A New National Atlas of Sweden

Helmfrid, Staffan, Prof. Dr., Stockholms Universitet, Kulturregografiska Institutionen, Norrtullsgatan 2, S-10691 Stockholm, Sweden

Background

The first Swedish national atlas, "Atlas över Sverige", was produced in the period 1953–1971 by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, cartography and print by GLA publishing house, Esselte. Inspired by the pioneering work done already in the 1920s. But it was not until after World War II that the idea was realised.

Private funding and the hard work of a whole generation of geographers and other specialists made this work a final success. Decisive contributions were made by geographers like Carl-Julius Anrick, Ivar Högbom, Gerd Enequist, Gunnar Hoppe and Gunnar Arpi, cartographers like Magnus Lundquist and Olof Hedbom and not the least the director of the publishing house, Åke G. Wickman. ‘Atlas över Sverige’, with text in Swedish and English, included around 600 thematic maps, largest scale 1:2 000 000. The total number of co-authors exceeded 100.

Already in the 1970s the question was raised about a second edition. Rapid structural changes of the country and scientific progress made this urgent, the more so when the last copies of the ‘Atlas över Sverige’ were sold. Olof Hedbom raised the issue at a cartographic meeting in Norrköping, 1984, and a study group was organised in cooperation between the National Land Survey (LMV), Statistics Sweden (SCB), the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG) and the länstyrelse (county council) of Norrbottens län, which financed the work of the group. The reason for this was the establishing in Kiruna of a modern unit for computer-based cartography, belonging to the LMV, as part of governmental efforts to create new job opportunities in the declining iron-ore mining community.

After remitting the report of the study group for scrutiny to a great number of public authorities, university institutes and organisations, a revised draft was prepared in 1986, intensively discussed by geographers at the “Geografdag” in Solbacka in June, presented to and discussed with the Ministry of Housing, and finally given in by the Land Survey Board to the Government for final decision by the Riksdag (parliament) in 1987.

In April 1987 the parliament decided in accordance with the proposition of the government to allocate the 40 million SEK asked for to the project for a planned 10-year period of production. A broad governmental support is indicated by the fact that many ministries contributed to this sum within their budget frames. Sture Norberg, planning director of LMV played a decisive role in all negotiations.

The Concept of the New Atlas

It was clear that the new atlas should rely on the most modern cartographic technology available, that it should be organised to make revisions possible and that it should be distributed in a handy book format, about 25 × 35 cm, allowing for the map scales 1:1.2 / 1:2.5 / 1:5 and 1:10 millions. It should meet with high scientific standards but be understandable to students in secondary schools. It was also foreseen to produce the atlas digitized on disc for personal computers. Special software should make class-room work with the basic data possible, data being stored in a national atlas data base.


Project Organisation

The atlas project is the joint responsibility of the National Land Survey, Statistics Sweden, and the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, with equal representation in the executive committee, headed by the director general of LMV, Jim Widmark. Geography is represented by Staffan Helmfrid and Åke Sundborg. The central editorial board and office is located in the Department of Human Geography, University of Stockholm, professor Leif Wastensson being editor in chief and professor Staffan Helmfrid being scientific editor and chairman of the advisory scientific council. This council has two permanent members, professors Erik Bylund, Umeå and Anders Rapp, Lund. In addition to these members one or more experts are added to the council for each specific theme.

For each volume a theme editor is selected. In principle the plan foresees every volume to have a responsible “host institution”, be it a university department, a public service or a state authority. The manuscript production thus will be highly decentralised throughout Sweden. After being scrutinized by the scientific council manuscripts are to be processed to film for printing by the Kiruna unit of the National Land Survey.

The project organisation has been at work one year. A system of contracts has been established to make the decentralised organisation work. When this report is written, Oct. 1988, manuscript work is going on for the first four volumes to appear. The rest of thematic volumes are in the stage of preparing a final synopsis as a basis for contract.

If, as the author of this report is convinced, regional policy considerations of the government have favorably supported the project, the project has positively answered to these expectations and accepted a very heavy model of organisation.

Work on the new Swedish national atlas thus already now involves people in the following places in Sweden – from north to south: Kiruna, Luleå, Umeå, Gävle, Uppsala, Stockholm, Örebro, Linköping, Jönköping, Göteborg, and Lund.

National atlases are at the same time being produced in all Norden countries except Iceland, in first or later editions (5th edition in Finland). This gives ample opportunities for exchange of ideas and cooperation, especially among geographers. Thus a Nordic atlas meeting was held in Helsinki 1987.

The new Swedish national atlas was briefly presented at the pre-IGU-congress symposium on ‘Skills in geographic teaching’ in Brisbane, August 1988, and raised interest for its pedagogic ambitions.

The first volume is scheduled to be published by April 1990. First examples of maps from the atlas will not be available for reproduction until late in 1989.
1 Nordpolargebiet (Arktis)