

Give the visionaries support in developing rural areas

Upgrade grass roots' initiatives and provide the visionaries and innovative non-profit associations with the resources they need to influence the attitudes in their local areas. This is the best way of contributing towards sustainable development in the rural districts. In Höga Kusten we continuously encounter people with a strong drive, who are behind a wide spectre of activities such as markets and fairs, services and meetings venues. In this drive of theirs lies the future – as long as we support rural development.

It is claimed that the present focus on individualism means that the will to associate is reducing – that unions and other large organisations are losing members. But the club or society work is not outdated, people still want to take part, drive changes and feel a sense of belonging, however perhaps with less of a commitment than before. Instead grass root initiatives evolve, driven by local enthusiasts capable of inviting strong engagement on specific activities and issues.

In our work with Leader Höga Kusten we encounter these driven visionaries on a daily basis, visionaries who jointly with others further the local development. A team of villagers have initiated a petrol station, grocery shop and music festival in Nora, because there was a need and simply for fun, respectively. Another group of locals have opened an art gallery in an old shoe factory in Mjällom, and also realized broadband development in Boteå. In the inland of Höga Kusten, villagers have introduced a marketplace for local food and made sure that visitors can enjoy the open, grazed landscape around the village.

And this is the picture all over the rural areas of the Swedish provinces Jämtland, Hälsingland, Dalsland, and also in northern Norway, in Traena... everywhere there are visionaries and innovative associations that drive the change they want to see in their local, rural area; often in creative projects involving local businesses and local authorities.

Many successful rural projects are based on innovative cooperation between local authorities, businesses and voluntary efforts. Businesses and the public sector contribute with financing and structuring, while the visionaries ensure that the efforts are supported locally and sustainable in character.

We must become better at exploring this successful model, in more rural areas!

More local authorities and regions need to realize the true importance of these visionaries and make it easier for them to dream – and do – on a big scale. The public sector must become better at recognizing committed visionaries and facilitate financing for driven entrepreneurs. In part this means unravelling public sector decision processes, and also to a greater extent, to involve visionaries in the communal planning processes.

We welcome those who are searching for inspiration in the drive in Höga Kusten, since we are convinced that here is a seed towards belief in the future and development of the rural areas.