

Dieter K. Müller
Linda Lundmark
Raynald H. Lemelin *Editors*

New Issues in Polar Tourism

Communities, Environments, Politics

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Preface

I felt always attracted by northern environments; thus, it is logical that northern and polar areas also have increasingly and, once again, become of great scientific interests. Located in Umeå, northern Sweden, this is of course also a reasonable thing to do, not least considering the ongoing struggle for developing tourism in order to maintain northern Sweden as an attractive spot to live in. Still, interest is only one factor among many others needed for starting and finalizing a book on Polar Tourism. During my postdoc period at the European Tourism Research Institute (ETOUR) in Östersund, Sweden, I was fortunate to have an employer with considerable experiences in polar issues. Dr. Olle Melander, a physical geographer by training, is an individual with a multitude of experiences in organizing and leading scientific and touristic expeditions to the polar areas. With his experience, he also encouraged and almost requested my professional engagement in the North in particular. He invited me to speak for Swedish polar scientists at the annual Polar Forum of the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat on the need of tourism and social science research. Dr. Melander convinced me about the necessity to further engage into a fascinating field of research. He also persuaded me to organize the 2nd IPTRN conference at the Abisko Research Station, Northern Sweden. This was, as usual, an excellent advice, and thus I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to Olle for all his support, all stories, discussions, and great memories.

I also would like to my coeditors Linda Lundmark sharing my interest for polar tourism during our everyday working life at Umeå University and Harvey Lemelin. Both had to deal with my sudden appointment as dean, which certainly interfered with work on this book. Moreover, life and polar tourism research at Umeå University was certainly improved by Suzanne de la Barre and Patrick Brouder, who I would like to thank for friendship and discussions. Other Umeå colleagues who supported this project in various ways are Roger Marjavaara, Carina Keskitalo, Patrick Lantto, and others at the Department of Geography and Economic History and the strong research environment of Northern Studies at Umeå University. Thanks also to other supporters and friends, Jarkko Saarinen, Rannveig Olofsdottir, Edward Huijbens, C. Michael Hall, Albina Pashkevich, and all those

who I forgot to mention, who make polar tourism research great fun. An even greater thank you to my partner Åsa Zetterström, my best friend and travel companion, who shares my interest in northern places.

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Finally, we all would also like to thank all contributors of this volume and all friends within the IPTRN for discussions and good companionship in polar places and for creating virtual polar worlds in the internet.

Umeå, Sweden

Dieter K. Müller

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Chapter 1

Introduction: New Issues in Polar Tourism

Dieter K. Müller, Linda Lundmark, and Raynald H. Lemelin

Abstract During the recent decade, academic interest in polar tourism certainly reached a new peak. The reasons for this development are plentiful. An important reason is of course the growing numbers of tourists arriving in polar regions and the associated attempts of commercial and noncommercial stakeholders to attract even more tourists to polar destinations. This and other changes, such as global climate change, imply new challenges and opportunities for polar regions, warranting research on tourism in the area. This chapter introduces some of the themes discussed in the scientific literature: definition of polar regions, environmental dimensions, and business and community perspectives. Moreover, the chapter reviews some of the institutional changes occurring in polar tourism research. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the contributions to this research volume.

Keywords Climate change • Community development • Economic development • Polar tourism • Polar regions

During the recent decade, academic interest in polar tourism certainly reached a new peak. The reasons for this development are plentiful. An important reason is of course the growing numbers of tourists arriving in polar regions and the associated attempts of commercial and noncommercial stakeholders to lure even more tourists to polar destinations. This implies new challenges and opportunities for polar regions, warranting research on tourism in the area. Moreover, global

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Fig. 1.1 Čuonavággi: Lapporten (the Sami portal), the U-shaped mountain formation dominating the scenery at Abisko, 68°21'N 18°49'E (Photo: Dieter K. Müller)

climate change has caused media attention for the polar regions, where major changes are predicted to happen causing significant impacts on environment and societies. Thus, the last chance to see, for example, polar bears and pristine polar environment generates, in some cases, interest in polar tourism (Lemelin et al. 2010b).

Thus, since the publishing of the first seminal book on polar tourism, *Polar Tourism: Tourism in the Arctic and Antarctic Region*, edited by C.M. Hall and M. Johnston in 1995, an increasing number of research monographs and articles manifest the ongoing increase in interest (Bauer 2001; Maher 2007; Maher and Stewart 2007; Snyder and Stonehouse 2007; Hall and Saarinen 2010a; Lück et al. 2010; Stonehouse and Snyder 2010; Maher et al. 2011b). Among the recent books, *Polar Tourism – A Tool for Regional Development* edited by Grenier and Müller (2011) can be found. This book is based on the first conference of the then newly established International Polar Tourism Research Network (IPTRN) held in 2008 in Kangiqsujaq, Nunavik. A second conference was held at the Abisko Scientific Research Station, Abisko, Sweden, in June 2010, and this volume documents the outcomes of that meeting (Fig. 1.1).

The IPTRN defines itself as “a group with a shared interest in research that advances the understanding of tourism in and about the Polar Regions. The IPTRN strives to generate, share and disseminate knowledge, resources and perspectives on

polar tourism; and strongly supports the development of international collaboration and cooperative relationships between members” (<http://www.polartourismnetwork.uqam.ca>). Accordingly, this book aims at following this ambition by presenting new and further developing issues in polar tourism. This is achieved not only by theoretical contributions but also by new empirical data from hitherto seldom covered sources and destinations. Thus, this book does not aim to become the final text on polar tourism, but to contribute important pieces to a complex puzzle depicting polar tourism knowledge.

At the conference site, several important dimensions of polar areas can be found, and thus, the location itself represents the situation in many polar settlements in a nutshell. Namely, these are nature conservation, tourism, indigenous population, resource extracting activities, science, and international cooperation. Abisko National Park was among the first national parks to be founded in 1909, preserving a Nordic fell nature and in particular a scenic canyon formed by the Abisko creek. Moreover, the Swedish Tourist Association’s (STF) mountain station operated since 1903 (Wall Reinius 2009). It was located at the railway line connecting the iron ore mine in Kiruna with the harbor town Narvik. It also became the final station of Kungleden (The King’s Trail), a 400-km long hiking trail through the Swedish Caledonian mountain range. The tiny village established for the railway construction and maintenance, and today with about 100 inhabitants, has Sami population and is home of active reindeer herders. Finally, Abisko has a long tradition of scientific monitoring of climate change in Arctic areas. Collection of climate data started already in 1913 and today the research station, which is nowadays run by the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, is part of INTERACT, the International Network for Terrestrial Research and Monitoring in the Arctic. Moreover, research activities in Abisko turned the village into an international destination and a settlement with the highest average educational level in the whole of Sweden.

Thus, the local situation depicts several of the major challenges and opportunities uniting polar places and also shows the complexity signifying polar issues, contrasting often stereotype perceptions of particularly the Arctic as homogenous, backward, and nature only. In the remainder of this introduction these current issues are further presented and justified.

1.1 Entering the Agenda

About 100 years after the race for the poles, polar areas have once again gained significant public attention. This is also manifested by increasing numbers of tourists arriving there (Hall and Saarinen 2010b). Accordingly, an estimated 12 million tourists (excluding tourism to the Russian Arctic) visited the Arctic in 2006. For the Antarctic, roughly 40,000 visitors were estimated in 2009/10.

The touristic interest in the polar regions has certainly multiple reasons. Partly global tourism has increased, and thus, even remote locations outside the main itineraries have been integrated not least in the search for new business

opportunities. In this context, the polar areas still play a marginal role considering a total number of 980 million tourist arrivals globally (UNWTO 2012), and thus, the polar regions have so far not caught the interest of, for example, the UNWTO. Still, the rapid growth in the area implied that tourism is increasingly seen as an important industry, contributing to shaping the future of these areas.

Tourism interests are not only seen from outside the areas. A globalizing economy has also created preconditions forcing peripheral areas to search for new industries where employment can be created, and tourism has been frequently identified for being such an industry (Hall 2007; Saarinen 2007; Grenier and Müller 2011). Places like Santa Park in Rovaniemi and Icehotel in Jukkasjärvi have been promoted as successful examples of how tourism can be used to create alternative livelihoods (Grenier 2007; Müller 2011). In this context, tourism is seen as remedy for structural problems of peripheral areas like depopulation and deindustrialization and not least as an opportunity for indigenous populations (Kapashesit et al. 2011). This is certainly applicable for most Arctic destinations, but Hall (2000) even shows the significance of Antarctic tourism on gateway cities in the southern hemisphere.

Besides these economic issues however major interest has been caused by ongoing environmental change in the area (Johnston 2006). Accordingly, climate change in particular has created a growing awareness of changes that are expected to be most significant in polar areas. Thus, issues related to protection of wildlife, adaptation of communities, and codes of conducts have been monitored and discussed in multiple publications (Hall and Saarinen 2010a; Stonehouse and Snyder 2010; Maher et al. 2011b). Particularly, last chance tourism, a consequence of the growing awareness of climate change, has been seen as important reason for visiting the areas (Lemelin et al. 2010a, b). Even the question to what extent polar tourism is contributing to the eradication of its own attraction base has been discussed. In this context, the question whether polar tourists become ambassadors and environmental role models has been debated (Maher 2011).

A further reason for the recent interest in the polar regions is related to the opening of polar oceans for international seaways. Climate change has caused a shortening of the ice season and thus increased accessibility for tourism, but also interests related to trade and resource exploitation. This entailed new geopolitical struggle over sovereignty in the Arctic (Dodds 2010), but also increasingly in the southern Atlantic Ocean (Benwell and Dodds 2011). Timothy (2010) argues that this struggle comprises tourism, too. Thus, he interprets the establishment of new national parks in the Canadian High Arctic as a tool for manifesting national sovereignty and presence.

Last but not least, climate change also entailed a renewed interest in polar sciences. Particularly the International Polar Year (IPY) 2007/2008 marks a hallmark for scientific endeavor. However, only few projects focusing on tourism were included in the IPY-sponsored research activities, despite significant expectations within the polar tourism research community (Stewart et al. 2005; Maher 2007). An indirect impact of the IPY is however the mobilization of tourism researchers interested in polar areas and indeed the establishment of organizations like the IPTRN, its conferences, and other's conferences.

1.2 Defining Polar Areas and Polar Tourism

There are multiple attempts to define polar areas presented in the various books on the topic. This book has no ambition to repeat definitions presented in recent volumes on the issue (cf. Hall and Saarinen 2010b; Maher et al. 2011b). Most of these definitions are based on scientific features like tree line or permafrost. Social science is absent in these definitions, and also the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) mainly departs from previous definitions based on science. Thus, regarding socioeconomic characteristics areas in Northern Sweden and Finland may have more in common with British Columbia and Northern Ontario than with areas considered being part of the Canadian Arctic. However meanwhile the former are the northernmost areas in Sweden and Finland, respectively, the latter are southern provinces within Canada. This indicates the sometimes blurry results of a complex political process entailing delineations of the polar areas.

Hence, the ambition of this book is to raise new perspectives on definitional issues. Thus, focus here is rather on critical assessments of taken-for-granted scientific delineations of the polar areas. Instead of simply departing from these definitions, the processes of defining and of knowledge production are at the core of the scientific interest presented here. This has been done with respect to geopolitics (Keskitalo 2004); the role of tourism in this context has so far however been overlooked.

Even regarding polar tourism, multiple definitions are available in the various publications on the issue. Here however definitions are not dependent on environmental delineations solely. Instead, perceptions of polar influence and form of the polar tourism product, which make defining polar tourism a tricky challenge. Obviously certain activities like watching polar bears seem to be genuine polar tourism activities – still they can be accomplished in zoos around the world, too. Moreover, polar attractions like the Fram Museum (Fig. 1.2) in Oslo do not only display the famous vessel but also the history of Norwegian polar explorations. Are visits to this and other museums a part of polar tourism? From this perspective, visitors certainly do have interests with respect to polar issues. Similar links can also be made regarding the various meetings organized to discuss polar issues. Is the annual meeting of International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) in Turin, Italy, in 2010 a part of polar tourism? Once again, participants are certainly traveling to Turin for the sake of polar areas. Thus, Maher et al. (2011a) argues that these forms of tourism should be included in definitions of polar tourism.

In this context, it is important to remember that tourism has to be seen as system linking tourists' origins to destinations (Hall 2005). In addition, most definitions assume that tourists should leave their home environment. With respect for polar tourism, this implies that travel within the polar areas should not necessarily be seen as polar tourism since environments in origin and destination at least should be similar. Thus, polar tourism usually links tourists from a non-polar origin to a polar destination.



Fig. 1.2 Polar heritage: the Fram Museum in Oslo, Norway (Photo: Dieter K. Müller)

Still, definitional problems as discussed by Leiper (2008) and Smith (1998) also apply to polar tourism. This means that demand-led and supply-led definitions may result in different outcomes since the former refers to tourist motives and the latter to the tourist industry, respectively. Thus, demand-led definitions focus on special-(polar)-interest tourists. VFR tourists to polar destinations are excluded since they travel for motives not related to the polar features of their destination. In contrast, supply-led definitions include VFR tourists since they use the same transport, restaurants, and maybe hotels as special-interests tourists. The same applies for business tourists, FIFO workers, and scientists.

Thus, a pragmatic approach and an including definition have to be advocated. Hence, polar tourism can be defined as tourism to polar areas and for the sake of polar areas. A consistent definition is however hard to maintain since data does not always allow for distinguishing different tourist motives.

1.3 Tourism in Polar Environments

Besides definitional questions, environmental issues continue to dominate the agenda of tourism in polar regions (cf. Hall and Saarinen 2010a, b; Stonehouse and Snyder 2010; Maher et al. 2011a, b). Often studies address the overall impact of

global climate change on resources for tourism like wildlife (Dawson et al. 2010), on risks for biological invasions (Hall 2010), and on tourism business (Brouder and Lundmark 2011; Tervo-Kankare and Saarinen 2011).

Often however focus is more on local emissions. Obviously, a growing interest for polar tourism amplifies the potential impact on the environment. This is particularly the case since tourism is concentrated to a few spots mainly.

In the Antarctic in particular, the Antarctic Peninsula has become a hotspot of tourism development (Bauer 2001). Landings take not the least place where cultural heritage related to early explorations is available, too (Roura 2010). Thus, only small spots are exposed to significant disturbance; meanwhile, for large parts of polar areas, direct impact is limited. Nevertheless, in the fragile environment, even small impact tends to be long-lasting (O'Neill et al., Chap. 6, this volume). Similarly in the Arctic, ship-based tourism mainly includes landings in small communities not equipped to host large amount of visitors. Moreover, iconic attractions like polar bears attract visitors increasingly and thus require thorough management (Lemelin et al. 2010a).

In many cases however major risks are induced by the increased presence of human activities in a fragile environment. For example, Stonehouse and Snyder (2010) list the following environmental challenges for sea-based tourism in polar environments: oil spills, sewage and wastewater, solid waste, and threats to wildlife. However, not all studies confirm these risks clearly since wildlife sometimes does not seem to be disturbed by tourism. Still precautionary action is usually forwarded (Malcolm and Penner 2011; van Polanen Petel 2011).

The concern for the polar environment and the impacts caused by global and local processes also call for management and governance (Lamers 2009). In the Antarctic, this is closely related to the Antarctic Treaty system (Baastmeijer 2011) but also manifested in guidelines adopted by tour operators (Stonehouse and Snyder 2010). In contrast, the Arctic is more contested, owing to various geopolitical and economic interests. International regulations are thus weaker and comprise mainly international conventions and agreements (Stonehouse and Snyder 2010). Instead national legislation governs human-environment relations, creating various outcomes in the Northern States.

1.4 Polar Tourism Business and Community Development

The recent debate on tourism and sustainable development shifted focus from not only comprising the environment but also economic and sociocultural dimensions. And indeed tourism development has frequently been identified as government response to declining populations, out-migration, and dependence on outside support (Jenkins et al. 1998; Grenier and Müller 2011).

Although successful examples are in place, many peripheral places in the North still suffer from bad accessibility and other factors related to their locations.

Certainly the sometimes isolated characteristics of polar communities imply a specific attractiveness, but this comes with a price. High costs for tourism products sometimes in combination with doubtful quality not least regarding food and accommodation services certainly limit the degree to that the tourism potential so far could be utilized.

Moreover, the small scale of many tourism operations implies high costs to actually become visible on a global market. Thus, it is the mass tourism destinations that actually contribute significantly to regional development (Lundmark 2006; Müller 2011). Thus, it is questionable whether tourism development is a viable strategy for all polar communities (Müller and Jansson 2007). Many small places do however continue to engage in activities and try to attract visitors.

Thus, challenges to local communities often originate from mass tourism in polar areas. In this context, cruise ships operating in the polar areas offer a travel package that can easily be purchased. This means however that impacts are highly concentrated in space and time. Receiving a cruise ship therefore sometimes overstrains the capacity of small communities to actually host the visitors and draw advantages from their presence.

It is obvious that communities struggle with a multitude of issues related to tourism development. These are sometimes related to management issues on the local level. More often, however, challenges are caused by the fact that polar places increasingly are tied into global processes of political economies. Hence, this book offers a number of perspectives on current challenges for Northern Communities. These are related to attempts of coping with, adapting to, and resisting against change caused by changes in the South. An important question is to what extent polar communities remain targets of global change or whether they manage to gain agency in order to influence future development.

1.5 Outline of This Book

The remainder of this book is structured in three parts further developing the topics raised in this chapter.

1.5.1 Conceptualizing Polar Tourism and Polar Regions

Hall and Saarinen (2010a:449) note that “Tourism always occurs somewhere. Therefore, identifying regional boundaries becomes essential to the categorization of tourists.” Defining borders automatically contributes to assigning meaning to the defined area. Thus, different definitions of the polar regions imply different meanings. Particularly during recent years, the conceptualization of polar tourism has entailed great scientific attention (e.g., Hall and Saarinen 2010b; Stonehouse and

Snyder 2010; Maher 2011; Grenier and Müller 2011). Still the variety of forms and expressions, as well as preconditions and consequences, certainly justify a further examination as it is done in this volume.

For the Antarctic boundaries are seldom contested. The Antarctic Treaty 1959 defines the area south of the 60°S latitude as Antarctic. The sub-Antarctic is the zone between 60°S and 45°S latitude. This implies that besides the continent South Ocean islands are included, too. However, biogeographical delineations are sometimes used to define the southern polar region (Hall and Saarinen 2010b). Since the area is largely uninhabited and strongly regulated by, for example, the Antarctic Treaty, dispute about definition is rare.

In contrast, the situation in the northern polar region is different. Here the Arctic Ocean forms the core of the region, which is framed by inhabited land. Hall and Saarinen (2010b) provide a survey of different definitions of the Arctic. Accordingly, most of the definitions are based on natural features of the area. Thus, the Arctic is seen as a homogenous region disrespecting the presence of people in the area; tourism to the Arctic is not tourism to an inhabited place in the first hand. Instead the social construction of the destination is primarily built on biophysical features. Hence, it is just a place different and remote from the surrounding south. Moreover, it is homogenized disregarding contrasting physical settings and living conditions within the area.

Only the definition given by the AHDR is not using isotherms representing physical conditions directly for delineating the Arctic. Still the AHDR (2004:17) states that “There is nothing intuitively obvious about the idea of treating the Arctic as a distinct region.” Because of pragmatic reasons, political entities are used roughly, mirroring earlier areas of scientific assessment, namely, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programmes (AMAP), once again falling back on science definitions.

Although aware of the problems regarding the definition of the Arctic as a region, the AHDR attempts to do so anyway. In texts, illustrations, and maps, this is done without acknowledging major linkages to areas outside the defined region. Thus, the Arctic is seen in the tradition of regional geography and Hettner’s (1927) *Länderkunde* highlighting the region as a major focus of scientific inquiry and concerned with the relationship of the physical environment and the human adaptation to it and transformation of it. Environmental determinism seems thus to be inherent of many definitions of the Arctic.

The delineation of the sub-Arctic creates even greater problems, but is on the other hand hardly addressed at all. Usually included in the term polar regions, a major discussion on its specific characteristics is often but not always absent (Hall and Johnston 1995; Maher et al. 2011a, b).

Hence, definitions of the polar regions provide little guidance for discussing polar tourism besides the fact that it is tourism to a different bioregion. From a touristic point of view this means that current definitions of the polar regions mainly correspond to ideas of exotism, depicting the areas as something else. For example, Jacobson (1997) delivers the story of the North Cape and how it is constructed as a