

Nordic Cooperation to create Multifunctional Golf Courses and Healthy Ecosystems

A multifunctional golf course views its activities from the perspective of the broader public. In addition to a high quality arena for golf, it provides various services that are beneficial to society at large, for example increasing biological diversity, conserving natural and cultural environments and providing a venue for a wider range of outdoor activities, without compromising safety.

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Introduction and background

People in the Nordic countries greatly value their rich natural environment, and outdoor activities are an important part of their life. Access to natural areas and cultural environments close to densely populated areas is important to the well-being of people. Outdoor life leads to good quality of life and better health as well as enhanced environmental consciousness. Our living conditions are influenced by our ability to live together with the ecosystems and depend on our ability to utilise them without destroying them. Sustainable management of the natural environment for the purpose of protecting natural processes and the value of the cultural landscape must be achieved (NMR 2008, Government offices of Sweden 2006).

Golf is a land-demanding sport that occupies more than 60 000 ha in the Nordic countries. The Nordic golf associations have around 900 000 members who play golf on just over 900 golf courses (STERF 2009). Golf courses have several roles to play in addition to providing playing surfaces for golf. Considering golf from an outsider's perspective, it can be seen that golf courses can provide a wide range of services that should be exploited, promoted and developed.

The hypothesis of this project was that the development towards an increased multifunctionality will help to maintain the values of ecosystem services and increased awareness of existing and future recreational functions of golf courses.

Results and case studies

The project shows that a multifunctional golf course views its activities from the perspective of the broader public. In addition to offering a high quality arena for golf, it provides various services that are beneficial to society at large, for example increasing biological diversity, conserving natural and cultural environments and providing a venue for a wider range of outdoor activities, without compromising safety.

The authorities in the Nordic countries are demanding establishment of multifunctional golf courses, which can help to achieve environmental targets and help improve people's health and quality of life, particularly in areas around towns and cities where a large number of golf courses are located. The guide 'Multifunctional Golf Courses - An Unutilised Resource' published within the project has been sent to more than 1 000 politicians, civil servants and officials in the Nordic countries (Strandberg 2011). 60 percent responded of which 40 percent are interested in collaborating in order to create multifunctional golf courses.

For golf courses the multifunctional approach is profitable. It provides opportunities for additional streams of income, deeper roots in society through work on sustainable development, better collaboration with the authorities, environmental and recreational organisations as well as other sports clubs and gives a better public image and greater political support. In order for efforts to create multifunctionality, there is a need for good, effective cooperation in which all parties stand to gain.



Photo 1: Bikers and golfers share common grounds at Copenhagen golf club.

Accessibility

The accessibility of golf courses varies. A few courses are private and are therefore only open to their own members, but most are open to guests and the public.

Copenhagen Golf Club leases its land, which is located in Jägerborg Animal Park. The park is a large nature reserve with huge old trees and open areas where large numbers of visitors come to walk in the forest, play golf, cycle, jog or ride. Everyone has an equal right to be in the area and all show great respect for others. (*Photo 1*)

Collaboration

Collaboration is the most important factor in creating multifunctional golf courses. The cooperation must be adapted to the requirements and the specific challenges facing golf and other interests in the region. It must also encompass a range of interests such as local authorities, national authorities, sports and recreation groups, landowners, residents, industry and others.

Hässelby Golf lies in an old cultivated landscape in Stockholm. In 2005 a decision was made to restore and extend the facility's pond system. A far-reaching collaboration was set up including voluntary organizations, the county administration board, the local authority, the natural history museum, the university and others. All those with a possible interest in how the pond system was constructed were invited to give their opinion and share their knowledge and experience, which they all did for free. This not only resulted in a new pond system, but also gave the project a strong footing so that there was no opposition to construction of the ponds.

Biodiversity

A golf course is an artificial environment where biotopes such as pools and ponds, which have decreased drastically in the agricultural landscape, are restored and provide threatened species with new habitats.

Kristianstad Golf Club was given permission by the local authority to build an additional 18-hole golf course on condition that the club worked to achieve environmental certification of the courses. The outcome was inventories of plants, insects, birds, amphibians and bats in order to identify nature values and adjust its management of the roughs accordingly. The cultural heritage of the area was also documented. A maintenance plan was drawn up for the areas outside the playing surfaces. The measures are not expensive but they make a great difference to biological diversity in the area. The results are monitored through an annual inventory of the flora.

Conservation

Many golf courses have revealed their cultural monuments through setting up information boards and installing footpaths leading to these objects. Through collaboration with the Board of National Antiquities, museums and the local history society, golf clubs can obtain guidance and perhaps even practical and financial support for renovating or preserving ancient monuments and the history of the area.

Nes Verks Golfpark is the name of the golf course at Arendal & Omegn Golf Club. It is built on land used by the Nes Iron Foundry from 1665 to 1959. When the golf course was being planned, it was considered extremely important to preserve the rich cultural environments in the area. In addition to old buildings, industrial premises and machinery, there was a constructed pond and a romantic park from the 1800s, framed by the attractive cultivated landscape. The cultural heritage sites have been signposted and made easily accessible to golfers and to the public. Culture trails etc. have been installed and signposted in collaboration with the local history society and the Foundry Museum.

Further actions underway and intended

The aim of the next phase of the project is to increase the benefits of golf to society, help maintain the values of ecosystem services and improve the business gains from multifunctional activities through:

- Arranging workshops with representatives of golf courses in order to identify opportunities and challenges for multifunctionality.
- Arranging collaborative meetings with representatives of different interests in society.
- Carrying out an inventory of current knowledge with the aim of exploiting knowledge and experiences from related areas.
- Identifying important partners to jointly initiate and run R&D on multifunctional courses.

Literature cited

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