Sporting events or nature conservation?

Sporting events or nature conservation?

Conflicts surrounding management of natural resources is the topic when the network Nordnatur gathers students for an intensive course at Hedmark University College.

The river Glomma lies frozen in blue January light outside the windows of Campus Evenstad directly south of Koppang in Østerdalen. Inside, 25 students from the Nordic and Baltic countries are sitting in groups and discussing.

Arvid Sloth, who is also Associate Professor at the Department of Forest and Landscape at the University of Copenhagen, is walking around and supervising the groups. They have 15 minutes left before going in to a new plenary meeting, and by then, they have to be ready to present their solutions. The groups, led by Norwegian master students, each have their own local conflict to work with throughout the whole course.

Today, there is theoretical preparation of field work which will take place later this week. What conservation challenges are connected to massive sporting events such as the long-distance mountainbike cycling race
Birkebeinerrittet? What considerations must be taken into account when wolves and gluttons are living in the same area as sheep and other grazing animals?

The course, which discusses altogether six local conflicts tied to nature management in Østerdalen, is called
Natural resource use in continental Norway ? conflicts and solutions, and awards five credits. The actual course in Østerdalen lasts for ten days, but in addition the students have net-based preparations and post-course work.

?Last year, this intensive course was a great success for us, and that is why the network chose for us to repeat it. We are very proud that the intensive course received Hedmark University College?s award for good learning environment for 2010?, says Barbara Zimmermann, who is a lecturer and international coordinator at Campus Evenstad and the coordinator of the network.

Problem-based learning with real cases, the involvement of master students and good feedback from the course participants were important reasons for receiving the award.

Nordnatur is a network consisting of 13 institutions of higher education from all Nordic and Baltic countries. It is supported through Nordplus Higher Education and was established in 2006. It was Hedmark University College and Barbara Zimmermann who initiated the cooperation, and Zimmermann is still the coordinator and a central figure in the network.

?The professional field
natural resource use has relatively few students and it is very useful for us to cooperate with our neighbouring Nordic and Baltic countries. In total, we have great professional competence concerning most natural environments that are represented in Northern Europe.?

Arvid Sloth from Copenhagen is very satisfied with the network, and points out that connections and personal initiative are important for this kind of network to function.

?We have a yearly network meeting that the partners take turns to host, and this is absolutely essential for a fruitful cooperation. Even though the course has its starting point in local natural resource conflicts, it still contains a breadth of topics which makes it very relevant for all the

participants.?

The idea behind the intensive course has always been for it to cycle between the partners. Next year, it is the University in Rovaniemi in Finland?s turn to host the course. The topic is the same, but of course the conflicts up for discussion will be different.

TEXT AND PHOTO: KJETIL MYKLEBUST/SIU

TRANSLATION: TONE NILSEN/SIU

Arvid Sloth supervising the students JP Rantonen (left) from Finland, Yvonne Østebø from Norway, Andre Purret from Estonia and Vesa Miettunen from Finland

DenmarkEstoniaFinlandIcelandLatviaLithuaniaNorwaySweden

See Nordnatur's website: http://prosjekt.hihm.no/nordnatur/