

REPORT ON COMMON CHALLENGES AND EXISTING / POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism
Deliverable DT1.4.1

SHAPE

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Acronyms

SHA	Sustainable Heritage Areas
WRB	Wester Ross Biosphere
NK	North Karelia Biosphere Reserve
KK	Komune Kujalleq
SNAE	Snaefellsnes Regional Park
NUI	Nordhordland Candidate Biosphere Reserve
GSA	Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere

Introduction

One of the objectives of the SHAPE project is to establish enduring stakeholder partnerships that maintain and develop cultural and natural heritage assets in SHAs through ecotourism initiatives that contribute to the sustainable growth of local communities, and transnationally share the experience gained. This report describes the challenges faced by the SHAs in SHAPE in both maintaining cultural and natural heritage assets and developing ecotourism. These challenges have been a main focus of discussions during the early part of the project both within the SHAPE project team and during regional stakeholder meetings. Here we identify the common challenges and show how these have led to the development of new ideas and approaches to ecotourism that help to address them.

1. Challenges reported by the SHAs

Table 1. Challenges reported in the transnational workshop in Wester Ross

WRB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of Collaboration - Seasonality - Transport - Limited Human Heritage Product - Lack of Local Statistics - Variable Wi-Fi and Broadband - Connectivity - Visitor Information Provision - Deteriorating infrastructure - Lack of parking - Few circular walking routes - Cuts in toilet provision - 'Wrong' type of tourists
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Too many tourists - Tourists doing damage
NK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remote, sparsely populated, population decreasing etc (> NPA)
KK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrastructure is a challenge - Education and entrepreneurship
SNAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The population is getting older - Limited diversity in employment opportunities - Rapid growth in tourism
NUI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of coordination and marketing - Infrastructure not “visible” (transport/accomodation/food) - Weather (rainy)
GSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Glentool Village was created to house the forestry workers – seen changes over time with the mechanisation of forestry. - Change in make-up of population - Primary School closure

2. Existing and potential approaches and initiatives identified by the SHAs

A shared understanding of the challenges in the SHAs allowed discussions to develop about new approaches and initiatives that might be successful in overcoming some of these challenges. The regional stakeholder workshops were a very important part of this process, where stakeholders and community members contributed their thoughts on opportunities for the development of ecotourism in their area. The outputs of this process were reported during a transnational SHAPE workshop on ‘common challenges and opportunities for developing sustainable ecotourism initiatives’ and are summarised in Table 2

Table 2. Summary of potential opportunities in SHAs (as discussed in transnational workshop – common challenges and opportunities for developing sustainable ecotourism initiatives)

WRB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Circular routes - Branding & marketing - Road/Mountain bike trails - Work days/parties - Innovative transport solutions - Education in responsible behaviour - Themed cultural/natural heritage interpretation, research and training
NK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eastern nature and culture - Koli area and ancient bedrock, ice ages - Provincial sustainability approach - Work with Universities
KK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop the UNESCO World Heritage Area

SNAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing enthusiasm for sustainability, social responsibility and food traceability - Innovation within existing companies and “traditional” sectors - Storytelling
NUI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thirty minute drive from Bergen city so in good position for attracting visitors - Existing local initiatives including wool, local food and biking - Many local roads to explore. - A wish to establish a stronger identity of the region (cultural landscape, building traditions, crafts)
GSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active Glentroll Village members – exploring partnerships to support development of village and local area - Wealth of assets identified both tangible and intangible - Experiential opportunities for wildlife watching - Dark sky activities

From discussions during the transnational workshop, a list of main themes for new approaches and initiatives for addressing common challenges was generated. The ecotourism initiatives now under development in the SHAs focus on these themes:

- Natural and cultural heritage routes
- Branding and identity
- Training (for young people and adults)
- Local products
- Slow adventure
- Digital apps
- Story telling
- Wildlife watching

Following the transnational workshop, plans for ecotourism initiatives were further developed in each SHA. Each SHA formulated a plan for these initiatives that explain the specific regional challenges to be addressed. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Initial plans for ecotourism initiatives in the SHAs

SHA ecotourism initiative	Regional challenges that the ecotourism initiative addresses
Wester Ross Biosphere – Development of a Destination Management Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of stakeholder cooperation • Lack of regional identity • Gaps between visitor expectations and experience • Lack of visitor information provision • Lack of circular recreational routes. • Limited transport options. • Lack of awareness of cultural heritage. • Lack of visibility of the Wester Ross Biosphere

<p>North Karelia –</p> <p>Koitajoki river initiative (tourism package linking regional natural and cultural assets)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic/environmental challenges; Our initiative hopes to address the short one to two night stays in the region through development of package services that can attract longer overnights stays in the province; meaning also more spending/tourist and lesser environmental impacts (longer overnight stays are more environmental friendly). • Unavailability of package services; we hope to enhance regional networking between PSPs such that they can network with one another in offering package services. • Youth migration from countryside; tourism development could also provide opportunities for employment for the youths who migrate from countryside in search for work. • Visibility of natural and cultural assets and services of PSPs e.g. through online sources, e-service
<p>Kommune Kujalleq</p> <p>Integration of nature and culture based tourism into Municipality Plan 2019-2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infrastructure. There is a lack of transportation possibilities. It is very difficult and expensive to travel around in the South of Greenland. There is a need for systematic transport and accommodation. • Bad weather, no alternatives, seasonal tourism and seasonal work – difficult to keep up a professional handling of inquiries. • There is a lack of entrepreneurship and education and we are missing a knowledge about the tourists who are coming – how do we prepare before they come. • A lack of quality assessment of the handicrafts that is being sold- we need a quality mark. • Many of the sheep farmers burn the wool. A cooperation is needed to focus on the wool and the different possibilities to use it and work together.
<p>Snæfellsnes Regional Park</p> <p>Visitor harbour and themed trails</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some tourism companies might be concerned about possible changes in tourism trends with tourist staying for a shorter time in Iceland and the overall number of tourists do not growing as fast as in recent years. The idea is to target tourism better and offer them a package of activities that might interest them. • The sudden raise of tourism coming to the area in the last few years when it was not prepared for this in terms of facilities and infrastructures. • A general tourists' lack of awareness about resources available in Snæfellsnes and how to interact with the landscape, the local people (farmers, landowners, etc.), the animals, etc.

<p>Nordhordland Candidate Biosphere Reserve</p> <p>Wool and food route</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will link together two projects that are initiated in the region, so SHAPE will be an extra contribution for them to raise awareness and be able to reach the tourism-market. • We have a map solution that all the municipalities are using, but this has not a good component for end-users to find the information, and that is what we need to develop. If we succeed, the region will have a new tool for presenting all sorts of information. This is time-consuming and comes with a cost that we will need to find financial support for.
<p>Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere</p> <p>Glentroot and the Cree Valley Biosphere Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South of Scotland has struggled to find its identity as a tourism destination, many visitors preferring to head to the 'Highlands and Islands' of Scotland to places whose heritage, culture and landscape dominate people's perception of authentic Scotland. This initiative intends to celebrate and promote what's distinctly special about the region and how the UNESCO Biosphere can help support this. • There is a lack of collaboration between businesses and organisations to develop and promote tourism products and experiences which fulfil the demands of the industry and the visitor. Creating partnerships will add value to existing tourism offer. • Lack of employment opportunities for young people in the region