

Toward indicators of nature-based recreation in Sweden

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Nature-based recreation has received an increased attention in several national policies in Sweden recently. Driven by the implementation of a national outdoor recreation policy and the assessment of the national environmental objectives, focus has been on the possibilities to develop indicators to monitor nature-based recreation (e.g. outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism) in the different policies. This paper briefly outlines this process including proposed key dimensions of such indicators and the design of a national outdoor recreation participation survey. Such information will serve practitioners with tools to better monitor and forecast nature-based recreation and associated effects on natural, social and economic environments.

Outdoor Recreation in National Policies

In 2010 the parliament voted for the government bill “The Future of Outdoor Recreation” (Framtidens friluftsliv) providing Sweden with its first outdoor recreation policy at the national level. The parliament did also request measurable objectives to be developed for each of the ten policy areas, which were reported to the Ministry of Environment in 2012. The ten policy areas and proposed measurable objectives include:

1. Accessible nature
2. Strong commitment and cooperation
3. The Right of Public Access (Allemansrätten) forms the basis of outdoor recreation
4. Access to nature for outdoor recreation
5. Attractive natural areas close to urban centres
6. Sustainable regional growth
7. Protected areas as a resource for outdoor recreation
8. Valuable outdoor recreation at school
9. Outdoor recreation for the good health of the people
10. Good knowledge of outdoor recreation

In December 2012 the government writ ‘Mål för friluftslivspolitikern’ (Goals for the Outdoor Recreation Policy) was published which points out the future of the Swedish outdoor recreation policy more or less following the intentions in the above mentioned ten policy areas (Writ. 2012/13:51). During the process described above, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency identified better statistics as one among several issues to be resolved if the objectives of the outdoor recreation policy is to be complied.

In addition to the national policy on outdoor recreation, eight out of the 16 national environmental quality objectives in Sweden also address social values in terms of outdoor recreation (for example a balanced marine environment, flourishing coastal areas and archipelagos, sustainable forests, a

magnificent mountain landscape, and a good built environment). Several of the objectives emphasize the importance of urban proximate environments for recreation opportunities as well as a natural environment free of noise. Other policies also including outdoor recreation are concerning forestry, protected areas and public health. Swedish forests provide many different benefits to society and the forest policy has two equal objectives – wood production and environmental protection. Social values are considered, but lack more specific objectives. Policies regarding protected areas have increasingly emphasized social values the last decades and in the early 2000 the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency launched the “Protect, Preserve, Present” program for a better utilization and management of protected areas. In the more recent proposition “Hållbart skydd av naturområden” from 2008 it is further stated that protected areas should be managed so they are accessible and a resource for regional development, tourism and public health.

Proposed Indicators

During 2013 the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency commenced a project to develop indicators for an effective follow-up of outdoor recreation in the environmental objective system in order to assess status, development and goal achievement within the eight objectives that have specifications for outdoor recreation (Naturvårdsverket, 2014). The system should be harmonized with the national outdoor recreation policy and the challenge was in finding common bases for a follow-up that can be used in both objectives’ structures. Since outdoor recreation is a multifaceted phenomenon that finds expression in different contexts and results in different types of values it is important to focus on outdoor recreation in aggregate form (the practice of outdoor recreation); indirectly measuring the values of outdoor recreation with information on the natural and cultural landscapes through assessment of the landscapes’ suitability, distance and accessibility; as well as collecting direct information in the form of experiences and knowledge on the part of visitors. Table 1 shows the main dimensions of the outdoor recreation indicators proposed.

Table 1: Main dimensions of outdoor recreation indicators

1. Participation in outdoor recreation	
2. Protecting and preserving values of outdoor recreation	2a. Assessment of the landscape’s suitability
	2b. Experience values
3. Accessibility	3a. Distance and approachability
	3b. Service and infrastructure
	3c. Information and knowledge
4. Noise (experiences of)	

A National Survey on Outdoor Recreation

In working with the indicators described above, several shortcomings became apparent in available statistics and data. While the number of suggestions may seem comprehensive, appropriate data

does not exist to the extent needed and one mean to deal with this has been to launch a national survey on outdoor recreation participation. The survey is conducted using a national web-based panel including 12 monthly waves of 700 responses each (8 400 observations in total). Questions asked concern frequency of time spent in the outdoors, participation in outdoor recreation activities, latent demand and constraints to participation. The survey also included several questions concerning the most recent visit in the outdoors as well as measures of the attractiveness of different nature environments by an assessment of photographs from the National Inventory of the Swedish Landscape (NILS). The survey is conducted by Mid-Sweden University on behalf of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency during 2014 and will serve as a benchmark for outdoor recreation in Sweden in the future.

References

Naturvårdsverket, 2014. Uppföljning av friluftsliv. Förslag till en samlad uppföljning av friluftsliv inom miljömålssystemet och friluftslivsmålen. Rapport 6480, Stockholm.

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