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# Synergy or marginalisation? Narratives of farming and tourism in Geiranger, western Norway

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Tourism is increasingly seen as a necessary income diversification strategy in rural Europe, especially in areas where traditional rural businesses are facing decreasing profitability. This view is clearly expressed in Norwegian government strategies. Measures to support tourism development are launched by public management bodies at national and regional level. For rural agrarian communities the cultural landscape is seen as an asset in developing tourism. The authors study the interplay between farming and tourism in Geiranger in western Norway using narrative and discourse analysis. Since the late 19th century, tourism and farming have co-existed in Geiranger. Recently, the area has also been subject to nature conservation and obtained World Heritage Status. Inspired by political ecology literature, the authors aim to identify and compare the narratives of local actors, and link these narratives to broader environmental discourses.

Keywords: *narratives, nature conservation, political ecology, tourism, world heritage*

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## Introduction

Rural areas traditionally dependent on primary occupations have been in the midst of structural changes and increasing demands of rationalisation during recent decades, in Norway as well as in Europe in general. At the same time, in Norway there has been a strong supportive policy to maintain viable rural communities. Not least, considerable subsidies have been put into the agrarian sector to secure a minimum income level. However, income diversification into tourism has been put forward with increasing strength as a necessary economic strategy for rural areas. Rural areas are seen as having important assets for tourism – such as forests, mountains, and a cultural landscape formed by agrarian practices (AP, SV & SP 2005; LMD 2007; Innovasjon Norge 2009).

In this article, we explore local views on the linkages between tourism and farming in Geiranger in the fjords of western Norway. Here, diversification into tourism started almost 150 years ago (Aasheim & Bruaset 2001). Tourism and farming have since coexisted in the area, and local people have been handling the interface between these two sectors for decades. Both sectors are important to the community.

In 2004, a Landscape Protected Area was established and in 2005 Geiranger became a World Heritage Site. Today, Geiranger is one of Norway's most visited destinations, receiving more than half a million tourists every year. After inscription on the World Heritage List, attention to Geiranger increased in the Norwegian media. Various articles in local, regional and national media have reflected farmers' worries about both the Landscape Protection and World Heritage status. This increased focus on conservation and heritage is also likely to affect the linkages between farming and tourism.

This study has three aims. First, we aim to identify and compare the narratives related to farming and tourism of various local actors (e.g. farmers, tourist operators, and local government officials). Second, we wish to compare these local narratives with broader national and global environmental discourses, especially concerning aspects of power and management of natural resources. Third, this combination of narrative and discourse analysis takes inspiration from the approach of political ecology, and we aim to explore how this burgeoning field, in especially American geography, can contribute to rural studies in a Scandinavian context.

This third aim is in line with an emerging trend of bringing political ecology 'home' (Wainwright 2005). Until recently, political ecology was seen as a particular perspective on environmental issues that is uniquely relevant in a developing context (Bryant & Bailey 1997). However, during the last few years it has become apparent that 'political ecologists working in many other parts of the world are now heading north, or simply going global' (Schroeder et al. 2006, 163–164). This trend has resulted in special issues of geography journals on political ecology in the First World (for example, *Environment and Planning A*, see McCarthy 2005) and on political ecology in North America (for example, *Geoforum*, see Schroeder et al. 2006).

Current thinking in political ecology usually focuses on power relations in land and environmental management at various geographical levels – local, national and global – and also the interlinkages between these levels. This approach has today 'become firmly established as a dominant field of human-environmental research in geography' (Walker 2005, 73). Within the sphere of political ecology, there is a particular interest in the ways that power relations

are reinforced or contested in environmental discourses which are maintained by powerful actors (Stott & Sullivan 2000; Robbins 2004). One trend within current Third World political ecology includes the study of local and global discursive environmental representations, the links or contrasts between them, and how they relate to policy narratives (e.g. Bassett & Crummey 2003; Forsyth & Walker 2008).

## Discourse and narrative analysis

Discourse and narrative analysis is an important critical tool within political ecology. Discourses and narratives are understood to be representations of reality, but at different levels. While narratives treat specific cases, discourses are frameworks for understanding more abstract and general phenomena, often understood as 'truth regimes' (Adger et al. 2001). Discourses are constantly being redefined by the actors involved, thus forming new narratives, while at the same time providing a set of conditions within which actions and interpretations may occur (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen 2005).

One of the characteristics of discourses is homogeneity in terms of message and expressive means (Adger et al. 2001). Discourse analysis thus implies a study of claims, claim-makers and the claims-making processes. From Blekesaune & Stræte (1997), using the terminology of Laclau & Mouffe (1985), we adopt the notions of *nodal point*, which is a shared understanding related to discourses, and *social antagonism*, which means the pacification of opponents through exaggerating their arguments.

Roe (1991, 288) describes narratives as stories with 'a beginning, middle, and end (or premises and conclusions, when cast in the form of an argument)'. Adger et al. (2001) show that narratives often include a cast of actors, such as archetypical heroes, villains and victims. Hence, in accordance with this interpretation, individual accounts are not treated as narratives. Rather, we understand narratives to be the underlying patterns in stories told by individuals.

We treat narratives as one example of expressive means within a discourse, and thus narrative analysis and construction can be seen as a first step in discourse analysis. While discourses provide a framework for interpretation of experiences, narratives are one of the mechanisms that constantly work to redefine the discourses.

With the aim of exploring how different groups of actors perceive and relate to the reality they experience, and to identify underlying patterns, this study uses an inductive approach based on grounded theory in which the data collected set the premises for the analytical process (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted during two periods in the summer and autumn of 2007, with a total of 26 individuals: local representatives from the tourism sector (three respondents), the local and regional World Heritage Management (two respondents), local and regional authorities (six respondents), and all those who have been involved

in farming activities in Geiranger during the previous five years, in order to reach a number of farmers who had ceased farming during the previous three or four years as well as still active farmers (15 respondents). Most of the farmers in Geiranger also have some income from tourism-related activities either on-farm or off-farm, and none of the households depend solely on the incomes from farming. Most of the farmers were interviewed two times, first in couples, then individually. In order to understand the background of the current situation, we read historical documents and records, and followed the debates in regional and national newspapers. Important issues raised during the interviews were nature protection and management, bush encroachment, local resistance, and the relationship between farming and tourism.

Starting with the local actors from tourism, farming, and the local World Heritage Office, we tried to identify the stories and accounts that were common within the various actor groups. Thereafter, we considered these local stories when we approached the statements of non-local actors (i.e. the representatives of the authorities and the head of the World Heritage Council). After some rounds of refinement, and comparing the stories of the different groups, two main narratives – marginalisation and synergy – emerged. The focus of the narratives and the topics that are treated in this paper are consistent with the main topics in the interviews.

## Geiranger

The Geiranger community lies at the head of the Geiranger fjord, one of the steepest and narrowest of all the Norwegian fjords. The mountains rise more than 1000 m directly from the sea level. Geiranger is part of Stranda Municipality in which 70% of the area is above 600 m a.s.l. (Daugstad 2009). There are few areas within the Geiranger community that are well suited for farming, and most of the farmland occupies steep slopes (Fig. 1). Given the natural conditions, the dominant agricultural system is agro-pastoral with livestock farming, namely cows, sheep and goats (for milk and meat).

The first cruise yachts entered the Geiranger fjord in the second half of the 19th century. Farmers organised sightseeing tours to the nearby mountainsides for visitors to experience spectacular views. When farming met hard times in the 1960s, several farmers built cabins for rental during the tourist season to supplement their income. Hence, the diversification of the farming sector into tourism in Geiranger has been part of a coping strategy for several decades. From the 1960s until today, the number of cabins and rooms for rental to tourists has increased to meet the needs of the constantly growing number of tourists. Today, there are three seasonal and one year-round open hotel in Geiranger with a total of 426 rooms. In addition there are 120 cabins for rent, mostly with 4–6 beds, from 13 different operators, five camping grounds and several rooms for rent in private houses (Geiranger online 2009). Geiranger has c.700,000 visiting tourists every summer season, of which c.200,000 arrive by cruise ships (Holm et al. 2007; Destinasjon Geirangerfjord Trollstigen 2009). The remainder of the tourists come either individually, mostly by car or bus, or as groups from nearby cities. After arriving,

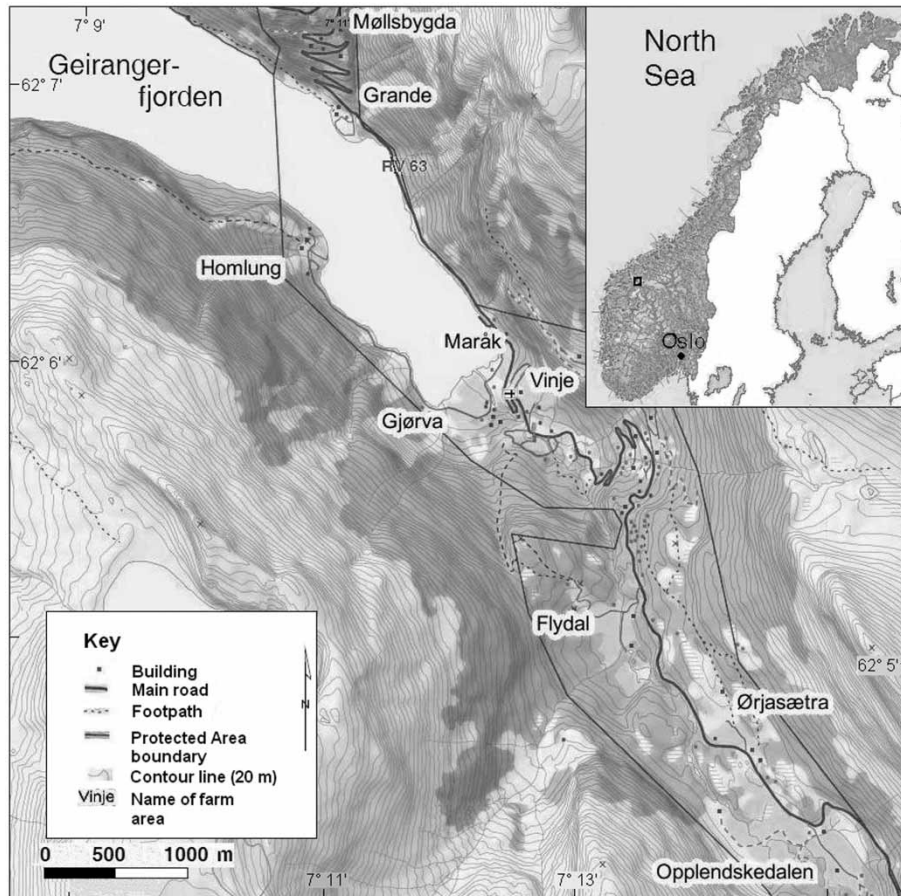


Fig. 1. Norway and Geiranger: location of places mentioned in the article (sources: <http://www.mundofree.com>, <http://www.gislink.no>)

these tourists can choose between five different boat trips to abandoned hamlets along the fjord organised by three different operators, as well as bicycle rental, kayak rental and touring by car (Destinasjon Geirangerfjord Trollstigen 2009).

For the farmers, the tourist season coincides with the busiest period in agriculture, especially the hay-making period. In order to have enough fodder for the livestock during the winter stabling period (October to May), many farmers have to cut grass more or less constantly from June to September. In order to keep the fenced-in areas close to the farm for hay production, the livestock is taken to mountain pastures during the summer months. Due to the coincidence of the peak season in both farming and tourism during a few summer months, many farmers express feelings of bad conscience over not being able to fulfil their different roles as family members, tourist hosts and farmers.

Currently Geiranger is experiencing a rapid decline in the number of farms. On average, one farm has ceased production each year during the last 20 years, but during the winter season 2005–2006 three farms were wound up, and two more have since cut down severely on livestock production. In Stranda Municipality,<sup>1</sup> the number of farms has decreased steadily from 317 in 1979 to 116 in 2006. The number of grazing animals has decreased as a

consequence, by 15–20% since 1989 (Statistics Norway 2009). There are various reasons for the decline in Geiranger. Some farmers have retired without having successors and others have decided to change their means of livelihood for various economic reasons. Today, only eight farms remain in Geiranger. Three of these farmers have farming as their main source of income, and two have farming as their only source of income. On the household level, all farms have other incomes, either from tourism on the farm, tourism outside the farm (hotel) or public service jobs.

#### *Landscape protection and world heritage in Geiranger*

The Geiranger-Herdalen Landscape Protected Area<sup>2</sup> was established in 2004 after a process which lasted for 18 years. The motivation for the designation was the distinctive fjord landscape with its geology, rich biodiversity, and cultural heritage. This rather lengthy conservation process had two distinct steps or ‘rounds’ of documentation, investigations and public hearings, both run by the public body in charge: the Environmental Department of the County Governor’s Office. In the first round (1986–1987), both the municipal authorities and local representatives from the farming sector expressed their resistance to the proposed designation, arguing that status as protected landscape would affect local

development and production, and that the proposal for a Landscape Protected Area was a sign of lack of trust in local management (Daugstad et al. 2005). The second conservation round, initiated in 1993, aimed at a greater degree of local participation, including the setting up of a council with representatives from both the affected municipalities, Stranda and Norddal, as well as local business representatives. This time the municipal boards changed their views, now expressing support for the Landscape Protected Area on certain conditions. Responses in this round were characterised by conditions and demands formulated to serve the interests of various actor groups (Daugstad et al. 2005).

The initiative to nominate West Norwegian Fjords (WNF) to the World Heritage List<sup>3</sup> came from the Nordic Council of Ministers (*Nordisk ministerråd*) in 1996 and the site was nominated by the Norwegian Government in 2002 (Daugstad 2009). Following a visit from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2004, the West Norwegian Fjords area, consisting of the Geiranger Fjord and surrounding areas together with Nærøy Fjord and the surrounding areas further south, was inscribed as a natural site on the World Heritage List in July 2005. The justification stated that the inscription was due to the region's geology and outstanding scenery. Cultural heritage objects and cultural landscapes were also mentioned as being an advantage, by both the World Heritage Commission and Norwegian authorities.

Since the formal inscription on the World Heritage List, various reactions have emerged. Farmers focus on what they see as impossible conditions for farming, researchers and the tourism sector worry about pollution due to heavy traffic in the form of cruise ships in particular, and all groups are worried about bush encroachment (*gjengroing*, i.e. the overgrowth of abandoned agricultural land by bushes and eventually forest). Open farmland reverting to forest is commonly seen as reducing a main asset for tourism in Geiranger: the landscape mosaic with small hamlets along the fjord. Bush encroachment is considered to be the result of the decline in farming and, more recently, also a possible consequence of climate change (Bryn 2006). A more optimistic viewpoint is, however, expressed by the tourism sector and local and regional authorities, who argue that World Heritage status may lead to increased touristic value for the area, and imply increased involvement of and support from central authorities.

With the national focus on the preservation of agricultural landscapes and the threat of bush encroachment, the local World Heritage Council initiated a project with the aim of strengthening and maintaining the farming sector in the World Heritage Areas. Objectives were to contribute to a level of farming activity that could maintain the cultural landscape and especially to identify the funding necessary to increase the number of grazing animals. (Verdsarvrådet & Vega kommune 2007).

## The narratives

We constructed two narratives based on the data collected as a whole. Starting with the farmers, we identified core topics in

their interviews. Thereafter, we compared these topics with the interviews from the other actors, such as representatives from the tourism sector, the World Heritage Management and the authorities, to see how these actors treated the topics. In developing the narratives, our goal was not that every individual should be able to identify completely with all aspects in the narratives, but rather that each narrative should represent the main arguments in the interviews with each group of actors.

### *The marginalisation narrative*

The marginalisation narrative is promoted by actors in the broad farming sector, consisting of local active and passive farmers, and agricultural authorities at municipal and county level. The narrative may be presented in the following way:

*The Geiranger area holds special environmental values generated by the traditional use of the resources in the form of farming, grazing and hunting. The area is of great interest for tourism because of these values. Farming and tourism have successfully existed side by side in Geiranger for a long time. Political interference has, however, disturbed this relationship through a polarisation of the sectors. The result is exploitation and marginalisation of the community and the farming sector, and a degradation of environmental values especially through bush encroachment. Local people are disempowered. It is necessary that the authorities recognise their responsibility to maintain a viable farming sector in order to prevent a collapse of the community. Because agricultural production forms the basis for both tourism and World Heritage, a continuation of the existing development, leading to a further decline of the farming sector, will undermine the existence of tourism activities and eventually lead to a collapse of the community and a loss of the World Heritage Status.*

This narrative tells a story with a beginning, middle and an end, and it clearly presents archetypical roles of villains and victims. The victims are the farming families in Geiranger, whereas the national authorities and policy makers represent the villains. There are three main arguments embedded in this narrative: marginalisation, bush encroachment and disempowerment, each of which is discussed in turn below.

*Marginalisation.* According to the farmers, marginalisation occurs at several levels. First, they claim there has been marginalisation of small-scale farming by a general demand for rationalisation in agriculture. Second, they argue that the farming sector is being marginalised within the community by the tourism sector that continually grows stronger. Third, they hold that Geiranger and other rural and peripheral parts of Norway have been marginalised by unfavourable policies and management of grants and subsidies.

The farmers describe a steady increase in costs related to farming during recent decades, without a concomitant growth in their incomes. Hence, rationalisation is necessary in order to decrease costs. However, in Geiranger, the farming areas are so small, and the land is so steep, that a highly rationalised type of farming is not possible. The result is that it is not possible to make a living from farming in Geiranger today.

Further, the interviewees behind the marginalisation narrative argue that the tourism sector has been strengthened by the authorities. Tourism activities generate added value and employment, important factors for economic growth, which is a goal for the nation. The combination of supporting tourism and scaling down the farming sector makes the situation almost impossible for the farmers. They feel that tourism takes over as the main activity in the community, and that it to some extent sets the premises for their daily farming activities. Moreover, the fact that tourism is based to a large extent on the cultural landscapes produced by farming causes frustration for many farmers in terms of how the tourism sector takes advantage of and exploits the farming sector. One middle-aged farmer<sup>4</sup> interviewed said:

They are not very interested in contributing economically to keep things running. The tourism sector is not interested in that. You could say that they have benefitted from the job we have done on keeping nature and the cultural landscapes beautiful. And in a way they have an income from it, because people appreciate it, and they want to come back. But if you consider farming as such, people that run the farms don't get much income from the tourists.

According to the farmers, this polarisation between the sectors is exacerbated by the Landscape Protection Status and the World Heritage Status. While the Landscape Protection Status constrains the use of agricultural resources, the World Heritage Status adds touristic value to the region. Hence, these two inscriptions both contribute to the marginalisation of farmers and the strengthening of tourism.

The last point in the marginalisation argument concerns how Geiranger as a community has become marginalised. The main argument here is that Geiranger is a community with few resources. Both time and access are limited, and thus, in order to sustain Geiranger, the tourism potential has to be utilised fully and locally. Today, however, the people experience that external actors exploit these resources by entering the tourism market in the peak season without offering any social or economic returns to the community. Furthermore, the authorities constrain locals from utilising the same resources, for example by ignoring the importance of opening the road that connects Geiranger to the eastern parts of Norway in time for the tourism season. In addition, the farmers claim that money destined for the community has been wasted. The World Heritage designation has led to grants for maintaining cultural landscapes. However, there is common agreement among the farmers that these grants have been wasted in projects and bureaucracy, and none of it has served to benefit the community or the farming sector. In general, there is a lack of trust in the management of grants and subsidies.

*Bush encroachment.* The farmers express a strong attachment to the landscape, which has been managed by local farmers for generations. Maintenance of this landscape is considered to be part of their pride in being farmers. However, as a result of the marginalisation of the farming sector, less and less land is being cultivated and used for haymaking, and the number of grazing animals is decreasing continuously. Hence, with less grazing, nature is claiming land back

through natural succession. The farmers stress that a continuation of farming activities is the most important factor in order to rescue cultural landscapes from bush encroachment.

According to some farmers, the Landscape Protection Status also contributes negatively to the maintenance of cultural landscapes as it constrains the use of natural resources. This status, it is argued, affects farming negatively in two ways. First, farming is affected indirectly by prohibiting power production from waterfalls owned by farmers. Power production represents a potentially substantial extra income which could strengthen the economic basis of farming households. Second, paradoxically, the Landscape Protection Status undermines to a certain extent the traditional uses of resources that have generated the very environmental values, which are being protected (see also Bjørkhaug 1998). Furthermore, according to some farmers, extensive tourism in the area leads to heavy pollution and the emission of greenhouse gases that further encourage bush growth.

*Disempowerment.* More than anything else, according to the farmers, political strategies have led to polarisation between the two sectors of farming and tourism. This is because forces outside the community are making decisions on the development of the community. The farmers argue that society at large (*storsamfunnet*) should take responsibility for maintaining Geiranger as a viable community. Most of the farmers feel they are at the receiving end of political decision-making emanating from the centre, and they talk about these decisions and policies as being beyond their sphere of influence.

During the process of Landscape Protection many farmers experienced that their responses were overruled by the authorities. Furthermore, several farmers have argued that the protection status is unfavourable to the environment. They argue that sound management and use of the environment is in the interest of the farmers and local people. The reasons for their resistance were not concretised by any farmer; rather, we identified a generally sceptical attitude towards the Landscape Protection Status. A similar resistance towards nature conservation measures has been found by Bjørkhaug (1998). Our interviews demonstrate a great deal of resistance among farmers towards rules and regulations set by the authorities, and they argue instead for increased local participation. This is a shared concern appearing in a number of studies from other national contexts (see for example, Stoll-Kleeman 2001; Gerritsen & Wiersum 2005; O'Rourke 2005).

Before presenting the competing narrative, it is important to mention that not a single farmer expressed total opposition between the two sectors, farming and tourism. Rather, many stress that the sectors complement each other, and that tourism has been important for Geiranger. The argument is, however, that a mutually beneficial relationship requires the tourism sector to remain small scale.

### *The synergy narrative*

The second narrative stems from a broad group, consisting of representatives from the tourism sector, World Heritage

Management, and municipal and government officials involved with conservation, planning, and development:

*The Geiranger area holds excellent environmental values. These values attracted the first tourists to the area, and they still form the basis for tourism activities. The fact that the area has been designated as a World Heritage Site is the ultimate confirmation that these values are of great international importance. Tourism has been the most important sector in Geiranger for a long time. Although farming constitutes an important contribution, Geiranger would not have been what it is today without tourism. Because of the importance of environmental values for tourism in the area, it is crucial to preserve these values. Through the inscription of Geiranger on the World Heritage List, the Norwegian authorities are committed to ensuring future maintenance of these values, and fighting bush encroachment has become part of the agenda. These are factors that contribute positively to the sustainability of both tourism and farming in the community.*

This narrative reflects a win-win relationship between tourism and farming. The tourism sector plays the part of the hero, but the narrative does not indicate any villains or victims. The narrative contains two main arguments: mutual benefits between tourism and farming as a result of landscape protection, and World Heritage as the saviour of Geiranger, each of which is discussed in turn below.

*Mutual benefits.* There is common agreement within the group presenting this narrative that there is a positive relationship between tourism and farming. While tourism relies on farming, and the maintenance of beautiful cultural landscapes through grazing and haymaking, it also provides necessary incomes and added value to the community.

The interviews express a complexity in this relationship. Synergy effects are dependent on the functioning of several factors, such as continued farming activities, a viable community and possibilities for locals to gain additional income from farm tourism. The interviewees in this group argued that it is because of this combination of farming and tourism that Geiranger has become as spectacular, beautiful and popular as it is today. Hence, it is important to maintain both of these sectors to ensure the future existence of the community.

*World Heritage status as the saviour.* Due to the mutually beneficial relationship between farming and tourism, the continuation of activities in both sectors is considered to be important. There is, however, a general concern that the farming sector is at risk. At this point, the World Heritage Status becomes important. Although Geiranger and surrounding areas are inscribed on the World Heritage List as *natural* heritage, it is claimed that the *cultural* landscapes played an important role in the inscription. Some representatives from local authorities even argued that the cultural landscape qualities were the decisive factor. Hence, a threat to these cultural landscapes implies a threat to the World Heritage Status. Since the World Heritage Status is awarded to Norway as a nation, it is argued that the Norwegian authorities have committed themselves to contributing to the maintenance of these landscapes in order to preserve their status.

The aforementioned project on profitability in farming in World Heritage areas (Verdsarvrådet & Vega kommune 2007)

is emphasised when it comes to the maintenance of cultural landscapes. There is a common optimism that the recommendations to the authorities emerging from this project will yield results. Furthermore, according to this argument, if the recommended economic resources are granted, this will be due to the World Heritage status.<sup>5</sup>

## Comparing the narratives

A categorisation of interviews into two narratives is a simplification. There are no clear-cut boundaries in the statements and interviews that form the basis for the identification of these narratives. Rather, there is a continuum of statements and views within and between the narratives. In this section, we assess the similarities and contrasts of the narratives, employing the notions of *nodal points* and *social antagonisms*. Blekesaune & Stråte (1997, 15; our translation) describe the constructions of antagonisms as follows:

We often find that different interest groups' presentations of political opponents have few nuances, and that the opponent's arguments are presented as more extreme than they really are. Through these constructions of social antagonisms the plurality of issues on the political arena is often reduced to simplified friend and enemy representations.

In the following, four central themes in the interface between the two narratives will be discussed in terms of apparent nodal points and social antagonisms based on key topics high-lighted by the informants.

### *Farming and tourism*

One obvious discrepancy between the narratives relates to how the marginalisation narrative focuses on the importance of farming, while the synergy narrative focuses on the importance of tourism in the community. Moreover, farmers tend to keep their distance from tourism. Although the large majority of them earn some income from tourism activities, only three farmers perceived themselves to be part of the tourism sector. We argue that farmers who rely on income from tourism, yet feel a need to distance themselves from the tourism sector, are sign of a reduction into a friend-and-enemy representation. They cannot identify themselves as both farmers and tourism agents – they feel compelled to choose one identity.

One hidden factor may play a central role here. For many of the interviewees, the difference between small-scale tourism (typically on-farm diversification such as cabins for rental or 'farm cafes') and large-scale tourism (hotels, sightseeing, etc.) was of crucial importance. Those who advocated the synergy narrative did not make this distinction. Those who put forward the marginalisation narrative, however, tended to talk about the 'tourism industry' or the 'large hotels' when they addressed the tourism sector, highlighting characteristics such as external ownership and lack of local control. Hence, large-scale agents were accused of being 'free riders', not contributing to the common good, and selling cultural landscapes without offering economic returns to the farmers who maintain these landscapes. In this respect, Geiranger

corresponds to well-documented challenges of scale and structure in rural tourism internationally (see for example, Hjalager 1996; Sharpley 2002; Hall et al. 2005; Saarinen 2006).

When almost all small-scale tourism actors refuse to define themselves as part of the tourism sector, this can be viewed as an indication of how important this differentiation is to the farmers. Not all farmers in Geiranger were equally categorical in their critique of the tourism sector. We find there is a discrepancy as to how harmful the tourism sector is pictured to be. Those who derive a large share of their income from on-farm tourism activity are likely to be less negative towards other tourism activity. As mentioned, no farmers expressed a totally opposing relationship between farming and tourism. This may seem contradictory to the 'enemy construction' between the sectors outlined above. However, the condition set by the farmers for a friendly relationship between these two sectors is that the tourism sector should remain on a small scale.

Despite certain antagonistic tendencies, both narratives recognise the importance of farming and tourism in Geiranger. There is no disagreement about the question of whether these two sectors play or have played important roles in the development of the community. Both narratives describe how these two sectors have co-existed in a mutually beneficial relationship. This shared point of departure can be seen as a nodal point in the two narratives. Blekesaune & Stræte (1997) discuss how nodal points rely on ideological backgrounds. Here, we apply a wider understanding of the notion. Instead of ideology, the background for this nodal point appears to be shared experience. The observed social antagonism must thus have emerged in recent times. In the view of the farmers, the negative impacts from tourism on farming emerged when the tourism sector grew stronger than the farming sector.

### *Landscape Protection and World Heritage Status*

The marginalisation narrative argues that the protection and heritage statuses restrict the sovereignty of the farmers, constrain farming activities and contribute to increasing the gap between farming and tourism. At the same time, this narrative portrays farming as the most important sector in ensuring that Geiranger remains a viable community in the future.

The synergy narrative, on the other hand, argues that World Heritage is an important step towards ensuring the future existence of Geiranger. Representatives from the tourism sector and the World Heritage Management argue that the protection and heritage statuses are positive factors for the community, and tourism is seen as the rural saviour of Geiranger. Tourism has brought new income opportunities to the community, and made it possible to make a living in the face of decreased income from farming during recent decades. Thus, because the World Heritage Status can be used in advertising Geiranger as a tourist destination, it contributes positively to sustaining Geiranger as a viable community.

The most noteworthy aspect of these two different attitudes and arguments is how they emphasise different aspects of the total situation. The respondents from the World Heritage Management and tourism sector tend to stress how the World

Heritage Status is a decisive factor for a positive outcome for all actors. In contrast, the opponents from the farming sector emphasise the restrictions that are implied by the Landscape Protection Status.

This dichotomy can be viewed as another instance of social antagonism. Both sides emphasise the factor that fits their argument, distancing themselves from the other side. Moreover, in a situation of social antagonism the arguments of the opponents are often pictured to be more controversial than they are presented initially. The main argument in relation to the Landscape Protection Status and World Heritage Status concerns the conflict between conservation interests and user interests. In the Geiranger case, plans for hydro-electric power production have been shelved and there are some examples of development plans for farming being terminated. This type of conflict is not a new phenomenon. Area conservation plans are often met with scepticism and resistance from farmers who defend their user interests (Daugstad et al. 2000). As pointed out by Bjørkhaug (1998), this can be explained by a general negative attitude towards protection as such, rather than by specific examples of restrictions set by conservation authorities.

Some interviewees from the group advocating the synergy narrative express more liberal attitudes towards environmental protection. For most of the local representatives, regardless of which sector or narrative they represent, it is clear that the most important focus is to sustain Geiranger as a viable community. They emphasise that the management plan for the Landscape Protected Area has to be adapted to ensure the livelihood of the community. This may therefore be regarded a nodal point for the local people. However, this nodal point is only partial; these arguments are less evident among the officials from the municipality and county administration.

For instance, the Environmental Department of the County Governor's Office advocates strong environmental protection and that the farming sector should base its future existence on the values embedded in conservation statuses. This office is the only place where the Landscape Protection Status itself is used in arguments about common positive effects. The remainder of the synergy proponents argue that the World Heritage Status is the decisive factor for positive development, as also documented by Holm et al. (2007).<sup>6</sup>

### *Bush encroachment and cultural landscapes*

The tension between bush encroachment and cultural landscapes has strong links with the Landscape Protection and World Heritage Statuses. Environmental values are central to this issue. This is the only aspect in which there is total agreement: bush encroachment should be arrested in order to save the cultural landscapes. The importance of the agricultural values in the landscape is emphasised by all interviewees, despite the fact that Geiranger is inscribed on the World Heritage List as a natural heritage site. Hence, the common interest in protecting these landscapes from overgrowing can be seen as a nodal point for the two narratives.

It is no surprise that the farmers expressed concerns about how bush encroachment threatens the cultural landscapes. It is more surprising that representatives from other groups of



interviewees shared these concerns. Daugstad (2008) argues that this awakening in the tourism sector towards the importance of cultural landscapes has evolved only during the last decade.

However, this does not mean that there are no disputes on this question. Bush encroachment is already occurring, and therefore there is increased focus on strategies for maintaining cultural landscapes. The debate is related to whether these landscapes should be maintained by farming activities or whether 'gardening' is sufficient. This relates to what Daugstad et al. (2006b) describe as the difference between 'active' and 'passive' farming. Active farming is based on livelihoods resulting from the production of food or fibre, while passive farming includes farm activities undertaken with the main purpose of maintaining a landscape or a building structure, often with the benefit of subsidies or special funding. However, according to Daugstad et al. (2006b, 70), 'the difference between active and passive farming is not clear-cut'.

In this study, there are two important aspects related to the issue of bush encroachment and cultural landscapes. The first concerns the purpose of the maintenance of cultural landscapes. Traditionally, the grass in these areas has been cut for fodder. However, as the number of animals has decreased during recent decades, the need for hay has also decreased. Therefore, the fodder resources in the steepest and most difficult areas have recently not been utilised. However, bush encroachment is now seen as such a threat to the cultural landscape that both farmers and tourism actors have suggested the need to cut grass on the mountain slopes in order to maintain the landscape.

Second, regardless of the purpose, three methods may be applied to achieve the objective of maintaining cultural landscapes. Such areas can be mowed by means of motorised devices, or they can be mowed manually, or the maintenance may be undertaken by grazing animals. Motorised and manual mowing may be done either as haymaking or as landscape care. It was a general view among the interviewees that if 'gardening' takes over the landscape care, there will be fewer animals in the area. Furthermore, motorised mowing of these areas is seen to be inadequate for landscape maintenance because the motorised devices will not serve the same functions for the ecosystem and biodiversity as the animals. Only one representative from the tourism sector downplayed the importance of animal production and grazing, stating that the tourism sector would find solutions to the problem of bush encroachment.

One of the motives for protecting the landscape in Geiranger is the area's rich biodiversity, which exists largely as a result of farming and grazing. Hence, the question of farming or landscape gardening is also linked to the quality of the landscape. Several interviewees in all groups explicitly mentioned the maintenance of rich biodiversity as being very important.

The only question on which there is total agreement is bush encroachment. There is no social antagonism relating to this topic. Despite the discussion above concerning how, why and to what extent the cultural landscape should be maintained, there are no exaggerations in the argumentation from either side leading to constructions of friend-and-enemy relations concerning bush encroachment. The importance of combating

bush encroachment in order to prevent overgrowth of the cultural landscape is generally acknowledged, and hence the necessity to fight bush encroachment can be seen as a nodal point between the narratives. It serves as a shared issue, in which all actors are engaged and agree on its importance.

An interesting point in this regard is how the valuation of landscapes differs in different parts of the world. In Norway, and in Europe in general, the cultural aspects of landscapes are emphasised, and are often subject to protection, as in the case of Geiranger. A multitude of studies illustrate the importance of cultural landscapes with conservation values due to low-intensity farming systems (e.g. Parish 2002; Thompson et al. 2005; Daugstad et al. 2006b; Dodgshon & Olsson 2007; Fischer et al. 2008; Soliva et al. 2008). This approach stands in contrast to conservation practices in, for instance, Africa, where the focus tends to be on the preservation of an African 'wilderness'. Mainstream approaches to nature conservation in Africa usually downplay the fact that African landscapes are also cultural landscapes. When the human influence on these landscapes is taken into account, it is usually in terms of a perceived negative impact – usually described as 'degradation'. While in Norway, bush encroachment is perceived as serious land degradation, in Africa, the opposite process – deforestation – is generally considered to be environmentally harmful independently of context. Such 'orientalism' (Said 1978) is a result of a long colonial and post-colonial history of who has the power to define what characteristics of landscapes are desirable.

#### *Local participation and bureaucracy*

In both narratives (marginalism and synergy), local respondents expressed more scepticism about bureaucracy and official policies and management than the authorities did. In general, interventions from the authorities are regarded as a threat to local decision-making.

An example of scepticism towards the management of the protected area is found in the following quote from a farmer: 'Conservation takes place in an office where they do not know what they are doing'. Bjørkhaug (1998, 108; our translation) describes similar attitudes among local people living in areas surrounding two conservation areas in eastern Norway: 'Generally, and pushed to the extreme, the resistance towards conservation can be summarised in the following points: . . . Conservation interventions are a violation to local sovereignty and ideas of democracy and self-governance'. One of her interviewees said: 'Generally, I dislike conservation; the decisions are taken over our heads' (Bjørkhaug 1998, 77; our translation).

In the case of Geiranger, there are differences in the orientation of the different departments of the County Governor's office towards the management of natural resources. Sagør & Aasetre (1996) describe different traditions within public management, where the agricultural authorities can be characterised by a 'client-orientation' and the environmental authorities by a 'profession-orientation'. Such orientations may be a contributing factor to the local farmers' stronger opposition towards the environmental authorities than towards the agricultural authorities.

The examples above illustrate how social antagonisms are created more by the local farmers than by any of the other groups. We argue that this is a sign of a defiant attitude on the part of the farmers. In the interviews with the farmers, there was a strong urge to define groups in constructions such as 'us' working against or meeting resistance from 'them', without further definition of the categories. This urge to talk about 'us' and 'them' is connected to the construction of social antagonisms. The construction of 'them' may be read as an indication that 'we' need something to oppose. The definition of friends and enemies is a central factor in the construction of social antagonisms.

There is a paradox in this process of defining 'us' (local farmers), and 'them' (other groups). The group mentality among the farmers is not very strong. The farmers seem to act on an individual level, rather than as a group fronting common interests and views. We find this lack of group mentality surprising, thinking that it would be beneficial for individuals to gather in a group, which would gain more power in discussions than an individual. However, according to Blekesaune & Stræte (1997), this is not unique to Geiranger. They find that individual orientation is common within the Norwegian Farmers' Union. In any event, this orientation among the farmers indicates that the definitions of 'friends' may be just as constructed as those of 'enemies'.

There are probably several reasons for the farmers' strong opposition to the Landscape Protected Area and other regulations that affect private farming activities. One of the reasons we identify is either the lack or poor quality of the information provided by the authorities. In addition, many farmers argue that government funds do not benefit the farmers locally, but disappear instead in bureaucracy and paperwork. This attitude reflects a lack of trust in government among many farmers, and the alleged poor performance of central government is used as an argument for more local participation in decision-making processes. Scepticism towards the authorities is linked to the argument about the marginalisation of rural Norway, an argument shared by both farmers and the tourism sector. The tourism sector pays special attention to the opening of the south-bound mountain road in time for the tourist season each year, and how external actors take benefit from the tourism potential in Geiranger during the peak season. Representatives from this sector claim that there is a lack of willingness among the authorities to facilitate a viable tourism sector in Geiranger. This situation contributes to the general distrust of the authorities within the local community.

Farmers described a change in the role of agriculture from food production to landscape production, or they referred to the multifunctional role of agriculture. Such changes affect their identity as farmers. A representative from the county administration described the change in the following words: 'Farming and farmers have to adapt so that their main livelihood is not food production, but rather they are nature managers of an area.' Several farmers said that they experienced this shift as a devaluation of farming and farmers. Problems concerning the change of identity as farmers are also found in other studies. Rønningen (1999, 133) finds that '[m]any felt landscape management agreements were "taking

the pride out of farming"'. Daugstad (2008, 411) states that 'many studies document the reluctance of farmers to turn to agritourism potentially compromising their identity and social role as traditional farmers producing food and fibre'. The same attitudes have been documented by Schermer & Kirchengast (2005) in an Austrian context and Stenseke (2000) with reference to Swedish farmers. However, Geiranger differs from the general picture, because the farmers there have an understanding that the role of a farmer includes landscape 'gardening' to a certain extent. Thus, the identity conflict in Geiranger is rather a struggle to be not simply identified as landscape providers but also to gain credit for being food producers. Only a few farmers in Geiranger totally rejected identification as landscape workers. One reason may be that farming and tourism have coexisted in the community for a long time. Most of the farmers are also tourist hosts and the struggle to balance these two identities may be something they are used to. We find that those who have managed the shift of identity and accepted their role as landscape providers are not as hostile toward the authorities as those who resist their changing identity.

## Environmental discourses

In linking local narratives to broader discourses, Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2008) criticise Lyotard (1997), who sees small and unconnected narratives to work everywhere. In contrast to such a postmodern position, Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2008, 56) argue that 'studies of local conflicts can reveal that there are underlying patterns in local constructions that are widely shared at a national as well as at a global scale'.

Similarities can be found between the findings in Geiranger and other studies undertaken in Norway or internationally, for example, the carnivore debate in Norway (Blekesaune & Stræte 1997), and European farmers' identity (Rønningen 1999). These similarities support the existence of a link between local narratives and broader discourses.

We have described how narrative analysis and construction can be seen as a first step in discourse analysis. Against this background we will show how we find the marginalisation narrative to be part of a traditionalist discourse and the synergy narrative to be part of a win-win discourse.

### *Traditionalist discourse*

The marginalisation narrative consists of three main elements, which focus on marginalisation of the farming sector and of the community, bush encroachment, and the disempowerment of locals. Unequal power relations are central to this argument. Embedded in the argument of bush encroachment, there is a focus on how environmental values are at risk. The farmers expressed strong attachment to the landscape and described how government regulations and the increase of tourism in Geiranger have negative implications for the environment.

Farmers in Geiranger described traditional management of natural resources as the best way to manage the landscape.

Thus, a viable farming sector is crucial in order to maintain these values. Restrictions on or obstacles to farming activities will eventually lead to bush encroachment and environmental degradation. These findings correspond with those of Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2008) on opposition to dog sledding in Gausdal (Norway). Such coherence in argumentation in Gausdal and Geiranger can be seen as an indication that these questions and issues have national relevance. Furthermore, the link between traditional land management systems and environmentalism is not unique in Geiranger, or in Norway. In a study on European agro-environmental policies, Rønningen (1999, 133) finds that '[m]ost farmers stressed they farmed in a very environmentally friendly way'.

Holm et al. (2007, 60; our translation) find that in Geiranger locals 'regard maintenance of environmental qualities as a kind of "effect" of an economically and socially sustainable system'. It is thus important to assess these issues in relation to each other. According to the farmers' argument, small-scale farming is marginalised due to rationalisation. This demand for rationalisation and higher efficiency exists both at a national and international level. Furthermore, it is argued that the farming sector is marginalised relative to the tourism sector locally. This problem is not unique to Geiranger. Farmers have been encouraged to diversify into tourism (e.g. AP, SV & SP 2005), but several studies confirm that farming is the losing partner in this interplay (Brandt & Haugen 2005). Holm et al. (2007) argue that this lack of economic sustainability for farmers constitutes a threat to environmental values.

In Gausdal there is a parallel marginalisation argument about how traditional economic activities are threatened: 'Local people claim that traditional economic activities, such as mountain farming, are difficult to sustain today due to economic and political factors at the national and international level' (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2008, 54). Hence both the Geiranger and the Gausdal narratives stress the adversity of economic conditions for farmers.

The next argument in the marginalisation narrative concerns how local people have lost the power to make decisions regarding the development of their community. It is argued that a growing bureaucracy and the special case of the Landscape Protection process have negatively influenced participation in decision making. During recent decades, great effort has been put into the establishment of protected areas in Norway. Many studies have assessed the success of the community-based approach to conservation processes. Studies find varying results, related to both the degree of local participation in conservation processes, and to the success of local management of protected areas (Aasetre 2004; Daugstad et al. 2006a). In particular, the rhetoric of the farmers in this study implies that local management is good, but the implementation of local participation has failed. Similarly, the carnivore debate shows arguments about local voices being overruled by urban values (Blekesaune & Stræte 1997), and Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2008) find that local farmers in Gausdal feel powerless and marginalised by bureaucracy.

Correspondences with these findings are also exhibited on an international level. Svarstad et al. (2008, 120) identify a traditionalist discourse related to the use of biodiversity, which argues that 'local actors are capable of managing

biodiversity and other natural resources in appropriate ways, if they are given the opportunities'. Hence, different geographical levels experience similar situations. Adger et al. (2001) identify similar global environmental discourses on desertification and deforestation, which hold that external intervention has disturbed sustainable local management.<sup>7</sup>

### *Win-win discourse*

The synergy narrative consists of two main arguments. The first is that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between farming and tourism, and the second is that the World Heritage Status contributes positively to the development of Geiranger. We have already labelled this narrative as a win-win narrative. Hence, the link between this narrative and a broader win-win discourse should not be surprising.

The first element that is central in this win-win perspective is the mutual benefit between the two sectors. This argument is supported by several official documents in Norway (e.g. LMD 2004). Several studies and reports describe the idea of tourism as a rural saviour as a general assumption in society (e.g. NOU 1990; Kaltenborn et al. 2003; Innovasjon Norge 2006).

The next argument in the synergy narrative concerns the positive role of the World Heritage Status in relation to sustaining Geiranger as a viable community in the future. According to Holm et al. (2007, 56; our translation), this reflects a general attitude: 'In contrast to other designation processes where areas are conserved by the Nature Conservation Act ... World Heritage Status is considered to be a potential for economic development'.

Furthermore, the Action Plan for Cultural Landscapes in the World Heritage Areas is the result of a common initiative from three regional authorities connected to two World Heritage sites in Norway. This initiative can be considered as an indication that the argument of the positive role of a World Heritage Status has relevance outside Geiranger. The positive role of this status is confirmed by Norwegian agricultural authorities, as a considerable amount of money has been granted to maintain these cultural landscapes through the tools outlined in the action plan (SLF 2008).

Besides these examples showing that the arguments of this win-win narrative can be recognised outside Geiranger, there are other parallel win-win narratives concerning other environmental topics. For instance, Svarstad (2002) identifies a win-win narrative concerning bioprospecting both in Norway and internationally. Based on these examples, we conclude that some striking similarities can be found between the narratives in this study, other narratives and broader environmental discourses. Nevertheless, it can always be argued that a categorisation such as the one made here is a simplification.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this study, we have used narrative analysis as a tool to assess the relationship between farming and tourism in Geiranger, a small community in western Norway. More specifically, we have focused on the interplay between these sectors, and how it is affected by conservation measures. The study has been

carried out as a study of local actors and their narratives. Two main narratives are identified. The first is a narrative about 'marginalisation', which is promoted by the broad farming sector. Through arguments of marginalisation, bush encroachment and disempowerment, the narrative presents local farming families as losers, and tourism as the winner.

The second narrative is about 'synergy'. It is promoted by a broad group of tourism and World Heritage representatives, and environment and development officials. This group presents a win-win narrative, where farming, tourism and the environment are all winners, arguing that farming and tourism complement each other and that the World Heritage Status generally has a positive influence on Geiranger and its local community and landscapes.

The two narratives share central concerns. All groups agree that environmental values are of great importance, and that these values have been put at risk. The difference is embedded in the understanding of how these values should be preserved. The farming sector considers national policies, and especially Landscape Protection, as a threat to environmental values, which jeopardise the future of local farming. The proponents of the synergy narrative, on the other hand, consider the implemented conservation initiatives to be hugely positive. The shared concern for environmental values serves as a nodal point in the narratives, whereas the difference in how they relate to conservation has evolved into social antagonism.

The actors behind the synergy narrative have diverse backgrounds. Pressure from the authorities concerning rationalisation of farms, the focus on the production of cultural landscapes and the stronger preference of the tourism sector are all parts of the same political paradigm, which emphasises commodification and profit. This may be an indication that the synergy narrative reflects a dominant attitude in society. The marginalisation narrative presented in this study stands in opposition to and challenges this dominant attitude.

Studies of narratives and discourses on environmental and developmental issues (e.g. Adger et al. 2001; Svarstad 2002; Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2008; Svarstad et al. 2008) identify, on the one hand, traditionalist and populist discourses, which advocate that local management practices are environmentally friendly without any need for regulation, and on the other hand, win-win discourses, which argue that external intervention is necessary in order to sustain environmental values.

Traditionalist opposition to modernisation as well as to conservation and local perceptions of being marginalised are key topics within political ecology (e.g. Robbins 2004; Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2008). Furthermore, we believe that political ecology with its explicit focus on power, on winners and losers, on the actors' different interests, norms, and power reflected in narratives, and on the links between the local and global levels can help to further develop rural studies in a Scandinavian and European context.

## Notes

- 1 Statistical data from the agricultural sector is only available on a municipality level. There are four communities in Stranda Municipality: Geiranger (250 inhabitants), Hellesylt (680 inhabitants), Liabygda (260 inhabitants), and Stranda (3500 inhabitants) (Stranda kommune 2009).

- 2 Since it was adopted in 1970 the Nature Conservation Act (*Naturvernloven*), has formed the background for all area conservation in Norway. Of four possible categories, Landscape Protection is the one that implies the fewest restrictions concerning use of protected areas (Lovdata 2008). The management unit for Landscape Protected Areas is the Environmental Department of the County Governor's Office.
- 3 The World Heritage Committee (WHC) is a subdivision of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In order to obtain World Heritage Status, an area or monument has to be protected by national laws. The World Heritage List is managed by the World Heritage Committee. The responsibility for the management of World Heritage sites lies with the relevant national state parties. They undertake to develop management plans and report the state of the nation's sites every sixth year (Daugstad 2009).
- 4 Respondents were guaranteed anonymity.
- 5 Since the time of the fieldwork for this study, funding has been granted from the national authorities based on this report (SLF 2008).
- 6 It is necessary to comment on the qualitative relationship between Landscape Protection and World Heritage statuses. The declaration of a Landscape Protected Area in Geiranger was a precondition for the designation of the area as a World Heritage site. World Heritage Status can be assigned only to areas that are conserved by the standards of the Norwegian Nature Conservation Act (*Naturvernloven*). The World Heritage Status itself does not impose further restrictions on the area (Møre og Romsdal fylke 2005).
- 7 Although Adger et al. (2001) refer to these discourses as 'populist discourses', they have much in common with traditionalist discourses. Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2008) treat these two types of discourses as being closely related.

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