

## Rediscovering nature as commons in environmental planning: new understandings through dialogue

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**Abstract:** A core challenge in environmental planning is the gap between a strong participatory ethos and top-down defined nature protection policies. Nature protection policies for large areas are concerned with securing ecological biodiversity and wildlife habitats against increasing societal claims. Such planning objectives also affect the socio-economic and cultural relations between the local community and the area they live in, and raise conflicts between local and national protection objectives and steering levels. Despite attempts to facilitate participatory planning approaches as a means of reducing conflict, nature protection continues to be contested in local communities. This paper explores the different understandings of nature at play between citizens and planning authorities throughout a habitat protection planning process in Norway. The paper discusses whether environmental planning of large spatial areas could develop communication arenas designed to deliberate different understandings of an area as a matter of commons between institutional planning perspectives of nature protection and (local) understandings of the area as part of everyday life. The paper sheds light on how large spatial areas are understood at different government levels and from everyday life orientations, and how these could be used to develop mutual understandings of the area as a common.

**Keywords:** Commons, environmental planning, everyday life, nature protection, participation, wild reindeer, local communities

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## 1. The commons *problématique* in environmental planning

Environmental planning is about operationalising policies to balance societal use of nature and resources with broader goals of sustainability and resilience (Innes and Booher 2010). It can be understood as a societal answer to the sustainability challenges that seeks to protect some areas or types of nature from the general unsustainability of societal development (Cowell and Owens 2011). Protection of nature is however not value free or objective. It raises wicked challenges without clear problem definitions or concrete solutions, with contradicting interests and values, with several layers of actors and institutions, and requirements of diverse types of knowledge and creativity (Rittel and Webber 1973; Lachapelle and McCool 2005). Planning of the environment and protection of nature is, in other words, increasingly contested (Macnagthen and Urry 1998; Sandström et al. 2008) and complex (Ostrom 2009), and is a multi-scale-linked process of approaching and governing nature-society relations (Armitage 2008; Poteete 2012). Planning of the environment can therefore not be separated from society, but must be understood as an implicit part of the societal development trajectory (Elling 2008).

The research presented in this paper explores the tensions in understandings of nature protection and use at play between citizens and planning institutions during an environmental planning process in Southern Norway: Heiplanen. The three-year regional planning process aimed to establish area boundaries to protect a wild reindeer habitat from societal development claims in a sparsely populated mountainous region. The researcher was involved as a participatory observer and researcher during the formal planning process and facilitated three workshops with citizens in three local communities to explore their perspective of the area (Vasstrøm 2013).

Nature protection has generated extensive conflicts between local communities, stakeholders, and national authorities in many different parts of the world (Engelen et al. 2008; Sandström et al. 2008). Protection of large areas affects not only ecological concerns such as biodiversity or wildlife habitats, but also the socio-economic and cultural relations between the local community and the area they live in. Planning of such areas brings out controversies and complexities that are related to deep paradigmatic understandings of nature and society among the actors involved in and affected by a particular process (Daugstad et al. 2006; Cowell and Owens 2011; Vasstrøm 2013). Emerging conflicts and a legitimacy deficit in nature protection in local communities has been answered with increased use of participatory approaches in environmental planning (Engelen et al. 2008; Daugstad 2011). Such participatory approaches are considered a way to reduce

conflict, increase legitimacy, and improve the knowledge base for decision making (Vandenabeele and Goordon 2007; Innes and Booher 2010). However, despite the participatory rhetoric and approaches, nature protection policies and planning continue to raise conflicts between national and local actors (Grönholm 2009; Clausen et al. 2010; Daugstad 2011). This participatory *problématique* in environmental planning shares similarities with the challenges described in the literature of management and governance of the commons (Dietz et al. 2003; van Laerhoven and Ostrom 2007; Björkell 2008; Short 2008; Berkes 2009).

Based on these problematic aspects of planning it seems relevant to question what the participatory rationale of legitimacy, efficiency and effectiveness does not answer. Fundamentally, it could be asked whether current participatory efforts in environmental planning continue to be conflictual in local communities because they are mainly concerned with developing answers to fulfill planning objectives that are already defined by national policies, experts, and planning professionals. Such an approach would create a situation where (local) participants are unable or less capable of deliberating perspectives that transcend or even contradict the institutional planning rationality (Elling 2008; Bäcklund and Mäntyselä 2010). The participatory efforts in environmental planning could perhaps benefit from employing a distinctive conceptualisation of nature-society relations that can facilitate communication across the contested nature and society rationalities present in nature protection.

This paper questions whether nature protection can learn from understanding and acknowledging distinct perspectives of nature at play in the planning of large spatial areas as a matter of commons. The concept of commons is explored as a potential communicative tie between the everyday rationality of citizens and the institutional rationality of planning professionals. Such a tie could serve to open the nature protection agenda beyond the nature-society segregation and legitimize perspectives of integral (everyday life based) nature-society views in the planning process. To address these perspectives this paper asks the following questions: i) What types of nature-society understandings were addressed or emerged during the planning process in Heiplanen and the local community workshops, and how can they be understood as perspectives of commons? ii) How did the development of nature understandings during the planning process contribute to the participatory arena?

This paper argues that the participatory ethos in environmental planning requires crafting a planning arena that can handle different, and even contrasting perspectives, on nature (-and society relations) as a sense of commons. Such conceptualization can serve to open the nature protection discourse from a matter of balancing ecological and economic interests by formal institutions, to also regarding how societal-nature relations are part of an everyday life context.

The following section introduces the planning challenges of wild reindeer habitat protection in a mountainous rural area in Norway. The paper hereafter relates environmental planning to two different theoretical perspectives of the commons. The case and methodology is described, followed by a description of

the planning process. Finally, the paper describes emergent nature understandings and discusses what planning of large spatial areas can learn from theories of the commons.

## 2. An (inter)national area challenge: wild reindeer and local communities

Wild reindeer is a cultural species and symbolizes the re-population of Norway after the last ice age. Norway has an international commitment to secure the last herds of European wild reindeer through the ratification of the Bern convention (Andersen and Hustad 2004). Wild reindeers are a gregarious species adapted to the harsh climate of mountain regions of the northern hemisphere and depend on certain key habitats during the year. They are extremely shy and their behaviour is highly affected by human interference. These characteristics make the survival of wild reindeer dependent on large desolate mountain areas (Strand et al. 2010).

The wild reindeer habitats in Norway are found in sparsely populated mountain areas with rural settlements in the valleys and the higher mountain slopes with scattered traditional herd cottages (now used for recreational purposes and hunting). Until the 20th century wild reindeer constituted an important local food and income source, and they are still considered to be part of the local socio-cultural history and hunting traditions (Andersen and Hustad 2004). Increasing and diverse claims to the mountain regions have emerged over the past 40 years, and the number of second homes in the wild reindeer areas has doubled since the 1970s (Ericsson et al. 2010). In the same period, hydropower development driven by national state actors has claimed and occupied large mountain areas for dams, infrastructure, power lines, etc. The sum of this development has affected the quality of wild reindeer habitats significantly (Ericsson et al. 2010; Strand et al. 2010).

Although the wild reindeer habitats have been subject to conservation measures over the last four decades a policy recommendation report from 2004 pointed at the emergent need for larger regional plans to secure habitats from “bit-by-bit” second-home building and power and infrastructure development (Andersen and Hustad 2004; Falleth and Hovik 2008). This report led to the Ministry of Environment commissioning nine regional plans to secure potential wild reindeer habitats on a greater scale. One of these plans is the subject of study in this paper; Heiplanen, which compromises an area of 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> and involves 18 municipalities and five counties in Southern Norway.

The establishment of large protection areas and national parks in Norway has created extensive conflicts between local and national authorities over the last 40 years (Daugstad et al. 2006; Falleth and Hovik 2008). One of the main planning and governance challenges of these large spatial areas with diverse claims of use and protection is, according to the Ministry of Environment, to combine the large-scale wild reindeer habitat requirements with local-scale development (Vasstrøm 2013).

### 3. The relevance of commons in environmental planning

This paper argues that large scale planning challenges, such as wild reindeer habitat protection, can benefit from conceptualising the area as a matter of commons, which can entail not only natural scientific knowledge perspectives and regional institutional planning and management objectives, but also everyday life perspectives and relations to nature. Nature protection planning of large spatial areas is a process of considering and balancing diverse aspects of what is to be “protected” (Cowell and Owens 2011). This involves considerations of ecological aspects at a relevant scale, i.e. of a habitat in a mountain region. Yet, it also requires attention to the local socio-economic and cultural aspects and consequences of such protection, i.e. the livelihood of local communities. The process of planning is therefore also a communicative challenge of allowing different values, interests, and rationalities of nature protection and use to meet through dialogue on the planning arena (Innes and Booher 2010).

Cowell and Owens (2011), among others, problematize the planning arena in nature protection as often crafted by environmental planning institutions that are commissioned to operationalize national policies to reach expert defined planning objectives. Further, the planning actors from these institutions are often recruited from the natural sciences, which gives them a particular ontological and epistemological perspective of nature-society relations and the role of knowledge (Reitan 2004; Brunner and Steelman 2005). However, if it is acknowledged that nature protection policies at a local scale affect not only nature as a segregated component of an area, but also the local everyday life relation to nature through economic, social and cultural practices, then local citizens should also be involved in defining what nature protection should be (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006; Hansen 2007; Cowell and Owens 2011).

It is a communicative challenge to open understanding between rational, instrumental, and natural scientific based measures of nature protection, with processes of (local) public deliberation of nature- society relations from a lifeworld perspective (Elling 2008). However, the notion of participation becomes meaningless if it is merely aimed at answering predefined objectives, and unable to deliberate other perspectives, even those that contradict or oppose to the initial planning objective (Hansen 2007; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010). Strengthening participatory efforts in nature protection therefore depends on a planning arena that allows explorations of diverse (and conflicting) understandings of nature-society relations in the planning arena (Hansen 2007). Such understandings may vary considerably between the local scale of citizens’ everyday life perspectives (and between people in the community) and the national scale of policy objectives (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006). Participatory approaches that succeed in creating such communicative ties could not only reduce conflict or increase legitimacy, but also facilitate exploration and learning about local everyday life perspectives of more sustainable (and in that sense also protective) nature-society relations (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006; Clausen et al. 2010).

The conceptualisation of the commons was used in this research project to address a potential re-orientation of the planning process in Heiplanen from the conflictual categorizations of nature use and protection towards an understanding of the area as a material common matter of concern for both institutional planning actors and the local communities. Perspectives on commons are rooted in many different theoretical disciplines, and have developed into an interdisciplinary approach (van Laerhoven and Ostrom 2007; Armitage 2008; van Laerhoven and Berge 2011). Fundamentally, the concept of the commons associates the material physical aspects of societal-nature relations with notions of knowledge and approaches to governance (Ostrom 1990, 2009). In this sense it conceptualises both substantial and procedural dimensions of how we as humans in a society relate and separate in a public and material sphere (Arendt 1958).

In the following, commons will first be explored from an institutional perspective, based in particular on Ostrom's principles for building local institutions, that considers commons a complex, but manageable resource. Secondly, commons will be conceptualised as the everyday life relation to nature entangled in socio-economic, cultural, political and historic relations to nature (Shiva 2006; Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Clausen 2011). These two conceptualizations of commons can be useful in understanding the rationalities of nature at play in the planning of large spatial wildlife areas where regional resource management perspectives are contrasted with local area relations.

### **3.1. Commons as institutional building**

In a traditional nature-use perspective, the commons are physical and material places and resources that constitute the foundation for a subsistence economy, with management or institutions related to local knowledge and cultural practices (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2006). The understanding of commons and its governance has been widely influenced by Garrett Hardin's paper (1968) and the metaphor of "the tragedy of the commons" (Ostrom 1990; van Laerhoven and Berge 2011). This metaphor built a discourse with a simplistic image of natural resource management that assumed that a national state governor would be omnipotent and wise, while users of a common resource were self-interested and ecologically myopic (Ostrom 1990). Nature protection policies and planning practice have widely followed this line of argument, resulting in increasingly centralized control and regulation of nature (Dietz et al. 2003). They are based on natural scientific expert perspectives that argue for a centralized and hierarchical government to secure ecological interests and resources (Reitan 2004; Brunner and Steelman 2005). The nature protection planning discourse is, in other words, influenced by a natural scientific paradigm, an economic development rationality, and a strong belief in national state government (Nelson et al. 2008; Cowell and Owens 2011).

These ideas and metaphors were strongly criticised in 1990 by Elinor Ostrom in *Governing the Commons*. Her opening argument was that neither the state

model nor the market model have proved uniformly successful, but rather that communities of individuals have, with varying success, formed unique institutions to manage their commons. The work of Ostrom and colleagues has mainly been focused on commons as (common-pool) resources and the challenge of developing institutional principles for natural resource governance models (Armitage 2008). The theory relies on the assumption that local users and participants have time- and place-specific knowledge, and the ability to form regulatory collective institutions with enforcement mechanisms (Ostrom 1990). Several research projects analyse how people and communities self-organise and build local institutions to manage their commons, and explore how these are affected by several internal and external factors (Ostrom 1990, 2009; Frey and Berkes 2014). The participants are thus not dependent on state authority enforcement or steered by simple economic rationality, but build and adapt institutional systems according to their observations and learning.

Yet, Ostrom and colleagues are careful to argue that there is no one panacea to the commons management, neither local nor national actors have the right answers (Berkes 2007; Ostrom et al. 2007). The challenge lies in developing institutions across scales (Armitage 2008; Poteete 2012), both in a theoretical-abstract sense (the agreed principles), and through empirical-concrete action (adjustable operationalisations) (Ostrom 2009). New institutional arrangements cannot be “applied” as a blueprint, but must be crafted in a particular local socio-economic reality and modified through participant adaption (Ostrom 2008). The institutional commons theory is thus on the one hand directed at developing formal institutions and legal frameworks for balancing ecological and economic interests through regulations (Berkes 2007; Armitage 2008). On the other hand it is concerned with developing social learning and collective action in local communities as a way of fostering stewardship and ownership to local nature resources (Berkes 2009; Frey and Berkes 2014).

Commons as a matter of building institutions to govern interests and resources is increasingly relevant in nature protection planning. Nature protection is not just a matter of conservation, but also of balancing and combining different economic and ecological interests (Folke 2006; Engelen et al. 2008). There is therefore a need to develop institutions that can manage the complexity of balancing diverse interests in spatial areas coupled with local and national actors and governance scales (Armitage 2008; Innes and Booher 2010). The institutional commons perspective serves situations where management goals might be complex, but are also broadly agreed by legitimate stakeholders and institutions. However, the challenges of environmental planning are also concerned with situations where the management goals are not only complex, but also wicked, and the legitimacy of the very understanding of the area is contested (Cowell and Owens 2011). To explore and develop understandings of such wicked challenges in environmental planning the institutional commons theory of Ostrom could be complemented with an understanding of commons that is also related to ambiguous everyday life relations.

### 3.2. Commons as everyday life relations

Environmental planning and nature protection is concerned with economic or ecological interests or resources, but also faces challenges around values and identity (Innes and Booher 2010). Planning of large spatial areas therefore also raises challenges of understanding the area as embedded in a socio-cultural reality of a local community with perspectives of the past, present and future (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Vasstrøm 2013). Such spaces do not have clearly defined boundaries, and there is not one well-defined resource to be managed. However, they are still a matter of how society and humans relate to nature and the area as a common (Clausen 2011). Planning of large spatial areas, in this sense, creates controversies about the very understanding and balance of nature and society relations and thus about whom the legitimate actors, interest, and knowledge claims are (Elling 2008).

The institutional commons theories could, from a nature protection perspective, be criticised for reducing broad challenges of societal development trajectories to a matter of balancing economic and ecological interests. Such a perspective reduces public participation to a matter of engaging relevant stakeholders in a collaborative process to define consensus within an existing framework (Hansen 2007; Clausen et al. 2010). As discussed by Clausen (2011), the institutional commons perspective thus fails to consider the “non-participants” and their relation to and perspective on the area in question. This generates a situation where institutional governance and planning collaboration is directed to answer a pre-defined purpose (and re-produce existing discourses) and not to deliberate aspects of nature protection beyond the existing perspectives. The challenge of environmental planning is therefore to develop communication arenas for deliberative processes where new understandings of the context can emerge across institutional and lifeworld rationalities and across local and national scales (Elling 2008; Clausen et al. 2010). Such participation is not only important to legitimise nature protection policies, but also as a way of generating perspectives of nature-society relations as a “common third” across expert systems, local knowledge, and everyday life perspectives (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007).

The notion of the common third represents nature-society relations as a concern that is equally and though differently shared by planning institutions and the public (as citizens and local communities) (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007). The common third is, in a procedural “abstract” sense, a shared arena or democratic space, where different perspectives are considered equally legitimate into defining the matter of concern. From a substantial perspective, the common third represents the different socio-ecological relations that are tied between nature and society which can be addressed from both a scientific expert perspective and everyday life understanding (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Clausen 2011; Vasstrøm 2013).

The concept of commons in this sense constitutes a potentially different approach to understanding nature-society relations in environmental planning beyond planning categorisations, interest orientations, and natural scientific

concepts. It seeks to withhold an orientation towards nature and landscapes as an “un-sectored” social collective good that requires the (re-)development of a broad public concern and stewardship. In this sense, it could serve as a communicative tie between expert rationalities and everyday life perspectives in planning. However, it also shares the same pitfalls as other conceptualisations; that it becomes a conceptual mean to reach consensus and thus serves to close the deliberative planning arena (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010).

#### 4. Methodology and case

Heiplanen was one of nine regional planning processes that were commissioned by the Ministry of Environment in 2007. The plan was expected to i) secure the wild reindeer habitat and ii) explore rural development perspectives. The decision-making structure was instituted by county and municipal mayors, but all decisions had to be grounded in up-to-date natural scientific knowledge. The natural scientific knowledge base was materialised as a map of the planning area that categorised potential wild reindeer living habitats and functional key areas. The map was presented as representing objective natural scientific knowledge and could not be influenced by political judgment, but was intended to function as a point of departure for political discussion (Mossing and Heggenes 2010).

The area of Heiplanen has a 40-year long history of nature protection measures to secure wild reindeer habitats. In 2000 this resulted in the formation of a 3500 km<sup>2</sup> landscape protection area in Setesdal Vesthei Ryfylke (SVR) (Falleth and Hovik 2006, 2008). The planning area of Heiplanen consisted of 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> and included the SVR landscape protection area in addition to an eastern mountain range. Three of the affected municipalities, Bygland, Valle and Bykle in Setedal, had their entire area (4043 km<sup>2</sup>) included in Heiplanen. Setedal is a sparsely populated valley (3418 inhabitants in 2013) surrounded by western and eastern mountain ranges. Previous nature protection processes have been particularly conflictual in Setedal and there are ongoing disputes related to nature protection and use between the County Governor (the regional state authority that ensures the implementation of national policies in the counties) and the municipal politicians and planning authorities (Falleth and Hovik 2008). These disputes concern the SVR area boundaries and regulations about wild reindeer habitat requirements and second-home construction, use of traditional herd cottages, traffic (snow mobiles, hiking, skiing, hunting), hydro-power development, tourism, etc. (Falleth and Hovik 2006). The process of Heiplanen thus constituted an interesting learning case for exploring the gap between national protection policies and local understandings of nature, and its influence on the potential for local participation in a large spatial planning process.

The research methodology consisted of document research on previous and existing planning initiatives and participatory research processes with local and regional planning authorities and local communities during the entire planning process. The researcher was accepted as a participant observer in the formal

planning process from the first public meeting in 2009 to the final crafting of the planning document in 2012. The researcher participated during formal planning meetings between regional and municipal planning actors (80 hours), and during municipal planning meetings and public hearings (60 hours). In addition, the researcher and the Heiplanen project leader had continuous dialogue (mail, phone, meetings) to reflect on the development and challenges of the planning process. The researcher also carried out focus group interviews about nature and knowledge understandings with the County Governor game managers from three counties. In 2010 the researcher, in collaboration with the municipal planners, arranged three local community workshops in three municipalities in Setesdal to explore citizens' perspectives of the "The good life for people and wild reindeer in Setesdal – now and in the future". The workshops were attended by 15–20 people over two days. The participants were not invited as stakeholders with particular interests, but as citizens carrying a whole-life perspective of the area. The outcome of these workshops was presented on two formal planning meetings to regional and municipal planners and to politicians respectively. At the end of the planning process semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Setesdal municipal planners and politicians, the County Governor game manager, the county government planner, and the project leader of Heiplanen to evaluate the plan outcome from different perspectives and verify the researcher understanding of the process development (Vasstrøm 2013). The different sources of information about the process were related to each other in the analysis to give a multi-faceted and bricolaged understanding of the planning process.

## 5. Regional nature protection and local perspectives

### 5.1. A regional planning perspective: The process of Heiplanen

The purpose and process of Heiplanen was defined by planning officers in the county government based on the commission from the Ministry of Environment. The planning process was presented at a regional public meeting in 2009, together with the map of the potential wild reindeer habitat to be secured. From 2009 to 2010 the project leader of Heiplanen (and researcher) visited the municipalities involved to gain insights about their particular challenges in nature protection and use. In the same period the researcher, in collaboration with the Setesdal municipalities, arranged three local community workshops to explore citizens perspectives on nature protection and use related to their current and future lives in the valley. In 2010 municipal planning authorities were twice invited to participate in a regional planning arena to comment on the first draft plan for area boundaries and regulations. At the first of these meetings the outcomes of the local community workshops were also presented by the researcher. In 2010 and 2011 the municipalities of Setesdal and the County Governor, encouraged by the Heiplanen project leader and the researcher, agreed to take part in dialogue meetings to discuss, face-to-face, the planning challenges and conflicts in the area of Setesdal. In 2012 the planning document was collaboratively crafted

by municipal planners and the County Governor representatives, and thereafter approved by the municipal and county governments (Vasstrøm 2013).

## **5.2. Emerging and reciprocating nature understandings**

The objective of Heiplanen was to categorise areas of protection and use and establish boundaries that could secure the wild reindeer habitat from future human and societal use. It also aimed to generate nature use perspectives for rural development. The regional planning documents and actors perceived nature use as economic growth generated by the exploitation of natural resources, particularly hydro power and tourism. Nature protection was understood as a matter of setting boundaries on a map and defining regulations for these areas based on up-to-date natural science knowledge. Protective regulations through boundaries on a map were communicated as the only possible means of “securing” the wild reindeer area from human use. Any problematisation of the boundaries could thereby be marginalised or disqualified as an expression of local economic rationality that was not conformant within the natural science securement discourse. The national commission of Heiplanen in this sense expressed a nature perspective influenced by a natural science planning rationality. The institutional planning categorisations of use and protection thus served to close broader deliberations about what nature use and protection could be.

The initial meetings between the municipal planners and politicians, the project leader and county governments (and the researcher) opened an exploration of the local challenges related to nature protection and use perspectives. The meetings revealed frustration among municipal planners and politicians about the simplification and instrumentalisation of the nature protection and use perspective, and with the natural science definitions of wild reindeer habitats. From their view the use of nature was not only related to economic exploitation of nature – although that was also important – but also concerned with the local citizens’ ability to use nature for recreational purposes, not least in relation to their traditional herd cabins in the higher mountain slopes. These local nature perspectives were further explored during the three community workshops in Setesdal.

The local community workshops attempted to encourage citizens to reflect on and express their perspectives on nature protection and use in relation to the good life of the community. The workshops sought to permit a view of nature distinct from that of the regional planning actors. In this sense, the workshops constituted a space where experiences and values related to life in the area could be expressed and collectively developed without a predefined agenda or established categorisations. The workshops revealed different views on nature, not only within the community, but also internal ambiguities for the individual participants about economic development (second-home development) and nature stewardship (the pride of untouched nature).

The citizens considered the use of nature for recreation (roaming, skiing, fishing, hunting, etc.) and the use of the herd cabins in the high mountains a

privilege of living in Setesdal. In all three workshops it was mentioned that restrictions on such nature “use” privileges could reduce (young) peoples’ motivation to move (back) to the area. The use of the area was also seen as bringing potential for tourism development and an experience-based economy, but this was not a primary concern. Several of the workshop themes expressed visions of developing local knowledge and nature management institutions that could improve local participation in nature stewardship and protection. Several workshop participants argued that such institutions would not only improve the competence of the state-governed nature management system and create new workplaces in the community, but also serve to re-vitalize their mountain identity and responsibility for nature in local development plans. Similar perspectives were reflected in another workshop theme, which discussed the potential for educating local young people as nature rangers. The (nature) education of young people was understood to be a potential means of strengthening their place identity and nature responsibility. However, the workshop discussions also acknowledged that the processes of re-embedding nature responsibilities in the local communities would require a long-term effort.

The nature values expressed in the workshops were related to the potential of using the area as a resource for economic development and the use of nature for recreation and hunting, but also to the uncategorisable sense and quality of living in an area of outstanding beauty. Nature was viewed as part of their historic cultural identity and the present area use, but also of the future life and viability of the valley communities. The workshops contributed to opening a different horizon for nature-society relations, which not only made the participants consider their nature responsibility, but also contributed to envisioning how Heiplanen could embrace aspects other than boundary setting and regulations.

In the formal planning arena the initiation of regional plan forums created spaces for deliberating different understandings of nature protection and use between municipal planners, politicians, county government planners and representatives from the County Governor. This opening for deliberation may have been partially influenced by the researcher’s presentation of the local community nature perspectives at the beginning of the meeting. The understanding of nature as related to either ecological or economic interests was thus complemented by local perspectives of nature as a more life-embedded recreational or culturally related perspective (Vasstrøm 2013). Although these regional planning spaces were still influenced by the planning focus on boundaries and categorisations, the regional plan forum recognized the deliberation of different nature understandings into the planning arena. The county government and County Governor representatives were challenged by the municipal understanding of different nature protection and use aspects in relation and opposition to the natural science based categorizations indicated on the wild reindeer map.

The legitimisation of a more diversified nature understanding in the regional planning arena generated a more egalitarian dialogue between the municipal and regional-state authorities about nature and area categorisations. The negotiations

of boundaries and categorization of zones between municipal planners and County Governor representatives became influenced by these more diverse understandings of nature and use. The notion of nature was thus acknowledged as something more complex than a resource defined by natural scientific knowledge, which also embraced an understanding of how people in the area related to nature in their everyday life. Through the five dialogue meetings the County Governor representatives came to acknowledge that nature's relations to the lived life in Setesdal had to be considered in the boundary setting exercise. In response, the municipal mayors acknowledged that the establishment of long-term boundaries for protection of some wild reindeer areas could serve the purpose of restricting economic interests, particularly second-home development. The final outcome of the Heiplanen process was a planning document and area map. The boundaries and regulations for Setesdal were crafted collaboratively between municipal planners and County Governor representatives.

## 6. Understandings of commons in the planning process

### 6.1. The institutional commons perspective in Heiplanen

The nationally-initiated wild reindeer protection process can be interpreted as a policy response to the long-lasting rural development – nature management conflicts in Norway, and to international responsibility for the wild reindeer (Bråtå 2008; Vasstrøm 2013). The policy commission was directed at securing an area resource – the wild reindeer habitat – from construction of infrastructure, second-home building and human disturbance in general. The area was, in this sense, perceived as a resource that could be separated from societal development through the creation of boundaries protected through regionally-agreed regulations. The process and purpose of this commissioned regional plan can thus be interpreted as an attempt to build a local-regional institutional system within a defined area. The planning document and regulations can be understood as the rules for use of the area, with principles of accountability and sanctioning mechanisms. This is in accordance with the findings of Bråtå (2008) who analysed two similar wild reindeer planning processes in relation to the common-pool resource governance principles of Ostrom (1990).

In his analysis Bråtå (2008), points to the lack of low-cost arenas for conflict management in these planning processes. In the case of Heiplanen it could be argued that low cost arenas for conflict management were gradually established through the dialogue meetings between the municipalities and the County Governor. The dialogue thus reconciled or at least generated improved legitimacy for the communication of both natural science and local nature understandings and values in the process. The meetings could be seen as an informal institutional trust-building process that facilitated adaption of national policy goals to the particular local area (Björkell 2008). Trust building and generation of mutual understandings are vital to develop social capital and knowledge systems across levels of governance (Armitage 2008) and in a longer term perspective lay the

ground for establishing co-management institutions (Ostrom 2008; Berkes 2009; Poteete 2012).

Although the dialogue meetings and planning outcome represent a collaborative result, they did not move beyond understanding nature protection and use as a negotiated balance between ecological and economic interests. The outcome of the formal planning process functioned to fulfil a pre-defined purpose framed by the national policies and planning institutional system: the formation of a plan document with area boundaries and regulations. The participation level of local authorities and citizens did not exceed an operational level of governance and remained an action of answering to decisions taken at higher levels of governance (Ostrom 1990; Björkell 2008). The planning outcome did not involve perspectives or actions targeted at furthering the local nature protection and use perspectives that were not related to economic activities. The broad nature protection perspectives developed in the community workshops were thus not considered plannable within the Heiplanen objective (Hansen 2007; Vasstrøm 2013). The planning process and outcome can thus be criticized for not furthering aspects of ecological stewardship in the local communities. Frey and Berkes (2014) argue that development of such ecological stewardship among local actors is an important component for long-term management of common resources.

## **6.2. Commons as an everyday life relation**

The division of nature into area categories of “protection” and “use” created an understanding of nature and society as incompatible entities; as though the plan was a matter of segregating people and reindeer. The local community, or everyday life, understanding of nature cannot be “out-separated” from the lived-life relations to the area (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006). From the local community perspective nature was perceived as a common materiality that embraced cultural, social and economic dimensions alike. Further, nature-society relations were understood as part of a common future development horizon, not just in an economic sense, but as part of a local community and individual potential for life, wellbeing and livelihood. Yet, these reflections also involved different and contrasting perspectives among the citizens. The relations, values and knowledge about the area were influenced not only by mental reasoning about quality and characteristics of nature, but also by embodied and sensed experiences of nature. The area in this sense constituted a common materiality of reference – or a common third – in the community for cognitive reflections and emotional relations. These multi-dimensional perspectives of nature were particularly present in the local community workshops, but were also discussed and recognized in the regional forum and dialogue meetings. From this lifeworld perspective the boundaries on a two-dimensional map is an “irrational” categorisation of nature (Vasstrøm 2013). Nature and the spatial area is rather a multi-dimensional common that bridge life and livelihood, history and futures of the social and physical place. However, everyday relations also involve many contrasting and ambiguous aspects between

citizens in a community and even within each individual (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Vasstrøm 2013). The socio-cultural commons related to the everyday life are not necessarily present as explicit and outspoken perceptions of reality (Clausen 2011). The generation of such common third perceptions requires that they are encouraged through social processes of deliberation (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007). The exploration of such common, though diverse, relations to nature can serve as an important ground for opening local participation and stewardship for a nature protection area in a planning process (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006).

### **6.3. Commons as a communicative tie**

The process of Heiplanen revealed that it is possible to widen the conceptualization of nature-society relations from a segregated perspective on negotiating boundaries of ecological and economic interests on a map, to understand nature as an integrated part of life in a local society. The participatory aspects of Heiplanen were improved because the planning actors became gradually willing and able to mould the planning objective, acknowledge different nature views, and thus negotiate the securement of wild reindeer habitat as a matter of common concern with different, but equally legitimate opinions and judgements. Such improved understandings can facilitate a reorientation of nature management institutionalisation between levels of local, regional, and national governance towards more adaptive and resilient practices (Berkes 2007; Armitage 2008).

The local community workshops illustrated that there is a basis for addressing nature-society relations with local communities as a matter of nature responsibilities and stewardship. It is, however, important to emphasize that the involvement of local communities is not a solution to nature protection or sustainability. Local actors and communities also represent strong economic interests that are not conformant with nature protection and they cannot be expected to evaluate development initiatives in relation to ecological expert knowledge (Armitage 2008; Cowell and Owens 2011). Yet, involvement of local communities is the only way of exploring nature protection objectives from an everyday life perspective of the area, that can on the one hand complement expert understandings and planning institutional management nature perspectives, and on the other contribute to further development of nature responsibility in the community (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Berkes 2009). Such involvement represents an important opportunity for creating local engagement for nature stewardship that could contribute with new perspectives of how to address nature protection in large spatial area planning (Vasstrøm 2013). However, participatory processes require time and resources to create arenas that allow citizens to express and deliberate based on their whole life relation to the area. It continues to be a challenge for environmental planning of large spatial areas to link local “free space” arenas with formal local-regional institutions to address the challenge of nature protection with both regulative means and community stewardship.

## 7. Conclusion

Nature protection planning of spatial areas to a high degree concerns politicized agendas between local and national governments, and strong interest contradictions between ecologic and economic interests (Reitan 2004; Daugstad et al. 2006; Engelen et al. 2008). Large-scale regional planning is necessary for securing wildlife habitats that often stretch over thousands of kilometres, and to develop management practices that secure key ecological areas across municipal borders and development initiatives. Complex environmental challenges like wildlife conservation or biodiversity protection requires expert knowledge about nature. However, this case illustrates that nature protection also concerns a broader understanding of nature as a social and cultural commons that is embedded in an everyday life. Planning of large spatial areas therefore also require attention and resources to establish local planning arenas that can consider understandings of nature and society from a non-sectored and non-scientific everyday life orientation (Nielsen and Nielsen 2007; Clausen et al. 2010). Without such local participation and anchorage, the regional planning purpose becomes illegitimate and distanced from local understandings and practices (Grönholm 2009; Daugstad 2011). Further, and more importantly, the involvement and contributions of local communities are basis for learning process of (re-)discovering and (re-)embedding nature responsibilities in local everyday life (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006). The challenge lies in establishing communicative ties across broad local everyday life perspectives and formal institutional regulations and expert knowledge.

This case illustrates that continuous dialogue – in a conflictual situation – could bring about collaborative endeavors between municipalities and the regional-state authorities. The opening for this dialogue was a gradual recognition that nature is not only a matter of ecological and economic interests, but also a common concern for the area as part of community livelihood. The initial conflict developed into a process of knowledge exchange and negotiations to craft area boundaries and categorization that would serve both the wild reindeer and the municipalities of Setesdal. This paper is thus a story about how institutional planning actors and affected communities understand and relate differently to a spatial area and how improved understandings across these scales may strengthen collaboration. Collaboration across such scales is important for the management of wildlife habitats and large nature biotopes in the future, in order to combine local and expert knowledge and develop adaptive management strategies (Armitage 2008; Berkes 2009). When this is said, it is important to question if institutional collaborative planning outcomes, such as a planning document create different outlooks in the local practice and better conditions for the wild reindeer, or if it is merely a bureaucratic exercise.

The community workshops showed that there is a potential for engaging local citizens to participate and deliberate broad nature-society perspectives; even in a process with a long enduring conflictual history and little trust in

national government. However, this required the establishment of an arena where the nature-society relations could be deliberated as something different than categorisations of protection and use, and defined by the citizens in relation to their perspective of “the good life” for people and nature. The outcome of the community workshops transcended the planning categorisations and sectoral interests to consider nature as part of their common basis for the past, present and future (Vasstrøm 2013). If nature protection is about care for nature on a long-term basis then local communities should be involved, encouraged and challenged to participate in deliberating what nature protection could be from an everyday life perspective (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006). Such participation does not presuppose community consensus of hegemonic community perceptions, rather it is a process of exploring nature as a material and immaterial common third that citizens can relate to in different ways.

This paper argues that the crafting of large spatial planning processes can learn from theories of the commons by recognizing divergent knowledge views of nature-society relations (Frey and Berkes 2014), considering key factors of building local institutions (Ostrom 1990, 2008; Berkes 2007) across levels of governance (Armitage 2008; Poteete 2012), and in relation to the whole life relation to the area (Nielsen and Nielsen 2006; Clausen 2011; Vasstrøm 2013). Further, this case also illustrates that commons theories can benefit from understanding spatial areas as common material and immaterial concerns from the everyday life perspectives of citizens. In order to ease the gap between nature protection policies and participatory planning endeavours the exploration of different commons perspectives on multi-scaled planning arenas might serve to improve not only the legitimacy of the planning process, but also the planning outcome impact on long term sustainability.

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