



**VARBERGS
KOMMUN**

PROSPERA
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

PROSPERA LOCAL ACTION PLAN

Municipality of Varberg

Second draft 2022-04-21



Part I – General information

Project: PROSPERA

Partner organisation: Municipality of Varberg

Country: Sweden

NUTS 2 region: West Sweden

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Introduction to Varberg

Varberg is located on the west coast of Sweden in the Region of Halland. Varberg Municipality is 1703 km² (both land and lakes) with a land area of 874,40 km².

In the whole municipality lives 66 658 inhabitants (2021), and the city of Varberg has 37 440 inhabitants. The region of Halland has 329 352 inhabitants and the third-highest population growth among Swedish regions.

A bit simplified one could describe it as; in the west, Varberg meets the sea with a long coastline, highly attractive for both recreation and housing. In the east, the municipality is characterized by woodland and rural areas. One will find the farmland with the important agricultural sector in between these. The highway and the train going north to south, connecting, and making Varberg accessible to bigger cities such as Gothenburg, Malmö and Copenhagen.

Even though urbanization is concentrated to the city at the coast, some towns and villages also face similar land-use problems, balancing economic interests with environmental needs and at the same time struggling to be competitive for both new citizens and new companies.

Challenges

In the current situation of growth and the context of the PROSPERA-project, some essential needs drive the participation in the project:

1. *Urban sprawl*, the city is growing, and how we use and plan to use our land is essential. Densification of the city continues, but growth is also apparent in areas where it is challenging to monitor the growth effectively. Further, the city faces challenges in offering affordable housing for different stakeholders.
2. *Mobility*, facing the need to cut CO₂ emissions, raises the question of promoting sustainable mobility in rural areas with low population density.
3. *Tourism and the natural heritage*; Tourism is essential for growth, business and employment but could also mean an overuse of eco-system services.

During the project, additional challenges have surfaced and are primarily related to urban sprawl and the need to incorporate biodiversity into activities and strategies.

The challenges could be read in detail in the PROSPERA Synthesis Report produced by the project.

In summary, a growing Varberg faces different degrees of urbanization where a balance between economic, environmental, and social perspectives is needed. This challenge is apparent in the city of Varberg, but it could also be experienced in other parts of the municipality that are not as densely populated. This is also why the concept of "Peri-urban" offers new ways to understand and pinpoint specific challenges of the space where the city grows. The peri-urban perspective (in Swedish "stadsnära landsbygd") was 2021 initiated in to municipal policy "The rural development plan".

Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- ☐ Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
- ☐ European Territorial Cooperation programme
- ✓ **Other regional development policy instrument**

Name of the policy instrument addressed: **Municipal Overview plan for Varberg**

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The learning process and policy influence

The proposed policy instrument (ERDF OP West Sweden) was obsolete a year into the project since the programming period ended in 2020. It was not a surprise, and actions to counter this had been part of the planning of the local policy influence process. The idea was that if the new program is launched and information about calls are available at the end of 2021, it would be a perfect opportunity for both implementing our defined actions and a possibility to showcase the influence from the PROSPERA-project.

With this as a guiding principle, our actions targeted two interlinked regional policy processes:

1. Development of the Regional Development Strategy of Halland, which is the underlying strategy of the OP.
2. The process to design the OP 2021 – 2027 ERDF West Sweden

Our first aim was to engage with policymakers and processes involved in the Regional Development Plan in Halland and later utilize our experiences and chosen good practices from PROSPERA into new projects in the coming OP. The reasons behind this could be found in the Swedish context for ERDF, where regional development plans are guiding documents for the OP¹.

¹ More information on the work with the PI is found in the Regional Report

Within these activities, Varberg has contributed with input to the new Regional Development plan expected to support the OP 2021-2027. The input has been text amendments and meetings with the policy owner (Region Halland), where we have been able to advocate the PROSPERA-logic and upsides of applying the peri-urban concept in regional strategies. Also, several informal discussions have been held with various actors – internally and externally.

Following Varberg's reports on the continued work to influence the policy instrument and plan for the future Action plan uncover various challenges that go beyond how one commits to stakeholder engagement. These challenges had to be taken into account and addressed. For example, the pandemic is one thing that all European projects had to deal with and the previously mentioned new programming period another. Nevertheless, Varberg has continuously worked to adapt to these circumstances by organising our stakeholder network, which stakeholders to involve in online study visits, and how we utilise the interest for transferring specific good practices from these study visits.

Policy instrument analysis

Late in semester 4/early semester 5, the development of the OP and the uncertainty of when it would be operational needed to be addressed. On top of this, the local context had also changed; Varberg was growing faster than expected, and the actual interest from our different stakeholders did not always align in the group and/or with the (drafted) OP. Therefore, after consultations with the Lead partner, Varberg conducted a new analysis to identify Policy Instruments that would be more beneficial to address and could guide the further process of transferring good practices.

The analysis included local, regional, and national policies on different levels. It also included an internal discussion on how to best capitalise on the lessons learned from PROSPERA GPs, the themes and common challenges² and balance this with the possibility to influence the instrument with available resources and within the given timeframe.

Our analysis showed that the most beneficial way forward would target the Varberg Municipal Overview Plan. This is because it meets most of our demands on relevance, applicability, timeframe, resources and potential to influence.

About the Municipal Overview Plan: a window of opportunity

The overview plan has a central role in the municipalities' work to formulate strategies for long-term sustainable development. An overview plan must state both a long-term and overall development strategy and the basic features of the intended use of land and water areas. The overview plan shall show how the municipality intends to consider public interests, how national interests shall be met, and how environmental quality standards shall be complied with. The plan must also provide guidance for how the built environment is to be used, developed, and preserved.³

² MOBILITY_CC 18 - Connecting peri-urban areas to the city, NATURAL HERITAGE_CC 20 - Constructing green infrastructure in the peri-urban area, CC 24 - Enhancing biodiversity, CC 20 - Constructing green infrastructure in the peri-urban area CLIMATE CHANGE_CC 33 - Needing to plan for too much and too little water

³ <https://www.boverket.se/sv/PBL-kunskapsbanken/planering/oversiktsplan/>



Figure 1: The overview plan

Varberg is currently undergoing a comprehensive process that aims to produce "Relevant planning material" to support developing and adopting a new overview plan. Therefore, our window of opportunity lies in the process that is expected to support this development and utilize lessons learned and good practices from the PROSPERA-project through our local action plan.

The majority of the partners in PROSPERA operates in another context than Varberg. Plans and good practices presented lean more towards an already existing problem with densification and land-management issues. In Varberg, these significant challenges could be avoided if we utilize their experiences and support a process where essential issues could be considered.

The Policy instrument also ensures that our planned actions correspond to the actual needs of the city, alignment with stakeholders, and is also an opportunity where PROSPERA experiences could be utilized.

Further, this way forward is well aligned with the initial key messages⁴ that we wanted to emphasise with our participation in PROSPERA:

1. There is an area between the urban and the rural – Peri-Urban - exposed to both urban and rural challenges and issues that might be specific in this context.
2. If regional growth and urbanisation is a goal, the area that we intend to use for this growth need to be highlighted, appreciated, and defined on its own terms to use assets and resources efficiently, correctly, and sustainable.

Strategy for influence and establishing guidelines for the Action Plan

The main aim is to contribute to processes and projects defined as "Relevant planning material" in developing a new Municipal Overview plan. With this approach, the policy instrument would benefit from experiences made by partners in GPs that are relevant for Varberg.

The Action Plan will facilitate this through the implementation of activities that include:

- Biodiversity in a growing city, secure green areas/structures before densification
- Soft mobility, with different purposes (recreation, tourism, Commuting) connected to green infrastructure in peri-urban settings.
- Stakeholder engagement enabling multipurpose solutions

⁴ Varberg Regional Report

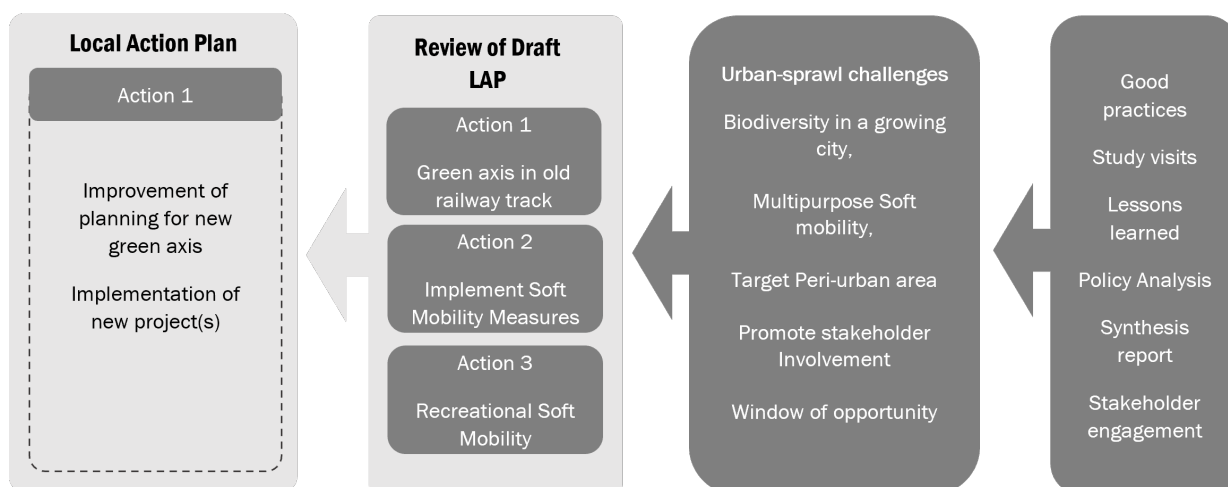


Figure 2 Process to design the Local Action Plan

Name of the Action	Improvement of planning for new green axis
Type of change	Implementation of new projects
Source and good practice to be transferred	Green Climate Axis Greenways
Good practice partners	PP1 Reggio Emilia (IT) + PP3 Ghent (BE)
Main lessons learned	Engaging with stakeholders when planning to connect peri-urban areas with the city, using green infrastructures. Multipurpose soft mobility Integrating sustainability and aspects such as biodiversity, (soft) mobility, tourism, recreation, local service into the future use of the area counters problems that could come due densification and urban sprawl.
Stakeholders	Development planning office Business and development office Communication office Inhabitants of Varberg Tourism business Service providers Businesses in the area Local politicians
Deliverable	Track area implementation plan ("Spårområdesutredningen") <i>Stakeholder vision of the green axis at the former railroad track</i>
Time frame	August 2022 – June 2023 The plan is to have the plan accepted by the Municipal council 2 nd quarter of 2023.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1: Improvement of planning for new green axis

Background

Varberg's continuous and increasing growth brings both possibilities and challenges for the peri-urban areas of the city. A key initiative in this development is the construction of a train tunnel under the city centre, releasing new areas in central locations open for exploitation. In connection to this there is also a planned relocation of the city harbour.

From an urban development perspective, the spaces of the former railway track will enable the city to densify in a competitive area. This initiative will include new housing, new business and new services for both companies and citizens.

At the same time, this also holds an opportunity to bring down existing barriers between the city and the countryside and replace them with new green multipurpose axis that promote biodiversity, leisure, recreation, and soft mobility between key locations.



As learned by participating in the PROSPERA-project and through our partners' good practices -Green Climate Axis (Ghent) and Greenways (Reggio Emilia), it is better to plan for green axes before densification. It is also apparent that this planning needs to involve different stakeholders with various views on how the use of this area. Their input into the Policy Instrument process would enable the future area to be utilised in a sustainable and attractive way.

In "**Improvement of planning for new Green Axis**" in Varberg, we want to enable stakeholders and future users of these green axes, generally outside the formal policy process, to be part of the development and planning for this area.

Turning PROSPERA-learning into action

The PROSPERA project has opened a wide range of possibilities in terms of learning from each other. Turning these lessons into practice two GPs have been our main inspirations:

1. GP Green Climate Axis Partner 3 Ghent, BE. *One of the goals In Space for Ghent 2030 is to develop 8 green climate axes that bring green and nature in the city centre, within reach for the citizens. These green climate axes also contribute to the climate adaptivity of the city. Moreover, they can be combined with soft mobility axes, stimulating people to come to the city by bike or by foot.*

We acknowledge the importance of utilising stakeholder involvement in planning and implementing green infrastructure when connecting peri-urban areas with the city areas. However, it is also essential to see that enabling in-depth planning in the early stages of an initiative like this is a pre-condition for promoting and establishing green corridors in a growing city.

Further, the GP also points to the impact of sustainability in all three dimensions; (1) The economic dimension i.e. connecting the city to new services and destinations, (2) The social dimension, i.e. connecting people from the peri-urban areas to the city centre and vice versa, and finally (3) The ecological dimension, i.e. reducing CO2 admissions, promoting biodiversity and increasing the cities resilience to climate change.

2. GP Greenways Partner 1 Reggio-Emilia (IT) *Greenways – Sustainable mobility and valorisation of the territory aims to jointly identify, develop and implement sustainable and soft mobility solutions with citizens living in a number of rural villages and/or peri-urban neighbourhoods of Reggio Emilia.*

"GREENWAYS could offers a methodology on how to address mobility issues in a rural setting in close collaboration with local citizens and other stakeholders. Applied and adapted to our context we use this approach for the promotion and identification of local needs of services, purposes for using the new area, and also support the identification of relevant soft mobility measures.

We expect that various stakeholders will use an area such as the former railway. They will however have different reasons and expectations, and to include those not necessarily engaged in this type of process could add new solutions, perspectives, and ideas that will increase the long-term sustainability of the area.

Connection to the PI

Integrating the lessons learned from the two GPs would mean that essential aspects currently not in the Municipal Overview plan would be included. At the same time, both the area that we target in this LAP and future Peri-urban areas, that today has no designated use in any plans is, an excellent area to test new approaches. In the long term we strengthen the municipality capacity to further address challenges such as biodiversity and soft mobility in similar areas where green axis could be developed. A more detailed description on the Policy instrument is under the headline "The Municipal Overview Plan: A window of opportunity".

Description of the action

This action will improve the current planning process in a targeted area of the Overview plan. The vision of the new area will be developed as a Green axis in Varberg through the involvement of stakeholders that are not part of the formal process and especially children as one representative of this target group. The plans for how the area will be developed will take place within phase 2 and the actual construction will take place over time starting in 2024 when the railroad has been removed.

The aim is to ensure that the railroad track could be developed with regards to the formal rules and regulation, for example on biodiversity, but should also include an inspiring vision on the future use of the area. An area where environment and citizens co-exist and use it for different purposes, such tourism, soft mobility, recreation, and leisure.

When the action plan is implemented the result of this process will be submitted to Municipal council for conformation and integrated into the policy instrument.

The action will follow a three-step process:

1. **Start-up:** Gathering information and designing the stakeholder involvement process. This would include a *communication plan* with means, goals and actions for when and how to communicate with the stakeholders and which stakeholders to engage. This is followed by a process where the different possibilities are promoted towards the stakeholders.
2. **Implementation** of the process where stakeholders' views are gathered. Including a display and visualization of the project.
3. **Finalisation** - consolidating the result and formal process for integrating the output in to the Track area implementation plan

At the end of this process the report - will be produced and accepted by the Municipal council as a vision for this area

Players involved

- PROSPERA Project Team – Monitoring the action
- Development planning office - Responsible for the planning of the area and the dialogue meetings.
- Business and development office – Responsible for involving the local businesses including tourism operators
- Communication office – Responsible for communication, creating interest and the final visualisation of the area

The municipal actors will form an action group in charge of project implementation with 6-8 people that will include additional staff from departments working on:

- Traffic planning
- Environment
- Public spaces

- Stakeholders – producing new ideas giving insight, sharing knowledge and feedback.
 - Inhabitants of Varberg (including children) through dialogue
 - Tourism businesses
 - Other service providers
 - Businesses in the area – Varberg city trade association. Destination forum (a network of businesses in tourism). There are some businesses that are directly affected by the change of the area and others are more peripheral stakeholders.
 - Local politicians

Timeframe

Start-up	M1: Detailed design of the stakeholder process
Communication plan	M1: Producing a plan for communication, including the local Prospera website.
Promotion of action	M2-3: Invitations, planning
Stakeholder involvement:	M3-9: Dialogue meetings, visualization, and other means of involvement. 2-3 meetings per month for 4 months.
Production of report and formal process for endorsement:	M6-10: Gathering the different investigations and stakeholder input into a plan to be accepted by the Municipal Council.
Dissemination:	M10-11 “Final OUTPUT production” - presentation, dissemination

Costs

Project team 2 persons 10% for 12 months – managing the action (15.000 Euros)

A project team of 6-8 people involved in the planning and execution of 2-3 meetings per month for 4 months (7.500 Euros)

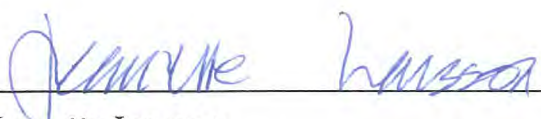
8-12 dialogue meetings (3.000 Euros/meeting)

Visualisation of the area (External consultant 3.000 Euros)

Materials (1.000 Euros)

Funding sources

By internal funding


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Place: *Varberg*

Date: *27 June 2022*

