# Hello, businesses rethinking plastics!

A report on business development for a changing plastics market in Sweden

HÅLL SVERIGE RENT®

## The preparation of the report “Hello, businesses rethinking plastics!” - a collective effort

As it goes with circular economy – one could never be circular alone – the result that this collective effort created, namely the “Hello businesses rethinking plastics!” report, is very much the sum of a collective group sharing their knowledge and insights. This report would not have been possible without the generous sharing of information on concrete case studies, where action is taken towards achieving a circular plastics economy in practice by each of the case study representatives. A special thanks to all the people who contributed to the preparation of this report.

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**The Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation** (KST) is a non-profit organization that promotes recycling and combats litter through public awareness campaigns and environmental education. The Ocean Alliance is an initiative by KST to stop the leakage of plastics entirely and to strengthen the move from taking, making and wasting to a fully circular plastics economy – together with the market for plastic products and packaging.

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# Executive summary

This report contains stories of changing the plastics market, one company case study at a time. It provides an insight into the current ecosystem of actions taken among businesses that are rethinking plastics in different ways. Guided by the fundamental Rs, **Refuse**, **Reduce**, **Reuse**, **Recycle**, **Restore**, this report showcases the vast variety of entry points that are available for businesses to tap into – or amplify – the transition towards a circular plastics economy. And most importantly, the report shows that action is already taken and change is underway, for using and reusing instead of taking, making and wasting.

Some key aspects that are central from the business case studies are to:

**Change your mindset, question** and **rethink** existing behaviours, material choice and life cycles.

Look at how **nature** does it and learn, and mimic.

Test and get ready to **scale** the solution.

**"It's essential to change people's behaviours. Learn not to throw things away. We don't want more waste in our waters. Everything can be recycled or reused in many ways. Try to repair and build something yourself."**

Stefan Larsson, founder of Lostboyslab.

For more information and a deep dive into each of the case studies, go to our website here, or scan the QR code with your camera.

# Sammanfattning

Den här rapporten innehåller fallstudier från olika företag, som beskriver förändringar av marknaden för plastprodukter och förpackningar. Den ger inblick i de många åtgärder som vidtas av företag som i någon utsträckning ändrat sin inställning till plast. Rapporten, som är baserad på de grundläggande R:en; **Refuse**, **Reduce**, **Reuse**, **Recycle**, **Restore**, visar på de många sätt som företag kan delta i – eller till och med påskynda – övergången till en cirkulär plastekonomi. Och viktigast av allt, rapporten visar att mycket redan görs och att en förändring redan inletts, vilket innebär att det blir allt vanligare att återanvända i stället för att utvinna, tillverka och skräpa ned.

Några viktiga aspekter som är centrala i fallstudierna:

**Ändra ditt tankesätt, ifrågasätt** och **tänk nytt** kring befintliga beteenden, materialval och livscykler.

Se och lär av **hur naturen gör** och försök efterlikna processerna

Testa och var beredd att sedan **skala upp** lösningen

**"Det är viktigt att förändra människors beteenden. Att lära sig att inte slänga saker. Vi vill inte ha mer skräp i våra vattendrag. Allt kan återvinnas eller återanvändas på flera olika sätt. Försök att själv laga och bygga något."**

Stefan Larsson, Grundare av Lostboyslab.

För mer information och en djupdykning i var och en av fallstudierna gå till vår webbsida här, eller skanna QR-koden med din kamera.

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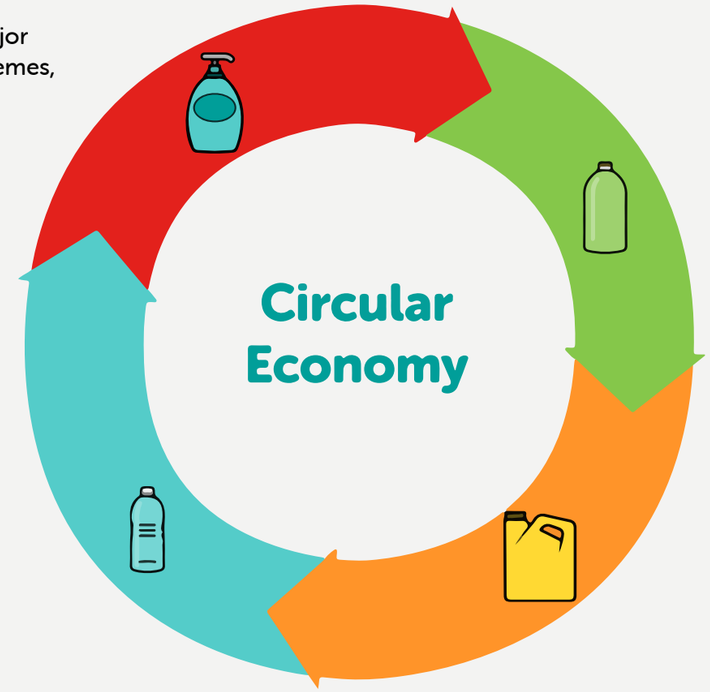
# Towards a circular plastics economy

Imagine a business that describes itself as being at one with nature, that strives to give back as much as it has taken and create long-term value for society. This is the core of the circular economy – a method and theory that has already been with us for a long time, even before the actual term "circular economy" was coined.

Its fundamental aspects of regenerative processes apply to the way we use any minerals, resources, commodities or services. It is therefore of no surprise that much innovation comes from the way nature works. Even when it comes to innovation around the most common artificial or synthetic commodities that we know of today, plastics, where biomimicry plays a role specifically looking at material substitution and defining regenerative material flows.

With plastic pollution as one of society's major global challenges today, polluters-pays schemes, extended producer responsibility, national and regional initiatives for practical action to stop the leakage of plastics and moving to sustainable use of plastics are being implemented. A global treaty on plastic pollution is also being developed.

Needless to say, yet so important to highlight, is the transition from the unsustainable use of plastics towards a circular plastics economy, for the good of both society and the planet.




**"The circular economy offers an opportunity for resource efficiency and the ability to do business simultaneously, and the circular economy is one way of doing it."**

Wisdom Kanda, senior lecturer in environmental technology at Linköping University.

**"We need more dialogue between practice and research and more public involvement to get citizens on board. We need to work together. A circular economy should be a natural process of democratic change in any society."**

Maira Babri, Senior Lecturer, Örebro University.

**"The circular economy is not something you can learn about simply by reading about it. You also have to do it. You have to use your hands. So, it's knowledge and awareness that you integrate with your body. We call that Árbediethu."**

Erika Omma Unnes, Project Manager, Ávki.

To read the 22 interviews in full, go to our website here, or scan the QR code with your camera.



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# Business case overview

REFUSE | REDUCE | REUSE AND RECYCLE | RESTORE

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# Structure of the report

As with the fundamentals of a circular plastics economy, where we are ultimately looking for a net-net circularity (that is, no leakage and everything is reused or recycled), the report follows a similar structuring with case studies to exemplify actions taken along the way, guided by **the five Rs:**

1. **Refuse** unnecessary and problematic single-use plastics
2. **Reduce** the use of fossil-based virgin plastics
3. **Reuse** and **recycle** plastic products and packaging
4. **Restore** our oceans from plastic pollution

Though these sections are presented in a numerical order, we recognise that the transformation towards a circular plastics economy is rarely a sequential process. There are continuous loops that feed both backward and forward, and there are interconnections between all of the Rs, which makes it more of a process in which you will find your starting points (or continuing points) depending on your context. However, we hope that the structuring will help you find inspiration easily from wherever you are.

For more information and a deep dive into each of the case studies, go to our website here, or scan the QR code with your camera.

# Entry points to a circular plastics economy

"Like many other countries, Sweden is starting to accelerate the pace of the transformation process towards a circular economy.

A myriad of policy changes, innovation and business models, incubators and testbeds, the growing body of research and hands-on experience, and pressure from the public and NGOs is reshaping the circular business landscape.

So, it's no longer a question of whether Sweden is in the transformation game, but how and how fast we can make things happen. The recent developments in Sweden are shaped just as much from within the country as by the strengthening momentum in Europe and globally."

Joakim Brodahl, Head of Cooperation and Sales,
Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation.



# Refuse problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics

Apart from the wasteful practice of only using a resource once, along the coastlines we see a lot of different kinds of plastic products. Many of these products were designed to be single-use. All of these items pollute our oceans and affect our economy, our health, our food security and more, in many different ways.[1] So, we all understand that we need to stop the leakage of plastics, and in doing so, we need to rethink and redesign plastic products. The very first thing to do as part of this initiative is to refuse single-use.[2] This is what we call a mindset shift trigger. And it is important, because people-power is essential in this movement – to refuse. But we also need real actions from businesses and governments in terms of refusing. And a lot is happening at the moment with regard to the tendency to refuse. We have the global treaty on plastic pollution underway, the single-use plastics directive being implemented in Sweden and the guiding roadmap for the sustainable use of plastics.

### A zero waste shop joining the Peak Innovation Incubator Program

Based on an equal interest in zero waste as a lifestyle, Fanny Näslund and Estefanía Coral founded **Vågen** in 2020. The goal was to create a place where people could connect, learn and meet as a community. In October 2021, they joined the Peak Innovation Incubator programme with the aim to bring zero waste and sustainable grocery shopping to as many people as possible. To do this, they need to develop systems and tools that help scale the concept in a sustainable way. The plan is to open at least five more shops during the next year, as well as a zero waste online shop, where people will be able to buy both food and zero-waste products.

### Material and packaging innovation at its core

**Blue Ocean Closures** in Karlstad has developed a new sustainable solution for big-volume products, such as big bottles for carbonated drinks. It is now possible to replace the plastic screw caps with bio-based screw caps. The design combines a top-liner and a body made of sustainably sourced wood-fibre (FSC-certified) materials. This product is a technological breakthrough, and it can be adapted to any container and can be recycled as paper.

### Alternative single-use laminate products for the healthcare sector

**Cellcomb** manufactures disposable single-use laminate products for use in healthcare.

[1] "Single-use plastics", 2020
[2] From Pollution to Solution: a global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution, 2021
[3] "How to reduce the impacts of single-use plastic products", 2021

However, in this case, the single-use approach is environmentally friendly because the materials are renewable and the end-product is compostable. Cellcomb provides a wide range of products, from protective sheets and bed linen to aprons that increase hygiene and patient safety. In addition to the healthcare sector, they are also involved in the food industry, where they produce absorbing pads for food trays that absorb excess leaks from food to prolong the shelf life and help mitigate food waste.

### Capacity-building for sustainable events and festivals

**LiveGreen** started as a music festival in Kristianstad in 2018. The venture has evolved since then. They offer capacity-building and they raise awareness to create sustainable, ecologically safe and inclusive events and festivals. Festivals can be seen as temporary cities, so all the challenges in society also exist at festivals, more or less. What makes it even more challenging is that the festivals are temporary, which historically has made them a magnet for single-use products.

> "Amazing things happen when we meet each other in person. Festivals are essential for our democracy and social sustainability. Actually, we're building temporary cities, and all the challenges in our society also exist at our festivals, more or less. What makes it even more challenging is that the festivals are temporary, which historically has made them a magnet for single-use products."
>
> — Louise Lindén, Founder and Innovation Manager, LiveGreen.

# Reduce the use of fossil-based virgin plastics

Of all the plastic that has ever been produced, less than ten percent has been recycled, because generally speaking, making virgin plastics is often the cheapest option (in comparison to collecting, sorting, recovering and recycling existing plastics).[4] Also, most of the virgin plastics made so far are fossil-based. Naturally, this is problematic in many, many ways, and action is needed to reduce the use of fossil-based virgin plastics. The externalities of plastic production are estimated to be about $1,000 per tonne of plastic produced (so that would mean $380 billion a year) from CO2 emissions, air pollution, waste management, and ocean clean-up efforts.[5] And, as we know, there are some solutions to this, one of them being the substitution of fossil-based virgin plastics with recycled or bio-based materials. Inspiration for this is often found in nature.

### Biomimicry and technology development

The green chemicals company, **OrganoClick**, has been working with biomimicry and technology development for the last 25 years. It was founded as a spin-off company from Stockholm University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in 2006. Their vision is a world free from plastic waste and chemical pollution. They have several products on the market, of which one is a binder made from food waste.

> "It is possible to bind these kinds of polymers into the cellulose matrix. I think it represents a massive potential because most of the functionalities we have in materials today have already been solved in nature."
>
> – Mårten Hellberg, CEO, OrganoClick

### Wood-based innovation to replace the use of fossil-based plastics

Nordic pine from Swedish forests is an integral part in the innovative FibraQ technology. The innovation is a chemical treatment of wood fibres to make them more hydrophobic and compatible with different types of plastics. Wood-fibre based plastic has been around for many years, but their innovation ensures that industries can use it for many more products and applications. **Biofiber Tech** provides the wood-fibre based material FibraQ as a low-carbon alternative to fossil-based virgin plastics.

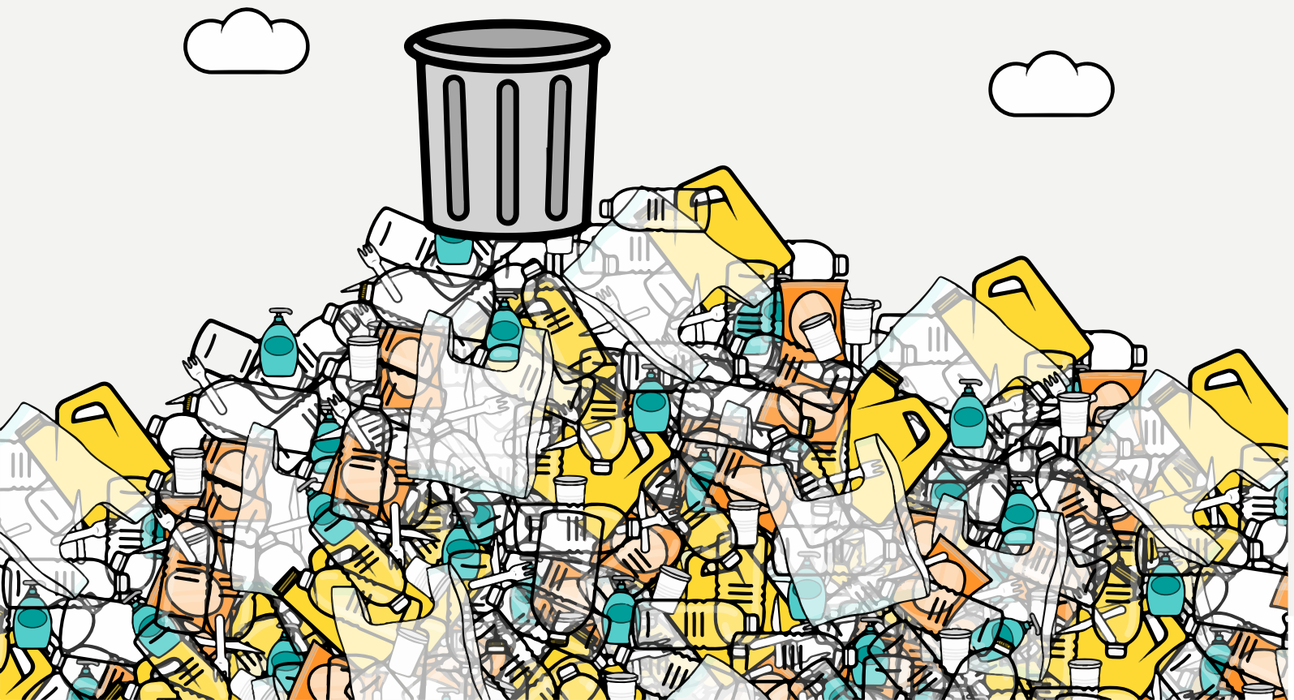
### Unique material created from recycled plastics and rubber

The cleantech company **Ecorub** has been in the business of transforming recycled plastics and vulcanised rubber into new materials for more than 20 years. One of these compound materials, TPRR®, is used to replace fossil-based virgin plastics.

[4] "Beat Plastic Pollution", 2022
[5] "The Future's Not in Plastics", 2020

### Multi-year packaging development

**IKEA** has been working with packaging development for many years, and the current aim is to find the best solutions free from fossil-based virgin plastics. IKEA's goal is to eliminate all fossil-based virgin plastic packaging by 2028. The industry shift is not happening overnight, but things are changing. For instance, harmful EPS was phased out a long time ago. IKEA uses approximately 90% wood-based materials, and not more than 10% of their packaging is plastic. Developing a packaging solution that does not glue different materials together will make the separation and recycling of various packaging materials easier.



# Reuse and recycle in practice and at scale

We need to massively increase the reuse and recycling of plastic products and packaging in practice and at scale. As material recycling levels are still low, we do understand that recycling is not the silver bullet solution to solving plastic pollution. There are examples of existing Deposit-Return-Schemes in Sweden ("pant") that obviously work pretty well, except that there is a lot left to be done.[6] As stated in the roadmap for sustainable use of plastics, an emphasis on reusing plastics repeatedly is a priority.[7]

### A sizeable deposit-return system

**Svenska retursystem**'s customers are all part of a sizeable deposit-return system. The company rents out durable crates and palettes for business-to-business distribution, eliminating many million pieces of disposable packaging. Their most common product is grocery crates, which can be seen in almost every Swedish grocery shop. The pallets and crates are made of durable, recyclable plastic. When the crate is empty, it is sent back for cleaning and, when necessary, repairs. Svenska retursystem has more than 1,500 customers, many of which are grocery shops.
There are 20 million crates at the moment, and 500,000 units are sent out every day. To make sure that the return system works, there are fees, rent and deposits for the products to circle back and be used again.

"Our crates are designed to last for 15 years. When the crate is worn out, we send it back to the manufacturer, who grinds it down and uses the material to create new ones."

– Pontus Björkdahl, Sustainability Manager, Svenska retursystem.

"This project is focusing on the whole value chain, so companies that are developing digital systems for reusable containers could eventually come up with incentives for a national or even international system."

Annelise de Jong, Project Manager & Senior Researcher, IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute.

### A take-away system at cafes and restaurants

The reuse of cups and food containers would make a significant difference and reduce waste and litter as well as excessive production. As take-away is becoming more common on a global scale, **IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute**, together with other Swedish companies, decided to try a new take-away system at cafes and restaurants, to see if people are interested in using reusable coffee mugs and lunchboxes.

[6] Plastic in Sweden facts and practical advice - A short version of Kartläggning av plastflöden i Sverige (Mapping Plastic Flows in Sweden), 2019

[7] The Swedish EPA's roadmap for the sustainable use of plastics, 2021

> "Most materials have already been produced in nature, so that's where we're going to start looking for raw materials and find new circular solutions."
>
> Christian Bergman, Industrial Developer, IDC West Sweden.

### Switching to circular materials in the textile, fashion and furniture industries

**CircularHub** is a project that helps companies transition to a circular economy, focusing specifically on companies in the textile, fashion and furniture industries. The project is run by Science Park Borås in close partnership with **IDC West Sweden**. CircularHub encourages the reuse of materials or components in products. The aim is to move from a linear to a circular economy, inspired by what nature does. CircularHub uses a range of tools to educate companies about circular business models such as reusing materials, rental models and sharing platforms.

### Learnings from ReTuna implemented in new Boden initiative

Understanding the development of the circular economy is an ongoing dynamic process. Consequently, many actors in the field gather experiences and learnings on the go, much of which can be utilised moving forward in other projects. The proposal for the concept in Boden, lead by **Cirkulenterna**, builds upon key learnings from ReTuna, and is about to establish a distribution centre that includes a drop-off area. It's a distribution centre for handling material, sorting and working on the materials to prepare them for delivery to external partners in the municipality.

### Collection and sorting of soft plastics

**TMR** is a producer responsibility organization located in Helsingborg. The company supports brands with producer responsibility tasks like collecting and recycling packaging material. A new company called Omni Polymer, owned primarily by TMR, collects pre-sorted flexible packaging materials, in other words, soft plastics. This is a recycling facility that washes soft plastics, recycles them into new plastic granulates, and then uses those to produce new products or new packaging material.

> "Many of the flexible plastics are laminate. This means they are made of several different layers of plastic, and thus they are difficult to recycle in traditional mechanical recycling. This has now been solved so that we can produce these plastic granulates out of the mixed plastic fraction and then produce new products."
>
> Christian Håkansson, Packaging Specialist, TMR.

> "Today's norm is that you take a block of material and cut out your piece, and what's left is your final product. That generates massive amounts of material waste and excessive use of energy. Additive manufacturing is the opposite of subtractive manufacturing because you add the material and a new component comes out."
>
> Stefan Larsson, Founder, Lostboyslab.

### 3D printing and additive manufacturing in circular design

**Lostboyslab**, based in Vellinge, specialises in circular design and additive materials and manufacturing. This circular studio has its own 3D printing farm with 137 printers. 90% of all the materials used by Lostboyslab is recycled. Furthermore, all their products can be manufactured on demand locally, even with local materials. They want to find new techniques, methods and processes to build circular design products and develop additive materials.

### Recycled PET bottles used for high-end acoustic panels

**Akustikmiljö**, situated in Falkenberg, has been developing and manufacturing environmentally friendly sound-absorbing products and acoustic solutions for more than 20 years. With a team of sound engineers, architects and designers, they create aesthetic public and private spaces focusing on pleasant sound experiences. EcoSUND is the core material that all their products are made of. It is a polyester fibre mixed with 50% PET from recycled plastic bottles.

> "We want to determine the value on all consumer packaging and incentivise consumers to bring their packaging to the right place."
>
> Martin Stenberg, Head of Sales, Bower.

### Consumer packaging and recycling trophies

What does a mobile app have in common with a beauty brand? The correct answer is a strong interest in increasing the recycling of consumer packaging. Over 285,000 users currently utilise the mobile app **Bower** to recycle packaging. One of their partners is the Swedish cosmetics brand **Isadora**, which has registered all their products in the Bower app.

> "With the Bower app, we can track how many people are recycling our products, collect consumer insight data and measure reductions in CO2 emissions through improved recycling rates."
>
> Amanda Berg, Communication and PR Manager, Isadora.

# Restore our oceans from plastic pollution

Restoration of our landscapes and seascapes in order to achieve the vision of plastic-free oceans means taking action **upstream and downstream**. It means picking up litter items that have already reached nature, while at the same time working with awareness-raising activities on human behaviour, but also strengthening existing waste management infrastructure and related policies.

## Outdoor activities and sustainable experiences

**Ribban Beach Camp** has been operating in Malmö since 2015, but co-founder Xenia Brundin and her team have been running their business in Sweden and Nepal for more than ten years. They started by renting out kayaks on the beach in Malmö to raise funds for the earthquake victims in Nepal. Now, they host personal development and management programmes in Sweden and Nepal. A big part of the adventure in their programmes is generating enthusiasm for sustainability and nature. The programmes therefore often take place in locations with high biodiversity.

> "We see these as opportunities for outdoor pursuits and activities to create a stronger bond with nature and a stronger community, where people feel personally and collectively empowered."
>
> Xenia Brundin, Co-founder, Ribban Beach Camp

> "Today, it's difficult for water treatment plants to separate microplastics from the water, but with the help of an installed filter connected to the washing machine, they could be prevented from spreading further."
>
> Tim Bergman, Founder, Pandora filter

## Filter solutions to prevent microplastic contamination of water

Every time clothes or textiles are machine washed, the fabrics release microfibres. These fibres stay in the wastewater and eventually reach our drinking water, thereby contaminating entire ecosystems. However, microplastic fibres could be prevented from reaching our domestic water by installing filters. Tim Bergman, the founder of **Pandora filter**, has designed a filter for industrial washing machine use. The idea behind the Pandora filter is to reduce the spread of microplastics and, at the same time, contribute to the circular economy.

### Public-private partnership to keep the outdoor hotspot Åre tidy

A project based on shared ownership and responsibility. Very simplistically, the reason is that business makes money from visitors, it's the visitors who litter and it would feel very wrong if business wasn't involved in taking care of the litter too. But the business community does not have the ability to mobilise the villagers to do this. That is the relationship between the village of Åre and the tourist association. That's why this cooperation is so important.

**"In terms of volume, we have achieved several full containers with things that should not be in our environment, which is great, but what is even more important to achieve is the cooperation and the understanding that what we all do can make a difference – when we help each other it becomes a case of "many small streams making a mighty river".**

Therese Sjölund, CEO, Åre Destination

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