

## My Scandinavian Fairy Tale

It's almost impossible not to fall in love with Stockholm. The harmonious combination of understated Scandinavian aesthetics and lively energy of European capital is totally fascinating.

In three months I've done an internship in the company "***Social Initiative***", got acquainted with the specifics of Swedish TV company operating at "***TV4***" and made friends with international journalists visiting ***International Press Centre***. All this happened thanks to the support of ***Sverker Åström Foundation*** and personally ***Sverker Åström, Carl-Johan Westring*** and ***Disa Håstad***, who helped me with advice, even being in Africa. They are truly global personalities and I'm deeply grateful to have a great fortune to know them. They amaze and inspire by their life energy!



### **Social Initiative**

It is the company my internship started with and which I have taken a fancy to.

Innovative, with small number of employees and cozy atmosphere, «Social Initiative» realises global scale projects. Global scale not only because there are projects in Uganda, Kenya, Baltics and other countries, but also because the goal of these projects is socially oriented, affecting the global issues.

“Social Initiative” creates strategic partnership relations between companies, individuals and projects run by social entrepreneurs. The company's goal is to achieve maximum effect from social interaction and to develop long term social projects.

I've been working on various tasks. I've prepared small presentations with the results of my research on ***venture philanthropy*** and ***employee volunteering*** as an aspect of socially responsible business.

It was very interesting to learn how projects for investment are selected, what methods are used to evaluate their effectiveness, how the interaction between the project and the investor goes. E.g., I made the video for a client company about trip of “Social Initiative” staff to Uganda, where one of the projects is operating. Taking Uganda Rural Development Training Program (URDT), talented girls from disadvantaged families learn to be entrepreneurs. Afterwards they share their knowledge with family and residents of their communities.

It was interesting to attend the forum, organised by world-known company Ashoka. Non-profit organisation “Ashoka: Innovators for the public” supports social entrepreneurs around the world. I was amazed how enthusiastic and really “socially responsible” these businessmen are, whose stories are inspiring.



*Social Initiative staff*

It was a great pleasure to work in a friendly team of professionals, gurus in their field - **Pernilla Bard**, **Caroline Cederlöf**, **Erika Öhlund**, who treated me so well, taught me a lot and were extremely hospitable! E.g. on Easter Eve I had a privilege to visit Erika's country house and see Swedish style of Easter celebration.

#### TV4

It's a huge television company, where I had a training under mentoring of a charming international journalist **Aina Jutterström**. The atmosphere here was extremely dynamic, with rapid work pace and irregular working hours. E.g., to prepare the news for morning show Aina and me arrived at the office at 4 a.m.

During the internship I had the opportunity to learn more about politics in Sweden, and even met outstanding Swedish politicians – **Carl Bildt** (Minister for Foreign Affairs) and **Anders Borg** (Minister for Finance). In addition to politics, I learned a little bit about finances. New beautiful banknotes with images of famous Swedish cultural figures were presented at the press conference in **State Bank of Sweden**. I've also visited open-air Zoo&Museum **Skansen**.



*TV4*



*Aina and me*



Aina was so kind to invite me to visit a curious event – a meeting of **Press Club (Publicist Klubben)** held in **Kulturhuset**. It's a place where young journalists, even students, as well as highly skilled and professional publicists gather. That day Svante Löfgren, an international journalist and a legendary person in Sweden, shared his thoughts and experience.

### International Press Centre

International Press Centre is a platform for foreign journalists working in Sweden. Here I've met journalists from Chile, Finland, Denmark, France, and of course, Russia.



*Taneli Männikkö (Finland) and me*



*Luis Garrido Lagos (Chile) and me*

After just a couple of weeks in Stockholm I had a chance to learn more about the keynote of life in Sweden – the principles of ecological safety. It was the main issue for the discussion during Russian journalists' visit, which was organised by the Swedish Embassy. Thanks to my wonderful curator **Jan Janonius** I joined Russian colleagues while visiting the Ministry of the Environment. After that, words about "Green Capital of Europe" became more than just a metaphor. Everybody is so concerned about ecology. Here, the garbage recycle business is so well developed that garbage as a material is lacking. Companies even buy it from other countries. Journalists from Russia made jokes: "We have more than enough of this stuff – we may share!"

For few days a group of American students had master classes in the Press Centre as a part of their university program trip to Europe. They were discussing topics related to Sweden. It was interesting to hear their opinion - as well as mine, "from outside". They have attended school in a one seedy area of Stockholm. As it turned out, even seedy area in Sweden looks quite ok for the Americans. They wondered, "What's so bad about it?"





The biggest event was a press conference during the visit of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. I've never seen so many policemen in Stockholm like during his visit. Mr. Putin met with King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. Lots of Russian journalists arrived. It was interesting to attend the press conference, to help with the translation, writing an article and then to compare the issues Russian journalists and their foreign colleagues emphasised in their articles.

## Culture

I was so amazed at the level of culture development and support in Sweden. I've visited the **Museum of Modern Art** (Moderna museet). Inspiring by the installations of the artist Eva Lofdahl, I was astonished what forms Swedish minimalism can come to. To enjoy classical art, I went to the **Royal Opera** to see the ballet "Coppelia". I've seen the musical "Hair" which has already become classic in **Stadsteater**. Recently opened Photo museum (**Fotografiska museet**) has a conceptual building and the content side as well. The City Library (**Stadsbibliotek**) is another conceptual building, where bookshelves are set in a circle.



*Stadsbibliotek*



The Dance Museum (**Dans museet**) presents pieces of classic art along with contemporary art installations. The Dance House (**Dansen hus**) is known for modern dance performances. There is no traditional scene and seats. People are sitting right on the floor and can move during a performance.



*Royal Opera*



*Traditional Swedish style*

I had a chance to travel a bit outside of Stockholm.

**Vaxholm** is a small town, a part of the archipelago, and a good example of very traditional Swedish village. It's mostly notable for its fortress and charming cafes on the coast.



**Uppsala** is definitely a must go place. This usually a modest and quiet university town not far from Stockholm turns into Mecca for cheerful students for the first weekend in May. Valborg celebrating is the case when all the stereotypes about reserved Swedes fade away. From early morning trains get to Uppsala students from all over Sweden. There are various activities going on, events, parks are turning into picnic areas, and parties, parties, parties - in clubs, student residences, - there's so much fun everywhere.



*Uppsala (ordinary day)*



*Valborg celebration*

### Swedes

While traveling, I enjoy the local cuisine, fascinating architecture, beauty of nature, but most of all I'm interested in people. They absorb and embody all these at once. That is what we call mentality.

Before my trip I had some image of Scandinavian people in my mind formed by articles on the web – and now I can say they are not totally true. I'd like to share my impressions of the Swedes. What they are...

**Politically and socially active.** They are usually members of various clubs, societies, foundations, associations, unions etc.

**Artistic.** I got the impression that almost everyone is engaged in some kind of creativity. Stockholm subway is called the longest art gallery in the world for a reason. I was also affected by the area where I stayed - Södermalm. It might be compared with SoHo in New York – full of



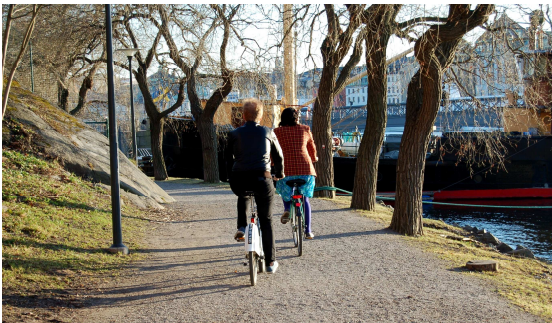
cozy cafes, plenty of galleries and vintage shops, it's a home of bohemian. Once, having a dinner at the restaurant with my friend who came to visit me, we wondered what all the mods around us were. "Do you know the photographer?" – one girl asked me in line to the bathroom. As it turned out, there was a photo exhibition opening party right the next room. That is how we suddenly became the guests at that event.

**Very polite.** I attended a fitness club, and every time asked for the towel and took the fruit. A week before my departure, I accidentally found out that I was supposed to pay 20 kronas for the towel and 5 kronas for the fruit. Nobody ever said anything! Administrator kept resisting my attempts to be charged, explaining that «Swedish are nice».

**Love nature and everything natural.** Organic - is literally the life motto in Sweden. Unnatural odors and flavors are considered to be weird. Once in the office my Swedish colleagues were surprised by strawberry smell of a cream – "it's so artificial".

Not only that Stockholm is surrounded by water, there is almost a perfect clean air, lots of greens, and yet almost every Swede has a country house!

As soon as warm weather came, streets of Stockholm were full of people. "We've been missing the sun so badly", one waitress told me in a cafe.



**Sporty.** I've never seen so many bikes. Official riding a bike is quite common here. Almost everybody is a member of some sport club and jogging is super popular.

**Calm.** Perhaps the reason is the size of the country. No fuss. Steady, hasteless, settled life.

**Minimalistic.** The simplicity and pithiness. This definition fits well for many things in Sweden. That's how uncomplicated a work of one young Swedish designer looks. Absolutely by chance we met a photographer and models, having a photo shooting for the catalogue.



### **Polyglots**

Swedes speak Swedish and English – as minimum.

I was so lazy and I know more words in Japanese than in Swedish. Because everybody speaks English – even homeless people who sell newspapers in the street! Once I've even discussed political news with one of them.

All in all, that was a fantastic trip!

I wish future Sverker Åström Foundation scholars enjoy Sweden as much as I did. I am endlessly thankful for having such a great experience. And there are many things in Sweden I left to explore next time:)