



## Threats and possibilities of a small island society in the middle of Sweden

This is the 4th assignment in “How to read an island” at the Open Academy of Åland.

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## Explaining the method

In this study I aim to examine the threats and possibilities of a small island society, I will lay out the facts about Vinön and then describe some threats, that I feel Vinön is facing. Then I will present from four other islanders. Then I am going to present some possibilities that I feel Vinön is ready for. Then I will present the possibilities from four other islanders. These islanders have different background and perspective. I am going to use the method of six thinking hats, a method introduced by Edward de Bono<sup>1</sup> this method was introduced to the students in "How to read an island". The thinking hats are used to describe a problem or some kind of difficulty that you may have. In a very simple explanation of the six thinking hats are:



White hat: Facts, figures, things that are known, or lacks information on.



Red hat: Emotions, feelings, impressions, hunches



Black hat: Possible dangers, problems, difficulties, critical thinking.



Yellow hat: Positive thinking, optimism, focus on benefits, opportunity-thinking



Green hat: Creative thinking, innovative thinking, new approaches to problems



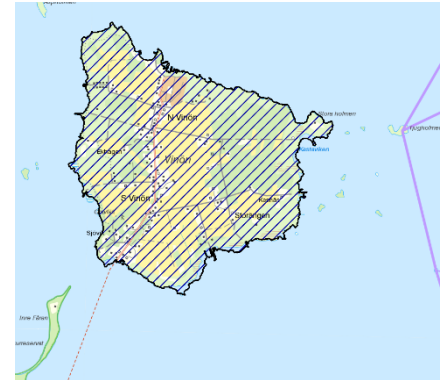
Blue hat: Organization of thinking, overview, summary

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<sup>1</sup> Edward de Bono Six thinking hats

## Vinön in facts and figures

The island of Vinön is the largest island in Hjälmaren. The other island that is inhabited all year round is called Valen. Vinön have an area of approximately 4,5 square kilometres, that is if you ask the islanders themselves. In “Sveriges Öar”<sup>2</sup> Vinön is 5,2 km<sup>2</sup>. Wikipedia also tells us that Vinön is 4,5 square kilometres. In search of the truth I contacted a friend that have access to the maps of Sweden and by his measurements Vinön has an area of 5,22 square kilometres. Vinön have an all year round population of 100 inhabitants, I counted all inhabitant in the fall of 2015 and four people have moved. There is approximately 50 people that live on Vinön half of the year, and a large number of summer residents. According to “Sveriges öar” the population was 102 inhabitants in 2012, 112 inhabitants in 2005, 119 inhabitants in 2002, 240 inhabitants in 1944.



The Swedish road administration have a ferry that at no cost takes you from the mainland port of Hampetorp to Vinön in 20-25 minutes. The ride is 5 km long. The ferry goes for 15 rides a day. The ferry takes 14 normal sized cars. For two months in the summer the ferry double its rides, because of tourists. The road administration have no longer an aim to make an ice road to the mainland in cold winters. So the ferry runs all year around, but not during the night.



There is a voluntary fire brigade on the island. It is 10 men who practice one time a month and can be called out when there is a fire on the island. The voluntary fire brigade on Vinön is a part of the fire department of Örebro. There are two defibrillators on the island.

The name of Vinön is believed to come from the old word for playground for fish and birds. This information comes from “Riksantikvarieembetet”<sup>3</sup>



Hjälmaren have rather a lot of fishermen, there is about 24 licences for professional fishermen. Ten of those licenses are on Vinön so fishing is an important part of the economy. Almost all fish is bought by a company that takes the fish to Göteborg where it is sold. Pikeperch and crayfish are economically most important. The fishing of pikeperch is certified by MSC Marine Steward Council ship, and have led to a stabile assets of pikeperch. The professional fishing gave

<sup>2</sup> Sveriges Öar Anders Källgård

<sup>3</sup> National Heritage

202 tons of pikeperch, 25 tons of pike, 49 tons of perch in Hjälmarén in 2014<sup>4</sup>. Household fishing is also popular. The licenced fishermen can fish on water that belong to the state. All farms own the right of fishing on their own water.

Farming is also an important part of the society of Vinön. There is seven family farms. There is cows, sheep, hens and pigs on the island nowadays. The soil is mostly sand and is good for growing potato and strawberry. In the sixties and seventies there were a lot of small cucumber grown. The spring often comes later compared to the mainland, but the autumn is warmer, a typical island climate. We estimate that Vinön have more hours of sun than the mainland.



Vinön has two historical sight's from 1000-1500 A.D. one burial place and one ring of stones, accompanied by a stone ship. Vinön was owned by a convent, Julita in the middle ages, then all the assets of the convents went to the state. Later Vinön was given to the estate of Segersjö and in 1792 Vinön was sold to Olof Andersson in Ljungå for 200 "riksdaler" in 1793 the two village community bought Vinön for 400 "riksdaler". Most of the islanders owned the land but not the provision from it, but in 1906 a lot of the islanders bought

themselves free from this. <sup>5</sup> Hjälmarén was reduced in 1877-1888 by 1,8 meters and after this the two settlements on Vinön was split, and the houses where moved in to new locations on the island. In 1874 the first store was bulid. In 1884 the schoolhouse was ready. In 1908 the telephone cable came. In 1940 the ferry came. In 1952 the electricity came.<sup>6</sup>

In 2005 Vinön was connected with fibre to the telephone station. Vinön no longer have a regular grocery store. The islanders are able to order food from a store in Örebro that already have an ordering system. The food-truck comes one time in a week. The post comes weekdays, and the newspaper comes all days that isn't holydays. The library in Örebro have a branch in the school that is open for one hour a week. The missionary house now owned by VKHF<sup>7</sup>, is used for worship one Sunday every month. These meetings ends with coffee and are visited by approximately 10% of the islanders. It is the state church that administrates this. The parish also arranges a social activity each month of the year.

All houses on Vinön have private solutions for their sewer system. A lot of these systems are not approved by the municipality. The municipality are looking in to different questions

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.slu.se/Dokument/externwebben/akvatiska\\_resurser/publikationer/Rom2013/G%C3%B6s%20Resurs%C3%B6versikt%202013pdf](http://www.slu.se/Dokument/externwebben/akvatiska_resurser/publikationer/Rom2013/G%C3%B6s%20Resurs%C3%B6versikt%202013pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bo Ek Vinön en resa

<sup>6</sup> Bo Ek Vinön en resa

<sup>7</sup> Vinöns Kultur- och Hembygdsförening see later on in the text



about sewer systems these last years. The municipality have denied people who wanted to build a house on the island permission for a sewer system, because of the threat of water pollution. All properties have their own well, some are not that deep and others are drilled. There have been problems of finding good water on the island and there is a concern that Vinön will become like a Swiss cheese and the whole ground water system will collapse. The municipality have suggested that water from the mainland would be a solution. The municipality also have suggested that a collective sewer system should take the waste to the mainland threw a pipe on the bottom of the lake.

In 1991 Vinöns Kultur och Hembygdsförening (VKHF) was founded as a result of the worries for the store, the school, the ferry.

The Association have struggled with a lot of the questions of the different services for the islanders. In doing so it have found help and support in the national organisation Skärgårdarnas riksförbund<sup>8</sup> and Hela Sverige ska leva<sup>9</sup>.

VKHF also have the role to bring people together. It pays for the printing of the monthly paper "Ö-bladet" that some women make each month and have done so for fifteen years. VKHF deals with issues concerning the practical life as well as the social life. The houses that VKHF own are used for all kinds of things. The old missionary house is used for art and crafts in the summer, and used as a church in winter. It is also used for simpler overnight accommodation for the Outdoor education. The old school house is used as meeting place, a summer café, library, an office with internet, copy machine and other office facilities. There is a loom in the basement, also a washing machine and a shower. One of the out houses holds a small museum. Members of VKHF also gathers and collect history objects and recollections of old times. They hope to make a book, that holds the history of every house on Vinön. VKHF takes care of all the holiday activities, such as Easter party, Valborgsmässoafton<sup>10</sup>, Midsummer activities, day of flea-market, melody crossword, light evening, winter day on the ice, autumn party, all types of activities to bring people together and promote social life. The motto for VKHF is "a living island". VKHF have also been the mother of different projects to promote Vinön.



## The treats of a small island society

The threats that I see for Vinön are based on my experiences after reading the literature in "How to read an island" and the experience from other island societies I have visited during the years being active in Skärgårdarnas riksförbund. I am 38 years old and an islander from birth and heritage. I have lived almost all my life on Vinön, I'm also a guide for tourist on the island so I try to keep myself up to date about the island.

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<sup>8</sup> The National Association for the Swedish Archipelagos

<sup>9</sup> The national organisation for the rural areas of Sweden

<sup>10</sup> Walpurgis Night

## An ageing population and the decreasing of the population

By the numbers from the population you can easily see that the population is decreasing, but not in an alarming way. Like Sweden in general, Vinön has an ageing population. It is hard to find work on the island, so commuting may be an option. The people that is moving to the island either has their roots here, or they are making their summer house into an all year round residence. There are not a lot of houses up for sale, and this makes it hard for young families to buy a house to live in. The ferry doesn't ride all hours and this makes it hard to have a shift job. The elderly often chose to stay in their houses as long as it is possible, and this hold back the house market. With an aging population comes the issue of home care. Our local association VKHF has been told that the old people that have home care are the most expensive in the municipality. There is also no way that the old people can get help at night because the ferry doesn't go at night.

## The issues of a rescue mission

A big change came for the islanders a couple of years ago, when the road administration decided that the ferry should be placed in Hampetorp instead of on Vinön. The first ride of the day were no longer to any use for the islanders and the last ride for the night became earlier in the evening. Before the move, the ferry was called out in emergencies, but now the road administration don't see it as a cost that they should bare. The islanders now are dependent on SSRS "Svenska sjöräddningssällskapet"<sup>11</sup> that has a one big boat, a small boat, and one hovercraft that carry people in emergency. This system is not yet fully trimmed in. There is no proper pier in Vinön or in Hampetorp. And the people that are on call are too few. The people that are on call gain nothing for being on call. The change in systems create an uncertainty for the islanders. The fact that the system not is fully trimmed in yet contributes to the feeling of uncertainty. This have in some cases made elderly or islanders with some condition to move to the mainland.

When the ferry was on call all night the voluntary fire department on Vinön had its mission to be the first part of the fire fighting. Then it would get aid from other fire departments. There has never been a fire at night on Vinön so the fire department in Örebro doesn't feel that they need a plan to get to Vinön at night with a fire truck or extra firefighters. If there is a fire at night, Vinön are on its own in fighting fire. In 2015 there was a day of education in hazards of fire and defibrillators, when society fails to give full service, the people themselves have to make precautions to avoid danger. There is also a plan to have one day of education every year. The education is free and is administrated by the fire department in Örebro.



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<sup>11</sup> Swedish sea rescue society

## The quality of the water in Hjälmaren

As of the present the lake is overfed, it is not in the danger zone of collapsing ecologically but there is a threat. All the sewer systems around the lake and in it, is supposed to be looked into by the municipality. They are supposed to be checked so that they are according to the relatively new higher standard that is demanded to stop overfeeding the lake. It is up to the owner of the sewage system to control that the system holds the relatively new high standard it is supposed to hold. Systems that are older than 5 years doesn't stand up to the new higher standard, so I estimate that 95% of the systems on Vinön is in need of fixing. Something must be done about the old systems and it is up to the municipality to stop the overfeeding of the lake. The municipality is looking at a solution that would transport water and sewage in pipes in the lake to the mainland.

If the islanders and property owners can come together and make a good suggestion for the solution of the water and sewer system, and present it to the municipality, the municipality is interested to hear what solution the citizens would prefer. The process on the island producing this solution can strengthen the community. An overlook on the possibility for chaired solutions can make the islanders more aware of the question of a sustainable life.

Water from the mainland would help the summer business like the restaurant that need a lot of water for shorter periods like concert nights. There will probably be optional to use the water from Örebro though some property owners might be forced to connect themselves at a rather high fee.

If the islanders and property owners fail to make a good suggestion to the municipality a lot of property owners will probably face a large fee when they are forced to connect themselves to the water and sewer system that is brought to the island by pipes from the mainland. This fee might be too big for senior islanders and they might have to sell their property probably to a summer resident. A lot of islanders see the solution of a pipe to the mainland as a threat for the lake, what will happen if or when the pipe breaks?

There is a group of islanders and property owners working with these questions, but they are complex and have a lot of technical issues that demands a lot of knowledge.

Water from the mainland will probably be quite chlorinated because it has travelled all the way from Örebro, especially in the warm summers.

It is of absolute necessity to solve the overfeeding of the lake but the issue is how to do it.

There are now and then plans to dig in the canal in to Örebro, to create better possibilities for boats to get to Hjälmaren. A digging would be a great risk for Hjälmaren when a lot of the old pollution from Örebro probably lies in the sediment of the canal. I can only hope the people who makes the decision to dig or not investigates what is in the sediments.

If Hjälmaren is overfed or a large pollution comes out it might be a threat for the fish, seafood and also the occupation for the fishermen.

## All the egg in one basket

Fishing is going very well at the moment and there is a hazard that too much effort and resources are going in to the fishery. It's the problem of putting all your egg in one basket, is dangerous for all society but especially islands.<sup>12</sup>

Hjälmarén once was the largest producer of crayfish in northern Europe. This ended in 1905 when the plague came and wiped out the whole population of crayfish. This became an economic lesson for the islanders. Crayfish was eaten by the rich people and had created a rather large income for the islanders. And with the plague the asset was completely wiped out. After that the islanders were forced into different ways to make a living on the island and the islanders are still good at diversifying but a substantial part of the income comes from the fishing.

## Other islanders view of the threats of an island society

Richard Widlund, 34 years, has lived on Vinön all his life except during his student years.

**Question:** What threats and problems do you see facing Vinön?

**Answer:** security aspects, we have to fight to get a better system of security at night. The frequency of the ferry rides reduced. The expansion of shore protection. Drainage issues, the authorities coming with compelling solutions. That there will be "Stockholm prices" of real estate, that will be a threat for permanent residents.

Peter Kumlin 70 year chairman of VKHF a former summer resident that now live on Vinön full time.

**Question:** What threats and problems do you see facing Vinön?

**Answer:** The threat is desertification and poor communications. Changed authority example shore right that can be 300 meters, would be devastating for Vinön. 100 meters is enough.

Catrine Neiler 45 years Vinöbo, cafe owner, a former summer resident that have her ancestors on Vinön, and have moved here with her family.

**Question:** What threats and problems do you see facing Vinön?

**Answer:** As you get older you may need more care and it is quite far to the care in Vinön. I see no threat for Vinön, if war comes, Vinön a safe place, if there is a madman who shoots around himself, there are men with rifles on Vinön who can take care of it.

Birgitta Andersson Åberg-Vinöbo 50+, have moved to Vinön with no former experience and married an island entrepreneur.

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<sup>12</sup> A geography of islands (Insularity: process and effects) Stephen Royle



**Question:** What threats and problems do you see facing Vinön?

**Answer:** Hjalparen is very overfed which may mean in the long run to the lake are dying due to lack of oxygen and all fish and shellfish die. The low water level favors nor fish.

This would then mean that you can't live as fishermen here, and that no tourists want come here.

We must get water and sewage around the lake.

More and more younger families choose not to settle on Vinön because of the ferry, if you have irregular working hours it does not work to settle here. This means that many houses only will be time residents and

the island will grow again. It can feel heavy and lonely for many children / teenagers, which does not benefit their social development and stress of bussing children to various activities on the mainland.

We then also don't have people who can engage in search and rescue and Nerike fire department / rescue services,

This can then also mean that there are fewer trips on the ferry if we even get to keep the ferry service.

## Possibilities for a small island society

### Good conditions for horticulture

VKHF was at some point worried that the fields were no longer used so they started a group for interested farmers. This have resulted in that fields that were on their way to become full of trees now is used again. A young couple that have interest and knowledge in farming now have hens and other animals in season. Another couple have invested in a storage for potatoes.

There is a positive attitude towards small-scale food production at the moment, and Vinön have good conditions for the small-scale food production. Vinön have more sun and a warmer autumn than the mainland. There is plenty sweet water from the lake to water the things that are growing, this in a time when water supplies are running low in some parts of Sweden. There is some infrastructure to take the water from the lake up to the fields. There is also buyers of the products in the form of tourists that visit the island and might be interested in a locally produced genuine island product. People are already coming to Vinön to buy local products like fish and crayfish so why not buy a can of something else that is locally produced. Vinön had made a name for itself as a producer of small cucumbers and strawberries so there is a tradition to work within. The old school building holds a kitchen that has the standard for small-scale food production. There is a couple of lady's that produce these kinds of products but a strategy and more energy could really make this of production to take off. Products from the land are somewhat a more secure production than the one from the lake. The weather is important for both of them but when you grow things you often know what you can expect to harvest. When you go fishing there is no insurance that you get anything.



## Good conditions for entrepreneurs

I have a theory that because the islanders have been landowners for a long time, we have learned to take the opportunities of surviving as they come. This have made us to true entrepreneurs, when counting how many islanders that have a business we found out that about 50% (we counted the entrepreneurs in 2007 for Skärgårdarnas riksförbund) of the population were entrepreneurs. Here are some examples of businesses:

Fishing and processing fish and crayfish, smoking fish.

Farming: growing vegetables, processing fruit and berry, holding animals for their meat and eggs.

All kinds of jobs for an excavator.

Tourism: renting cabins, café, restaurant, bike rental, ice cream kiosk, tours with different perspectives, driving tourists, local flea markets.

Services like; building, painting, electricity, heating.

Education: outdoor education, that several entrepreneurs are engaged in.

Mail order business.

Producing craft to the local arts and craft.

Bakery and baking at home.

The entrepreneurs are also used to take a livelihood when it is presented, this lead to business that engages themselves in a lot of things.



VKHF – contribute to the good society and good communication that creates a positive spirit.

VKHF have over the years been part of a lot of projects to promote the island. VKHF now uses it's workforce to create meeting places for the islanders the meeting places create a feeling of belonging and a feeling of Vinön as an island society. VKHF has in its monthly paper Ö-bladet, focus on positive activities to create a positive island society and also to show that things happen on the island off the summer season. The fibre cable to Vinön have been lying on the bottom of the lake for 10 years and have made it possible to make the grocery shopping easy and faster and have made it possible to work from home when possible. Promoting the possibility to work from a distance should attract more residents to the island. VKHF also have installed solar cells on the roof of one of their building, promoting the thought of making your own energy in Ö-bladet and making more islanders interested in producing energy.

## Other islanders view of possibilities for a small island society

Richard Widlund, 34 years, has lived on Vinön all his life except during his student years.

**Question:** If you think creatively what opportunities have Vinön?

**Answer:** There is a lot you can cultivate and process, and also develop the food and fishing tourism. You should be able to catch your perch, fillet it and get it cooked. A cozy accommodation for tourists. The possibilities for winter tourism could be used more. Attracting the right people for all year round living. Opportunities for joint telecommuting, a local that you can use when you are working "from home", to use technology jointly but also because it is more fun to work together. Be able to help each other.

Peter Kumlin 70 year chairman of VKHF a former summer resident that now live on Vinön full time.

**Question:** If you think creatively what opportunities have Vinön?

**Answer:** The combination of fishing, farming must remain, and even something more. Offering a vibrant rural island. Become satellite residents to Örebro with really good transport links. Good communications, both physically by ferry and other transport but also for new technology with good connection and mobile phone coverage. Political subsidies for people in the periphery. Get some kind of activity on the island, such as accommodation for the disabled.

Catrine Neiler 45 years Vinöbo, cafe owner, a former summer resident that have her ancestors on Vinön, and have moved here with her family.

**Question:** If you think creatively what opportunities have Vinön?

**Answer:** Create a retirement home when it is available can house the other residents with its own restaurant, this provides jobs for vinöbor. There are private medical center, helipad. The resort has its own animal and its own slaughterhouse, dairy, cider, brewing. There should be a small shop for the goods produced. There is a marina with boat refueling station. Vinön should not be too exploited, but feel safe. Vinön should have an active gardener to do Vinön more beautiful with trees, flower beds and shrubs. Children should go to school on the mainland.

Birgitta Andersson Åberg-Vinöbo 50+, have moved to Vinön with no former experience, and married an island entrepreneur.

**Question:** If you think creatively what opportunities have Vinön?

**Answer:** A fixed link so that younger generations can / want to stay at Vinön and pensioners dare stay on the island when the ambulance etc would work satisfactorily. It is important that we support all the possible ideas and entrepreneurship. We must dare to

think beyond the "box"!

That we dare to receive a portion of newly arrived people to Vinön!

## Summery

It is interesting to look at an island society, and it is also interesting to hear other people's angle of looking on the island with their different background and experiences. While looking at different threats and possibilities you see the outlines of the society and I was forced to take a step back to look at the society from a different perspective. The things that are happening on the island right now influences what I feel is important and also what the other islanders feel is important. The threats of the island are looked into by different groups with VKHF as a frame of the work. The visionary ideas are harder to get the time to get on print and work with in a structural way. As an islander you have to fight for the basic needs in many cases (transportation, communication, being able to be rescued) and the visions are often left as visions. Or at least you think so, but if you look in the rearview mirror a lot of visions have been concretized during the last 10-15 years.