

Vinge, H., & Flø, B. E. (2015). Landscapes Lost? Tourist Understandings of Changing Norwegian Rural Landscapes. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 15(1-2), 29-47. doi:10.1080/15022250.2015.1010283

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## **Landscapes Lost? Tourist Understandings of Changing Norwegian Rural Landscapes**

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### ABSTRACT

Rural landscapes are the product of consumption for increasing numbers of tourists from urban areas. Many Nordic rural landscapes face a situation called spontaneous reforestation: as mowing and grazing have almost come to an end, scrub and trees thrive. The national tourism industry is concerned, leaning on the assumption that well-managed agricultural landscapes are central to Norway's touristic appeal.

This article seeks to investigate how tourists understand and make sense of the landscapes they visit. It presents findings from qualitative interviews with 75 domestic and international tourists, conducted in three different study areas in Norway that are prone to spontaneous reforestation. The tourists were asked to describe the surrounding landscape and to reflect upon the meaning of the landscape and the different landscape elements. Manipulated photos of the past and probable future development were brought into the interview to aid reflection.

A main finding is that landscape elements that the tourists perceive as threatened, seem to be preferred over those experienced as plentiful. Another important finding is how the tourists in our study in different ways tend to make sense of the landscapes they visit through their understanding of their known landscapes. Lastly, we find that understandings of landscape change processes are embedded into wider discourses of nature and culture.

Key Words: landscape changes, spontaneous reforestation, meaning, rural tourism, Norway

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## **Introduction**

The Norwegian fjord landscape topped the charts in National Geographic Travel's annual destination ranking in 2009, strengthening the national tourism industry's belief that fjords, mountains and fields are the country's most unique tourist attractions (<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/>). A widespread assumption is that well-managed agricultural landscapes are central to the Norwegian tourism product (Randen & Bartnes, 1967; Stang, 2008). These landscapes are now changing. The concern is that further spontaneous reforestation of these landscapes will lead to less attractive tourist landscapes. As yet, little research has been done to investigate this concern (Fyhri, Jacobsen, & Tømmervik, 2009).

This article gives an outline of tourists' understanding of and preferences for different landscape elements. A discourse analytical framework is applied to data from interviews with tourists who visited three tourist landscapes prone to spontaneous reforestation. Two research questions are investigated: 1) How do the tourists understand the Norwegian landscape and the change processes that are going on? 2) What discursive elements can be identified in these understandings?

### *Agricultural Industrialization and Land Use Changes*

The landscapes that tourists consume have not been shaped with the tourism experience in mind; rather, this value is a positive externality of the labour and practices of food production. Continued agricultural production in marginal production areas such as mountain and fjord areas depends on political support. These areas are therefore also especially prone to changes in agricultural policy. From the 1960s, increased industrialization, professionalization and intensification of agricultural production led to massive restructuring in the sector (Almås, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2000; Marsden, Munton, Whatmore, & Little, 1986;). This development also changed many of Europe's rural landscapes (Roberts & Hall, 2001). Policy also shifted from viewing the farmers solely as food producers toward stressing their

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importance as stewards of common goods such as cultural landscapes, local communities and cultural heritage. With this shift, the importance of the rural landscape as a product for the tourism industry became increasingly recognized (Butler, 1998).

Up until 1950, Norwegian agriculture predominantly consisted of small family farms. These farms combined an intensively farmed infield with grazing and fodder harvesting in the semi-natural outfield. Agricultural industrialization made infield resource utilization much more efficient. This development put an end to outfield resource utilization, and led to the abandonment of many farms along the coast and in the mountains that were not suitable for large-scale farming (Barlindhaug, Holm-Olsen, & Tømmervik, 2007; Daugstad, Rønningen, & Skar, 2006; Norderhaug, 2008). This led to large-scale spontaneous reforestation of these previously cultivated areas, with scrubs, bushes and trees popping up in areas where they were previously kept down by humans or animals (Bryn & Debella-Gilo, 2011; Fjellstad & Dramstad, 1999; Moen, Nilsen, Aasmundsen, & Oterholm, 2006;). The process of reforestation is generally assessed negatively in Norwegian public debate; with the destruction of visually appealing landscapes as well as the loss of biodiversity as the most frequently mentioned arguments. Many actions are taken by public bodies to prevent reforestation. An example of such an initiative is one providing goats to areas considered important for tourism to make sure the vegetation is kept down. Landscape development is seen as an important part of both environmental and agricultural policy, as well as for cultural heritage. In recent years, tourism authorities have started to worry about the landscape development, fearing that reforested landscapes are less appealing than open cultivated land.

In many Norwegian rural areas where industries have been shut down and agriculture declined, tourism is becoming a new economic mainstay. This is especially true in the inland areas and the western fiord regions, where over seven percent of the population is employed in tourism (NHO Reiseliv, 2012). Tourism is a priority industry for the Norwegian government. In 2011, 6.7 million international tourists visited Norway, generating about 6.5 percent of the national onshore gross domestic product (Farstad, Rideng, & Mata, 2011).

*Tourists' Understandings of Landscape*

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A lot of research on the views of tourists on landscape and rural environments has been inspired by the British sociologist John Urry (1990). In 1990, he published his book “The Tourist Gaze”, where he draws on Foucault (1977) to propose that the way in which the tourist sees landscape, cultural events and other objects of their visual consumption, is socially conditioned. Our gaze as tourists informs our selective viewing of the landscape, Urry claims (Urry, 1990). It means that tourists often do not see the people who live and work in the landscape, the labour that goes into maintaining a landscape or the poverty that hides behind the door of a picturesque but run-down cottage.

Consumption of rural landscapes in the fjords and mountains is central to the Norwegian tourism experience. The tourist's gaze, according to Urry (1990), is directed toward certain parts of the landscape while overlooking others, directed toward objects or features in the landscape that are in some way distinct from their everyday life, often searching for nostalgia.

To study discourses is to explore how meaning is created, challenged and maintained, and how language and culture defines the world (Fairclough, 1995). Tourists are affected by different social discourses and practices. For many European tourists, Norway and the Nordic region represents “the last of the wild” in a European context (Mehmetoglu, 2007). The historical shaping of the outfield into a cultural landscape is largely hidden from tourists who lack contextual knowledge of the long-term human creation of these landscape types (Waitt, Lane & Head, 2003). Also, even if they have an understanding of the cultural impact, some simply prefer landscape types with less human influence (Larsen, 2007). While studies of landscape perceptions and scenic beauty have long traditions, the study of the social construction of the tourist landscape are often overlooked (Ringer, 1998). In a study from Finland, Tyrväinen and colleagues (2001) found a preference among tourists for landscapes with a combination of natural and agricultural elements.

*Landscape, Resources and Representation*

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Landscape can be understood as an embodied relationship with past experiences, stories and memories, as well as how landscape stories make references to collective discourses and sociocultural phenomenon (Macpherson, 2009). The past landscape is often perceived as stable, with the character and identity of those that have shaped the land. Change is therefore perceived as a threat to the values attached to the landscape (Palang, Sooväli, Antrop, & Setten, 2004). Residents and visitors have different attachments to landscape elements (Ringer, 1998). A study in the Italian Val Grande area found that tourists enjoyed the increase in wilderness, but perceived a loss of rural communities as negative (Höchtel, Lehringer & Konold, 2005). Partly forested landscapes with great deal of diversity are often preferred over predominantly forested or homogenous agricultural landscapes (Hunziker, 1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Forest and agriculture have different connotations and meanings across time and space. Pre-industrial societies regarded nature as active, alive and sacred, while during the industrial revolution it became something that could be controlled for profit (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). Changes in agricultural production methods led to a disconnection of food production from nature (Marsden, 2006). The role of nature in a society thus reflects economic, ecological and social dimensions (Castree & Braun, 2006).

The amount of forest occupying developed countries varies, from more than two-thirds of the land in Japan and Finland to one-tenth or less in the United Kingdom. Norway has 37% forest and only 3% arable land. Different resource utilizations enter into representations of a nation's or region's identity. The division of land is deeply rooted in culture and intertwined with the history of the people living on it (Ashwood, 2010; Bonanno, Baker, Jussaume, Kawamura, & Shucksmith, 2010). Discourses on forest conservation in Japan emphasize an essential connection between forest landscapes and Japanese culture (Nakashima, 2006), while farming has a special place for Norwegian national identity, due to late industrialisation but also as an effect of the national identity project from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Blekesaune, 1999; Daugstad, 2000; Daugstad, Rønningen et al., 2006). The agricultural landscape thus holds a special position in rural discourses in Norway, and is overrepresented in the official inventory of "valuable cultural landscapes" (Jones, 2008). A study among stakeholders in European mountain regions found that reforestation in Norway was specifically related to a loss of

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tradition and cultural heritage, as well as predicted to be a future problem for accessibility and tourism (Soliva et al., 2008).

### **Data and Methods**

This article is based on data from 37 qualitative single and group interviews with altogether 75 tourists. The interviews were conducted in three different tourist locations in Norway experiencing spontaneous reforestation, Hadsel, Vesterålen in the coastal north, Vik in the western fiord landscape and Valdres in the inland mountain region. The areas were chosen because the landscape is the object of consumption, what is being gazed upon (Urry, 1990). The countryside landscape are the main tourist attractions, not theme parks, museums, tours or other forms of organized human activity.

The interviews took place during July and August 2010. The tourists were approached in tourist places in the areas, camping sites, ferry terminals and picnic areas. The primary criterion for the selection of tourists was that they had travelled to this rural landscape for leisure purposes. We selected tourists based on a goal of getting the broadest selection of nationalities possible. Interviewing in groups was preferred due to getting a level of dialogue between the participants, but we also included single informants to get broader country representation in the material (Table 1). We had a goal of doing at least ten interviews in each place, and included five more in Valdres to also include the large group of cabin owners. The material consists of ten different nationalities. In addition to Norwegian, the sample included Swedes, Danes, Germans, Dutchmen, Swiss, Americans, Italians, Spaniards, and Austrians. All in all, 30 informants were domestic and 45 were international (Table 2).

To obtain knowledge about landscape understandings, semi-structured qualitative interviews were employed. The tourists were asked questions from a semi-structured interview guide, both more general questions such as how they would describe the landscape in the surrounding area, as well as questions regarding the meaning in this landscape and the different landscape elements. All the interviews were recorded. The interviews were carried out in Norwegian, English and German. In some of the interviews, the interviewees did not master English fluently. All the quotes originally conducted in English are therefore verbatim, with

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the wording reflecting the language proficiency of the interviewee, in order to be as true to the informant's own descriptions as possible. The interviews quotes conducted in Norwegian and German are translated into English from the original language. The translation from Norwegian posed a challenge with some concepts that did not translate so well. As much as possible, the tone and wording in the interview are sought kept.

### *Photos as Aid for Reflection*

Manipulated photos of the past and probable future development were brought in some time into the interview process to aid reflection. It is important to emphasise that even though we used photos to aid talking about the meaning in changing landscapes, this should not be confused with the school of scenario-based approaches as put forward by Emmelin (1996) and others. The manipulated photographs showed a particular landscape from the area the informants were interviewed in. The interviews did not take place in this particular site, but all interviews were performed outdoors in order to enable using the surrounding landscape as mean of reflection. Our goal was to investigate what possible effects the factual vegetation development could have on tourists' landscape experiences, and therefore it was important that the photos complied as much as possible with the landscape development prognoses. Photos are a close representation of reality, and are therefore well-suited to facilitating communication with informants not knowledgeable on the topic in question (Al-Kodmany, 1999; Orland, Budthimedhee, & Uusitalo, 2001; Van Auken, Frisvoll, & Stewart, 2010). Several studies of travellers' landscape perceptions have been criticised for using unrealistic photos showing an implausible change process in the landscape. Pictures used in this study were therefore thoroughly designed and evaluated by project members from different disciplines, including biologists and landscape ecologists. Land maps made by the Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute of the probable development of spontaneous reforestation in different areas and landscape types were used as a basis for the visualisation. It was important to choose landscapes that were well-suited for showing spontaneous reforestation in different phases. It was also important to ensure that elements in the photo or the aesthetics of the photo in general did not



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distract from the development we wanted to use as a starting point for the tourists' reflections. Three sets of photos, in each of the three study areas, were made by manipulating them with Adobe Photoshop software. The first set of photos (Figure 1) provided an overview of a landscape showing two different developments alternatives, one representing the probable development with increased agricultural activity, the other representing the probable landscape development with decreased agricultural activity. The two other sets of photos show in more detail the vegetation development in the infield (Figure 2) and the outfield (Figure 3) if the present trend of reforestation continues.

Our data consists of the tourists' reflections on the landscape. Central to the interviews was capturing their impressions about how the landscape had developed and how they thought it might develop further. Typically the tourists themselves started to define which photos they believed depicted the past and which were now, or which photo they believed represented the current situation and which depicted the future. This gave us an idea of the direction they thought the landscape development is going, and information on what they thought lead to the different development. The understandings of the actual development are a basis for reflections on the rural landscapes. The participants had different backgrounds and thus different knowledge of the actual change processes in the landscapes. For example, the Norwegian tourists were familiar with the vegetation development, whereas most of the non-national tourists were not. The reflections around the role of rural landscapes and the discourse these landscapes are a part of are still interesting and useful for identifying the meaning attached to the landscape. Even though the tourists unfamiliar with the development have an "incorrect" understanding of the changes going on in the landscapes, their reflections around it say something important about their valuation of different elements.

After transcribing the audio files, the interviews were coded with the help of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The material consisting of a large amount of interview transcriptions were first coded openly according to factual themes covered by the interviewees. These were then coded in a second round with grouping into broader categories. This analysis revealed different core subjects that formed clusters of meaning. Some themes were anticipated such as changes in vegetation and activity in the landscapes, but others themes



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came to light in the data that we did not anticipate, especially reflections on the role of humans and nature in society at large.

## Results

After identifying the words and terms used by the tourists to describe the landscapes we created a “word cloud”, shown in Figure 4, which depicts each word or term in a size corresponding to how many times the term was used.

We continued to analyse the words and terms they used to describe the landscape they saw, before we organized the statements in different categories of meanings. In the end we were able to distil them down to three core concepts that the tourists seemed to be referencing when trying to describe the landscape they were seeing: variation, contrasts and traces of human activity. In the following section, we will show how these three concepts seemed to be central.

### *Variation*

The rural landscape is appreciated for its visual and recreational qualities. The concept of variation stands out as the element the tourists valued most about the Norwegian rural landscape. These quotes from three tourists travelling in the upland region of Valdres illustrate this:

“Varied... very different all the time. Compared to the Netherlands, everything is flat, and you are more used to that picture. (...) What I like in Norway is this difference, forest and grass.”

“In the Netherlands we all live together, (In Norway) everybody lives along the road. (...) I find it beautiful, different. You are less people and more a community, I think.”

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A couple from Washington, D.C., put Norwegian landscapes together with European landscape in general and compared them with the United States:

“... In the United States, when you think of farming, you think of huge farms, even if you don’t really see them. Not if you live in a city or something. And in fact, I mean there is no doubt that one of the things that adds to Europe’s charm is the small farms with different crops and different colours and (...) if you keep the land you know, uncluttered, I mean, that’s a wonderful aspect of European farming.”

Another Dutch woman, who was travelling in a camper van through Vesterålen, found the agricultural elements in the surrounding landscape important for her tourist experience, and used the Finnish forest landscape as a negative contrast:

“If I travel along the road it’s lovelier to see differences in the landscape. Woods, farmlands and sea, mountains. Have you ever travelled through Finland? Just trees and mosquitoes. Very boring landscape. I fell asleep. And here not, I’m looking. Around every corner you’re expecting a new view and there is.“

The scattered farms and small patches of farmland in between the “nature” create a variation that seems to be attractive to tourists travelling in Norway.

### *Contrast*

Contrast seems to be another important quality of the Norwegian landscape. An Italian couple in Vesterålen was fascinated by the drama created by the small holdings situated along the sea, and how they made the mountains look taller and more dramatic than they would have without the settlement:

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“We were in by the Trollfjord, and we saw this small farm by the sea surrounded by all the mountains, it made us think that this mountains was taller than it actually were when we look it up in the map”.

“It is like putting a match-box into a picture of a fish, without the box the fish is just a fish, and you get no sense of the size”

Another couple was inspired to reflect on how people have managed in such harsh conditions:

“When you see the small houses surrounded by all this dramatic nature you can't help thinking about how they have managed in such harsh condition, you start thinking about how life must have been here and how it is to live here during the winter and ... yea you know.”

“To see people living in the nature like they do here give an extra element in to it, it is like a novel... the settlement and the people make the nature more beautiful in a way”.

### *Historic Trace*

Stone hedges, old farm buildings and boathouses are all elements that seem to give an extra dimension into the visual aspect of the landscape. It is not just about variation and contrast; it is also about history and the long lines of mankind.

“The landscape tells an important history. To see all this traces of human activities in the landscape creates a link to something we have to go to the museums to see elsewhere in Europe,” said the Italian couple.

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It was typical for Norwegian tourists to be concerned about how much of the historic traces were about to disappear from the landscape. A couple from Bergen pointed towards the remains of an old fruit garden in Sogn and made a point out of all the shrubs and trees that were creeping in and taking over:

“In just a few years we will not be able to see that garden anymore, it will be transformed into forest and all the work that our ancestors have put into it will disappear from our eyes. And if we don’t see it we will soon forget it.”

#### *How Do Tourists Understand Landscape Development?*

In the previous section, we gave an overview of what the tourists saw in the landscapes they were visiting. But how did they understand the change processes in the landscape? These change processes imply both past and future changes, understandings of how the landscapes have been formed and the forces affecting their future. The tourists interpreted the development in different ways. Some informants believed the landscape they were visiting was prone to increasing amounts of shrubs, bushes and trees on previous agricultural land; others suggested that the landscape developed towards increased cultivation of land at the expense of natural landscape elements.

Many, including most of the domestic tourists were knowledgeable about the actual landscape development. Reforestation of previously cultivated land was familiar to them as a landscape change process. Others did not know about this process. Still, both the reflections from tourists knowledgeable on vegetation development as well as the reflections from those unfamiliar with it are important for our study, because it provides insight into how the Norwegian tourist landscape gives meaning to those visiting it. Different landscape elements gave different meaning to different tourists. The Norwegian landscape and the changes to it also brought reflections around the classical sociological problem dealing with the changes from traditional societies towards industrialization.

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The three main characteristics identified in the tourists' landscape stories above—variation, traces of human activity and contrasts—were perceived as threatened by societal development, which was understood and framed in two ways. This development is either a situation of spontaneous reforestation, or of industrialized agriculture expanding into nature. As a result, the variations, traces and contrasts disappear from the landscape, which turns into a monotonous landscape. The ideal landscape is similar, but the processes threatening this landscape are understood differently. This tells us something about the features the tourists appreciated about the Norwegian landscape, and what they don't want to see. The following sections describe two distinct understandings of the landscape change process.

#### *Monotonous forest threatens the aesthetics, culture and quality of life*

Many, especially the domestic Norwegian tourists, were familiar with the land use changes. These tourists talked about the areas that previously were held open by mowing or grazing as something they were concerned about. In this landscape story, abandonment of agricultural land leads to increase in monotonously vegetated landscapes. This development was perceived as negative.

This discourse consists of many feelings and a strong sense of responsibility for preserving the landscape that they see as the result of their ancestors' work. The following quote, from a woman from Oslo enjoying her retirement days in a cabin in Valdres, illustrates how many domestic tourists expressed a high degree of emotional attachment to the landscape and its changes:

“Norway is becoming afforested, and it is really sad.”

For these tourists, the reforestation process is seen as an issue of high importance that demands rapid action, without any obvious solution. This causes feelings of powerlessness, as shown in this quote from a man from central Norway on holiday in Valdres, talking about his ancestors' landscape:

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“They ploughed with horses, struggled in the hillsides and mowed the grass by hand in the summer. Now it is all disappearing in trees and bushes. (...) An open landscape is cosier than an overgrown. No one is working or doing anything useful. People are just letting it grow. It looks depressing, negative. (...) In the end only the forest remains.”

For these tourists, farmland is the landscape element that represents the original landscape, at least the landscape that was before the present situation. This landscape is perceived as threatened, and it is also perceived as the most beautiful. The ever-increasing vegetation represents an agricultural landscape in decay, where fields and pasture gradually disappear in favour of bushes and trees. Spontaneous reforestation will give us an undesired landscape, with more vegetation and fewer people. Nature expands into culture, and the consequence will be abandoned nature. The vegetated landscape represents industrialisation of agriculture, as well as abandoned smallholdings, rural depopulation and a distancing of food production from everyday life in a society where traditional forms of farming are no longer viable. The agricultural elements in the landscape are described as assuring and calm, whereas spontaneous reforestation is associated with a stressful modern life. Nature resource utilization is seen as the foundation for rural settlement and viable communities, as stated by this man in his late twenties from the eastern part of Norway:

“It is positive that the landscape is being used and maintained instead of falling into decay. If cultivation of land ends, we will see reforestation. I think cultural landscapes are beautiful.”

Central in the story about the landscape where abandoned nature is expanding is the idea that nature should be tamed; man must control nature. For tourists concerned about spontaneous reforestation, a perceived loss of work ethic in contemporary society causes frustration. The new, spontaneously reforested landscapes symbolize a society where the

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inhabitants are less likely to perform and master manual labours. Manual labour, symbolized by cultivated fields, represents something morally good:

“I remember my grandfather’s farm, how they used everything available for them. They mowed the grass everywhere, no matter what, and harvested fodder for the cows. I will say that the forest is increasing; at least that’s what you can see. It is becoming overgrown.”

Our tourist interviews show a strong sense of nostalgia for the landscapes of the past, both from older tourists, as in the quote above, and younger tourists, like this woman from Oslo:

“The traces from the past disappear, like that stone wall, or this particular way to build fences and separate the properties, it disappears.”

We also find that different types of forest have different representations. The new, “afforested” forest is ugly and morally bad, as opposed to other, useful and more traditional forests:

“It is happening all over the country, and it is happening so fast. We get another type of trees, not this old birch forest with crooked trunks and beard (...). It turns into another nature, it is no longer a fairy-tale forest.”

#### *Monotonous agriculture threatens the aesthetics, culture and quality of life*

Some of the interviewed tourists believed that farmland was expanding at the expense of forest. Accordingly, these tourists interpreted the development as opposite of the factual development. Their fear was that increased agricultural industrialization will lead to more monotonous landscapes at the expense of people’s connection with both nature and food production. These landscapes are seen as less aesthetically pleasing. Large, continuing



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agricultural fields with few crop rotations are seen as dominant and represent monoculture, such as for this German man travelling with his wife in Vesterålen:

“Number 2 is more like Germany, monoculture, it is crazy. The other one is better for birds.”

For him, the vegetated landscape is perceived as threatened, beautiful, and represents the original landscape. The natural elements in the landscape represent fresh air, wild animals and a sustainable and healthy environmental development. The agricultural elements in the landscape represent development that threatens these qualities: industrialisation of agriculture and technology gone too far.

For some, the forest is the preferred landscape element, as this quote from a Swiss woman shows:

“I would like to see that (more vegetation) in the future because trees keep air and for me it’s healthier (...) because if you have already landscapes like this you take more trees away, because you need more land to make agriculture or whatever. And then maybe the industry comes and then bigger buildings are coming because the trees are already gone so why not build more because if you have more work, more people are coming to work there.”

The quote also shows that industrialisation of agriculture is seen to have a destructive potential. Many of the tourists fear that the Norwegian rural landscapes run the risk of development similar to the rural landscapes of the more central areas of Europe. This quote from a Dutch woman in Valdres illustrates this:

“I like it when they do it (agriculture) nature, like not this big. In the Netherlands for example they have the big industries. And I don’t like that so much. So we have bad meat.”

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An important moral argument we encountered among several of the participants with this understanding is that culture is expanding too far into nature. The arguments from the green movement resemble the arguments with a focus on preserving nature. Nature has a value in its own right, resource utilization has gone too far, and mankind has a responsibility to prevent the destruction of nature and the planet. The smaller scale, traditional farming that they see in the Norwegian landscape represents man integrated into nature. The industrialization of agriculture is seen to have a destructive potential on many levels, and the agricultural landscape therefore represents an increased demand for growth in every area of the society, as this man from the Netherlands says:

“Agriculture must be bigger, more land for one farmer that he can live and earn money. And in earlier times this was enough, but he needs this. We live in a world with more, more, more.”

The idea of the responsible farmer is central in this discourse. He is seen as a keeper of the good values associated with rural areas, such as a close relationship with nature and a good work ethic. Smaller scale agriculture is seen to be a more sustainable way to utilize natural resources than the industrial agriculture they know from their home countries:

”More woods, more oxygen. Here the land becomes poorer. When it is less wood you get much erosion and that is very bad. This gives and takes, this takes.”

#### *Historical understanding of the visited landscape*

The previous section outlined two positions on how the interviewed tourists understood and interpreted the landscape development. Moving beyond the differences, we showed that the tourists talked about the landscape with reference to something common: the landscape development they knew from home. One of the main outcomes from this study is the finding

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that comparison to the tourists' known landscape was used to such a great extent when they made sense of the landscape they visited. If a tourist had experienced increased human activity in the landscapes he or she was familiar with, this was projected onto the visited landscape. Similarly, tourists who experienced dwindling human impact at home transferred this to the holiday landscape. This is shown in the following quotation where a man from Freiburg, an area in the south of Germany that experienced spontaneous reforestation similar to Norway:

“It took a lot of energy to make it free years ago, hundred years ago. And it will cost a lot of energy to keep this and cut the grass. (...) It is the same discussion in our little valley.”

The tourists all looked for the history in the landscape. This is an interesting finding; the tourists' interpretations of how the landscapes were changing seemed to be closely linked to which landscape types each informant considered to be most beautiful. The landscapes that were experienced as threatened were regarded to be more beautiful than the landscapes that were thought of as abundant. Tourists that experienced natural landscape elements as scarce and agricultural areas as plentiful expressed a visual preference for the natural elements in the landscape, while the opposite was true for those who experienced reforestation of areas previously held open by agricultural activity. A strong sense of nostalgia was found where the past landscape equals the preferred landscape.

#### *Discourses of threatened rural landscapes*

The dynamics between human activity and vegetation, culture and nature, were important dimensions in the interviews. These dimensions were situated in the context of the role of rural landscapes in society at large. The tourists' preferences for either vegetated or open landscapes seemed to be deeply entangled in the framework through which the tourists viewed their world. A key element in the tourists' discursive framework was an idea that society has lost some essential qualities. These qualities were associated with traditional food

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production practices. Sustainable agriculture was seen as crucial for the future of both attractive tourist landscapes and the planet at large.

Another key finding was the notion that both the industrialization of agriculture and the abandonment of marginal agricultural land are processes that remove man from nature, either by dominating nature too much or distancing him from it. The argument is summed up in this quote from the Dutch woman in Vesterålen, where she points to the Norwegian rural landscape as the ideal balance between man and nature:

“Everything has to sides. Nature is good, but I always said to the right or to the left, but the balance has to be there. And I think this is the balance.”

Many of the tourists experienced Norway as some sort of last frontier for their idea of the ideal rural landscape. There is an admiration for smallholdings and fields among the forests and a more untouched nature. Norwegian rural landscapes are perceived as very exotic and exclusive, like this man from the south of Sweden speaking about the Vesterålen fjord landscape:

“It is all about the diversity; smallholdings scattered around with nature close by, animals grazing. It is almost impossible to experience this anywhere else anymore.”

The vegetated hillsides combined with small patches of cultivated land were for them the picture of an idyll that their home country has lost.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Our aim has been to study how tourists understand a rural landscape and the change processes in it. The tourism industry’s concern is that the increased vegetation and decline in open spaces will lead to a reduced tourism experience for visitors and thus fewer tourists and

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tourist dollars flowing to the rural areas of Norway. The in-depth interviews with tourists conducted in this study show that an increase in vegetation can be perceived positively, but also that too much vegetation is perceived as boring. The Finnish forests were used as an example of an undesired landscape. Connection and attachment to the assessed landscape seem to influence the way informants value different landscape elements. Soliva et al. (2008) showed that stakeholders did not separate between the visual landscape and non-visual aspects such as economy and culture. Our findings suggest the same to be true for tourists. Each tourist is viewing the landscape through their own interests, concerns and memories, supporting the theory put forward by Urry (1990). An understanding of whether the landscape they visited was prone to either industrialization or spontaneous reforestation depended on their context and the discourses they experienced at home. Our findings suggest that the desired landscape is understood as similar to the landscape that is perceived as threatened, unusual or scarce. The study implies that perceived threats to the study landscapes are connected to how the informants experience the balance between nature and culture. If human presence in rural areas is perceived to be dwindling, then natural elements in the landscape seem to represent something uncontrolled and invading. In contrast, for tourists experiencing rural areas to be increasingly influenced by human activity, natural elements seem to represent something valuable that must be protected. Many tourists in our study describe a notion of failing as stewards of the landscapes they have inherited from their ancestors. We see stories of lost landscapes, where the landscapes of the past are echoed in the desired landscapes of the future. This cyclical time dimension brings a return to past landscapes, childhood memories and longing for a life in closer interaction with nature. The tourist gaze in this study can therefore be seen as a nostalgic gaze.

Another important finding is a common discursive reference among the different understandings. We found it striking how rural landscapes where vegetation, humans and agriculture interact are put forward as close to the ideal situation for most of the tourists we talked to. The Norwegian rural landscape seems to be a strong symbol of man interacting with nature in a sustainable way. Small-scale farming is put forward as an ideal way to produce food and, for some tourists, as a desired way of life. We can therefore say that we see different

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representations in the different discourses, but a shared moral, namely the balance between man and nature, as well as the sense of responsibility for the future of the planet. Change in the Norwegian rural landscapes also brought reflections a rapidly changing world, and a concern for what kind of food production the future will bring.

This article shows how dominant meanings are drawn upon by social actors in various ways. For an industry selling experiences, understandings should be of importance. Tourists in our study have chosen to visit rural landscapes where the landscape in itself is the primary tourist attraction. Their opinion is therefore a rightful parameter for testing the attractiveness of different landscape elements, and a warning against staging an ideal type of tourist landscape. Our results have implications for policy; Norwegian agricultural policy has a strong focus on maintaining nationwide farming, also in areas not suited for high productive production. The emphasis on variation and balance between culture and nature as Norway's prime benefit shows that incentives directed towards maintaining rural settlement and agriculture also will benefit the tourism product.

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## Table captions

Table 1: Interviews by interview place and number of interviewees in each interview

Table 2: Informants by interview place and origin

## Tables

Table 1. Table 1: Interviews by interview place and number of interviewees in each interview

Interviews by place	1 informant	2 informants	3 informants	4 informants	Number of interviews
<b>Valdres</b>	4	11	0	1	16
<b>Vik</b>	1	8	0	2	11
<b>Vesterålen</b>	1	8	1	0	10
<b>Total interviews</b>	6	27	1	3	37

Table 2: Informants by interview place and origin

	Domestic	International	Number of informants
<b>Valdres</b>	14	16	30
<b>Vik</b>	8	17	25
<b>Vesterålen</b>	8	12	20
<b>Total informants</b>	30	45	75

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## Figure Captions

**Figure 1.** An overview of the landscape in Hadsel kommune in Vesterålen, Nordland, showing two different scenarios of landscape development: the first with decreased agricultural activity and the second with increased agricultural activity.

**Figure 2.** A series of four different stages of reforestation in the infield, from Vik kommune in Sogn og Fjordane.

**Figure 3.** A series of four different stages of reforestation in the outfield, from Beito in Østre Slidre kommune in Valdres, Oppland.

**Figures 1-3 are wished to be included in the text as following:**

Figure 1, consisting of attached files “figure 1a” and “figure 1b”:





Vinge, H., & Flø, B. E. (2015). Landscapes Lost? Tourist Understandings of Changing Norwegian Rural Landscapes. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 15(1-2), 29-47. doi:10.1080/15022250.2015.1010283

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Figure 2, consisting of attached files “figure2a”, “figure 2b”, “figure 2c” and “figure 2d”:





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Figure 3, consisting of attached files “figure3a”, “figure 3b”, “figure 3c” and “figure 3d”:

