



Green Pilgrimage - Action plan

Partner Details

Project: Green Pilgrimage Project supporting natural and cultural heritage

Region Östergötland

Country: Sweden

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Policy Instrument

- 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: **Tourism Industry strategy of Östergötland**

Introduction

In Östergötland, the tourism industry is a primary industry, an industry that is growing with regards to employment and growth in our region today. Along with a tradition of small businesses and entrepreneurship, this has led to a strong enterprise base in tourism and events. It is therefore also important that the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), continuously supports the regional tourism industry strategy, as tourism, experiences and events are traditionally strong growth areas. The opportunities for continued development are still large, thanks to the unique natural, environmental and cultural values, in combination with innovative and strategic development and continued investments. The Swedish domestic market is the most critical market to our destination, but there is also a need for further actions abroad, in order to activate and increase the international import market. It is necessary to continue developing the travel opportunities to the destination of Östergötland and Vadstena in particular. Other areas that require further development for the destination to become a leading pilgrim experience destination, is sustainability in the destinations, product and business development, marketing and training.

Sweden is at the cutting edge when it comes to sustainable development in the tourism industry. This comes almost naturally for those of us living in a relatively sparsely populated country and having a tradition of being close to nature and the surrounding environment.

Our visiting guests agree on this, making increasingly stringent demands when it comes to how the tourism industry handles the issue of sustainable development.

A clear and responsible investment in sustainability also provides competitive advantages on the market, which is another reason why it is imperative to work hard in promoting sustainable development from all perspectives, being financially, ecologically and socially/culturally.

According to our Tourism Industry Strategy, all tourism-related activities should be characterised by sustainability with a view to helping to promote sustainable growth in the region. To promote the sustainable development of tourism, the strategic measures of the destinations, companies and the regional developers needs to focus on:

- Seeing things from the visitor's perspective, being a superior host, delivering high quality service and leaving the visitor with an experience that meets or even exceeds their expectations.
- Valuing and incorporating our natural and cultural heritage. Example: Incorporating the local culture into products and packaging. Increasing the unique factor of local products by incorporating local history, foods and local crafts as well as training staff in the area.
- Keeping resource consumption and waste production to a minimum. Example: Sorting litter and avoiding single-use products. Recycling, reusing and focus on energy efficiency. Restricting the effects of tourism-related transport.
- Cooperating with local stakeholders to create an attractive society. Example: Providing information on the significance of tourism.
- Sustainable travel to and from destinations.

One of the obstacles that we are facing, dealing with sustainable development of pilgrimage, is the need for places that provide sustainable food, service and lodging along the route. This is a crucial point in developing sustainable pilgrimage and tourism.

With the potential increase of pilgrims along the pilgrim routes we see a raising need for more sustainable solutions on food, lodging and services along the trail. The interest for pilgrimage is increasing in Sweden, but there is still not a lot of people walking. The timing is perfect to set a good example for stakeholders along the trails to increase the sustainability and provide updated digital information for pilgrims.

Partners

In Green Pilgrimage project:

Kent County Council, UK

Region Östergötland, Sweden

National Pilgrim Centre, Norway

Institute for Tourism Research and Development, Romania

Norfolk County Council, UK

Diocese of Canterbury, UK

Puglia Region, Italy

Action Plan:

Region Östergötland - project holder

Linköping Diocese

Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena

Municipality of Vadstena

Vadstena Parrish

Hela Sverige ska Leva

County government

Stakeholders providing food and lodging along the trail

Volunteers

Project Background

This is a summary on lessons learned from all study visits and stakeholder meetings in Phase 1 of the project:

1. The importance of long term strategies and commitment.
2. The importance of cooperation and partnership on local, regional and national level.
3. The importance of public support both in policy and as a partner in grant applications etc.
4. The importance of long term work with local communities along the trail.
5. The existence of specific legislation/regulations concerning nature and cultural values along the trail.
6. The existence of consecutive long term 'master and strategic plans'
7. Large diversity in background an approach to pilgrimage
8. The importance of networks/associations supporting and promoting the ways
9. Many destinations are in early stages of development
10. The importance of develop the pilgrim destination – not just the trail
11. The importance of finding tools to measure the amount of pilgrims
12. The importance of setting a maximum limit for the trail in early stage
13. The value of a well-established and staffed pilgrim centre
14. The development of organised walks as a tool for spiritual reflection
15. Difficulty to work without a clear policy framework
16. Important to find ways to cooperate between faith and secular organisations.
17. The importance of long-term commitment when reactivating a tradition.
18. The central role of a national policy supporting the trail.
19. The role of local entrepreneurs in creating a genuine experience.
20. The importance of storytelling along the trail
21. The importance of developing digital maps and tools
22. The importance of fully committed individuals in realising daunting ideas.
23. The importance of public support in realising infrastructure.
24. The importance in cooperation with local and small scale entrepreneurs in food, lodging etc.
25. The importance of finding practical tools to improve the greening of the pilgrimage

From this lessons we have identified some actions to go on with in phase 2 of the project.

Project Aims and Outcomes

- Policy influence on sustainable tourism policy by studying best practices, workshops and conferences with stakeholder involvement for the improvement of governance and decision making
- Develop a long term strategy for the cooperation between Region/municipality and Diocese/pilgrim centre by making a strategic partnership.
- Develop a long term plan for the three trails coming into Vadstena and name them Saint Birgitta Ways.
- Explore funding opportunities for the support for long term development of basic infrastructure along the way
- Advocate a stronger communication policy to include digitalization and social media to lay grounds for new projects.
- Change of strategic direction for tourism and business development along the walking routes and the destination.
- Improved international perspective on the green benefits of pilgrimage. Raise awareness about sustainability among pilgrims and stakeholders
- Cooperate with local, regional and national stakeholders on pilgrimage
- Develop tools to raise awareness about sustainability among pilgrims and stakeholders

Project Progress to End of Phase 1

- 2017-2019
- Attended all study visits
- Peer review on digitalisation extended with a study of The pilgrim of tomorrow
- Develop a model of digital map/app for a pilgrims trail in Östergötland region
- 4 stakeholder meeting per year
- 2-3 steering committee meetings – Swedish
- New model for joint signposting and management of pilgrim trail/regional trail - Pilot between Ödeshög and Vadstena
- Signposting on the new regional trail between Omberg and Vadstena
- 2019 Finalise action plan

The National Context

There is no strategy or support on pilgrimage on the national level in Sweden. The national strategy for tourism industry is being revised and an updated strategy will be launched during 2020. So far pilgrimage is not mentioned in the strategy. But the strategy highlight nature tourism, hiking and sustainability. Pilgrimage will be a tool to fulfil the strategy. Decision makers will have to be informed about the opportunities of pilgrimage.

There are many pilgrim trails in Sweden, but no designated national pilgrim trails to Vadstena. Some of the trails are St Olof Ways, heading to Norway and Trondheim. Sweden has a long tradition of pilgrimage but the development of trails is slow and uncoordinated, without support from the national level.

The Regional Context

During 2019 – 2020, the regional strategy for tourism is being revised, due to the fact that there is a national strategy coming out this year which will affect the regional and local level accordingly. The final outcome and plan for this is not yet set when Phase 1 is over, but we will give feedback from the Green Pilgrimage project into the work of the new strategy. Cooperation between stakeholders, regional pilgrim centres and regional authorities will not only improve sustainable tourism in a regional context, but strengthen cooperation in general.

Contacts and lessons learned from study visits has led to a strategic cooperation (leading beyond the current project) on pilgrim development in the region between Region Östergötland, Vadstena Municipality and the pilgrimcenter in Vadstena run by the Diocese of Linköping. From 2019 and onwards we will produce an annual action plan for cooperation.

Region Östergötland has financed a new regional trail from Omberg to Vadstena, following the suggested pilgrim route, <https://maps.ostgotaleden.se/sv/ostgotaleden/211164/karta>. The final signage and preparation for this is done in the end of 2019. Sweden has developed a digital map/app as part of the GP project. This map is available for pilgrims in Östergötland. <https://maps.visitostergotland.se/sv/kartor/209802/karta>

The map has been improved during 2019 and will be developed further on within this strategic partnership in the region.

The project has also lead to the inclusion and promotion in both the municipal tourism strategy and in other policy and profile documents.

Conclusions

In order for us to achieve the vision and objectives, we need to implement our best efforts and initiatives that are long term sustainable and based on a visitor perspective. The on-going work with strategic and structural matters to create strong destinations and reasons to travel shall continue, but will be complemented with further efforts within product and business development, market communications and sales.

The Green Pilgrimage Project support these aims from the Regional Strategy for tourism. The strategy is being revised during 2019 and 2020 and results and conclusions from this project will be input to that work.

During Phase 1 of the Interreg Green Pilgrimage project, we have achieved a greater understanding of the common European heritage that pilgrimage represents. By studying best practices, we have experienced different ways of addressing common challenges and possibilities.

By creating an Acton Plan for Phase 2, we seek to highlight some of the lessons learnt during Phase 1.

At the final stage of the project, we expect our achievements to be:

- A formalised strategic partnership in region Östergötland for pilgrimage
- An yearly updated action plan for pilgrim development in the region
- Policy influence that lead to a change of governance of decision making
- Raised awareness and engagement of stakeholders that leads on to new projects
- Develop “Pilgrims Welcome” as a tool for greening the pilgrimage
- Increased amount of media coverage
- Improved project knowledge and skills

During the study visits organised by the project, we have experienced a lack of updated information and “green pilgrim image” in many of the places for food, services and lodging. We would like to develop a tool – Pilgrims Welcome – a ‘simple certification’ of service places for pilgrims that requires sustainability and updated and clear digital information. Pilgrims Welcome will be our concept to develop sustainable tourism and rural development that might influence strategies and policies on national, regional and local level.

Action Plan Summary

For Phase II of the Interreg Green Pilgrimage Project, we are planning four actions. These are:

1. Incorporate lessons learned in policies (regional and local)
2. Strategic Partnership for pilgrim development
3. Pilgrims Welcome
4. Vadstena -The Swedish Pilgrim Destination

With these actions we plan to work for and monitor improved governance/decision making through Action 1 and 2. Action 3 is a practical tool for greening the stakeholders. In action 4 is a change of strategic focus and the possibility for new projects.

Actions

Parallel with the ongoing process of influencing the regional policy for tourism industry we will develop tools that makes difference; a new strategic partnership in the region, a practical tool for sustainable pilgrimage and a change in strategic focus the Destination Vadstena. We believe that practical work and good examples are a successful way of influencing policies.

Action 1 – Incorporate lessons learned in tourism policies

Description

During 2019 – 2020, the regional strategy for tourism is being revised, due to the fact that there is a national strategy coming out this year which will affect the regional and local level accordingly. The final outcome and plan for this is not yet set when Phase 1 is over, but we will give feedback from the Green Pilgrimage project into the work of the new strategy. Cooperation between stakeholders, regional pilgrim centres and regional authorities will not only improve sustainable tourism in a regional context, but strengthen cooperation in general.

We plan to incorporate the following lessons learning from *Green Pilgrimage* into the revised strategy.

- It's important to involve local and regional stakeholders in a long term process of working together, this is not an issue that can be resolved within a certain project. The revised strategy will have a section on building strategic partnerships with a continuous working process.
- Local stakeholders are often volunteer organisations or smaller businesses, with a lot of passion but depending on people having the time to volunteer. We want to ensure that a long term process is secured within the municipality, the Church and the region.
- Both from the project and in the current situation it is obvious that businesses and organisations that had a digital strategy to reach the public are better off in a new situation, therefore a digital strategy is important for the revised strategy.

As a result of the Green Pilgrimage project and the focus in the region on outdoor tourism in peaceful nature environment and the long-term work with Östgötaleden, we have been selected as a member of a coming project to define and implement a National Standard for lowland trails in Sweden. Another region in Sweden is main project owner, and Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena is selected to analyse and find solutions on a national level of Pilgrim routes.

On a local level (Vadstena Municipality) the policies for culture and outdoor life in Vadstena municipality have been influenced by the project by referral responses, meetings and dialogue. We will go on working with implementing the strategies. Vadstena as a pilgrim destination is mentioned in the new brand platform for Vadstena developed and launched in 2019.

Organisations Involved

Region Östergötland - Project holder

Linköping diocese

Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena

Municipality of Vadstena and other municipalities along the Pilgrim route

Stakeholders in the region of Östergötland

Link with policy

Tourism Industry strategy of Östergötland is being revised. This practical example will influence the process of renewing the strategy to focus more on sustainable tourism where pilgrims are a good example.

Impact on policy

Improving environment friendly maintenance of the route and sustainable tourism and rural development

Timeframe

2019-2020

Costs

€3000

Sustainability

To be developed

Suggested Funding Sources

Region Östergötland

Linköping diocese

Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena

Municipality of Vadstena

Action 2 – A Strategic Partnership for the development of pilgrimage in Östergötland

Description

Region Östergötland's efforts in the fields of outdoor recreation and the culture shall, as far as possible, be coordinated with the regional strategy for Tourism. The Region of Östergötland is, together with the municipalities, the head of Östgötaleden a regional trail, which is 1400 kilometers long. The trail offers the opportunity to unite nature, cultural heritage and experiences for both residents and visitors. Hiking has great potential in both cultural and nature tourism. The interest in pilgrimage is increasing and several pilgrim trails cross the county with Vadstena Abbey church as the main destination. The Östergötland Region, the Linköping Diocese and the Vadstena Pilgrimcenter have jointly been part of the EU project Green Pilgrimage, which has investigated how increased pilgrimage can contribute to greater growth and increased visitor industry, while protecting nature and cultural heritage. The partners now form a strategic partnership for the continued development of sustainable pilgrimage tourism in Östergötland.

Region Östergötland will strengthen the opportunity to combine nature and cultural heritage experiences through the development of the regional trail in collaboration with the municipalities and other stakeholders.

A strategic partnership will be formed during 2019, between Region Östergötland, The Linköping Diocese, and the municipality of Vadstena to achieve:

- Clear roles regarding for instance trail management and pilgrim routes coordination, updates on the digital map, signage and marketing of pilgrim trails
- Clear roles on exploring funding opportunities for the support for long term development of basic infrastructure along the way
- A plan for how often the meetings should be taken place

These are the main objectives for the action:

1. Develop a long term strategy for the cooperation between Region/municipality and Diocese/pilgrim centre.
2. Explore funding opportunities for the support for long term development of basic infrastructure along the way

Organisations Involved

Region Östergötland,
Linköping Diocese (Pilgrimcenter)

Implementation plan

- The partnership will be formed in 2019 or early 2020
- Yearly action plan will be developed 2020 and 2021. It will sort out responsibilities on trails maintenance.
- Sweden has developed a digital map/app as part of the GP project. This map is available for pilgrims in Östergötland. <https://maps.visitostergotland.se/sv/kartor/209802/karta>. The map has been improved during 2019 and further development and responsibilities will be part of the discussions within this strategic partnership in the region.

Link with policy

Tourism Industry strategy of Östergötland is being revised. The different strategic partnerships are part of the current strategy and will be updated using knowledge and feedback from the Green Pilgrimage

Impact on policy

Describing the strategic partnership between the Region and the Pilgrimscenter (or Linköping Diocese)

Timeframe

2019-2021

Costs

€1000

Sustainability

Long term commitment on trail management, signage and digital map.

Waste management is handled by the municipalities (both Vadstena and Ödeshög) and public transportation is handled by Östgötatrafiken, which are not part of this strategic partnership.

Suggested Funding Sources

Region Östergötland

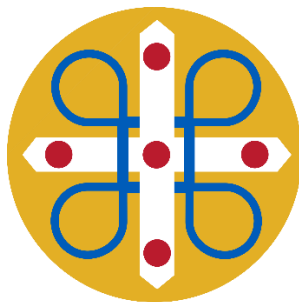
Linköping Diocese

Action 3 - Pilgrims Welcome

Description

Parallel with the ongoing process of influencing the regional policy for tourism industry we will develop a practical tool for sustainable pilgrimage. We believe that practical work and good examples are a successful way of influencing policies. As we experience a lack of updated information and “green pilgrim image” on lots of the places for food, services and lodging in Europe we would like to develop a tool - Pilgrims Welcome - a simple ‘certification’ of service places for pilgrims that requires sustainable offers to pilgrims and updated and clear digital information on the trail. The concept Pilgrims Welcome addresses stakeholders for food lodging and services along the pilgrim trails in all Sweden.

Stakeholder that sign up will get a yearly sticker to put on their door “Pilgrims Welcome 2020” and be part of the database on places for Pilgrims.



**PILGRIM'S
WELCOME
2019**

The list below are the specific selected lessons learned from Green Pilgrimage which ‘Pilgrim’s welcome’ will be based on. Lesson no 6 is very central as we have several experiences on pilgrims missing the pilgrims feeling along trails in Sweden and other countries.

1. The importance of long term strategies and commitment.
2. The importance of cooperation and partnership on local, regional and national level.
3. The importance of long term work with local communities along the trail.
4. The importance of networks/associations supporting and promoting the ways
5. Important to find ways to cooperate between faith and secular organisations.
6. The role of local entrepreneurs in creating a genuine experience.
7. The importance in cooperation with local and small scale entrepreneurs in food, lodging etc.
8. The importance of finding practical tools to improve the greening of the pilgrimage.

Actions:

1. Develop criteria for Pilgrims Welcome by involving stakeholders (2019)
2. Pilot Action – Develop a digital tool for Pilgrims Welcome and test this on some stakeholders (2020)
3. Implement Pilgrims Welcome in the region of Östergötland (2020-2021) starting in the Vadstena/Omberg area

To influence on the greening of pilgrimage in practical terms we want to use the lesson learnt on study visits in Europe to develop a simple certification for places that provide services for pilgrims that pushes for more sustainability and convenient information.

Our main objectives will be:

- Raise awareness about sustainability among pilgrims and stakeholders.
- Develop a functioning concept of sustainable hospitality – ‘Pilgrims Welcome’ (including food, energy, waste, transportation and required and correct information on pilgrimage, public transport, natural- and cultural heritage)
- Use pilgrimage to promote local sustainable development
- Improve the sustainability components of an updated regional sustainability strategy

We will also be looking at parallel projects focusing on sustainability along the pilgrim route for example public transports.

Developing criteria’s for Pilgrims Welcome together with stakeholders and make an external analysis on similar certifications. It will be a quality concept for stakeholders focused on pilgrimage for strengthening their offer for a better guest experience and sustainable development.

Next step is to create a database that facilitates to keep all information updated. Stakeholders (food, lodging, services) requires to update their information yearly to receive the yearly sticker to put on their door. Updated digital information on the trail will automatically be sent to the stakeholders. One of the criteria’s will be to keep this information available. We will test the criteria’s and digital tool on ten stakeholders in Östergötland to evaluate and make sure it works properly.

Sweden has developed a digital map/app as part of the GP project. This map is now available for pilgrims in Östergötland. <https://www.visitostergotland.se/209802/Pilgrimsvandra-i-Ostergotland/>

Information from the Pilgrims Welcome will automatically update the information on places to eat, sleep etc. on this map/app. To keep information updated is one of the aim of the concept “Pilgrims Welcome”.

Organisations Involved

Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena, Linköping Diocese

Vadstena parish

Stakeholders along the trail

Implementation plan

1. Develop criteria’s for Pilgrims Welcome by involving stakeholders (2019)
2. Pilot Action – Develop a digital tool for Pilgrims Welcome and test this on some stakeholders (2020)
3. Implement Pilgrims Welcome in the region of Östergötland (2020-2021) starting in the Vadstena/Omberg area

Link with policy

Perhaps the national standard for low lands trails.

Impact on policy

Improving environment friendly maintenance of the route and sustainable tourism and rural development

Timeframe

2019 - 2021

Costs

€20000

Sustainability

Pilgrims Welcome - a simple 'certification' of service places for pilgrims that requires sustainable offers to pilgrims will be a practical tool for greening the pilgrimage concerning in many ways, for example:

- waste management
- green energy
- organic food
- public transportation

Pilgrims Welcome also address rural development by helping new and small stakeholders to improve their business.

Suggested Funding Sources

Linköping diocese,

We now apply for funding from The Swedish board of agriculture – Rural development.

Action 4 - Vadstena - The Pilgrim Destination

Description

In this action we try to change our strategic focus – to focus on Vadstena – the pilgrim destination.

In most study visits we have taken part in a walk, a short pilgrimage to sample the local route. The focus has been on maintenance, way-marking, infrastructure, digitalization and service points.

Two of our stakeholders that have taken part in several of the study visits, are Vadstena DMO (Vadstena Turism & Näringsliv AB) and Vadstena Pilgrim Centre. Vadstena DMO play a key role in the development of the pilgrim destination – Vadstena. How they manage local cooperation, encourage product development and market Vadstena is essential for the overall development of Vadstena as a pilgrimage destination.

Vadstena Pilgrim Centre function as a pilgrim reception and play a key role in the development of the pilgrim destination of Vadstena. How they greet and meet pilgrims is essential for the overall pilgrim experience.

Our goal is to revitalise, presenting/branding and market Vadstena as a pilgrim city/destination.

The implementation of this action will depend on the response from involved organizations and local businesses when presented to the idea of strengthening a pilgrim identity for the city.

Marketing activities are dependent on the accessibility of new funding.

We aim to create new projects and encourage product development by:

- Engaging with local businesses for the development of pilgrim offers
- Strengthening the collaboration with local organizations and volunteers
- Exploring the possibilities to further expose/promote pilgrimage in local events, festivals etc.

Organisations Involved

Vadstena Pilgrim Centre, Vadstena Parish and Linköping Diocese, Vadstena Municipality and Vadstena DMO.

Implementation plan

The importance of storytelling is a lesson learned from many study visits. The art of storytelling is essential for modern pilgrimage. It conceptualizes the tourist attraction, appealing to the tourists' interests and preferences. Consequently, tourists themselves have a role in the production of a tourist attraction. It is for this reason that a tourist attraction is often understood as a system which consists of various components, the tourist being one of them.

The implementation of this action will depend on the response from involved organizations and local businesses when presented to the idea of strengthening a pilgrim identity for the city.

Marketing activities may be dependent on the accessibility of project funding.

Link with policy

Regional Tourism Strategy

Development in cooperation between the public and private sector with respect for the difference in roles and the importance of local business commitment.

Vadstena Branding and Destination Development Strategy

Pilgrimage is one of the USP of Vadstena that supports the overall brand. The pilgrimage tradition can form the basis for a number of initiatives within the tourism industry.

Vadstena Municipality Plans

To facilitate business development by improved access to nature by signed routes as well as preservation and development of the cultural heritage of Vadstena.

Impact on policy

Creating new projects and products to enhance the pilgrim destination.

Timeframe

2020 + 2021

Costs

€20 000

Sustainability

Enhancing the identity as a pilgrim city will have an impact on non-pilgrims, new to the idea of sustainable tourism.

Suggested Funding Sources

Vadstena Pilgrim Centre
Vadstena Parish
Linköping Diocese
Vadstena Municipality
Vadstena DMO (Vadstena Turism & Näringsliv AB)
Region of Östergötland
Provider of project funding

Conclusions and Monitoring

The experiences from the first years of the project, study visits, development of digital tools, and new knowledge will support a vision of working towards The Birgitta Ways – a national trail to Vadstena from Denmark, Norway and Stockholm.

The Action Plan will be one part, an important step towards The Birgitta Ways, and will give us a tool to create a national and international interest in pilgrimage among stakeholders and organisations in Sweden.

Actions will be monitored by project partner in close cooperation with Pilgrimcenter in Vadstena and Linköping diocese

All actions will be followed up by a short summary of achievements.

Timetable and level on ambitions for Action 3 and 4 depends on external funding.

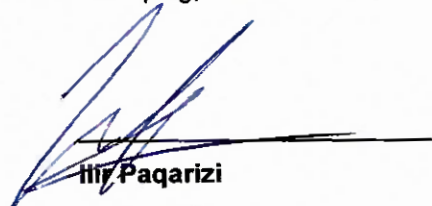
Linköping, 2020-05-28



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