

Outdoor recreation in change – What about Sweden?

Klas Sandell, Karlstad University, Sweden, klas.sandell@kau.se

Outdoor recreation in Sweden

Experience-oriented encounters with nature have been developed in Sweden, as in other western industrial countries, since the end of the 19th century (Sandell & Sörlin, 2008). This has been done by using concepts like outdoor recreation, outdoor life (Scandinavian: *friluftsliv*, litt: free-air-life), outdoor education and nature tourism. The earlier establishment of these perspectives in Sweden, through outdoor-related organisations, was clearly connected to international inspiration and society's prosperous elite in the fields of science, the church and the military. Children's and young people's education and upbringing have always been important aspects, and both school and recreational interests in nature have been regarded as a national identity- and mobilisation tool. During the early 1900s, outdoor life activities and organisations were dominated by the upper class – and particularly by men, although a democratisation took place in Sweden in the 1930s in an attempt to encompass a wider public. Cycling holidays, youth hostels and camping became typical features of this outdoor expansion. After the Second World War, and parallel with the development of a post-war material welfare society, outdoor recreation also became increasingly "materialised" in the shape of holiday cottages, caravans, pleasure boats and advanced outdoor equipment. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the authorities are once again focusing on outdoor recreation and nature based tourism on the basis of public health, environmental engagement and regional development. From a population survey (Fredman et al, 2008), we also note that:

- about 40% of the population estimate that they "rather often" or "very often" spend time in nature during weekends and holidays;
- about half of the population estimate that as a child they spent time in nature "very often" during the holidays;
- the most important activities (over 80% participation) are "walking for pleasure", "forest walks/hikes", "gardening", "sunbathing" and "picnics";
- also, deep aspects such as "spending time outdoors usually makes me feel or sense that I and all other humans belong together with and are part of nature" are agreed on fully or in part by almost 80% of the population.

Examples of current changes and challenges

Sportification and indoorisation

Two examples of current changes and challenges with regard to outdoor recreation in Sweden are the interconnected tendencies of sportification and indoorisation (Sandell, Arnegård & Backman, 2011). While these aspects have so far not affected the broad public pattern of out-of-doors

in Sweden to any great extent, they are likely to influence the future situation in various ways. Modern industrial society is characterised by functional specialisations. Instead of being part of the hunt, fight, play and search for resources, sporting activities like running, jumping, throwing the javelin or dancing are turned into specific activities with specialised rules, time-limits, equipment, assessments and specially designed (often indoor) settings. Parallel to this successive specialisation of sport kinetic, cultures requiring uncontrolled spatial environments are also evident. Using concepts like outdoor recreation and nature tourism, recreational activities were established that were often more inspired by Romanticism's anti-civilisation ideals of other values and nature experiences than by industrial society's functional specialisation and cultivation of nature (Sandell & Öhman, 2010). Although these two traditions – competition-oriented physical exercise in controlled environments vs. nature encounters and experiences in uncontrolled environments – developed in parallel, they have often been in conflict with each other. Here, in these borderlands, the role of the nature experience, the ambition to control and opinions about competition and risk have all been recurring dividing lines. Strong signs seem to indicate that these borderlands are now being dramatically "renegotiated".

The future of the right of public access

The right of public access is of fundamental importance for the public's visits to and presence in the countryside in the form of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism in Sweden (Sandell & Fredman, 2010). In principle, it can be seen as the "free space" (Fig. 1) between economic interests, privacy and nature preservation/conservation. But the landscape itself must also "tell" the user about the possibilities and limitations of things like land use and time of year (e.g. how vulnerable the land is), weather (e.g. for lighting fires), visibility (e.g. how close one can be to a house). As with all stories, though, one has to learn to read, listen and interpret; something that is challenged in today's highly mobile and urbanised society with its intensified motorisation, privatisation and commercialisation. However, the *landscape perspective* of the right of public access, characterised by democracy, consideration, adaptation, multipurpose use and an integration of nature/culture, is important both as an educational tool and an illustration of sustainable development in the future.

The need for stable, long-term knowledge structures

It is of utmost importance that stable, long-term institutional structures for research and monitoring and arenas for dialogue and knowledge transfer are established with regard to outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism in Sweden. Outdoor recreation in general has a limited research tradition in Sweden, although there are many signs of outdoor recreation habits in transition. There is also a

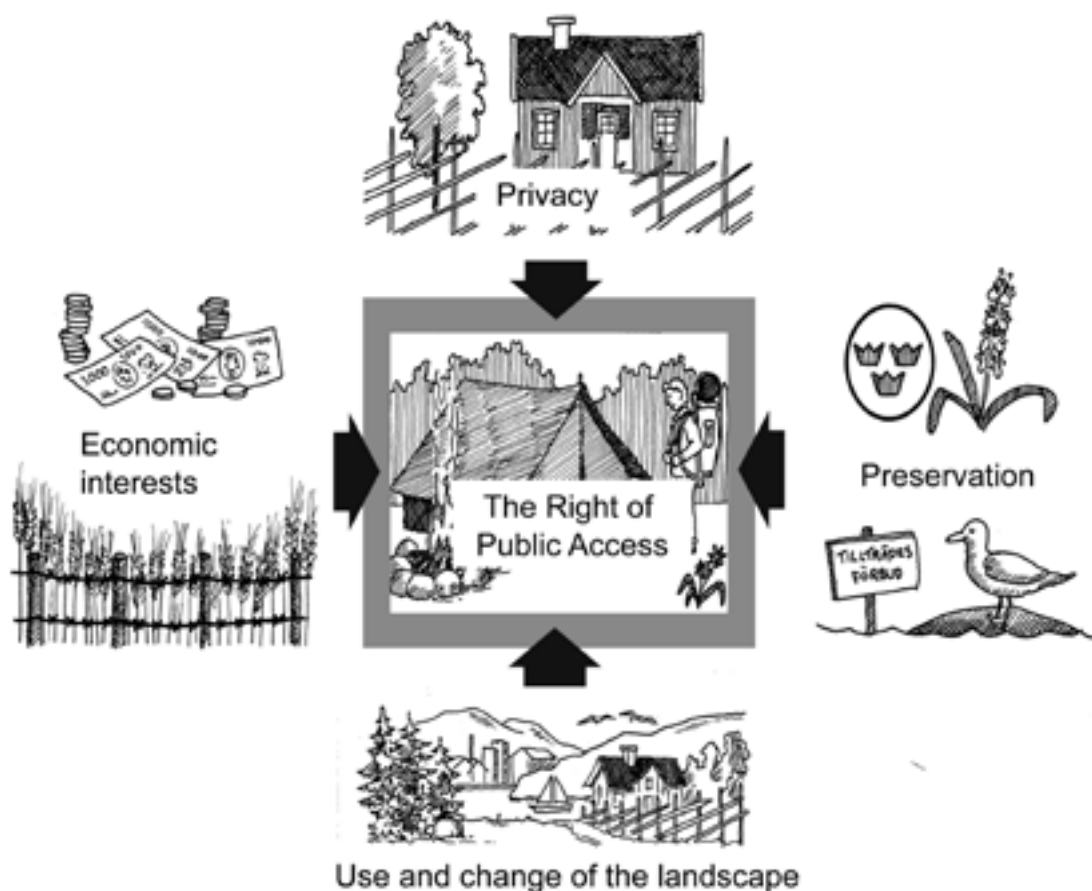


Figure 1. The right of public access as a "free space" between the limitations of privacy, economic interests, preservation and the use and change of the landscape (e.g. Sandell & Fredman, 2010; Drawing by Matz Glantz).

tension between this internationally influenced situation and an interest in discussing what the characteristics of a Nordic outdoor recreation tradition, including the right of public access, could be. Sweden is also an increasingly multicultural society, where terms, activities, norms and landscape preferences vary greatly. This is why the need for stable knowledge structures beyond the time span of our research programme has been an important objective of Outdoor Recreation in Change (Sandell, Fredman & Sten-

seke, 2011). In addition to ordinary scientific efforts, arenas like annual national conferences, public reports, newsletters and an informative website have been established. Maintaining these knowledge structures and other requirements for recurrent research and monitoring now has to be prioritised. Mainly due to financial hesitations, the outcome is uncertain, although there is still time for the relevant authorities to take action.

Fredman, Peter; Karlsson, Sven-Erik, Romild, Ulla & Sandell, Klas (red.) (2008). Vilka är ute i naturen? Delresultat från en nationell enkät om friluftsliv och naturturism i Sverige (Who is out in nature? Part results from a national survey on outdoor recreation and nature based tourism in Sweden). Rapport No. 1, Forskningsprogrammet: Friluftsliv i Förändring, Östersund.

Sandell, Klas; Arnegård, Johan & Backman, Erik (red.) (2011). Friluftssport och äventyrsidrott: Utmaningar för lärare, ledare och miljö i en föränderlig värld (Outdoor Sport and Adventure Sport – Challenges for Teachers, Leaders and Environments in a Changing world). Studentlitteratur: Lund.

Sandell, Klas & Fredman, Peter (2010). The Right of Public Access: Opportunity or Obstacle for Nature Tourism in Sweden? *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 291–309.

Sandell, Klas; Fredman, Peter & Stenseke, Marie (2011). Framtida forskningsstrukturer för friluftsliv och naturturism i Sverige: Ett diskussionsunderlag (Future research structures for outdoor recreation and nature based tourism in Sweden: A basis for discussion). Rapport No. 17, Forskningsprogrammet: Friluftsliv i Förändring, Östersund.

Sandell, Klas & Sörlin, Sverker (red.) (2008; 2a reviderade uppl.). Friluftshistoria – från 'hårdande friluftsliv' till ekoturism och miljöpedagogik: Teman i det svenska friluftslivets historia (The history of outdoor recreation – from 'the hardy outdoor life' to ecotourism and environmental education: Themes in Swedish outdoor history). Carlssons bokförlag, Stockholm.

Sandell, Klas & Öhman, Johan (2010). Educational potentials of encounters with nature – reflections from a Swedish outdoor perspective. *Environmental Education Research*, Vol 16, No. 1, pp. 95–114.