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ABSTRACT

Innovative capacity of Svalbard's tourism industry and its role in climate change adaptation

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Case studies from all over the world demonstrate that climate and weather factors, such as temperature, precipitation and winds, influence tourism. However, the climate is changing, which effects are observed in changing weather patterns, melting ice or thawing permafrost. The Arctic is one of the regions where the effects of climate change are expected to occur sooner and be more severe than anywhere else in the world. This makes Arctic tourism destinations, which are dependent on natural environment, vulnerable to undergoing processes.

This presentation discusses the innovation capacity of tourism industry as the key element of adaptation to climate change. It shows how networking and cooperation in the tourism sector and personal attitudes towards climate change influence innovation in tourism on Svalbard related to climate change adaptation. The presentation is based on research conducted on Svalbard among tourism industry stakeholders. The research included social network analysis (SNA), which provided information on the tourism stakeholders network - its structure, cooperation patterns and knowledge exchange channels. Additionally interviews with local stakeholders were conducted in order to recognize the opinions and attitudes of the locals towards climate change, in order to track how knowledge about climate change is disseminated within the network.

The study shows that tourism network on Svalbard is characterized by good cooperation and trust. However, the recognition of climate change threats is low and access to external knowledge on climate change adaptation is limited. Thus, tourism industry on Svalbard may not have sufficient capacity to cope with the effects of climate change due to too much uniformity and centralization, hampering the creation and absorption of new knowledge that is crucial for adaptation. The solution may be to create a more formal and coordinated network that is concentrated on climate change adaptation and would enable to raise awareness about climate change, better exchange of information and create the conditions for innovation and creative adaptation to change.

