

Adapting
to Covid-19:

How local tourism businesses cope

Examples from The Wash and North Norfolk coast,
England and Geirangerfjord, Norway

«protect and prosper»



Photo with courtesy of Wildcraft Brewery.



university of
 groningen



Interreg
North Sea Region
PROWAD LINK

European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

Adapting to Covid-19 crisis

«protect and prosper»

Protect and prosper is the ethos of the EU Interreg project, Prowad Link. Prowad Link aims to unlock the potential of nature as a driver for jobs and sustainable development. This is achieved by working directly with Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to develop nature as a brand, creating mutual benefits for SMEs and the natural environment.

Partners from The Wadden sea World Heritage site (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands), Geirangerfjord section of the West Norwegian Fjords World Heritage site (Norway) and The Wash & North Norfolk Coast protected areas (United Kingdom) are working in collaboration to build knowledge about sustainable business operations in touristic nature areas and to develop sustainable products and services.

2020 has been characterised by the devastating effects of the Covid-19 crisis. In this report we highlight some of the coping strategies and solutions developed by tourism SMEs across the three focal sites and five partner countries.

We want to thank all the businesses who have kindly contributed to this research and report!

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Else Ragni Yttredal (NTNU)

Arron Wilde Tippett (NTNU)

Hellen L.A. Dawo (RUG)

Tom B. Long (RUG)



Photo: Else Ragni Yttredal.



Photo with courtesy of Mrs Temple's Cheese.

«People don't spend money going overseas... we are enjoying the benefits, September was 40% up on last September.

I went to the beach yesterday, the mobile caravan sites are absolutely jammed, the holiday cottages are jammed»

Adapting to Covid-19:

Mrs Temple's Cheese

Wighton village, North Norfolk Coast, England

«protect and prosper»

In short

Mrs Temple's Cheese is located within the North Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). A family owned business, Mrs Temple's Cheese, produces a range of artisanal cheeses primarily for the Restaurant and Events markets. They employ 14 staff from the local community and use waste from their dairy farm to provide energy to the village through their anaerobic digester. Their regenerative farming methods helps them to preserve and enhance the natural heritage and reduce environmental impacts.

Challenges due to Covid-19

Covid-19 has created a range of challenges for Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within or bordering Nature Protected Areas.

Customers

Due to the national lockdown and banning of large gatherings and events, Mrs Temple's Cheese main customers; pubs and restaurants and hotels have been significantly affected by the Covid-19 crisis, with national lockdowns forcing them to close their doors.

Space

Mrs Temple's Cheese usually offer group tours, with refreshments and option to some cheese. Due to the crisis, visits have been stopped, reducing interaction with the public.

Several jobs and responsibilities

Mrs Temple's owner and manager teaches NHS nurses and has therefore been working longer hours than usual in this job.

Solutions

Building a new customer base

"It is in my interest to preserve the culture; I have a tourism dependent business. I have to make sure that they feel welcome and have a good time."

Mrs Temple's cheese took an opportunity to engage with second home owners in the area who had moved temporarily to Norfolk to escape the risk of infection.

She replaced farm tours with "cheese cabaret" (a mix of entertainment and local food and drink tasting. Mrs Temple's Cheese side-stepped their space issue by using large local community spaces adapted to provide a safe environment for people to relax, interact with supervision and buy their product.

"The cheese cabaret... it terrified me because it was me that had to take off my mask and they all sat comfortably behind theirs."

She diverted workforce to prepacking portions to collaborate with local businesses expanding into vending machines, home delivery box schemes, online sales to provide minimal contact, service in local shops whose customer base expanded with temporary residents.

Key enabling factors

Parallel Processes

The owner and manager at Mrs Temple's Cheese is an experienced lecturer and public speaker, which gives her the expertise to engage in events to target new customers.

Social Capital

Mrs Temple's Cheese have strong links with the community through their regular presence in the local media, educational events, community activities, and also through providing electricity to their village via their anaerobic digester.

Make the most of your industry representative body!

The UK Government advice during the crisis has been described as hard to understand and inconsistent by small businesses in the Norfolk area. Mrs Temple's Cheese decided to make use of their representative body who provided clear interpretation of the advice, enabling Mrs Temple's Cheese to navigate the changeable rules and regulation throughout the lockdown and beyond.



Link to film about cheese making.



Facebook



«We had one week to adapt. People really do not understand what service production is about. Such a change is like a furniture manufacturer loosing their main product and having to set up new production lines in 2-3 weeks. It is almost impossible»

Adapting
to Covid-19:

Hotel Union

Geirangerfjord, Norway

«protect and prosper»

Union Hotel in short

Situated in the centre of Geiranger Village, Union Hotel is a large family run spa hotel and conference centre with a history dating back to the late 19th century. Union Hotel is open all year round, providing stable employment in the village.

Situated in the center of Geiranger village, the hotel has 197 rooms, 3 restaurants, spa department, swimming pools, bars.

Challenges due to Covid-19

The destination of Geirangerfjord is mostly based on international tourists coming by cruise, bus or as individual travelers. Norway was for much of 2020 summer season closed for international visitors and cruise visitors to the area were down to zero.

Uncertainty about the situation, when to open, how to cope with risk related to the spread of Covid-19 were some of the main challenges.

Customers

Having almost 80 – 90% international customers in summer season, many of which were group visitors, the hotel had to adjust to an all Norwegian market with individual travelers

In addition, to keep open all year round the hotel is dependent on the business market and larger events. This market also disappeared almost completely in 2020.

Staffing

Due to the uncertainty of the situation, whether, how and at what time to staff was one of the main challenges because staff is one of the main costs.

“Now we have in place infection control plans. They work. Then it is a question of how much staff we dare to take in, how many visitors we think will come and how we staff in relation to that”

Solutions

- › Early phase, removal of cancellations to make room for new (Norwegian) bookings
- › Checking and applying for public compensation measures
- › Change of food concept away from buffet breakfasts, lunch and dinners to menu orders
- › New procedures for infection control
- › New plans for staffing – also grouping staff to avoid an overall spread of Covid-19
- › New plans for cleaning, spa-department
- › Training of staff to adjust to Covid-19
- › New menus

Key enabling factors

- › Flexibility, work and will of owners
- › Compensation funds
- › Funds for training and competence building
- › Flexible national rules of furlough
- › Seasonal staffing - flexibility

Effects of Covid 19

- › Loss of 80-90% international visitors
- › Turnover down 43% public compensation measures not included
- › The hotel is the only hotel in the area open all year round. 2020 the hotel closed end of November, before the Christmas season

New food serving methods.
Photo: Malin Merok.



Link to film presenting the hotel
and the area.



Website





Photo: Else Ragni Yttredal.

“We actually had the whole season booked by foreigners. When the corona came, cancellations poured in. We had to stop our project with new pitches for motorhomes”

Adapting to Covid-19:

Vinje camping

Geirangerfjord, Norway

«protect and prosper»

Vinje camping in short

Vinje camping is a family owned camping site close to the centre of Geiranger. On the premises is a powerful water fall and a special cave in which it is possible to have barbeque or relax. The camping site includes 7 larger cabins – winter isolated, 4 small movable cabins, place for tents, motorhomes and caravans.

Challenges due to Covid-19

The destination of Geirangerfjord is mostly based on international tourists coming by cruise, bus or as individual travelers. Norway was for much of 2020 summer season closed for international visitors and cruise visitors to the area were down to zero. Uncertainty about the situation, when to open, how to cope with risk of the spread of Covid-19 were of the main challenges.

Customers

From having 80-90 % international customers very few of these were due to come in 2020, Covid-19 season.

Staffing

Due to the uncertainty of the situation, whether, how and at what time to staff was one of the main challenges.

Solutions

After first hesitating, Vinje Camping became quite active in redirecting their product toward the Norwegian market. The camping continued to build better pitches for motorhomes and invest in a bouncy pillow to attract Norwegian families. Other measures were:

- › Changing marketing from English to Norwegian
- › Actively reassuring their customers on their web site that they were taking the Covid-19 situation seriously
- › Providing antibacterial and other cleaning materials in the cabins and in the common areas
- › Writing an overview of what was open in Geiranger
- › Postponement of staff and less staffing

Key enabling factors

The owners of Vinje camping had already started thinking, planning and implementing changes in the direction made relevant during Covid-19 (bouncing pillow and pitches for motorhomes). The fact that they did not have all year-round employees except themselves made costs and work effort flexible. Their familiarity with the challenges of seasonality and adaptation to them was also an important factor.

Enabling factors in general were:

- › Geirangerfjord area’s attractiveness as a tourist destination
- › Clear dates set for opening for tourism by National Authorities
- › National campaigns urging Norwegians to travel in Norway
- › Flexible and instant help from government in case of furlough for employees. This saved business expenses

Effects of Covid-19

Spring season was cancelled (until June 20). At first the camping received cancellations from all foreign customers. Through summer customers were almost 100% Norwegian, except some Germans by end of July and beginning of August – when borders were opened. Season came to a full stop when the Norwegian schools started by mid August.

Turnover down by 35%.



[Link to film presenting the camping site](#)



[Website](#)



«When Covid-19 struck, the customer base disappeared»

«We were planning to open in March when the cruise ships arrived and if the weather conditions allowed to. Instead we opened mid-May only for weekends»



Photo Else Ragni Yttredal

Adapting
to Covid-19:

Westerås farm

Geirangerfjord, Norway

«protect and prosper»

Westerås in short

Westerås farm is a family owned and run combination of farm and tourism business. On the farm there are sheep, goats and lamas. The old farmyard in addition includes a restaurant in the barn, 5 cabins and 2 apartments for rent.

Challenges due to Covid-19

The destination of Geirangerfjord is mostly based on international tourists coming by cruise, bus or as individual travelers. Norway was for much of 2020 summer season closed for international visitors and cruise visitors in the area was down to zero. Uncertainty about the situation, when to open, how to cope with risk of the spread of Covid-19 was one of the main challenges.

Customers

From having 50-65% of guests in the restaurant from cruise ships, this was down to 0. All bus groups were cancelled.

Staffing

Due to the uncertainty of the situation, whether, how and at what time to staff was one of the main challenges.

Effects of Covid-19

- › Customers were almost 100% Norwegian, opposed to mostly international in 2019
- › Only individual travelers – not cruise or groups
- › Was in 2020 not part of an established value chain
- › Booking.com became even more important to attract Norwegian travelers
- › Shorter season – but longer than expected (June – mid October)
- › Turnover during summer season reduced by approx. 50%

Solutions

Westerås farm made no radical changes to their business due to Covid-19 but tried to make adjustments and find coping strategies. This included:

- › Postponement and minimization of staff
- › Contacted customers with pre-bookings to check if they wanted to cancel to open up for Norwegian customers
- › Network of cabin owners joined to discuss the situation
- › Kept up with the national Norwegian business association's recommendations
- › Destination is included in general advertisement to influence Norwegians to travel in Norway
- › Active on Facebook-group – “Vacations in Norway”
- › New procedures for cleaning of cabins and apartments
- › New procedures for the restaurant: Cleaning, serving of food, distance between tables, how to handle dirty dishes and waste food

Key enabling factors

- › Geirangerfjord area's attractiveness as a tourist destination
- › Familiarity with changes according to season and number of customers
- › Clear dates set for opening up of the tourism businesses (June 15, opening up for Norwegians, July 20 opening for international visitors)
- › National campaigns urging Norwegians to travel in Norway
- › No all year employees, except owners, made staffing flexible
- › Flexibility of owners – due to alternative jobs, extra working hours



Link to film from
the farm



Facebook



«We spent the first week panicking and the second week planning properly. We changed the business around into a customer drive through at the brewery and home deliveries. That has worked very well.»

Photo with courtesy of Wildcraft Brewery .

Adapting to Covid-19:

Wildcraft Brewery

Buxton, North Norfolk, England

«protect and prosper»

In short

Wildcraft Brewery is a micro-enterprise (2 staff) located in North Norfolk, 3 miles from one of the many protected areas along the North Norfolk Coast. Wildcraft is a community brewery with a pre-Covid-19 focus on selling to pubs and restaurants. Wildcraft's beers are lovingly made using locally foraged fruits and herbs to giving them a unique nature focused brand.

Challenges due to Covid-19

Covid-19 has created a range of challenges for Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within or bordering Nature Protected Areas.

Customers

Pubs and restaurants have been significantly affected by the Covid-19 crisis, with National lockdowns forcing them to close their doors. This eliminated Wildcraft's customer base overnight and left their invoices unpaid.

Sourcing

Sourcing outside of local supply chains has proved difficult during the crisis, specifically sourcing glass bottles.

Staffing

A staff of two has meant that during the crisis working hours have gone up significantly.

Space

Limited space within the brewery has meant that brewery tours have been postponed.

Solutions

Wildcraft Brewery changed their customer base overnight by switching from pubs and restaurants to home delivery.

Wildcraft overcame issues of limited indoor space by taking operations outside. They set up a drive-in shop and a pop-up pub in their carpark.

Key enabling factors

Parallel Processes

Wildcraft were already producing small volumes of bottled beer and therefore had the knowledge and experience of transition to their new customer base.

Wildcraft's community outreach work at pubs and restaurants, such as beer "tap takeovers", meant they had the training and certification required to set up and run a pop-up pub from their brewery.

Social Capital

Wildcraft's community focus meant that their glass bottle sourcing issues were buffered by their local customers returning their used bottles.

"This year I didn't have to go out at all foraging as people brought fruit and herbs to us for beer."

Wildcraft were able to continue to gather natural ingredients during the crisis. In fact, their close links with the community resulted in them receiving larger than usual volumes of fruit and herbs.

Drawbacks to solution

Overtime

Wildcraft beer by the bottle is taking 3 times as long to produce than beer cask or box production. This has meant long working hours for Wildcrafts hard-working staff of two.



Facebook



Website



«A lot of the skippers really invested in what we do, they believe in it, so there is an emotional connection to the company»

Adapting
to Covid-19:

The Coastal Exploration Company

North Norfolk Coast, England

«protect and prosper»

In short

The Coastal Exploration Company provides unique sail powered boat tours into some of North Norfolk Coast's most beautiful and pristine areas. Traditional, red-sailed whelk and crab boats are used to navigate the winding inlets along the coastline and provide each of their customers with a unique experience of the local natural and cultural heritage.

Challenges due to Covid-19

Covid-19 has created a range of challenges for Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within/bordering Nature Protected Areas.

Customers

A national lockdown forced CEC to close during the peak summer season, significantly reducing their annual income.

Government Support

Startup status has meant CEC has struggled to obtain financial support.

Space

Limited space on smaller vessels restricts the numbers of customers and types of product offers that CEC can provide.

Solution 1. Covid-19 Product

Development

A wellness sail has been developed which provides trips for individuals with a focus on relaxing:

"Taking individuals or a couple in an engineless boat and explain that it will move with the tide so that it is the force from the sun and the moon. Deep breathing, yoga, empty their minds".



Website with videos

Key enabling characteristics

Parallel Processes

CEC already has experience of providing relaxation sails for vulnerable people.

Social Capital

Positive relationships with national media, the Guardian, the Sunday Times and more, has allowed CEC to provide far reaching, high-end, marketing for their new wellness sail product.

Natural Capital

The North Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty enables CEC to develop products which expose their customers to "nature and its healing effect".

Human Resources

CEC employ "a whole mixture of skippers and that is what makes it really interesting and a rich mix for the clients".

Solution 2: Focus on Maintenance

One of CEC's biggest costs is maintenance. The Covid-19 crisis has meant that the boats are not being used, providing time for key maintenance and repairs. Staff have been using their own free time to help with boat maintenance.

Key enabling characteristics

Human Resources and Social Capital

CEC try to give their skippers a range of benefits which reward their dedication:

- Access to take their families out on CEC boats for free
- The opportunity to build their second careers using CEC, such as photoshoots for a model and writing opportunities for a budding journalist