Beslutsunderlag

Ansökan om medel för förstudie

Ansökan skickas till:

Mittuniversitetet och Härnösands kommun

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| Namn på förstudie  Tourism and sustainable development in Härnösand and the High Coast | Datum för start av förstudie  1 Jan 2019 | Datum för avslut förstudie  30 June 2019 |
| Sökt belopp  350 000:- |

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# Sammanfattning förstudie

Despite Härnösand’s position as a key gateway community to the Höga Kusten UNESCO World Heritage site, its full potential as a tourist destination has not been realized. This is somewhat surprising given that the city’s growth strategy (Tillväxtstrategi Härnösand, 2017) highlights the significance of Höga Kusten both as an internationally recognized site as well as its brand image. Indeed, the growth strategy pinpoints the region’s attraction for cruise tourists and hikers, as well its various cultural and historical facilities.

This pre-study aims to identify the potential for further developing tourism in Härnösand and Höga Kusten in a manner that enhances the region’s overall sustainability. The objective is to avoid the “numbers game” whereby communities chase increasing arrivals and revenues without anticipating the ramifications of this increase. Rather, the hope is that this pre-study will lay the ground for tourism development in the region in a manner that supports the community’s overall sustainability objectives. As a point of departure, it focuses on the following broad themes: (a) festivals and events; (b) nature-based tourism with a specific emphasis on coastal attractions; (c) gastronomy and; (d) the potential of establishing a college offering an innovative education with regards to the visitor industry. This background research will lead towards a full-blown project application for effectively developing and managing tourism in the context of Härnösand’s overall sustainability objectives. The pre-study will begin on January 1st and should be completed by June 30th. The requested sum for the pre-study is 350.000 SEK.

# Syfte, mål, målgrupp, avgränsning samt leveranser

This pre-study will first examine Härnösand’s potential to develop a tourism sector that functions as an integral component of the community’s overall sustainable development goals. Given that Härnösand has not yet emerged as a heavily visited destination, despite its location as a key gateway to the Höga Kusten UNESCO world heritage site, it offers a unique opportunity to embrace a innovative strategy for tourism development that avoids many of the pitfalls witnessed in numerous destinations worldwide but also in Sweden (e.g., too many visitors concentrated in only certain hotspots, spending modest amounts of money while imposing a heavy burden on the destination). It is well-recognized that too many destinations worldwide that function as gateways into protected areas (e.g., national parks, wilderness areas and heritage sites) often suffer from problems associated with rapid and uncoordinated tourism growth. This situation is one that can be avoided in Härnösand’s case. The hope is that the community can ultimately gain the reputation as a best-practice destination for sustainable development.

As part of this pre-study, a first step is to map out, based on prior research, practices leading to the development of a visitor-based industry that comply with a community’s overall vision of sustainability. Moreover, it is imperative to identify the existing state of affairs regarding tourism within Härnösand and Höga Kusten while inventorying the potential of new (and innovative) sights and products. In order to do so, a clear understanding of various stakeholders’ perspectives is necessary including those representing public agencies, private companies and non-governmental organizations. This necessitates the staging of at least one focus group meeting early on in the pre-study process to better comprehend the themes that these stakeholders see as vital for tourism’s future development as well as any apparent obstacles that might inhibit the sector’s contribution to sustainable development. Based on the themes identified from the focus group(s), more detailed interviews will be conducted with several key players.

Unltimately, one major output of this pre-study will be an international literature state of the art as well as presentations of best-practice cases from around the world. Additionally, a report relating to the potential and challenges for future tourism development in a sustainable manner will be produced. This material will serve as fodder to develop a full-blown application together with Härnösands Kommun/Höga Kusten for developing an effective plan and implementation strategy for the area’s future visitor industry. The findings of the pre-study will be communicated in several ways including a report, popular-literature pamphlets, and a final presentation to the kommun.

In final analysis, the findings of this pre-study shall be used as the foundation in order to carry out comprehensive research on the way in which Härnösand/Höga Kusten can develop tourism effectively in terms of its overall sustainable development goals. Specifically, the aim is to use this pre-study as the first step towards developing a full-blown project application on this topic.

# Bakgrund och omvärldsanalys.

Communities worldwide have turned to tourism as an economic development and diversification strategy. This is certainly the case in places, including Härnösand, that have suffered the effects of industrial restructuring following, for instance, the closure of manufacturing plants and/or the relocation of a major employer. Through tourism, communities feel that they can rapidly address the most serious negative effects of economic restructuring such as rising unemployment, outmigration and the loss of a tax base. Tourism’s advantage is that many of the activities relating to it have low entry barriers while it is also an effective way to recycle the use of existing infrastructure or facilities (e.g., old factories or warehouses). In addition to serving to make a community more attractive for visitors, a fundamental aim behind tourism development actions is to enhance a community’s livability and expand its drawing power a place to invest in, set up new companies and live.

Unfortunately, all too often, the growth of tourism takes place haphazardly, partly because of the very diverse nature of the players involved in this sector. Superficial understanding of tourism’s dynamics tends to be a dominant theme in many municipalities especially when these are misguided by promises of rapid economic growth and, as a result, it often leads to several undesirable impacts that negatively influence the community’s overall sustainability. In reality, only a very small number of destinations have adopted approaches to tourism development, which are well planned and managed.

Härnösand has the unique opportunity to initiate a clearly thought out planning process for its tourism sector. As a gateway to Höga Kusten and the entire northern part of the country it already has the basic ingredients for developing tourism. The challenge is to ensure that such development is effectively managed in a way that understands that tourism is only one sector within the broader community system which can have influences to varying degrees on numerous other sectors (e.g., transportation, housing, water consumption, infrastructure). Theoretically, we know that to initiate an effective tourism development process that keeps to sustainability guidelines has plenty of challenges for many reasons including the differing timelines of the various stakeholders involved. A key challenge is to ensure that these players agree on key principles that would serve to minimize the negative externalities associated with the sector. Based on lessons learned from other key destinations that have successfully managed tourism’s growth in a sustainable fashion, the hope is for Härnösand to emerge as a best-practice scenario in its own right.

# 4. Kartläggning kompetens och verksamhet Mittuniversitetet

ETOUR is a leading tourism research centre in Northern Europe that was established in 1997. Studies performed by researchers attached to ETOUR have regional, national and international significance. In addition to producing numerous reports, which effectively help businesses, government agencies and policymakers among others, researchers in this environment are engaged in cutting-edge studies leading to peer-reviewed publications and presentations. Several key personnel are engaged in action-oriented research and, as such, they can be of considerable value for in terms of contributing to the proposed project.

# 5. Koppling övergripande strategier

Mid Sweden University has recently adopted a strategy for the period 2019-2023. The overarching goals of this strategy include the need to respond to societal challenges, improve external relations and help to strenghten regional development. All of these dovetail with the ambitions of the project proposed here.

In addition Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling has identified the lack of strategic alliances with academic entities as a weakness for the destinations ability to grow sustainably. The pre-study is deemed to be an ample opportunity to strengthen the relationship between all involved parties.

Furthermore, Härnösands kommun in their own growth strategy address how and in what direction the municipality should develop, and which areas are the best to focus on. Based on global trends as well as shifting attitudes, the strategy underlines that tourism (as part of the experience economy) is one of the main growth areas for the future of the region.

Tourism is of special interest since it caters to businesses based on either natural or cultural resources, it is labor intensive and, unlike many other sectors these days, it is spatially fixed, meaning that it is tied to a specific place or region. Moreover, the production and consumption of tourism services are tied to each other. As for which areas should be developed, the strategy of the kommun highlights the community’s close connections to the sea and the high coast as well as recognizing the existence of innovative bsiness enterpreneurs. The proposed project aims to address the challenges and opportunities and contribute towards developing Härnösand and the High Coast as a place both to visit and, more importantly, to live in.

Whilst Härnösands kommun has clearly pinpointed sustainability as a strategic ingredient for its future success, the destination as a whole still needs to do so. The pre-study will enable the destination to address this and strengthen the destination’s future strategies.

# 6. Koppling framtida profilområde

* During previous workshops between ETOUR and Härnsösands kommun/Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling discussions focused on identifying common areas of interest. Based on the desires of Härsösands kommun there are three different themes that are “of special interest”…
* Evenemangsutveckling – (Event Development)
* Naturbaserad turism (kustperspektiv) – (Nature-based tourism with a coastal emphasis)
* Gastronomi (ev. koppling utbildning) – (Gatronomy coupled to education)

All of the above themes are of equal strategic importance for other areas within Höga Kusten (Kramfors, Sollefteå and Örnsköldsvik) and best practices identified during the pre-study can enable a better balance between supply and demand within the destination as a whole and thus support Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling’s strategies for sustainable growth. Especially the gastronomic perspective has been highlighted by the regional tourism industry as a obstacle for further growth where the pre-study can provide insight valuable for several entities such as Region Västernorrland, ALMI etc.

# 7. Relation forskning och R&D nationellt och internationellt

Researchers at ETOUR have a long-standing tradition in research especially in three areas. These are respectively: Nature based tourism; E-tourism and marketing; Destination Development. The research emphasis is diverse. In recent years there have been publications relating to mountain tourism, trail development and usage, the geography of tourism workers, events and festivals, tourism and peace, sustainable development and so on. The researchers in this environment are actively engaged in several funded projects and participate in international conferences as well as being invited to act as a keynote speakers at various events. For the purposes of this application, which emphasizes events, nature-based tourism and gastronomy there exists the competence within the unit to undertake worthwhile research (see a list of reports published in the ETOUR environment in recent years at <https://www.miun.se/etour/ETOUR-Publikationer/>). For the purposes of this pre-study a short state of the art presentation is included here.

**Sustainability and Nature-based Tourism**

Much attention has recently been paid towards the sustainable development goals (SDGS) of the United Nations (see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>). Several of these 17 goals relate either directly or indirectly to communities and their future well-being and it is with this framework as a base that the proposed pre-study should proceed. Obviously, previous studies relating to sustainable development and its relation to tourism abound (Weaver, 2006; Hall, Gössling and Scott 2015) and have been a topic that tourism researchers have been investigating for more that 3 decades. Unfortunately, there still exists much confusion relating to the understanding of tourism’s contribution to sustainable development, maily because the industry itself continues to adopt a sectoral interporetation of sustainability (i.e., sustainable tourism) rather than examining how tourism will contribute towards overall societal sustainable development (Ioannides, 2008). It is important within the context of this pre-study to adopt a holistic viewpoint of sustainable development that treats tourism as only one part of a community’s development agenda and, importantly, such a perspective should not only emphasize economic growth perspectives but rather understand tourism’s effects on environmental protection and social equity.

**Events and destinations**

For the last decades a group of reserarchers at Etour has focused on Events and Event impacts. At the moment the field of research occupies one associate professor and two PhD-students. Planned events are these days considered one of the most effective modes of place branding, contributing with millions of free advertising minutes for destinations across the globe (Richards, 2017). Mega events provide the clearest example of this dynamic. Benefits to long-term tourism is one of the most common cited reasons for bidding and staging mega events. The liminal nature of events also means that event visitors on location are likely to bring home with them an overwhelmingly positive image a destination, largely shaped by the transcendent experience they had at the event itself (Chalip, 2006).

As Getz and Page (2016) point out, the enormous positive potential of events brings with it considerable risk, from low ROIs to poorly executed events that damage the destination brand. The continued growth of the events sector and the stakes involved therefore dictates further scrutiny of regional development efforts involving events. To effectively use events in growth strategies, destinations must first understand the full range of impacts of the events in their portfolio, the potential synergies between these events, and the potential synergies between the events and the destination, region or local community.

The historic focus on economic return has overshadowed the crucial role of social values and the importance events have in the lives of local residents (Wallstam, Ioannides and Pettersson, 2018). Events related research therefore needs to adopt a holistic view on events as a tool in regional development.

As the findings of the pre-study has national relevance Härnösands kommun/Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling aims to share the gathered knowledge outside of the academic spheres by means of a national conference. Target groups are regions, DMOs, national agencies etc.

# 8. Relationer andra aktiviteter

Currently, researchers in the ETOUR environment are involved in several projects. For instance, there is work on creative cities and gastronomy, research relating to handicapped accessibility on trails, investigations of the social and economic effects of tourism at the regional level and work concerning the impacts of various events. Recently, the environment has been awarded funding to undertake and investigation of the impacts of the upcoming VM 2019. The competence that exists within the research unit is diverse and extensive and there are several people here could be involved in the investigation of the situation in Härnsösand.

# 9. Partner och andra aktörer

The initiative for the project comes from Härnösands kommun and Höga Kusten Destinationsutevckling to Mid Sweden University, facilitated by the consulting company Pro&Pro. After a couple of workshops in Sundsvall and in Östersund respectively, our first step is to approach this application for a pre-study with these three stakeholders in the core group.

Regardless what the pre-study will conclude the ambition is to broaden the group of partners, especially among small and medium sized enterprises.

More funders may be on board if it develops into a major project, i.e. the European Structural Funds.

# 10. Samhällseffekter

A main point of the pre-study is to demonstrate innovative ways for destinations such as Härnösand to embrace tourism in a manner that influences the overall sustainability of the community and the surrounding region. Based on best practice examples from other destinations as well as guidelines such as the United Nations’ sustainable development goals the aim is to ensure that as the community pursues the development of tourism it does so in a manner that ensures, among others: that jobs created pay a living wage and offer the opportunity for career-building; that events adhere to environmentally-friendly principles and do not detract from the resident population’s ability to enjoy their community; that efforts are made to avoid overcrowding in key areas.

The ambition is that this region can emerge as a best-practice destination that can be an example in its own right for other communities throughout Sweden and elsewhere. Over time, the hope is that a robust tourism sector that adheres to the full principles of sustainability will also lead to a highly livable community.

# 11. Kommunikation

* Etour has a very strong tradition in research communication and utilization of research. During the pre-study a communication plan will be outlined. Meetings, publications, web-based announcements, and the use of social media will be utilized.

# 12. Organisation för genomförande av förstudie

Researchers in the ETOUR environment are involved in several tourism-related investigations. A diverse range of expertise exists in several fields including: nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation; events and experience economy; tourism and sustainable development; E-tourism; econometric studies of tourism’s impacts; tourism, workers and working life. These competences ensure that there are researchers who are well suited to perform this pre-study.

* For this pre-study the three following persons could be involved:
  + Martin Wallstam ( <https://www.miun.se/Personal/martinwallstam/>)
  + Dr. Anna Sörensson (<https://www.miun.se/Personal/annasorensson/>)
  + Dr. Wilhelm Skoglund (<https://www.miun.se/Personal/wilhelmskoglund/>)
* The planned project will involve a steering group including members from ETOUR, HSAND, Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling. Stakeholders including selected businesses and other interested parties will be invited to be on the steering group.

13. Planerade aktiviteter, tidplan och kostnader

* To the table: Studies, research, writing, Focus group meetings, interviews workshops, steering group…

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| **Aktivitet** | **Start** | **Slut** | **Kostnad** |
| Pre-study | 1/1/2019 | 30/6/2019 | 350.000.SEK |
| Focus group meeting | To be determined |  |  |
| Interviews with stakeholders | To be determined |  |  |

# 14. Risker

The major risk for this study, other than the distance between Östersund and Härnösand is that everyone working for now at ETOUR is fully occupied with other tasks. Nevertheless, the funding from the pre-study could allow us to release the time for one or two researchers from other duties and so it should be a risk that is overcome fairly easily. We have considerable experience in handling such situations.

# 15. Undertecknande

Undertecknad enligt §10 i Personuppgiftslagen (PUL, 1998:204), att de personuppgifter om undertecknad som har lämnats i ansökan, får behandlas på sådant sätt och i sådan omfattning som är nödvändig för hantering av ärendet (registrering i diarium o. likn.) och enligt §34 PUL att de publiceras på Internet i information om projektet.

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| Plats och datum | Förstudieledarens underskrift | Namnförtydligande |

Källor:

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