Environment (MoE), and thus execute state authority. At the same time, the board members are nominated by and appointed among the members of local and regional councils, and thus represent local communities.

Such a hybrid solution, combining centralization and decentralization, is rather unique (Hongslo *et al.* 2015; Sandström *et al.* 2008b). Models based on co-management between central government and local stakeholders are more common among European countries (see *i.e.* Zachrisson 2009a;

Getzner et al. 2014; Barker and Stockdale 2008). In spite of this uniqueness, the Norwegian solution is nevertheless theoretically interesting. The protected area boards are accountable upwards to the Minister and downwards to the local constituencies. This duality may work as a mechanism to solve conflicts between central and local level and strengthen the legitimacy of nature protection. Critics of this model fear that local user interests will be favored over national goals and protection values (Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012; Skogen 2013). This paper focuses on the role of local and regional politicians in protected area boards. By mapping the board members' interaction with other actors and studying the function of the boards, we ask the following three questions:

- First, which actors and interests do mayors interact with in their capacity as protected area board members? Mainly representatives of the local communities and user interests or also national authorities and protection interests?
- Second, how do the boards handle the inherent tension between local interests and national obligations? Do the board members focus narrowly on local concerns, or also on national and international concerns?
- Third, how do the boards handle the conflicts between use and conservation? Do they focus narrowly on use interest, or also on conservation concerns?

The article is based on data from surveys to protected area board members and other actors involved in the management of protected areas, and on case studies of the work of two protected area boards. Through examining outcomes of this hybrid model, we aim to contribute to the discussion on the institutional design of nature protection management (Zachrisson 2009a; Hovik *et al.* 2010; Ostrom 1990; Carlson 2008).

2. Nature conservation management – a multidimensional task

In this paper, we focus on the division of power and responsibilities between levels of government. Nature conservation management, like any nature resource- or eco-system management, crosses

boundaries (Olsson *et al.* 2007, Armitage 2008; Berkes 2009; Moss 2012). It crosses the boundaries of municipalities and counties. In order to account for all human activity that influences the ecosystem, it crosses the administrative boundaries of a range of policy sectors. Global concerns and international treaties influence and often grounds nature conservation, while conservation regulations restrict the activities of local people. Thus, nature conservation management crosses the boundaries between different levels of government. These features pose questions of institutional fit (Moss 2012; Olsson *et al.* 2007); how do we incorporate transboundary challenges in an institutional design?

Two challenges are of particular importance regarding the division of power and responsibility between levels of government: balancing local autonomy with national commitments to biodiversity conservation and balancing use and conservation (Jones and Burgess 2005; Sandström *et al.* 2008a; Hovik *et al.* 2010). Concerning the balance of local autonomy and national commitment, nature conservation is justified in the need to secure nature values and diversity for present and future generations of humanity. Designation of protected areas is a state responsibility, based on national obligations to international agreements. However, nature conservation intervenes in the livelihood and welfare of local people, and is, furthermore, often dependent on their knowledge and experiences (Olsson *et al.* 2007; Armitage 2008). Agenda 21, the Convention on biodiversity, the Aarhus-convention and the ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous People all recommend some form of local participation. Norway has joined all these agreements, and has consequently stated that affected parties should be able to participate in the decision-making and management of national parks and other protected areas (St. meld. No. 21 2004-2005).

The second challenge concerns the conflict between conservation and use. The main aim of biodiversity conservation is the protection of species and areas threatened by human activities. The question is whether one should allow some forms of human activities in protected areas, and what type of activities. In Norwegian national parks, traditional use of natural resources, like grazing, fishing, hunting and picking berries and mushrooms is allowed. As national parks are most often

established in remote areas with declining populations and economic activities, the possibility for further economic development is crucial from a local perspective. Nature based tourism has been mentioned as an example of an activity that could be beneficial in such areas. (Fredman and Tyrväinen 2010). Economic utilization of the national park status for the benefit of local communities is a declared policy goal of the Norwegian government (St. prp. no. 65 2002-2003). Thus, how to balance conservation and use is brought to the fore by both central and local government and industry.

These two challenges tend to merge, as the main concerns of the local communities often are to sustain traditional use and promote further economic development. In order to meet these challenges, nature conservation management requires a careful and sustainable balancing of the representation of local and global values and interests, and appropriate vertical distribution of power among representatives of the local communities, national and international policy-makers.

Finding this balance has proved difficult. The traditional top-down conservation management has empowered the professional state bureaucrats (Arnesen and Riseth 2008; Emmelin and Kleven 1999), and thereby prioritized nature values and protection interests over local values and user interests. It has been criticized for insensitivity to local knowledge, for lack of responsiveness and little capacity to adapt to the local context (physical or social), not recognizing the needs of the local people, and been considered ineffective as local people have resisted the management rules (Ribot et al. 2010; Lane and Corbett 2005; Zachrisson 2009a; Ghimere and Pimbert 1997). There is strong empirical evidence behind this critique, both internationally and nationally (Zachrisson 2009a; Sandström *et al.* 2008a).

Community based – or bottom up – conservation, on the other hand, has been criticized for prioritizing human development, while subordinating biodiversity goals that are rarely achieved (Zachrisson 2009a p. 11, Bradshaw 2003, Brandon et al. 1998). However, the scientific evidence of the effects of local conservation management are mixed or ambiguous (Zachrisson 2009a; Wilhusen *et al.* 2002). The evaluation of previous administrative trials of municipal management concluded

that the management practice was largely in line with national policy and there were only a few examples of violations (Falleth and Hovik 2008).

In order to balance these concerns, the most common trend in developed countries has been to introduce co-management models. In such models representatives from different levels of governments share the power with representatives of private stakeholder, as in the case of Lapponia in Sweden (Hongslo et al. 2015; Zachrisson 2009a), Hohe Tauern National Park in Austria (Getzner et al. 2014) or in National Parks in Scotland (Barker and Stockdale 2008). In addition to include private stakeholders in the management, Austria and Scotland have also integrated the responsibilities for economic development within the framework of National Park management. Norway deviates from this trend by solely involving representatives of elected local and regional councils in managing state power. Other representatives are part of an advisory committee, that meet once a year and have no formal power.

3. The local protected area management of Norway

In Norway, like in most other developed countries, a professional state bureaucracy (i.e. the county governor) has managed protected areas. The 2010 reform delegated the responsibility for the management of large protected areas to a board comprised by mayors or vice mayors from affected municipalities, elected politicians from affected counties, and (where relevant) members represented the Sami parliament (St. prp. No. 1 2009-2010). The local council nominates board members, while the Ministry of Climate and Environment (MoE) formally appoints them. The board members are often mayors and vice mayors, as MoE encourages the nomination of high-level politicians.

The boards have the power to issue dispensations from the protection regulations, and adopt and revise the management plan for the protected area. The Norwegian Environment Agency (NEA) subsequently approve the management plan. Furthermore, the Minister has the power to instruct

the boards, while the county governor (and other actors) can appeal board decisions. The Minister considers the appeals (from January 2015 delegated to NEA).

Also new in this model is that each area has a protected area manager. Although employed by the county governor, he or she is subordinated to and secretary to the board. Their linkages to the county governor and their professional background is assumed to contribute to a professional management based on natural sciences, while their linkages to the area is assumed to promote the influence of local knowledge. An advisory group of stakeholders is thought to promote lay local knowledge and the interests of users. The advisory group is compulsory, but the board appoints the members of the group and decides its mandate.

The goal of the reform is to combine local anchoring with holistic management in line with conservation regulations (St.prp. no. 1 2009-2010). Furthermore, it aims for knowledge-based management, including both scientific and local knowledge. The reform covers all national parks and large landscape protected areas in Norway. Approximately 150 municipalities were invited to participate in the new management model. By the end of 2014, 37 boards were appointed (Norges nasjonalparker 2015).

Norway has a long history of conflict in nature conservation (Reitan 2004; Hovik and Reitan 2004; Daugstad *et al.* 2006; Overvåg *et al.* 2015). Involvement of local actors in protected area management has been on the table for decades. The 2010-reform succeeded administrative trials testing out decentralization of power to affected municipalities (Falleth and Hovik 2008). Unlike the trials and contrary to the recommendation by NEA of administrative decentralization (DN 2008), the government proposed this hybrid model (St. prp. No. 1 2009-2010).

The reform implies that local and regional politicians execute state government authority. It introduces a mechanism of downward accountability, as local councils nominate board members amongst themselves, and thereby seeks to gain local democratic legitimacy. At the same time, as parts of state administration, the boards are upward accountable to the MoE, and expected to consider national policy signals and national conservation goals and obligations. As such, the reform

blurs the division between levels of government. The double accountability lines can be interpreted as an attempt of institutional fit, to incorporate the multi-level character of nature conservation. The model also represents a geographical fit between the protected area and the jurisdiction of the board, as the boards comprise representatives from all affected municipalities. Since Norwegian municipalities and county municipalities are multi-purpose governments with broad responsibilities (farming, forestry, hunting, land use and infrastructure development, among other things), the model also integrates the multiple sectors affected by nature conservation. This reform is one of several examples of recent reforms in Norway resulting in institutional hybrid solutions. As such, it is an example of the post “New Public Management” trend described as “whole of government”, with a holistic approach focusing on coordination and integration (Christensen and Lægreid 2007).

In this paper, we study how protected area management boards and board members maneuver in the conflicting landscape between local and national concerns. We do this by examining the board members’ pattern of interaction or contact: Is it restricted to local actors or open towards a diversity of actor groups? We furthermore study how the boards respond to the inherent conflicts between local and national interests, and between protection and use.

The reform combines political and administrative decentralization (Agrawal and Ribot 1999), introducing both downward and upward accountability lines (Zachrisson 2009b). There is a risk that this model will suffer from weaknesses that often characterize inter-municipal cooperation in Norway; low political control and blurred accountability lines (Jacobsen 2014), resulting in a weak representation of local population (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Ribot et al. 2010). According to the literature on network governance, democratic anchorage may be strengthened through linkages to elected councils, but also through stakeholder participation, transparency and decision processes following democratic norms (Sørensen and Torfing 2009). We follow these arguments, and assume that the benefits from political decentralization will depend on the ability of the board members to have an open dialog with the elected councils, various stakeholder groups and the local public. In that case, the benefit of such hybrid model could be better informed decisions that both are in line

with national conservation goals and responsive to the interests and experiences of local people. This will require that the board members make their decisions based on input from various stakeholder groups, and, furthermore, actively defend and explain their decisions to the local people, when national conservation rules constrains or stop local activities.

According to the literature on adaptive management, it is not sufficient that the boards act as brokers balancing different interests, there is also a need for bridging organizations that are able to bring together different actors representing different interests and values, and local and expert knowledge (Berkes 2009; Olsson et al. 2007; Armitage 2008). It is not only a matter of representing the variety of interests, but also to involve and mobilize different actors. This will also require openness and dialogue with the various stakeholders.

There is reason to expect that the hybrid Norwegian model could achieve a good balance between local and national concerns. There is, however, a risk of a bias towards either side. On the one hand, there are reasons to expect that the boards will emphasize the interests and values of the local community, as the board members are accountable to the people in the municipality. As mayors or council members, they must consider and secure the interests of their voters and the community as a whole, in order to be re-elected. Thus, in tricky cases, they might choose the local before the national. As members of a protected area board, on the other hand, they are obliged to act in accordance with national regulations and to fulfill national policy goals. Both the formal norms and the potential sanctions by the Minister may put on the boards, point to this. A narrowly upward focus could result in local management simply legitimizing state conservation policy locally (Sandström *et al.* 2008a). In that case, we cannot expect change in the content of management practice.

Underlying the conflict between central and local level is the second dimension; the conflict between use and conservation. An important motive for local political involvement in nature protection is to promote economic development (Falleth and Hovik 2009). This concern is also voiced by central government, who launched a policy for stimulating and facilitating local industrial activities

in relation to nature conservation in 2003 (The “Mountain text”, St. prp. No. 65 2002-2003). Local actors often regard traditional top-down protection and rule oriented management as rigid and insensitive, hindering rather than facilitating industrial activity that could cater for both valuable nature qualities and popular accept of nature protection (Falleth and Hovik 2009). The question we raise is: Does this reform render mayors and other political leaders capable to strike a balance between conservation and use?

4. Data and methods

We base this paper on a combination of surveys, qualitative interviews and register data. We conducted web-based surveys to relevant actor groups in 20 national parks and large protected areas of southern Norway in February – June 2014. These groups are the protected area board members, the protected area managers, members of the inter-municipal advisory groups and members of stakeholder groups. As this paper focuses on the work of the protected area boards, the data from the board member survey is our main source. We do, however, report findings from the other surveys, as this makes us able to cover the work of the protected area boards from different angles. Table 1 presents the respond rates of these surveys.

TABLE 1 APPR. HERE

We further selected two protected areas, Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park and Setesdal-Vesthei-Ryfylkeheiane landscape protected area, for case studies. In the case areas, we conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives on the boards, stakeholder groups, municipalities, protected area managers and county governor. In all, we conducted 17 interviews (with 19 informants) from January to March 2013. We also used information given by the manager and board members in Stølsheimen-Nærøyfjorden landscape protected areas – collected for the same project.

We complemented these data with register data of all complaints of decisions made in all protected area boards, collected from the Ministry of Climate and Environment.

Our first research question covers the board members' pattern of interaction. The task is complex as a large and diverse group of actors is affected by and contributes to the management of the area. In the survey, we mapped the frequency of contact with 12 important actor groups. These predefined actor groups cover the most important actors and interests, as local user interests, environmental interests, and local and national authorities are all represented. Therefore, we believe this question covers the board members pattern of contact sufficiently for our purpose. We related the board members' frequency of contact to the other respondent groups' frequency of contact with members of the protected area board.

Our second research question asks how the board members balance the tension between local interests and national conservation goals and obligations. This question is mainly covered by interview data, supplemented by data from the surveys. In the survey we asked the board members to indicate how well two statements described them. The statements are: "For me as a board member it is important to take care of local interests and view points", and "... to take care of national protection rules and regulations". The board members' response to these statements is used as an indicator of how they balance these two concerns. We further add data of the other respondent groups' assessment of the board members ability to balance these concerns.

The third research question concerns the tension between protection and use. This issue is also mainly covered by interview data, supplemented by survey-data mapping the board members and the other respondent groups' assessment of how well local management is balancing these issues.

5. Findings

5.1 Pattern of contact

Our first research question deals with the board members' pattern of contact with other actors – in their capacity as protected area board members. The results presented in figure 1 unveil that the

board members have most frequent contact with the protected area manager and actors in their own county or municipality, i.e. the fellow council members and members of the administrative staff. Most of them have less frequent contact with private stakeholder groups, researchers, the county governor and other public authorities involved in the area (such as the nature inspectorate, the wild reindeer board or mountain boards). They are seldom or never in touch with environmental administration at central level (like NEA and MoE) or other public administration (could be road authorities, other transport authorities, energy directorate, military).

FIGURE 1 APPR. HERE

These findings are supported by the other respondent groups, the protected area managers, stakeholder groups and municipal administrators (see table a1 in appendix). The interviews in the case area confirm the impression from the survey data of low interaction between the boards and affected stakeholders or the public. None of the informants report strong public awareness of the activities of the board. The board members seem neither to be active in gathering information used as input in the decision processes, nor in informing and arguing for the output of the process. As one Protected Area Manager expressed it:

The protected area board lives a life in isolation. They seldom inform about what is happening (Protected area manager).

The board members seem to trust, and rely on, the information they get from their administration (either the park manager or the municipal administration), or the knowledge they hold as members of the local community. In the capacity of conservation board members, the mayors and other prominent local politicians seldom seek additional information from stakeholders, professional community or central government.

Our study unveils that the board members' pattern of contact is narrow, largely restricted to local actors directly involved in the management of the actual protected area in question. Surprisingly,

they have scant contact with local stakeholders groups, like land owners, industry and environmental groups. Thus, our findings indicate that the board members orientate mainly *downward* to the local community and *inward* to the system of protected area management.

5.2 Central – local dimension

The second research question asks how the boards balance national and local aims. As shown in Figure 2, a large majority of the board members completely or partly agree that it is important to take care of *both* concerns.

FIGURE 2 APPR. HERE

The protected area managers support the assessment by the board members (see table A2 in appendix). Municipal administrators and stakeholder groups have no unified opinion, probably indicating either variation among individual board members in how they balance these concerns, or variation in expectations among the respondents. The interview data supports the board members' assessment. The informants underscore that the purpose of the board is to manage central government regulation, and that this obligation is important to fulfill. A board member expresses it like this:

When the municipal council or local party expect us to front a case in the board, is it important to ask: Who do I work for? When we are elected to the board, we are there to do a job in accordance with laws and rules and be loyal to the board (Board member).

The board members perceive themselves as representing local communities, and promoting local concerns. They share this perception with the other informants. In addition to formal rules and scientific knowledge, the board members consider it crucial to secure that local experience-based knowledge about the specific area informs decisions.

It is important that we have been in the area. It should have been mandatory for the case officer to have been there (Mayor and board member).

The managers, indeed, also emphasize the importance of local knowledge, as illustrated by the following:

I draw on local knowledge [...]. Good local knowledge makes it possible for us to look for opportunities, [...]. Not only management by regulations, we do also rely on reality (Protected area manager)

Another aspect of the local orientation is to act as an “ombudsman”. Although we find variations in how clearly the informants express this, the concerns for each individual applicant are important for the board members. One mayor reported that she usually is in contact with applicants preceding the final decision. In general, they try to avoid decisions that are unfavorable to the applicant. They also try to avoid decisions that are not in line with the recommendation made by the protected area manager. When the applicants’ concerns and the administrative recommendations conflict, the boards negotiate solutions that are in line with the protection regulations and at the same time is satisfactory for the applicant. Accordingly, the interviewees highlight the political competence of finding solutions in situations with conflicting interests and complex concerns:

The mayors are used to consider several regards, and make decisions when there are conflicting regards and interests. They are particularly good at balancing different regards. That is what is the advantage of the politicians (Protected area Manager).

One main concern for the board members is to make sure that the protected areas are managed in a way that is acceptable for local people. This implies searching for compromises between conservation concerns and the interests of the applicants, but also informing local actors of the reasons for regulations and decisions. An important, but difficult task is to defend and explain their decisions to local actors. “(It is) important to give people information and insight in why decisions must be as they are” (Board member).

5.3 Protection – use dimension

The formal function of the protected area boards is to execute national conservation policy. Previous studies of the preceding administrative trials found that the delegation of management responsibilities triggered the development of local nature management policies, placing sustainable

economic development at the fore (Falleth and Hovik 2009). Our question is – to what degree do the politicians use the protected area boards as an arena of discussing and developing local policy for economic development? And, do they perceive that the local management model contribute to such local development? Figure 3 reports the board members own assessments.

FIGURE 3 APPR. HERE

The board members are ambitious in realizing the development potential of nature protection, and their self-assessment is that they are able to find good balance between conservation and use. The protected area managers and the majority of stakeholder group members support this view; while the municipal administrators tend to disagree (see table a3 in appendix). Their rather negative assessment finds support in the interview material, which modifies the impression from the survey-data. In the interviews, the board members emphasize the limitations and restrictions in developing and implementing policies for sustainable development. The mandate of the board is to manage protection regulations, not to promote economic development. This frustrates the members:

The greatest challenge of the protected area board is that economic development is not a defined responsibility of the boards. This is wrong, in my opinion, and I am sure it will be changes (Mayor and board member).

The boards were overloaded with decisions on individual applications, mainly on dispensations regarding use of snowmobiles, which left little time for other matters. After changes in the legal procedures in 2013, the boards may delegate such decisions to the manager. We conducted the survey after this delegation, a fact that might explain the differences in findings between the case studies and the survey. The combination of dealing with individual cases and no responsibility for industrial developments is threatening the system of local protected area management, according to some of the board members:

If the boards are supposed to decide only on simple issues regarding motor transport, then the mayors will leave the boards (Mayor and board member).

... we have to be allowed to work with industrial development in the local community If this fall out, I am afraid that the commitment from the mayors will fade away (Mayor and board member).

The primary, but difficult local political ambition of “developing the protection, not hollowing it out” (Board member), is still just that: an ambition. The local politicians’ ambition to integrate protection management and sustainable development is not yet realized. So far, the boards mainly decide on single issues. Strategic issues concerning sustainable development are not on their agenda.

Complaints

A study of the complaints made to the boards’ decisions and of the Ministry’s conclusion in these cases, can shed further light on whether the protected area boards favors local user interests at the expense of national requirements and conservation values. By the end of 2014, 40 complaints on decisions made by the local protected area boards were registered. By that time, MoE had made final decisions on 27 of those complaints. Table 2 shows how those 27 cases distribute between complaining bodies and conclusions.

TABLE 2 APPR. HERE

The low number of complaints (40 in five years) indicates a strong acceptance of the decisions made by the protected area boards. The 27 complaints which are settled, are almost evenly distributed between developers/applicants and environmental administration or NGOs (the county governor and Friends of the Earth). The Ministry supports, completely or partially, 12 of these 27 complaints. It is not surprising that the “success rate” is high for the county governors, as they were previously responsible for managing the protection regulations. There are, however, both accepted and rejected complaints among the complaints from the applicants, the county governor and Friends of Earth Norway. To summarize, the statistics over complaints do not indicate any systematic tendency of favoring by the local management boards.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Our first research question considered the interaction between the board members and other actors and interests. Our study unveils that, in the capacity as members of protected area boards, the local and regional politicians have frequent contact with other public actors with responsibilities in the area, such as the protected area manager, fellow council members and municipal administrators. Their contact with landowners, environmental groups or other local stakeholders is surprisingly low. We know from previous studies that Norwegian mayors and members of local councils have frequent contact with individual citizens and groups of citizens, as they are active in searching for information from local actors (Hanssen and Vabo 2008), and local actors are active in lobbying politicians (Bjørklund and Saglie 2009). It is possible that the board members consider their competence as mayor or prominent member of the local council sufficient to fulfill their role as protected area board member. They are persons with a broad and deep knowledge of the interests and concerns of the local people. More surprisingly, local stakeholders do not seem to lobby the board members. The case study suggests closed decision-making processes, where the main inputs come from public administration and fellow politicians. The role of private stakeholders, either environmental NGOs or local user groups, are passive, informal and weak. The boards do not mobilize stakeholders or bridge different groups. Consequently, although the Norwegian model empowers local actors and takes local concerns, the model is closer to an old-fashioned government model, than the governance models found in other European countries.

Our second research question focuses on the central – local dimension. Our data indicate that the fear that the local management model cause a strong bias towards local interests is overstated. On the contrary, the local and regional politicians seem to fulfill their obligation as protection area board members. In their capacity as board members, local politicians adjust to the norms and rules embodied in the institutional settings of the boards as executors of central government authority. At the same time, the data suggest that the double accountability lines

function. As representatives of the local and regional communities, the politicians bring in local perspectives. They search for decisions informed by local knowledge and the interests of local actors, and aim to find a balance between national policy concerns and local interests. Whether this hybrid solution is able to realize the ambition of local popular support and a holistic and integrated management remains an open question.

The board members state that their ambition is to create local understanding of the conservation values and acceptance for the protection regime. They do so by basing decisions on deliberation on the board and recommendations from the protected area manager, and communicating and justifying these decisions to local stakeholders. The system of local management, or political decentralization, has so far not implied that local stakeholder groups and other affected interests are invited to influence decisions directly. On the contrary, a lack of transparency and popular involvement seems to mark the system. These are features common to inter-municipal boards and other types of indirect democracy (Jacobsen 2014). Mechanisms for downward accountability or democratic anchorage (Sørensen and Torfing 2009), like transparency, and popular and political involvement, seem to be unused. Consequently, the democratic potential of political decentralization (Ribot 2004; Agrawal and Ribot 1999) is limited when it builds on indirect democratic governance. The protected area management model is used to execute central government policy that is informed by local concerns and thereby locally anchoring or legitimizing conservation policy. It is not used as a channel of policy debate and policy development. Thus, our conclusion supports findings in previous studies (Hovik et al. 2010; Sandström et al. 2008a)

Regarding our third research question, our data clearly indicates that the boards are not arenas for discussion and formulation of a local or regional policy for sustainable development. Contrary to other countries, where the responsibility for economic development is integrated with the responsibility for protection management (Getzner et al 2014; Barker and Stockdale 2008), these concerns are discussed and decided on other arenas in Norway. The most important concerns for the mayors – local development – is excluded from the protected area boards. If the mayors do not find

a way to integrate protection management and their strife for economic development, there is a risk that they leave the boards. There are reasons to believe, however, that the boards' ability to create local support and legitimacy relies on the fact that they are comprised of local political leaders. Mayors and vice mayors have broad contact with local actors and extensive local knowledge. There is a risk that decisions made by boards comprised of political backbenchers will be less informed by local knowledge and less accepted by local stakeholders.

Thus, the protected area boards seem to be able to balance between national conservation goals and obligations, and local interests. Less seems to be achieved regarding stakeholder involvement and integrated management. This is probably a consequence of the government and single-purpose character of the Norwegian model. Co-management or governance models might have opened up the management, both regarding actors and issues. Even though the experiences from co-management models in other countries are ambiguous (Barker and Stockdale 2008; Zachrisson 2009a), there is evidence indicating that co-management have the potential to mobilize and empower local stakeholders (Zachrisson 2009a), promote co-production of knowledge (Armitage et al 2011; Berkes 2009) and bridge actors and interests (Olsson et al. 2007).

The opponents of local management have been concerned with the risk of prioritizing local interests at the expense of the nature values (see Fouchald and Guldbrandsen 2012; Skogen 2013). Our study indicates that the local management system handles this dimension satisfactorily. Other aspects should be of greater concern: One is how to secure an open and transparent management able to mobilize the resources and knowledge of actors outside the public management apparatus, as local and external user groups and professional communities. Another is to find ways where the local political leaders (the board members) are able to combine their duty of protection area managers with their ambition of sustainable economical and societal development.

Therefore, it is important to let the boards combine protection management and sustainable development. The board members have showed that they are able to find balanced solutions between global conservation values and local interests. They might also be trusted to do so

concerning conservation versus use. The fact that they are not, can be interpreted as a result of a design to create local support for the national conservation policy rather than to give local actors the power to influence the policy.

Acknowledgements.

This paper reports findings from the research project LOCALMAN: Ideals, models and practice in natural resource management. Does local management matter? sponsored by the Norwegian Research Councils program Miljø2015. (Project number 203784). An earlier version of the paper was presented at the workshop on Local government reforms at the Nordic Political Science Association (NOPSA) conference in Gothenburg, August 12th-15th 2014. We thank the participants of this workshop and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments, which help to improve the paper.

References

- Agrawal, A. and J.C. Ribot. 1999. "Accountability in Decentralization: A Framework with South Asian and West African Cases." *The Journal of Developing Areas* 33 (4): 473-502.
- Armitage, D. 2008. "Governance and the Commons in a Multi-level World." *International journal of the commons* 2 (1): 7-32.
- Armitage, D., F. Berkes, A. Dale, E. Kocho-Schellenberg and E. Patton. 2011. "Co-management and the co-production of knowledge. Learning to Adapt in Canada's Arctic", *Global Environmental Change*, 21: 995-1004.
- Arnesen, T. and J.Å. Riseth. 2008. "Konfliktfyllda naturskyddsprosesser i Norge." In *Omstridd natur. Trender & utmaningar i nordisk naturförvaltning*, edited by C. Sandström, S. Hovik, and E. I. Falleth, 83-104. Umeå: Borea.
- Barker, A. and A. Stockdale. 2008. "Out of the wilderness? Achieving sustainable development within Scottish national parks" *Journal of Environmental Management*, 88: 181-193.
- Berkes, F. 2009. "Evolution of Co-management: Role of Knowledge, Generation, Bridging Organizations and Social Learning." *Journal of Environmental Management* 90: 1692-1702.
- Bjørklund, T. and J. Saglie. 2009. «Ensaksdeltakelse: om underskriftskampanjer og politikerkontakt.» In *Det nære demokratiet – lokalvalg og lokale deltakelse*, edited by J. Saglie, 187-210. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag.
- Bradshaw, B. 2003. "Questioning the credibility and capacity of community-based management." *Canadian Geographer* 47 (2): 137-150.
- Brandon, K., K.H. Redford, and S.E. Sanderson, eds. 1998. *Parks in peril: people, politics and protected areas*. Washington DC: Island Books.
- Carlson, L. 2008. "Omstridd natur i teori och praktik". In *Omstridd natur: Trenden och utmaningar i nordisk naturförvaltning*, edited by C. Sandström, S. Hovik, and E.I. Falleth, 33-59. Umeå: Borea.
- Christensen, T. and P. Læg Reid. 2007. "The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector Reform." *Public Administration Review* 67 (November/December): 1059-1066
- Daugstad, K., H. Svarstad, and O.I. Vistad. 2006. «A Case of Conflicts in Conservation: Two Trenches or a Three-dimensional Complexity?" *Landscape Research* 31 (1): 1-19
- DN (Direktoratet for naturforvaltning). 2008. *Lokal forvaltning av verneområder – en evaluering av delegering*. Direktoratet for naturforvaltnings tilrådning til Miljøverndepartementet. Trondheim: DN.
- Emmelin, L. and T. Kleven. 1999. *A Paradigm of Environmental Bureaucracy? Attitudes, Thought Styles and World Views in the Norwegian Environmental Administration*. NIBR's Pluss series 5-99. Oslo: Norwegian institute of urban and regional research.
- Falleth, E.I. and S. Hovik. 2008. *Lokal forvaltning av store verneområder: erfaringer fra fire forsøk*. NIBR-rapport, vol. 2008:11. Oslo: Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning.
- Falleth, E.I. and S. Hovik. 2009. "Local Government and Nature Conservation in Norway: Decentralisation as a Strategy in Environmental Policy." *Local Environment* 14 (3): 221-231
- Fauchald, O.K. and L.H. Gulbrandsen. 2012. "The Norwegian Reform of Protected Area Management: A Grand Experiment with Delegation of Authority?" *Local Environment* 17 (2): 203-222.

- Fredman, P. and L. Tyrväinen. 2010. "Frontiers in nature-based tourism." *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*. Vol. 10. 3: 177-189
- Getzner M., M. Lange Vik and E. Brendehaug. 2014. "Governance and management strategies in national parks: implications for sustainable regional development". *International Journal of Sustainable Society*, Vol. 6, 1-2: 82-101
- Hanssen, G.S. and S.I. Vabo. 2008, «Styringsdilemmaer i lokaldemokratiet – økte utfordringer med digitalisering?» In *Digitale dilemmaer.*, edited by E. Skogerbø and G. Enli, 18-38. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Hongslo, E., S. Hovik, A. Zachrisson and A. K. Aasen Lundberg (2015): «Decentralization of Conservation Management in Norway and Sweden. Different translations of an international trend». *Society & Natural Resources*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2015.1086456>
- Hovik, S. and M. Reitan. 2004. "National Environmental Goals in Search of Local Institutions." *Environment and planning C, government and policy* 22 (5): 287-699.
- Hovik, S., C. Sandström, and A. Zachrisson. 2010. "Management of Protected Areas in Norway and Sweden: Challenges in Combining Central Governance and Local Participation." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 12 (2): 159-177.
- Jacobsen, D.I., 2014. *Interkommunalt samarbeid i Norge. Former, funksjoner og effekter*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Lane, M.B. and T. Corbett. 2005. "The Tyranny of Localism: Indigenous Participation in Community-Based Environmental Management." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 7 (2): 141-159
- Miljødirektoratet. 2015. Nasjonalparker og verneområdestyrer. <http://nasjonalparkstyre.no/>
- Moss, T., 2012. "Spatial Fit, From Panacea to Practice: Implementing the EU Water Framework Directive." *Ecology and Society*, 17 (3): article 2.
- Olsson, P., C. Folke, V. Galaz, T. Hahn. and L. Schultz. 2007. "Enhancing the Fit through Adaptive Co-management: Creating and Maintaining Bridging Functions for Matching Scales in the Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, Sweden." *Ecology and Society* 12 (1): article 28.
- Ostrom, E. 1990. *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Overvåg, K., T. Skjeggedal and C. Sandström. 2015. «Management of mountain areas in Norway and the persistence of local-national conflicts». *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2015.1062747>.
- Reitan, M. 2004. "Politicisation and Professional Expertise in the Policy of Nature Conservation." *Local Environment*, 9 (5): 437-450.
- Ribot, J. C., J. F. Lund, and T. Treue. 2010. "Democratic decentralization in sub-Saharan Africa: its contribution to forest management, livelihoods, and enfranchisement." *Environmental Conservation* 37 (1): 35-44.
- Ribot, J. C., 2004. *Waiting for democracy: The politics of choice in natural resource decentralization*. Washington, DC: World Resource Institute.
- Sandström, C., S. Hovik, and E.I. Falleth. eds. 2008a. *Omstridd natur: Trenden och utmaningar i nordisk naturförvaltning*. Umeå: Borea

- Sandström, C., E.I. Falleth, and S. Hovik. 2008b. «Omstridd natur.» In *Omstridd natur: Trenden och utmaningar i nordisk naturförvaltning*, edited by Sandström, C., S. Hovik and E.I. Falleth, 13-32. Umeå: Borea.
- Skogen, K., 2013. «Lokal naturförvaltning?» *Fjell og Vidde* nr. 4, 2013.
- St. meld. nr. 21. (2004-2005) *Regjeringens miljøpolitikk og rikets miljøtilstand*. Oslo: Miljøverndepartementet
- St. prp. nr. 1. 2009-2010. *Statsbudsjettet 2010*. Oslo: Finansdepartementet.
- St. prp. nr. 65. 2002-2003. *Tilleggsbevilgninger og omprioriteringer i statsbudsjettet medregnet folketrygden 2003*. Oslo: Finansdepartementet
- Wilhusen, P.R., S.R. Brechin, C.L. Fortwangler, and P.C. West. 2002. "Reinventing the Square Wheel: Critique of a Resurgent «Protection Paradigm» in International Biodiversity Conservation." *Society and Natural Resources* 15 (1): 17-40.
- Zachrisson, A. 2009a. *Commons Protected For or From the People. Co-management in the Swedish Mountain Region?* PhD Dissertation. Department of Political Science, Umeå University
- Zachrisson, A. 2009b. "The Designation of Fulufjället National Park: Efficient Co-management through Downward Accountability?" *Local Environment* 14 (3): 259-271.

APPENDIX

TABLE A1 HERE

TABLE A2 HERE

TABLE A3 HERE

Table 1: Respond rate of the four surveys.

Survey	Number of distributed schemes	Respond rate (per cent)
Board members	121	53%
Protected area manager	24	83%
Inter-municipal advisory group	80	59%
Stakeholder group	225	42%

Table 2: Complaints on decisions made by protected area boards: Complaining body and conclusion. (Absolute numbers).

	Complaining body			
	Developer / applicant	County governor	Friends of the Earth Norway	Owner of neighboring property
Total number of complaints	16	7	3	1
Complaints rejected	11	2	2	0
Complaints supported	5	5	1	1

Table A1: How frequent different actor groups report to have contact with members of the protected area board (percentage).

Group of actors	Never	Seldom or infrequent	Once a month or more frequent	N
Protected area manager	0	15	85	20
Municipal administration	38	53	9	47
Stakeholder group members (total)	23	68	9	91
- Local industry	28	61	11	36
- Local NGOs	20	80	0	30
- Public authorities	26	53	21	19

Table A2: Protected area managers, municipal administrators and stakeholder group members assessments of the board members link to local actors and accept for national protection goals (percentage)

	Agree completely or partly	Indifferent	Disagree completely or partly	N
“Local and county politicians lack sufficient distance to the applicants to take care of the protection regulations”				
Protected area managers	15	10	75	20
Municipal administrators	47	20	34	41
Stakeholder group members	37	24	39	89
“Through management responsibility, the local and county politicians have gained comprehension for the central government’s view regarding protection management”				
Protected area managers	85	15	0	20
Municipal administrators	36	26	38	42
Stakeholder group members	58	28	13	81

Table A3: Protected area managers, municipal administrators and stakeholder group members assessments of the board members ability to find a balance between protection and use (percentage)

	Agree completely or partly	Indifferent	Disagree completely or partly	N
“Local management contributes to a good balance between use and protection”				
Protected area managers	90	5	5	20
Municipal administrators	34	9	57	46
Stakeholder group members	66	11	23	91
”Local management contributes to integrate the management of the areas inside and outside the protection borders”				
Protected area managers	70	20	10	20
Municipal administrators	30	19	51	47
Stakeholder group members	57	19	26	92
“The board is flooded by individual cases, we have no time and space for development issues”				
Protected area managers	50	15	35	20
Municipal administrators	39	18	42	38
Stakeholder group members	54	24	22	79

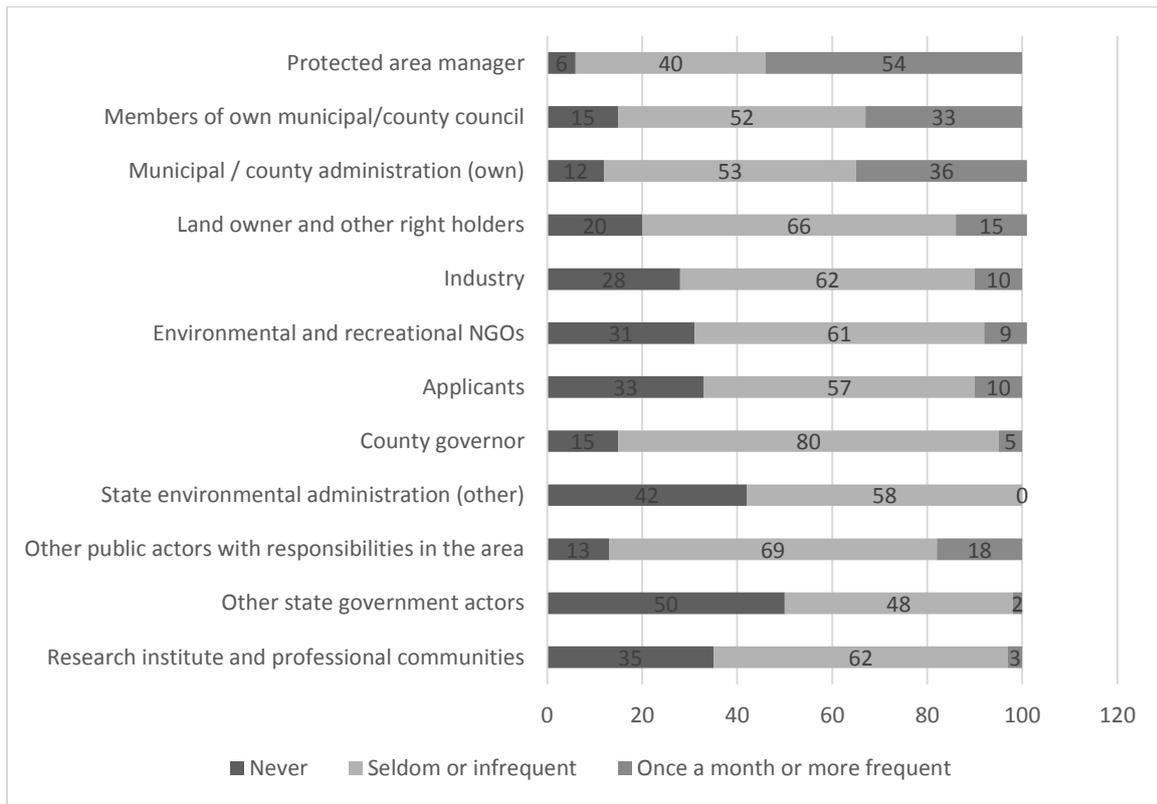


Figure 1: Protected area board members pattern of contact. Percent reporting how frequent they are in contact with the following groups of actors in their capacity of board members (N=54-63)

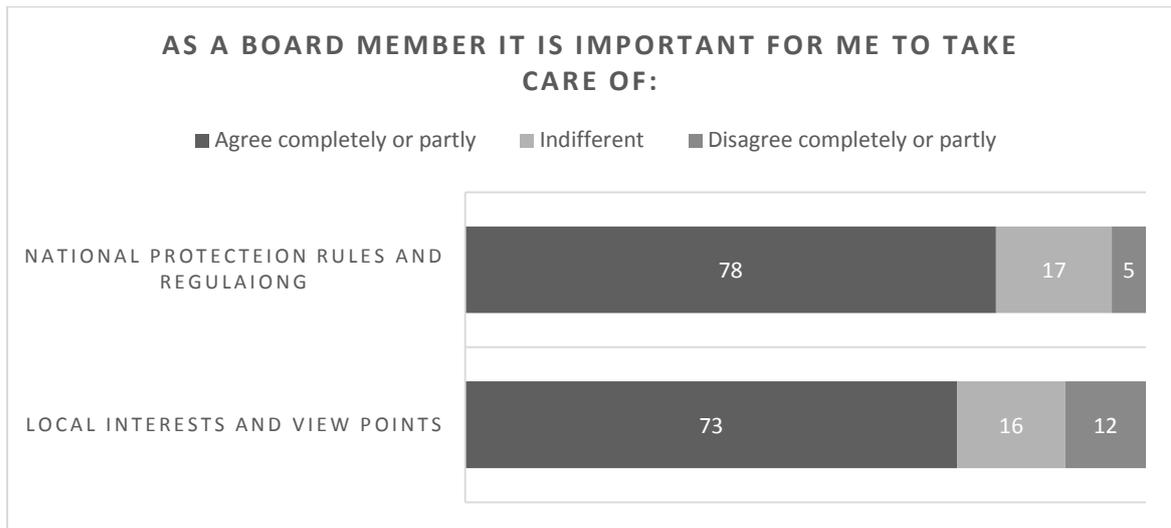


Figure 2: Protected area board members assessment of his or her emphasis on taking care of local interests and state regulations (percentage, N=60, 62).

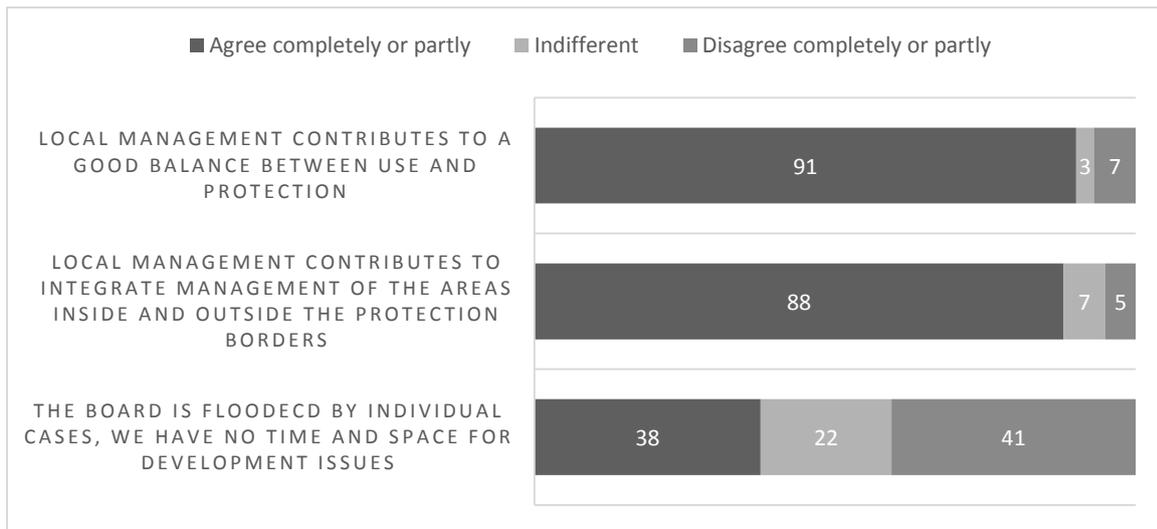


Figure 3: The board members assessment of the following statements concerning protection and use (percentage, N=59-61)