

1) Title of the case

City of Umeå and the Swedish quality award for municipalities

2) General description of the organisation and/or project

Umeå is one of Sweden's newest and fastest growing cities. The average age of the 110 000 people who live in Umeå is 37. Efforts are also made to develop Umeå even more - the goal is to pass the 150 000 figure before 2050.

The city offers world-class art, drama, films, industries, music and research. It aims to attract more companies, break new construction records and, not least, become the European Capital of Culture 2014.

Umeå has been expanding for several decades. Growth really accelerated in 1965, the same year that the university threw open its doors. Obviously, there is a connection. Education provides skills, which attracts companies that, in turn, attract more people. In the last 30 years, housing in Umeå has doubled and this rate of growth continues. There are 700 to 800 new apartments constructed each year.

Sweden is divided into 289 municipalities. Swedish municipalities have great autonomy and the way they are organized differs. Municipalities are bound by law to provide certain services, while other areas are covered on a voluntary basis.

By law, municipalities are responsible for:

- social services
- the school system
- planning and building issues
- health and environmental protection
- waste management, refuse and street cleaning
- water and sewage
- emergency and rescue services
- contingency planning and safety
- chief guardian/public trustee services

Other services provided on a voluntary basis include:

- recreation and leisure activities
- cultural services
- energy operations

The municipality is a democratically governed organization, and elected representatives are responsible for municipal activities.

Every fourth year, Umeå elects a new Municipal Council - a "municipal parliament" - at the same time as the County Council and the parliamentary elections are held in Sweden. The 65 seats in the Council are allocated in a direct election process between candidates representing the political parties participating in the election. The Municipal Council then selects the members of the Municipal Executive Board and members of the other municipal committees and boards. The Executive Board, which has 15 members, is the local equivalent of the cabinet at the national level. The Municipal Council meets in accordance with a set timetable, and the general public is welcome to attend. The written documents and reports discussed are public information and are available at the municipal offices.

4th Quality Conference

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The Municipal Council appoints three municipal commissioners from members of the Executive Board. One commissioner represents the political majority and chairs the Executive Board - this post is currently held by Lennart Holmlund (Social Democrat). The two other commissioners represent the political opposition (1st Vice-Chairman) and the political majority (2nd Vice-Chairman).

Municipal Committees

The municipality's operations are so comprehensive that the Executive Board cannot possibly make all the necessary decisions, and the Board is assisted by a number of politically appointed committees responsible for the various areas concerned. The members of these committees are elected by the Municipal Council.

In addition, there are three Neighbourhood Councils in Umeå - in Sävar, Holmsund/Obbola and Hörnefors - which function as local executive boards and have their own administrations. The key concept is grassroots democracy, where the administration should be as close to local inhabitants as possible.

Municipal administrations

Each municipal committee has an administrative unit, with employees who prepare items of business, implement political decisions and conduct all other business within the committee's area of responsibility. Umeå's current operations involve 11 different administrations. The city's Chief Executive Officer is the senior municipal official. The executive heads of the various administrations manage the operations of their administrative units and are responsible for implementing decisions taken by municipal committees.

3) The main content of the case

Umeå a winning city - Why?

"Umeå a winning city" is our slogan. We would like all our residents to feel like winners by living, existing and working in Umeå. Our case is about the evaluation according to the "Municipal Compass" a model of best practice in which many Swedish municipalities participated. We have used the "Municipal Compass" as a tool to evaluate and improve the organisation.

We will tell you why,

- Umeå is the fastest growing city in Sweden.
- the index of quality has risen by 22 % in 2 years.
- the results of a survey among the employees have increased for the fourth year.
- Umeå won the Swedish Quality Award for Municipalities 2005.

4) The reasons behind the case

The first evaluation according to the "Municipal Compass" was made in 2003 and the second in 2005. The evaluations gave us information about our strengths and areas to improve. There is also a good opportunity to compare the results of more than 40 evaluations of municipalities in Sweden.

5) The actors behind the case

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities is responsible for the "Municipal Compass". Two consultants from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities made the evaluation by reading documents like planning documents, budget documents and reports. They also had interviews with about 40 people from the organisation, such as politicians, managers and employees.

6) The process leading to success

In 2003, the city's Chief Executive Officer decided that Umeå should try to evaluate according to the "Municipal Compass". After a discussion with the Executive Board and the involvement of the directors of the 11 different administrations, we applied. In this first evaluation, Umeå achieved very good results and therefore we decided to apply for the Swedish Quality Award for Municipalities 2005.

7) Results indicating the success

The "Municipal Compass" evaluates 8 areas.

1. Democratic control, transparency and accountability
2. Citizen access and customer orientation
3. Co-operation between politics and administration
4. Decentralisation of management
5. Controlling and reporting
6. Human resource development
7. Innovation policy
8. Community partnerships

	2005	2003	Improvement
Democratic control, transparency and accountability	66	56	18 %
Citizen access and customer orientation	69.5	55	26 %
Co-operation between politics and administration	80	64.5	24 %
Decentralisation of management	82.5	71.5	15 %
Controlling and reporting	71	45	58 %
Human resource development	78	68.5	14 %
Innovation policy	71	57	25 %
Community partnerships	90	80	13 %
TOTAL	608	497.5	22 %

Umeå will use these results to set goals and to improve all 8 areas. A new evaluation according to the "Municipal Compass" will be made in 2007.

8) The main obstacles of the case

The main obstacle is to go from evaluation to taking actions to improve.

9) Main sources of inspiration behind the case

Sources of inspiration are mainly other municipalities that have made an evaluation, for example, Botkyrka and Trollhättan.

10) The most important lesson learned

The most important lesson learned is that using the “Municipal Compass” is a powerful tool for improving the municipality in all aspects. The evaluations show what we need to improve and provide us with examples from other organisations that we can learn from.