



BEST PRACTICE: VÄRMLAND COUNTY, SWEDEN



Key Challenge

Lack of knowledge and skills for tourism stakeholders.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Certification; Digital solutions; Capacity building.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Rural

Territorial Level | NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 21,789 km²

Population | 283,548 in 2023

Type of Tourism | Adventure; Rural; tourism; Coastal, maritime and inland water; Cultural.

Tourism Organisation | Värmland County Council (development and financing); Visit Värmland (Promotion, management and development), public-private partnership (50% self-financed).

Main Stakeholders Affected | Accommodations; Restaurants and bars; Other tourism service providers, Research and Development (R&D) organisations.

Additional Challenges Covered | Insufficient use of new and advanced technologies in tourism; Lack of stakeholder management.

Context & Background

Located in mid-western Sweden, Värmland is an all-year-round destination for nature and rural tourism. Tourism has grown in importance in recent years and in 2023 around 2.5 million overnight stays were recorded (mainly from nearby markets). Tourism accounts for around 10% of both GDP and employment.

Key Challenge

After the pandemic, the focus of tourism strategy has shifted to sustainability as a central tool in the process of improving resilience and competitiveness. Stakeholders play a crucial role in this transition, but they face challenges due to limited human resources-often individuals or small teams-and a lack of skills and expertise, which make the transition to sustainable practices difficult.



Implementation of Solutions: Based on the “Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Tourism”, Visit Värmland has initiated projects to raise awareness among tourism stakeholders about the need to implement sustainability and digitalization. The projects also build knowledge for greater resilience, competitiveness, and finding new market segments with higher added value.

SOLUTIONS

- *1:1 consultation*, an initiative that runs from 2023 to the end of 2024 and in which Visit Värmland's trained experts coach tourism companies (accommodations, destinations, campsites, restaurants and catering) on digitalisation and sustainability. Two to three free coaching sessions can be arranged in which the company's status quo is determined and individual adaptation plans are developed in the areas of digitisation and sustainability.
- The *“Innovation in the Hospitality Industry”* project, implemented in 2021-2023 in collaboration with Compare, a regional tech cluster, used innovation arenas as a method to create innovative digital solution to encourage collaboration and sustainability within the tourism industry.
- The *Smart Villages project* (2021-2024, in collaboration with Karlstad University) used an innovative method (*place-based digital experiences*) to improve hospitality businesses' knowledge and skills on how to be smart and create solutions that contribute to the place attractiveness as well as business.
- *Mystery checks in accommodations* commissioned by the DMO by auditors from the label “Swedish Welcome” were an effective means of convincing the accommodations to obtain the eco-certification that the DMO has been promoting for many years. After the mystery check results were communicated to the accommodations and the external auditor also explained the need for eco-certification, some accommodations decided to get certified.

Replicability potential: Very high (requires stakeholder collaboration).

Cost & funding source: 1,500,000 euros for the project “Innovation in the hospitality industry” co-funded by React-EU and the regional Council; 700,000 euros for Smart Villages, funded by the Knowledge Foundation; 1,500 – 2,000 euros per company for the mystery checks, co-financed by EU and regional funds.



Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Strong collaboration between different stakeholders including local authorities, tourism businesses, environmental organisations and the community; Strong commitment from the county to make a meaningful change and become more resilient; The sustainability approach was the basis for the change; Companies that felt noticed and could talk about their individual problems and difficulties.

Barriers: Lack of resources (time, people, finance) of some companies.

Results and Impacts

- High satisfaction rate among stakeholders with coaching activities. Surveys after coaching sessions show a satisfaction rating with the coaching of 5.68 (out of 6) and a rating of 5.76 (out of 6) for the relevance of the coaching.
- 50 SMEs (out of 400) participated in the digitalisation coaching (completed) and 28 participants attended sustainability sessions (still ongoing).

Recommendations by the Destinations

- Patience is important as changes take a lot of time.
- It is helpful to learn from other best practices and vice versa it is also important to share the knowledge and experiences with others.
- Close contact with different type of stakeholders is essential for collaboration.

Useful Links

[Innovation in the Hospitality Industry](#)

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