



## Report of the study tour to North West Gotland

Marta Dobrogowska (Poland), Tunde Juray (Hungary), Roman Kuchár (Slovakia), Aleksandar Lukic (Croatia), Kaidi Nõmmerna (Estonia), Aiga Petkevica (Latvia), Geza Salamin (Hungary), Fredrik Svahn (Sweden).

### **1. The character of the area**

This is a flat area, used mainly for cultivated land or grazing, with pine forests. Farming in the area is mostly sheep and cattle breeding : arable crops are mainly used for feeding animals. The landscape is appropriate for different kinds of agro-tourism, golf, cycling, horse riding, walking, etc. Some farmers already offer accommodation to visitors. There are not many restaurants or other services for tourists in the area. Part of the beach is within a natural park.

### **2. The case studies**

#### **2.1 Bunge Museum**

The museum is located in Bunge village, close to the main road to Färo, which gives excellent opportunity to attract tourists, more effectively than any other marketing. The museum gives interesting insight into how Gotland farmers lived during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The creation of the museum was driven by the desire to save old farm buildings from Gotland, which might otherwise be destroyed and forgotten. The museum takes care of 110 old farmsteads, of which 75 have been dismantled and rebuilt in the museum and the rest are mainly conserved on the original sites. This is a unique collection of traditional wooden buildings in the Gotlandic style of timber framing.

The museum attracts large numbers of visitors, mainly families with children. A survey showed that 50% of these visitors came because they were just passing the museum on their way to Färo island, 25% read about it in a guidebook, the other 25% heard from their friends and other people.

The museum plays an important role in bringing to life community events such as christenings, confirmation, weddings and funerals. Local actors add a living element to the historical farmsteads. Craftsmen from the area sell their products in the museum. The museum is sustained financially by a subvention of 300,000 SKr from the Gotland municipality, by subscriptions of 500 SKr each from a number of local entrepreneurs, and by the voluntary effort of about 50 local people. The museum is a member of the Gotland Tourist Association.

#### **2.2 The farmer's cabin project**

At the farm of Anders Borgen, we heard about the cabin project jointly initiated by the tourism company Gotland Resor and the local farmer's union.

The main idea of the cabin project is to diversify the income of the farmers by developing high-quality accommodation for more demanding visitors. The tourism company is the initiator of the project, working with the farmers' association. At the moment 14 farms are included in the project. The farmers use their own finances to build new cabins, to a standard design prepared by an architect : each cabin can accommodate 4 people.

Gotland Resor has a contract with each farmer to handle the management and marketing of the cabins. The contract guarantees to the farmer a certain minimum income (50,000 SKr per year) from the cabins over a five-year period. Most of the farmers involved do not offer any other activity to their visitors, but they do tell them about activities available in the area, such as golf and horse riding.

(See case study 2.4 in the report on the tour of Visby, and case study 2.1 in the report on the study tour of Fårö, for further information about the farmers' cabins scheme and the Gotland Resor travel agency).

### **2.3 Football golfing, Stenkyrka**

This enterprise, unique in Gotland, was established in 1999. The idea came from a similar successful business in northwest Sweden.

The main feature is an 18-hole field for football golf. This occupies 18 hectares of land, which is much less than the area needed for an ordinary golf course. The enterprise offers numerous kinds of entertainment, from football golf to traditional Gotlandic games and other popular activities, and a popular restaurant. There is no overnight accommodation.

They have no special target group in their marketing activities, as this kind of game can be played by people at every age. They advertise in the Gotland Guide, and have their own website. There are only two employees, one full-time and one part-time.

The centre is visited by at least 3,000 guests each year. Most of the customers come from other parts of the island and from Stockholm. The numbers depend on the weather, and most of the activity takes place in the high season of June and July. This kind of amusement is popular among groups of friends, so it is not unusual for 150 to 200 people to be present at one time during a weekend. Guests often use Stenkyrka for their birthday parties, weddings and other special events.

Looking to the future, the owner has plans to build tourist accommodation; to create a swimming pool with other facilities (a miniature version of Waterland); and to organise new activities such as kayaking. More information from [www.fotbollsgolf.gotlandica.se](http://www.fotbollsgolf.gotlandica.se).

### **2.4 Ihre Gård : farm tourism**

Ihre Gård farm is situated beside the road 149. The current owners bought the farm in 1989, when they moved from Stockholm to Gotland. The farm already had a small shop and a café, which is partly why they chose it.

Two generations of the family live and work on the farm. Farming is still their main activity, both as a source of income and to sustain the farm image for tourists. They have 140 hectares of arable land, mainly used to produce animal feed; about 100 lambs; and 100 suckler cows. Their income from farming is subsidised by the State. They produce some wool and some linseed oil. They have always recognised the need to diversify their sources of income beyond farming. Some of the family members work part-time in Visby : but farm-based tourism is a very significant source, bringing in between 30 and 40% of the family's total income.

Today, the farm offers tourist accommodation in 2 restored farmhouses (total of 7 beds) and 3 cabins (total of 11 beds). This accommodation is quite cheap, and attractive to families with children. Guests can enjoy horseback riding (13 horses). There is a mini-golf course in the yard. The café is open on a regular basis. In the summer, the host family prepares grilled lamb on some evenings, which brings additional income of about 60,000 SKr.

Products made on the farm – wool, linseed oil and food – are offered to tourists in the farm shop, alongside other goods.

Running all these activities on the farm demands effective co-operation within the family, and an additional workforce especially during the summer season, when there may be 10 local people working full-time in addition to the family. The farm co-operates with local restaurants in promoting the local area. They see co-operation as much better than competition : for example, their income from tourism increased over the last year despite the fact that two new restaurants were opened within a distance of 10 km.

Ihre Gård farm is a member of Gotland Tourist Association, because this allows more efficient marketing of Gotland in Sweden as well as abroad. The farm is promoted through the Gotland Guide publication, newspapers and radio. Word of mouth publicity is also very important for their business.

Looking to the future, the family believe that they must continue to diversify and to try new ideas. They think that the introduction of new and faster ferries from the mainland to Gotland will boost tourism development on the island. They propose to increase the total number of tourist beds on the farm from 18 to 40, across a range of price and quality. They may introduce new activities for visitors, such as hunting trips, sea kayaking, and activity weeks for groups of company staff. They are concerned about the obstacles to such development, namely strict regulations related to the sale of food and alcohol drinks, an inadequate sewage system, and poor co-operation between enterprises in Gotland.

#### **2.4. Bläse limestone museum**

The museum is situated on Kappelshamn Bay, in the parish of Fleringe. The museum was established in the year 1983, when a disused limestone quarry and buildings were donated to the Bläse Lime Industry Memorial Foundation. The Bläse Lime Industry Society was founded in the same year, and has worked since then to create the museum and related activities.

The museum portrays the stone industry on Gotland and the working and living conditions of those involved. It is possible to see how the lime is slaked, how the people lived in the stone-quarrying era during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is also an exhibition of wooden carvings by the sculptor Georg Moberg and his library of archives. In the café, visitors may have a coffee served with homemade baking. The restaurant serves lunch and dinner, even to larger parties. The concert hall is used for concerts, song and music evenings and other events. In Bläse there is also Gotland's longest railway (2.2 km), which offers visitors a half-hour round trip.

The museum attracts about 30,000 visitors per year, mainly families and tourist groups. The marketing budget is quite low, and the management relies more on word of mouth publicity and on the image of smiling bar servants. They benefit from some sponsorship by local limestone industries owned by German and Finnish companies.

#### **2.5 Skymnings sheep farm**

Skymnings farm is the most remote dwelling in a flat and sparsely populated area, traditionally used for rearing sheep. The farm has been owned since 1974 by a couple who were previously doing other jobs : the husband was trained in farming, the wife in accountancy. They run the farm and sheep-skin business together, with 3 or 4 employees and some casual help during the summer.

At the beginning they rented 2600 hectares of land. In 1997, they bought 5500 hectares from other farms, so they now own 5500 ha and rent 3000 ha. Most of this land is in grazing

: 150 ha is arable land, used for growing winter food for the sheep. They have 470 ewes, producing about 120 lambs each year, and would like to increase this number significantly, perhaps to a total of about 1600.

Their main product is sheep skins. The wife has good skills in design, and since the beginning has placed high emphasis upon quality of product. They were the first in Sweden to enter this production of sheep skin. Their aim is to sell the product directly to visitors whom they attract to the farm. They produce clothes and other items made of sheep skin, and sell them in a shop on the farm. Up to 90% of their production is sold in this shop, and the rest is mainly exported abroad. Each sheep costs about 180 – 200 SKr to rear, and yields about 450 – 500 SKr. A sheepskin coat may cost about 900 – 1000 SKr to prepare, and may be sold for 13,000 – 17,000 SKr.

They have 15,000 or more visitors during the summer season. The visitors are mainly wealthy people from mainland Sweden who wish to buy high quality things made of sheep skin or wool; and people who are interested in farming, especially sheep farming. Business is best during the main tourist season, when people from Stockholm are on the island.

Their biggest problem, since the enterprises began, has been with the local planning authority, who would not allow them to erect a big sign beside the road to promote their farm and business. They have also had difficulty in finding employees who are willing to do the hard outdoor work of caring for sheep. There have been some problems in coping with all the cars and buses which bring the visitors.

Their plan for the future is to run the farm for three or four more years (the husband is now 62) and then to sell it if possible. They believe that the name Skymnings, already well known in Sweden and many other countries, will be attractive to a buyer.

### **3. Our reflections on the study tour**

**Challenges in rural tourism.** After discussing case studies and comparing them with our experience and knowledge, we identified some problems and obstacles for future tourist development of Gotland.

Tourism is like a “life-line” to remote areas like north west Gotland. But the main problem seems to be that visitors have a wrong image of Gotland. They think of it as a small island, and therefore come for only a short period of time. This means that they can only take part in a few of the activities on offer, and they bring less benefit to the local economy than they would if they stayed longer. Moreover, the shortness of the tourist season is a major problem.

On the supply side, we sense that there are not enough people who really know how to take care of tourists. Companies do not co-operate as much as they could. Some of the entrepreneurs are not satisfied with the work of the Gotland Tourist Association : they would like to see more focus on marketing Gotland as a major destination both within Sweden and abroad. They also feel that the legal controls on tourist development are too strict and not sufficiently supportive, in relation for example to accommodation, signs on the roads, new buildings, producing and selling alcohol beverages, or kitchen facilities.

The enterprises that we visited point towards the following elements of success of different actors in rural tourism :

- diversification of farm enterprise - “many legs to stand on” (but not too many!);
- to be a bit crazy and adventurous;
- a clear, and where possible unique, idea of a tourism product;
- use of existing economic, social and cultural capital in rural areas;

- meeting two needs together, namely the need to diversify the economy of farms and to create diverse activities for tourists;
- co-operation, flexibility, marketing and synergy between actors in the local economy, which can create a more competitive and sustainable tourist product.

In relation to the individual enterprises that we visited, we think that **Bunge museum** is an important element of the tourist offer in the northern part of Gotland. It involves the local community, volunteers and entrepreneurs in its operation, and it strengthens the interest of both islanders and visitors in history and cultural heritage. We would recommend the museum to launch a more active programme for visitors, and perhaps to develop tourist accommodation in the style of old farmsteads.

We think that the **farm cabins** project is very soundly based. There is a real demand for accommodation facilities of higher quality. The tourist company "Gotland Resor" and the farmers' union are co-operating well; and are offering farmers what they need, namely security for their investment, while leaving the farmers to make their own independent business decisions. This kind of development is natural for a farmer who already has some experience with tourism. We would recommend more research into potential visitors, the creation of more activities for tourists, and a strong focus on quality.

We think that the **football golf** enterprise offers popular kinds of activity. It illustrates well the idea that "for success, you have to be a bit crazy and adventurous". The co-operation with nearby restaurants is very good example of flexibility and networking, rather than competition. We would recommend the owners to continue introducing new activities each year, and to pay more attention to the safety of visitors during the recreational activities.

After seeing some of the other tourist enterprises on Gotland, we think that **Ihre Gård** is not as well organised and managed as it could be. We fear that there may be simply too many activities taking place on one farm : they may be "standing on too many legs". The natural and built environment of the farm is quite neglected. The accommodation facilities probably offer real "value for money", but their low quality does not benefit the image of Gotland. We would recommend the owners to focus on a few key activities on the farm, and on more efficient management of people and environment.

The **Bläse limestone museum** is a good example of finding a new function for old industrial complexes on Gotland. It conserves an important heritage. One of the initiators of this museum is still enthusiastic and much involved in it : we fear that it may be difficult to continue the project after his eventual retirement. For this reason, we recommend the involvement of more young people in the project in order to make it more sustainable.

As for the enterprise at **Skymnings**, the most important challenge for the future is who is going to run the business. The farmer's children are not interested in doing so, which makes the farmer very sad. This enterprise, combining a farm and a small but high-quality fashion industry, is effective and competitive. It widens the tourism offer on Gotland, and its survival and development would benefit the local economy. It is therefore worth trying to secure its future.

#### **4. Group reflection on the process of the study tour**

##### **4.1 Format**

**What was good.** Important factors for success were :

- A very good group !
- A small group, with independent transport and budget
- A Swedish speaking person in each group

- The right contact person at each visited place, with knowledge and experience concerning the project or business
- Flexible timing, and enough time for discussion, social activities and learning
- A variety of places and entrepreneurs, offering different thinking of people involved in business
- Cooking together, which is great for team building.

#### **What went wrong.**

- Wrong information about the group was given to some entrepreneurs : they thought that we were from regional government !
- In Bunge museum we were treated as normal visitors and spent more than an hour on an ordinary tour : we thus had less time for interviewing and discussions
- Our expectations for accommodation facilities in eco-houses at the Ihre Gard were not met.

#### **4.2 Process**

On the first day, the group appointed an evaluator, who had the responsibility to observe the process of group work with the eyes of an 'outsider' as much as possible. This evaluation was based upon the objectives for the study tour which the group set for themselves. These objectives were :

1. to answer the questions defined by the training organisers
2. to learn from the entrepreneurs as much as possible
3. to feel good together, to get to know each other, to create a community
4. to offer advice or good ideas to the entrepreneurs.

During the two and a half days that we were together, the emphasis shifted away from objective 1, while objective 3 became the most important. The group was very successful in creating a good, friendly atmosphere during the discussions with the entrepreneurs whom we visited. In this, the members of the group were good team players, asking questions together and supporting each other. By the end of the study tour, the dynamism of the members in this communication had decreased, but the group had integrated into a community with internal coherence. Most of us felt that we could be a very efficient, competitive work group.

**Formal roles.** The team defined several functions or roles at the beginning of the process. Members of the group took on jobs as :

- drivers
- book-keeper
- interpreter
- camera woman
- note-makers (being changed at each visited site)
- responsibility for typing to the computer
- evaluator

These pre-defined responsibilities were a crucial element in the successful common work.

**Self-developed roles.** During the joint work, the team created some new undefined functions, because the members took up different tasks or responsibilities according to their personal character, skills and motivations. This flexible role distribution was also very helpful. These roles included :

- project manager/organiser : Aleksandar was the one who pushed the group to formulate tasks and deadlines, called the members' attention to concentrate on tasks and find solutions, and kept the time from the beginning
- father feeder : Fredrik took up the responsibility to take care all of the others, as a good father

- fun makers : Fredrik and Roman
- carrying the work : Aiga and Kaidi were the ones who provided a continuous base of the work
- Solving suddenly emerged problems : Roman, Marta.

The other members also made very important contributions to the process.

**Problems and failures.** Some predefined tasks were not implemented in time, for example typing into the computer. As the emphasis, in the group's objectives shifted towards creating a community within the group, we concentrated less and less on the tasks defined by the Euracademy organisers. Therefore at the end we had to hurry up, and make serious efforts to meet the requirements by the deadline. However we achieved very valuable results in terms of community building.

The study tour was the most successful period of the summer school for these participants, because the group could develop a very creative, well organised co-operation, which was continuously adapted to the changing objectives.

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