



# THE NORDIC WORLD HERITAGE AS A MODEL REGION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

March 2020

**BARK**  
**DARK**



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

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# INTRODUCTION

## Project background and aim

The purpose of this project is to understand and address the barriers for working strategically with sustainable tourism at Nordic World Heritage sites. The Nordic region currently has 42 World Heritage properties representing beacons in heritage protection as well as key assets in national tourism promotion. With the increasing growth in tourism to many World Heritage sites and the political attention to its socioeconomic potentials, strengthening the sustainability of tourism and heritage protection at and around World Heritage properties is an on-going challenge across the region.

In 2010 the Nordic World Heritage community encouraged all Nordic state parties as well as World Heritage site managers to adopt sustainable tourism strategies for the World Heritage Sites. This echoed similar decisions by the World Heritage Committee and was subsequently followed by a close cooperation between the Nordic World heritage sites and the World Heritage Center, culminating in three conferences and workshops [Suomenlinna 2012, Karlskrona 2013 and Roskilde 2014] on sustainable tourism. Here the Nordic World Heritage community tested and evaluated a new online toolkit developed by UNESCO, in the shape of 10 step-by-step 'How To' guides. The toolkit was published in 2015 and aims at helping site managers develop sustainable tourism strategies as an integral part of the overall management regimes. The purpose of the toolkit has been to help site managers to effectively manage and maximize tourism benefits, while minimizing its negative impacts.

The UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Programme and the Nordic World Heritage community agreed to pursue a strategy making the Nordic World Heritage sites a model region for sustainable tourism, with the underlying goal that all Nordic Heritage sites should develop strategies for sustainable tourism. With the creation of the Nordic World Heritage Association in 2016, the organisational framework was set to continue the work on making sustainable tourism a strategic priority for the Nordic World Heritage sites.

## The purpose of the project

What initially sparked the idea for this project is that the UNESCO toolkit is not being used by a great number of Nordic World

Heritage sites. The project wants to explore why through gaining a general understanding of the various challenges for working strategically with sustainable tourism at the Nordic World Heritage sites today. The project wants to use this new knowledge to promote the sustainable tourism agenda in the Nordic World Heritage community and to facilitate the development of new practices at site level.

BARK Rådgivning is carrying out the project for the Nordic World Heritage Association with financial support from the Nordic Working Group on Biodiversity under the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The overall goals of the project are:

- To address the impact of tourism on Nordic World Heritage sites.
- To encourage dialogue and cooperation on sustainable tourism across Nordic borders.
- To build common competencies on sustainable tourism in Nordic world heritage sites.
- To inspire and support Nordic world heritage sites in their work on developing sustainable tourism strategies.

## Method

The following methods has been applied in the research:

- Eight qualitative interviews with project reference group members [from local, regional and national authorities, tourism and business organisations and UNESCO].
- Four qualitative pilot interviews with Nordic site managers with the purpose of framing the themes and questions for the quantitative survey.
- A quantitative survey sent to all 42 Nordic World Heritage site managers [36 answered the survey].
- Seven qualitative follow-up interviews with Nordic World Heritage site managers, selected among survey participants, with the purpose of deepening and elaborating on survey answers.
- Workshop at the Nordic World Heritage Conference the 22nd September 2019.

# 1

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## **INVESTIGATING BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES**



# SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

## The greatest challenges in relation to sustainable tourism among Nordic World Heritage sites are:

- Congestion of parking lots, service facilities and local infrastructure
- Strain on landscape and buildings
- Too few visitors in the off-seasons and/or too many visitors in the high-season
- The fact that tourism does not contribute to site economy

## The challenge profile for sites **WITH** a sustainable tourism strategy:

- Experience more challenges in total
- Congestion of parking lots and service facilities
- Conflicts between locals and visitors
- Too many visitors during high season

## The challenge profile for sites **WITHOUT** a sustainable tourism strategy:

- Low visitor numbers
- Tourism is not contributing to site economy
- Lack of cooperation with local tourism businesses
- Rate themselves "currently economically unsustainable"

Issues like crowding, congestion, strain and conflicts between locals and visitors thus seem to drive the need for a sustainable tourism strategy, because visitor management issues create the burning platform that makes a strategy seem immediately necessary and useful, whereas low visitor numbers do not.

## A status of the sustainable tourism strategy work among Nordic World Heritage sites shows that:

- 60 pct. of the sites have or are in the process of making a sustainable tourism strategy.
- Many of the sites without a strategy have a great awareness on the topic and a sense of the general importance of having a strategy for sustainable tourism.
- There is a low involvement of local residents in the strategy work.
- Better visitor management is a way to improve tourist contribution to site preservation and economy [by minimizing strain on local nature, culture, environment etc.].
- Clear responsibilities and a well-defined organisational structure is key to the implementation of the strategy.

## This project defines sustainable tourism as:

- **Environmental sustainability:** How does tourism affect the cultural and natural values of the destination?
- **Social sustainability:** How does tourism affect the local community and how does the tourists affect each other?
- **Economic sustainability:** How does tourism contribute to the economic sustainability of the destination, site and local community?



### The UNESCO toolkit is only unknown to 11 pct. of the Nordic World Heritage sites.

- Sites **with** a sustainable tourism strategy have most often used the toolkit.
- Sites **without** a sustainable tourism strategy or in the process of making one are not currently using the toolkit.
- The toolkit is not an initiating factor of the strategy process; if a site does not already have a strategy for sustainable tourism, providing information about the existence of the toolkit is not enough to change this.

#### The issues with the toolkit, according to the sites, are:

- Too complex to use
- Too resource demanding
- Not suited for local context
- Practical application is difficult

#### The benefits of the toolkit, according to the sites, are:

- Inspiration for the smart way to develop your strategy
- Better understanding of key stakeholders, destination and challenges
- Better cooperation between the various stakeholders

### The barriers for developing a strategy for sustainable tourism, according to the sites, are:

- Prioritization of resources
- No sense of urgency due to low visitor numbers
- Lack of 'destination thinking' (tourism is someone else's problem)
- Lack of practical inspiration and process facilitation to get the strategy process started
- [Knowledge of the UNESCO toolkit is, on the other hand, NOT a barrier]

### The barriers for implementing a strategy for sustainable tourism, according to the sites, are:

- Lack of local involvement and ownership
- Lack of competences among local tourism businesses
- Lack of clear responsibilities and organisational structures (who is the 'project manager' of the practical implementation of the strategy?)

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CHALLENGES

The greatest challenges that the Nordic World Heritage sites experience when it comes to sustainable tourism, are listed in the chart below.

- Typical visitor management issues such as various types of congestion and strain are among the top challenges.
- Either too few visitors or too many visitors – or both, depending on season – are another set of challenge that many sites face.
- Many sites also find it a challenge that site tourism does not contribute to site economy, e.g. through direct funding of maintenance or preservation costs. Seen from site perspective it is not sustainable if tourists are only an expense and not a resource.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Congestion and overcrowding of parking lots and/or service facilities during peak hours of high season	38.89%	14
Too few visitors in the off-season	36.11%	13
Tourism on the site does not contribute to site economy	36.11%	13
Strain on landscape [flora, geology, cultural heritage]	30.56%	11
Strain on buildings and/or built structures	27.78%	10
Congestion of local infrastructure	27.78%	10
Overcrowding negatively affects the visitor experience	25.00%	9
Behaviour related conflicts between locals and users	25.00%	9
Too few visitors at the site	25.00%	9
Too many visitor during high season	22.22%	8
Local tourism actors lack competencies	22.22%	8
Tourism on the site does not contribute to the local economy	19.44%	7
No or little cooperation between site and local tourism business	19.44%	7
Other [please specify]	19.44%	7
No sense of ownership to the UNESCO site among the local population	16.67%	6
Accidents	8.33%	3
Disturbance of wildlife	5.56%	2
Behaviour related conflicts among visitors	2.78%	1
Too many visitors at the site	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 36 (respondents can check more than one box)</b>		

Question: Which of the following would you consider a challenge at your site in regard to sustainable tourism?



Survey participants was also encouraged to give qualitative answers to why working strategically with sustainable tourism is a challenge at their site. Here are some examples that represent the typical answers:

### Lack of political prioritization

Lack of understanding of World Heritage values in the city council.

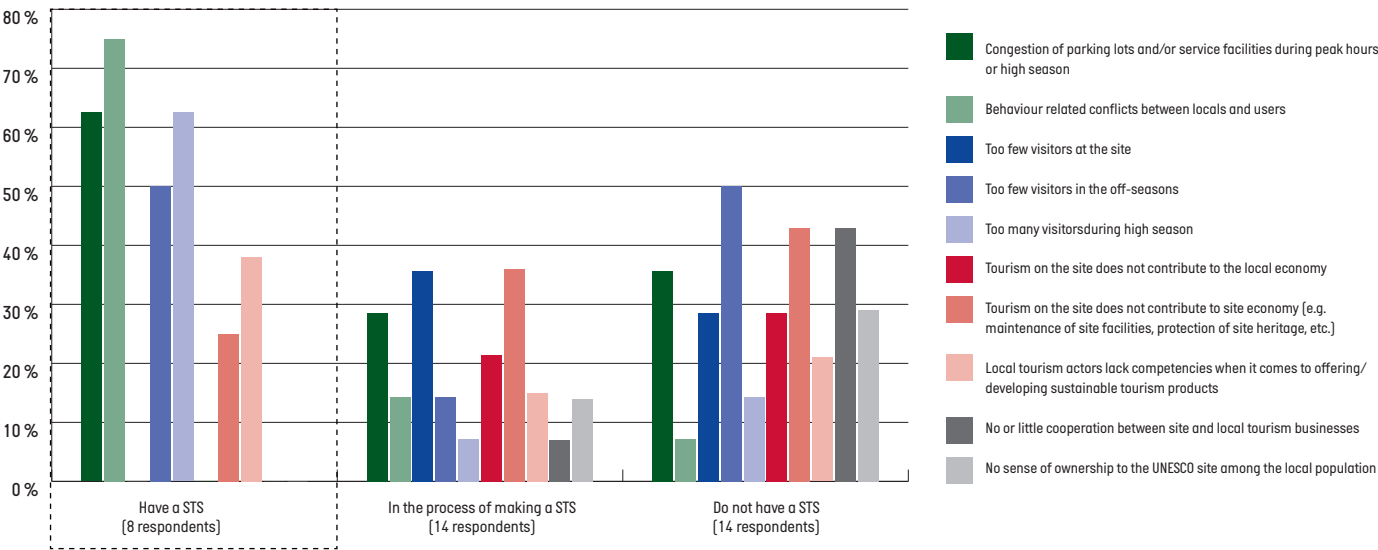
### Lack of local ownership

Local ownership of attractions in our site is fragmented, could be stronger.

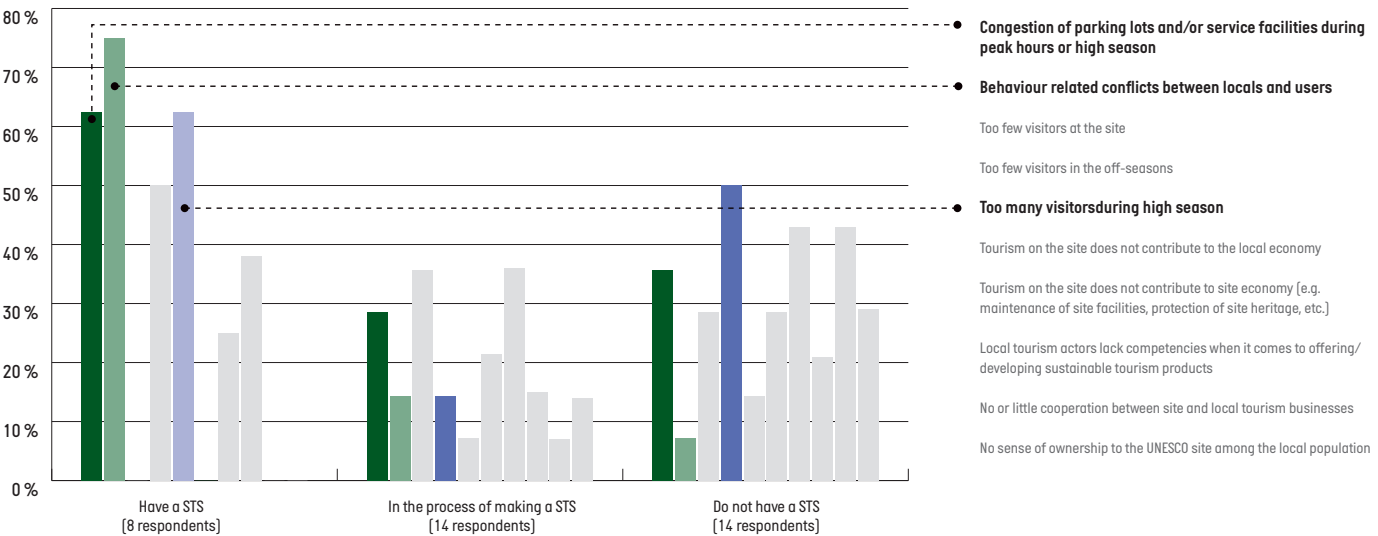
### Guest awareness/behaviour

Lack of awareness among guests about how to behave in a responsible and respectful way.

### Sites with a sustainable tourism strategy experience more challenges



Question: Which of the following do you consider a challenge at your site?



Question: Which of the following do you consider a challenge at your site?

In general, sites that have a sustainable tourism strategy experience more challenges than sites without a strategy. Their specific challenges are:

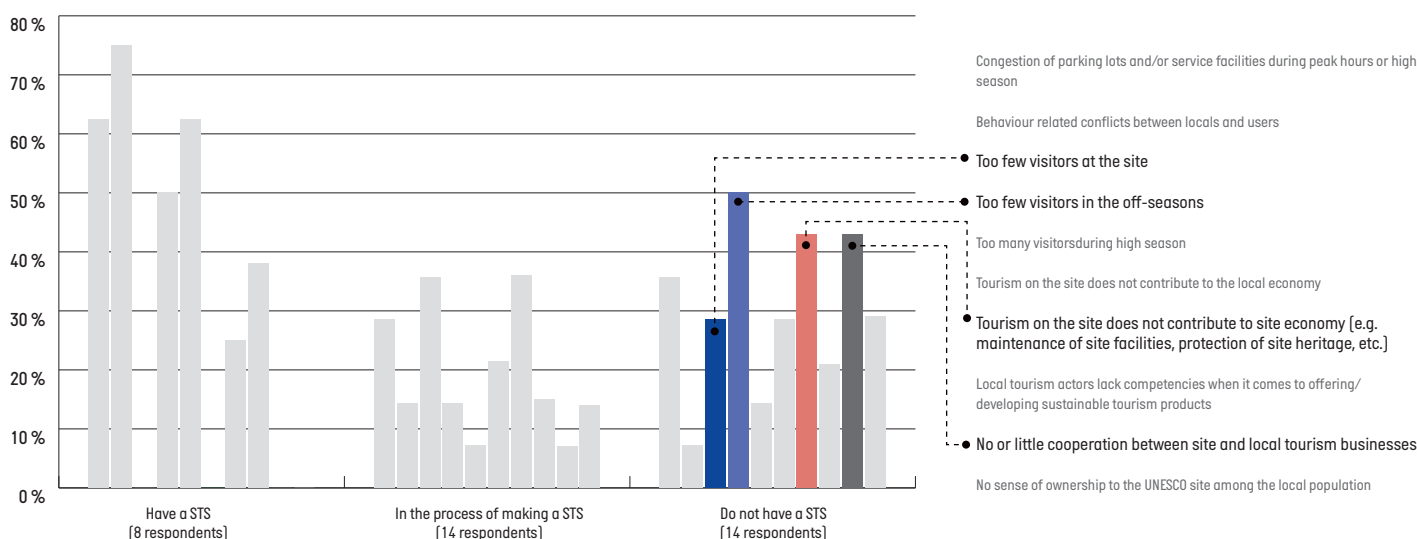
- Congestion of parking lots and/or service facilities during peak hours.
- Behaviour related conflicts between locals and users.
- Too many visitors during high season.

In other words, typical visitor management issues that creates a strong 'burning platform' and an immediate need for a sustainable tourism strategy that can address the issues.

**We don't have a sustainable tourism strategy. We haven't had any negative impacts from tourism yet, so we haven't focused on these problems, but the situation might not be the same in 10 years. So, we should be prepared with a strategy to handle this.**

SITE MANAGER

## Sites without a sustainable tourism strategy have a different challenge pattern



Question: Which of the following do you consider a challenge at your site?

The sites without a sustainable tourism strategy have a different challenge pattern from the sites with a strategy. Their main challenges are:

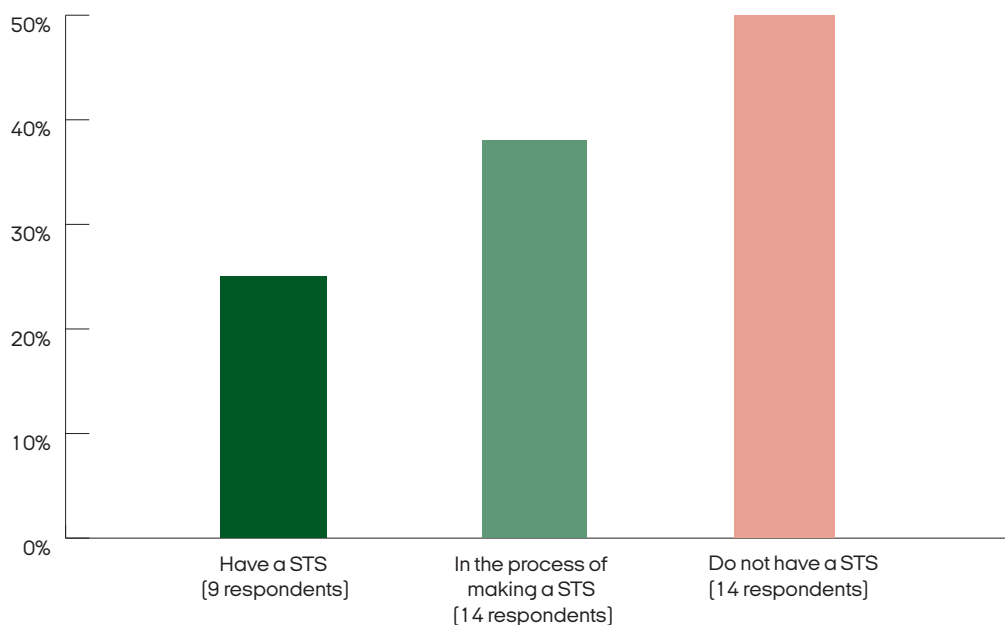
- Too few visitors at the site
- Too few visitors in the off-season
- Tourism on site does not contribute to site economy
- No or little cooperation between site and local tourism businesses

The low degree of cooperation with local tourism actors can be due to a low number of tourists in the area as a whole. Perhaps the local tourism industry is of no considerable size. Or perhaps the lack of cooperation presents a yet untapped potential? A potential that can be realized if applying a more strategic destination thinking approach to site management, i.e. through working together with local tourism actors in a common effort to create more sustainable tourism and to integrate the site into a greater destination framework. The lack of destination thinking in itself could also be a challenge, supporting the notion that tourism is someone else's problem, to put it a bit bluntly.

**I think some sites experience that their tourism numbers aren't large enough for the concept of sustainability to take up any significant space in their considerations. But in my opinion sustainable tourism is also about having enough tourism – tourism is a locomotive that can pull positive things with it if the framework is right.**

SITE MANAGER

### Sites without a sustainable tourism strategy are more likely to consider themselves economically unsustainable



*Has checked the box: "Our World Heritage site is currently economically unsustainable."*

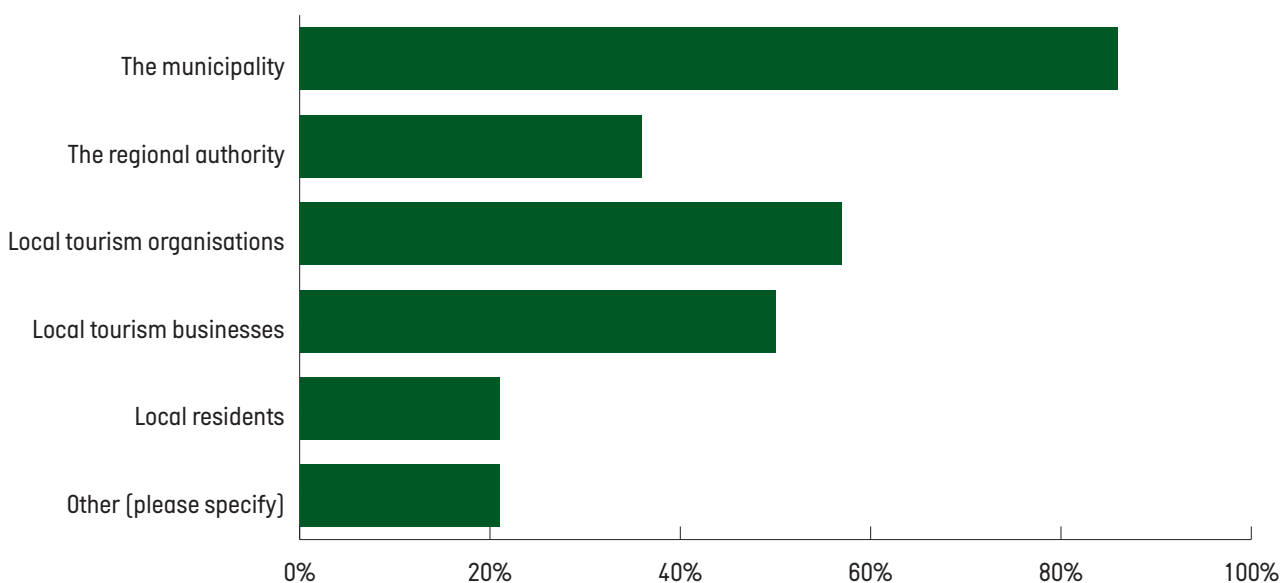
50 pct. of the sites that do not have a sustainable tourism strategy consider themselves currently economically unsustainable. This correlates with the key challenges that these sites report, such as low visitor numbers and no contribution to site economy from tourism. A bit paradoxically, their typical challenges are both the reason why they do not have a strategy (low visitor numbers is not

seen as a burning platform that needs to be addressed through a strategy for sustainable tourism) and the reason why they probably need a strategy. A strategy for sustainable tourism could help attract more visitors, and could also, on a more general level, help the sites put their potential value and role in local destination development on the political agenda.



# A STATUS OF THE STRATEGY WORK

## Local residents are not very involved in the strategy development process



Question: Are you collaborating / have you collaborated with any of the following in producing your sustainable tourism strategy?

60 pct. of the sites in the survey either have a sustainable tourism strategy [8 sites] or are in the process of making one [14 sites]. Most of them have been working together with the municipality and about half of them have been working together with local tourism organisations or businesses.

In comparison, relatively few have been working together with local residents in the development of their strategy. On the other hand, data from the qualitative interviews with site managers indicate that there is a great awareness of the importance of including local residents in the strategy process:

**"The purpose of the strategy is to create local engagement, something that the locals can see themselves in. To get input from the locals and develop the social side of sustainability."**

SITE MANAGER

Engaging the local residents and other local actors is key if you want to create a sense of ownership to the strategy and make sure that it will actually be implemented. Engaging local actors

will also build a greater understanding and a stronger network across various groups of stakeholders otherwise perhaps not in the habit of cooperating with each other.

### A strategy for sustainable tourism needs to be anchored in the right organization

**"One of the reasons why we succeeded with our sustainable tourism strategy is that the municipality took responsibility as project manager. When the municipality is the 'owner' of the strategy it is very powerful, because our site is not an isolated island, it is part of a greater destination."**

SITE MANAGER

As the quote above describes, a strategy needs to be anchored not only in the local community but also in the right organization, making sure that the strategy is coordinated with other strategic initiatives across the destination, that the implementation of the strategy is progressing and that all actors necessary for making the strategy a reality take ownership of their tasks and responsibilities.

### The reason some sites do not have a sustainable tourism strategy

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Other [please specify]	40.00%	6
We do not have the funds to make one	26.67%	4
We do not have the proper knowledge and/or experience to make one	20.00%	3
We are already following sustainability guidelines from a broader tourism strategy	20.00%	2
We are already following a broader tourism strategy, that does not have a particular focus on sustainable tourism	13.33%	2
Our site is already sustainable so we do not need one	6.67%	1
We do not believe that such a strategy would have any effect	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 15</b>		

Question: What are the reasons you do not have a sustainable tourism strategy?

Of the participants in the survey, 14 sites do not have a sustainable tourism strategy. And six of these sites have stated 'Other' as a reason for this. They have given a number of qualitative answers to this, and their answers suggest that the importance of having a strategy is very much on their mind, and that sustainable tourism is a topic of priority for them. Here are some examples to illustrate this:

**"We are currently revising the management plan and one activity is to consider sustainable tourism in future development of the site."**

**"So far, the municipality has not prioritized that, but we see it as an important investment for the future. We need to develop strategies and policies."**

**"It is important, but right now we are focusing on a new management plan. After the completion of that we might continue with a strategy for sustainability."**

**"There is a general lack of an overall strategy for tourism and visitor management at the site."**

Also, an example from Bryggen in Bergen (one of the respondents in the survey that do not have a strategy yet) supports this sense of importance and the initial steps already being taken to build the right foundation for a strategy: In September 2019 a specialised council for the world heritage of Bryggen was established, consisting of cultural heritage administrators, the directorate for cultural heritage, regional conservators, the municipality, local museums, building owners, the university and local tourism actors.

The goal is to create the foundation for a closer collaboration between the different actors and to start the preparatory work for developing a common strategy for sustainable tourism at Bryggen.

# THE UNESCO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TOOLKIT - STATUS AND USER PATTERNS

Sustainable planning and management of tourism is one of the most pressing challenges concerning the future of the World Heritage Convention today and is the focus of the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.

To address this challenge UNESCO has developed a toolkit consisting of ten 'how to' guides that describe best practice approaches to sustainable economic development through tourism:

**"The first of their kind, the 'How To' resources offer direction and guidance to managers of World Heritage tourism destinations and other stakeholders to help identify the most suitable solutions for circumstances in their local environments and aid in developing general know-how for the management of each destination."**

[QUOTE FROM THE UNESCO WEBSITE].

Read more about the toolkit at:

<http://whc.unesco.org/sustainabletourismtoolkit/how-use-guide>

## Low knowledge and use of toolkit

The majority (67%) of Nordic World Heritage sites have either not used or do not know the UNESCO World Heritage sustainable tourism toolkit.

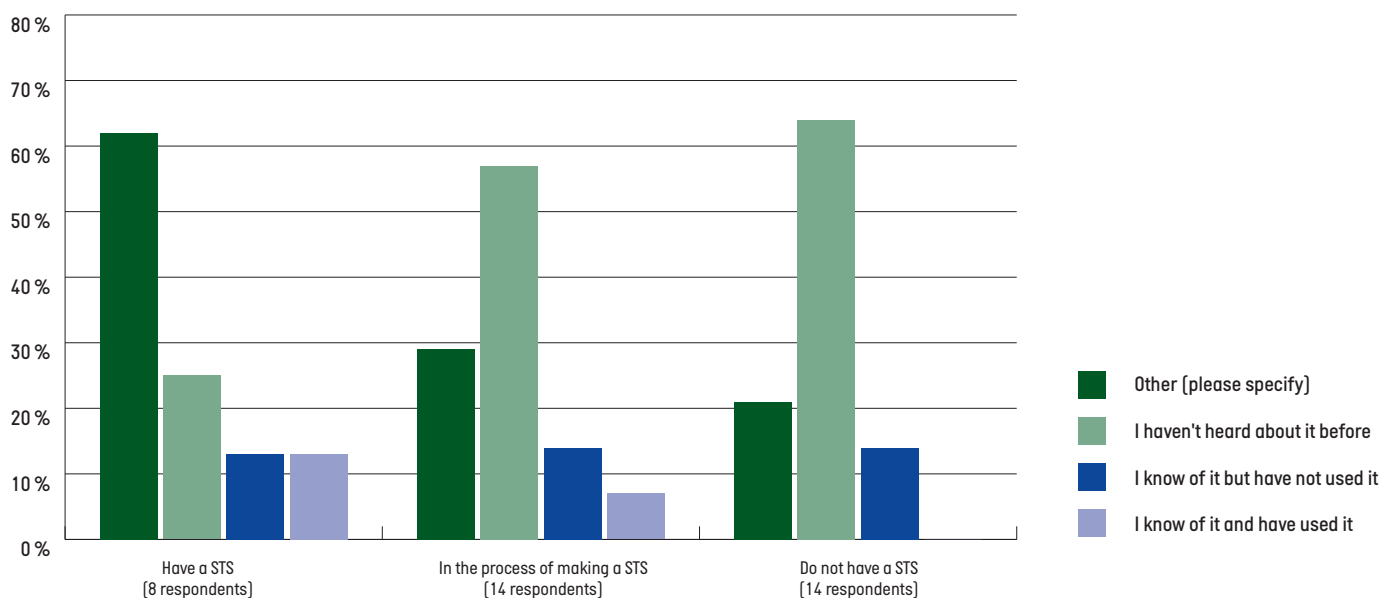
- 18 sites (50%) knew the toolkit but had **not** used it.
- 12 sites (33%) knew the toolkit and had used either **all** of it or **parts** of it.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I know of it but have not used it	50%	18
I know of it and have used parts of it	25%	9
I haven't heard about it before	11%	4
I know of it and have used it	8%	3
Other (please specify)	6%	2
TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 36		

Question: Do you know of and use the UNESCO sustainable tourism toolkit?



## More sites with than without a sustainable tourism strategy have used the UNESCO toolkit

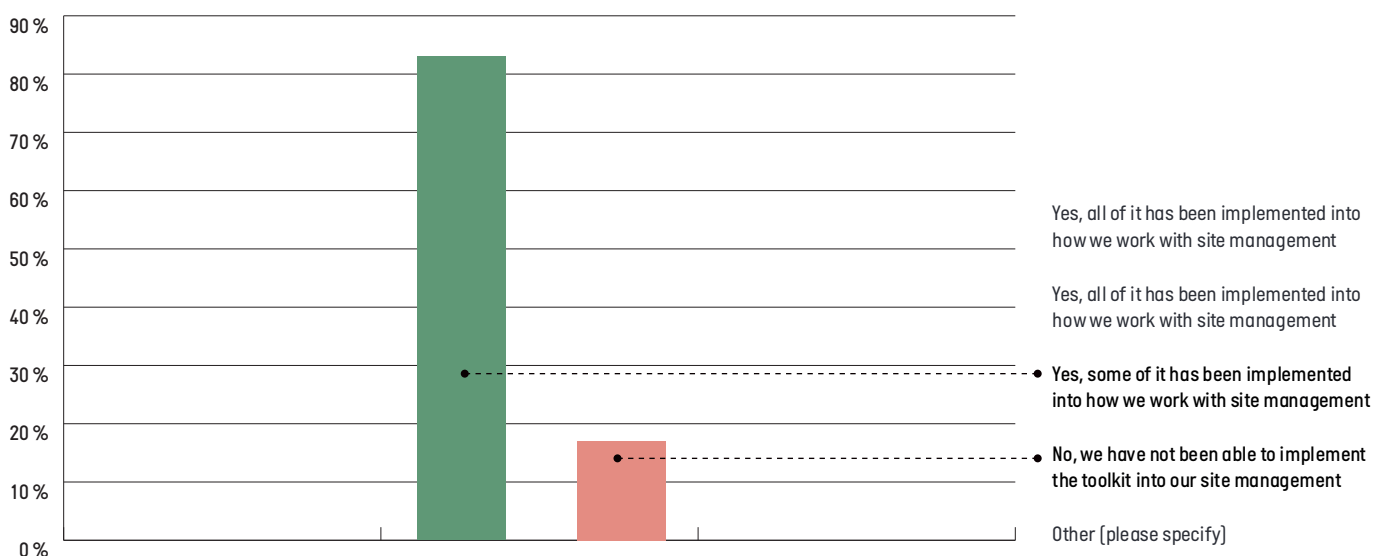


Question: Do you know of and have you used the UNESCO sustainable tourism toolkit?

As seen from the left, a large share of sites with a sustainable tourism strategy have used the UNESCO toolkit. But the majority of those currently in the process of making a sustainable tourism strategy are not using the UNESCO toolkit. The reason for this could be that they are still in the early stages of the process and

have not gotten around to applying the tool kit guides yet. Three of the sites without a sustainable tourism strategy have used the UNESCO toolkit, and from the follow-up interviews it has become clear that they have used the toolkit as a diagnostic tool to identify their challenges - an important first step in the strategy work.

## Practical implementation of toolkit results into the daily management of sites is successful



Question: Have you managed to operationalize the UNESCO sustainable tourism toolkit (i.e. have you managed to implement the toolkit into how you work with site management on a practical level)?

Six out of eight sites with a sustainable tourism strategy find that some of the results and learnings from using the toolkit have been implemented into the way they work with site management, initiating actual change in management practices.



"When I started in this job I printed out the whole toolkit and thought 'maybe I'm reading this later' and now it has been 3 years and I haven't made any progress."

"It's probably a good toolkit, but I don't know how to put that in my daily management. It seems like a separate thing from my daily work, maybe that's the problem."



"I shopped around in the toolkit. You don't have to use everything in the tool box – then it becomes too overwhelming. It is a tool for thinking through some procedures."

"It tries to get you to think more like a DMO – who are your stakeholders and that kind of thing. Pretty basic stuff but definitely not something that all world heritage sites have considered."

### **The toolkit is not an initiating factor of the strategy process**

Summing up the conclusions it seems that the toolkit does not work as an initiating factor of the strategy process, meaning that hearing or learning about the toolkit is not a sufficient motivational factor to begin a strategy process. But the toolkit is useful when you have already decided to develop a strategy for sustainable tourism, guiding you through the most important steps of understanding what your challenges are, which key actors should be involved etc.

In the latter case it works like a 'tool box' where you can pick and choose the tools suited for your particular situation and process.

In the former case, when not connected to an explicit need for working strategically with tourism, it is seen more as irrelevant 'home work' with no real connection to the everyday work of the site manager. In other words, the sense of urgency of having a sustainable tourism strategy needs to come from elsewhere.

### **The issues with the UNESCO toolkit**

The most frequently cited issues that users and non-users of the toolkit mention, are:

- That it is too complicated to use.
- That it is not easily accommodated to the local context.
- That it lacks practical application value.
- That it is too resource-intensive a process to complete.

Here are some qualitative examples of what the respondents answered when asked:

**In your opinion, what is the UNESCO sustainable tourism toolkit lacking or how could it be improved?**

**1 It is perceived as a resource demanding process to have to go through all 10 steps**

Some of the respondents see the tool kit not as a tool box, you can pick from, but as a 10 step program you have to complete from start to finish.

**"Unrealistic in terms of resources [time and funding] if to be realized step by step."**

**"I don't know if it is lacking anything – on the contrary, it's rather too comprehensive. We don't have enough resources to use the toolkit, neither personnel nor money."**

**"It requires a lot of work and time to fulfil since the site is complex – it involves private owners, four municipalities and different tourist organisations and together maybe one hundred stakeholders. We haven't seen any part that is willing to take the costs."**

**2 Site managers are asking for more practical inspiration and locally adapted process facilitation**

Learning from others and being guided through a strategy process that takes local conditions into consideration is a big, unmet need among the respondents.

**"It's lacking localisation (language and operational environment)."**

**"It would be nice to have some examples and some tips on how to implement the strategy work on site regarding different stakeholders."**

**"All the various toolkits from UNESCO may be difficult to get hold on and fully understand due to complicated**

**language. It would be fruitful to have workshops to get the work started."**

**"Maybe we need some workshops together with other sites. I think workshops are more useful than a written toolkit"**

**"When I created our strategy, I went through Suomenlinnas strategy and thought about what parts I could use for our own strategy. It is really useful to have some examples – to specifically see what other sites have done. I would also like to hear more about the process other sites went through when creating their strategy. And also the possibility to talk about the things that didn't work and the failures."**

**3 Site managers are asking for ways to better integrate the toolkit, i.e. the sustainable tourism strategy work, into daily management structures**

Integrating the sustainable tourism strategy work into already existing management tools and practices can help make sure that it doesn't feel 'external' or irrelevant but is seen as an equally important part of the daily management.

As the last quote below suggests, monitoring progress in sustainable tourism efforts is a practical, hands-on way of recording the value of the work you do, for your own sake as well as for the sake of attracting positive political attention to your efforts and achievements.

**"One idea to get more users of the toolkit is to integrate it when working with the management plans. For example, that the sustainable tourism chapters in the plans builds on the toolkit."**

**"We need a monitoring system for the site manager to see what the status of sustainable tourism is at the moment and how we are making progress. This would also be a handy tool to provide reports on sustainable tourism for the stakeholders and decision makers."**



## The UNESCO toolkit benefits

The sites that have had positive experiences with using the toolkit highlights its ability to serve as inspiration rather than being a 10-step program that must be completed from start to finish. Especially, there is a focus on the toolkits ability to help the sites understand their situation and challenges, identify key stakeholders, improve cooperation with local actors and develop a sustainable tourism strategy for the site. In other words, all the important analytical and strategic work that comes before the actual implementation of changes.

When looking at survey results, you can see that the answers that the respondents have given to the question "What are some of the benefits you have gained from using the UNESCO sustainable tourism toolkit?" corresponds in a very logical way with the most used guides from the toolkit.

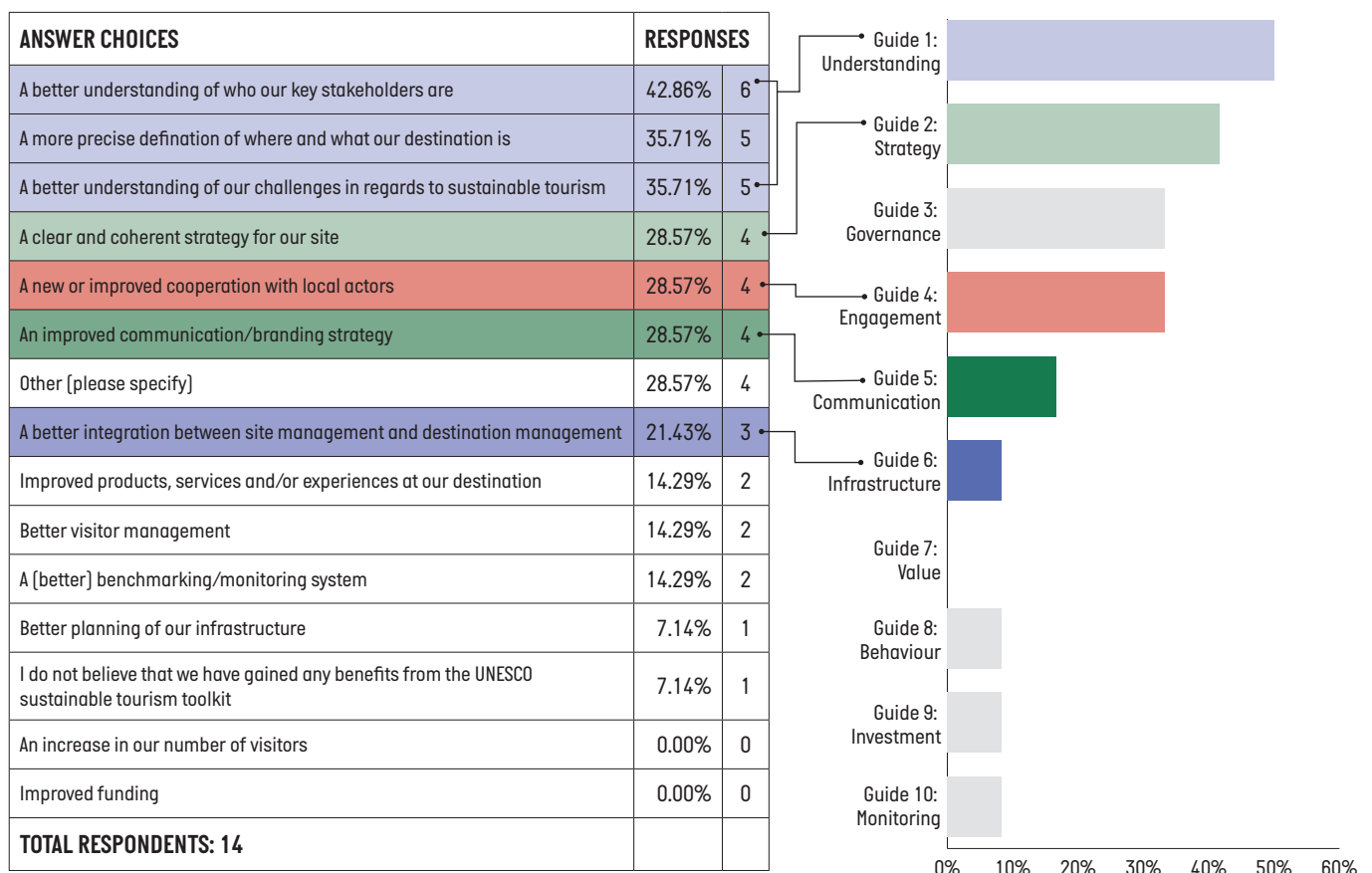
When the majority of respondents say that they have gained 1) a better understanding of who their key stakeholders are, 2) a more precise definition of where and what their destination is and 3) a better understanding of their challenges in regards to sustainable tourism, it corresponds with the fact that 'Guide 1: Understanding' is the most popular guide. And so forth through the guides Strategy, Governance, Engagement and Communication [see model below].


The rest of the guides – Infrastructure, Value, Behavior, Investment and Monitoring – are primarily guides aimed at creating practical, concrete change [what UNESCO refers to as the 'core delivery'] based on the more diagnostic and strategic nature of the first five guides.

One can only speculate:

1. **why the site managers primarily use the first half of the toolkit and**
2. **why they do not think that the toolkit has helped them e.g. improve their products and services, create better visitor management and infrastructural planning or increase their number of visitors.**

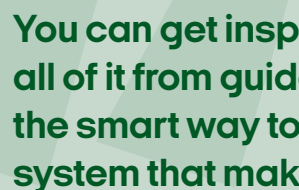
Maybe the toolkit works better as a diagnostic tool and strategy tool, and less as a tool for the practical implementation of the strategy, due to its low compatibility to the numerous local contexts? Maybe the sites need another kind of guidance or inspiration when faced with the practical steps 6 to 10? Or maybe they run out of time or resources after having completed the first five steps? Further research into this matter is needed.






**The toolkit is a good starting point for collaboration between heritage and tourism sectors from the perspective of the needs of the site.**

- QUOTE FROM FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW



**You can get inspired by it, even though you don't use all of it from guide 1 to 10. It provides inspiration for the smart way to work with this issue. It is a tested system that makes sense. I feel like I have UNESCO backing me up when I say that it's okay to make money on the world heritage.**

- QUOTE FROM FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW



**I see it as a useful tool to get all the involved participants working together.**

- QUOTE FROM FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

# 2

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**SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER-  
WORKSHOP IN STOCKHOLM ON  
THE 2ND OF SEPTEMBER 2019**

# ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Thingvellir National Park, Iceland  
[Promote Iceland]

## The purpose of the workshop

The overall purpose of the workshop was to present and discuss the insights from the analysis, with a focus on how to address the identified issues and challenges. Thus, the following summary of the workshop is really a set of jointly developed conclusions on the analysis, elaborating and qualifying its key points in a dialogue between all of the five Nordic countries.

## The workshop program

BARK Rådgivning presented the insights from the analysis. To supplement an analysis insights with some practice-based examples on how to work strategically with sustainable tourism, Tove Damholt, site manager at Stevns Klint in Denmark and Ingunn Sørnes from Innovasjon Norge gave two presentations.

Tove Damholt talked about how Stevns Klint organized and implemented their sustainable tourism strategy through a clear coordination of tasks and responsibilities, creating a strong ownership and sense of purpose among all the key stakeholders, from local tourism actors to the political level of the municipality. Today, the tourism strategy for Stevns Klint is anchored in the municipality, underlining the fact that UNESCO site Stevns Klint is part of a bigger destination.

Ingunn Sørnes from Innovasjon Norge talked about the process of implementing the Norwegian certification model for sustainable tourism destinations.

Ingunn Sørnes explained how they get the destination management organisations and other local stakeholders to successfully engage in the process, how they help facilitate the process and what kind of value the certification creates for the destinations – from controlling the impact of tourism to using sustainability in destination branding and communication. One of key points of success in this program is the carefully designed work process that guides and helps the destination through the certification, from specially trained process consultants to workshops and network meetings.

## Participants

There was a great interest and turnout for the workshop with a total of 35 participants from 6 different countries, mainly site managers but also other stakeholders such as representatives from tourist organisations and cultural institutions in the Nordic countries.



## LEARNING POINTS FROM THE WORKSHOP - AN OVERVIEW

- The UNESCO toolkit is difficult to adapt to the local context of the sites
- There is a great demand for more process facilitation and opportunities for sharing experiences in relation to the strategic work
- Impact should be created through change of daily practice, not one-time strategy project
- Integration of strategies can support the goal of implementing a sustainable tourism strategy into daily practice
- Stakeholder inclusion creates common ownership and a stronger strategy
- The strategy needs to be anchored in the right organisation
- A strategy is a strong tool for engaging in dialogue on the political level
- A strategy for sustainable tourism can (also) be a useful tool for sites that struggle with low visitor numbers
- Monitoring progress is a learning tool as well as a political tool
- A certification of sustainable world heritage sites has potential brand value





Grimeton Radio Station, Varberg Sweden  
[World Heritage Grimeton Radio Station]

# LEARNING POINTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

## **The UNESCO toolkit is difficult to adapt to the local context of the sites**

One of the biggest barriers for using the UNESCO toolkit is that it is difficult to adapt to the various and very specific local contexts of the Nordic World Heritage sites. The sites vary greatly in size, type, ownership, stakeholders, visitor numbers, infrastructure, seasonality, resources, geographic/national location and many more. These differences make it difficult for the practical guides in the toolkit to reflect the specific challenges that each site may experience and thereby makes the toolkit feel less applicable.

Participants in the workshop explained how they feel the need to translate the UNESCO toolkit in order to make it more useful to them:

- Translating the toolkit from English and into the national language of the site. Greenland is for example in the process of translating the toolkit into Greenlandic.
- Translating the toolkit into guides that fit the local context of the site, making the toolkit more practical and applicable. The World Heritage site mining area of the great copper mountain in Falun, Sweden, is currently part of a project where the UNESCO toolkit is going to be tested and adapted to the local context of Falun. The idea is to develop a more practical tool/method that can be used by other Swedish World Heritage sites, based on learnings from Falun.

## **There is a great demand for more process facilitation and opportunities for sharing experiences in relation to the strategic work**

One of the biggest take-aways from the workshop was that site managers request some sort of practical process facilitation of the strategy process. A text-based toolkit is not enough to get the process going.

The idea of workshops and meetings between sites with a practical focus on the process of developing and implementing a

strategy for sustainable tourism was mentioned by many of the workshop participants. Workshops and meetings create a forum where site managers can share experiences, inspire each other and learn from the successes (and mistakes!) of other sites. Using existing national and Nordic networks and organisations to facilitate these workshops was suggested.

## **Impact is created through change of daily practice**

The workshop participants agreed that a strategy is only helpful if it can be integrated into the daily practice of site management. A sustainable tourism strategy should improve existing work processes or create new ones that support the development of a more sustainable approach to tourism at the site/destination. It is not a one-time exercise.

## **Integration of strategies can support the goal of implementing sustainable tourism strategy in daily practice**

The workshop participants pointed to the fact that there are many strategies, plans and vision documents that they are required to produce or follow. Adding another strategy can seem overwhelming or unnecessary – for site managers as well as for local stakeholders experiencing ‘participation fatigue’ and a frustration/confusion due to the number of different strategies that they are asked to engage in. In order to prevent ‘strategy overload’ the sustainable tourism strategy should be an integrated part of the overall management plan or strategy of the site or destination. Some of the participants suggested that the development of a sort of ‘template’ for how to integrate a strategy for sustainable tourism into the existing format of the management plan would be helpful.

## **Stakeholder inclusion creates common ownership and a stronger strategy**

Another potential challenge of effectively working strategically with sustainable tourism is how the ownership of the site and the overall destination is configured – both in terms of legal ownership of land and buildings, and in terms of local engagement and sense of ownership among stakeholders. Sites with complex owner structures or many different stakeholders have a greater





Fortress of Suomenlinna, Finland  
[Valokuvaja, The Governing Body of Suomenlinna]

task ahead of them in terms of creating a common strategy for sustainable tourism.

At the workshop it was pointed out that it is important to include all the various local and regional stakeholders in the strategy process. Learning from Tove Damholt from Stevns Klint it is important to know that this can potentially be a demanding process in terms of time and resources, but that it pays off in the end when you have taken the time to get everybody on the same page. The early stages of the strategy development process should focus on creating a shared sense of purpose and goals among the various stakeholders at the site / destination. This involvement can happen through workshops, meetings etc., ensuring that every voice is heard. The process establishes a common understanding of challenges, opportunities and goals, and ultimately helps create a strategy that the stakeholders will actively support and help realize.

#### **The strategy needs to be anchored in the right organisation**

Maintaining a shared sense of progress once the strategy is done is also important. Learnings from Stevns Klint show that in order to turn a strategy into action, the strategy needs to be anchored in the right organisation, and this organisation is not always the World Heritage site. A site is often part of a larger destination, making

the DMO or the municipality a more natural 'project manager' of the strategy. The role of the strategy manager is to make sure that everyone knows what to do and works in the same direction.

#### **A strategy is a strong tool for engaging in dialogue on the political level**

While the importance of a bottom-up approach to creating a strategy was shared by the participants, many also highlighted the importance of political support from the top. Having a strategy for sustainable tourism is an important tool when trying to gain political support, giving you something that you can point to and say "this is what we are trying to achieve, this is how we want to do it and we need your help", as one of the participants put it. Different agencies, departments and ministries can have a vested interest in sustainable tourism (e.g. within culture, tourism, business, nature preservation, etc), and a strategy is a strong tool for dialogue with the various political actors.

#### **A strategy for sustainable tourism can (also) be a useful tool for sites that struggle with low visitor numbers**

Not all sites experience a critical need for having a sustainable tourism strategy, and as the survey among the Nordic World Heritage sites shows, sites without a sustainable tourism strategy often categorizes themselves as having challenges with too few





Røros Mining Town and the Circumference, Norway  
[Tom Gustavsen, Destinasjon Røros]

visitors. Sites with low visitor numbers might find it difficult to see the need for a strategy, because the most important 'burning platform' for working strategically with sustainable tourism seems to be when sites experience visitor management issues related to high visitor numbers.

At the workshop it was discussed that it is important to remember that working strategically with sustainable tourism can also be about attracting more visitors to your site, e.g. in an effort to create a positive contribution to the local economy and in terms also to the economy of the site, as a strategy, as mentioned, can help create political focus on the site's potential contribution to tourism, local development etc.

### **Monitoring progress is a learning tool as well as a political tool**

Participants in the workshop discussed both the benefits and challenges of monitoring the effects of implementing a sustainable tourism strategy.

Monitoring the effects of your sustainable tourism strategy can help create motivation among stakeholders, show decisionmakers and politicians the results of your effort and the importance

of your contribution to local development, help encourage other sites to create their own strategy, and make it possible for sites to compare results and learn from each other.

### **A certification of sustainable world heritage sites has potential brand value**

Trend studies within the field of tourism indicates that there is a growing market for sustainable tourism with tourists wanting to travel to destinations without leaving a negative impact on the local environment. Some participants suggested that a certification model for sustainable tourism could be a solution to incentivize more sites to create sustainable tourism strategies. Inspiration comes from the Innovasjon Norge certification program.

As part of the certification all certified destinations are marketed by Innovasjon Norge as sustainable destinations, creating a brand value 'carrot' for the destinations to work strategically and ambitiously with sustainable tourism.

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**ACTION PLAN FOR  
THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**



# ACTION PLAN

## Recommendations for how the nordic world heritage sites can continue to work more strategically with sustainable tourism.

This chapter presents a set of recommendations for actions that can support the further work of the Nordic World Heritage sites and the Nordic World Heritage Association (NWhA) towards a more strategic approach to sustainable tourism.

The tourism of an area or destination is a complex network of actors with a variety of goals and agendas, and for tourism to be sustainable – at the Nordic World Heritage sites as everywhere else – these goals and agendas to a certain point need to be aligned. World Heritage sites are not isolated entities but are intertwined with local communities and destinations, and in and around many Nordic World Heritage sites today, tourism is an indisputable and important part of local business life. So making tourism work in favour of the sustainability of the site requires a proactive, strategic and collaborative approach that involves the whole network.

As a site manager it is essential to make an effort to understand the tourism network that your World Heritage site is part of. Be curious, start the dialogue, get to know the relevant tourism actors in the area, explore common issues and interests, find common ground, talk about what kind of long-term development is desirable and how you can help each other get there. And use this new network collaboration to give tourism a positive role in the effort to create sustainable World Heritage sites and build peace in the minds of men and women.

### Fine-tune the toolkit

Many of the site managers in this analysis have stressed the need for a simplification and adaption of the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit to better fit their local context and situation. Sites in Greenland and Sweden are currently testing locally adapted versions of the toolkit, and experiences from these projects should be shared in the Nordic community.

It is recommended that the Nordic World Heritage community initiate a discussion on how the toolkit can be made more practically applicable [preferably also involving UNESCO], with the goal of fine-tuning the toolkit and the communication of its practical usability. Start by asking:

- How can the toolkit be improved and reintroduced to the sites

in a way that presents it as both relevant and simple to use?

- How can the sites make 'short cuts' in the toolkit, based on simple self-assessment and prioritization of each site's specific issues? How can the toolkit help each site figure out which guides to use and in which order, breaking the process into smaller and more manageable workflows?
- How can the toolkit's process recommendations, practical advice, cases etc. feel more relevant to the local context of each site? How can the use of the toolkit be integrated into the day-to-day management process instead of becoming a one-time project?

The discussion of these questions could be a part of a bigger conference on sustainable tourism, developed and facilitated by UNESCO for the [Nordic] World Heritage sites.

### Do case studies

Sharing experiences and learning from each other is something that a great many of the Nordic site managers value and request. Building on the experience of other sites is a way to short cut the strategy process, seeing tangible examples of how others have gone about defining the problem and developing solutions.

A case study collection is an efficient way to share these experiences across sites. It can be a one-time publication or, better yet, a dynamic format that is updated continuously, e.g. on a webpage. The examples do not all have to be from Nordic World Heritage Sites, or from World Heritage Sites on the whole – e.g. the Norwegian certification model for sustainable tourism destinations or national parks in and outside of the Nordic countries could also be sources of valuable inspiration.

Relevant themes for the case studies could be:

### Cases on process and partnerships

- Involvement of multiple stakeholders: Cooperating with local/regional authorities and tourism-/destination management organisations in the strategy process.



- Local involvement and anchoring: Involvement of local actors (e.g. citizens, associations and local tourism business) in the strategy process.
- Industry involvement: Cooperating with larger tourism actors (e.g. tour operators, cruise ship operators) in the strategy process.
- Successful and creative use of the UNESCO toolkit.

#### Cases on results

- Sustainable tourism strategies that have managed to tackle visitor management issues.
- Sustainable tourism strategies that have managed to support local business development and attract more / new kinds of tourists.
- Sustainable tourism strategies that have successfully been integrated into the daily management of the site, creating impact through day-to-day practice.
- Sustainable tourism strategies that have been useful as a tool for engaging in dialogue with the political level, locally or nationally.

#### Host network meetings

Case studies and pilot projects exploring barriers and opportunities of working strategically with sustainable tourism are helpful as inspiration. But they are also projects with an expiration date, so to

speak, and need to be supplemented by an ongoing and more permanent dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experience. It is recommended that the NWHAs take the initiative to arrange continuing network meetings for the Nordic World Heritage sites with a range of relevant themes, targeting a variety of sites and challenges within the field of sustainable tourism. The purpose of the network meetings is to strengthen knowledge sharing and cooperation across the sites and provide inspiration and advice on how to address various challenges.

Many Nordic site managers come from relatively small organisations. This stresses the importance of a transverse network that supports easy access to the knowledge and experiences of fellow site managers in the Nordics.

The network meetings should be seen as a supplement to the yearly Nordic World Heritage Conference, keeping the network active and alive in between the larger conferences and allowing for the ongoing discussion of tourism related challenges in a smaller forum and with a specific focus on different themes. For inspiration on themes see the suggestions for case studies above.

#### Set-up

The network meetings are day events, and the sites take turns hosting these. The frequency of the network meetings should ideally be at least two meetings a year. All members of the NWHAs are





Ilulissat Icefjord, Greenland  
[Rino Rasmussen, Visit Greenland]

invited each time, leaving it up to each site to decide whether the theme of the meeting is relevant to them or whether they have the time to participate.

After each meeting it is recommended that a resumé is sent to the network, highlighting the most important perspectives and discussion themes of that meeting. This will also give the sites that did not participate in the meeting a chance to feel involved and motivate them to participate next time.

Each network meeting program builds on a standardised but flexible template, including elements like:

Presentations from the network participants: Site managers or other site actors presents a current issue, a concrete project, a method or a tool that is subsequently discussed in plenum.

- **External knowledge and inspiration:** An external presenter contributes with new knowledge and experience from another professional context related to the subject of the meeting. It could be tourism organisations, scientists, governmental agencies etc. The purpose is to challenge standard perceptions and understandings and to build bridges between the realm of World Heritage and the realm of tourism.

- **Workshop:** Practical exercises allowing for discussions and reflections in smaller groups and insight into other approaches and methods for solving relevant issues.

- **Visiting the site:** A visit to the site to add context to the meeting and an opportunity to see some of the qualities, challenges and solutions implemented at the site in an effort to promote sustainable tourism.

### Use existing platforms to push the agenda

It is recommended that the NWHa continue to push the agenda of the Nordic World Heritage sites as a model region for sustainable tourism. The most obvious way to do this is to use the yearly NWHa conferences as an opportunity to share knowledge, experiences and inspiration on the matter.

Another recommendation is to move the strategy for sustainable tourism from 'nice to have' to 'need to have', by making it a mandatory chapter in the management plan for all UNESCO World Heritage sites. This, again, should support the goal of implementing the sustainable tourism strategy into the daily practice of site management.