

## **Snowmobiling and free riding in the Jämtland mountains, Sweden**

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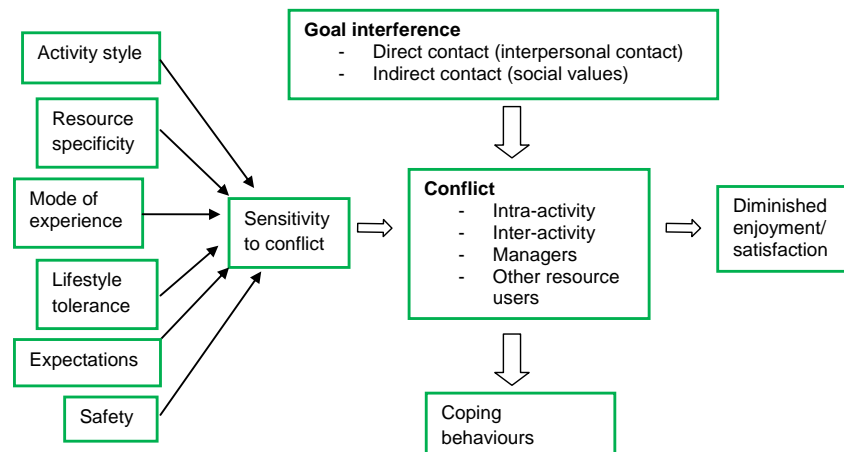
### **Introduction**

A large body of international research has shown that stakeholder conflicts remain an important obstacle to the sustainable management of landscapes, including those of high natural value (Adams et al., 2003; Manning, 2011). There are several dimensions to the multi-functionality of landscapes, often apparent when multiple land uses overlap in the same area as well as when multiple interests in the same use-practice emerge. This may lead to conflicts over land use with one example being snowmobiling and free riding outside the trails (Vail & Heldt, 2004). This project investigates conflicts over land use in the context of the Jämtland mountain region, Sweden where tensions due to snowmobiling and free riding are increasing. The study takes a planning and management perspective. The research questions are:

- How is snowmobiling and free riding considered by planning, management and other stakeholders?
- What kind of developments can be identified; why?
- How are different planning and management strategies regarding snowmobiling and free riding discussed or implemented?

The increasing popularity of snowmobile tourism and outdoor recreation contributes to local and regional growth, but there is nonetheless a need for balanced resource uses (Heldt & Heldt Cassel, 2007). In the Jämtland mountain region, the snowmobile club in Frostviken has launched a project to provide special areas for free riding of approximately 30,000 hectares while also seeing to the preparation of trails. One of the project's partners is the *Swedish Environmental Protection Agency*. The goal is to promote sustainable tourism where the development of snowmobiling activities would be done with consideration to environment and stakeholders. The project stems from increased pressure (e.g. conflicts between users, security issues and wear on nature) due to snowmobiling off the trails. The challenges at stake are many: landowners have complained of destroyed forest plantations, there have been incidents and accidents, drivers have lacked knowledge etc.

Conflicts can be defined as goal interference attributed to the behavior of someone else – as is the case with free riding. Conflicts can arise when different types of land use interests are pursued at the same time in the same landscape. Although landscapes can accommodate different types of land users without creating a conflict, this can change if: (1) land-users change their behavior or activity, (2) land users increase their use in time or space, or (3) new land-users appear in the area. In addition, conflicts can arise if a resource is depleted or if regulations or perceptions change.



**Figure 1.** *Conflicts in outdoor recreation* (adapted from Manning 2011, p. 216).

To handle conflicts, it is critical to look at the specific process through which particular conflicts arise. Stakeholder conflict has received significant attention in tourism and outdoor recreation research, often explored through the theoretical lens of sociology (e.g. Ewert et al., 1999). In such context conflict has been described as a struggle between individuals or groups, often due to limited access or rivalry of opportunities over resources. Manning (2011) has synthesized this research into a model of participant and stakeholder conflict (Figure 1).

## Method

This study serves to examine the dynamics of conflict behind snowmobiling and free riding in the mountain region of Jämtland, Sweden. The study consists of a web based survey that generated responses from 862 snowmobilers in the region in 2015. Organizations and snowmobile clubs distributed the survey through social media. In 2015, twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out with fifteen representatives from the public sector and the tourism industry. Moreover in 2018, additional interviews will be conducted. The study is also based on information found on webpages and in local media.

## Results

According to the survey, a majority of snowmobilers value free riding as important (16%) or very important (58%). The respondents of the survey regard free riding established on public land as positive. However, snowmobilers are unsure if such areas would actually be large enough; there are different opinions regarding the benefits of having free riding areas. Some of the respondents believe that the state should provide with such areas and not just leave the responsibility to the private landowners. Some of the respondents say free riding areas would help reduce conflicts related to reindeer husbandry and nature conservation. At the same time, there is anxiety that concentrating snowmobiling to delimited areas would disturb the local population. Nevertheless, free riding also creates contradictions within the user group itself or as one of the respondents stated in the survey:

“Some do not respect the ideal work of the snowmobile clubs and destroys for everyone else.” Finally, restrictions of movement due to nature conservation leads to conflict according to snowmobilers.

The interviews reveal, among other things, that free riding has increased in the region. This cause conflicts. There has been a change over time; from being a mean of transport, the snowmobile has become the main activity in itself. The snowmobile is also an identity marker of the landscape and represents an important financial resource. Safety is an increasingly important issue. Zoning regulation is regarded as one tool to handle conflicts but a holistic approach will have to prevail over individual solutions.

## Conclusions

Handling conflicts is of special relevance for authorities at all levels involved with questions of planning and management. The same goes for stakeholders with special land use interests in the Jämtland mountains, such as those involved with reindeer herding, tourism, outdoor recreation, conservation and energy production. There has been a new development of snowmobile activities for planning and management to handle in the Swedish mountains, not least in terms of conflicts but also because of security issues e.g. avalanches. From the model presented above, one can get a deeper understanding of the conflicts and the reasons behind them. Nevertheless, more knowledge is needed about the different strategies of planners, managers and other stakeholders as well about the users and the underlying social motives behind their attitudes and activities. To handle conflicts related to snowmobiling and free riding will require continued dialogue, negotiation and further research.

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