

# Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere as an Arena for Sustainable Development

#FromTalkToAction #ThinkGlobalActLocal #TheFutureWeWant

Inger Elisabeth Måren, UNESCO Chair at the University of Bergen (UiB)

Organizers: The UNESCO Chair at UiB, the Norwegian UNESCO Commission, Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere and the UN Association of Norway

*We read daily in the media about climate change, loss of nature and biodiversity, erosion, marine pollution and over-harvesting. But does this also happen here at home? To reach the UN Agenda 2030 - an action plan for humanity, the earth and our wellbeing - we must stimulate new knowledge development by linking local initiatives to national and international strategies, and by seeing people and nature in context. We need to change the way we live: How we produce, consume resources and interact with each other - and with nature. And we must act now! What does sustainable development mean in action for municipalities, businesses, individuals and local communities in our region?*

On Day Zero of the Bergen SDG Conference 2020, Storelogen at Kvarteret was crowded with more than 80 enthusiastic people eager to discuss Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere as an arena for sustainable development. The interactive workshop gathered stakeholders, politicians, managers, students and researchers from the Nordhordland region and Bergen to discuss and share ideas on how Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere can become a role model for sustainable development. By using the recently designated Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere as a case study for sustainable development, the workshop addressed issues related to the 2030 Agenda - to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The workshop was organized in two parts: 1) introductions and 2) discussions engaging all workshop participants.

## 1) INTRODUCTIONS:

- Tora Aasland, leader of the Norwegian UNESCO Commission. With her long experience working with sustainable development we were introduced to the establishment and primary role of UNESCO and UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere" programme.
- Lene Conradi, Mayor of Asker Municipality. Conradi leads a municipality that has worked on a reform of the politics and frameworks for its governance anchored in Agenda 2030. In Asker they have chosen to focus on six of the SDGs and have also implemented all SDGs in their framework.
- Sara Sekkingstad, Mayor of Alver Municipality. Sekkingstad described how the municipality valued the establishment of Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere Area, and how Alver was going to achieve the SDGs with this in mind. She underlined the need for connecting the global to the local, and to engage all the people living in the region. Only then, she said, we will manage to make sustainable development actionable.

All speakers addressed sustainable development practice in the context of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how this can affect municipal planning policy, and how Nordhordland as a region can benefit from the status as a UNESCO Biosphere. UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme (MAB) is in itself relevant to Agenda 2030, as biosphere reserves are model areas for sustainable development (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences>). Launched in 1971, UNESCO's MAB Programme is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.

## 2) DISCUSSIONS:

Representatives from municipalities, managers, aquaculture, agriculture and the energy sector, as well as researchers and students, were invited to discuss challenges and possible solutions associated with environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development in western Norway - focusing on local

sustainability in the Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere. By using a method developed by researchers at the Stockholm Resilience Center, coined “Seeds of Good Anthropocenes” (<https://goodanthropocenes.net>), we asked people to envision a realistic and optimistic vision of what the world can be. The justification for this entry point can be described with this quote from this group’s web-page: “Most days we are bombarded with dystopian visions of future calamity through the media and general conversation. The unprecedented pace of anthropogenic change certainly does raise valid and vital concerns about the future of our planet. But if we simply continue on the paths we are on, such visions run the real risk of becoming self-fulfilling.” Workshop participants were asked to 1) identify the sustainable future we want 50 years from now, 2) what existing initiatives (seeds) are here that support this sustainable future, and 3) which are the pathways and stepping stones to get from these seeds to achieve our visions of a sustainable future.

Participants were divided into groups according to three different topics:

- (1) The municipalities' role in ensuring sustainable development locally
- (2) Sustainable ocean in Nordhordland
- (3) Sustainable land in Nordhordland

Having this cross-disciplinary cooperation and discussion with different viewpoints on how to solve issues and reach particular visions was interesting and engaging. The methodology: “seeds of good anthropocenes” with the flower and the visualization was creative and worked well in guiding discussions in focused, constructive and positive directions. The discussions revealed concrete examples aimed directly at implementing the SDGs locally. This included sustainable construction work, a competence centre on marine littering, an innovation center for young people and much more.

The take-home message from stakeholders and researchers is that we need interdisciplinary cooperation, we need to materialize words into actions, and we need to spread and co-create knowledge so that everyone in a community knows they are a part of a collective action for the greater good of all. The take-home message by the students was to continue with such workshops because they gather people for interdisciplinary cooperation as it is important to share ideas to find good solutions for our common challenges in achieving sustainable management and development. An idea for the future could be to have a separate discussion for only students to open up to more student participation.

(1) Vision. **“We have thriving sustainable local communities where the inhabitants are proud of their Nordhordland region”**. This means being part of something bigger, all members of society are involved, there is more co-creation between municipalities, civil society and businesses, all pupils finish middle- and high school, “we walk the walk”, we have Biosphere ambassadors, all CO<sub>2</sub> is cleaned, “blue bybane”, the use of positive motivation measures, young entrepreneurship, diversified business, support young change agents, emphasis on building and nourishing collaboration and cooperation.

(2) Vision: **“Teaming life in rivers, fjords and ocean, and the submarine at Fedje is removed”**. This means changed attitudes towards pollution and waste management, more sustainable aquaculture, sustainable catch of wild fish, enhanced knowledge, incentives and planning for a healthier ocean, development of sustainable small-scale tourism, eco-tourism, nature as a source for well-being for the inhabitants of Nordhordland, use senior competency in novel ways in the communities, the ocean as a possible source of energy (off-shore wind), digital knowledge building, more cross-cutting and transdisciplinary research and education to meet future needs in complex systems.

(3) Vision: **“Sustainable land-use in all of Nordhordland”**. This implies more research and knowledge creation on multiuse of landscapes, knowledge-based decision making, climate neutral food production, restoring of some cultural landscapes, development of better composting and soil conservation measures, area positive politics avoiding habitat loss and fragmentation due to development, more small-scale farmers that have fulfilled economic sustainability, enhanced production of local food, Green Spot Mongstad, green shipping, diversified farming practices, mobilization of local resources and stimulation of green innovation, where the UNESCO Biosphere can be “the round table” for actors to meet, discuss and solve real-world problems in Nordhordland which can be scaled up across all of Norway and beyond.