

The “Inside-Out” Process

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The “Inside-Out” Process

Per Wallsten

A Key Approach for Establishing Fulufjället National Park in Sweden

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Fulufjället, with an area of 385 km², was recently designated Sweden's 28th national park. This article describes how the park establishment process turned negative local opinion positive. The basis for success was a shift of focus from restrictions inside the boundaries of the national park to opportunities outside. This “inside-out”

process implies a new approach to area protection and local community participation in Sweden. This is in line with the contemporary Swedish nature conservation strategy based on the principle of sustainability, which takes account of both ecological and socioeconomic development in a district.

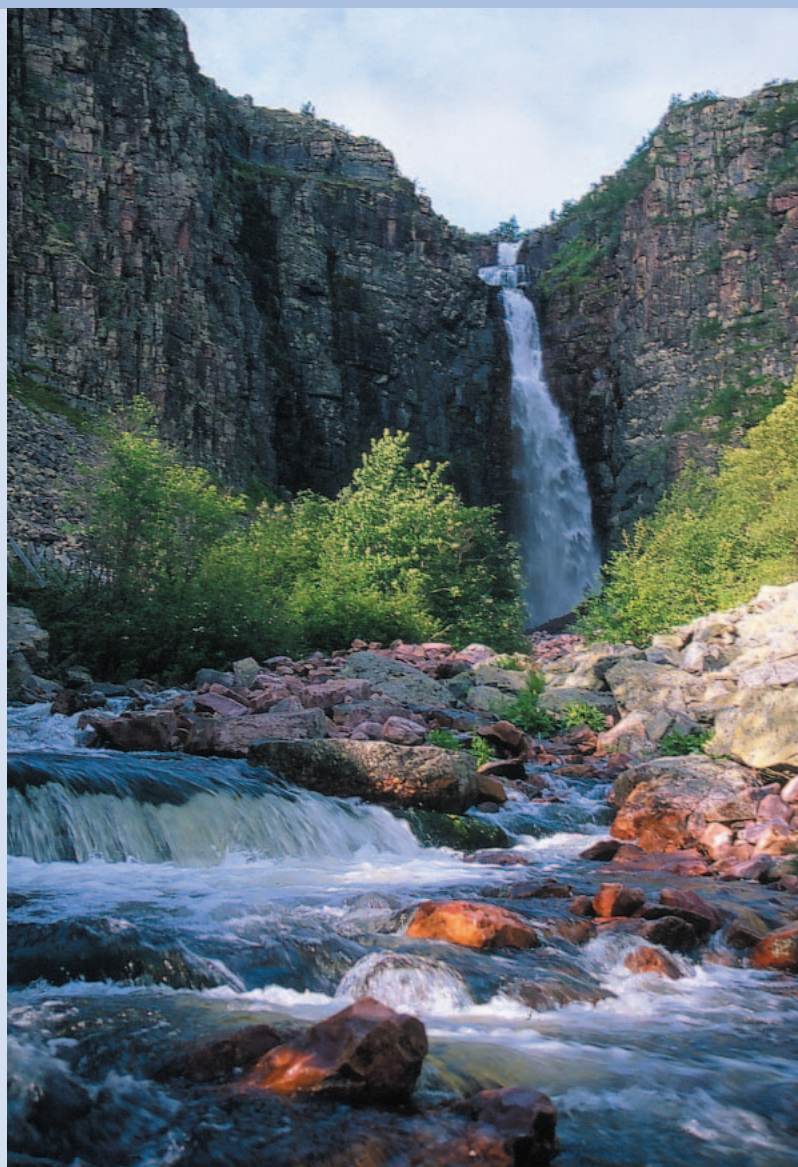


A slow start

Since the launching of Sweden's National Park Plan in 1989, 2 proposed large national park projects in the mountains have been turned down because of local opposition. After a long and difficult planning process, the King of Sweden opened the Fulufjället (“Fulu Mountain”) National Park in the southern part of the Swedish high mountain range in 2002. Establishment of the park, carried out by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), is considered one of the best examples in Sweden of conflict management involving local and national interests. The park consists of a sandstone mountain with an undulating bare plateau, rising from steep slopes with virgin forests. The rich fauna include robust populations of brown bear and lynx. Other attractions are Sweden's highest waterfall (Figure 1) and 140 km of marked summer and winter trails, with several overnight huts.

Phase 1: A traditional process and growing conflict

The area surrounding Fulufjället is sparsely populated, and no one resides inside park boundaries. The unemployment rate is high, and because many young people leave the area to find jobs, the population is steadily decreasing, whereas the average age is increasing. Hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling are traditional local activities in Fulufjället. Such permanent forms of activity are an important part of the quality of life for local people, especially because conditions are otherwise hard. Yet, restrictions were necessary to reduce recreational impact and to enhance the quality of experience if Fulufjället was to be redesignated as a national park after being a nature reserve.



Conflicts between plans for a national park and local interests gradually became apparent as regulations were formulated and clarified. All regulations were seen as great intrusions on traditional lifestyle

FIGURE 1 Njupeuskär, Sweden's highest waterfall, with a heavily eroded sandstone canyon, is the major attraction in the new national park. (Photo by Leif Östergren)

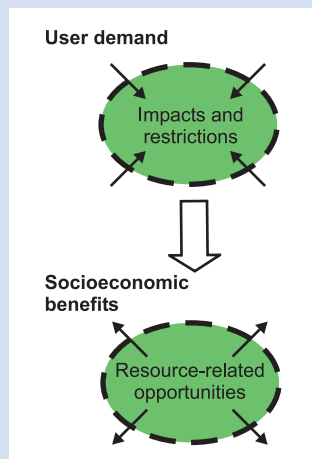


FIGURE 2 The traditional, outside-in national park planning process versus the improved, complementary inside-out process, which was successfully used for Fulufjället National Park. The traditional model focuses on problems and regulates user demand inside the park; the improved model focuses on opportunities and benefits outside the park.

and as a threat to the quality of mountain life. Rumors that “everything will be forbidden” were widespread. Debate focused on restrictions in the park. The potential benefits from a national park were unclear to local people and municipalities, despite efforts to provide information. Mistrust of the state’s assurances was obvious. This constituted a typical “outside-in” process (Figure 2). Emotions about land-use rights were high, and old conflicts between national and local interests and center versus periphery came to a head. Resistance to the national park project also appeared to contain elements of displeasure with current conditions. The municipality formulated unreasonable demands reflecting the dominant (most strongly expressed) local views. Another mountain national park project failure appeared imminent.

Phase 2: An enhanced process

This situation required new strategies. In cooperation with the Dalarna County Administrative Board, the SEPA initiated a process to parallel traditional planning—the Fulufjället Surrounding Project, launched in 1997.

The Surrounding Project had a local focus; the significance of the project leader simply visiting people where they lived, partaking in their reality and conditions of life in personal conversations was evident at an early stage. Certain social problems in small villages also came to light, giving the project leader something of a “therapeutic” function—a demanding task. This first stage concluded with an unprejudiced inventory of actual conditions, including demographic data. The results made it obvious to local people that the “no national park alternative” also had disadvantages: negative socioeconomic trends would most likely continue if nothing changed.

The second stage of the project assumed a new national park in Fulufjället. This starting point gave local people support and confidence in formulating ideas about how a park could bring social, economic, and other benefits, thus making it a source of opportunities rather than a source of restrictions. The result

was a local vision, based on broad participation and shared by many people in the area. This did not necessarily mean commitment to the national park plans; the point was that if a park was established, the vision could become a reality.

The focus was now on how to obtain benefits from outside the borders of a national park rather than on the earlier issue of the design of the inside of the park. A vision emerged of a new visitor center with local employees, new tourism facilities outside the park, and better infrastructure with improved roads and telecommunications. The “loss” was clear: a national park would bring some restrictions. But now, at last, the gains were also clear: a new future and opportunities for people to remain and find jobs in the area. Project staff were available for support throughout the process. Confidence replaced mistrust. This improved “inside-out” planning process created a basis for making the national park a reality (see Figure 2).

Phase 3: Realization

The creation of local networks was an important effect of the Surrounding Project. These included networks of: women, previously almost invisible in this more or less male-dominated situation with hunting and snowmobiling as the main issues; people with ideas for a new future; small-scale entrepreneurs, etc. This encouraged some to question viewpoints opposed to change and made them feel that they were not alone in perceiving the possibilities of a national park in Fulufjället. This was the turning point. Growing local acceptance was a basic reason for final approval of the national park concept by the municipality.

The zoning structure of the park, on the basis of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) framework, contributed to the process. The ROS involves a pristine core zone where hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling are forbidden. This is balanced by more heavily used recreational activity zones, where desires of locals can be fulfilled (Figure 3). The ROS defined environmental settings and appropriate activities and experience in different zones. This made the resource

advantages in the area obvious and showed that both national and local interests would be accommodated in the park, even if spatially distributed. The ROS concept was transparent, theoretically and practically comprehensible, and was an important communication tool.

The SEPA then intensified the formal process, which now had a strong base to build on. Visitor infrastructure was improved with concrete actions in the establishment zone rather than the usual nice words about future ventures. The strategic effect was important. Excavators, helicopter transport, and construction are strong symbols of change and new jobs! The work was well financed, partly by funding from the European Union, and constituted the greatest investment to date in visitor quality in a national park. A new visitor center, new and restored huts and trails, and visitor information were also included.

Many parts of the local vision have now been realized. Local people can see how the new national park creates possibilities for socioeconomic development in the Fulufjället area. Some tourism facilities have already been improved, and new small-scale tourism companies and economic networks have been started. The challenge is now for the local community to take advantage of opportunities created by the new park. The SEPA is convinced that the improved planning process has helped create good conditions for this to happen.

The future

Responsibility for the Surrounding Project will be transferred to the municipality and local networks. Local stakeholders will participate in the park management council. Organized tourism inside the national park is controlled by park regulations, with the aim of promoting sustainable tourism to foster conservation. As a result of this process, Fulufjället has been certified as one of Europe's first "PAN Parks"—a part of the new Protected Area Network (PAN) initiated by the World Wildlife Fund.

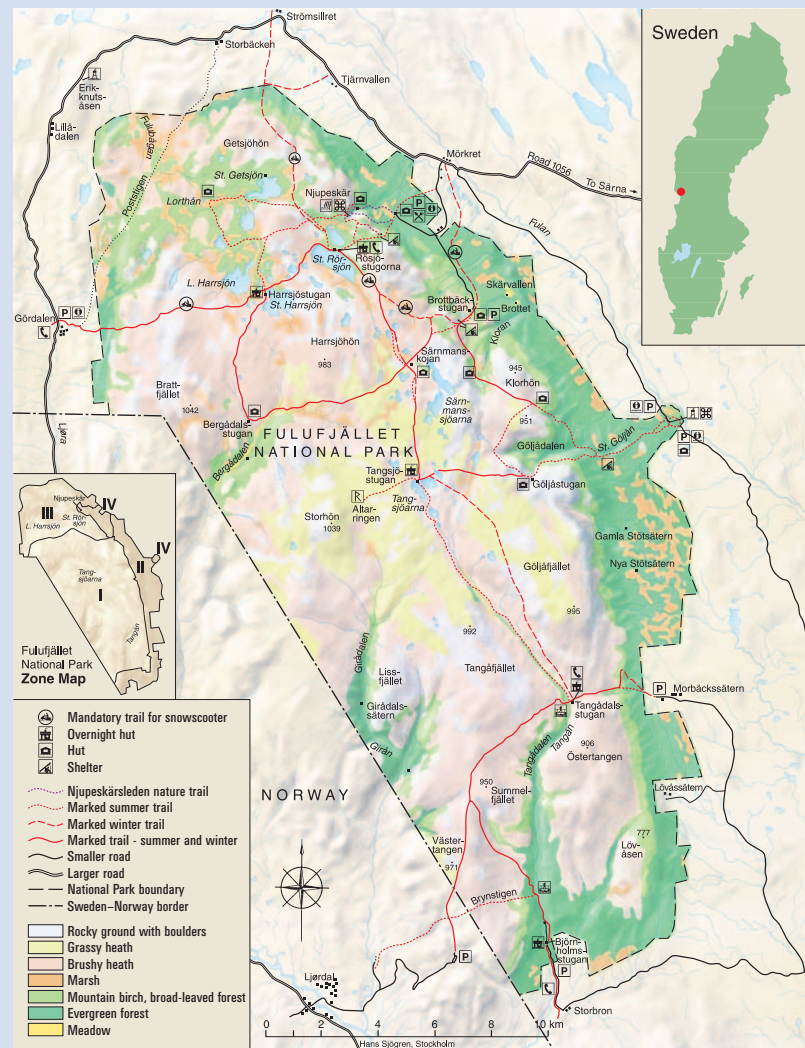
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Per Wallsten has an MSc in landscape architecture. He has specialized in national park planning, visitor management, and outdoor recreation issues at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency since 1994, where his responsibilities included establishment of Fulufjället National Park.

Figure 3 Map of Fulufjället National Park, with ROS zone map (inset): Zones I, undisturbed (60% of the park); II, low activity (15%); III, high activity (25%); IV, structure (<1%). (Map by Hans Sjögren)



Before establishment of the park, the SEPA carried out a visitor survey in Fulufjället for use in management planning. Repetition of the survey this year will provide a unique before-and-after study relevant to designation of national parks. Changes will be seen in visitor characteristics, patterns of use, experiences, and preferences; this will be useful as a monitoring and management tool.

In the new politics of nature conservation in Sweden, the government points to the Fulufjället process as a good example of how conservation of nature can contribute to regional development. The SEPA considers that the Fulufjället concept can serve as a model for future national park establishments in Sweden.

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