

“My research focus is to understand social aspects of nature-based tourism in relation to local practices”



Photo credit: Gaute Svensson

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My name is Gaute Svensson. I am a 37-year-old doctoral student at the University of Tromsø. My employer and project owner is Halti National Park Centre – a centre that, in addition to research, is also involved in providing information and education regarding protected areas like national parks.

My disciplinary background is social anthropology, which also constitutes the academic anchoring of my previous and current work. As for the general features of my research focus, my main concern has been to understand social aspects of nature-based tourism in relation to local practices like hunting, angling, harvesting and outdoor recreation in Northern Norway. In the ongoing doctoral project my main concern is two-fold and can be summed up in a question: How do local outdoor practices and traditions influence nature-based tourism today and vice versa? This question is based on an interest in understanding the dynamic aspects of outdoor practices and traditions today – something that is fundamental to humans in the Barents region. In order to understand how people in this region understand nature (and themselves in relation to nature, one might add) one must offer viewpoints on how these practices are adapting to the changes of today. This is the context which creates some of the premises of my research on nature-based tourism, an industry which is said to contribute to sustainable rural development.

Anthropology is known, among other things, for its focus on people's everyday lives, a point of departure seeking what is often referred to as a native's point of view. In my doctoral research everyday life has been approached through internships at several nature-based tourism enterprises as well as through participation in hunting and angling among locals in Northern Norway. Participant observation in this fieldwork has included small game hunting, salmon fishing, ice fishing for char, glacier walks, canoeing, deep sea angling, and dog sled trips, to mention a few.

Among other work-related tasks I am the project manager for the trilateral project *Norman*. This is a project bringing together Norwegian, Finnish and Canadian nature management institutions focusing on the managed of protected areas. We had our initial seminar in Canada in 2013, and we are planning to host the second and final seminar in Tromsø, Norway this year. Besides Halti National Park Centre in Norway, the other partners in Norman are Metsähallitus and the ELY Centre in Finland, and the Department of Natural Resources in Northwest Territories Canada.

My personal interests have been important in defining my academic work, as my main hobbies are hunting, angling and outdoor recreation. As I was taught old traditions like snare hunting when I was growing up, my curiosity for these old practices has been highly important in my personal and professional life. Beside hunting and angling in more modern ways, I also have a desire to keep the old practices alive – a desire that calls for research. This interest has led me to cross-cultural, non-academic work in Greenland and Canada, where I have sought to learn about other forms of traditional hunting and angling. Beside a year of hunting and angling in Northern Norway and Northern Sweden, I have taken several trips to Northern Canada during which I was living off the land for periods of two to twelve weeks. The Arctic and Barents regions are rich in knowledge, practices and traditions of a life in nature. It is my belief that traditional ecological knowledge can help us understand the challenges of tomorrow.