

## Tourism education in Sweden: Past, Present and Future

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*This article will describe how tourism education was started in Sweden for about 33 years ago, at university level. The article gives some hints about how three dedicated young teachers take the same initiatives at different colleges more or less at the same time.*

*It is description of how the established university society looked at this new and odd subject – tourism, but also how the Swedish university system changed a lot and became a much more modern and streamlined one. The article ends up with some desires like what Swedish tourism programs in the near future need, is increased funding for research and more international contacts and collaboration with other teachers and students!*

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### 1. Introduction

As it is increasingly common that my foreign colleagues ask questions to me “how does it come that Sweden was so late in establishing an academic tourism education compared to many other countries”? One can find it somewhat surprising that a modern and highly developed society like Sweden did not receive any higher education within tourism until 1978. But it has its explanation in that in both academia and politics did not consider tourism as job-creating activities with their own requirements for special skill, and that it contributed to improving of the country's current account balance.

It has been written only a few lines about how Tourism studies in Sweden started many years ago, to be more specific 1978, thanks to three perceptive and forward-looking teachers took the initiatives in three different colleges in Sweden. Unfortunately two of them died in the last two years, so the only one of the initiators of who is alive. The teachers who took the initiatives were Leif Aronsson in Östersund, Bengt Nybelius in Borlänge and Anders Steene in Kalmar, the author of this article. In the article: *Tourism geography or tourism? Reflections on the development of a topic*, Müller (2010) wrote that “It was in most cases, human geographers who led the establishment and training was characterized therefore by a geographical perspective on education.” This was not the case in Sweden; none of us was geographer. Leif Aronsson was business economist, Bengt Nybelius was linguist and I myself, Anders Steene, sociologist. All three of us had working experiences from outside the

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universities, mainly in leisure and sport areas, and brought a quite another perspective into the academic education. Looking back over the last 33 years I have the feeling that our different academic subjects as well as our experiences from outside the university was a benefit in developing tourism studies in Sweden. Furthermore, Müller claims that a fourth university college, in Karlstad, started at the same time. This was not true; in Karlstad the studies started first year 1987. The tourism program starter colleges were located in different parts of Sweden, Kalmar in South Sweden, Borlänge in the Western part of Sweden, more or less, and Östersund in the North of Sweden. As these conflicting issues show that it is worth to spend time and document the development of tourism education in Sweden.

The article aims to tell the story of when and how the academic tourism education was established in Sweden much later than many other European countries, discusses what tourism education needs in future. Told by one of tourism education initiators in Sweden who were involved from the establishment to the development. Therefore is the article in a narrative shape. The article employs a narrative approach: trying to make sense of the world with how a person experience, comprehend the world, he or she tell the others what he or she found and what kinds of aspects it had (Sikes and Gale, 2006). Stories have always been passed on knowledge and experience, person to person, generation to generation. When a person begins to tell us something we are listening. Not all are good storytellers, but everyone can tell and everyone has a story to tell. Man is in itself a story, with all his experiences, both good and bad (Möller and Försund, 2003).

## **2. Tourism Education in Sweden: Start**

While some of Scandinavian countries started the tourism education before the year 1977, some did not. For example, there were a few academic programs at some colleges focusing on hotel, restaurant, travel agents and tourism in Finland. The tourism education had started one academic program in tourism studies 1974 at Oppland College and there was also a college in Stavanger teaching in Hotel Management in Norway. However the tourism educations in Sweden and Denmark were not took off. While there were no academic tourism studies in Sweden, there were just a few courses in ticketing at travel agencies and some vocational schools for hotel and restaurants. In Denmark there were no academic studies in tourism at all, and Denmark had only vocational training for hotel and restaurants. This documentation shows that eventually the situation of tourism education was more or less the same in Scandinavia, with an exemption of Finland.

Anyhow, 1975 the Swedish Government and Parliament took two decisions, one to establish a Tourism Council with the task of marketing Sweden as a tourist destination and a second decision to expand higher education with essentially a college in every county (Regeringens proposition, 1975:9; Regeringens proposition, 1975:47). These two decisions made it possible to launch the development of new colleges and new courses. For the first time the Government took a more comprehensive decision and consider tourism as a key economic sector in the Swedish economy. And the second decision gave Sweden 12 new colleges in addition to the six already existing universities. As a consequence of those decisions, ceased the possibility to freely choose study courses at the university and the number of student places became limited.

The government bills also said that

- the relationship between education and research would be stronger,
- all teaching takes the form of training or educational programs,

- lifelong learning a priority,
- education should be based on the needs of society and working life

Furthermore, almost all higher education was organized in study lines or programs and ties to the labor market was clarified by that the education were grouped into five different sectors, as follows

technical and vocational training

- administrative, economic and social training
- care training
- training for teaching careers
- training for cultural and information professions

The study lines or programs were organized in either *General educational programs* or in *Local educational programs*. General educational programs should meet for the country's long-term needs important education, like medical, engineering, law, dentist etc. and local educational programs should meet a region's short term needs. In addition, with this legislation the country was divided into six academic areas with a board in each region, whose task was to via its budget allocate resources to colleges in their respective regions. The Regional University Board had a special responsibility for local educational programs and individual courses.

The new rules, mentioned above, opened the possibility to develop new courses in the higher education at the new colleges. Very often the initiatives were taken by young teachers at the new colleges but sometimes the colleges were approached by local trade and industry, to convince the colleges to start teaching programs for their needs of well educated employers. This was also the situation of the three new colleges in Borlänge, Kalmar and Östersund at 1977. In Kalmar the trade and industry clearly approached the college management to develop courses in tourism, the author were the one who get the assignment from the vice-chancellor to develop a local educational program in tourism studies. At the colleges in Borlänge and Östersund the connection to the trade was not so obvious. Here the trade was added a bit later on and then more as a referral body.

All three colleges started to plan, individually, for new educational programs and the idea of tourism came up at all three of them. Mainly because all three were located in very popular tourist areas, Östersund and Borlänge had a lot of winter and mountain tourism and Kalmar had a lot of coastal and summer tourism.

We at all three colleges had some contacts with the tourism business to find some starting points in how to develop our programs and we realized early on that we probably need courses that were interdisciplinary and needed to build a touristic knowledge as an integrated part in the courses. So we realized that tourism as one subject must be a mix of traditional academic knowledge and practical skills to meet demands of tourism industry representatives to make the students employable. This also meant that we need to create interplay between theory and empirical work in our courses, which led us to the insight that we must avoid the traditional academic research downspouts. Thus, applied research must be the general research approach when it comes to tourism. In addition to above mentioned courses, we realized that we also needed some traditional academic courses like business administration, geography, sociology, language, history, marketing, law, etc.

Institutional factors also helped the development. For example, the newly started Swedish Tourist Board (Regeringens proposition, 1975:47) drew attention to the respective (three) colleges on that there were other colleges in Sweden that worked with the same idea of studies in tourism. Which led to that the different colleges began to collaborate to create the best possible courses based on local conditions, as mentioned above.

In autumn 1978 the first students started their studies in tourism at the three colleges; and at that time the duration of the tourism programs two years. Our new tourism study programs attracted many students and from new social groups as well - the programs were perceived as something new, modern and future-oriented. However the programs were not immune from the institutional treats, it took some year for the programs were legitimized. As our courses were *Local educational programs*, it was always a threat from the Regional University Board that we would not get funds for a new course coming year. Because of the program would meet a local need from the region, it was always uncertain whether the Regional University Board consider that the regional needs for skilled workers in the tourism industry was now met for some years. A result could therefore be that the board would invest in other courses or program(s), which would mean that we were forced to close down our tourism studies.

It should also be said that right from the beginning, we also tried to create a relationship between research and tourism industry to become more in symbiosis that was more of applied research than what occurred at universities and colleges at this time. Throughout the 80's there were cooperation between tourism education and tourism industry when it came to what it would be researched. But in the late 90s, we could see a shift in research towards a more traditional academic model for the benefit of the researcher's own merits.

### **3. Tourism Education in Sweden: Development**

It took several years to be free from the uncertainty we had about our continuation and we started courting The Swedish University and College Office (UHÄ) as early as 1983, to get the studies classified as *General educational programs* and to get our program extended to three year to complete as a bachelor degree in tourism. The year 1987 took UHÄ the decision to upgrade our tourism studies to *General educational programs*, which gave us our budgets direct from the government and we were not depending on the Regional University Board anymore. But we were still only two years study programs.

This year Sweden also got one more study program in tourism at Karlstad University College, so from 1987 we were four colleges with two years study programs in tourism.

At the end of the 1980s started a hotel and restaurant management program at the School of Economics and Law at Gothenburg University. But a few years later, the program focused more on the service industry, now they, again, have begun to focus on hotel, restaurant, tourism and events.

The academic year 1991/92 we got the permission from the Swedish University and College Office (UHÄ) to extend our Tourism study program from two years study to three years study and it gave the opportunity for our students to take a Bachelor of Science degree in Tourism.

Throughout the 90's and early 2000 one could notice an increase of the interest to start new tourism and hotel management studies in a lot of Swedish universities. The universities in Umeå, Huddinge/Stockholm, Orebro/Grythyttan, Linköping, Lund/Helsingborg and Malmö were going to start up different programs in tourism. Mainly with subjects like culture, nature, events, tourism and destination planning, leisure and sport management, city tourism, it would take too long to list all topics which currently are taught at the various universities and colleges (Forneng, ed. 2006).

While the education was taking off and more universities were opening tourism related programs, the Swedish government and EU's Structural Funds established The European Tourism Research Institute, ETOUR, 1997, to undertake research that might lead to new and more jobs in the Swedish mountains. During the years 1997 to 2004 ETOUR was funded by EU Structural Funds, but today ETOUR belongs to the Department of Tourism, Mid University and financed by the University.

Already 1990 said Director B Sahlberg at the Swedish Tourist Board, later professor at ETOUR, that *Tourism is now a wide open field for research.*

#### 4. Tourism Education in Sweden: Today

When we started 1978 we were 3 colleges with tourism studies, but nowadays the number of programs and host universities have increased tremendously. Andersson (2008, 22) wrote in her up-to-date survey *the number of tourism programs at the university level has nearly doubled since the previous survey, 1997.* Today it is more than 30 programs in 13 locations, of which seven programs are at master's level in Sweden. Table 1 shows the names and total numbers of the current tourism programs.

Table 1 The number of tourism programs at university level and focus, 2008

Title of the programs	Number of the programs
Business Tourism	1
Tourism Management, Tourism, Tourism Economics	11
Destination Development, Sustainable Development	2
Tourism Hospitality, Service Management	2
Hotel and Restaurant	9
Cultural Tourism. Nature Tours	2
Experience Production	3

Source : Andersson, B, 2008, *Turismutbildningar 2008. Med perspektiv på utbud och efterfrågan.* Tillväxtverket. Rapport 0001. Stockholm.

In addition to tourism education at university level, one can now also see the establishment of universities of applied sciences in areas such as the tourism industry. And, no education is allowed to start unless there is a statement as requests from the tourism industry working life.

Today, we are working hard to ensure that the students should develop their professional competence through an independent, investigative and critical attitude, and practice their ability to work in teams. The teaching methods give students the opportunity both to understand and handle the situations they will encounter in their profession, and to develop their own learning. Problems, processing, reflection and personal responsibility are

therefore the key concepts for contemporary tourism students. The inter-professional learning is about "learning together to work together" (Andreasson, 2008). The tourism education developed students' inter-professional skills through regular training modules where students from different courses meet and work together. The inter-professional stages starts already during the first semester, followed by further integrated training modules and ends with a, in groups of two, written essay in freely chosen topic.

ETOUR is still, 2012, the only research institute in Sweden, which is exclusively engaged in the research on tourism. A brief summary of ETOUR's research areas and specialization is as follow (for further information see Svensson, 2012).

#### **Activity overview:**

- ETOUR conduct research, education and transfer of knowledge on tourism, in particular factors and processes with an impact on destination development.
- The ETOUR research staff represents a broad range of academic competences and research is often interdisciplinary.

#### **Specializations, areas and projects:**

Three broad themes make up the research focus of ETOUR:

- Destination development: covering themes such as local and regional development, business and society, seasonality, governance and organisation, human resources, accessibility and information.
- Nature and culture-based resources: covering themes such as tourism in protected areas, heritage tourism, eco-tourism, resource management, indigenous peoples and planning for tourism.
- Tourism in the experience economy: covering themes such as information and communication technology, product development, innovations and customer satisfaction.

Today, the tourism education and research in Sweden have been faced to several problems. One of the problems, as the author looks upon it, is the lack of national organized postgraduate studies in tourism. Today it is up to each university to take care of this matter. Second problem is, there is no coordination of research programs, which may be regarded as an advantage in a small country like Sweden with limited financial means. In addition to this, the Swedish Research Councils still have a somewhat negative attitude towards tourism as a research field and are thus scarce with the grant applications that have a tourist focus. Another problem is that there is no advantage to interact with the tourism business or the surrounding society and use that as a merit in ones CV. Unfortunately, professional experiences does not count as a qualification either for students or teachers at the university (Andersson, 2011). At university one speaks of the "third mission", i.e. the interaction with the surrounding society (working life), but there are no guidelines for how to do this. Unfortunately, professional experiences not count as a qualification either for students or teachers at the university (Andersson, 2011). This is an attitude that must be changed, particularly in view of that tourism is a multidisciplinary business and we are educating for working in a complex industry.

## 5. Guidelines for the future of Tourism Education and Research in Sweden

As regards the future, I see several major issues such as the research councils', applied research projects and the internationalization of education. First issue is the research councils which reluctance to deal with tourism research applications in the same way as more traditional academic subjects, and the research councils' have to support the tourist research projects in a totally different way than they do today. All academic education must be research-related, resulting in better quality and distinguishes us from other educations. An important objective is to provide tourism research of high international quality with social relevance. It is also important to offer tourism courses with current and relevant knowledge, provide international perspectives and research links. Excellent tourism-research needs a clearer financial support. This is to help developing tourism science and make it internationally comparable with other university programs in tourism and hopefully be among the best internationally.

It should also be said that the major research funders in Sweden have during the past 30 years has granted money only to about 10-15 or so tourism research projects. But in December 2009 was a *Tourism Industry's R & D Fund* created in which both employer and employee organizations shall contribute with 3-4 million per year. This means that the Foundation has 6-8 million to allocate at different research project annually. It is likely that the situation for tourism researchers in Sweden to change significantly. Sorry to say the fund has not get any written rules, after 2 years discussion, how to apply and what areas the fund are going to prioritize has not been clear yet.

The second issue is how to come back to the mutual interaction in the case of applied research activities that existed in the '80s - multidisciplinary business, we are still educating for working in a complex industry and the need to be trained to work in an multi-complex interaction environment. Likely the fact is that both the tourism industry and tourism programs must approach one another, again, in order to provide mutual support in developing their respective activities.

The third issue is the internationalization of education and the need to increase exchanges between various tourism programs in Europe, but also on a global basis. What both Swedish students and teachers need is better understanding and knowledge of the countries known as emerging countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China. A fairly large proportion of the populations of these countries have already begun to travel as tourists and that trend will probably increase in the near future. Therefore, the need for knowledge of how the population of these countries live, think and travel, a skill that is crucial when we in the Nordic countries will compete with the rest of the world to attract emerging countries' population to our part of the world. Tourism is by definition international, as well as universities should be it and we operate within an environment which requires international perspective.

The fourth issue is the how many students should be educated. In the document *National Strategy for Swedish hospitality* writes Swedish Tourism Ltd that, Swedish tourism industry will the year 2020 have a tourism consumption of 500 billion Swedish crowns, 260 000 person-years and an export value equivalent to 200 billion Swedish crowns. This compared with 2009 when tourism consumption was 252 billion Swedish crowns, 160 000 person-years and with an export value of SEK 94 billion Swedish crowns (SHR 2010). If these objectives can be achieved, there must be more educated students from tourism programs, which have intimate knowledge of the complexity of the tourism industry consists

of. Thus, Swedish tourism needs skills in product development, market analysis and marketing, management and others topics. There seems to be a large labor market for tourism students over the next coming 10 years.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, the tourism education in Sweden was started by three universities and by three initiators who background different than tourism. Today one can see that the structure and types of the programs varies from university to university. Tourism education and research in Sweden has some issues which negatively affect its performance. What Swedish tourism programs in the near future need more coherent education up to PhD increased funding for research and more international contacts and collaboration with other teachers and students! Both are essential components! The Swedish tourism programs have to receive both improved links with research in the regular education and also get a better understanding of other countries and its people. The students need to get a better market expertise when they are going to market Sweden as a new and attractive destination for tourists.

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