

# The road to an updated image of Sweden abroad

**In a time of increasing globalisation and mass communication, a country is dependent to a large extent on how it is perceived abroad.**

Political goals, trade, investments, visitors, and exchanges of talent and creativity are all highly dependent on the perceptions of the rest of the world. Sweden's development and future welfare are contingent on strong relations with the outside world and more active exchanges with other countries in many different fields. This is only possible if more people know about Sweden and become interested in what we are and what we have to offer. Today, the world's knowledge of Sweden is limited, and its image is often too unclear and out of date.

So we need to unite around a clearer, unified image that better reflects contemporary Sweden – an image that is also distinct and relevant to the people we want to reach. The organizations in the Council for the Promotion of Sweden (NSU), have thus developed a common platform for work with Sweden's image. It includes a focused message about Sweden and serves as a practical working tool. With the platform as our tool, we enhance the impact of our joint as well as individual initiatives.

## A common platform creates a clearer focus

Enhancing Sweden's image involves creating a clear position for Sweden internationally – a unique place in people's conscience that distinguishes Sweden from other countries. In order to be clearer, we must find common denominators for Swedish phenomena. A key starting point has been that Sweden's image should be honest. People living in Sweden as well as elsewhere in the world should be able to recognise themselves. The message also has to be both distinct and attractive. We have to find what makes Sweden unique and what attracts people today. It is not enough simply with geographic differences or cultural expressions like food and handicrafts. We also have to show our values, our lifestyle and our way of thinking.

## Unique values produce a unique position

Surveys of global value patterns, including the leading World Values Survey ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)), show that Sweden's values are unique from an international perspective. Sweden is not at all a country of "lagom" or moderation, but rather the opposite, to a large extent a country that is open to new ways of thinking and focused on development with values that break traditional patterns. The fact that we live according to these values is confirmed and noted in a large number of international studies and media. In the work to develop a representative and credible platform, the following general characteristics have also emerged:

### ***New ways of thinking – a belief in reason and a desire to move forward***

*As one of the world's most developed countries, with advanced expertise in strategic future industries, and as a test market for many of the world's leading companies, Sweden has a strong position as a country open to new ways of thinking at the cutting edge of development. But Swedish openness to new ways of thinking involves not just our aptitude for technological innovation, world-leading research and an awareness of trends, but also at heart our values and our lifestyle. It involves how we see ourselves, our relations and the world around us.*

### ***An ethical foundation – development that puts people and the environment at the centre***

*Sweden has a unique position in the world as a country open to new ways of thinking that is at the cutting edge while at the same time it gives great consideration to strong ethical values such as equality between men and women, sustainable development and human rights. With an openness that encourages new ways of thinking and a desire to be caring, an inclusive society is created, one where the goal is to ensure that everyone has a place and where*

*development goes hand in hand with environmental sustainability. The idea of allowing every individual to observe government decision-making processes, and also respecting an unspoiled countryside that is accessible to everyone, is based on long-term thinking.*

### ***Gradual change – continuous renewal through participation and a shared heritage***

*Development in Sweden is not tumultuous but gradual. Sweden is not a country characterised by revolutions. Rather, Sweden has been shaped over the last few centuries by a consistent forward-looking attitude and the drive to work together for a better future through close ties and participation. It is a question of pragmatic progress, continually building on Sweden's heritage, its values and what works well.*

### ***The desire for balance – part of the Swedish character***

*A feature that is unique to Sweden is its clear desire for balance, a feature that has given rise to the Swedish notion of "lagom" or moderation. The humane, gentle, ethical side of Sweden is balanced by innovative, pioneering ways of thinking. The results of progress are balanced by the conditions of people and the environment. The drive for participation, equality between men and women, and consensus also create balance in society. This gradual, pragmatic and open-minded way of working balances the old and the new and allows foreign phenomena and knowledge to be easily adopted and mixed with what is traditionally Swedish.*

So Sweden's image is based on a combination of shared values that stand out in an international perspective. They give Sweden a unique, attractive position that is firmly grounded in Swedish history and the present day. The country's gradual change, with an emphasis on openness to new ways of thinking and ethical values, together with the drive for balance, can be summarised by saying Sweden is a country focused on development based on people's needs and the conditions of the environment. This in turn can be summarised by the term progressive.

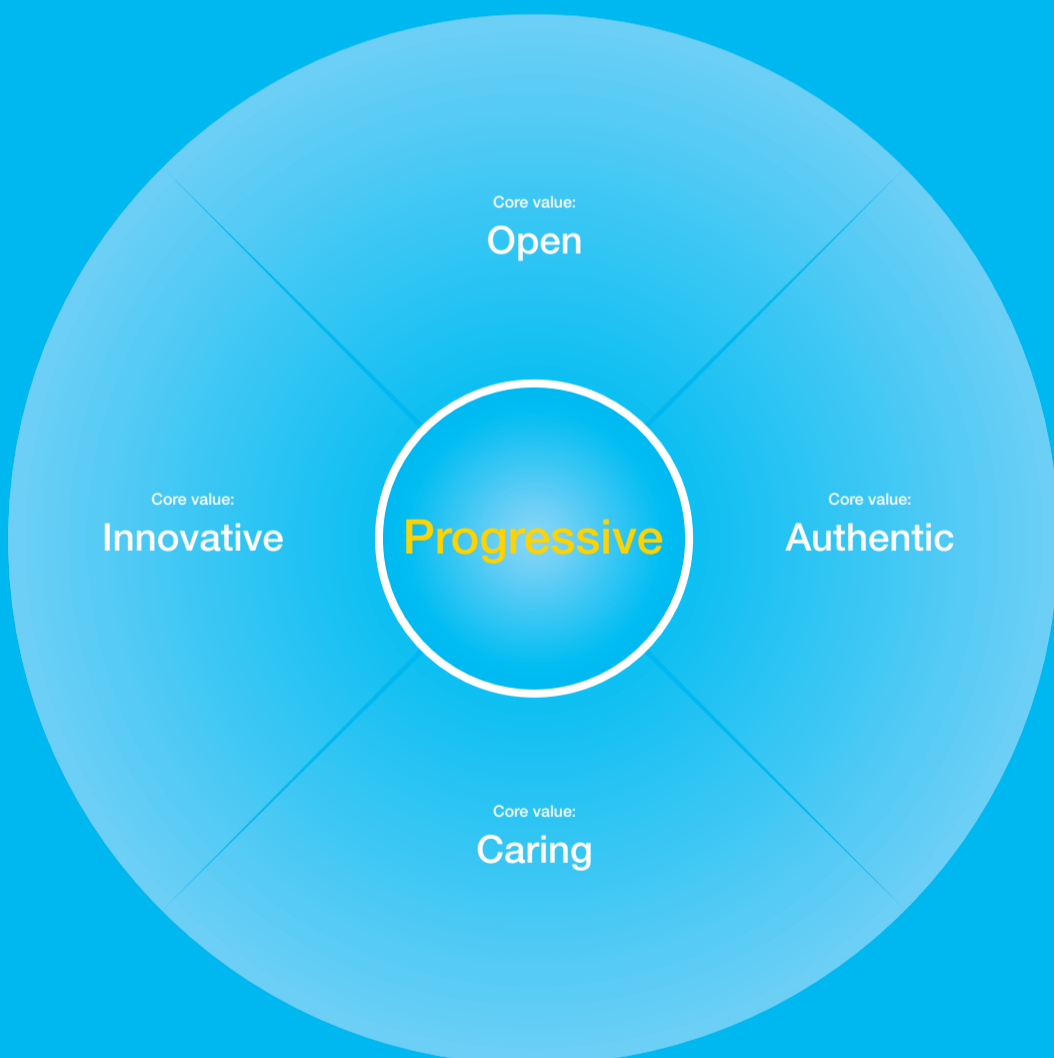
### The platform

Over the period 2005-2006, the platform was developed in close collaboration between the Council organizations. In all, some 500-600 people were involved at some stage of the process, both through a number of workshop series and through surveys and studies of Sweden's image. In May 2006, the Council decided to adopt this platform as the foundation to be applied in internal work with Sweden's image.

### Common platform

With a common platform for Sweden's image, we get the following in our work representing Sweden abroad:

- A guide for long-term and short-term priorities
- A more effective way of working together in the Council and with other Swedish parties involved
- A practical working tool to monitor Sweden's image



## Progressivity – a desire to improve

Sweden can thus best be described as a country focused on development based on people's needs and environmental conditions – a progressive country that strives for balanced development. On a comprehensive level, progressivity means having strong faith in the future and a desire to gradually make the world a slightly better place. It means having faith in the creative force of people and the ability to take responsibility for one's life. Working together and being open to the rest of the world and to the future in order to take advantage of its opportunities. There are four traits that together are particularly important in explaining what we mean by being progressive. These are Innovative, Open, Caring and Authentic. We call these our core values.

By using these as the signposts in our communication and actions, we help establish a progressive image of Sweden for the rest of the world.

### Nation Brands Index

In the Nation Brands Index, a survey of country brands which is sent to 26,000 people around the world, Sweden places at the top as a progressive, open country focused on development that balances development with people's needs and environmental conditions.

## Innovative

Innovative means new ways of thinking. Seeing things from a new perspective. Seeing opportunities and solutions and having faith in a better future. Not allowing oneself to be limited by engrained opinions or traditions. Examples of Swedish new ways of thinking:

- Knowledge-intensive business and society
- Paternity leave, the Cohabitees Act and registered partnerships
- Pioneering design, fashion and popular culture
- A strong tradition of inventions

## Open

Open means having a positive attitude to free thinking and to differences between people, cultures and lifestyles. It involves being curious and being sensitive to others as well as giving people space and creating exchanges. Space for the ideas and views of individuals as well as physical space to move freely without obstacles, fences or crowding in our readily accessible countryside, in cities and in places in between. A few examples of Swedish openness:

- International business and a test market for products sensitive to changing trends
- Broad-minded people that like to travel
- A tradition of adult education and active organizational life
- Public access to official records and the right of access to private land

## Caring

Caring means safeguarding every individual. Providing safety and security as well as respecting and including all people. It means feeling empathy and sharing with those who are most vulnerable. Becoming involved with others and trying to see to the needs of every individual. Examples of Swedish caring:

- The drive for equality between men and women and participation in decision-making
- The ombudsman system
- A broad commitment to the environment
- Life-long learning for everyone
- International involvement with active work for peace and development aid

## Authentic

Authentic means being natural and unaffected. It means being reliable, honest and informal. It also involves being straightforward, unpretentious and clear and standing up for one's values even when it is not very comfortable. Being authentic means being in touch with your past and your roots and open to the future. Some examples of Swedish authenticity:

- A strong tradition of quality
- Living traditions and cultural heritage
- Informal style and trustworthiness in business
- Lifestyle in close symbiosis with nature and the changing seasons
- High ethical standards on food and animal husbandry

# Brand Sweden

The road to an updated image of Sweden abroad

## An attractive position in a time of change

In a time of revolutionary global change, the progressive approach is an attractive asset. An openness to new ways of thinking and an ability to adapt are of considerable importance in keeping up with development. At the same time, there has to be an ability to guard against and handle the downsides that rapid development can entail, such as environmental damage, social tensions and welfare problems. Development and this art of living with continuous change that takes into consideration both people and the environment are something that people throughout the world strive for. This means it is strategic to "own" the position as a progressive country, and Sweden can be credible as this owner. The new ways of thinking and open-mindedness of Sweden and Swedes have also been at the heart of international interest in our country, which is an advantage in our future work as well.

## What are we offering?

Sweden as a collaborative partner and source of inspiration. Inspiring others and being inspired by them. Of course, Sweden does not have all the answers, but we are often on the cutting edge of development and we are open to sharing our experience with the rest of the world – working together and sharing the future.

To find out more, go to: [www.sweden.se/sverigebildn](http://www.sweden.se/sverigebildn)

*The Council for the Promotion of Sweden Abroad (NSU), which includes the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swedish Institute, Swedish Trade Council, Invest in Sweden Agency, Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications and VisitSweden, has developed a common brand platform for Sweden. It provides the basis for an updated and more forceful presentation of Sweden abroad and is to serve as support in our different activities. The platform is also a natural starting point for closer collaboration with other Swedish parties who have interests outside Sweden.*