



"Värmland waterway strategy"

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Varmland, Sweden – December 2007

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Summary

The Swedish section of the VNE project, Inland Waterways of Europe has consisted of a study carried out in Värmland, focusing on the archipelago in the northern part of Lake Vänern and the Vänern municipalities of Säffle, Grums, Karlstad, Hammarö and Kristinehamn. The main objective has been to make use of municipal development plans and previous EU projects to identify and propose a future development plan for the archipelago in northern part of Lake Vänern. This plan is intended to demonstrate how the area can be made more attractive for tourism.

On the basis of the experiences we have gained from our participation in the European VNE project, which has involved ten countries, we have chosen to focus in our study on a number of areas where we believe investment in the archipelago should be concentrated. These areas are recreation, meeting places, accommodation, visitors, attractiveness, the environment and accessibility. They have determined the direction of the study and have been the focus of our analysis of the strategies for developing the Vänern archipelago.

The northern Vänern archipelago differs from other archipelagos in Sweden in several ways. The primary difference is that the resident population on the island is small and thus there is a low level of basic infrastructure. Together with the restrictions that are in place, protected areas and the fact that the archipelago is only accessible to a small number of people, primarily boat owners, this has limited the possibilities for recreation and tourism. There are a few places which already have the capacity for certain activities whilst other areas are too vulnerable and thus unsuitable for most forms of recreation. The archipelago has an existential value as well as a utility value and ways must be found to utilise the area without threatening its vitality, which is what makes the archipelago attractive. This means that the development of recreation and tourism must ensure a balance between varying needs. Certain areas will thus be excluded whilst others will be developed subject to certain restrictions.

The Vänern municipalities and the County Administration in Värmland are positive to increasing tourism and recreation in the area. The difficulties which have to be overcome to facilitate further development involve a lack of services on the islands. There are a few ferries that traffic the islands at certain periods. This means that the archipelago is seen as one attraction among many others and not as the primary attraction for tourism and recreation. The number of private entrepreneurs is relatively small due both to the low number of visitors and the difficulties resulting from the fact that certain areas are largely protected from exploitation. This has meant that several municipalities have taken upon themselves roles normally played by private interests.

The municipalities and the County Administration are facing a situation where further developments should be planned on a regional rather than a municipal basis. Regional cooperation requires a decision to be taken regarding the aim of such cooperation and the geographical delimitation for potential future investments in the archipelago.

At present the municipalities participating in the Värmland study have differing geographical identifications. They invest in different geographical directions. The factor that unites the municipalities and the County Administration is they all invest in outdoor activities. The region should therefore draw up a joint strategy regarding the reception of visitors, attractions and profile. A profile where the archipelago and water provide the resources for attractiveness, meeting places, recreation etc. is only in evidence in certain areas and in some of the investments. What is needed is a careful inventory of what is on offer in order to increase each of the parties' knowledge and to create a basis for joint marketing. Jointly marketing the region would be advantageous for all parties.

The region must also determine whether the cooperation should be formalised. We recommend the municipalities and County Administration to visit and study other

archipelagos where the possibilities are similar. An alternative to formal cooperation could be to create a specific biosphere, an economic association or a foundation.

Future investment in the northern Vänern archipelago also requires developing strategies for establishing a dialogue with both visitors and entrepreneurs. The dialogue with entrepreneurs should be geared to improving their business opportunities in the archipelago whilst, as regards visitors, an extensive survey is needed to determine who the visitors to the archipelago really are. We recommend a wide-ranging visitor questionnaire in order to map visitors' movements in time and space in the islands, attitudes, needs, background and so on. Information about the target group together with visitor statistics can be a valuable tool for marketing and for future development. It will provide a basis for establishing priorities and for investing in specific attraction and recreation values.

Information about visitors should be used in conjunction with planning for tourism and for a sustainable administration of the archipelago. This will facilitate sustainable investment from the user perspective and not just from the conservation perspective. Focusing on the users increases the opportunities to make the archipelago accessible to both tourists and the local population. At present, however, there is no basis for long-distance tourism in the northern Vänern archipelago. Investment in some form of North Sea cooperation should be a central issue as international visitors in the future will to a large extent have their geographical point of departure in the countries surrounding the North Sea. What the investments in the northern Vänern archipelago should primarily focus on is increasing accessibility for the local population and increasing information about the inhabitants' knowledge of the archipelago and its natural and cultural values in order to concentrate, in the long term, on the national and international markets.

The Värmland study has resulted in a report which has been distributed to all the parties who participated, to the municipalities involved, politicians, entrepreneurs and authorities. The results of the study have been disseminated at seminars during the spring and autumn of 2007 and have also attracted the attention of the media in Värmland.