



Sustainable destination development

Defining Sustainable Change

In 2015 five destination organisations in Sweden reported on the results of their involvement in Sweden's Sustainable Destination Development initiative.

The initiative had one clear goal over a four-year period: To strengthen and develop sustainable tourism destinations in Sweden.

Over forty regional and local organisations applied to take part in the initiative. In cooperation with VisitSweden, The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (national authority) selected the entries from Bohuslän, Kiruna, Stockholm Archipelago, Vimmerby and Åre. Each destination has its own unique character and its own developmental needs. All five destinations had goals that were specific to themselves in addition to their shared objectives.

All of the destinations realised the importance of improving organisational structures. They also saw that reaching out to, and engaging more proactively with the private sector is vital for future development.

As a result of the initiative the destinations have launched many activities covering several industries, and these have led to prolonged tourist seasons and increased numbers of visitors. Additionally, the participants have learnt new lessons, collaborated and shared best practices. The steering group, comprising the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and VisitSweden, underlined the importance of passing on lessons learnt as a result of the initiative to councils and destination organisations throughout Sweden.

Objectives shared by all participating destinations to prolong tourist seasons:

- ▶ Improve the quality in customer care and the hosting of tourists.
- ▶ Develop new and more sustainable products and services.
- ▶ Enhance overall accessibility.
- ▶ Attract a higher number of international visitors while remaining sensitive to overall sustainability issues, e.g. social and environmental factors.



**Find your unique strengths,
be brave and find the core and
soul of your destination.**

Project leader, Therese Sjölundh
- Åre Destination



A woman wearing a long brown coat, black boots, and a black hat stands on a large, grey rock formation. She is looking down and to the right. The background shows a calm sea under a bright, overcast sky. The foreground consists of more rocks and a sandy beach.

**Join forces and learn from
each other.**

CEO, Thomas Andersson
– Stockholm Archipelago

The path to success

The successful implementation of project activities had several common features.

All major stakeholders needed to agree on the defining characteristics of their destination. All parties realised the necessity of maintaining clear and concise communication to allow for effective learning and knowledge sharing. Key decision-makers such as politicians should be aware of the “whole picture” in order to get support for the projects. Project developers must have clear mandates and resources and stakeholders need access to all the necessary tools and resources, knowledge and support as they progress.

The **Bohuslän** project realised the importance of strong prioritisation and a focus on collaboration with companies with shared aims. Access to necessary tools and business model support was also of vital importance to the council.

In **Kiruna** one of the key contributing factors to success was the building of solid networks (locally, regionally and nationally), while access to expert knowledge was also highly valued.

Stockholm Archipelago needed a strong steering group; this was particularly necessary as a result of the high number of stakeholders involved. A solid common strategy and action plan was also crucial.

In **Vimmerby** a focused approach with momentum was achieved by making clear choices during the early stages of the project and prioritising them. Vimmerby also placed emphasis on creating a joint vision, and this then laid the basis of true collaboration between all involved – training activities supported implementation.

The **Åre** project saw that strong private sector engagement, backed by a solid organisational platform, was key. Åre also emphasised strengthening the defining characteristics of the destination.



**Income from tourism rose
from 619 million in 2013
to 678 million SEK 2015.**

Project Leader, Dharma Johansson,
Kiruna In Swedish Lapland/KLEF





**We learnt how important it is to give
companies the right tools and advice to
help develop their businesses sustainably.**

Head of Administration, Marie Linde
- West Sweden Tourism Board, Bohuslän



Key activities

VIMMERBY

1. Enhancement of the “gardens of Astrid Lindgren” experience.
2. Further development of tourism business services.
3. Development of high quality products and services.
4. Outlining a sustainability approach to enhance and certify sustainability of companies.
5. Training and development in hosting skills and knowledge.

STOCKHOLM ARCHIPELAGO

1. Establishment of a framework for action between eight municipalities and three regional organisations.
2. Creation of a joint communication platform (including website) and progression towards a “joint/shared destination identity”.
3. The development of 33 new destination products.
4. Development of a joint sustainability strategy.

BOHUSLÄN

1. A joint declaration of commitment by key stakeholders.
2. Sharing of know-how.
3. Product and service development.
4. Construction of a sustainable development strategy.
5. Bohuslän trademark development.

KIRUNA

1. Development of Kiruna Lapland’s sustainability programme.
2. Creating a full chain for accessibility and infrastructure (from finding the destination on the internet to making a booking, transport and signalling in all needed languages.)
3. A specific focus on space science and space-related tourism.
4. Collaboration with academia to secure a high-level of knowledge.
5. Identifying and outlining longer-term financing for tourism development.

ÅRE

1. Sustainability programme developed under the Global Sustainable Tourism Council destination criteria and Natural Step’s principles for sustainability.
2. Identification and development of new products and travel services.
3. Increase global awareness about Åre.
4. Identify competence gaps and fill them.

“When a large number of people start to share the same vision for a destination, things start to happen.”

Project leader, Patric Engqvist
– Vimmerby Municipality



Achievements and lessons to share

Truly innovative, the Sustainable Destination Development initiative has created new collaborations and enabled many far-reaching projects. From the promotion and appreciation of the cultural heritage of the Sami people in Kiruna to Åre's development of a vision of becoming Europe's most attractive year-round Alpine destination by 2020, a wide scope of achievements and projects have been realised.

By the end of 2015 around 150 new products were made available for the international market. The initiative also led to a greater understanding of international market demand and more collaborative agreements with international agencies regarding tourism were made. An increase in visitor numbers has been seen across the five destinations and a higher visibility in international media has been achieved.

Delivering sustainability goals (those with particular emphasis on the environment) were made possible through the application of two separate approaches. The first approach was to use a model from the Swedish Welcome organisation. This had a certification of its own and was followed by Bohuslän, Vimmerby and Stockholm archipelago. The second approach relied on the criteria laid out by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council; this was used by Åre and Kiruna.

Importantly, the project has helped to show the importance of developing sustainable destinations. It has also underlined the faults that may be encountered. The project highlighted the benefits of a national initiative, bringing credibility and status, as well as driving through concrete action. The five separate projects demonstrate how destinations can learn from each other and share their knowledge further.

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In 2012 five destinations across Sweden participated in Sweden's Sustainable Destination Development initiative. In 2015 the results came in. By sharing knowledge, clear communication and targeted activities, each location managed to raise international visitor numbers and develop programmes of sustainable development that were sensitive to both social and environmental factors. Now the lessons learnt from the experience of these five destinations will be shared with similar destinations in Sweden as they too look for year-round sustainable destination solutions.

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