

Report by Mrs. Lean Celion
Vice Mayor of Gotland, Sweden

Sustainable tourism on Gotland

For the people on Gotland, an island in the middle of the Baltic Sea, environmental issues have always been of central importance. Being close to the sea, the soil, the meadows and the forest leads to a solid commitment to the environment, and maybe the need for long-term sustainable development is more evident on an island, where the conditions for life often are shaped by local resources.

Gotland is Sweden's biggest island in terms of area and population. Yet although it is Sweden's biggest island, it is still a very small part of Sweden. We are slightly more than 57,000 inhabitants, or 0.7% of the population of Sweden, in an area that is 0.8% of the whole of Sweden, which means that there are 18 Gotlanders per square kilometre.

In Sweden there is a long tradition of local and regional self-government. Municipalities and county councils have a strong position, with their responsibility for a wide range of activities and their right to levy taxes to manage these tasks. Moreover, the state has gradually decentralised duties to the municipalities and county councils.

Gotland is the only one of Sweden's 289 municipalities that also takes charge of the duties normally handled by a county council for example health care and public transports. The municipality of Gotland is also a regional self-governing body, one of the four in Sweden. In these areas the regions own elected politicians have been given greater responsibility for general development issues. The increased regional self-government means that responsibility for regional development - such as measures that favour long-term positive development of the entire region - are moved from the state-controlled county administrative boards to the regional self-governing bodies. The intention is to provide a better democratic foundation for regional development work and to give the citizens greater influence over the development of the region. The idea is also that regional resources can be used more effectively if responsibility is assembled in a democratically elected body.

In 1922 the municipality council proclaimed itself to be an Eco-municipality (nowadays there are 60 eco-municipalities in Sweden). The municipality's Agenda 21 has set up an overall goal: that Gotland will be a sustainable society in the course of a generation – in 25-30 years.

Since 1992 environment work has been resolutely carried on in all sectors and organisations on the island. Households are involved in sorting waste at source and composting. Businesses and the municipality co-operate on various projects: environmental management systems and ecocycle adaptation are key terms in development.

The work for a sustainable society is an important part of Gotland's work for increased growth and employment. Along farming, tourism is the biggest industry on Gotland. Every year about 700,000 visitors come to the island, most of whom come in the summer months. More and more people want to experience and enjoy nature and culture on Gotland. There is a growing interest in "ecotourism" which requires new, environmentally adapted solutions.

Between 1995-1999 Gotland was an own objective 5b area and during this period Gotland belongs to Objective 2 Islands Sweden, which involves 300 inhabited islands with a total

population close to 90,000 inhabitants. These programmes had and have possibilities to support projects stimulating eco-tourism. Some examples are:

Information centre on Fårö

Fårö is one of Gotland's smaller islands and maybe most known as the island where Ingemar Bergman has chosen to live. Due to Fårö's special nature and culture it's seen as an area of national importance (like many other areas on Gotland). About 300,000 persons visit Fårö during summer.

The information centre is the base for the newly established network of tourism companies on Fårö. The aim is to combine business development with ecological thinking and stimulate the development of new products and by that create new jobs and increased incomes.

The most important task for the information centre is to spread information and knowledge about Fårö's values, but also tourism and society information. The centre is open all year around and have local guides employed.

Fishing tourism

One of Gotland's aims is to increase the number of tourist to the island and for that purpose use the island's special prerequisites, for example the possibility for fishing. One project inside the objective 2 programme is to engage and gather all actors in the fishing sector in the work for a sustainable fish population. The aim is to safeguard the natural fish population with a broad biological diversity and to use it as an attraction for fishing tourism on Gotland. The project contributes to a better environment by watercourse restored to its former conditions with a richer fish, insect and plant life.

Networking

On Gotland the objective 3 programme supports between 10 – 15 networks with tourist companies working with sustainable tourism. One is the network Naturetourism Gotland, a network consisting of small companies and organisations. The definition of Nature tourism is: consideration for nature, to follow and take part in research and development, to preserve animals and vegetation, small groups of visitors, professional guides and to give knowledge about nature. Activities are, for example, bird-watching, horseback riding, fishing and walking-touring.

Interregional co-operation

One of Gotland's most important strategies for the future is to increase contacts with the outside world and to strengthen our co-operation, above all with other European islands and areas in the Baltic region. A powerful reason for this is our increasing dependence on factors, events, and decisions taking place outside Gotland. Gotland is a member of a variety of networks such as B7 (Baltic Sea Seven Islands) CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions), Island Commission and Baltic Sea States Subregional Conference.

BEST B7 Exchange on Sustainable Tourism I and II

As an example of interregional co-operation Gotland is together with the B7 islands working in the BEST project – B7 exchange on Sustainable Tourism is a joint project between the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea. The B7 islands are Bornholm, Denmark; Gotland, Sweden; Hiiumaa, Estonia; Saaremaa, Estonia; Rügen, Germany; Åland, Finland and Öland, Sweden.

The BEST project was initiated as a result of the Common Strategy for the B7 island, which was adopted in Visby in May 1996. The main objective is to promote Sustainable Tourism in the islands. Sub-aims are:

- to develop an inter-island cooperation network to promote the development of sustainable tourism
- to establish common systems for codes of conduct, benchmarking a quality control
- to adopt and publish a Green Paper
- to initiate at least three development projects.

The project is supported by the INTERREG IIC. All activities in BEST I are now concluded and BEST I is now planned to continue as BEST II and an application for INTERREG III will probably be prepared during the spring of 2002.

.The Baltic Sea

The Baltic Sea has been classed by the International Maritime Organisation as a "Special Area" with stricter rules than other seas because of the geographical and ecological sensitive conditions. As a consequence Destination Gotland, responsible for the ferry traffic from the mainland has invested a great deal in catalytic converters, more efficient emission control, sorting at source, environment-friendly paint and staff training.

So as a summary it's not only possible to live a sustainable tourist life on Gotland, it's also possible to travel to Gotland in an environment friendly way.