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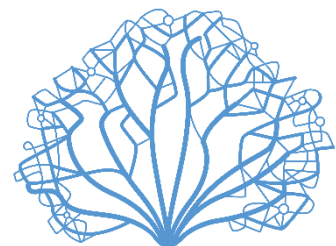
Student report - A Case Study in Strategic Employer Branding to Compete for Talent

Host company: Sotenäs Municipality

Students: Selma Coghlan, Chi Huynh, Kerstin Ekholm, Moa Lindström

The purpose of this study was to formulate a strategic approach, with a basis in employer and place branding, to leverage the SIRR project Pilot Hubs with Sotenäs municipality as a case. One common goal within the partnership in SIRR is to compete with larger cities and regions to attract talent and residents. By clearly defining the target audience and crafting a message that resonates with these groups, the Pilot Hubs can create a distinctive brand identity that supports both population growth and economic development.

Overall, a value-driven approach positions the Hub effectively against larger cities, enhancing its attractiveness as an innovative region with proximity to nature, strengthening its employer brand and supporting long-term population growth and economic development.





GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN

Sotenäs: More Than a Summer Destination
A Case Study in Strategic Employer Branding to Compete for Talent

Selma Coghlan
Chi Huynh
Kerstin Ekholm
Moa Lindström

1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction and Problem Definition

Sotenäs municipality, situated along the west coast of Sweden, is home to about 9,000 residents and is known for its rich coastal life, scenic hiking trails, and summer tourism. Every year, this results in a significant influx of visitors, turning Sotenäs into a seasonal hub of activity (Sotenäs Kommun, 2024a). While tourism boosts local economy, it places strain on municipal services such as healthcare and elderly care without contributing to the municipality's tax income (C. Berg, personal communication, 4th of September, 2024). Thus, despite the success in tourism, the municipality is facing complex socio-economic challenges with a declining and ageing population together with worker shortages and difficulties in attracting full-term residents (C. Berg, personal communication, 4th of September, 2024; Ekonomifakta, 2024). Consequently, Sotenäs municipality is working on repositioning itself as more than a tourist destination by strengthening its employer brand (C. Berg, personal communication, 4th of September, 2024).

The Industrial Symbiosis Centre is a key driver in sustainable and innovative efforts as it seeks to be a leader within maritime development and to bring people together to create innovation, education and work opportunities (Symbioscentrum, n.d.). This focus is strengthened through unique initiatives such as "Fiskereturen", Sweden's only marine recycling unit that collects waste produced by the fishing industry, such as old and unused fishing gear, to prevent it from polluting the oceans and harming wildlife (Fiskereturen, n.d.). Such initiatives emphasises the commitment to sustainability and innovation within Sotenäs' organisations, presenting an opportunity to attract individuals who prioritise such values. To attract long-term residents, the municipality must develop a strong employer brand that effectively communicates the benefits of working and living in Sotenäs. Current marketing efforts include Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and a website where the municipality posts frequently (Sotenäs kommun, 2024abcd). However, as rural areas like Sotenäs compete with larger urban centres for talent, such efforts must be modernised and evolve into a more sophisticated employer branding strategy (Laurin & Parent-Lamarche, 2024).

Strategic employer branding can differentiate a region from its competitors by focusing on specific qualities that resonate with a certain target group (Edwards, 2010). This entails aligning and matching the region's organisational values, which have been perceived to be sustainability, nature and innovation, with the personal values of its target audience, making it an attractive place to work and live (Edwards, 2010). Focusing on a few unique selling propositions is supported by Olsen et al. (2022) who argues that a narrow brand positioning strategy generally leads to a competitive advantage. Hence, employer branding is employed with a focus on innovation and sustainability, and place branding is employed with a focus on the scenic nature. Place branding is recommended, in close relation to employer branding, as it can serve as a critical process in attracting the right mix of new residents and market a region as an attractive place to live (Wæraas et al., 2015). This strategy not only boosts regional competitiveness, but also reflects a shift in how municipalities are viewed; they are not only places, but organisations and political institutions who must act strategically in a time where rural municipalities often find it challenging to attract residents and employees (Eshuis et al, 2013; Wæraas et al., 2015).

In line with this, identifying target groups is essential, despite risks including higher data costs, limited reach and uncertainty of overall profitability (Ahmadi et al., 2024). Sotenäs have expressed an

interest in attracting younger individuals with practical and academic backgrounds due to the needs of the regions (C. Berg, personal communication, 17th of September, 2024). Hence, demographic segmentation was utilised in identifying individuals who fit this criteria and who are likely to be interested in what the municipality has to offer. When segmenting the market, several aspects were taken into account; the segment should be large enough to be profitable, easily identifiable and measurable, accessible through targeted marketing efforts, and responsive to different marketing strategies. Additionally, the group must align with the overall goals and capabilities of the region (Andaleeb, 2016). Thus, attracting individuals who are drawn to perceived values such as innovation, sustainability and nature, increases the likelihood of attracting long-term residents as individuals are more likely to stay long-term if they share values (Edwards, 2010). By clearly defining its target audience and crafting a message that resonates with these groups, Sotenäs can develop an employer and place brand to differentiate itself and foster long-term stability in both population growth and economic development (Edwards, 2010; Laurin & Parent-Lamarche, 2024; Wæraas et al, 2015).

1.2 Purpose and Research Design

The purpose of this case report is to formulate a strategic approach, with a basis in employer and place branding, to leverage Sotenäs municipality's innovative and sustainable industries together with its unique location to appeal to prospective residents and workers. In doing so, the goal is to compete with larger cities and regions to attract talent and residents. By clearly defining the target audience and crafting a message that resonates with these groups, the municipality can create a distinctive brand identity that supports both population growth and economic development (Ahmadi et al., 2024; Kladou et al., 2017; Laurin & Parent-Lamarche, 2024). The strategy will focus on how Sotenäs can differentiate itself from larger urban centres, fostering long-term sustainability by attracting talent and residents who share the region's perceived core values.

The case study method is employed to explore Sotenäs municipality, employer branding and place branding with various data collection methods both practically and from academic literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). Primary data includes informal discussions with Charlotte Berg, the contact person in Sotenäs, and questionnaire surveys sent to 5 individuals currently living and working in Sotenäs. This data collection technique offers an understanding of the strengths and uniqueness of Sotenäs from insiders' perspectives which is essential for the development of employer and place branding strategies. Additionally, internal reports provided by Sotenäs municipality serve as secondary data enhancing the validity and reliability of the primary data findings (Yin, 2009). Existing industry reports about employment trends, human resources as well as academic journals in relevant fields will provide a foundation to understanding the trends related to the case.

2. Alternative solutions and their benefits and risks

In the pursuit of developing a strong employer brand for Sotenäs municipality, several solutions have been evaluated based on their ability to effectively attract full-time residents. After evaluating multiple approaches, certain solutions were deemed more effective in supporting these goals, while others were not prioritised due to their limitations. One of the initial approaches explored targeting more narrow groups of individuals where young blue collar workers within the fishing industry were central, based on information about the labour demands in that sector and a desire to target young adults (C. Berg, personal communication, 10th of September, 2024). Targeting such a specific group could allow for a very tailored marketing approach, which would enable for engagement with the intended audience (Chouaki et al, 2022). However, this solution presented several risks due to the

narrow focus on a single industry, which could limit long-term resilience. Research shows that targeting a broad and diverse workforce is crucial in developing a successful and adaptable employer brand (Edwards, 2010). Labour demands in specific industries are prone to fluctuation, and solely focusing on one narrow group can hinder the municipality's ability to attract varied skill sets which is necessary for its economic stability and growth (International Labour Office, 2019). Additionally, as seen in the chart reported by Arbetsförmedlingen (see appendix A), the actual demand for labour in this sector was smaller than initially anticipated. Thus, expanding the target audience to include workers over multiple industries with a focus on Sotenäs' strengths in innovation, sustainable organisations and proximity to nature is a more sustainable solution. Such a change was further made, with the same reasoning, within the group of young professionals, where the group was expanded to include students from higher vocational schools in addition to students from academic universities. This broader approach aims to attract a diverse workforce of individuals with varied skills, which aligns with the municipality's long-term goals.

Another solution that was considered included implementing an internal marketing strategy to foster a stronger sense of community and pride among existing residents. Such an effort aimed to increase local engagement and motivate residents to stay in Sotenäs by enhancing their connection to the municipality (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Sjöberg, 2024; Swain et al., 2024). However, the focus on internal marketing alone was not prioritised due to its limited impact on attracting new talent. Wæraas et al, 2015 (2015) argue that rural municipalities often benefit more from external branding efforts which led to a focus on allocating resources to external branding efforts that target potential workers and residents from outside the region. By focusing on external outreach, the municipality can more effectively address its labour shortages and attract a diverse workforce.

3. Preferred solution

3.1 Target group

The preferred solution for Sotenäs municipality embraces a broad and diverse target group from an industry perspective, while retaining a focus on young adults, aged 20-35 years. This group is divided into two segments; young professionals, including students or recent graduates from universities and higher vocational training schools, and young blue collar workers.

3.2 Brand strategy

In attracting the target group, employer branding is the overarching strategy with place branding functioning as a subsidiary process. As described by Laurin and Parent-Lamarche (2024), employer branding can be used to develop a desirable image of a region, increasing its attractiveness by communicating shared values with potential employees. According to one of the questionnaire respondents, who encountered Sotenäs at a university event, the Industrial Symbiosis Centre transformed their perception of Sotenäs from a tourist destination to a hub of innovation, resulting in them now working and living in the municipality (see appendix B), which supports the idea of innovation being a driving force in attracting young adults to Sotenäs. Moreover, Yamane & Kaneko (2021) together with Dougherty and Clarke (2018) discusses the younger generation as a driving force in sustainable development and innovation where they argue that they generally value sustainability and are wired to be successful innovators. They further argue that activities within sustainability are as important as salary, showing the potential connection between personal and organisational values within this target group.

Similarly, Edwards (2010) emphasises that employer branding is not only about highlighting economic benefits, but creating an emotional connection with potential employees. Laurin and Parent-Lamarche (2024) further highlights that holistic values, involving a balance between job opportunities and quality of life, are critical to address when aiming to attract and retain employees in rural areas. Addressing such values could include offering flexible work hours and contributing to residents' well-being outside work. According to Theodori and Theodori (2014), focusing on innovation, economic growth, and personal benefits is essential in retaining young adults. Laurin and Parent-Lamarche (2024) adds to this in discussing how the chosen target group has additionally been shown to value stability and a strong community. Thus, focusing on such aspects are crucial in building strong relationships and attachments. One respondent noted that while Sotenäs' nature is incredible, more organised communities for young people are needed (see appendix B). This aligns with Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2010), who stress the importance of local engagement for building attachment, and Callejo-Gonzales and Ruiz-Herrero (2024), who argue that social connection is more crucial than geography. Thus Sotenäs should invest in fostering healthy communities to strengthen its employer brand (Sjöberg, 2024; Swain et al., 2024; Swaminathan et al., 2020).

Moreover, Vuorinen and Vos (2013) discuss how the meaning of landscape is central in place branding in rural regions and incorporating it in a strategy through place branding can present the municipality as both a workplace and a dynamic living environment (Wæraas et al., 2015). By highlighting values that the municipality shares with young adults, Sotenäs can position itself as an attractive destination (Edwards, 2010) and leveraging such attributes can, in general, improve the attractiveness of rural municipalities, making them more competitive (Laurin & Parent-Lamarche, 2024). In this case, values amongst young adults seem to conform with the region's strengths in innovation, sustainable practices, and scenic nature, while also valuing communities and work-life balance. Thus, these elements should form the core values of the strategy, aligning organisational and personal values to attract young talent (Laurin & Parent-Lamarche, 2024; Swaminathan et al., 2020)

3.3 Communication strategy

Branding Sotenäs as an appealing municipality to live and work in entails identifying and emphasising key value propositions that resonate emotionally with the target audience, creating a strong connection between potential employees and the municipality (Cleave et al., 2016). Experiential marketing is recommended as it takes an experienced-centred approach that engages potential employees, aiding in creating the holistic experience they seek (Schmitt, 1999). Immersive, experience-driven engagements can reflect upon values such as work-life balance, communities and a shared interest in sustainable solutions, fostering emotional connections between potential employees and the employer brand (Edwards, 2010; Wæraas et al., 2015). To effectively communicate through experiential marketing, Sotenäs could adapt both online and offline strategies to guide consumers to a final decision (Abeer et al., 2023).

In today's digital climate, it is essential for brands to stay relevant to engage with wider audiences more efficiently and at a lower cost through social media platforms (Appel et al., 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Additionally, a study across 80 countries has shown that 76% of companies amplify digital marketing for their employer branding strategy (Minchington, 2014). Sotenäs' current marketing efforts include their website, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, but despite being active, the municipality is experiencing difficulties in attracting full-time residents (C. Berg, personal

communication, September 24th, 2024). Marketing efforts should follow the strengths of the municipality, such as innovation and sustainable solutions, to not damage the brand (Cleave et al, 2016). With our target groups being part of a younger generation, LinkedIn, Tiktok and Instagram are recommended for Sotenäs' online communication channels (Abeer, et al., 2023; Internetstiftelsen, 2023). LinkedIn could be used to portray professional development and career opportunities, as well as highlighting the personal working-experiences of current employees. Channels such as Instagram and TikTok could be used to showcase the communities, scenic nature and balanced lifestyle Sotenäs offers through sensory-rich and dynamic content (Abeer et al., 2023). Moreover, as the municipality has a strong presence on Facebook and the channel is effective in community building through groups and pages, this channel is included in the strategy (Abeer et al., 2023; Sotenäs kommun, 2024b)

In addition, Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) discuss how online user engagement extends beyond brand generated content to include user-generated content or electronic word-of-mouth. Especially younger generations tend to consider user-generated content as a more trustworthy source (Munsch, 2021). Thus, the voices of current employees and employers sharing real-life working and living experiences on social media could reinforce Sotenäs' brand image and authenticity (Dev & Padhi, 2023). Local advocacy from current employees and residents can provide insights into the working and living environment making the municipality understandable and relatable (King et al., 2014). However, while user-generated content can be beneficial, it comes with risks. Negative aspects can be shared online, potentially damaging the municipality's reputation, and content may not always align with the intended key message (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, positive testimonials from employees and residents can improve credibility and appeal (Dev & Padhi, 2023). Thus, by actively managing and engaging with user-generated content, while establishing clear guidelines and responding to feedback, Sotenäs can leverage its benefits while limiting potential risks (Thelen, 2020).

Furthermore, Sotenäs can enhance its employer brand through in-person experiential marketing. Such events provide an opportunity for potential employees to engage directly with the municipality's values and experience the benefits of living and working in Sotenäs firsthand. Hosting workshops on sustainability, local innovation, and regional development at universities and higher vocational schools could create lasting impacts on students. Beyond events like career fairs, more immersive and experiential events are suggested to form emotional connections with individuals who are part of the target audience (Schmitt, 1999). As Schmitt (1999) motivates, experiential marketing is less about functional features, and more about the customer experience. Because of this, events where individuals get to *feel* Sotenäs should be prioritised, by eating their food, hearing their stories, breathing the Sotenäs air, people will grasp the essence of the community more efficiently than if they were to read about the functional benefits in a pamphlet (Schmitt, 1999).

4. Implementation

The following section discusses practical applications, outlining how the employer and place branding strategies can be implemented in Sotenäs. In supporting a compelling employer brand for the municipality to attract long-term residents, communications must focus on key messages, brand elements, and brand values that align with the municipality's perceived core identity. Key messages should highlight Sotenäs' unique combination of innovation, sustainable efforts and natural beauty, highlighting the region as a year-round hub for professional growth and healthy living. Current efforts that could be emphasised to support such key messages includes the municipality's Industrial Symbiosis Centre and initiatives like "Fiskereturnen" (Fiskereturnen, n.d.; Symbioscentrum, n.d.).

Moreover, highlighting the nature of the region through place branding can help appeal to young professionals and blue-collar workers who value both career opportunities and nature (Wæraas et al., 2015).

Additionally, brand elements such as the name, logo, and tagline are important for recognition, and their effectiveness depends on how well they reflect Sotenäs' core brand values (Kladou et al., 2017). In this case report, brand values are connected to the strengths of the region which has been identified to be sustainability, innovation, professional development and the scenic environment that Sotenäs municipality offers. A modern logo that is easily identifiable and a slogan like "Sotenäs: Where innovation meets nature" could communicate this balance, reinforcing the region's identity as a place where people can thrive professionally and personally. By integrating these elements with a clear, value-driven message, Sotenäs can position itself as an attractive alternative to larger cities, offering stability, career growth, and a high quality of life, in line with values of the target group.

4.1 Events

To foster awareness, experiential marketing with local organisations, universities and higher vocational training schools is suggested. Current marketing efforts are mainly visible on the municipality's LinkedIn page where, for example, upcoming events such as recruitment days are being posted, however, with barely 12 likes and one repost (Sotenäs Kommun, 2024d), the municipality should focus on making the message more attractive visually in addition to evaluating using other platforms. By collaborating with universities and attending career days and fairs, Sotenäs can engage with future employees directly and position themselves as an attractive region for after graduation, thus extending their brand reputation with personal connections to students (Schmitt, 1999). Such collaborative marketing enables potential employees and residents to co-create value by engaging them in events, rather than through one-way communication (Cova & Cova, 2012).

To implement this strategy practically, attending a career fair such as Gadden, a work fair for students at the School of business, economics and law (Gadden, 2024), is an opportunity in the short-term to highlight the unique values of Sotenäs. By attending Gadden, the municipality can showcase the organisational culture by bringing ambassadors from the municipality to interact with the students, creating personal relations. According to Setiawan et al. (2022), interaction with a brand in an event environment shapes the impression of the brand where the priority is to create a feeling of belonging by increasing engagement. Through collaboration with both universities and higher vocational training schools, Sotenäs municipality could also host events in the municipality, inviting students to visit. In addition, a collaboration with universities can foster a long-term opportunity with workshops and career days during the year, not only connected to a yearly fair. Physical events such as fairs or visits to the municipality should also be followed up afterwards with interaction online through platforms such as LinkedIn where students can stay updated on potential job offers and to personally keep in touch with ambassadors who attended the fair.

Using experiential marketing as part of the communication strategy can be effective as it engages members of the target groups with its experienced-centred approach (Schmitt, 1999). The goal with the different type of events suggested as part of Sotenäs' marketing strategy is to create an environment where members of the target groups are able to experience Sotenäs' perceived core values and to create emotional connections to the municipality (Edwards, 2010; Wæraas et al., 2015). Thus, we initially suggest two types of experiential events besides the career fairs. Firstly, we suggest

an event done as a collaboration with eco-friendly venues in large cities, for example Gothenburg. Such an event, or series of events, can be called “Taste of Sotenäs”, and is a way for individuals residing in these cities to experience Sotenäs without being there physically. We suggest the event should include workshops and panels led by Sotenäs residents, for example people involved within the Industrial Symbiosis Centre, utilising the local culture and unique attributes of Sotenäs to form emotional connections. If the event were to take place in Gothenburg, students that Sotenäs interacted with during Gadden, or other career fairs, could be invited to the event taking place at Jubileumsparken (Göteborg 2023, n.d.), a venue aligning with the sustainability focus of Sotenäs. Here, Sotenäs could have different stations connected to different workplaces, communities and initiatives within Sotenäs, where they could get the opportunity to try sustainably sourced seafood (blå mat) or learn to craft with recycled fishing nets (Symbioscentrum, n.d.). There would also be panel discussions elaborating on the unique selling points of living in the rural municipality, perhaps with interviews with residents who have decided to relocate to Sotenäs. After the event, there could be follow-up campaigns on social media, perhaps including recorded content from the event, and reminding people through follow-up engagement about the benefits of considering Sotenäs as a place to live and work, perhaps even creating a hashtag connected to the #tasteofsotenäs event.

Another, more experiential and long-term plan could be hosting a “Sotenäs weekend”, inviting young professionals, blue collar workers, and other Sotenäs-interested visitors to experience Sotenäs first-hand. This weekend could be filled with free activities organised by companies, organisations and communities within Sotenäs, allowing visitors to experience Sotenäs and the community. Such free activities could include guided hikes along the coast, workshops on sustainable living, workshops with “Fiskereturén” and the Industrial Symbiosis Centre, as well as allowing for local businesses to showcase their crafts. Again, individuals who attended career fairs or the “Taste of Sotenäs” event would be invited, but the “Sotenäs weekend” would be available for all, creating awareness and building the place brand. Networking opportunities could also be offered, with representatives from organisations presenting job opportunities and having “speed-dating” events with potential employees. By leveraging local resources and talent, Sotenäs could showcase all that it has to offer, promoting both its employer and place brand in a community-driven way. Similarly, digital follow-up engagement would be essential to keep momentum and engagement high after the weekend event.

4.2 Digital communication

4.2.1 LinkedIn

To practically implement the strategy for Sotenäs on LinkedIn, it is essential to tailor the approach based on audience. With young professionals, Sotenäs’ LinkedIn content should focus on its innovative projects, particularly the Industrial Symbiosis Centre. For the target group of blue collar workers, the focus should be more on job security, the benefits of living in Sotenäs, and communities. Sotenäs’ current LinkedIn presence (Sotenäs kommun, 2024d) is characterised by infrequent postings and the content lacks engaging and creative elements that are crucial to foster interaction, and needs to be less formal and informational to resonate with the target audiences and to engage them (Abeer, et al., 2023).

Confetto et al. (2023) emphasise how younger individuals evaluate organisations based on their employee value proposition, which entails the benefits one would receive from working in Sotenäs. Thus, such initiatives should be highlighted on the platform. A strong emphasis should be placed on LinkedIn posts highlighting individual success stories, for example sharing stories of recent hires or

interviews with employees, in order to provide authenticity and relatability. Focus should also be placed on user-generated content, as according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), online user engagement extends beyond brand generated content to include user generated content. In this digital world, employer branding is done both by the organisation itself, but also by its employees, and “by sharing content about their employers, employees are indirectly contributing to the formation of employer brand perceptions” (Joglekar & Tan, 2022). Thus, Sotenäs should encourage residents and employees to create their own content on LinkedIn, which the municipality should then share, creating a relatable brand. The LinkedIn content could also be closely tied to other marketing initiatives, such as Sotenäs appearing at school fairs. After attending Gadden, for example, Sotenäs could publish content from the fair, linking to the municipality’s career site, and making sure the students who were interested in the municipality at the fair, stay interested by continuing the journey of them understanding the value proposition of Sotenäs.

In practice, the content plan for LinkedIn should focus on engaging both young professionals and blue collar workers through consistent updates and relevant content. Initially, Sotenäs could publish 2-3 LinkedIn posts per week. In addition, creating interactive content such as a LinkedIn newsletter for Sotenäs to attract potential employees in a professional context could be part of an ongoing process of co-creating value, including components such as interactive questionnaires or links to external events. Job postings should remain accessible with regular posts of attended events, new initiatives and current projects, expanding their network while allowing potential hires to apply easily while engaging with the content. These strategies leverage LinkedIn to assist Sotenäs in attracting new talent while strengthening their reputation, and thus their employer brand (Confetto et al, 2023).

4.2.2 TikTok

TikTok may not be a marketing platform that Sotenäs wants to use short-term, but due to its potential, a preliminary implementation plan is included. TikTok could be a great platform to continue to encourage user-generated content (Dev & Padhi, 2023). Local advocacy from current young residents through platforms such as Tiktok can provide tangible insights into the working and living environment, as well as the vibrant community within Sotenäs municipality (King et al., 2014). A practical way to encourage this could be to promote current employees and residents of Sotenäs to share their experiences, through livestreams, or “a day in the life”-videos on TikTok, strengthening the brand image and the authenticity of the municipality (Dev & Padhi, 2023). To initiate this further, using trending content and vocabulary suited for the platform and audience is a way of increasing engagement among young people. A Sotenäs TikTok-page would also entail opportunities for place branding, as they can share content of events happening, which have the potential of going viral and reaching new audiences. Halmstad municipality is a good example of a municipality that has a TikTok-page with content varying from marketing summer jobs, to videos of concerts and fun events (Halmstad Kommun, 2024). Sotenäs could showcase the benefits of living in the municipality, leveraging the natural beauty of the environment. The content can be similar to that of LinkedIn, but focusing more on events and more casual, frequent content.

4.2.3 Meta

To effectively implement Sotenäs’ employer and place branding strategy on Meta platforms, specifically Instagram and Facebook, the municipality has to tailor the content to the unique audience and dynamic of each platform. Sotenäs municipality currently has more than 7,300 followers on Facebook and 4,700 followers on Instagram (Sotenäs kommun, 2024b; Sotenäs kommun 2024c), providing a strong foundation for building its brand on Meta. The platforms enable engagement with

different demographics, with Instagram being popular among younger audiences, while Facebook offers broader community engagement, including older individuals (Abeer et al., 2023; Meta Foresight, 2023). Considering the branding and communication strategy focusing on younger adults, Instagram is recommended as a primary digital channel whereas Facebook is seen as a secondary channel where content from Instagram can be shared, and groups can be supported, as they are connected through Meta (Meta Foresight, 2023). Facebook is considered to be a part of the municipality's communication plan, but is not a primary focus in the proposed strategy as its primary target group is not young adults. However, it is suggested to be a platform for reposts and groups that support communities (Abeer et al., 2023).

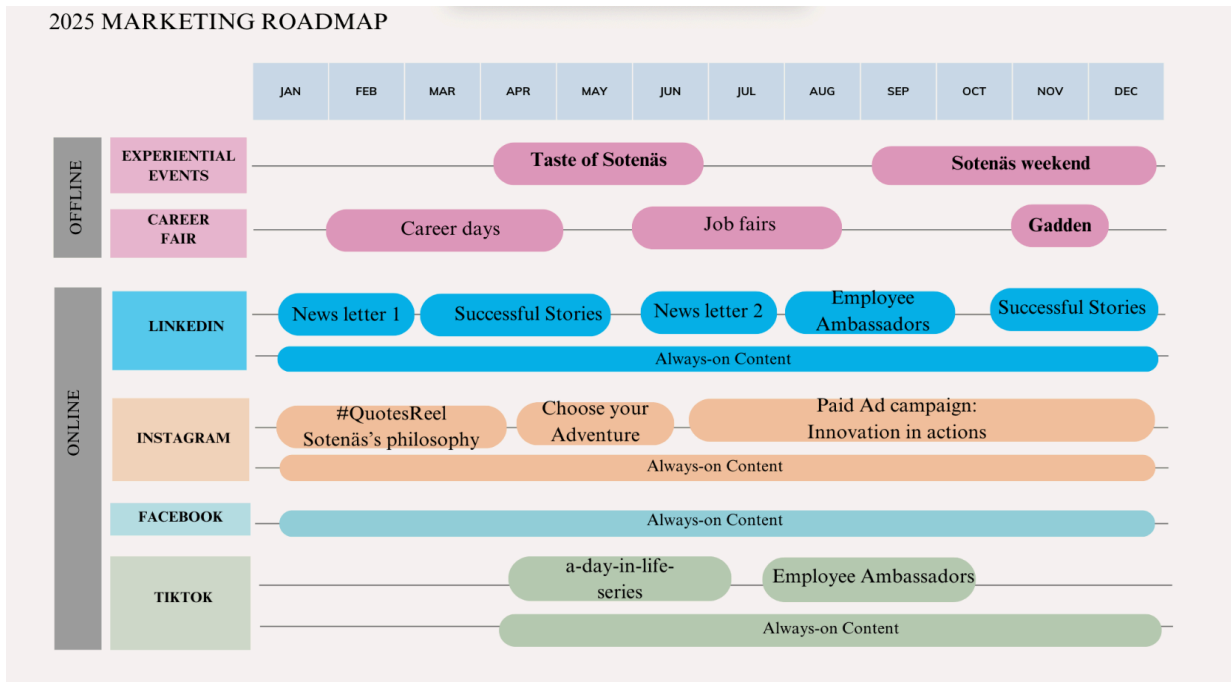
For Instagram, paid ads are suggested to increase visibility and engagement by targeting specific demographic groups as well as analysing and measuring metrics for improvements (Carah et al, 2023). The use of paid ads can vary in its form of content and formats (Instagram, 2024), where reels and stories are suggested for Sotenäs. To promote the municipality through paid ads, objectives could be to increase awareness, attract potential employees and promote Sotenäs as a progressive and innovative municipality, where relevant campaign themes could be innovation in sustainability. To portray these, diverse job opportunities should be showcased, for example through "behind-the-scenes" videos, showcasing everyday life in Sotenäs in both an informational and personal way. In addition to paid ads, stories should be utilised to foster engagement and enable the use of polls and Q&As, but also short-form videos, particularly reels, to increase engagement. Through reels, Sotenäs can showcase people enjoying local nature through activities attracting potential young residents. In addition, reels can be used as a fun and informal way of engaging people, similar to TikTok. An example of a trend that is currently popular among young people on Instagram and Tiktok is a trend where organisations jokingly use an older generation employee to talk about their workplace as if a Gen Z employee would have had written a script, resulting in a funny generation clash. This is something that Svenska Kyrkan (Svenskakyrkan & Biskopdalman, 2024) has gone viral doing, showing how small and easy efforts on these platforms can create engagement. With the opportunity to respond quickly and compassionately, Sotenäs can support its target groups, creating a relationship with its followers, fostering a positive brand image (Appel et al., 2019). Moreover, Cleave et al (2016) note that virtual communities can help build connections amongst residents. In the long term, local advocacy and groups on Facebook can offer a space for individuals to share experiences and ask questions, hence forming a virtual extension of the physical community.

4.3 Evaluation

The evaluation of Sotenäs Municipality's communication strategy will focus on assessing its success based on clear objectives, social media performance and event outcomes. Key objectives include strengthening Sotenäs municipality's employer brand, increasing job applications, boosting brand awareness, engaging the target audience and increasing participation in immersive events. To evaluate these goals, social media metrics such as impressions, reach, and engagement on platforms like Meta, LinkedIn, and TikTok will be tracked. For example, Sotenäs can aim for a 10-20% increase in follower count over six months across channels, and a 3-5% engagement rate on posts as well as tracking job applications via LinkedIn to help track recruitment success. Social media further presents an opportunity as there is a two-way communication, entailing that we can learn from users and gather feedback and data for market research (Cleave et al, 2016). This could be done through polls and surveys on social media and by monitoring mentions and comments to gather valuable feedback to make informed future decisions and to take into account the ideas and opinions of social media

users. For experiential events, both quantitative and qualitative metrics should be used. Quantitatively, the number of attendees at university fairs, workshops, and local events can be tracked with the aim to increase the attendance rate. Moreover, engagement at the events, such as participation in workshops or follow-up inquiries, should be measured. Qualitative metrics include event feedback, sentiment analysis through post-event surveys, and social media mentions during and after events.

4.4 Tentative timeline



The timeline is constructed by prioritising resource allocation, seasonal factors, and student graduation schedules. The first quarter will focus on revitalising existing communications channels with more engaging tactics. The second and third quarter will be highlighted by the “Taste of Sotenäs” event and participation in fairs and career events, held outside the municipality to avoid the most crowded time of the year. The fourth quarter will feature broader outreach at Gadden, along with the ‘Sotenäs weekend’ initiative to bring more people to Sotenäs.

5. Concluding remarks

The proposed employer and place branding strategy for Sotenäs focuses on showcasing its perceived core values of innovation, sustainability and nature. The proposed strategy aims to differentiate Sotenäs from larger cities by leveraging its unique offerings, both as an employer and a community, to attract full-time residents. Through different marketing initiatives, such as hosting immersive events, participating in university fairs and bolstering its social media presence, the municipality can build a compelling brand. The feasibility of the proposed strategy is strengthened by its practical recommendation. While the effort will result in increased costs, it aligns with the overarching goal of attracting residents to Sotenäs. Overall, this value-driven approach positions Sotenäs effectively against larger cities, enhancing its attractiveness as an innovative region with proximity to nature, strengthening its employer brand and supporting long-term population growth and economic development.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Table from Arbetsförmedlingen in Sotenäs

Bransch	Inskrivna arbetslösa	Kvarstående platser	inskrivna per ledig plats	Balans arbetslösa och lediga jobb	Andel kvinnor
Genomsnitt per månad	144	130	1,11	Balans	41%
Hotell, restaurang, storhushåll	11	38	0,28	Mindre konkurrens	49%
Hälsa- och sjukvård	7	23	0,31	Mindre konkurrens	70%
Försäljning, inköp, marknadsföring	19	18	1,04	Balans	66%
Industriell tillverkning	11	12	0,96	Mindre konkurrens	26%
Sanering och renhållning	10	8	1,23	Balans	39%
Socialt arbete	7	8	0,87	Mindre konkurrens	47%
Installation, drift, underhåll	9	5	2,01	Mer konkurrens	6%
Bygg och anläggning	8	4	1,92	Balans	4%
Naturbruk	5	3	2,08	Mer konkurrens	18%
Pedagogiskt arbete	*	2	-		53%
Administration, ekonomi, juridik	12	2	5,92	Mer konkurrens	75%

Appendix B. Replies from residents in Sotenäs municipality.

Questions:	Resident 1	Resident 2	Resident 3	Resident 4	Resident 5
What is your age, place of residence and occupation? Did you grow up in Sotenäs, or have you moved there?	29y, Smögen, grew up in Nässjö Småland. Moved to Sotenäs 2020 because of Master thesis and afterwards job offer.	Jag är 24 år gammal, bor på Smögen och jobbar som snickare.	My name is Olof Svahn, I'm 21 years old and I live on Smögen in an apartment with my girlfriend. I work at Fiskareföreningen Norden with sewing and repairing nets used in fishing equipment	I'm 24 years and I'm living on Smögen Sotenäs. I'm working as a manager in a grocery store.	Ihor, 37 år, Väjern, flyttade med sin familj från Ukraina
How do you think Sotenäs is viewed by people who live outside the municipality?	I had never heard about Sotenäs before I met a person from the municipality at the Linköping University, presenting their symbiosis work, but of the towns Smögen and Kungshamn. I saw the towns as tourist places with a fishing culture, but after hearing about their symbiosis network, it was clear for me that a lot of innovation is going on there.	Jag tror att Sotenäs har ett relativt gott rykte med låg kriminalitet, fina miljöer och bra livskvalitet. Å andra sidan ses det av vissa också som en turistfälla på sommaren med mycket folk och orimligt höga priser på det mesta.	I think that when people look at Sotenäs they see an old fishing village with a lot of history. It is also famous for being a tourist hotspot and with great night life partying opportunities kn the summer	I think that people sees our municipality as a prosperous and wealthy one. For those o live farther away I think people view it as a place where no one lives in the winters.	Hela västkusten upplevs som en semesterort
If you have moved to Sotenäs as an	Masters theses and interesting job offer	Jag är född här och anledningen till att jag stannat är för att jag har	First of all, this is my home, my family lives here and has always	It was a job opportunity that made me not to move.	Motivet till flytten var bekantskaper. Mest av allt lockas jag av

<p>adult, or decided to not move from Sotenäs after growing up there; what motivated this decision? What attracts you the most to Sotenäs?</p>	<p>connected to symbiosis development.</p>	<p>familj och vänner här, och att jag känner mig som en del av samhället.</p>	<p>been living here since longer than what is documented. That is by far a good enough reason to stay here. But worth mentioning is the beautiful west coastal nature, the great people and the rich old history. You cant find these things anywhere else</p>		<p>människors uppriktighet och välvilja och, naturligtvis, den unika naturen</p>
<p>What opportunities do you see for young people, looking for a place to live and work, in Sotenäs?</p>	<p>Expensive with housing and not too many different job being offering with carrier opportunities for those who have studies at university.</p>	<p>Inom vissa branscher, såsom bygg och industri finns det gott om möjligheter men inom vissa andra områden är det sämre. Det finns bostäder att hyra om man flyttar hit, men köpa är svårare på grund av de väldigt höga bostadspriserna i kommunen.</p>	<p>There are a lot of opportunities. Work wise, there are a lot of jobs where the need of an higher education aren't as important as a good work ethic</p>	<p>Work opportunities would I say is quite good. The big industries, carpenter and healthcare. The problem I see is housing and renting. Houses and apartments on the market is far to expensive for "ordinary" people and there is not much to rent.</p>	<p>Det är mer komplicerat här... sommarjobb (t.ex. bartender, servitör)</p>
<p>What are the top three things about living in Sotenäs, that you can't really find somewhere else?</p>	<p>The nature is amazing, beautiful and relaxing. I like the seasons, up and downs with people moving around in the municipality depending on mostly holidays. The closeness to both Gothenburg and Oslo.</p>	<p>Väldigt vacker natur, fin samhällsanda och närheten till både skogen och havet.</p>	<p>No. 1 The big seasonal difference, the summertime is full of activity, people and life and the winter is quiet, calm and cozy. This makes a great contrast where you always can look forward to the next season. Every moth is beautiful as the previous. No. 2 That everyone knows everyone. You will always have people around you that care for you and knows you. If you need something, just go to your neighbor. There will always be someone you know at the supermarket who can give you advice for what du make for dinner. In Sotenäs you are never alone unless you want to be. No. 3 During the most part of the year (not including the tourist season) you can feel safe walking alone on the streets freely. Even if you don't see any houses near you and walk in the dark you are safe.</p>	<p>The one thing I can't find somewhere else is the nature.</p>	<p>Natur, människor, möjligheter...</p>
<p>What do young professionals do in Sotenäs in their daily life besides work as</p>	<p>Spending time outdoors and try to get friends over from cities over spring, summer and autumn</p>	<p>Många spelar fotboll.</p>	<p>The summer is full of activities. But even if it might not feel like it, even the winter has some things to offer.</p>	<p>There are not much this to do I would say. There are some activities connected with sport but I would</p>	<p>Jag tycker att det finns problem med detta i kommunen... Mina döttrar håller på med dans. Det finns inte</p>

collective hobbies? Sports communities? Other communities?	weends/holidays. During winter spending more time in Gothenburg e.g.		There are sports for example soccer and table tennis. There are gyms and a indoor swimming pool. The churches always as some ongoing activities. In the fall, right after the summer, the lobster fishing season starts, and around easter you can help build you local "easter bonfire"	say those are more focused on children. We usually hang out together.	många andra alternativ
Is Sotenäs a tight-knit community? Are there groups or communities within the municipality that would make it easier for someone to move there without knowing anyone?	This could be better. There are not too many communities for younger people (20-35). There are some accosiations like IK Granit or networks for "driven women", and also Tumlar is great.	Ja, åtminstone delar av sotenäs är tajta samhällen. Jag är uppväxt på Smögen och där upplever jag en fin samhällsanda där man hjälps åt, hälsar på varandra och värnar om våran gemensamma ö. Många andra delar av kommunen tror jag är mer splittrade. Det finns gott om olika föreningar att söka sig till om man är ny i Sotenäs.	I think the best and the easiest way to find a community fast is to join a sport or a church. Otherwise you will always find something or someone just by going to the gym, the supermarket or the hardware store	I would say that Sotenäs is rather a tight-knit municipality. I know some people who have moved here that found it rather difficult to interact and find a community. Most people here have there "groups" and the lack of meeting places makes it hard to get to now people.	Sådana organisationer är. Equmenisscout Smögen: Språkmedlemmar är alltid välkomna dit, oavsett ålder, nationalitet eller religion
What do you feel are the common morals and values in Sotenäs, if any? Regarding perhaps community, sustainability, work-life balance?	"Keep it like before" but at the same time "force and push for innovation".	N/A	I believe that in Sotenäs it is not as important with a great education as it is important that you can work well. Many of the most "successful" people in Sotenäs has not even a gymnasium degree	I think people in Sotenäs have a high work ethic.	Jag har en dubbel åsikt här: människor är alltid uppriktiga och vänliga, och å andra sidan finns det inte tillräckligt med jobb från höst till vår
If you were to recommend Sotenäs to someone as a place to live and work, what would you highlight?	The nature/ocean, the beauty with the seasons, and the closeness to big cities.	Jag tycker att många i den här kommunen är bra på att ta tag i saker. Folk jobbar mycket men många är också engagerade ideellt på fritiden. Det är en driven kommun där majoriteten vill framåt, det är min uppfattning.	The nature, the history, the traditions, the people and the way of living in Sotenäs is all worth highlighting. But the most important thing, and what makes this municipality so great is that you have to love Sotenäs to live in Sotenäs. And that's also what makes it so great. Because that means that the people who live here care for and value the nature, the history, the traditions and the people.	I wouldn't recommend someone to move here frankly. The only argument is that I think it was a good place to grow up in. It felt safe, but I don't know if I think that anymore.	Jag rekommenderar alltid att komma på sommaren. Kombinera arbete och oförglömlig vila. (På vintern är situationen tyvärr radikalt annorlunda)