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# The life of an environmental strategist

An observation study from an environmental communicator's perspective

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is based on an internship at Södertälje Municipality. During three weeks I have observed and interviewed the environmental strategists in order to understand their view on communication. I have also dug deeper into one of the projects to get a better understanding of their work. Most of the strategists' out-turning projects are based on a classical communication model where the focus is on the sender and on the messages they want to deliver. This model does not take the receivers perspective into account and is therefore difficult to use when trying to changes people's behavior. According to for example McKenzie-Mohr and Nitsch, it is important with communication in order to make a change and take the target group's perspective. During my time in Södertälje I have realized that there are several barriers for not communicating. Time constrains, resources and lack of knowledge are some factors which make this work difficult. With some more efforts on communication in the environmental strategists' work in Södertälje they can though be able to take others perspectives, get feedback and hopefully give people the tools to change behavior and act in a more sustainable way.

**Key words:** Environmental communication, municipality, environmental strategist, perspective, barriers

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Thanks to the environmental strategists in the Municipality of Södertälje for letting me do my internship with you. I have learned a lot and I had a great time. Thank you.

To Johan,  
I will never forget you

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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*In the introduction chapter I will present the aim and research questions for the study and also a background to understand in what context the environmental strategists work.*

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Environmental issues have become more and more important among politicians and business leaders in the world. Also citizens have realized that we have to do something about the negative impact we humans have on the world we live in. To transmit this knowledge and will into practice is easier said than done. We often know what is better for the environment, but we have barriers of not acting in that way. Decision-makers often try to change people's behavior through information, but according to researchers, such as McKenzie-Mohr and Nitsch, this is not the most efficient way. A better way, according to the authors, is to try to get to know the target group, take the group's perspective and find out why they are not acting in a less environmental harming way. They have found that communication is a key in order to get a change in environmental issues.

In Sweden most of the local environmental work is done in the municipalities. Since this is the political level closest to the citizens I thought it would be interesting to investigate how a municipality is working with communication. During an internship with the environmental strategists in Södertälje municipality I have had the opportunity to study their work and see how they work with environmental issues and communication. I have done a study among environmental strategists who wants to make the world better but are struggling with time constrains, lack of money and no formal knowledge about communication.

## 1.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this thesis is to describe, try to understand and learn more about the work of the environmental strategists in Södertälje municipality and what communicative challenges they meet in their work.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How is the attitude towards communication among the strategists in Södertälje municipality?

How is communication used?

What are the barriers when not using communication?

## 1.3 BACKGROUND

### 1.3.1 SÖDERTÄLJE MUNICIPALITY

Södertälje municipality is located in the south of Stockholm county and has about 80 000 inhabitants. There are three dominating employers in the area, Scania, AstraZeneca and Södertälje municipality. The municipality contains both countryside and towns, which gives diversity to the area. In the 2006 elections none of the political blocks got majority in the council. A cross-party collaboration was therefore established with the Social democratic, Left and Green parties forming the municipal

governing body and the Moderate, Liberal, Centre and pensioner's party in a position with a possibility to influence in broader matters (Södertälje kommun, 2008).

The Local Government Council is the highest political body of the municipality and act like a local parliament. The Municipal Executive Board functions as the municipal government. The council takes decisions in principal matters such as Strategy & Budget. The Board's task is then to control and monitor the progress. The committees act as political guidance for different areas, such as construction and detailed planning, education, environment and care for the elderly. In the offices the civil servants work and are carrying out the daily work after the political guide lines (see figure 1) (Södertälje Kommun, 2008).

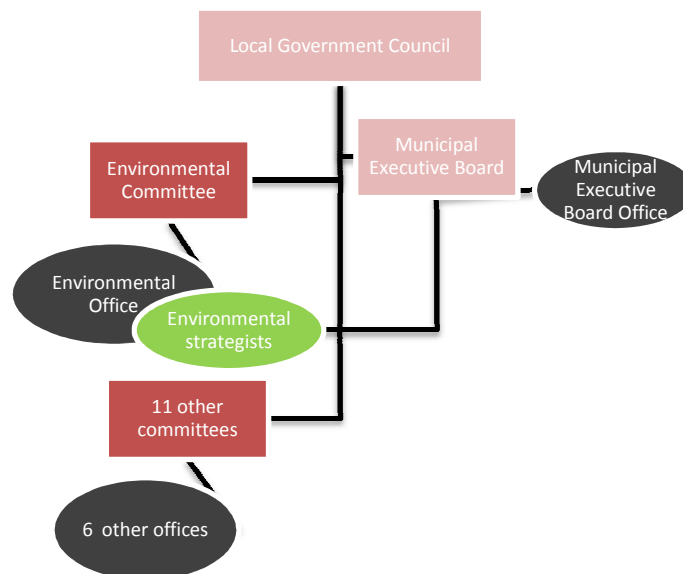


Figure 1: Organizational sketch of Södertälje Municipality

### 1.3.2 THE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGISTS IN SÖDERTÄLJE MUNICIPALITY

The team of environmental strategists in Södertälje Municipality consists of three women. Two are biologists and one has studied environmental science.

The strategists belong to the Environmental Office and their boss is the Environmental Manager. However, they are not getting their political decisions from the Environmental Committee like the rest of the office, but are working directly under the Municipal Executive Board (see figure 1) with the green party municipal commissioner, Ewa Lofvar Konradsson, as their contact person. She is also the head of the Technical committee. Decisions of what the strategist should do are discussed mainly among the strategist together with their boss and the commissioner. Bigger decisions though, have to be brought up in the Municipal Executive Board.

This arrangement means that the environmental strategically decisions are anchored higher in the hierarchy than if they would belong to the Environmental Committee. The decision way also

becomes faster. It can though seem a little bit confusing for others at the Environmental Office, since the strategists belong to the same office and boss, but get political decisions from a higher instance.

The past years there has only been one strategist working in the municipality. She had a budget of 800 000 SEK/year but was not able to use it all due to time constrains. The solution was to employ two new strategists last year to help out, since the thought was that human resources are more valuable than money. Now the salary of the new employees has taken parts of that budget and the strategists still do not know if they have any money for activities this year. This makes it difficult for the strategists to plan their activities and might result in a “panic” in the end of the year when they get to know the financial status and have to spend the money before the year ends.

The Södertälje municipality express they want to be in the front edge in environmental issues and are an Eco-municipality as well as a member of the Climate Municipalities Association. The highest priority at the moment is the Climate change. The environmental goals of the municipality are gathered in an Agenda 21-program, which also works as a climate strategy. Connected to this document is an energy plan. These documents are developed by past and present strategists and lead their work.

The environmental strategists in Södertälje are working with many different tasks. The focus for the strategists is set by the politicians and is at the moment on internal issues with the reason that you have to look after yourself first before you can tell others to change. They are among other things in working groups for different projects as Sustainable travel in urban planning and other planning issues, working with climate strategies, energy counseling, transports within the municipality and a carpooling project within the municipality. There are out-turning projects as well such as a car-sharing project, Earth Hour earlier this year and an upcoming energy campaign. They are also a referral body in some issues.



## 2. METHOD

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*In this chapter methods used during the work with the thesis and limitations are described. Chapter 2.1 describes the work I have done with the environmental strategists and chapter 2.2 the focus group I conducted. In 2.3 the limitations of the study are described.*

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### 2.1 OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

This thesis is based on an internship at the Södertälje Municipality. During three weeks I have followed the environmental strategists in their daily work; read documents, been on meetings, had the important coffee breaks, observed and asked questions. I have also conducted interviews with the strategists about their view on communication to get a better understanding of how they use communication in their work.

As a red thread through my work I have had the symbolic interactive view. According to Charon the central principle of symbolic interaction is “...that we can understand what is going on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world” (Charon, 2007, p. 193). One way of doing that is through observations and an additional method to get the perspective of the actors is also through interviews. I have done both in order to get a broad perspective as possible. Different actors interpret a situation according to the perspective they have, where perspective is angles on reality, a place where we stand when we are trying to understand the reality. I have had that in mind and realized that my findings and understanding of my observations is not the single truth since we can not see the world the same way, but we have all different perspectives according to our backgrounds, the situation, our position in the situation and so forth. To come to an organization as an outsider gives me another perspective of what is happening than the people within it has. They are both right since it is our own interpretations of a situation just different ways of experience it. We can never see something from all perspectives, but we can try to see things from as many angles as possible to get a better picture and come closer to some kind of “truth” (Charon, 2007, pp. 1-13).

To get the strategists view and perspective on communication I conducted a work-shop where we discussed the issue. I think this was a good way of getting their thoughts and on the same time an opportunity for them to hear how the others interpreted the word and what thoughts they have, and also to make them have a common understanding of the concept. The strategists have an interest in learning more about communication and were willing to participate in the work-shop. They seemed to speak quite open and honest about their thoughts. Though, the only thing I have first hand information about and I am able to analyze is the discussion we had and what they said. I do not know if their thoughts were different but I have decided to believe that what they said was as honest that they could. Since I had worked with the strategist some weeks before the work-shop I had a pre-understanding of what their thoughts were, which might have effected the way I lead the session. They had also worked with me, which might have affected their answers in the way that they spoke more positive about communication since they know that I was a communication-advocator.

As a researcher I have been forced to make choices about the material, I have e.g. transformed the recordings and speech into text, translated it into English and excluded parts of the interview. These choices might have affected the outcome but I hope though, that the content is still relevant and give a good picture of what was said.

## **2.2 CONDUCTING A FOCUS GROUP**

To get a better understanding of how the strategists work I decided to take a deeper look at one of their projects. It was a car-sharing service that has had little priority during the years and is now being evaluated. I decided, together with the strategists, to contribute to the evaluation with my communicative knowledge. I had an interview with Berndt Lindgren at Svensk Samåkningstjänst, the provider of the service, to learn more about the service and I also conducted a focus group. The focus group was based on McKenzie-Mohr's Community Based Social Marketing- strategy and contained politicians and civil servants in the municipality working in the Town Hall. I did no further election of the participants since I thought that every ones opinions were needed. There were five participants of which three used the car to work on a daily basis, one used it sometimes and one did not own a car. Since the thoughts I have only are representative for the persons participating in the focus group I can not draw any conclusions of all employees. The result is only a fragment and some thoughts of benefits and barriers for the employees of using the car-sharing service. Since the members in the focus group were only civil servants and politicians, the result might also have been very different from the thoughts of other employees in the municipality. It would have been preferable to have more focus groups, but due to problem finding participants and also time constrains this was not possible.

## **2.3 LIMITATIONS**

During my three weeks internship in the Södertälje Municipality I did not have time to deeply investigate all the aspects of the strategists' work. I have only seen a fraction of the work they are doing and can not draw any broader conclusions of their work. Since the out-turned project has been easier to investigate I have focused on those and have to a lesser extent been involved in internal planning issues in the municipality where most of the strategists work is done. There are many perspectives in which you can observe an organization but I have done it from an environmental communicative perspective out of the knowledge and experiences I have.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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*In this chapter a theoretical framework of the study is given to be able to analyze the result I have got. In 3.1 I give an explanation of the grounds in communication in order to have a platform in the further analysis. 3.2 explain the classical communication model since that is the model most used in Södertälje Municipality. The next chapter (3.3) includes Community Based Social marketing which is a communicative strategy I used in my work with the car-sharing service.*

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### 3.1 WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

To communicate is in the communicative act, something that happens as an exchange between people, not something that one person does with another. A communicative strategy is therefore not a way to make myself understood to you, but to make us understand each other (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005, p. 48). Linell (2007, pp. 38-39) explain minimal communicative interaction as a three-step model: “if speaker A utters something and thereby indicates a targeted understanding, then B must indicate his understanding of this by some responsive action, typically another utterance, and then A has to show her reaction to B’s response by yet another action (utterance)”. To be able to communicate we have to take each others perspective and try to understand what the other person means.

Hallgren and Ljung are referring to Kenneth Burke in order to describe what people do and why they do it. To describe a situation that effects the environment we need to have factors as; *the act*, what is happening; *the scene*, the background for the action or the environment where it takes place; *the actor*, or actors who are committing the actions; *the means*, the tools used to do the action; and the *aim*, why the action takes place. The authors mean that these aspects are equally important, but in communicative situations we are often focusing on one or two aspects with the result that we do not understand a situation fully and if we are trying to change a situation we will not use the right tools. These aspects can be used as a way to analyze a communicative situation and answer the questions what is going on? And how do we move on? The connection between the aspects is not static but can change and is interrelated with each other. For example if some one is talking (act), the person (actor) is somewhere (scene), the person has an aim with talking and is using her words and gestures to do it (mean) (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005, pp. 29-32).

In a communicative situation you experience someone taking your perspective, as well as someone else try to take your perspective on an issue. According to Hallgren and Ljung, this is two very important factors for producing new knowledge. Through the communication it is possible to test arguments, try new views, add new knowledge and develop old one (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005, p. 49).

### 3.2 THE CLASSICAL MODEL

The classical model describes communication in six steps; Sender, message, channel, audience, effect and feedback. This model takes its starting point in the sender and the message he wants to deliver. The channel is then used to reach the audience and get the desired effect. The effect that the

message has on the audience is then monitored through some kind of feedback (Nitsch). The classical model has a strong sender focus, and the emphasis is on the sender and the message the sender want to deliver. This model is very common and might have its advantages in the possibility to reach out to many different people on the same time. It can be used as an “awareness maker”. Although, it might not be that efficient when it comes to change people’s behavior since the receivers needs is not taken into account. The model might also be better when it comes to selling things, since engage people in environmental questions does not give an instant effect for the participants.

Critics to the classical model is that is has a tendency to neglect the target group’s perspective. This result in a failure to adopt to the target groups and to communicate effectively. If the target group is going to accept, understand and use information they have to be able to see the relevance of the information from their perspective. This means that it is important for the communicator to change perspective and see it through their eyes (Nitsch, p. 205).

According to Nitsch (p. 104) the message is the most important factor to take into consideration when developing an environmental communication strategy; the content and meaning of the words and symbols used. It is important, he stresses, to have people’s thoughts, feelings and actions in focus. It is also important to remember that we are not blank sheets, but we have all experiences and interpret information in different ways and that nothing exists in isolation. What we see and what we take note of depends on our prior knowledge and experience and is also dependent on the situation and circumstances we live in. The important thing of making a strategy is then, according to Nitsch to try to identify the factors that we are most dependent upon and to take these into consideration when planning and implementing a communication strategy.

Nitsch suggests that in standard advertisement it is often about choosing one brand over another, which is quite simple to make people do. Your appeal to the individual as a consumer and address their immediate convenience or gratification of consuming it. In environmental issues though, there is often no immediate advantage. What is promoted is often something that is more costly and inconvenient, includes a radical change, and the target group is not only consumers but producers, decision makers and citizens. It is also other factors that have an impact like politics, markets, technology and legislations. To deal with all these factors and try to make a change in behavior, McKenzie-Mohr promotes a concept with focus on the barriers that make us avoid sustainable behavior. Not until we have dealt with them, he says, we can reach out to the people and make them change in behavior.

### **3.3 COMMUNITY BASED SOCIAL MARKETING**

According to McKenzie-Mohr we can have a positive attitude towards an issue and even knowledge about its benefits but still there can be barriers that are hindering us from acting in a sustainable way (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 2008).

Community based social marketing (CBSM) has its believes in behavior change and is most effective when delivered at community level where it focuses on overcoming barriers of not acting sustainable

and focus on the benefits of the activity. The model has four steps: 1) Identify the barriers and the benefits of the activity. 2) Develop a strategy using tools for behavioral change. 3) Pilot the strategy to see if it works. 4) Evaluate the strategy when it is running and make adjustments if needed.

The model has its point of departure in the community along with the community. Through investigation and workshops, surveys etc., the barriers are identified, but also the benefits of the new behavior. The barriers can be both internal, like lack of knowledge or absence of motivation and external such as it is e.g. inconvenient or expensive to carry out. These factors then have to be dealt with in different ways (McKenzie-Mohr).

McKenzie-Mohr (2008, p. 2pp) means that there are three reasons why people are not engaging in an activity. 1) People do not know about the activity. 2) People who know about the activity may perceive particular barriers associated with the activity, for example that it is expensive, it is inconvenient or takes time. 3) People do not feel that there are barriers associated with an activity, but perceive it simpler to continue the present behavior. So, to influence what people do we must understand the way they perceive the barriers and benefits. According to McKenzie-Mohr people tend to do activities that have high benefits and for which there are few barriers. It is also important to remember that an activity that is a barrier to someone can be a benefit for someone else and vice versa. Behavior also competes with behavior, if we are car-sharing to work means that we are rejecting the behavior of going alone in the car. In order to develop effective environmental programs, it is thus important to understand the perceived barriers and benefits and make programs that remove the barriers and enhance benefits for large segments of the population. In community-based social marketing these actions are identified and then the public are divided into groups with similar characteristics and different strategies are developed to encourage an environmental friendlier behavior.

McKenzie-Mohr (2008, p. 4) suggests that there are three important questions to answer in developing a community-based social marketing strategy.

- 1) What behavior should be promoted? And the questions what are the potentials of an action to bring about the desired change? And what are the barriers and benefits that are associated with each of the potential actions? When deciding which behavior to promote it is also important to identify whether there are resources to overcome barriers and enhance perceived benefits.
- 2) Who are the target group? A successful program must target those individuals who presently engage in the competing behavior, but also identify who among these who are likely to change.
- 3) What conditions will an individual face in deciding to adopt a new behavior? Which conditions lead to a behavior that is not preferable and what would facilitate a behavior we want to encourage?

The strong side of CBSM according to McKenzie-Mohr is that it starts with people's behaviors and work backwards to find ways to match it. Often tactics are decided by the ones making the program because they think they know best. For most complex behaviors it is necessary with multifaceted approaches and that the approaches have to change over time.

McKenzie-Mohr agrees with Nitsch that information alone is often not enough to influence behavior. The campaigns often made of brochures, flyers and newsletters, are only based on one or two perspectives. Mark Constanzo is quoted in McKenzie-Mohr "Although advertising is an important tool for creating awareness, it is wasteful to invest most of your efforts in an influence strategy that has such a low probability of success" (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 2008, p. 14).

The CBSM-strategy might be efficient in changing people's behaviors but it is time consuming as well as a more expensive way of trying to change people's behavior than a classical model. It is therefore important to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the different models when conducting an environmental strategy.

## 4. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

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*In this chapter my observations, interviews and focus group during the internship is given and analyzed. In chapter 4.1 the environmental strategists' view on communication is given and analyzed. The next chapter (4.2) is a case study where I dig deeper into one of the projects the environmental strategists are running.*

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### 4.1 THE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGISTS' VIEW ON COMMUNICATION

When talking to the environmental strategist in Södertälje municipality they say that they have a quite bad knowledge about communication. Though, I interpret it like they seem to have knowledge about what it is and what it can include, but they have strong barriers not to use it.

The main personal goal for the strategists they express as “save the world”, that is why they are working with environmental issues. In their work they have the possibility to break this vision down into goals and plans in order to make the world a little bit better. They have a problem though; to see a long term goal with their work and a red thread. The work involves many different issues on diverse levels and the strategists say that most of the time they are just running trying to catch different trends in the society which often results in a work that is not always well considered and has a clear goal. They agree however that one of their goals in their work is to change behavior among the employees and citizens in Södertälje municipality into a less environmental harming way of living and that communication is important in this work in order to move forward. There are many projects they would like to do, but since their time is limited they have to do a strict prioritizing and some issues get a deeper engagement than others.

The classical communication model is the model most used among the environmental strategists in Södertälje when it comes to out-turning projects. They do not use the word, but when they describe how they work in projects, I perceive it as classical communication. The strategists plan for how to reach out and are not putting themselves in the receiver's perspective in order to see how they want to be reached or what their needs are. The result is often information brochures, leaflets, the homepage and other one-way channels where the sender is the main actor. This behavior, together with heavy work load which makes it difficult to follow-up projects, makes it difficult for the strategists to know how many who has taken part of an activity or changed a behavior. The classical model is a rather cheap and easy way to get a message out and can be good and necessary to use sometimes when the goal is to make awareness or to reach out to many people at the same time. But according to McKenzie-Mohr and Nitsch they will not change any behaviors with that model. When I spoke to the strategists this was new information for them and they were eager to find alternatives for this model.

The strategists seem a bit torn. On one hand they realize the importance of communication and that involvement of targets groups has a higher possibility to behavioral changes and more long lasting results. On the other hand they do not want to talk to the public since it takes time and cost

resources. Two of the strategists have been working with Agenda 21 before and are a bit tired of public participation. They say that it is better if they themselves come up with ideas about projects since they know what is possible for them to do. When the public starts to talk it is often about issues that are not on the strategists' table. From the strategists' perspective it is more important to get the job done the best way they can and act logical out of the possibilities they have at the moment. Even though the strategists understand the importance of communication they have other very strong barriers for not acting in that way as well. The main barriers for the strategists for not communicate to a higher extent is that it often costs time and money, and that they do not have the knowledge of how to do it.

Since the strategies lack formal knowledge about communication and information they think that their possibility to get in contact with people would increase if they had a better and closer relationship with the information department at the municipality. They would also like to have a closer cooperation with the inspectors at the environmental office because they are out in the society, meeting people. With a better cooperation the strategists could use the knowledge of the inspectors when planning activities and can in that way know what is happening and what needs people and companies in the municipality have.

Södertälje has a large population of immigrants and the strategists feel that they have not reached this group as good as they wanted to. In order to better reach these new language groups the strategists have decided to have a project concerning energy use together with Telge Energi. In this project the strategists have seen their limitations in communication and hired a consultant to carry out the project. The planning has just started but the present proposal has a communicative approach with a lot of involvement from the target group. The proposal has similarities with a CBSM-strategy, but with a major focus on creating awareness of the issue. This is a good way of doing it, but I think it would be better if the strategists were more involved in the project. As I perceive it now, the strategists are planning the aim of the project together with the consultant but the consultants will be the ones carrying it out. This is the purpose since the strategists do not have time to carry it out, but I think it is important for the strategists and the people in Södertälje if the strategist were a little bit more involved and got to see themselves how the work is carried out. At one meeting I attended with the consultants Patrik Derk, managing director at Telge Hovsjö, was invited. He has long experience of working in Hovsjö, which is a district with many immigrants, and had a lot of important knowledge. He had not been on previous meetings so the project proposal was made without his knowledge and without consulting any other person with similar experience. Patrik had a lot of comments about the proposal and told us important differences between "Swedish" neighborhoods and "immigrant" neighborhoods. For example do the stoves have to be changed more often in an "immigrant" area since they are normally used much more than in other areas. This kind of information is invaluable when creating a communication strategy about energy use. A reference group was planned to be created at a later stage, but was not yet chosen. I emphasized the importance of including the target group as soon as possible to get to know the group and their needs before the project proposal was set. Because even if Patrik had a lot of information I think it is important to speak directly to the people at an early stage, especially since the strategies and the



consultants apparently has a Swedish background and do not live in the target areas. Even though the proposal was communicative no one of the consultants had real knowledge about the target group and the proposal was set from their perspective. I think the communicative part would come in too late with the risk that the project would focus on issues that are not important or relevant in this area, or might miss issues that are. With more participation at an earlier stage, it is more likely that the project would concern the right issues and the outcome would hopefully become better and more long lasting. I think it is a common problem that participation and dialogues are involved in project, but at a stage where it is difficult for the target group to make a difference and a reason why many environmental projects fail.

In some projects the environmental strategists are dealing with might not be the most effective due to environmental reasons but are important due to good will. The annual and global WWF campaign Earth Hour for example was supported by Södertälje municipality. It was an obvious thing for them to do, but also perceived as necessary. According to a survey I conducted in Södertälje before the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, the date for Earth Hour, only 1/3 knew about Södertälje's support, but almost everyone thought it was a matter of course that the municipality was supporting the action and said that they would get upset if it was not supported. This clearly came to its end when Stockholm municipality did not support the activity by the reason "we are doing so much else". They got to defend themselves in national Media and a lot of citizens were upset. In this kind of cases, the strategists think, it is important to show your support even though a major action is not planned or possible to realize. Even the car-sharing project is partly a good-will project, at least according to Ewa Lofvar Konradsson, the responsible politician. She means that it gives a signal to employees that the municipality cares about the environment, as well as it has a symbolic value to the public (Konradsson, 2009).

The strategists spend most of their time in front of their computers or in different meetings with internal or external actors. They are seldom visible in the municipality and there is no easy access for the public to get in contact with them. As a result there is no natural way for the strategists to talk to their different target groups to get their perspective or thoughts about a project. The strategists say they get stressed when they get phone calls from the public because they have so much other things to do. From my point of view this makes a distance between the strategists and the target group, whether their work is within the municipality organization or is the citizens. Without talking to each other, or communicate, it is difficult to see the needs of the target groups, if there are a need of something, or find ways to reach out to people. If you do not know your target group it is very difficult to influence them.

The strategists agree that they would like their job to get a higher status than they feel it has today. One way of increasing their status, they say, is to make people know what they do, talk to people. I think that is important as well. If they run a project, get people involved and stand up for what they have done I believe it is more likely that people value their work. A better communication and involvement of others can also contribute to a higher status because the target group feels acknowledged. I also think it is important for the strategists to communicate with employees in the municipality and with the citizens in order to see how the work they do is received. In that way the

strategists can feel pride over their work and see what actually happens. Today when they have little or no evaluations of projects, it is difficult to know how a project went and what went wrong in an unsuccessful project. Neither is the fruits harvested from a successful project.

## **4.2 CASE STUDY**

During my internship in Södertälje I chose, together with the strategists, to study the communication in one of their projects more thoroughly. We chose a car-sharing service they are offering the employees in the municipality. The municipality has paid for this service since 2002 and very few are using it. It has not been prioritized by the strategists and no recourses have been put in order to promote the service. Neither has there been a clear reason why the service exists or a goal to reach. Last year the Environmental and Health committee, which at that time gave the strategists their commissions, asked the environmental strategists to evaluate the municipality's contract with the service provider, Svensk Samåkningstjänst; how many people who use the service, if it can be improved and if the environmental benefits are large enough. An evaluation of the service has never been done before, but has now started. I decided to help out with the evaluation and put my environmental communicative perspective on it. Since I had more time than the strategists normally do, I could use an alternative method to what the strategists normally use.

### **4.2.1 SVENSK SAMÅKNINGSTJÄNST**

Car-sharing is an organized sharing of rides in a private vehicle among two or more individuals. The service is internet based and includes the possibility for the employee to register on a website and search car-sharing partner. What distinguishes this service from others on the market is that there are employers who are members and pay a fee, while the employees use it. In this way the safety is supposed to increase since users has to log on with a connected address. The computer then matches the users travel data with other users. At the moment Södertälje is the basis for the service with the municipality of Södertälje, Scania and Astra Zeneca as major customers. These three companies together have about 20 000 employees who are potential users of the service and can car-share. The benefits for the municipality to be a part of this is, according to Bernt Lindgren (2009), a representative of the service, that the need for P-sites decreases, it is a "feather in the cap" for the environmental work in the municipality and that the wear on the roads and particles from cars are reduced. In Södertälje municipality 59 persons out of 5500 employees are connected to the service at the moment. This figure indicates, however, how many people have registered on the page and not how many are actively using the service. The number of active users was not possible to get according to Bernt. With some calculation of registered trips it is clear that no more than 30 persons have a registered trip, but it is still impossible to know how many who are using it. For this service the municipality pays 5000 SEK+ 6 SEK per employee, which makes about 38 000 SEK/year. Money that comes from the Environmental Committee.

### **4.2.2 PROMOTING THE CAR-SHARING SERVICE**

As far as it is known among the present environmental strategists in Södertälje there was no evaluation of need before the service was bought and not later either. There have neither been any

targets with the service or any spoken out reason for having the service. In the evaluation that started in November 2008 no goals for the service was set either. This is a big problem since without a clear goal it is difficult to know what to strive for. Is the goal to lower the CO<sup>2</sup>-emissions among the employees? To make it more convenient for them to go to work, or is the service only to show the employees and others that Södertälje Municipality are offering a service that promotes a more environmental friendly way of travelling? Since there are no goals it is impossible to know if the service is successful or not, or worth continue paying for. If the goal is only to make good-will and the service is used as a way for the municipality to show that they do something for the environment, the goal is reached as soon as the contract is signed. I hope, and think though, that there is a bigger goal as well. In my work I have assumed that the reason for the service is environmental and that as many as possible should use the service.

According to the responsible environmental strategist for this project, little work has been done to promote the service during the years and it has had low priority. At two occasions the past seven years, representatives from the service has been in the municipality trying to promote the service and show how it works, last time in February this year. Other ways to promote the service has been through leaflets left at coffee tables in the Town Hall and a paper about the service that every new employee in the municipality gets together with a lot of other information when they begin an employment. There has also been a notice at the intranet. Even though the service has not been prioritized during the years the work with the service follows the line of how the strategists perceive their out-turning work is done. There is a straight classical communication model where the starting point is the sender and no communication is going on with the target group. What distinguish this project from most of the others is that the focus has been on the mean. According to Hallgren and Ljung, the aspects act, scene, actor, means and aim are equally important to understand a communicative situation and understand how to move on. As I understand it the strategists normally focus on the action, something they want to deliver. Here on the other hand the focus is put on the mean (the service) and the other aspects totally disappear. There is no clear goal set, but the aim is probably to lower the CO<sup>2</sup>-emissions rather than to make people use this particular service. The focus is so set on the service though that a wider perspective on how to lower the emissions is not taken. The act is here symbolized by the municipality offering the employees a service and the employees are offered the service. There does not seem to be much action, but also that is an important observation to make, that people act through not acting and use the service. The scene is where the action is and can be both abstract and concrete. In this case the scene is the working place; the municipality and the travel habits among the employees. But it is also norms and thoughts about what environmental friendly is and our own barriers. The actors in this “scene” are the strategists, the representatives from the service, politicians and employees in the municipality. This is also a forgotten aspect since hardly any communication is going on between the actors and their perspective is not taken. Neither is the actors invited to participate in the action.

When analyzing in this way it is clear that the focus has not been on all the aspects but almost exclusively on the mean. The service has been the important factor and nothing else has been prioritized. According to Hallgren and Ljung it is then difficult to change a situation, in this case to

increase the car-sharing in order to decrease the environmental impact of the employers in Södertälje municipality, since we do not get a whole picture of what is happening. Since we do not know the actors it is impossible to know why they act like they do. And without an aim it is difficult to analyze the act. The scene is also diffuse which makes it difficult for the actors to act. A mean in isolation if not known how, where, why and by whom it should be used, has little use.

#### 4.2.3 TAKING THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TARGET GROUP

In order to evaluate the car-sharing service I used McKenzie-Mohr's CBSM-strategy and conducted the very first step, to find benefits and barriers to see if it is worth continuing the work. To do this I made a focus group with employees to get their viewpoints. I only conducted one focus group so the result I have is my interpretations of what was said during that meeting. It might not be representative for all employees but give a hint of possible benefits and barriers. The result is also in accord with what has been said informally during coffee breaks and to an evaluation made by the municipality of Karlstad about the same issue.

McKenzie-Mohr's three reasons of why people do not engage in an environmental friendly activity seem to fit very well in this project. Either people do not engage in an activity because they do not know about it, they know about it but perceive particular barriers associated with the activity, or they just think it is simpler to continue the present behavior. McKenzie-Mohr therefore thinks in order to influence people, it is important to understand the target group's perceived barriers and benefits about the service.

The members of the focus group all thought that car-sharing is a good thing, in theory. They liked the idea, and saw the benefits; still they had strong barriers towards car-sharing and especially towards the service. To use the car was a way to put the jigsaw of life together, you can be more spontaneous and it is good to use if the public transport is poor or you need to transport things. In order to lower the use of the car the members point at better and faster public transport from more distant destinations, that the gasoline prices increases would also be a wake-up call for the greatest users.

All the members of the focus group knew about the car-sharing service and had seen the information; the small leaflets, on the intranet, some had also seen the representative from the service when he was in Town Hall and talked. Only one person had an account at the service but she had not carried through a trip. This could indicate that the straight communication has worked as an awareness maker in this case, people know about the alternative, but it has not made people change behavior. One person in the group did car-share some days a week, but had not found her partner through the service. They all agreed that they knew people who car-shared, but no one used the service. If you want to car-share you find people anyway, they discussed. In a travel survey conducted in the municipality in 2005 also shows that 8 % of the employees car-share, but only 0,8% has used the service (Viklund, Edding, & Hyllenius, 2005).

According to Haster et al a success for car-sharing is based on the fact that the company has problems that car sharing (together with other solutions) can solve. With this in mind, it can still be difficult to motivate a company to spend the necessary resources in order to ease their personnel's commute. There is a risk that the company likes the idea, not seldom due to environmental reasons, but does not realize the real undertaking (Haster, Svensson, & Schultz).

It was very difficult to get the members in the focus group to say anything positive about the service, but finally they admitted that it was easier to find each other. Reasons to car-share could be that you do not have to drive yourself everyday and it also has economic advantages. What was interesting here was that no one mentioned the environment as a reason to car-share. Even though there has been no goal with the service I have interpreted the situation as the municipality was offering the service due to environmental reasons. Ewa Lofvar Konradsson, the responsible politician, also has a clear environmental focus with the service. When I denounce the environmental aspect to the focus group they say that it is not relevant in this context. "If you care about the environment you should promote public transport" was the answer. This is very interesting since the municipality and target group then has different goals with the service and see the benefits in different ways. I think this could be possible to have different reasons to promote a service, or several gains from a new behavior, but it is important to know what the target group thinks in order to approach them with the right arguments. This could be necessary to keep in mind when working with the service or other ways of a sustainable travel habits.

The main barriers for the people in the group to use a car-sharing service was that if you car-share you are not owing your own time. The car is often used to do more things than just drive to work and to share the car would hinder this. They also thought that it is a non-flexible system where you can not choose when to go home. If you live close to public transport, bus or train often provide more flexibility than the car-sharing would make. Here they also compare time with money. Financial gain of car-sharing counteracts loss of time. Another big barrier is also the fact that you have to be social with someone you might not know if you car-share. Weather the participants used public transport or car to get to work, they all valued to be alone when travelling or with someone they know. To talk to someone they do not know about nothing in particular was something that they really did not want to do.

The group did not care if the employer offers a car-sharing service or not: "It is my responsibility how I get to work." Although they pointed out that they liked the service, but if the municipality should pay for it, it is important that the service is properly evaluated and hard work is done to promote it. They do not see the purpose of having the service as only good will, if the service is not used.

#### 4.2.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE CAR-SHARING PROJECT

Through the focus group I wanted to show on a possible way of talking to target groups and get information that is needed and try to see the issue from their perspective in order to develop or evaluate a project.

The investigation of the target group's needs is just a small thing I have done in order to see the benefits and barriers they have regarding the service. It is clear that there are strong barriers of not using the service such as it is inflexible and you have to be social to someone you do not know. The benefits were also few. The attitude towards car-sharing is positive when they do not have to do it themselves, but they are all very negative to the service as provided by the employer. Although I think that further investigations of the service should be done I can, out of the material I have, question if the municipality should continue the support of this service. First there has to be a reason why the service exists, what it is to be achieved. When that is clear the next step is to, if the goal is to make people car-share to decrease the CO<sup>2</sup>-emissions, consider if the strategists have enough resources and knowledge in order to change people's behavior. From the perspective I have, and the knowledge I have gotten from the strategists, I do not think that it is wise to continue. It takes huge resources to overcome the barriers. Also in Karlstad they have experienced that car-sharing requires a lot of work in comparison to the results they have got and that web based systems are expensive in comparison to the effect (Haster, Svensson, & Schultz)

To provide a service like the car-sharing service is very simple but at the same time relatively difficult to work with, according to Haster et al. The risk of choosing a simple method, like the internet service, with no results as a consequence is therefore huge. In Södertälje it is easy for the employer to connect the company and its personnel to a car-sharing matching service without providing any resources for marketing or consolidation of the project. This might make the municipality look good, but to get people to use the service is more difficult.

This good-will aspect is the main reason of keeping the service in Södertälje I think, but the strategists and other responsible persons have to consider to what price it is worth it.

## 5. CONCLUSION

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*In this chapter I will conclude the thesis with my main findings.*

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During my time in Södertälje I realized that it is not always easy with communication, and not always possible. But it is needed. With more communication in the environmental strategists' work in Södertälje municipality they can be able to take others perspectives, get feedback and hopefully make people change behavior and act in a more sustainable way. In the case study of a car-sharing service, it clearly shows that information is good to make people aware of an issue, but to change people's behavior more work has to be done.

From my, an environmental communicator's point of view, there is not much communication going on among the environmental strategists in the municipality of Södertälje even though they have the will. The work in a municipality has many boundaries. The knowledge about how to talk to people is low and I think that it is a common problem among municipalities and other authorities or organizations as well. There might be a will, or a law, that advocate participation or at least that the target groups perspective is taken, but it is difficult to translate it into practice due to time constrains and limited resources and knowledge. The strategists have in practice two bosses or persons who give them directions. One of them, the politician, might change every fourth year due to elections. The focus on environmental issues can then change, or other issues can become prioritized which can make the work unstable. They have also some issues and working groups they have to be in no matter if they want it or not since it is decided by others or have to be done due to good-will, which makes the time limited. The foundlings are also limited, and this year unknown, which makes it difficult to plan the activities. With the limited time, resources and knowledge the municipality have, it is not possible to have a satisfied communicative process in every project they have, but I think it is important to make active and enlighten choices of when to chose different strategies and try to always take the perspective of the others.

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