

Exploring adaptive governance in Arctic tourism: A cross-case analysis from Svalbard and Greenland

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ABOUT THE STUDY

This study examines how sustainability is understood and implemented – both formally and informally – in tourism governance in two Arctic destinations: Svalbard and Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaat).

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- **FACE-IT** (EU Horizon 2020 grant No. 269154).
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Tourism in the Arctic



Tourism plays an important role in ensuring vibrant and viable communities in the Arctic. However, many Arctic destinations have experienced a dramatic increase in arrivals and there are concerns about tourism-related pressures (Jóhannesson et al., 2022).

The Arctic region also faces rapid climatic and environmental changes that place pressure on the social-ecological systems that tourism relies on (Dannevig et al., 2023; Schlegel et al., 2023).

(Un-)Sustainable tourism



Despite decades of sustainability-driven initiatives in tourism governance, existing approaches have fallen short of their goals (Sharpley, 2020).

There is concern about the sustainability of the tourism sector and the negative impacts of its continued expansion (Gössling & Peeters, 2015).

Increasing pressure on local populations and tensions related to social, economic, and environmental change continue to grow (Gössling et al., 2020).

Tourism contributes to increased carbon emissions and the sector has yet to achieve any meaningful decoupling from growth and emissions (Sun et al., 2022).

Adaptive tourism governance



There is a need for more context-specific and place-based governance of Arctic tourism (Ren et al., 2024).

Adaptive governance is one such emerging approach (Juhola, 2023).

Adaptive governance approaches prioritize collaboration, flexibility, and context sensitivity to tackle the multifaceted complexities of contemporary social-ecological challenges (Hovelsrud & Westskog, 2023).

Findings: Svalbard

Local tourism actors argue that top-down governance impedes socially sustainable tourism governance, and that this system hinders collaboration and participation in governance processes.

However, the governance system on Svalbard is guided by strict regulations that explicitly aim to maintain the archipelago's vast wilderness and prioritizes environmental protection over other activities.



Findings: Greenland

Tourism is steadily increasing in Greenland and there are calls for tourism regulation and strategic planning.

In Greenland, environmental sustainability is gaining prominence.

There is a shift towards prioritizing “better tourism” over “more tourism.”

In the absence of formal regulation and governance mechanisms, local grassroots-driven initiatives are emerging.



Conclusion

Socio-ecological systems in the Arctic are undergoing profound changes with implications for the future.

Local communities and the tourism sector are impacted by these changes.

Including diverse knowledge systems and representation in governance ensures a broader range of understanding and potential solutions.


Adaptive governance is useful for ensuring a more sustainable tourism industry.



QUESTIONS?


THANKS FOR LISTENING

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