Cooperation and innovation to develop tourism and combat seasonality
A case study of local tourism firms in Geiranger, Norway

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study describes how local tourism firms in Geiranger, Norway view innovation and cooperation as strategies to develop tourism and combat seasonality. The study examines different approaches to seasonality as well as how the innovation system of a tourism destination can be a way to transition from one to all-season tourism. Five local tourism firm owners or managers in Geiranger were interviewed in order to explore their understanding of these concepts. The findings of this study illustrate the complex opportunities, challenges and contradictions local tourism firms experience while combating seasonality. Ultimately, it stimulates a discussion if it is possible to combat seasonality on the basis of tourism development. The topic was chosen to address challenges with seasonal tourism in relation to sustainable socio-economic development in rural communities. UNESCO world heritage Geiranger is regarded as one of the most scenically outstanding fjords in the world. Because of its rural nature and strong position in the global tourism industry, it constitutes an excellent location to research this phenomenon.

Keywords: tourism, seasonality, innovation, cooperation, development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Local tourism firms in Norwegian tourism destination Geiranger operate in a highly seasonal context, one that local tourism firms intend to change because of negative socio-economic impacts, such as financial uncertainty due to seasonal fluctuations. In an interview published by the Norwegian Hospitality Association, Monja Mjelva who is the 4th generation owner and manager of Hotel Union Geiranger shared her and husband Sindre Melva’s intention to combat seasonality: Together we can create a Geiranger that is a good place to visit as well as live all year, (...) but we are bleeding in the winter. Our hope for the future is that it will be possible to run our business with profit all year (NHO Reiseliv, 2019). This quotation from Monja emphasizes the importance of expanding the tourism season in order to promote a sustainable development for Geiranger as a tourism destination and community alike. This statement suggests that cooperation between tourism firms may be an element in achieving all-season tourism and is what sparked motivation for this study. However, there are a number of ways to handle seasonality and it is not always in everyone’s interest to change seasonal dynamics. This constitutes one of many challenges with strategies for combating seasonality and raises the question whether it is possible to combat seasonality based on tourism development.

The purpose of this introductionary chapter is to introduce the reader to the history and current context of tourism in Geiranger. The reader will get familiar with the aim, research questions and delimitations of the study, as well as introduced to relevant definitions and the disposition of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Geiranger is located in Sunnmøre in Møre og Romsdal county in western Norway. It belongs to the municipality of Stranda and is regarded as one of the most scenically outstanding fjords in the world (UNESCO, 2019). The area is home to a number of unique natural and cultural sites and is characterized by its old mountain farms and many waterfalls (Visitnorway, 2019., UNESCO, 2018).

There are three ways to reach Geiranger. Figure 1 below illustrates road and ferry connections, for example road Fv 63 via Djupvatnet on 1016 meter above sea level, which connects with Rv 15 to Lom and Otta. The only all-season road connects Ørnevegen and Eidsdal, and this old road was completed in 1955. It is also possible to travel by sea and there is a ferry connection from Hellesylt and Ålesund (Visitnorway, 2019).
Geiranger has a long history of tourism and welcomed its first cruise ship in 1869. Today, tourism constitutes the main economic sector in the village (Fjordnorway, 2019). The population of Geiranger is around 200 people and the village has a kindergarten, a year 1-9 school and a home for the elderly (Fjordnorway, 2019). The largest employer is Hotel Union Geiranger with approximately 70 full year employees that rises to 140 during the summer months. Around 80% of the parents to the children in the local school and kindergarten work at the hotel (NHO Reiseliv, 2019). Thus, Geiranger is a small community which makes the presence of tourism firms crucial for the development of the local community.

Seasonal tourism concentrates the approximately 800 000 to 1 million annual visitors to the summer months, while the winter months are quiet and slow-paced, during which most firms closed. Tourists arrive on cruise ships or via road connections to explore the wide range of accommodation and tourism activities available, for example hiking, kayaking, fishing as well as cultural and wellness-experiences (Fjordnorway, 2019., Fjordsenter, 2019a). Geiranger also has its own bakery, brewery and chocolate factory (Fjordnorway, 2019).

Furthermore, in 2005 Geiranger was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List to represent the Western Norway’s Fjord Landscape along with Nærøyfjord and surrounding areas. The inscription led to the formation of the Geirangerfjord World Heritage Foundation, which is situated in Geiranger. The foundation is the major local actor in working towards the future goal of making Geiranger a sustainable all-season destination (Visitnorway, 2019). They are managing the world heritage visitor center as well as responsible for protecting and communicating the world heritage values to the public. (Fjordsenter, 2020ab) Furthermore, the world heritage status and the environmental impact of mass tourism has generated attention
The Geirangerfjord World Heritage Foundation has been involved in processes organizing ways to measure and reduce pollution due to cruise ship tourism in order to promote a sustainable development of the world heritage area (Fjordsenter, 2020b., UNESCO, 2018). This ultimately led to a national regulation to make Geiranger the world’s first zero emission resolution at sea by 2026. This means that any ships or ferries that enter the port must be emission free by that year, but steps toward that goal has already been taken through stricter emission regulations. The purpose of the regulation is to promote a sustainable future for the local population, climate and tourism alike (UNESCO, 2019).

1.2 Aim and research questions
Local tourism firms in Geiranger that wish to promote sustainable development through regulating mass tourism speak of reduced crowdedness in high season and fluctuations in income and visitor numbers. In order to achieve this, they stand before a number of challenges, seasonality being the main issue. The aim of this study is to explore how local tourism firms in Geiranger view cooperation and innovation as ways to develop tourism and combat seasonality.

Three research questions have been formulated in order to approach this issue further:
- How does innovation and cooperation promote tourism development?
- What challenges are there to innovation and cooperation for tourism development?
- How may innovation and cooperation combat seasonality?

1.3 Delimitations
This study is based on the perspective of local tourism firm owners or managers in Geiranger. The purpose is to understand their experience and understanding of cooperation and sustainable development in Geiranger, both as a hometown and tourism destination. This means the study is limited to their perspective when it comes to describing their view and relationship with other parties, such as non-residing firm owners, neighbor tourism destinations and representatives from the municipality. A more generous timeframe would allow these voices to be heard and produce a more complete overview of the situation. Similarly, secondary data such as regional programs for social, - and tourism development would contribute to the understanding of the current and future development processes in Geiranger. However, because the purpose of the study is to describe experiences and perceptions of these processes from a local perspective, the interviews remained the focus.

1.4 Definitions
This section provides explanation to a number of concepts that are used throughout the study.
- **Seasonality** refers to calculated fluctuations in the tourism flow throughout the year, where summer constitutes high season, winter off-season, spring and autumn shoulder season. **Seasonality dependence** refers to the phenomena where local tourism firm owners depend on mass tourism during summer for their livelihood.
• *Tourism destination* refers to a place to be visited for a memorable experience and efforts made to strengthening the brand and attractiveness for that place is defined as *tourism development or innovation*

• *Cooperation* refers to processes of working together to the same end. In this study it refers to cooperation between tourism actors. A previous study on networking between tourism firms define the concept as *a means of overcoming the lack of resources faced by small rural-tourism firms and may be a strategy for developing rural-tourism experiences* (Tolstad, 2014, p. 111). This study defines cooperation in the same way.

• *Tourists, customers and guests* are used synonymously to describe consumers visiting the destination

• *Sustainable development* is commonly defined as development that meets present needs without compromising that of future generations. This study involves both environmental aspects of protecting the natural landscape, as well as *rural development* where Geiranger will continue to be a place to both live and work in this definition.

**1.5 Disposition**

This study starts by introducing the reader to previous research on seasonality, innovation and cooperation within the field of tourism. This chapter serves as the theoretical part of the study and constitutes the base on which the data is analyzed later in the text. The third chapter presents the chosen research methodology as well as describes and discusses the research process in a critical way. The fourth chapter presents the data collected during the interviews which is analyzed in the following chapter referring back to previous research. Finally, the last two chapters discuss and conclude the findings. A full reference list as well as the interview guide as an appendix is available at the end. Please note that the interview guide is in Swedish as it was the spoken language during the interview process.
2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter presents previous research on seasonality, innovation and cooperation in the tourism sector. These studies and articles explain different understandings of these concepts from a rural perspective, most of them are based on qualitative interviews or quantitative surveys with tourism firm owners around the world, including Norway, Spain, China, Greece and New Zealand. Because of these countries sharing a common ground from a seasonal or organizational context it is comparative to the local situation in Geiranger. An understanding of the context of seasonality as well as the meaning of innovation and cooperation between tourism firms is crucial in order to successfully analyze tourism development in Geiranger.

2.1 Seasonality

Tourism seasonality concentrates tourism to a certain period of high activity, often referred to as high season, while the remaining year that is shoulder and off-season is characterized by little to no activity (Clydesdale, 2017). Tourism in itself is generally view upon as an effective tool to promote rural development. A rural location that is experiencing a decrease in population and migration may benefit from new job and income opportunities related to tourism (Martín Martín et al. 2017). However, varying levels of seasonality may influence the socio-economic impacts of tourism. Because seasonality concentrates tourism income during high season, it may hamper overall growth and development and trigger financial uncertainty.

Many tourism firms have high fixed costs and limited capacity to receive guests. This is particularly true for firms that offer accommodation or dining. If a camping site is full, it means there are no more spaces to sell. This makes these firms vulnerable to days of less demand, and thus dependent on the high seasons promises of good revenue. Thus, seasonality quickly becomes demanding to firms that constantly need to manage demand and available capacity according to the fluctuations of seasonality (Clydesdale, 2007). A similar connection was made in a rural household survey in a tourism area in China. It concluded that level of seasonality may indeed be a tool to evaluate rural development. According to this scale, low level of seasonality due to a steady flow of tourism and income throughout the year indicates a well-developed rural community. Under these circumstances, tourism firm owners can provide jobs all year which benefits the community (Su & Aaron et al., 2019). On the other hand, high levels of seasonality mean the majority of work force is lost at the end of the season which has a destabilizing socio-economic effect on rural communities (Martín Martín et al., 2019, Martín Martín et al., 2017). Thus, community and tourism firms depend on each other for their survival and sustainable development (Getz & Nilsson, 2004).

A study of seasonality and local tourism firms in Bornholm, Denmark identified three strategies for handling seasonality (ibid), see Figure 2 below.
According to Getz & Nilsson (2004) there are three different strategies for handling seasonality, which are presented in Figure 2 above. These are the coping, combating and capitulating strategies. The purpose of this model is to analyze situation-based strategies to handle seasonality in a way that best balances investment and costs. In some cases, it is more profitable to adapt to seasonality and keep open during high season and close during off-season. A coping strategy accepts the nature of seasonality which means staff have seasonal contracts and need to find a secondary income somewhere else after the high season (ibid).

Attempts of combating seasonality often include efforts to decrease the gap between high and off-season. Communicating extended opening hours and differentiating prices are strategies attempting at extending the shoulder season (Clydesdale, 2007). Another strategy is to identify new tourism segments and innovating new tourism products that attract new customers, for example by specializing in eco-tourism or rock-climbing (Getz & Nilsson, 2004., Andriotis, 2005). A third combating strategy is that of cooperation between tourism firms to overcome challenges in innovation through shared resources such as staff (Getz & Nilsson, 2004). However, financial uncertainty in seasonality often demand a secondary source of income of the firm owner. This puts the firm owner in a vulnerable position and there is a risk that a capitulating strategy is used to exit seasonality and sell the firm (ibid).

However, some tourism firm owners adopt a coping strategy without financial motivation. In fact, some prefer to close during off-season to enjoy a certain lifestyle or have a break from visitors (ibid). A study of seasonality dependent wine regions in New Zealand emphasize the importance of a common understanding of seasonality among firm owners as this can differ (Fountain et. al., 2001). Another study of tourism firm owners in Crete voiced the question whether seasonality should be viewed as a problem or a conscious choice (Andriotis, 2005). It was suggested that efforts changing the seasonality dynamic on the island would result in a shift of work placement where seasonal workers got permanent contracts, which would affect their secondary workplace in for example agriculture. The seasonal lifestyle may include utilizing the off-season for travelling, resting or making investments for the business, all which may an important part of people’s life (Fountain et. al., 2001). If strategies for combating seasonality

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**Figure 2. Three strategies for handling seasonality**

*Source: (Getz & Nilsson, 2004, p. 28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COPING (adapt to seasonality)</th>
<th>COMBATING (attitude + action)</th>
<th>CAPITULATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Close part of year</em></td>
<td><em>Stay open all year</em></td>
<td>Shrink, sell or terminate the business if other strategies fail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maintain the premises</em></td>
<td><em>Develop other tourist segments</em></td>
<td>(or by personal preference of the owners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Reduce or dismiss staff</em></td>
<td><em>Cater to residents</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Seek other income</em></td>
<td><em>Augment the product’s appeal</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tourism business is secondary to other activity</em></td>
<td><em>Increase profitability through value adding</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Borrow money or go on the dole</em></td>
<td><em>Develop export products</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific Coping and Combating Actions might be compatible.
is to have any effect, it is important to reach a common understanding for why that is desirable. This is crucial because non-involvement hamper any development (ibid).

2.2 Innovation
Previous research suggest that innovation may be a way to develop tourism and combat seasonality. It is suggested that innovation is the act of carrying out ideas (Nybakk et. al. 2008, p. 3). Innovative ideas are necessary to compete on an ever-changing market and promote development. Flagstad (2006) discusses the relationship between innovation and seasonality by studying a winter-season destination attempting to combat seasonality and achieve all season tourism. He argues that the complex structure of a destination constitutes important elements of innovation that may affect seasonality, for example institutional investments. This structure is illustrated in Figure 3 below and explains major factors that influences innovation in a destination.

![Figure 3. Tourism destination as an innovation system for extended tourism season](source)

According to Flagestad (2006), the core of destination-based innovation involves tourism firms, local government policies and knowledge support. These actors innovate in a context of antecedents that are situation and location dependent, such as natural and cultural context. Together, these constitute the tourism destination and may be influenced by external resources.
such as universities and other institutions. The fundamental point Flagestad makes is that innovation may emerge from a destination and be an instrument to influence seasonality, but the arena is complex. The window of opportunity lays in the possibility of transferring an existing strong destination brand onto remaining seasons. In this way, tourism firms may create value in off-season and attract more visitors. This capacity depends on the quality of the core system in the model, followed by the destination’s antecedents and external resources (ibid).

Although, innovation goes beyond seasonality and previous research emphasize internal innovation capacity in order to develop tourism. A quantitative survey-based study on Norwegian nature-based firms identify a connection between entrepreneurial attitudes and innovation. It suggests that tourism firms that show positive opportunity recognition and risk-taking attributes tend to show higher levels of innovation (Nybakk & Hansen, 2008).

Furthermore, involvement of employees and customers may promote innovation by increasing the competence level in the internal innovation process (ibid and Rønningen, 2010). Tourism firms may use these attributes to create new tourism experiences that add value to the destination (Nybakk et. al., 2008., Hjalager, 2009). Although, Hjalager (2002) problematizes that many employees in tourism have short term contracts and may be difficult to motivate for development work.

However, Andriotis (2005) relate low innovation capacity to seasonality as tourism firm owners do not have time and resources to innovate during the hectic high season. Hjalager (2009) believe this tendency to be a general characteristic of tourism firms and believe innovation is therefore best triggered through local government policies and regulations. This may be achieved by investments that aim to control or influence tourism, for example regulations on crowd control related to high season (Clydesdale, 2007). The idea that policy making on an institutional level triggers innovation, is a common belief in previous research (Nybakk et. al., 2008., Nybakk & Hansen, 2008., Rønningen, 2010., Clydesdale, 2007). Financial support and commitment to local tourism development in form of advice increase competence level and innovation capacity between firms (Nybakk et. al., 2008., Rønningen, 2010). In addition, regulations from an institutional level may generate major change that forces firms to adapt to new circumstances (Hjalager, 2009., Flagestad, 2006). Thus, policies that trigger innovation such as re-positioning a destination as a green destination may help combating seasonality by targeting new tourism segments (Clydesdale, 2007). Furthermore, Andriotis (2005) argues policies aiming at combating seasonality should target firms that already in this process, rather than those who have chosen a coping or capitulating approach. This is because he believes it will produce a more immediate and efficient result than using resources to convert the latter.

2.3 Cooperation
This chapter explains how cooperation can promote innovation and tourism development, including that of a seasonal context.

A combating strategy to seasonality may include innovation that target new tourism segments and adding tourism value in the off and shoulder-season, for example by creating new tourism experiences. This provides visitors with a wider selection of products, which strengthens the brand equity of the destination (Getz & Nilsson, 2004, Flagestad, 2006.,
Cooperation between tourism firms may be a key factor in achieving this as previous research indicates a positive relationship between cooperation and innovation for tourism development (Nybakk & Hansen, 2008 and Rønningen, 2010). These studies suggest that tourism firms that cooperate with others show high levels of innovation. This highlights the importance of tourism firm networks (Rønningen, 2010). Flagstad’s (2006) innovation system Figure 3 position tourism firms as directly involved in innovation processes that can alter seasonality. Nybakk & Hansen (2008) agree that firms often innovate together with others. Thus, cooperation may be an effective way to overcome challenges in tourism development (Tolstad, 2014).

Hjalager (2002) claims that the turbulent nature of the tourism sector makes it difficult for tourism firms to establish the level of trust to competing firms that is needed to cooperate. She argues that the sector is characterized by competitiveness and jealousy between firms. Frequent change of owners as well as seasonal staff is also said to hamper development of relationships between firms, and thus cooperation. Although, more recent studies indicate the opposite. A study of a network of tourism firms in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway showed that cooperation was present and had a cohesive effect on the local community (Tolstad, 2014). The firm owners in Tolstad’s (2014) study viewed each other as friends and colleagues rather than competitors. Previous research suggest that networks promote exchange of competence such as destination-based knowledge, and in so doing, serving as forums of discussion and support (ibid and Denicolai, 2010). It also improves the ability to recommend the service of others when customers request a tailormade experience (Nybakk et. al., 2008). This constitutes internal capacities within the innovation system.

Because of the connection between cooperation and innovation, it is important to understand the former to be able to address seasonality. More specifically, to understand what motivates and hampers cooperation. Denicolai (2010) emphasize relationship-based trust as a condition for cooperation. The firms in Gudbrandsdalen described their relationship as mutually considerate as they all wanted the best for each other (Tolstad, 2014). Thus, relationship-based trust is about trusting the good intention of one another (ibid., Nybakk et. al., 2008) emphasizing the importance of trust in relation to cooperation. Trust is the glue that hold cooperation strategy together as it forms positive relationships between actors. Nybakk et. al. (2008) ’s study gave a number of examples of how relationship-based trust has generated fruitful cooperation between firms. One example was that of an outdoor activity firm that decided to ask a landowner to rent a piece of their land for their climbing activities, even though it was their lawful right to use the land for free. The purpose of this interaction was to build trust with the landowner in order to create a positive relationship between the two. This was appreciated by the latter who helped them build a parking lot on the land (ibid).

However, a key challenge to cooperation is conflicting approaches to seasonality between tourism firms in a destination as it makes efforts to combat seasonality ineffective (Fountain et. al., 2011). This highlights the importance of reaching a common understanding of how seasonality should be handled (ibid, Flagestad, 2006). The absence of a common understanding reduces the impact of relationship-based trust and motivation for cooperation, which has a negative impact on innovation.
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to allow the reader insight in the research processes so that the reader may reflect on this study in a critical way. Firstly, it presents the and motivates the chosen research method in relation to the aim and research questions of the study. Secondly, it explains the research process and motivates decisions made along the way. These insights are critically discussed in the final section by evaluating the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Qualitative interviews

This study is based on five qualitative interviews. In contrast to quantitative methods that often focus on facts and numbers, qualitative research methods aim to describe and understand subjective experiences. As a result, they often follow an inductive approach where theories and concepts are generated during the research process, rather than pre-determined and then tested. (Bryman, 2008, p. 366). Qualitative interviews encourage respondents to reflect and share what they believe is relevant and important. In this way, it is possible to understand why and how something is a certain way. (ibid, p. 393). The respondents in this study were encouraged to share and elaborate their information through a number of strategies such as open, probing and specifying questions as well as moments of silence that allowed time for reflection (ibid, p. 446-447, 456). The choice of this method generated rich in-depth data relevant to the aim of the study, which is to better understand the relationship between cooperation and innovation in tourism development among local tourism firm owners in Geiranger (ibid, p. 386-387).

The general research focus was determined at an early stage which motivated a semi-structured approach to interviewing (ibid, p. 439). A certain degree of structure was practical at times when the conversation went off-track. However, the flexibility of this method allowed the respondents to speak rather freely which gave rise to significant issues that otherwise would not have come to light, such as the relationship between tourism and societal development.

3.2 Sampling

The respondents chosen for the interviews are five tourism firm owners or managers in Geiranger between the ages of 29-47. Some of them have multiple professions. Their tourism firms offer services of either accommodation, outdoor activities, cultural experiences or local cuisine. One firm represents the world heritage center which has multiple functions and services in sustainable destination development. See the presentation of respondents in Figure 4 below.

**Presentation of respondents**

- Respondent 1, 32 years, co-owner of a tourism firm in the service industry, 051219
- Respondent 2, 47 years, co-owner of a tourism firm specialized in cultural experiences, 051219
- Respondent 3, 44 years, director of a local tourism site and foundation, 061219
- Respondent 4, 29 years, co-owner of a tourism firm in the service industry, 091219
- Respondent 5, 30 years, manager of an outdoor activity firm and camping site, 131219

*Figure 4. Presentation of the respondents*
The research focus was determined early which gave sufficient time to find respondents relevant to the study. They were chosen based on a flexible criterion with regard to the delimitations of the study as suggested by Hay (2016, p. 124). The criteria were that respondents have to manage or own a local tourism firm and live permanently in Geiranger. This accessed insight from their perspective as professionals and residents alike. During one of the interviews, it came to light that a respondent recently had recently moved away. She was now only living in Geiranger during six months of the year. However, as the move was so very recent and she fit the criteria for several years prior, her replies were still judged as relevant to the study.

The number of qualitative interviews depend on the quality of data and the researcher’s ability to make sense of it (ibid, p. 125, Bryman, 2008, p. 461, 542). The interviews in this study were on average 60 min long which gave enough sufficient and relevant in-depth information to analyze the research questions. Because the respondents began to repeat information toward the end and there was limited time, it was decided that five interviews were enough.

Six tourism firm owners were initially contacted by e-mail. Five accepted to participate in the study, whereas one did not reply. The purpose of the introduction e-mail was to provide the respondents with the relevant information needed to enable them to make an informed consent or choose to decline to participate, as suggested by Hay (2016, p. 32). The e-mail included a presentation of the researcher and the study and motivated why the respondent’s replies were relevant to answer the research questions. They were informed that the study will be published, and it was explained that all replies will be handled confidentially. The respondents were offered to decide time and place for the interviews within a timeframe of the nine days the researcher was in Geiranger. They were assured to be given the opportunity to proofread and make changes in the translated English version of their replies.

A second e-mail was sent a few weeks later with the purpose of preparing the respondents for the interviews. It repeated some of the information above and encouraged the respondents to make contact if they had any questions or if they would feel uncomfortable having their replies recorded, as recommended by Hay (2016, p. 163). No feedback was received, and all interviews were ultimately recorded. Furthermore, the e-mail also included an interview guide containing suggested interview questions categorized in themes of innovation and cooperation in tourism development. The purpose of this was to prepare the respondents by asking their perspective on these particular topics in an accessible way.

3.3 Execution

This section presents the executive part of the research process in three steps. These are interviewing followed by the processing and analyzing of data.

3.3.1 Interviewing

The interviews took place in December 2019. Two took place in the respondents’ workplaces and two in the respondent’s homes in Geiranger. The fifth interview took place in a café in the nearby city Ålesund. Private and quiet settings are favorable when conducting interviews as it is easy to hear what is being said, as well as difficult to be overheard by others which creates trust (Hay, 2016, p. 443). Qualitative research touches on the lives of others and it is difficult to estimate what consequences this study will have for the respondents, for example by

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changing social dynamics where they live (ibid., p. 29-31., Bryman, 2008, p. 120). Geiranger is a small town and it is difficult to stay anonymous. Although this study does not touch on harmful or very sensitive topics, effort has been made to protect the respondents’ privacy. This is why the respondents had the possibility to pick the time and location for their respective interviews. The purpose of this was to create a context where they felt safe and comfortable to speak their mind. In order to protect the respondents from any negative consequences related to their participation, the researcher aimed at being as transparent about the research process as possible and handle the data confidentially by coding it and keeping it away from public access. However, the respondents agreed for their workplace to be published.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews let conversation flow seamlessly in the direction of what the informant found to be relevant and important. The interview guide was helpful in referring back to the core focus of the study as it was challenging not to get carried away at times. The interview guide was used with more flexibility with each interview as the researcher’s confidence as an interviewer increased. This pattern of more openness may have had an impact on the flexibility on the replies of the respondents. Open as well as follow-up questions of mainly probing-, and specifying nature was used to avoid asking leading questions, which was challenging not to do at times (Bryman, 2008, p. 446-447). I found that interpreting questions, despite the intention of checking the validity of my understanding, could seem leading as well. This may have had an influence on what direction the conversation went, but that is also, to some extent, one of the ideas with semi-structured interviews to some extent.

No written notes were taken during the interviews in order to allow full focus on what was being said and to create a less formal atmosphere so the informant could feel more relaxed and speak freely. Although, written notes may be useful to remember gestures and facial expressions that helps interpret what has been said. In overall, the researcher tried to stay attentive and responsive to the respondents replies. That is why most of the interviews were conducted with some days in-between, to allow enough time to regain full focus (Bryman, 2008, p. 446-447, 456). Two of the interviews were conducted on the same day, which may have affected the results. The researcher was aware of this and took a few hours break in-between to re-energize.

3.3.2 Transcribing

The interviews generated large volumes of relevant data and proved to be a good method to explore the complexity of the respondents’ perception on local cooperation and innovation. This is a typical feature of qualitative interviews (Hay, 2016, p. 150-151). The recorded interviews were transcribed immediately, except for in one case when two interviews were conducted in the same day. The purpose of this was to have a fresh memory of the conversation, including body language and energy of the informant, as recommended by Hay (2016, p. 170). This was a time-consuming process as every interview took approximately four to five hours to transcribe.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish, which is the researcher’s language. One respondent replied in Swedish and four in Norwegian. All replies were transcribed directly into Swedish and memos of these translated into English. The reason for transcribing in Swedish is because it would be too time consuming to keep to the original language, especially since the
dialect in Geiranger varies in spelling. Translation makes it difficult to reproduce the interview in written form, as transcriptions includes not only what has been said, but how (Hay, 2016, p. 170). Because I have lived in Norway for seven years and have sufficient Norwegian skills and the respondents are used to working and communicating with Swedish seasonal workers, I judged that this was a correct decision. In reproducing how the respondent spoke, I had to translate not only words but expressions and tones. Specific words may have different meanings in Swedish and English. For example, the Norwegian word kjekt can mean both fun and nice in English. Awareness of these linguistic nuances is important when it comes to interpreting what is being said. Such words and expression have been noted in the transcripts (Bryman, 2008, p. 496).

In order to overcome issues with translation and ensure the trustworthiness of a study, one may process data through a number of checking procedures before the final result (Hay, 2016, p. 126-127, 173). A number of checking procedures were conducted in this study. Firstly, the respondents were asked to read and comment on the translated material. Secondly, peer review was done on two occasions during seminars held at Uppsala University. It was important to ensure that all respondents had sufficient English- and Swedish skills to understand the translations. Overall, I did not experience any issues with this. Although checking procedures aim to improve level of credibility and validity, it may result in censorship that has the opposite effect. One informant asked to make changes in her replies, as well as removing quotations that she felt could harm or upset people in the village. In this way, some information was lost which ultimately may have had an effect on the final result.

3.3.3 Analyzing
The process of analyzing data started during the transcription process by taking notes as well as summarizing their content in memos that were quick and easy to interpret. This was an efficient way to reflect on the content throughout the process, for example by noting similarities and differences between replies. The purpose of coding and analyzing processes is to make out a meaning of what has been researched, thus analysis happens naturally throughout the whole process (Hay, 2016, p. 374).

It was challenging to identify what data was directly relevant to the research questions. At first, it seemed overwhelming to abstract information from large volumes of transcribed material. It proved helpful that an analytical approach to the material was adopted at an early stage as stated above. Initially, I perceived there was a lot of interesting, but perhaps irrelevant information. Taking the time for the abstraction process was crucial as it involved reflection on the meaning and relevance of the content (Hay, 2016, p. 379, 381). This was enhanced by mapping out the data visually. The transcribed material was printed, and individual sections of quotes cut out. All text was cut out at the start. These were categorized into piles representing some degree of content cohesion, for example tourism products, societal development, relationships and so on. These were then re-grouped several times in order to identify new connections and dimensions. The initial number of categories were around twenty, which was ultimately narrowed down to three main themes. Subcategories were identified in the same way before everything was transferred into written text.
The material went through checking procedures with peers and the supervisor of the study, in order to improve the quality of the text. At this stage, special attention was given to present the data in a comprehensive way so it can be understood easily, as recommended by Hay (2016, p. 374). The data was analyzed based on two approaches, grounded-theory and thematic analysis. The grounded theory approach is evident in the inductive way of relating and analyzing based on the findings of the study and compare these to the work of others. Any theories and discussions are based on data and previous research and theory, rather than predetermined hypothesis and statements (Bryman, 2008, p. 541, 544-555). The thematic approach came naturally after the unexpected turn of data focusing on the societal development-dimension of tourism development in Geiranger. The thematic approach was helpful in the coding process in order to cluster phenomena in cohesion. It added value in coding thematically, which gave new insights than coding only according to themes of previous research. The result is an analysis containing elements of both strategies, explaining phenomena thematically as well as grounded theory.

3.4 Trustworthiness

Qualitative methodology is naturally prone to subjectivity as it is characterized by personal involvement (Hay, 2016, p. 30). Every researcher is influenced by personal experiences and opinions, as well as societal norms and brings these into each part of the research process. At the initial stage of the study, I held a pre-conception that cruise-tourism would be a sensitive topic for the respondents and so, I tried to avoid touching on that question. However, this assumption changed during the first interviews and these questions became a natural part of the story which the respondents wished to share. Intersubjectivity may impact interpretation (ibid, p. 384-385. The issue of subjectivity makes evaluating validity in qualitative research complicated. This is because it would be impossible to reproduce a qualitative research process fully transparently due to its situation-dependence (ibid, p. 414-415).

In order to deal with the issue of subjectivity, critical reflexivity has been applied throughout the research process. By becoming self-aware of one’s position and subjectivity it is possible to evaluate and critically reflect on decisions made during the research (ibid, p. 39, 41, 411). The issue of subjectivity as well as that of power is deepened because of the fact that my personal connection to Geiranger as a former resident and worker in the tourism industry. There is a risk this creates an asymmetric relationship between researcher and respondent, where one has power over another (ibid, p. 35-37). However, the fact that I am no longer living or working in Geiranger reduces the risk of a potential power imbalance. On the other hand, this connection gave me the advantage of a good understanding of the local culture and research context. I experienced this as especially helpful when interpreting the data. Overall, I found the strategy of critical reflexivity very useful, especially in the abstraction process of the research. This resulted in that the information used in the study was chosen in a more reflective and critically aware manner and the text was modified accordingly.

It may be complicated to assess the validation and reliability of this study due to its subjective and interpretative nature, which is typical for qualitative research (ibid, p. 409). When assessing trustworthiness in a qualitative study, one may look into the criteria for credibility, dependability and transferability (ibid, p. 412-413). This study aims to increase
credibility through repeated checking procedures of data and text with respondents, peers and a supervisor. Further credibility could have been attained if the study included additional method and/or data, so called *triangulation* (Bryman, 2008, p. 378). The attempt of transparency aims to improve trustworthiness (Hay, 2016, p. 413-415). This study is not to be used for generalizing and it is possible that a similar study in another time could produce different result. It does however give sufficient and in-depth insights that answer the research questions, which is why this methodology was applied.
4. RESULT

This chapter presents data collected from five interviews conducted with local tourism firm owners and managers in Geiranger. It is divided into three sections problematizing seasonality, describing main features as well as challenges and contradictions with innovation and cooperation to develop tourism and combat seasonality.

The respondents of this study argue that sustainable tourism and societal development must put an end to mass tourism. Thus, combating seasonality to achieve a well-balanced and all-season tourism is considered the main objective of Geiranger. In order to achieve this, they believe in attracting new tourism segments by adding tourism value to the winter season, as well as positioning Geiranger as a green tourism destination. The capacity of local cooperation and innovation processes depend on the quality of internal positive opportunity recognition and risk-taking ability, relationship between tourism firms and other actors as well as institutional support. Although agreeing on most points, the respondents agree the phenomena is complex.

4.1 Combating seasonality

Respondents believe the main key feature to achieve sustainable tourism and societal development in Geiranger is combating seasonality. They main reason for this is that seasonality does not promote all-season, but seasonal employment. This has a negative impact on the community and the respondents problematize that population numbers in Geiranger are already small. *If we don’t have residents we don’t have anyone to take care of the world heritage* (Respondent 3). Three respondents express concern that there are only six children in the local kindergarten today and only 19 children in the school. Although, respondents agree that seasonal workers contribute to the community through added competence and social dynamics, there is an issue with their impermanency because they do not settle down and contribute to sustainable societal development. Respondent 4 reasons:

> Perhaps we would have different kinds of people here if we had all year tourism, who wants to live here and maybe start a family. Then we would have more children in school and kindergarten. People who can contribute to the village

Thus, there is consensus among the respondents that combating seasonality to achieve all season is their main goal. *The objective has to be that more local firms stay here all year and run their business all year, because that gives workplaces and the residents we need* (Respondent 2). They believe that creating tourism value in the off-season will generate income that provides more freedom to break free from seasonality dependence as the need to make profit in the high season will decrease. This is how the respondents aim to achieve societal and environmental sustainability by combating seasonality.

Furthermore, additional reasons why respondents view seasonality as undesirable are environmental and safety aspects of mass tourism. Insufficient infrastructure to cope with the large volumes of visitors during summer as well as high levels of pollution from cruise ships and traffic, has a negative impact on the well-being of local residents and the natural
environment. We cannot let there be chaos on the roads causing accidents, and blue smoke cannot lay like a lid on Geiranger because then we will get sick (Respondent 2). Again, it is argued that strategies to combat seasonality is not motivated by maximized financial profit but connected to environmental impact and well-being among local residents such as more family time during the summertime. If we begin to let mass tourism up here and focus on the highest volume and profit possible, then this place will quickly fall apart (Respondent 2).

Although, some respondents express concern for all season tourism as they enjoy the quiet off-season which offers time to rest and restore after the hectic summers. One respondent suggests that the excess free time in off-season works cohesively and strengthens cooperation culture in the community which benefits tourism firm development. This suggest a contradiction where respondents would like to put an end to seasonality due to its intensity but wish to do so through tourism development. Respondents address this contradiction by motivating a well-balanced all-season tourism with an even volume of visitors throughout the year. There has to be a balance. If there is to be activity in winter, it might have to be less in summer. I think it is going to be very weary for people if it is going to be full on all year (Respondent 4).

Lastly, respondents believe that the key feature to combat seasonality is a common understanding for the phenomena and shared objective of a well-balanced all-season tourism. If we are going to care for Geiranger (…) we must unite and maintain a common understanding for our heritage and not only focus on volume and money (Respondent 2). They believe the issue of societal development and seasonality affects all local residents and thus, serves as a common cause which has a cohesive effect on the community. This shared understanding may therefore promote cooperation culture between tourism firms to develop tourism and combat seasonality.

4.2 Main features of cooperation and innovation
This section explains how local tourism firm owners in Geiranger describe local cooperation and innovation processes as a way to develop tourism and combat seasonality. These are paradoxical innovation capacity, cooperation through co-creation of tourism products, institutional policy making and regulations and networking to promote destination-based competence.

Firstly, respondents express an innovation capacity paradox in relation to the objective of an all-season tourism. They argue that innovation hampers innovation because of lack of time during high season and absent colleagues and employees in the off-season. Due to seasonality most tourism firms expand their labor force in high season but as most development work takes place in the off-season; they are left to carry it out alone. At the same time, respondents argue that low demand in off-season may stimulate innovation by forcing tourism firm owners to think in different directions to attract customers. As tourism firm owners in Geiranger attempt to combat seasonality by expanding the season, they reflect on innovation capacity in this new context absent of the certain visitor flow during summer. It has been easy to start a business in Geiranger during summer. It’s almost like you only have to open the door. It is so much people during summer so you will make money, but the winter has no people. You have to do something different (Informant 4). One informant has observed that other and less popular tourism
destinations in the region seem to maintain a higher level of innovation. This is why she believes that the period where Geiranger aims to transition into all-season tourism may stimulate innovation, simply because the new context will demand change from firms.

Secondly, local tourism firms in Geiranger view themselves as colleagues rather than competitors and have adopted a cooperative strategy to innovate to develop tourism. They believe that cooperation will be important to combat seasonality. *We don’t compete with our own region. We’re competing against other tourism destinations globally. The stronger we stand together with surrounding regions and products, the more attractive we become as a tourism destination* (Respondent 3). She says tourism firms in Geiranger have understood that they are all co-contributors and thus depend on each other to offer the complete tourism experience that is destination Geiranger. Tourists expect a variety of accommodation, activities and food experiences when they visit, and this is why a majority of the respondents agree cooperation is necessary to strengthen the destination. *I do not think anything works here long term if you do not try to cooperate with others* (Respondent 4). Cooperation between firms aims to add value to the destination and the respondents mentions *Taste of Norway*, a collaboration between Fjord Service, Geiranger Brewery and local restaurant Brasseriet Posten as an example of this. Together these firms offer a sight-seeing tour on the fjord including tasting of local beer and small dishes based on locally produced ingredients. Respondents believe that cooperation to create tourism value in winter is crucial to combat seasonality. They emphasize focus on locally produced products and nature-based experiences that show visitors what makes Geiranger and the region special. One respondent is involved in a rather new concept called Go Viking aiming at communicating nature-based and cultural winter activities in Geiranger *It is in line with our ethics and attitudes to join Go Viking because it is about creating a tourism product outside high season* (Informant 2).

Thirdly, some respondents argue that policy making and regulations on an institutional level may affect innovation capacity among local tourism firms. Two respondents relate this to developmental restrictions in Geiranger due to its world heritage status and/or geological features, such as limitations in housing construction due to risks of avalanches. In addition, one respondent who lives and works in a traditional smallhold protected by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage has turned the place into a small tourism firm specializing in cultural and historic storytelling and activities. *There are some restrictions when you live in a protected home. Luckily, it has not stopped or hindered development* (Respondent 3). The idea that regulations stimulate innovation is also discussed on a municipal to national level. The world heritage status has proved to be an efficient tool to catch the attention of local politicians to advocate for tourism development, such as the 2026 emission regulations on sea. Respondent 3 emphasizes the unique opportunity the heritage status brings as Geiranger stands before an opportunity to become a global fore runner as a zero-emission destination: *We have a unique chance to build a greener tourism and a greener destination, and that’s a possibility we won’t give away* (Respondent 3). She believes the green trend has the potential to strengthen Norway’s position on the global tourism market. Her professional role includes networking with other Norwegian tourism destinations which have shown to set similar environmental goals as those of the heritage fjords. Thus, identifying opportunities in regulation systems may positively
impact efforts aiming to combat seasonality, for example by focusing on a new tourism segment such as green tourism.

Lastly, respondents emphasize the importance of maintaining good relationship between local firm in order to promote cooperation that strengthens the destination. Networking is seen as a way to educate employees about the many tourism experiences and products the village offers. Because the firms view each other as colleagues rather than competitors, they believe that destination-based knowledge makes it possible to recommend their customers other products in a relevant way. This is why two respondents agree it is important to establish personal relationship to both firm and product in order to recommend them. *I want to be able to stand behind the quality I recommend* (Respondent 1). In order to achieve this, respondent 5 arrange an annual kayak tour free for receptionists in Geiranger. *We hope that a personal meeting with us will give a good impression, so they choose us first, and recommend us* (Respondent 5). Thus, building relationships through personal experiences is important to motivate cooperation that strengthens the destination.

### 4.3 Challenges and contradictions

The respondents identify four main challenges when it comes to cooperation and between tourism firms to develop tourism and combat seasonality. These are described as fear of change due to seasonality dependence, lack of institutional support, distrust to non-local firms and the intimate social context of a small community. These are all factors that hamper cooperation and innovation by either limiting relationship-based trust and/or risk-taking capacity.

Firstly, seasonality dependence stimulates negative attitudes to change among local tourism firms. High levels of seasonality in Geiranger forces many tourism firms to earn enough money during the few summer months to sustain them for the rest of the year. One informant argues for all season tourism but address this contradiction. *Our challenge is that many firms are dependent on the chaos during summer* (Respondent 1). Thus, any development that involve risks of reduced income or threatens their livelihood place firms in a vulnerable position and hampers risk-taking capacity. The respondents believe that most local firms value the well-being of the community before maximized profit, but financial uncertainty produce a fear of change. *Money is feelings, finance is feelings. There’s no doubt about that* (Respondent 2). One example of this is the discussions on reduced cruise tourism that preceded the 2026 emission regulations. Two respondents argue that although this was in line with local sustainability goals, it constituted a source of stress and worry for firms that depende on seasonal cruise tourism. *It is difficult to say how things will be. I understand that people are afraid and worried for the future. But, it about both parties respecting small conditions and that people are trying to make a living* (Respondent 1). The respondents express understanding for colleagues’ fear of change due to seasonality dependence and emphasize the importance of supporting and respecting each other through positive opportunity recognition. For example, one respondent argues that traditional family firms that are forced to reinvent themselves may motivate the younger generation to stay in Geiranger and eventually take over the firm. *It is healthy to think new thoughts and to develop one’s business. This is how you can make it attractive for the younger ones who wish to move home* (Respondent 3). Furthermore, in order to handle fear of change one of the respondents believe it is important to create forums for discussion where everyone
can feel respected and understood. This builds trust and anchor ideas of change in a safe environment.

Secondly, there is consensus among the respondents that Geiranger is lacking sufficient institutional support when it comes to tourism development and handling mass tourism. This hampers cooperation and innovation in two ways. The first one is that lack of sufficient infrastructure such as upgraded roads, more parking possibilities and public toilets impose safety as well as health risks with mass tourism in high season. The second reason is that current regulation systems for housing and building possibilities in Geiranger makes it difficult to move there. Lack of municipal support and investment hampers tourism development through limiting the capacity to handle the volume of visitors. Respondent 5 argues this makes local firm owners feel forced to step in as voluntarily heroes. One example she gives is feeling pressured to maintain the old tradition of salutation to the cruise ships, despite it being costly for the firm. She thinks the municipal should step and support the maintenance of old tradition: *It should not have to be our responsibility. We should not need heroes* (Respondent 5). Lack of institutional support may generate distrust and negativity between firms. On the other hand, respondent 3 has experienced positive cooperation with a municipal politician. She emphasizes the importance of involving the municipal in development work in order to raise local issues on a regional as well as national level. All respondents emphasize the importance of municipal support in development work.

Thirdly, distrust towards non-local tourism firms constitute an issue to innovation and cooperation. Relationship-based trust between local firms is rooted on the premises that they believe they want the best for each other and the community. Respondent 1 suggests this is why local tourism firms prefer to cooperate with one another, rather than non-local firms or external actors.

You will always recommend your good neighbor and colleague. You will ask the locals first, rather than contacting someone from the outside. You would rather call those you know contribute to Geiranger (...) in one way I think it is because you know the person, care about them and wish them well

Although, she argues this to be a matter of prioritization rather than dislike towards non-local actors. At the same time, two respondents argue that demotivation to cooperate with non-local firms is rooted in their adoption of a coping strategy to seasonality as they only operate in the high season. Some non-local firms are registered in other cities and do not pay taxes to the municipal of Stranda, to which Geiranger belongs. Respondent 1 argues that their non-involvement in innovation processes trigger distrust and frustration among local tourism firms:

You feel like you stand alone trying to develop the village. It is obvious, you see it today, who is living here and cares about the village and who come here from the outside to make money. You see that they are not trying to expand the season or contribute in any way

Furthermore, one respondent believes that this issue has stained local tourism firms’ motivation to promote cooperation outside the destination. A culture of distrust to outside actors hamper external cooperation to develop tourism and combat seasonality, such as with other tourism
destinations on a regional level. Two respondents agree that there is great potential in transforming this attitude and continue inviting external actors to local conferences and forums to share information and ideas. One points out that the neighbor town Stranda uses a number of nearby destinations in their marketing, including Geiranger, and suggest that tourism firms in Geiranger should do the same. *We cannot only keep ourselves within Geiranger. Perhaps this is where we should open up to cooperation* (Informant 5). This being said, respondents believe there is great potential for regional cooperation to develop tourism and combat seasonality, but stricter boundaries must be set to non-local firms that do not share this objective.

Lastly, the intimate social context of Geiranger is due to its small size. Respondents say cooperation and innovation to develop tourism and combat seasonality is sometimes hampered because of this. Because of its small population number, tourism firm owners find themselves taking on a number of roles within the community for example as parents, neighbors and colleagues. This social context can make it challenging to separate what is personal contra work related and can create tension between people. It may be easier to take things personally when sensitive topics are discussed. Because of this, respondents believe some people may not voice their opinion in fear of being judged or misunderstood. Although all respondents voice this concern, they express awareness of not only this issue but their own position. Respondent 3 says she often reminds herself not to take people and their opinion for granted just because they live in a small town and know each other well. *We have seen examples when people change their mind completely. People who used to be opponents to the green and the environment and that whole package, suddenly become environmentalists* (Respondent 3). All respondents agree that despite these difficulties, it is important to maintain a dialogue and discuss sensitive topics in order to move forward to develop tourism. In the end, they believe in the value to stand united in representing the destination. *When I speak negatively about Geiranger, first and foremost I speak negatively about myself, but I also speak negatively about the others and that’s not how we would like it* (Respondent 2). Thus, respect and awareness are the key factors to overcome challenges with the social context of cooperation and innovation processes in Geiranger.
5. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This chapter explains the data by referring back to previous research on seasonality, innovation and cooperation. The purpose is to understand how local tourism firms in Geiranger view these concepts as instruments to develop tourism and combat seasonality. In order to do that, this chapter addresses three paradoxes in local innovation, cooperation and tourism development respectively.

Firstly, there is the hypothetical question how all-season tourism would impact innovation capacity among local tourism firms. Innovation is said to be a key element to develop tourism and combat seasonality, driven by entrepreneurial attitudes such as positive opportunity recognition and risk-taking ability (Getz & Nilsson, 2004, Flagestad, 2006, Nybakk & Hansen, 2008). Despite challenges with fear of change due to seasonality dependence, tourism firm owners express high level of entrepreneurial attitude and motivation for innovation. This is evident as they develop new and locally produced tourism products that adds value to the current off-season, attracting a new audience. Their idea is that this type of innovation improves the overall quality of the tourism destination through its selection of products and experiences. This indicates that tourism firms in Geiranger follow a similar strategy to what Flagestad (2006) explains as transferring brand equity from one season to the others. In this way, local tourism firms in Geiranger use innovation as a tool to combat seasonality.

However, the paradoxical relationship between innovation and seasonality is evident as the respondents of the study discuss time and resources for innovation. Andriotis (2005) suggests that seasonality hampers innovation capacity because of the hectic and time-consuming high season. Respondents of this study agree and confirm that innovation processes generally take place during off-season for this reason. Furthermore, it was argued by one of the respondents that efforts at extending the tourism season demand creativity to attract visitors, which may promote innovation. On the other hand, the migration of non-local firms, and their employees, is identified as a challenge to cooperative strategies for innovation. The respondents express frustration that development work is left to the few actors left in off-season. The off-season may indeed be negative to innovation because of the absence of employees which is an important feature to promote innovation. This shows the complexity of the innovation system and again, raises the question how all-season tourism would impact innovation. Based on the perspective that off-season promotes innovation, it is likely to suggest that an expanded tourism season will negatively impact innovation capacity. Respondents address this by suggestion that the all-season tourism is to be a well-balanced one in which mass tourism is restricted. This study has not been concerned with how balance in all-season tourism is to be achieved, although it is a crucial aspect for local tourism firms’ goal to promote sustainable development in Geiranger.

Secondly, there is the potential of improved cooperative strategies to develop tourism and combat seasonality related to non-local tourism firms and external actors such as other tourism destinations in the region. This study relates to previous studies that portrays cooperation to promote innovation as a driving force for tourism development (Nybakk & Hansen, 2008, Rønningen, 2010). In fact, local tourism firms in Geiranger cooperate with one another to
achieve innovation explained in the previous section. Relationship-based trust as described by Denicolai (2010) indeed showed to be an important feature motivating cooperation between local firms and the lack of such may explain the demotivation to cooperate with the non-local ones. In Geiranger, it would seem that the level of contribution to the sustainable societal development of the community is the key trust-building factor. Tolstad (2014) argues that cooperation may help in overcoming obstacles in development. The respondents of this study believe that cooperative processes may aid challenges with fear of change and intimate social context by providing safe forum to discuss and implement ideas. They emphasize the importance of having a cohesive and common goal to refer to, as well as show respect and understanding for varying degrees of seasonality dependence. Referring back to Figure 3, cooperation between tourism firms is a process that occurs within the core system of the destination (Flagestad, 2006). Non-local tourism firms would also be placed in this core system, but due to their seasonal nature they are not part of tourism development in the same way as the local firms. This suggests that there is great potential in cooperation between these firms and that they make use of their resources, but the issue is that they have adopted a coping strategy to seasonality. Conflicting approaches to seasonality are considered a key issue with cooperation (Fountain et. al., 2011). In this case, cooperation with non-local tourism firms would supposedly counteract efforts at combating seasonality as these firms are seasonal by definition. Even if there would be ways to motivate their involvement, it is not likely that such efforts would be realistic in terms of time and energy. Instead, as the respondents, suggest there may be potential in cooperating with other destinations in the region. It is likely that such efforts would fundamentally change the arena in which destination Geiranger operate. Again, referring back to Figure 3, it would mean the implementation of the section of external resources. In this way, it is possible that tourism firms in Geiranger could attempt all-season tourism with more muscle. Networking with other destinations could trigger a higher level of innovation and be an important source of inspiration and exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, if Geiranger more actively pursued cooperation with other destinations that have all-season tourism it could greatly promote the objectives of Geiranger to achieve the same.

Lastly, this study describes a paradox in that local tourism firms aim to combat seasonality with a strategy based on tourism. According to the respondents, all-season tourism is both the objective and strategy of combating seasonality. This raises the question of what came first, the Phoenix or the flame? What is supposed to be achieved first, all-season tourism or all-season jobs and permanent residents? The key objective for all-season tourism is said to be societal development, namely, to overcome the negative socio-economic impacts of seasonality due to impermanent residents (Su et. al., 2019, Martín Martín et. al., 2017). At the same time, respondents in this study emphasize how financial uncertainty related to combating seasonality hamper risk-taking ability in local firms. All-season tourism aims at transferring value from high season to remaining seasons (Flagestad, 2006). The issue is that this is related to major financial risk for the combating firms. This suggests that it would be complicated to start extending the tourism season by hiring more staff due to financial strain. This would put tourism firm owners in a vulnerable position and this study suggests that this level of risk-taking does not exist. On the other hand, promoting all-season tourism primarily would contradict statements in the previous two sections as it would cause a lot of stress on the individual firm
owners that are left to deal with development alone. Again, respondents address this by emphasizing that tourism development in the shoulder and off-season must be of a well-balanced nature, with an even flow of visitors. Hjalager (2009) and Clydesdale (2007) argue that institutional involvement may aid tourism development, the latter suggesting this can help regulate crowd-control. This may be an important aspect in local attempts at combating seasonality. The respondents say they lack municipal support to handle mass tourism. According to Getz and Nilsson (2004) this could suggest that firms that have adopted a coping strategy to seasonality would be more affected by this challenge than those who try to combat seasonality. Or perhaps, the latter would be worse affected in a transitionary period where effort is needed to combat seasonality while still operating under high levels of seasonality. Although, there is a possibility that if successfully achieving an all-season tourism this challenge would have less meaning as the impact of mass tourism would decrease. The question is whether institutional support should focus on efforts made to cope with seasonality issues identified in this study, or combat seasonality to best promote local and sustainable development. Furthermore, it should be said that even if local tourism firms in Geiranger actively attempt at combating seasonality, it is not likely it will be a quick process. This means that even if the transition period from one to all-season tourism may generate uncertainty among local firms, it is likely that off-season tourism will transition slowly which gives time to adapt to new circumstances. During this period of extended opening hours and extended seasons, it may be useful for local tourism firms to explore possibilities of cooperation in sharing resources, such as staff, to promote financial and organizational stability.
6. CONCLUSION

This study found that local tourism firms in this study are incorporated in a complex innovation system in which they aim to develop tourism and combat seasonality to achieve all-season tourism. This concluding chapter refers back to the research questions and relates these to the findings of this study.

Firstly, innovation and cooperation between local tourism firms is used to promote tourism development. This is first and foremost through the development of new tourism products and experiences or by raising the quality of existing ones. The purpose of this is to strengthen the tourism destination by offering visitors a broader choice of activities and services.

Secondly, this study has identified four main challenges to innovation and cooperation for tourism development in Geiranger. These are fear of change, lack of institutional support, distrust to non-local firms and the intimate social context of a small community. These challenging features of local cooperation and innovation hamper these processes which ultimately has a negative impact on tourism development as it is desired by the local tourism firms of this study. Although, the respondents’ express awareness and insight in these obstacles and do generally show a positive attitude to innovation and cooperation between firms as they view each other as colleagues rather than competitors.

Lastly, it was found that local tourism firms in Geiranger believe that present innovation and cooperation strategies for tourism development may be transferred onto shoulder and off-season to combat seasonality. These strategies involve promoting all-season and winter activities and thus expanding the tourism season. An important feature of this strategy is the local tourism firms shared objective and understanding that tourism development and means of combating seasonality should aim to promote sustainable societal development of Geiranger.

There is indeed a strong enthusiasm among local tourism firms in developing their community, and this study show the complexity of the process of becoming an all-season tourism destination. The respondents call for a well-balanced all-season tourism with an even flow of visitors in order to overcome challenges with innovation and cooperation processes, present-day seasonality as well as avoiding a future situation of constant mass tourism. The question is what a well-balanced all-season tourism means and how it is best achieved.

In conclusion, this study has explored how local tourism firms in Geiranger view innovation and cooperation as ways to develop tourism and combat seasonality. Although this study does not aim to make any general assumptions on seasonality and tourism development, it constitutes an important and relevant source of insight to these processes from the perspective of local tourism firm owners. As local tourism firms in Geiranger stand before opportunities of major tourism development in terms of green and winter tourism, it is an exciting time to follow their combat on seasonality. Based on the findings of this study, it may be argued that addressing challenges that put tourism firms under high financial risk and uncertainty is a crucial element of future development. Future research may aid in this matter by exploring how institutional policy making can aid tourism development by taking on a coping contra combating strategy to seasonality. Furthermore, future research on tourism seasonality may focus on cooperative strategies that involves sharing resources to overcome the transitioning period from one to all-season tourism.
7. REFERENCES


**Presentation of respondents**
Respondent 1, 32 years, co-owner of a tourism firm in the service industry, 051219
Respondent 2, 47 years, co-owner of a tourism firm specialized in cultural experiences, 051219
Respondent 3, 44 years, director of a local tourism site and foundation, 061219
Respondent 4, 29 years, co-owner of a tourism firm in the service industry, 091219
Respondent 5, 30 years, manager of an outdoor activity firm and camping site, 131219

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Fjordsenter. (2020c) “Geiranger Verdsarvfjord Kart.”


APPENDIX

Intervjuguide

Om dig och din verksamhet

Namn, ålder, kön
Var arbetar du? Hur länge har du arbetat där?
Är du bosatt i Geiranger? Om ja, hur länge har du bott i bygden?
Berätta kort om ditt arbete och din roll i organisationen
Hur många ansatta är det (cirka) i organisationen? Låg- respektive högssäsong?
Vilken produkt eller service är det din organisation levererar?

Innovation

Vad betyder begreppet innovation för dig?
Har din produkt eller service förändrats de senaste åren? Hur?
Vilka egenskaper anser du viktiga för att utveckla en turistprodukt eller service?
Vilken kompetens anser du viktig för detsamma?
Vad motiverar dig och dina ansatser att tänka innovativt?

Samarbete och nätverk

Vad betyder begreppet nätverk för dig?
Berätta om hur din verksamhet kommer i kontakt med andra bedrifter i bygden
Vilka möjligheter, stöd och, om, positiva attityder har du erfarenhet av dessa tillfällen?
Vilka svårigheter, motgångar och, om, negativa attityder har du erfarenhet?
Vilka egenskaper anser du viktiga för lyckade samarbeten mellan lokala aktörer?
Vilken kompetens anser du viktig för detsamma?

Innovation & samarbete i turistdestinationen Geiranger

Hur upplever du att turistdestinationen Geiranger arbetar innovativt för att utveckla turismen i området?
Hur kan den förbättras?
Hur upplever du att din verksamhet bidrar till detta?
Vilka utmaningar möter du?

Egna reflektioner

Har du någon annan punkt du vill lyfta och tycker är viktig? Något ing jag inte tagit upp?