

## **Sweden**

### **Low Population Density**

Sweden is one of the greatest countries in the Western Europe, with an area of 450 000 sqkm. Sweden is 1,600 kilometres from the south to the north. Of the total population of nearly nine million people, about 85 per cent live in the southern part of the country. One out of four persons lives in the three main metropolitan areas. Sweden has a low average population density, approximately 20 inhabitants per square kilometre. Urban settlements occupy a few per cent. This means that most of the Swedish area is unexploited.

### **The Landscape**

Due to Sweden's great area the nature varies in different parts of Sweden. Cultivated land accounts for some eight per cent of the area, as do fells and mountains and twelve per cent consists of mires. The rest, more than half the country, is covered by forest.

Sweden has also a lot of water. There are 96,000 lakes, large and small, which together with the nation's wetlands cover approximately one fifth of the country's surface. There are thousands of islands along the jagged coast. Most of the land is relatively flat, but along the mountain chain in the north-west reaches altitudes of up to 2 000 meters.

Natural conditions are clearly reflected in historical and present-day land use. The Swedish landscape is divided into predominantly open landscape, a mixture of open landscape and forest and predominantly forest. Parallel to this there is a division between local/regional centres and peripheral settlements. A long-term process of polarisation in land use combined with a steadily shrinking area of agricultural land has been in progress throughout last century. Increasingly predominant in the open landscape is the cultivation of grain crops, whereas forested and mixed areas typically support livestock farming and pasture.

Most of the contraction in the use of land for agricultural purposes is occurring in forested and mixed country. In some parts of the country, particularly inland areas of central and northern Sweden, most agricultural land has already fallen into disuse. If this process is accentuated any further, farming will cease in these areas altogether.

The modern cultivated landscape is characterised by mechanisation and use of chemicals. Structural rationalisation and use of cheap raw materials made it possible to rationalise agriculture despite. This process had a particularly devastating effect on hay meadows and other land where fodder grew naturally. In many cases the use of such land for agricultural production ceased entirely and in others intensive use of fertilisers occurred. Accumulation of nitrogen harms the many species adapted to low levels of that element, species which have become characteristic of land where fodder grows naturally.

Remnants of these ancient fodder lands are the feature of the traditional agricultural landscape that has attracted most attention in modern times. Great efforts are made to conserve the biological diversity associated with them: hay meadows and natural grazing lands. Fragments

of biologically valuable land areas are also found as features of the agricultural landscape: midfield pockets of vegetation, stone-walls, solitary trees, ditches and watercourses, roadside verges etc. The national survey of meadows and pastures has identified some 200,000 hectares of land worthy of conservation.

### **Right of Public Access**

The Swedish people are very fond in and very proud of the Swedish countryside and also the old towns and villages. An aspect regarding to this and important to keep in mind is the *right of public access*. You cannot find so many details written in the law just about "the right of public access", but you can find it as a "human right" in our constitutional act. The right of public access has its ground in the Middle Ages when Sweden was even more sparsely populated than now and when people walked or rode through the countryside. We now use to say what is not forbidden in any act is allowed. So the right of public access allows you to roam about freely (without asking the landowner) even to go camping (one night or so) in the countryside, if you do not destroy. You are for example entitled to enjoy the fragrance of the flower covered meadows. You are entitled to walk, cycle, ride or ski across other people's land - provided you do not cause any damage.

### **More specific about landscape in the law**

If we look in the law we cannot find anything about "landscape" explicit. But you can find words as culturally characteristic landscape, environment and natural environment. Words that are a part of "landscape", landscape with a definition according to the Landscape Convention.

In Sweden we have since 1999 a coordinated body for environmental legislation - the *Environmental Code*. And as a little contradiction to the text above you can really find the word "landscape" in the text, namely in the chapter of environmental impact statement (EIS). It is there stipulated that an EIS should assess the effects on landscape among other aspects.

In the part of the code concerning protection of nature we have provisions on national parks, nature reserves, culture reserves and biotope protection areas. The basic idea of *national parks* is to preserve parts of our national cultural heritage for future generations and the national parks are to be representative biotopes which are preserved in their natural state, but also beautiful unique environments which have experiences to offer. Another idea is also to give people the opportunity of getting into the forest and countryside. Biotopes in the national parks are for examples virgin forest, deciduous forest, swamps, archipelago and old agricultural landscapes. Apart from the national parks Sweden has a large number of *nature reserves* and other protected areas like culture reserves. A total of just over 8% of Sweden's territory is protected in one way or another.

Some other provisions in the same part of the code with regards to the landscape are the provisions on shore protection. A special shore protection applies by the sea, inland lakes and watercourses. The purpose of this is to protect the preconditions for outdoor activities of the public and to preserve good living conditions of fauna and flora. This means that is not allowed to build new houses in a zone of 100 metres (sometimes more) along the shoreline. The county administrative board or municipality may, in certain circumstances, grant relaxation from the prohibition. These provisions have a big impact on this sensitive landscape.

In another part of the Environmental Code you can find a provision protecting the natural environment. It is a kind of "security provision" stipulating if there is no other regulation in the code that you have to consult the County Administrative Board if you are planning an activity or a measure that will materially alter the natural environment. In the same chapter there is also provisions about quarries for rock, stone, gravel and the like. A permit is required to conduct quarry operations.

In the Forestry Act you can also find regulation on the forestry that has impact on the landscape. Provisions for example the figuration and the size of areas where trees will be felled. In the Plan and Building Act you can find regulation about buildings and other exploration concerning aesthetic consideration among other things of importance for the built landscape.

As you see we have in Sweden no special text in an act or no special act about "landscape". But if we put together pieces from different acts we have a rather good consideration of the landscape. If or when we will implement the European Landscape Convention we must probably look it over and do some changes.

## **Fifteen Environmental Objectives**

In 1999 the Swedish Parliament adopted environmental quality objectives relating to fifteen areas, describing what quality and state of the environment and natural and cultural resources of Sweden are ecological sustainable in long term. To provide more tangible guidance for efforts in the environment it has been defined interim targets for each objective.

The relationship between each environmental quality objective and the related interim targets may be described as follows: The environmental quality objectives define the state of the Swedish environment which the environmental measures seek to achieve, while the interim targets state the direction and timescale for the ongoing concrete environmental measures. In most cases, the interim targets relate to the situation in 2010, although other timescales have been chosen in a few cases. The content of the interim targets varies too. Some describe a certain environmental quality target, while others set out certain changes, such as changes in emission levels, that are to be achieved.

### Sweden's fifteen environmental quality objectives

- 1 Limited influence on climate
- 2 Clean air
- 3 Natural acidification only
- 4 A non-toxic environment
- 5 A protective ozone layer
- 6 A safe radiation environment
- 7 No eutrophication
- 8 Sustainable lakes and watercourses
- 9 High-quality groundwater
- 10 A balanced marine environment, sustainable coastal areas and archipelagos
- 11 Flourishing wetlands
- 12 Sustainable forests
- 13 A varied agricultural landscape

14 A magnificent mountain landscape

15 A good urban environment

The fifteen environmental objectives represent a major contribution to our efforts to improve the environment. A system of environmental objectives, intermediate objectives, sectoral objectives in each sector, the regional objectives by the county administrative boards and the local objectives by the municipalities. This approach increases participation and encourages the various sectors and levels in Sweden to take an active part in the task of implementing the fifteen environmental quality objectives. *The Environmental Code* is the main legal instrument for achieving the environmental objectives.

With regards to the landscape and the European Landscape Convention the last six objectives are of most interest.

### **Sweden and the implementation of the convention**

Sweden has signed the convention in the beginning of 2001, but we have not ratified it. Our intention is to do that. A project together with the other four Nordic countries was finished in the end of 2002. In the project we have tried to find a common basis for the Nordic landscape and the work with the Landscape Convention. The project group has established areas of emphasis for the Nordic countries further efforts with the convention. In June 2003 a brochure was printed and the report "Nordic Landscapes" will be available at Internet.

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This compilation is written by Ebbe Adolfsson who works at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Some of his issues are to promote the use of strategic environmental assessment and integrated landscape management plans, he is also the Swedish contact person concerning the European Landscape Convention.