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The Nature of Nature in Nature-based Tourism

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ABSTRACT *It is obvious that nature plays a key role in nature-based tourism. But how important are natural environments for nature-based tourism supply? What kind of natural environments are demanded, and how can or should such environments be accessed? These issues are addressed in this paper using a two-dimensional model of the nature-based tourism servicescape. Based upon a grounded theory mixed-method approach, we analyze to what extent nature-based tourism companies in Sweden depend upon natural environments and facilities (*naturalness dimension*), and open access and exclusive rights to natural resources (*access dimension*). Findings show that this sector considers open access much more important than exclusive rights, while naturalness and facilities both represent important attributes. The exception being companies providing extractive activities (e.g. hunting), in particular those with a majority of international customers, where exclusive rights to resources are much more important. This paper provides new knowledge how the nature-based tourism industry can be supported through nature protection, sustainable management of natural resources, public infrastructure and access policies.*

KEY WORDS: outdoor recreation, servicescape, access, exclusive rights, natural environments, facilities

Introduction

> When [foreign] visitors come here in November or December when it is dark, windy and snowy, they just say – aaah this is so great! They are from London or some other place and you know they just want it to be quiet.

The importance of nature in nature-based tourism may at first seem axiomatic. Isn't it obvious that nature plays a key role in this type of tourism, as illustrated by the above quote from a nature-based tourism company offering fishing and snowmobiling located in rural Sweden? The answer to this question is of course, yes – nature matters. At the same time, such an answer raises questions related to key dimensions of the

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nature–human nexus. To what extent are nature-based environments necessary for nature-based tourism supply? What kind of natural environments are demanded? And how can or should such environments be accessed?

Existing tourism literature provides some guidance in this respect. Valentine (1992) proposed three types of human–nature relationships in the nature-based tourism realm; experiences *dependent* on the natural setting (e.g. safari), experiences *enhanced* by the natural setting (e.g. camping), and experiences where the natural environment has a *subordinate role* (e.g. outdoor swimming pool). Newsome, Moore, and Dowling (2002) discuss 'natural area tourism' as tourism *within* natural environments, with a *focus on* natural environments and for the *protection of* natural environments. In a more recent review, Fredman, Wall Reinius, and Lundberg (2009) identify four recurrent themes related to the definition of nature-based tourism: (i) visitors to nature areas, (ii) experiences of natural environments, (iii) activity participation and (iv) normative aspects related to sustainable development, local impacts, etc. Although there is no commonly agreed upon definition of nature-based tourism, contemporary literature associate it with recreation and adventure (Laarman & Durst, 1987), perceptions of undisturbed nature (Valentine, 1992), protected natural areas and destinations (Lang & O'Leary, 1997), elements of nature and protection of nature (Hall & Boyd, 2005), activities directly dependent upon the natural environment (Mehmetoglu, 2007), spending time in nature areas outside the home environment (Fredman et al., 2009) and tourism that takes place in areas rich in natural amenities as well as activities connected with natural settings (Lundmark & Müller, 2010). It is obvious that none of these leave nature behind, but the meaning of nature and how it is approached are less evident.

Inspired by a grounded theory approach generated through empirical data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), this study is conceptually based upon the collection of papers making up the special issue on nature-based tourism of the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). The call for this issue attracted over 40 abstracts, and the 11 papers selected for the final publication addressed the topic from several perspectives, including fishing rights, protected areas, recreational experiences, quest for facilities, recreation opportunities, public access, spatial perceptions, wilderness, environmental impact and willingness to pay for ski tracks. From this sample of research topics we identify two main dimensions in the nature-based tourism human–nature nexus.

The first – *the naturalness dimension* – includes demands of the natural environment on a naturalness-facilities continuum and relates to issues such as protected nature, recreational experiences, facilities and wilderness (Denstadli, Lindberg, & Vistad, 2010; Haukeland, Grue, & Veisten, 2010; Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, & Newman, 2010; Sæþórsdóttir, 2010; Uusitalo 2010; Wray, Espiner, & Perkins, 2010). The second – *the access dimension* – includes access to the natural environment on an open access-exclusive rights continuum and relates to issues such as harvesting rights, public access and provision of services (Heldt, 2010; Sandell & Fredman, 2010; Stensland, 2010).

Regardless whether the tourism activity is dependent, enhanced or just contextualized through natural environments, we judge these dimensions appropriate as a framework to further elaborate the role of nature in nature-based tourism, and for the purpose of this study they are investigated through the following research questions;

(1) To what extent is the nature-based tourism industry in Sweden dependent upon natural environments (without facilities such as establishments and marked trails)?
(2) To what extent is the nature-based tourism industry in Sweden dependent upon facilities (e.g. establishments and marked trails) associated with natural resources?
(3) To what extent is the nature-based tourism industry in Sweden dependent upon open access to natural resources?
(4) To what extent is the nature-based tourism industry in Sweden dependent upon exclusive rights to natural resources?

Theoretical Framework

Nature as Servicescape

The concept of servicescape has greatly influenced conceptualizations of commercialized space and it was initially a framework for exploring the impact of physical surroundings on the behaviors of producers and consumers in the service industry (Bitner, 1992). A servicescape refers to a human-made controlled space where the physical facilities may have a substantial effect on consumers' satisfaction, and is in various ways manipulated and designed in order to facilitate commercial exchanges. In the servicescape concept, the surrounding environment is of great importance as it affects the overall service experience. Looking at the nature-based tourism sector from a supply perspective, visits to natural settings are turned into commercial products through the consumption of nature-based goods and services. Products typically range from package tours that are all inclusive with comforts and conveniences to expedition-style arrangements that facilitate more independent outdoor activities involving risk and uncertainty (Curtin & Wilkes, 2005; Mehmetoglu, 2007; Varley, 2006). Such products differ in their human–nature interaction, including the dependency on wilderness-like settings, services and facilities.

Using nature as an arena for tourism includes some important differences and challenges compared with the human-made controlled space since the characteristics of nature as a servicescape differ from other servicescapes in several ways. In a human-made servicescape, background conditions (or ambient factors) such as temperature, noise and cleanness are usually below the level of immediate awareness of customers, while design factors, architecture and comfort exist at the forefront of our awareness (Baker, 1987; Ezeh & Harris, 2007). However, in the natural servicescape, the physical environment, or the ambient factors, is in the foreground rather than being in the background of the service delivery (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998a, 1998b). Even though the natural servicescape is predominately natural rather than built, natural and built conditions coexist in many sites (Arnould et al., 1998a, 1998b; Hall & Boyd, 2005). Therefore, in the natural servicescape it seems like the ambient factors and the designed factors interact more clearly with each other and that the ambient factors affect customers' experiences and behaviors to a greater extent than in human-made servicescapes.

The natural servicescape also includes many unpredictable components associated with the service encounter, implying that nature-based tourism companies often have restricted managerial control over the site where they offer their products and services.

For instance, in protected areas such as national parks or nature reserves preservation of the site and use by the local population are often prioritized over recreational and tourism use, especially since the UNCED Rio Earth Summit on sustainable development in 1992 (Zachrisson, Sandell, Fredman, & Eckerberg, 2006). Nature-based tourism companies are in many places dependent on permits to use access land or concessions for certain activities, and thus become under the control of someone else's decision rules (Wyman, Barborak, Inamdar, & Stein, 2011). If the tourism operator has no exclusive rights to the land, he or she has very few possibilities to manipulate or change the physical environment in order to develop new or improved products and services. Situational factors such as wildlife sightings, temperature and snow conditions are also beyond the control of tourism producers. In addition, most nature-based tourism activities imply that the producer and customer together access the servicescape from outside, rather than the customer entering an environment under the provider's control (Arnould et al., 1998a, 1998b). Participation in many of the activities offered by nature-based tourism companies can also be done on a non-commercial basis and a major challenge is subsequently how a company can make people pay for the same activity being freely accessible and/or provided by an agency or non-profit organization at low cost (Tangeland, 2011).

The nature-based tourism supply can accordingly be considered a special form of servicescape (cf. Arnould et al., 1998a; Chui et al., 2010; Hultman & Andersson Cederholm, 2006) where the physical environment plays a key role in visitors' experiences and consumers' satisfaction. In the nature-based servicescape, activities are being sold as commodities of tourism and packaged in terms of scenery, relaxation, adventure, escape from civilization, etc. (Manfredo & Driver, 1996). This is a different form of servicescape than those originally described by Bitner (1992) and others (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). This is a natural rather than built environment – a servicescape in which nature is commercially produced to serve different touristic and/or recreational purposes (see also Arnould et al., 1998a; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011).

In summary, we argue that control over resources in the nature-based tourism servicescape is highly associated with different aspects of naturalness and access. While profit maximization may not always be the primary goal within this sector of the tourism industry (Ateljevic & Doome, 2000; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012; Stensland, 2010) an increased control over the production process should be of interest to any service-minded organization. We do accordingly identify two main dimensions of importance in the nature-based tourism servicescape relevant to the Swedish/Nordic context – the naturalness dimension and the access dimension – i.e. companies' dependency on natural and built environments, and the dependency on access and exclusive rights, respectively, on the nature environment.

The Naturalness Dimension

As discussed above, one key aspect of the nature-based servicescape is that it is predominately natural rather than built. This is of course connected to customers' expectations of nature-based experiences and perceptions thereof, as well as how the natural servicescape is communicated, presented and interpreted by both producers and consumers. Ideas about nature vary over time and between different traditions,

cultures and individuals since the meanings are reflections of broader contexts (Castree & Braun, 2001; Cronon, 1995). For example, wilderness, authenticity and uniqueness are not inherent in places; rather it depends on the viewer's experiences, contexts and interests. In tourism, producers' articulate and market the product according to their interests – it is the tourism producers' narratives of nature which are framed for the service experience and with a certain purpose in mind. Thus, the framing is not always strategic, or systematic, and producers are perhaps not aware of – or have not reflected upon – the staging and the cultural context of what is understood as natural or human-made.

Natural environments are more or less impacted or manipulated by humans, and through a complex ever-changing process of interaction between nature and humans, landscapes have been, and continuously are, formed (Cronon, 1995; Hornberg & Crumley, 2007; Wall-Reinius 2012; Wästfelt, Saltzman, Gräslund Berg, & Dahlberg, 2012). A natural environment can be illustrated by a relative scale where natural and cultural components interact from nature without visible artifacts or traces of human activities to more or less arranged, human-made and built areas (Arnould et al., 1998a; Wall-Reinius, 2009). Hall and Boyd (2005) illustrate how land use can be described as a continuum based on the degree of relative naturalness and remoteness from human settlements. The degree of naturalness increases as a function of the distance from human settlement and access, and the natural servicescape consists of both more remote areas and areas closer to urban areas (Hall & Boyd, 2005). In much nature-based tourism, naturalness is important to convey a sense of remoteness and wilderness but more recent research has shown that visitors to natural environments often seek an escape from civilization in combination with a demand for facilities, infrastructural services and overall good service quality (Haukeland et al., 2010; Komppula, 2006; Wall-Reinius, 2009, 2012, Wall-Reinius & Bäck, 2011). This may reflect a tendency from a more puristic recreation behavior towards a growing share of tourists who demand more facilities and services when recreating in natural environments (Fredman & Emmelin, 2001; Vorkinn, 2011; Wall-Reinius & Bäck, 2011).

The Access Dimension

Access to nature areas is fundamental to both outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism and this access can in principle be provided in three ways, or a combination of these (Sandell & Fredman, 2010; Williams, 2001);

- Access to areas of personal ownership which can be used exclusively.
- Access to publicly owned areas, e.g. protected areas that are open to outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism use.
- Access to private and/or publicly owned areas that can be utilized by individuals for their own activities – even though not primarily designated for this – as long as economic interests connected with land ownership and traditions of suitable behavior are respected, e.g. the Right of Public Access in the Scandinavian countries.

In most countries the property-owner has an exclusive right to land, and access to outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism are generally not allowed without permission. Making the nature-based servicescape a private commodity has obvious

business advantages, but is at the same time problematic due to the public good properties of the landscape. For example, wildlife as a focus for tourism can be regarded as a common pool resource (i.e. non-excludability and subtractability) and sustainable management can accordingly be threatened unless proper institutional arrangements are established (Moore & Rodger, 2010).

In Sweden, the landowner's exclusive right to land is restricted by the Right of Public Access which implies that landowners have to accept that other people may enter their land (or water) for outdoor recreational use (including an overnight stay) as long as no damage is made to growing crops, vegetation or other natural resources (Ahlström, 2008). Similar rights can be found in other Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Finland but also Scotland. The Swedish Right of Public Access has no restrictions on commercial use but in certain (protected) areas permissions are required from regional authorities. The Right of Public Access is, however, currently debated (Sandell & Svenning, 2011) whereby land-owner associations have argued for an exclusion of organized commercial use while the nature-based tourism industry wants to maintain this opportunity in combination with voluntary land-owner agreements.

Although the Right of Public Access is considered a success factor in the nature-based tourism industry (Sandell & Fredman, 2010) it may also be an obstacle in terms of economic efficiency and business development due to the risk of overexploitation of a 'free utility' as recreational values in the landscape are considered of no commercial value (Hultkrantz, 1995; Mortazavi, 1997). For example, public access in New Zealand has been turned to more exclusionary rights due to Maori land use claims, increased lack of environmental awareness and a demand for more commercialized activities following growth in international tourism (Curry, 2002).

Public and protected areas can be designed to facilitate recreational use and in many countries people are directed to such areas for outdoor recreation participation since access to private land is restricted. In Sweden, however, because of the Right of Public Access protected areas have generally been less important for the supply of outdoor recreation opportunities (Fredman & Sandell, 2009) and commercial activities have even been prohibited in some of the national parks. Agreement with landowners is yet another way to access the natural landscape where the company has to pay a leasing cost for the land or a concession for a certain operation. This approach has not been widely used in Sweden, except for hunting and fishing as these rights come with land-ownership (excluding certain types of sport-fishing along the coast or in the biggest lakes as well as small game hunting).

The Two-dimensional Nature-based Servicescape

As discussed above, both naturalness and access each represents a continuum along which the human–nature relationship can be envisioned. These dimensions capture not only companies' dependency on natural *vs*. constructed environments and access *vs*. exclusive rights, respectively, they also reflect the demand side of nature-based tourism and peoples' preferences for a diversity of outdoor recreation of experiences (Manning, 2011). Although preferences are difficult to categorize, and may change over time, we may think of these dimensions as a means to structure the

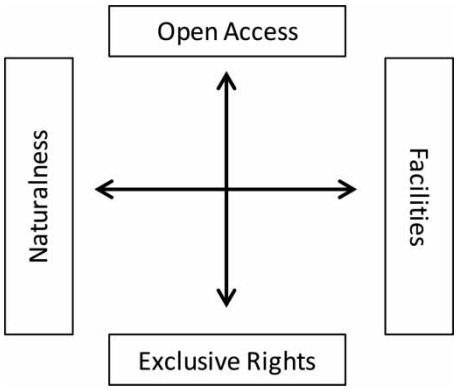

Figure 1. The two-dimensional nature-based servicescape.

human–nature relationship in a nature-based tourism context. For example, some people may prefer visiting wilderness-like areas with few or no interactions with other visitors and to meet such a demand companies would likely look for a servicescape that features both naturalness and exclusive rights. Other people prefer a high degree of facilities, services and interaction with other visitors, and to meet this type of demand companies would look for a servicescape that features trails, cabins, lodges, etc. in areas where others also have access. In a similar way we may think of people demanding the combination of facilities and exclusivity (e.g. an exclusive hunting safari), or wilderness experiences under an open access regime (e.g. more traditional non-extractive outdoor recreation).

Hence, combining the two dimensions of the nature-based servicescape, we can identify four possible combinations (fields) representing naturalness/open access, naturalness/exclusive rights, facilities/open access and facilities/exclusive rights, respectively (Figure 1). These fields not only capture dimensions of supply and demand. As discussed above, many of the special characteristics of the nature-based servicescape are associated with control over resources and the production process, some of which are managed by public institutions such as environmental protection, natural-resource exploitation, access legislation and infrastructure development. The two-dimensional nature-based servicescape suggested here as a model to elaborate the role of nature in nature-based tourism involves the public sector just as much as tourism companies and tourists looking for nature-based experiences.

Methods and Analyses

This study uses a mixed method approach including qualitative data from interviews and quantitative data from a subsequent telephone survey to study how the nature-based tourism industry articulates its dependence on the nature environment. The informants were the managers of 11 nature-based tourism companies in Sweden (selected after consultations with professionals in the field) based on (i) their supply of nature-based tourism services and (ii) geographical location in order to provide a good representation of the

nature-based tourism industry in Sweden (Lundberg & Fredman, 2012). The interviews were done in 2009 using a 'life-story' approach which represents a first-person narrative where the interview is an open-ended process and the researcher is not controlling how the story is told (Atkinson, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The 11 companies represent micro- or small-sized nature-based tourism companies and interviews were done with the person responsible for the operations, which in most cases also was the owner of the company. Interviews were fully transcribed and a content analysis was done with respect to the research questions of this paper. The analysis was based upon the approach by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) where the meanings of longer sentences become more concise through short phrases. Quotes have been used to illustrate and exemplify the message of the interviews.

The quantitative data are from a telephone survey among nature-based tourism companies in Sweden. Since no public data exist for such tourism companies, a convenience sample was received from three national organizations working with the promotion of nature tourism; the Farmers Association (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund), the Swedish Ecotourism Association (Ekoturismföreningen) and the state-owned forest company Sveaskog. These organizations provided contact information to nature-based tourism companies for a telephone interview conducted in May and September 2009. Interviews were made using a regular telephone and a computer-aided questionnaire to record the answers during the interview. The survey included several sets of Likert-type questions focusing on, among other topics, the importance of different factors related to natural resource use, facilities and access in the operations. Respondents were asked to reply on a five-point scale ranging from (1) 'not at all important' to (5) 'very much important'. The survey included several additional questions with a focus on management, company characteristics, customer markets and dependence on the nature environment.

The representativeness of a convenience sample of this kind is not known and therefore this is a limitation of the study. Companies associated with the organizations providing contact information may not reflect the structure of the nature-based tourism industry in several respects (e.g. supply, size and market). On the other hand, all three organizations are represented nationwide, are well known in the sector and do implement several quality-criteria among their members. However, very small or newly established companies may not be represented in our sample to the degree that reflects the situation in Sweden today.

For this study, 131 completed interviews were used with companies involved in the following nature-based tourism categories:

(a) hunting, fishing ($n = 45$),
(b) hiking, guiding, climbing, skiing ($n = 48$),
(c) canoeing, kayaking, sailing, rafting ($n = 38$) and
(d) dog-sledging, snowmobiling, horse-back riding ($n = 57$).

These categories are used in the subsequent analyses since they share some common properties. Hunting and fishing are connected with land ownership rather than open access. Participation in these activities requires certain equipment, training and permission. Compared with the other activities included in the study, hunting and fishing also extract the natural resource (although different forms of catch and release are

increasing, traditional hunting and fishing are still the dominant forms), and are accordingly referred to as *extractive activities*. Hiking, guiding, climbing and cross-country skiing are land-based activities which typically require quite large back-country areas and good physical condition among participants. This group is referred to as *self-propelled activities*. Canoeing, kayaking, sailing and rafting share many of the same characteristics but they are all dependent on water, and are accordingly referred to as *water-based activities*. Finally, dog-sledging, snowmobiling and horse-back riding are all reliant on external power in the form of dogs, horses or mechanical engines, and we consequently refer to them as *enginized activities*. With the 'engines' follows dependence on special equipment and skills, and they are also typically performed on trails in the back-country. The number of observations for each activity group totals to more than the total sample size of 131 companies because 35% of the companies in the study did supply activities included in more than one of the categories above. Hence, analyses of data (using SPSS statistical software) were done with uni- and bivariate, rather than multivariate, methods since independent variables were not exclusive categories.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the frequency distributions for the dependent variables used in this study across all companies. Results show that natural environments have the highest degree of importance closely followed by facilities. More than half of the surveyed companies consider natural environments without facilities such as establishments and marked trails as 'very important' while half of the companies consider facilities with the same degree of importance. The third most important item is the Right of Public Access which over 40% of the companies consider as 'very much important'. The Protection of Public Access to Beaches and exclusive rights to natural resources are of less importance to a majority of the companies studied. For example, 42% consider the Protection of Public Access to Beaches not at all important and 34% give no importance to exclusive rights to natural resources.

Table 1. Frequency distributions (%) for dependent variables: 1 – no importance; 3 – moderate importance and 5 – very high importance. $N = 131$.

How important are the following for your tourism business?	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Natural environments (without facilities such as establishments and marked trails, i.e. places not specially designed for visitors such as forests, meadows, mountains, caves, lakes, rivers and shores)	5.4	3.9	9.3	28.7	52.7	100
Facilities (e.g. cabins, ski-areas, sport facilities, beaches and harbors)	3.1	3.9	14.7	27.9	50.4	100
The Right of Public Access	17.7	6.2	11.5	20.0	44.6	100
Protection of Public Access to Beaches	42.4	8.1	13.8	15.4	20.3	100
Exclusive rights to natural resources	33.8	13.4	25.9	12.6	14.3	100

Since the Right of Public Access and the Protection of Public Access to Beaches both represent dimensions of open access to nature, they have been merged in to one variable referred to as Open Access (the correlation between the two open access scales across all companies is $r = 0.338$; $p < 0.01$). Hence, for the following analyses we consider four dependent variables – *natural environments*, *facilities*, *open access* and *exclusive rights* – which refer back to our four research questions and the two-dimensional nature-based servicescape presented above. Because of the limited number of observations in some of the scale categories, we use three-category measures for the subsequent analyses (categories of the original five-point scales have been merged as indicated in the table headings). While Table 1 reported the relative importance of some key items across all companies included in the study, our next focus will be at variations across different types of nature-based companies based on attributes such as supply of activities, years in business, location and market.

The Natural Environment

Natural environments (without facilities such as establishments and marked trails, i.e. places not specially designed for visitors such as forests, meadows, mountains, caves, lakes, rivers and shores) are not identified to be of any greater (or lesser) importance to any particular type of company (Table 2). We do, however, observe a tendency that companies operating in the north of Sweden to a larger extent value this attribute as very important compared with companies operating in the south. The overall small variations in this attribute are interpreted such that natural environments are important to

Table 2. Importance of *natural environments* (categories 1, 2 and 3 of the original five-point scale have been merged into one category) (given in percent).

	Low importance (1,2,3)	Large importance (4)	Very large importance (5)	Total	Chi-sq.
Extractive activities	24	24	51	100	1.73 ($p = 0.420$; df = 2)
Self-propelled activities	23	23	53	100	1.64 ($p = 0.441$; df = 2)
Water-based activities	16	35	49	100	1.08 ($p = 0.584$; df = 2)
Enginized activities	15	29	56	100	1.10 ($p = 0.578$; df = 2)
Years in business[a]	20	26	54	100	1.03 ($p = 0.596$; df = 2)
Northern Sweden[b]	18	22	60	100	3.92 ($p = 0.141$; df = 2)
International customers[c]	21	30	50	100	0.23 ($p = 0.890$; df = 2)

[a]Number of years in business ≤ 5.
[b]Company located in Northern Sweden.
[c]Proportion international customers $> 50\%$.

nature-based tourism companies in general regardless of their characteristics. Support for such a conclusion is found in the interviews where wilderness, silence and inaccessibility were experienced as exclusive and attractive attributes.

> When Germans come here to Värmland they are out in the wilderness . . . the forest is enough for them and they do not have to see the mountains. While others [Swedes] think this is nothing but forest, no mountains, no openness etc. (Fishing, hunting and snowmobiling provider in the mountain region)

> When visitors [foreign] come here in November or December when it is dark, windy and snowy, they just say aaah this is so great! They are from London or some other place and you know they just want it to be quiet. (Fishing and snowmobiling provider in the interior)

Certain natural environments can create unique opportunities for the nature-based tourist company and thereby create favorable conditions for certain activities or experiences which may be hard to deliver in areas where the natural environment is different. A unique opportunity for activities was exemplified with the river Klarälven, where the meandering flow of water creates special favorable conditions for timber-rafting.

> Our advantage is that Klarälven is so unique, the flow of water isn't easy to copy, and there is no other river that has the same conditions. The rivers in Europe are completely different; they are wider and are more crowded. (Rafting provider)

The second dimension of the natural environment continuum studied – facilities such as cabins, ski-areas, sport facilities, beaches, harbors, etc. (Table 3) – are significantly (10%-level) more important among companies doing hunting and fishing compared to those with other activities. Sixty percent of the companies involved in extractive activities gave this item rank five on the scale compared to 45% of the companies involved on non-extractive activities. This finding was also supported from the interviews as many of these companies had access to such facilities (e.g. cabins and harbors). There seems to be a certain co-existence between nature-based tourism companies and physical facilities as they become complementary to each other in the tourism supply. This fits well with a shift in recreation behavior towards more comfort and all inclusive products, and a willingness to pay for 'new' outdoor activities which require special skills and knowledge.

> We [Swedes] learned how to walk when we were little kids and no one will pay for that. However things are starting to change. For instance, snowshoeing tours which have never been done in Sweden before are starting to take off. (Provider of traditional outdoor activities in the mountain region)

As with the natural environment category, we think the overall small variations in the facilities attribute can be interpreted as this attribute being important to nature-based tourism companies in general. If that is the case, we have documented the paradox of nature-based tourists demanding wilderness in combination with a quest for services

Table 3. Importance of *facilities* (categories 1, 2 and 3 of the original five-point scale have been merged into one category) (given in percent).

	Low importance (1,2,3)	Large importance (4)	Very large importance (5)	Total	Chi-sq.
Extractive activities	*11*	*29*	*60*	*100*	*4.86 ($p = 0.088$; $df = 2$)*
Self-propelled activities	38	32	30	100	2.54 ($p = 0.281$; df = 2)
Water-based activities	30	22	49	100	2.31 ($p = 0.316$; df = 2)
Enginized activities	18	31	51	100	0.86 ($p = 0.649$; df = 2)
Years in business[a]	19	31	51	100	1.60 ($p = 0.450$; df = 2)
Northern Sweden[b]	24	28	49	100	0.376 ($p = 0.829$; df = 2)
International customers[c]	20	27	52	100	0.105 ($p = 0.949$; df = 2)

Note: Italic value indicates significance difference at 0.1 level.
[a]Number of years in business ≤ 5.
[b]Company located in Northern Sweden.
[c]Proportion international customers $>50\%$.

and comfort, which is also supported from the interviews. One respondent, who operates in the Stockholm archipelago, explains that their tours are often a mix of outdoor and adventure experiences with high-end hotels and fine dining opportunities.

> ... during the day we lived 'the real life' in the archipelago and during the evening we eat well and stay at comfortable hotels. (Activity provider in the archipelago)

Access to the Natural Environment

Next, looking at access to the natural environment, we find indications that open access is considered of less importance among companies that have been in the business for more than five years compared with those which have been in the business for a shorter time (Table 4). Percentages also indicate that companies doing water-based activities on average consider open access of higher importance compared with non-water based companies, while for companies with enginized activities, open access may be of less importance. These conclusions are, however, not backed by statistical results but from the interviews we find that open access is considered to be particularly important among those companies offering water-based activities which are dependent on access to the shoreline.

> We could never do this if we had to pay all the landowners ... we never know where our guests will stop even though I will tell them to make a stop where I have the landowner's permission. (Rafting provider)

Table 4. Importance of *open access* (categories 1 and 2, and 4 and 5, of the original five-point scale have been merged into one category) (given in percent).

	Low importance (1,2)	Moderate importance (3)	Large importance (4,5)	Total	Chi-sq.
Extractive activities	26	37	37	100	3.78 ($p = 0.151$; df = 2)
Self-propelled activities	33	29	38	100	0.28 ($p = 0.870$; df = 2)
Water-based activities	25	31	44	100	3.02 ($p = 0.221$; df = 2)
Enginized activities	44	23	33	100	2.84 ($p = 0.242$; df = 2)
Years in business[a]	*41*	*23*	*36*	*100*	*4.90 ($p = 0.086$; df = 2)*
Northern Sweden[b]	43	28	29	100	3.36 ($p = 0.186$; df = 2)
International customers[c]	30	35	35	100	1.52 ($p = 0.468$; df = 2)

Note: Italic value indicates significance difference at 0.01 level.
[a]Number of years in business ≤ 5.
[b]Company located in Northern Sweden.
[c]Proportion international customers $> 50\%$.

These types of companies do also express worries about weaker open access since developed and built up shoreline can hinder their business.

> . . . I of course have to say that I do not agree when people build close to beaches. So, it's good that it is controlled . . . however, they should be stricter in big cities like Stockholm . . . there is too much development along the shoreline that hinders our business. (Activity provider in the archipelago)

Finally, our analyses shows that exclusive rights to natural resources are much more important to companies offering extractive activities, i.e. fishing and hunting, compared with companies with a non-extractive activity supply (Table 5). Forty-seven percent of these companies give this item a 4 or 5 compared with 16% of the companies providing non-extractive other activities. A majority of the companies in the self-propelled and enginized categories consider exclusive rights of low importance, and for such companies it may not be the exclusive right of natural resources as such which is important, but rather to produce unique and 'exclusive' products that are not accessible otherwise. Expressed in several of the interviews, lack of exclusive rights may cause conflicts with landowners and make the company difficult to run. The interviews also express conflicts with public use and how exclusive rights to natural resources would have made their product more unique and less crowded.

> . . . It would be nice if we could have a private beach right down here where only our guests could sunbath. Now everyone that lives in the area will come here to

Table 5. Importance of *exclusive rights* (categories 1 and 2, and 4 and 5, of the original five-point scale have been merged into one category) (given in percent).

	Low importance (1,2)	Moderate importance (3)	Large importance (4,5)	Total	Chi-sq.
Extractive activities	*33*	*20*	*47*	*100*	*14.12 ($p = 0.001$; $df = 2$)*
Self-propelled activities	57	21	21	100	3.12 ($p = 0.210$; df = 2)
Water-based activities	56	25	19	100	1.76 ($p = 0.415$; df = 2)
Enginized activities	51	30	19	100	3.00 ($p = 0.223$; df = 2)
Years in business[a]	44	26	30	100	1.37 ($p = 0.504$; df = 2)
Northern Sweden[b]	48	23	29	100	0.742 ($p = 0.690$; df = 2)
International customers[c]	42	33	26	100	1.51 ($p = 0.469$; df = 2)

Note: Italic value indicates significance difference at 0.05 level.
[a]Number of years in business ≤ 5.
[b]Company located in Northern Sweden.
[c]Proportion international customers $>50\%$.

> sunbath. The beach is very small so it gets easily crowded . . . (Nature tour provider in south Sweden)

Joint Effects (Location and Market)

Given the relatively small number of observations in this study, the possibilities to statistically analyze joint effects across the independent variables are limited. Using analyses of variance of the original five-point scales, we have then looked at joint effects for location and market to see if these two key parameters have any significant impact on the dependent variables across the four types of nature-based tourism companies studied. Location is of importance since Sweden has a large north-south stretch where human population and physical conditions vary greatly while the market, in terms of domestic *vs*. international customers, features variations regarding outdoor recreation culture, experience, knowledge and willingness-to-pay.

The most striking result is that *exclusive rights* to natural resources is by far most important to companies with international customers providing extractive activities, and of less importance to companies with Swedish customers not providing extractive activities ($F = 6.74$; $p = 0.000$). We also find that exclusive rights are more important for companies doing extractive activities regardless of geographical location ($F = 4.55$; $p = 0.005$), while they are less important to companies with self-propelled activities in northern Sweden ($F = 3.50$; $p = 0.018$). Regarding the importance of *open access*, we find it to be more important to companies with Swedish customers providing

self-propelled activities ($F = 2.35$; $p = 0.076$), and for companies with water-based activities in the south of Sweden. Looking at companies with a majority of international customers, *natural environments* without any facilities are of greater importance to companies providing non-extractive activities compared with those providing hunting and fishing services ($F = 2.52$; $p = 0.061$). *Facilities*, such as cabins, ski-areas, sport facilities, beaches and harbors, are of less importance to companies providing self-propelled activities in northern Sweden ($F = 2.10$; $p = 0.104$), but likely to be more important to companies with a majority of international customers providing extractive activities ($F = 1.88$; $p = 0.137$).

The Cooperative Servicescape

While the results presented above provide evidence of the multidimensional nature-based tourism servicescape, many nature-based tourism companies are small scale and target niche markets (Ateljevic & Doome, 2000; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012) which call for different forms of cooperation (collaborations, partnerships, etc.) between players in the tourism production system (Plummer, Kulczycki, & Stacey, 2006). Tourism is a composite product and many nature-based tourism companies accordingly need to work together with other complementary companies providing travel, lodging and accommodation. Yet another important aspect is the relationship with owners and managers of natural resources (e.g. landowners, forest companies, agencies, nature protection organizations, etc.). The cooperative dimension of the nature-based servicescape was not particularly targeted in this study, but results from the interviews clearly indicate its importance.

> *. . . unless the Holiday Club resort had been built, we would not have existed* (Company offering all year round tourist activities in Åre). (Adventure activity provider in the mountain region)

Many of the companies studied do not consider each other as competitors, but rather a cluster of tourism suppliers that generate a more attractive destination and stronger pull factors for traveling.

> For us, it is very important to have many collaborators since we are located in the periphery far away for larger tourist destinations such as Åre. We must fight for guests and costumers. (Sami experience, fishing and snowmobile provider in northern Sweden)

Networking has long been known as an important aspect of tourism development and successful destination networks typically include support agencies pursuing both community and commercial goals (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005; Nybakk, Vennesland, Hansen, & Lunnan, 2008). Cooperation can not only attract more customers and facilitate marketing, tour packaging, etc. but can also be used to avoid or manage conflicts with landowners and other resource uses in the area (Plummer et al., 2006). Many of the companies studied pointed out the importance of cooperation with local residents and landowners in order to create a successful tourism product. These ties and relationships

have usually been built up over a long time and nature-based tourism entrepreneurs that are embedded in the local society often experience less conflict with landowners and other resource users. This represents a form of social capital, which has long been recognized as a source of community development (Laven, Krymkowski, Ventriss, Manning, & Michell, 2010; Putnam, 2000), illustrated here by one of our informants:

> We were lucky, me and my wife, that we both had worked here for twenty-five years started our business. I used to buy timber, be involved in the community center, game management areas and fishing areas, and my wife she worked at the animal hospital. So they knew who we were. We were embedded in the local society and that was very important. If I had come from Umeå, Stockholm, Malmö or Gothenburg and settled down here in the small village NN . . . and told them that I wanted to attract ten thousand visits from Germany and Holland and that we want to angel. Then they would not have been so cooperative. (Fishing and snowmobile provider in central Sweden)

An Empirically Modified Nature-based Servicescape

Based upon the results provided above, we suggest an empirically modified version of the two-dimensional nature-based servicescape proposed earlier in this paper. As illustrated in Figure 2, our empirical inquiry clearly shows that natural environments are important to the nature-based tourism industry regardless of activity (question 1a), while facilities are of greater importance to companies providing extractive activities and having a majority of international customers (question 1b). We find that the importance of open access, in terms of the Right of Public Access and the Protection of Public Access to Beaches, is more mixed among the studied companies, but more so among companies providing self-propelled activities, water-based activities and having a

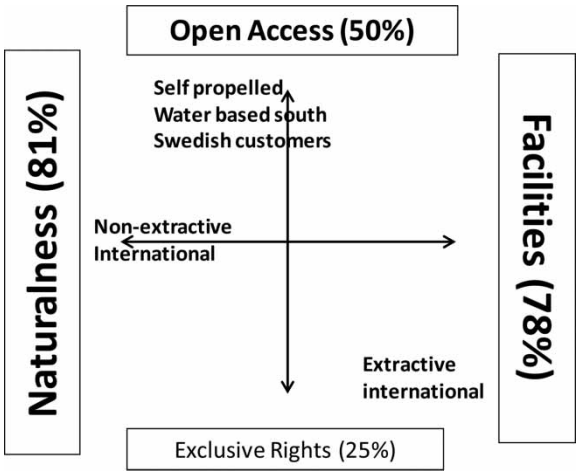

Figure 2. The empirically modified nature-based servicescape.

majority of domestic customers (question 2a). Finally, a demand for exclusive rights to natural resources is clearly associated with a supply of extractive activities and even more so combined with a focus on international customers (question 2b). Percentages presented in Figure 2 represents the proportion of companies reporting 4 or 5 (i.e. very important) on the five-point scale for each dimension, respectively (based on figures from Table 1).

By focusing on nature as a servicescape, some critical aspects and characteristics associated with the nature-based tourism industry are revealed – aspects which perhaps are overlooked in built or more controlled service environments. The overall importance of natural environments may seem axiomatic, but experiences of the servicescape are affected by the producers' and the consumers' interpretations, expectations, and constructions, and phrases such as 'natural', 'wilderness', etc. may have multiple interpretations. In this study, we did not include what connotations such features may have for the tourism companies, which should be considered as a topic for further inquiry. Our results emphasize that nature protection and sustainable management of natural resources highly support the nature-based tourism industry, and tourism should accordingly be considered in these contexts. This is of particular importance in environments attracting international visitors, such as national parks (Wall Reinius & Fredman, 2007).

The second major dimension – facilities – represents human-made attributes of the nature-based servicescape. Such facilities will provide a means for the nature-based tourism industry to commercially stage nature and reduce uncontrollable situational factors as suggested by Arnould et al. (1998a). Natural surroundings will still be most important as they affect the overall experience of the service, but facilities could support, enhance or even be a requirement to experience nature. Some of these facilities will usually be provided by private operators or landowners (e.g. hunting cabins) while other are typically provided by public agencies or local non-profit organizations (e.g. trails). There is strong support for a public funding of hiking- and skiing trails in Sweden (Fredman, Karlsson, Romild, & Sandell, 2008), driven by an extensive outdoor recreational use. It is, however, reasonable that the tourism industry financially contributes to this kind of infrastructure as it apparently adds to the servicescape for several activities studied, and may also open up opportunities for new outdoor activity products for which willingness to pay is greater (e.g. snowshoeing).

The Swedish open access regime to nature (through the right of Public Access and the Protection of Public Access to Beaches) has a large impact on the nature-based servicescape. It will not only spatially enlarge the potential servicescape for tourism companies, it will also indirectly make private landowners part of the tourism production process. Owners of land and water have the right to different forms of natural resource uses directly impacting vegetation, fauna and landscape esthetics (e.g. agriculture, fishery and forestry) and will consequently have an important indirect impact on the nature-based servicescape. Our study shows that open access to nature is an important attribute to maintain, but more so for some types of nature-based tourism companies than other. This supports previous research which has shown that the Right of Public Access is of importance to the nature-based tourism sector (Sandell & Fredman, 2010). Geography, market as well as recreation activity matter in this respect, and should provide an important input to the current assessment of the future development

of the Right of Public Access by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Sandell & Svenning, 2011). While most hunting and fishing includes exclusive rights to resources, it is recommendable to consider alternative means to manage the relation between tourism companies and land owners (e.g. concessions, contracts, etc.) in order to avoid future conflicts around those activities that are dependent upon the Right of Public Access.

Conclusions

In this study, we find that the nature-based tourism industry in general terms considers open access much more important than exclusive rights, while naturalness and facilities both represent important attributes. We have also, from a supply perspective, documented the contradiction of nature-based tourism companies providing naturalness in combination with services, facilities and comfort which have been previously observed in several studies of tourism demand (Haukeland et al., 2010; Komppula, 2006; Wall-Reinius, 2012). By using a two-dimensional nature-based servicescape as an analytical framework, we have gained new insights on how the nature-based tourism industry can be supported through nature protection, sustainable management of natural resources, public infrastructure and open access policies. We have also demonstrated the importance of networks and cooperation, and given the multi-functionality of the nature-based tourism servicescape both landowners and the public sector becomes important stakeholders in the tourism production process. Hence, the provision of the servicescape for the nature-based tourism sector is a joint venture between both private and public interests.

The explorative character of this study is not without shortcomings. The relatively small sample size and non-exclusive categories used for the statistical analyses limit our possibilities to statistical inferences from the quantitative data. Our mixed-method approach which supplements the quantitative results with in-depth interviews does, however, provide a much more informative examination of the role of nature in nature-based tourism than a quantitative analysis alone. Such approaches are also suggested for future research given the complexity of this sector. The topics identified in this study should also be considered for further investigation on a larger scale, perhaps including other Nordic countries. Such a research design will provide better representativeness and analyses can be done for smaller functional and spatial units with a better statistical power. Themes of particular interest for deepening analyses include analyzing the supply of the nature-based tourism industry, the role of open access in the nature-based tourism production process, commercialization of nature experiences, sustainable product development and public–private cooperation.

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