

# Accelerating sustainable society and a flourishing Scandinavia through a living and communicating network of AI-summits

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## **Abstract**

The need for a radical transformation of society, business and way of life towards sustainability is by now widely accepted and acknowledged in the Mid Scandinavian region. This transformation also occurs as a major objective in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, both nationally and locally. However, after creating awareness, moving from knowing to doing is now the real challenge. Pushing for sustainability in strategies and visions, or even providing extensive funding for projects related to sustainable development is not doing the job fast enough. One obvious reason being that the more sustainable ideas and solutions of the future do require new levels of systems thinking and solutions on the level of the “whole system”. That in turn is dependent on connections and relations across traditional silos and organizational borders that currently does not exist.

Therefore, stakeholders from Sweden and Norway are currently experimenting together on using a living and communicating network of Appreciative Inquiry Summits to accelerate sustainable, circular, and flourishing development in Scandinavia. The initiative is designed as an innovation project with hands-on exploring, prototyping, as well as researching how to accelerate the desired transformation. The project, called SMICE, is inspired by the “whole system in the room” approach of the amazing initiative “Sustainable Cleveland 2019”. However, as the context of this initiative is a large sparsely populated region, including also several countries, the set up now evolving is moving beyond just one annual big AI-summit towards more of a distributed system, “ecosystem”, or network of AI-summits and other resources that live, communicate and relate to each other continuously. During this presentation we will share our progress made, results, learnings, challenges, insights, and practices from our exciting and important journey so far.

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### **Speakers information**

Johan Lilja is an associated professor within quality management at Mid Sweden University. His PhD thesis, presented 2010, was devoted to bring “the positive” as a target into quality management practice and theory. Since then the exploration concerning expanding theory and practices for product, service and organizational development had been much inspired by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and positive psychology in a close dance with quality management and in combination with other areas such as design thinking, leadership and innovation. Together with a personal and professional strong engagement in sustainability this has naturally also led to an increasing interest in large scale change and facilitation of various AI initiatives such as summits for accelerating companies, agencies, the Mid Sweden University and now regions and countries into a more sustainable and flourishing future. The latest work relates to a curiosity in using the strengths and practices of AI and positive psychology to accelerate sustainability and flourishing. A core question is how we can accomplish long-term and wide-spread impact.

David Hansen is an assistant professor in sustainable production and innovation management at Aalborg University in Copenhagen. His PhD thesis from 2013 engaged with bridging strength-based and problem-oriented approaches to operations management and organizational improvement. Since 2007 David has used Appreciative Inquiry to drive change in all types of organizations and from different positions, ranging from consulting of specialized engineering firms to chairing a volunteer organizations with tens of thousands of members.

Daniel Richardsson, principal with Styrkebaserad i Sverige AB (Strength Based in Sweden, Inc.), is an organizational consultant and change maker in the field of Sustainable Development and Flourishing Businesses and Societies. Daniel is working for The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - Sida - a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government, with the mission to reduce poverty in the world. With Sida Daniel is currently working with the “Swedish Government Agencies for Sustainable Development” project. Daniel is also working for the SMICE Network for Sustainable Development in the Mid Nordic Region of Scandinavia. As a facilitator and guide for both short- and long-term initiatives and development processes, Daniel inspires leaders, employees, organizations, researchers, regions, and students to take bold steps to practice, explore and learn how to successfully use Appreciative Inquiry, Design Thinking/Doing, Positive Organizational Psychology and other strength-based processes and behaviors.