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New Protected Areas in Norway: Local Participation without Gender Equality

*In Norway, as in many other countries, new protected areas are currently being established and managed with strong policy references to "local participation." Is this policy implemented in a way that incorporates the concern for gender equality? The present article provides data from a study of 2 cases in which new protected areas have recently been established. The first is the Dovre Mountains Conservation Plan (*Verneplan for Dovrefjell*), which was adopted in 2002 and includes Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park. In the second case, the focus is on an area which was established in 2004 as the Geiranger-Herdalen Landscape Protected Area (*landskapsvernområde*). It is argued that one could expect Norway—perhaps more than any other country—to implement local participation in protected area establishment in a way that ensures gender equality. However, the results of the study show that local participation within the context of conservation issues ignores policies and legislation on gender equality. These findings are analyzed and causes for this state of affairs are shown to reside in structural features on the one hand, and the lack of demand for female candidates in local elections and appointments on the other. It is concluded that the main factor explaining this situation is neglect by Norwegian conservation authorities of their responsibility for gender mainstreaming. Efforts to legitimate conservation with reference to local participation are seen as problematical when local women are involved only to a very limited extent.*

Keywords: *Participation; protected area; conservation; gender; equality; women; Norway.*

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Introduction

Local participation in designation and management of protected areas

In recent years, great changes have taken place in international discourse on conservation. Previously, there was an almost hegemonic view of the role of the national state as being in full control of the management of national parks and other protected areas. This implied that local inhabitants were excluded from decision-making. Recently, many environmentalists and national conservation authorities worldwide have gradually begun to emphasize the importance of local participation in decision-making and management of protected areas (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Hulme and Murphree 2001; Ghate 2003). It is argued that the involvement of local actors brings in local knowledge, which leads to better decision-making, planning, and management with respect to sustainable use. Moreover, when admitted as participants in decision-making and management, local people are likely to feel ownership of conservation rather than resistance to it. In other words, local participation is seen as providing local legitimacy for national and international conservation goals.

Local participation related to protected areas is not without its problems. On the one hand, the idea has met with skepticism among some environmentalists, who fear that local inhabitants are being granted too much power, that they do not possess the necessary competence, and that this could be a menace to both global environmental values (for example, biodiversity) and defined conservation needs (Hågvar and Borgstrøm 1998; Oates 1999). On the other hand, a number of case studies have criticized the lack of real influence of local people in protected areas (eg Hulme and Murphree 2001; Brockington 2002; McLean and Straede 2003).

The idea of local participation in conservation may be implemented through different processes, institutions, and mechanisms, and in strong or weaker ways; the impacts on conservation may be positive or negative. Local participation varies in form and content, and can be seen as ranging on a scale from, for example, 'passive participation' to 'self-mobilization/active participation' (Pimbert and Pretty 1997).

In Norway a number of new protected areas have recently been established or are in the pipeline. The current goal is to protect 13% of Norway by 2010. Some municipalities are about to have more than three-quarters of their land declared as protected areas. Thus, policy-making with regard to protected areas is a central issue in these municipalities.

In the new designation processes, the Norwegian government emphasizes local participation. This development is evident, for example, in *White Paper No 31* (GoN 2001). In these processes, local participation is implemented first of all by setting up reference groups representing local actors in the designation process, and later on for the elaboration of a management plan. Furthermore, delegation of management authority has been granted to about 40 municipalities in the case of small protected areas (often nature reserves) and lower protected area categories (often landscape protected areas). Management authority in 4 national parks has been delegated to local and regional bodies for a test period of 5 years. Moreover, arrangement of public meetings and invitations to submit written comments constitute ways of involving local people in designation processes.

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In the literature on local participation regarding protected areas, *gender* has rarely been a focus to date. The present article aims to address the gender equality concern through a study of local participation in 2 cases of new protected areas in Norway.

Gender equality in politics

Does increased emphasis on local participation imply that local women and men are able to get involved in decision-making and management of Norwegian protected areas on equal terms? This would correlate with the Convention on Biological Diversity, which affirms the need for full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation of biodiversity conservation (UN 1992a), and with Agenda 21, Chapter 24, which addresses "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development" (UN 1992b). It would also be in line with the Norwegian Gender Equality Act (GoN 1978), which puts requirements in place for the participation of women in all sectors of society, including women's representation in local politics. This Act, together with the Local Government Act (GoN 1992), requires affirmative action as a means to ensure that at least 40% of the representatives on municipal standing committees are of each sex (GoN 1978, § 21; GoN 1992, §§ 36, 37, 38). Furthermore, 40% is a well-established political target regarding gender equality in public bodies in Norway.

More than in any other country, it would be reasonable to expect that in Norway gender equality is taken seriously in policy-making with regard to the environment. Gro Harlem Brundtland pointed to the necessity of doing this in the "Brundtland Report" (WCED 1987). One year earlier, Brundtland had turned international attention to gender equality in Norway when, as Prime Minister, she appointed a "women's government" with 8 women among a total of 18 cabinet members. In 2004 the Norwegian Nobel Committee gave the Peace Prize to Wangari Maathai of the Greenbelt Movement. This implies recognition of efforts to integrate the issues of gender equality and natural resources, and also promotes an image of Norway as a country in which the combination of these concerns is highly valued.

Research methodology and the 2 case studies

For a period of 5 years (2001–2005) we followed the processes of designation and establishment of management rules for the Dovre Mountains Conservation Plan (*Verneplan for Dovrefjell*) and Geiranger-Herdalen Landscape Protected Area (*landskapsvernområde*). We conducted participatory observations at relevant meetings, and carried out about 50 qualitative interviews with persons involved with the 2 protected areas at the municipality, county, and state levels.

The main objective of the project was to study the aspect of local participation in the 2 cases. Relatively early on, we found the gendered character of local participation to be one of the most striking aspects in both cases. We therefore collected information about gender representation in all relevant bodies, and made gender one of the focuses of our qualitative interviews.

As of 2002, the protected areas of *Verneplan for Dovrefjell* encompass a total of 4370 km^2, including an enlarged national park (Dovrefjell-Sundalsfjella), 9 new areas with fewer restrictions (*landskapsvernområder* and *biotopvernområder)*, and an enlarged nature reserve (Fokstumyra). The protected areas include parts of 8 municipalities and 4 counties. The municipalities are Dovre, Lesja, Oppdal, Sunndal, Rauma, Nesset, Folldal, and Tynset. The counties are Oppland, Sør-Trøndelag, Møre and Romsdal, and Hedmark.

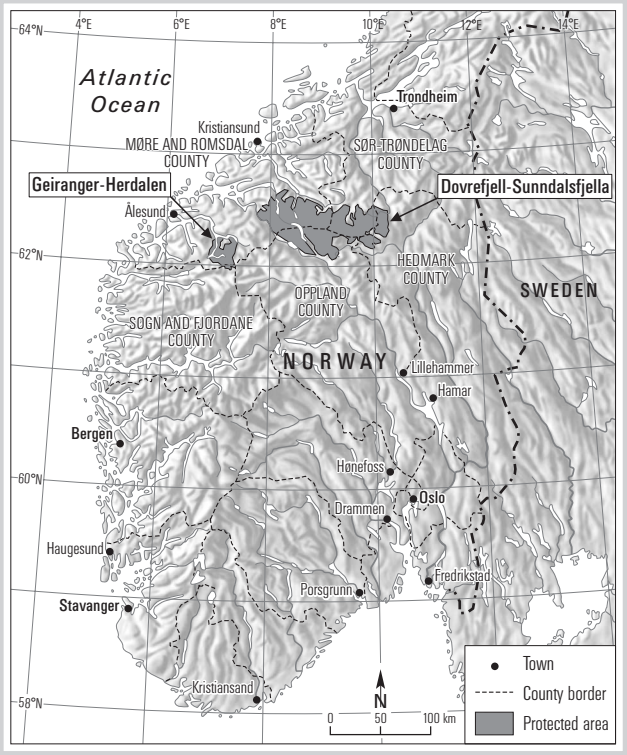
The Geiranger-Herdalen area was designated a Landscape Protected Area (*landskapsvernområde*) in 2004. It encompasses 498 km^2 in the municipalities of Norddal and Stranda in Møre and Romsdal counties. The area consists of high and rather inaccessible mountains and a valley with settlements and agricultural production. The Geiranger fjord is a well known international tourist site with cruise traffic during the summer (Figures 1 and 2).

FIGURE 1 Geiranger, a popular tourist destination. (Photo by Hanne Svarstad)



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FIGURE 2 Map of southern Norway, showing the area covered by Dovre Mountains Conservation Plan *(Verneplan for Dovrefjell)*—including Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park with adjacent protected areas (totally 4370 km^2)—and the Geiranger-Herdalen Landscape Protected Area *(Geiranger-Herdalen landskapsvernområde)* covering 498 km^2. Coordinates for a central point in Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella (close to the boundary post between the 3 counties of Oppland, Møre and Romsdal, and Sør-Trøndelag) are: WGS84: 32 V 6 920 000 / 500 000 UTM. (Map by Andreas Brodbeck, based on a design by Kari Sivertsen, NINA)



Results

In the designation process for both Dovrefjell and Geiranger-Herdalen, the actors involved emphasized the importance of broad representation of various stakeholders in the appointed reference groups. This led to selection of representatives from the agricultural, tourist, and other sectors, as well as landowners. However, we found that very few women were appointed to these reference groups.

At Dovrefjell, 6 local reference groups were established to participate in the designation process. Each group consisted of 5 to 10 members. Table 1 shows that 3 of the reference groups had one female member, while the other 3 groups had no local women as members. Altogether, 7.5% of the local members of these groups were women.

In the Geiranger-Herdalen case, a much smaller protected area was planned than at Dovrefjell, and only one reference group was established to provide local participation in the designation process. Table 2 shows the composition of the reference group. Eight of the 11 members were appointed from the 2 municipalities involved. In addition, one member came from the administration of the county council (*fylkeskommunen*) and 2 from state authorities at the county level (*fylkesmannen*). From each municipality, one member was chosen from elected politicians, and 2 members represented the sectoral interests of agriculture and landowners as well as the tourist industry. In addition, one member came from the administration. Only the member from the county council administration was a woman; the rest of the group consisted of men.

After the designation of the Protection Plan for Dovrefjell, new local reference groups in the area were appointed from each municipality in 2003 in order to provide inputs in the process of drawing up a management plan for the protected areas. Table 3 shows that of a total of 55 members in these groups, 10 (18%) were women.

Dovre Mountains Council *(Dovrefjellrådet)* is a council with representatives from the involved municipalities and counties. As of 1 July 2003, Dovre Mountains Council was given the power and responsibility of managing the protected areas for a period of 5 years. This is part of the trial mentioned above, which involves 4 national parks (Svarstad et al 2003). Table 4 shows that in 2005, 4 of the 24 representatives (16.7%) on the Dovre Mountains Council were women.

The Dovre Mountains Council appointed a working committee (board) of 7 members. Five of these represent the municipalities. The working committee has never had any female representatives from the municipalities. However, the working committee has 2 representatives from county councils, and in the period from 2000–2005, these were women.

At Geiranger-Herdalen, the municipalities of Norddal and Stranda indicated that they would submit an application to take over responsibility, from the county administration, for the management of the small protected area, as in about 40 other cases, as mentioned



FIGURE 3 The opening of Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park in June 2002. From left to right: the mayor of Dovre municipality and leader of Dovre Mountains Council, Erland Løkken; King Harald of Norway; and the Minister of the Environment, Børge Brende. (Photo by Hanne Svarstad)

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TABLE 1 Number of women among local participants in reference groups for the designation process of the Dovre Mountains Conservation Plan *(Verneplan for Dovrefjell)*.

Reference groups	Number of members	Number of women
Dovre municipality	6	—
Lesja municipality	6	1
Oppdal municipality	10	—
Tynset municipality	5	1
Folldal municipality	6	1
Cooperation group from Møre and Romsdal county:		
Members from Nesset, Rauma and Sunndal municipalities	6	—
(Member from the state authority at county level; different persons in 3 parts of the period)	(1)	(1/3)
Member from the administration of the county council	1	—
(Member from the state landowner, Statskog)	(1)	(—)
Total	**40 (100%)**	**3 (7.5%)**

above. A steering committee was established at the end of 2004 to elaborate the management plan. This collaborative committee consisted of 2 participants from each of the 2 municipalities and 2 participants from the county administration. All of these were men. However, a woman private consultant was hired as the secretary of the group.

Discussion

Our findings clearly show that the policy of "local participation" in decision-making in these 2 cases is not at all implemented in a way that incorporates concern for gender equality. Given the legislation, policies and the high official profile of Norway in questions regarding gender equality, these data are surprising. The participation of women in all the committees and councils examined in the 2 cases is, for instance, far below the official target and legal requirements in Norway (at least 40% women). It is also far below the average percentage in Norway of 35% women in the municipal councils for 2004–2007, and 43% women in municipality standing committees (Hovik and Steigen 2004). However, it is our impression from other cases of protected areas in Norway that these results are not unusual.

Why the lack of women in "local participation" is problematical

Our main argument is that the lack of gender equality in local participation and decision-making on protected areas is problematical, as it represents a democratic deficiency. From the perspective of *women*, on the one hand, we see this as an issue of rights and opportunities for participating on equal terms in all aspects of public policy-making. For women, this is an important dimension of democracy. Besides, through political participation, women have an opportunity to promote their own interests. This does not imply that all women have the same interests. Rather, the argument is based on recognition of possible gendered differences in opinion.

TABLE 2 Number of women among members in the reference group for the designation process of Geiranger-Herdalen Landscape Protected Area *(Geiranger-Herdalen landskapsvernområde)*.

Reference groups	Number of members	Number of women
Representatives for Norddal municipality	4	—
Representatives for Stranda municipality	4	—
Administrative representation from the county council	1	1
Administrative representation from the state authority at county level	2	—
Total	**11**	**1**

From the perspective of *society*, on the other hand, there is a loss when the competence of women is not valued and when women, who constitute half of all members of society, do not participate in problem-solving with regard to sustainable use and conservation of natural resources.

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TABLE 3 Number of women in local reference groups for the management plan of Dovre Mountains (2003).

Reference groups	Number of members	Number of women
Dovre municipality	13	4
Lesja municipality	6	1
Oppdal municipality	9	—
Tynset municipality	5	1
Folldal municipality	7	1
Nesset municipality	6	—
Rauma municipality	2	1
Sunndal municipality	7	2
Total	**55 (100%)**	**10 (18.2%)**

In the literature on gender, environment, and development, some contributors, eg Shiva (1989), argue that women always act in a way that is more environmentally friendly than that of men. This position has been criticized as a form of gender essentialism and over-generalization; the critique refers to the diversity and complexity of ways in which gender—in combination with other factors—can play a role in natural resource management (eg Jackson 1993; Braidotti et al 1994; Gupte 2002). In accordance with the latter view, we believe that the role of gender is often of great importance, but that statements about the gendered nature of views and practices in a specific location cannot be made prior to doing empirical research. We would welcome the opportunity to conduct research to determine whether or not the lack of women among local participants in our cases and in similar cases is the source of differences in priority setting and decision-making.

Nevertheless, we do find the situation troublesome from the perspective of *conservation*. Local participation in Norway is presented as a way of ensuring local ownership and legitimacy for the designation of protected areas. We believe that this is impossible to achieve when half of the local people are largely left out (Figure 4). In another, very different mountain area of the world—the Indian Himalaya—the same conclusion has been drawn regarding the negative consequences of having little or no participation of women in community programs that have to do with protected areas (Badola and Hussain 2003).

Explanatory factors

The percentage of women in relevant decision-making bodies in the 2 cases was found to be far lower than the minimum 40% representation for each sex required by Norwegian policy and legislation, as mentioned above. How can one explain these findings? We think it is useful to draw a major distinction between explanatory factors related to the election and appointment of local participants to relevant bodies, on the one hand, and explanatory factors at the national level, on the other.

In literature focusing on the lack of women among policy-makers, some authors make an analytical distinction between the lack of either "supply" or "demand" of female candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). It is useful to apply this distinction in our 2 cases. In questions concerning natural resources in Norway, we think there is reason to believe that it is often difficult for women to express their opinions: this is a sector in which masculine tradition and culture are usually strong. We therefore expected to find a lack of supply of female candidates. However, during investigation of our 2 cases, we found that women had rarely been asked to participate. Thus, the low number of female members must be explained instead by the lack of demand for female candidates.

Why were so few women asked? Most people we interviewed were quite surprised that we raised this question. They had not thought about gender equality as a topic relevant to decision-making bodies in these cases. In both cases, decisions about local participation in committees involved state authorities at county level, as well as various actors in the municipalities.

TABLE 4 Number of women representatives on the Dovre Mountains Council *(Dovrefjellrådet)* as of June 2005.

Members	Political representatives	Number of women among political representatives	Administrative representatives	Number of women among administrative representatives	Total number of representatives	Number (and %) of women among representatives
8 municipalities	8	2	8	—	16	2 (12.5%)
4 counties	4	2	4	—	8	2 (25%)
Total of 12 members	12	4	12	—	24	4 (16.7%)

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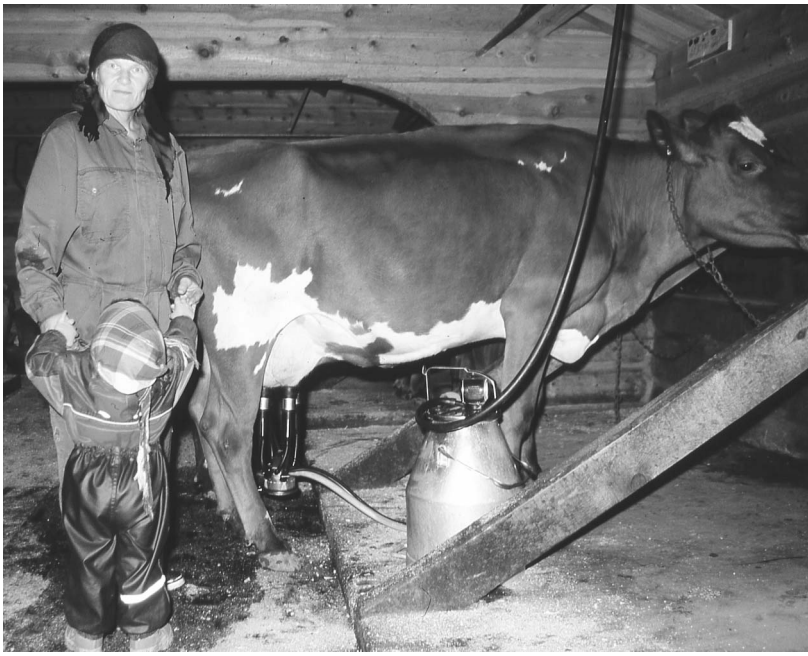
Several informants drew attention to the *structural features* of the established bodies. The Dovre Mountains Council and its working committee, for instance, are based on political representation at a high level. Thus, the mayor usually represents the municipality, and women are seldom elected as mayors in these municipalities. At the same time, Table 4 shows that the structural feature of having administrative representatives on this Council reduces the percentage of female representation. One informant expressed the view that if there had been 2 political representatives from each municipality instead of one, it would have been easier to encourage or enforce satisfactory representation of local women.

There are also explanatory factors at the national level. Gender equality in Norway is, as in the European Union, subject to a sectoral principle, implying that each ministry is responsible for mainstreaming gender equality policies. The environmental sector in Norway is responsible for the establishment of new protected areas. The Ministry of the Environment takes the lead on this issue, and implementation is done by the Directorate for Nature Management. Gender mainstreaming in this case implies a duty to provide information and see that implementation in the municipalities is conducted in accordance with the gender equality policy (Guldvik 2004). However, in their efforts to enhance local participation in decision-making for protected areas, neither the Ministry nor the Directorate has mentioned the issue of gender equality at all. Thus, the establishment of committees and reference groups in the counties and municipalities reflects ignorance of responsibility for implementing gender equality at the state level. This has resulted in neglect of gender as a relevant factor in the establishment of structures, as well as specific participation in the bodies established to provide local participation.

Conclusions

We argue that in Norway, perhaps more than in any other country, one could anticipate that local participation in area conservation is implemented in a way that ensures gender equality. However, in the cases examined, we found a profound lack of gender equality. On the one hand, we consider the situation to be problematical from the perspective of women's rights. On the other hand, we see it as a loss for society when women are excluded. The efforts to legitimate conservation with reference to local participation are particularly problematical when women are involved only to a very limited extent. Since women have rarely been asked to be local participants, we cannot explain the findings by a lack of supply of female candidates. Hence there has been a lack of demand for female candidates in the elections and appointments of local participants. Furthermore, we find structural features to be important. The most important explanatory factor was found at the national level, where the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment and the Directorate for Nature Management have neglected their obligations to mainstream gender equality.

FIGURE 4 A Norwegian farmer and her grandchild in a mountain summer farm. Such farms, traditionally run by women, are based on dairy production. The two case studies in this article reveal that despite their important role in the community and in production, women are grossly under-represented when it comes to local participation in conservation planning. (Photo by Karoline Daugstad)



In Norway, local participation with regard to protected areas is implemented on the basis of committees and councils that do not have exactly the same structure in each case. Therefore, our case approach was crucial in revealing a differentiated picture of gender imbalance. While statistics on this topic cannot cover all cases, we can describe the situation of gendered representation for our 2 cases. Moreover, the case approach made it possible to reveal the main explanatory factors. Thus, if conservation authorities in Norway or any other actors want to change the situation, they could use the findings of this study as a point of departure for further research and the specification of necessary action. Furthermore, we think the time has come for practitioners, as well as scholars worldwide in any project, program, or study, to integrate gender equality as an explicit concern whenever dealing with local participation in conservation. Our study has shown that gender equality cannot be taken for granted.

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