

Outdoor recreation in Sweden - Can local land use planning deliver the areas needed?

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Nature areas suitable for outdoor recreation can be protected in local land use plans and building permits - provided that local politicians consider outdoor recreation as an important issue. Otherwise, exploitation (such as development of housing and infrastructure) is often considered as more important (Petersson Forsberg 2009). There are several rationales for the protection of nature areas. A frequently used argument is public health (Swedish Government 2002, Verheij et al. 2008), but citizens' high demand for outdoor recreation can also be a justification (Fredman et al. 2008). Local land use plans affect privately owned land as well as public land, and the right of public access ensures public access to private land. The main purpose of this paper is to describe and discuss local land use planning as a tool for the protection of nature areas suitable for outdoor recreation. Zoning will be discussed as a possible solution to strengthen outdoor recreation in planning, with examples of the planning framework Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS).

There is a notion that local land use planning can function as a tool for the protection of nature areas suitable for outdoor recreation (Swedish Government 2002). To some extent this might be true, as Swedish municipalities have a 'planning monopoly'. Thus the provision of recreation areas, other than nature reserves and national parks, rests with them. The comprehensive plan has a central role in the Swedish planning and building legislation; it covers the whole municipality and it is compulsory. It is a source of knowledge where the public interests are considered (Ankre 2007).

A survey conducted in spring 2008 (to all Swedish municipalities N=290) showed that most municipalities consider outdoor recreation as an important issue in their policy documents. However, in the adjustment to other interests during the processes of planning and permits, outdoor recreation is not necessarily the winning part. Thereby the status of outdoor recreation in local land use planning appears to be weak (Petersson Forsberg 2009). Reasons for this might be that comprehensive planning is not legally binding and almost half of the municipalities do not keep their comprehensive plans up to date (National Board of Housing, Building and Planning 2009). Another explanation might be the 'compact city'; a current planning ideal where exploitation of green areas and brownfields is promoted with sustainability arguments (Neuman 2005).

The legal frame of shoreline protection³ has recently been revised to better suit diverse parts of Sweden with various conditions for exploitation. The right to grant exemptions from the shoreline protection has thereby moved from a regional to a municipal level. This has led to highly divided opinions of what the effects on public access to shores might be. Interest groups⁴ fear an increased exploitation of the shore, leading to a decreased public access (Alarik et al. 2008).

In 2007 and 2008, questionnaire surveys were conducted addressed to Swedish citizens. Results showed that 15% of the respondents perceive a lack of nature areas suitable for recreation. Furthermore, the respondents express strong opinions that the municipalities, instead of the state, should have greater influence on the protection of shorelines (Fredman et al. 2008). In a questionnaire survey (2007) directed to visitors and second home owners in the Blekinge

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³ The shoreline protection safeguards both public access to the shore and biodiversity 100-300 m from average water level

⁴ The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), Friluftsförbundet (The Swedish Association for outdoor life) and The Swedish Tourist Association.

archipelago, Sweden, almost ¼ of the respondents had experienced that buildings, fences or activities had prevented them from moving freely in areas close to the shore (Ankre 2009).

The purpose of the planning framework Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is to divide a region into geographical perceivable areas with various contents. The separation is both spatial and qualitative. How to implicate and use the ROS is not an obvious task (Ankre 2007). So far, in the application of the ROS in Sweden, the dilemma is the opposition between nature conservation and use, and other forms of recreation development. Also, because of the public right of access, there are other prerequisites for regulations of activities and admittance, which requires an adjustment of the ROS to Swedish conditions (Emmelin et al. 2005). However, this will be aided with the current strengthening of the comprehensive planning, along with zoning and the increased support of knowledge to planners and decision makers. Thus, in the Swedish context, the need for new policies is less than the need for a more stringent implementation of the already existing. What effects on public access the legal revision might bring is too early to say, but the use of local land use planning as a tool to protect the public access can be crucial.

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