

Differences enrich us all



Folkbildnings-
studieförbundens
intresseorganisation **förbundet**
Swedish Adult Education Association, SAEA

Index:

Differences enrich us all	3
Non-formal adult education must be able to push the boundaries	4
We all love our children	6
For active lives	7
Waxed tablecloths and raincoats turned into corsets and party dresses	8
We can change our lives	10
A commitment that knows no bounds	11
Peace agents head for Europe	13
Us and our neighbours	15
We want facts	17
World music and dance in Skåne	19

Differences enrich us all

More attention should be paid to what non-formal adult education can achieve in work to encourage integration and in giving people an opportunity to get involved and boost their self-esteem – for everyone's benefit. Sweden's study associations have a unique contact network, with direct access to the groups, clubs and societies which many people with a foreign background choose as their meeting places.

Thanks to specially commissioned training courses and working in partnership with municipalities, the Employment Service, the social insurance office and social services, the approach offered by non-formal adult education can enable everyone to forge a valuable and meaningful life for themselves as a private individual and in the labour market too. Non-formal adult education takes everyone's differences on board and makes the most of them.

In non-formal adult education we know that it takes time, we know that people have to feel secure before they can feel capable of launching out and showing what they can do. We know that sharing experiences fosters trust and confidence in a new life and a new future, whatever may lie in the past and whatever experiences you may bring with you. Non-formal adult education has built up unique trust and goodwill among the groups in society who most need support. We know that differences enrich all our lives.



Maicen Ekman
General Secretary

Swedish Adult Education Association, SAEA

Non-formal adult education must be able to push the boundaries

Cars were burning in Gottsunda last summer and many police officers said in various media that they were concerned about the youth gangs hanging around in that part of town. It's here, in premises containing rehearsal space for 40 bands and a studio, that the Study Promotion Association runs the hip-hop project Bring down the Beat. The project is about creating a meeting place for young rappers, songwriters, lyricists, producers and DJs.

A few lines from Teenage Thoughts by Sara ft. Dreads & Isse.

“The family you haven't got
by your side
the world gets heavy
and you start to suffer
your life is built on all the tears
when you were abandoned and hurt”

Around a hundred young people have given the project a go and about 35 of them come down to make music twice a week. Over 2,000 people have attended their concerts. Once they have joined the project and found their feet, they are given a mentor, someone who has been with the project for a while and is a little bit older. A big brother or a big sister who acts as a role model. They also train the young people as circle leaders so that in the future they in turn will be able to lead study circles and projects and take responsibility.

Make the word integration mean something

Hip-hop is a music style with a message, reminiscent of prog rock in the 1970s, that comments on and seeks to change society. Instead of using the word “integration” as an empty soundbite, project coordinator Daniel Bergström wants to create a space where young people can come together on terms that tie in with the music they like. Many of the young people who are involved in hip-hop have a foreign background. The regulations

governing non-formal adult education mean that funding cannot be provided for all the work that is carried out. Sometimes the group is too small and sometimes it's too big. Currently the project also receives funding from the Swedish Inheritance Fund, but Daniel hopes that the non-formal adult education system will ultimately adapt to reality rather than the other way round. Young people will learn to run study circles and receive support whether they play pop and rock or are into hip-hop. “Non-formal adult education has to push the boundaries and move with the times,” says Daniel.



For Daniel Bergström, project coordinator at Bring down the Beat, integration is all about music.

It's about gaining self-esteem by expressing yourself

The open meetings start with a session called “Open mic”. Anyone who wants to can take the microphone and improvise a rap. It's something that commands respect. Many of these young people are linguistically gifted in a way that's entirely their own. They tell it like it is and are fantastic at improvising. The words just flow out.



In the hip-hop project young people develop their interest in music on their own terms.

“The best thing about it is when their words really speak to someone,” says Daniel. “When the barriers come down and you see the real person underneath. So many of these young people do things for others but rarely feel that they do anything really well for their own sake that they think is cool and that gets a positive response from other people.” One of the participants, stage name “Flex”, opened for Ken last summer at a number of gigs and many of the others are working towards music as a career. Lots of the big names in the world of music today started just like this, by running a study group in a rehearsal room provided by a study association.

“Integration isn’t just about learning Swedish. Swedes and people with a foreign background need meeting places where they can share positive experiences – in this case, music.”

Daniel promises that more musical experiences are in the pipeline but at the moment they are top secret.

Text och photos: Kajsa Wiktorin

We all love our children

The parenting course Active Parenting is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all children have the same rights and are of equal value. No-one must be discriminated against. The Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children in its signatory countries. But the rights we think children have depend on our own values. What we have in common, whatever our background, is loving our children.

“No-one, whatever their background, wants to lose their child to the street”, says Christine Radell, one of 450 Active Parenting group leaders operating in 70 of Sweden’s municipalities. Active Parenting is a process and experience-based course aimed at active and joyful parenthood. In collaboration with Folkuniversitet in Kristianstad, Christine leads a study circle with 10 participants, women and men, all of whom are Arabic speakers. With the help of an interpreter, the group meets on ten Friday mornings to talk about what it’s like being a parent.

Tools for being a parent in Sweden

Christine and the other Active Parenting group leaders meet immigrant parents, often men, who are finding it hard to hold onto their authority in Sweden. Children gain power through their language skills and “overtake” their parents. They gain self-confidence and a sense of security in Swedish society which their parents lack. A feeling that the children are taking over and it is they who are making the decisions can lead the adults to feel insecure. This role reversal causes concern and problems for everyone in the family. There is also a risk that when people have difficult experiences in their past, losing their self-esteem will re-open old wounds. The circle addresses this and a lot more besides, to strengthen the parental role, to provide tools for understanding themselves and for creating good relationships with their children in their lives as they are now being lived in Sweden. Christine is careful to say that there is no right or wrong.

As well as gaining tools for dealing with everyday life and opportunities to act as active adults in Swedish society, the study circle also involves bringing people together. Many of the groups have Swedish participants and participants with a foreign background. Children with different backgrounds often spend time together and meet at each other’s houses, but immigrant parents and Swedish parents rarely meet. Here they get a chance to get to know each other, possibly for the first time.

A gentle introduction to Swedish society instead of being thrown in at the deep end.

Agnetha Birgersson, the woman behind Active Parenting in Sweden, thinks that parenting courses have a constructive role to play in integration work. People meet around something which for most of them is the most important thing they have – their children. They get close to each other because this is a subject that affects everyone deeply. This closeness leads to understanding, and understanding creates sympathy. This helps everyone to get to know each other in an atmosphere of respect and to meet on equal terms. The participants have different backgrounds and are attending the study circle for different reasons. Some take the initiative themselves, others are told about it by the municipality. There is a need for more of these neutral meeting places where people can get together and get to know each other. Many immigrant parents have said that they would have liked to attend a study circle immediately they arrived in Sweden. “If only I’d known this five years ago!” That would have helped them understand immediately what they were told at parents’ meetings and prepared them for parents’ evenings and seeing parent patrols on the streets. Things that only make sense if you are born in Sweden.

Text and photos:
Kajsa Wiktorin



Agnetha Birgersson, who introduced Active Parenting in Sweden and Christine Radell, group leader of Active Parenting and study circle leader at Folkuniversitetet in Kristianstad. Active Parenting brings together parents with different backgrounds around love for their children.

For active lives

“Some of the initiatives run by the state are actually unnecessary. They’re throwing money down the drain because their ambitions are too high. For the study associations it’s all about volunteers. If you enjoy it, you’re welcome, if you don’t, no-one’s job depends on you turning up. Integration has to happen on people’s own terms!”

The study association Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan - Skolan operates from premises in the centre of Malmö.

“The name is a bit odd,” says Maja Chodhiewicz, who has been involved since the start back in 1994. “It’s got the word school in it twice but when it was suggested we change it, there were protests.”

Going to school or working brings prestige. In this group keeping occupied is important, both for your own wellbeing and also because doing something important with your days gives you status among friends and family. Instead of sitting at home alone, 70-80 elderly people come here three days a week. Most of them are over sixty but some have taken early retirement and others are on long-term sick leave. Two have been coming from day one and one of them is now eighty-six and still active. The participants are originally from the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Iraq, Pakistan, Vietnam and Lebanon, and include women and men. Some have worked at government level in their homeland while others are illiterate. People with different experiences of life and different assumptions, who meet on equal terms.

Gardening improves quality of life

Maja herself comes from Bulgaria and knows what it means to be an immigrant. She knows how important it is to feel well and have a daily life with meaning.

“Together we create a space where people can grow. We nurture everyone’s individual characteristics and know-

ledge.” The participants plan and work independently in small groups. Respect is important. There are now nine groups meeting three times a week. Two of the days are dedicated to language skills, while Fridays are reserved for visits, health and exercise and other creative activities. The school has two allotments in a nearby park where they plant herbs and vegetables in the spring to harvest in the autumn.

On their own terms

The biggest challenge has been finding ways of working that work for everyone. Initially a lot was asked of the participants but over time Maja and her colleagues have cut back on this. Not everyone needs to or is able to integrate in the same way. No-one can be forced to enjoy themselves or to integrate. You have to feel a need to learn Swedish before you see the point in doing so. In these groups it might start by recognising bus number 3 that goes to the city centre. It’s easier to learn on the basis of your own needs. Just leaving your own part of town and coming into the centre of Malmö makes a difference for lots of people. You become part of society and automatically share in the city’s life and culture. The school works well with the rest of society, with the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, social services and the Employment Service. They know what it is we do and that everyone is welcome. For many people Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan – Skolan is the only option for achieving a meaningful life. Maybe because everyone who comes really wants to be there.

Everyone cares about each other

After the summer and Christmas breaks, the participants are eagerly looking forward to starting again. Community and a sense of belonging are hugely important. “We look after each other!”



Gardening in SV-skolan’s own allotments.

Text and photos: Kajsa Wiktorin

Waxed tablecloths and raincoats turned into corsets and party dresses

The labour market is crying out for skilled craftspeople who speak a language other than Swedish, because Swedish companies often locate their textile production outside Europe. Eva Lindstrand is the project manager and teacher at Design Rosengård, a project run by Medborgarskolan in Malmö with funding from the Swedish Inheritance Fund. With its high immigrant population, there is a great need for meaningful employment for young people aged 16-25 in Malmö.

Creating new traditions together

“Real knowledge is often buried in a different layer,” says Eva, referring to the experiences and histories that the participants bring with them. Design Rosengård enables hidden craft traditions and other talents to emerge and develop, and find a place in Swedish society. Today the project reaches unemployed young women, originally from Iran, Iraq, Sweden, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The project would also like to attract young men, but this has proved more difficult. This is something they want to change. The group meets every morning and learns the basics of fashion drawing. They plan, sketch and sew. There’s a lot of recycling and second hand, with different materials and styles. One theme in the autumn was “Huvudsaken”, where everyone worked on an item of headgear. The results demonstrated different cultures and life experiences, and a strong desire to show who you really are.

Starting to open up

The project is run in collaboration with the City of Malmö, social services and the Employment Service. The young people are told about the project and that participation involves taking responsibility. Many of them have no opportunity to attend expensive schools

or take out a student loan, others are unemployed and have nothing to do or have social problems. Design Rosengård is an opportunity for them, and also for society, to make the most of gifted talents that would otherwise never have been given the chance to flourish and pave the way for a future in design. Eva thinks that contact with social services can sometimes feel rigid and inflexible. Even if the staff are positive, finding your way through all the rules can be difficult. But things are starting to open up, the authorities are starting to understand how important the project is to these girls’ self-esteem.



“We’ve had a girl here who has had a tough time with bullying and self-destructive behaviour. Although her family had completely different expectations, she herself took the step to come here. She uses all the materials, creates fantastic things and says this is what she has chosen to do for the rest of her life. They start out as invisible mice but gradually they flower and turn into personalities. For the first time in their lives they feel dedicated and proud of something they have created themselves.”



More visible

A shirt project is on the cards for the spring. Piles of men's shirts will be transformed into haute couture dresses. The aim is to become more visible, have more exhibitions and get work experience placements with fashion studios. These creative young people will continue in the world of art, crafts and fashion. Non-formal adult education often acts as an incubator for creative people who lack a network or self-confidence. In this case they are designers, who may become the people behind the innovative fashion of the future, influenced by styles from all around the world. Creating clothes that might be worn by people all around the world.

Text and photos: Kajsa Wiktorin



We can change our lives

In Södertälje almost one in three people has a foreign background. The town is colloquially referred to as “Little Iraq” as it has taken in the largest number of Iraqi refugees in the whole of Sweden, particularly in recent years. This means that initiatives are necessary to help these people and meet their needs. One municipally supported initiative run in partnership with the Workers’ Educational Association, ABF, is the study circle *On the way to the future* *وحن قيرطلا يلع لبقتسملا*, which brings together about ten men who speak Arabic. They meet every week at the ABF building in central Södertälje to learn the basics of running your own business, everything from the differences between a planned economy and a market economy to types of company and business plans. The aim is for the participants to test out their ideas for businesses and hopefully be able to start their own companies. The teachers on the course stay on as mentors even once the businesses are up and running.

Dare to change your life

“As an immigrant it’s almost impossible to get a job in Sweden. That’s our fate,” says study circle leader Emanuel Poli. “To get a job, and to keep it, you have to be twice as good as a Swede. This means we need to act quickly and focus on opportunities for recently arrived immigrants to start their own businesses. No company gets it right from day one, most of them need support during the start-up phase.” Running your own business is a way of creating something from the education you have and of keeping your skills alive. “If you manage to earn a living, you also stop feeling like a burden on society.”

From high status to low status

Saed Yakeen Eleya, who hasn’t been in Sweden long is thinking about doing something in the transport industry. The situation and life in Sweden are still new to him. He doesn’t yet know how to apply the work and education he had in Iraq in Sweden. He has been offered

cleaning jobs but thinks it’s hard to go from a high status job in his homeland to a cleaning job in Sweden. “Who could have known that there would be war in Iraq?” His family are spread across the world, he is in Sweden and is still seeking a platform, socially and in terms of an occupation, to take him further. Maybe a business of his own, trading abroad, could be the opportunity he needs. A study circle with fellow Iraqis, based on voluntary participation, is the best solution of all for him at the moment.

Own food in old age

Anton Admon has been in Sweden since 1995 and has performed a number of different jobs. He’s now thinking about starting a private home services business for elderly Arabic speakers. He thinks that many elderly people would appreciate a service with staff who know their own culture, speak their own language, make good food from home and are familiar with the various traditions and how they are celebrated. He himself enjoys working with the elderly and says that he learns a lot. His idea has been well received by the other participants in the study circle.

“It’s important that we make our own choices, that others don’t make them for us.”

“As an immigrant you have to be prepared to change your life when you come to Sweden. Life doesn’t continue the way it did back home. It can take time to adapt, and it’s only once you’ve realised that that you can move on,” says Emanuel who is successfully running several businesses. They all think that more courses for start-ups should be provided in Arabic. “But it has to be voluntary and be based on people’s own interest, so we feel that we are the ones who have power over our lives!”

Text and photos: Kajsa Wiktorin



Saed Yakeen Eleya and Anton Admon are on the ABF course *On the way to the future*, and are planning to start their own transport and elderly services businesses.

A commitment that knows no bounds

Last year Fatima Mahmutovic was awarded NBV's adult educator of the year prize for her work on integration. The award was made, in the judges' words, because "Fatima has displayed a deep commitment to non-formal adult education. An honest person who fights indefatigably to break through cultural prejudices and achieve integration goals. Her commitment knows no bounds – adults, children and young people alike have a place in her big heart."

Fatima left Bosnia 15 years ago during the war. Her family arrived in a refugee camp in the small Swedish community of Garphyttan. With her fluent English Fatima found it easier to communicate with local people. Thanks to Swedish neighbours, involvement in the Bosnian society and NBV she soon became integrated.

"Everyone who comes to Sweden should have a sponsor or a family to have contact with, to help them gain an insight into the culture and to understand traditions and codes."

I don't just like my job, I love it

For the past seven years Fatima has been working as a study consultant at NBV in Örebro. She is clear about what she is trying to achieve. It's about building bridges between people, not just between immigrants and Swedes, but also between old and young and between different religions. Creating opportunities for people from "different worlds" to meet. She has been particularly involved in working with Bosnians.

Fatima wants to be a role model for the immigrants who attend NBV's courses in Örebro. She is a member of the Integration Choir run jointly with the Red Cross. When 150 people from different nationalities and backgrounds sing together in different languages it raises the roof. Not everyone can afford to attend an (organised) study circle that costs money. The immigrant societies run their own circles and cultural events in their own premises around Örebro. They do crafts and make jewellery, often someone in the society is an expert. The leaders and everyone else share their skills. Fatima often visits, partly to learn something new, and partly because she likes it.

"I know what the people who come here feel like. Your own identity is important. I'm a proud Bosnian who wants to be part of Swedish society. We have to open our arms to everyone. Not judge anyone in advance. Greater understanding and greater openness would also help many well-educated people from other countries.

Validation can help more people to work in the areas for which they are trained. Countering prejudice is the hardest and the most important thing and non-formal adult education is uniquely placed to do this as we reach so many people, particularly those who are most disadvantaged."

Reawakening a love for life

Seven years ago Fatima was working with immigrant women from fourteen different countries who were on



Fatima Mahmutovic, study consultant at NBV in Örebro, was awarded last year's adult educator of the year prize for her work on integration.

long-term sick leave or were long-term unemployed. This is the weakest group in society there is, which most social bodies had found hard to reach. When the project began they didn't have a common language. Fatima started by pointing to parts of her body and the women who could, wrote words on pieces of paper which they showed each other. They also used the book Svenska Koderna (the Swedish Code) by Silvia Nilsson Puccio, Uli Brown and Marie Bengts, about hidden rules in Swedish society, to create understanding rather than misunderstandings. Reading it resulted in a lot of laughter.

Today Fatima meets these women with pride. They are doing well and she is convinced that the meeting place at NBV was essential to that. She wants to do more for immigrant women, many of them have little quality of life. Love for something new needs to be awakened.

Fatima cites the Millennium Declaration, signed in 2000 by the world's heads of state and heads of government. As a proud adult educator she keeps its aims alive and takes responsibility herself by informing and spreading knowledge wherever she may be to make the world a better place for everyone. This is what drives her and she has enough energy and drive for everyone lucky enough to cross her path.

Text and photo: Kajsa Wiktorin

Peace agents head for Europe

There are 100 Muslim peace agents in Sweden today. They are young Swedish Muslims from different backgrounds, who provide information about Islamic peace culture in clubs and societies, in schools, and for agencies and companies. The peace agents were recently in Brussels presenting the project to the Swedish trade minister and the Spanish government, which took over the EU presidency after Sweden.

The initiative behind the project lies with the study associations Ibn Rushd and Sensus with funding from the Swedish Inheritance Fund, the Folke Bernadotte Academy and the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

We are a link between different worlds

Both Lina Ghazzaoui and Yasri Khan, who are proud to be peace agents, say that bringing people together face to face is crucial if we are to be able to create a peace culture based on mutual understanding. The peace agents are contacted by schools, agencies and companies. They then tailor a lecture or a workshop to suit the clients.

“Sweden is so segregated, which is why we’re so important. We act as a link between different worlds and build bridges between different cultures. The toughest meetings and discussions often lead to the most heart-felt hugs afterwards,” says Lina.

The different worlds are united in my heart

Lina is a Muslim and a Swede. She was born in Sweden and her parents are from Lebanon and Palestine. “The different worlds are united in my heart but not in reality. When I was little I didn’t know there was such a thing as racism. Sweden was the only safe place on the globe. The older I become, the more aware I become of how things really are. I have friends who had their veils pulled off by strangers on the bus. In the end you don’t feel you belong anywhere. People shouldn’t judge me or anyone else. Only God knows what I believe and what I think.” For Lina the largest and most important issue is housing segregation. “If you’re Swedish and have foreign neighbours, integration can start in the stairwell. The way things are now, it’s like going abroad when you travel from Rinkeby to Djursholm.”

A global society with room for everyone

As a peace agent Yasri feels he has a clearer identity, he has a job to do. He thinks that exclusion is the biggest problem in Sweden today, partly self-exclusion of the groups who feel marginalised, and partly people’s inability to make use of the knowledge and experience that they all possess.

“It’s to do with group dynamics on a huge scale. All groups change when new members come in. The group



A hundred peace agents were awarded diplomas at Kulturhuset in 2006

has to accept new members as a plus rather than a threat. Historically you can see that a major turnover of people in societies and groups leads to progress. That differences enrich us all. Yasri talks about a global society and says that Sweden has to keep up if it is to be part of it. Opening doors and inviting in rather than shutting out. Closed societies, which arise when people feel excluded, create neither integration nor development.

Non-formal adult education – a Swedish export

Ultimately peace agents are about creating cooperation around peace by combating Islamophobia, but also phobia of westerners, which can be found among Muslims. The peace agents are young Muslims who believe in themselves and what they are doing, who are working with others to build up a national peace work network and educate the world around them at the same time. To create a broad foundation, the project works with other peace organisations such as the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation, PeaceQuest and Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice. Now the study associations want to spread the idea out across Europe via a new project, Europe Muslim Peace Agents, which will train 1,000 young Muslims aged between 18-30 from ten European countries as peace agents. Non-formal adult education is being exported abroad and is breaking down barriers to create a new global society.

Text: Kajsa Wiktorin
Photos: Jeanette Qvennerstedt



Peace agents Lina Ghazzaoui and Yasri Khan

Us and our neighbours

The Turkish women in Oxhagen wondered what sort of edible berries their children were talking about. To find out, they went into the forest and picked blueberries, which they turned into jam for everyone to take home and give their children for tea.

“It’s important to seize on the questions and interest immediately, otherwise it can disappear,” says Inger Öhrn from the Bilda study association, who is on the board of the cooperative group Träffpunkt Oxhagen. “You can’t decide what other people will want to do in advance. You have to start out from the needs expressed, everything from picking blueberries to learning Swedish and developing democracy.”

Let Oxhagen bloom

Oxhagen is a small housing area built in the 1960s and with 2,000 residents. It is one of many residential areas in Sweden where the majority of people are of foreign origin. According to statistics, people here feel worst of everyone in Örebro. But there is a great deal of creativity and drive in this area, which is drawn on by the study circles run by Träffpunkt Oxhagen. A few years ago, second-hand crocheted tablecloths gained a new lease of life when a group of women started crochet cafés. Together with artist Kaipa Gunilla Ericsson the tablecloths were turned into flowers with stamens and pistils. With their different craft skills, they created the huge, colourful work of art that now decorates the ceiling in their meeting room. The outdoor environment has also been improved by street art, with crocheted art works decorating lamp posts. It’s a way of exerting power over the local environment.

Culture, integration and democracy

Since 2006 the meeting place has been run as a cooperative of associations with nine different organisations. Activities are run here for adults, young people and children. The three key words culture, integration and democracy characterise everything that goes on here. Inger Öhrn contributes ideas and inspiration. She finds that the strength of this work lies in the way it builds bridges between residents. Knowing your neighbours creates a sense of security and a sense of community, which in turn increases the status of the area for those who live here. Together they are focussing on long-term integration work, with culture as the common denominator. Both as a means of expression and as a bridge between cultures.

One initiative leads to more

One woman asked whether she could have a cultural programme and demonstrate dancing from the Congo. Although the dance was a dance of praise to the woman’s god, the evening ended with thirty people from different nationalities and faiths dancing together. This was followed by several cultural evenings of dance, food and music, based on individual initiatives. The work of the cooperative has continued and developed ever since. More associations are joining in and it is hoped that collaboration on a broad front will increase, seeing more new players and focuses.



“Oxhagen blooms - a relational work” 2007-2008. The work was created by Kaipa G Ericsson who also took the photograph.

Self-determination results in independence

Creating a positive feeling of home in your own local area is particularly important in disadvantaged areas. If you feel secure and feel that you have a stake in the area in which you live, it’s easier to make progress in Swedish society. To show the opportunities for influence, politicians from all parliamentary parties were invited in to create a dialogue on housing. The fact that

residents can be involved in influencing whether a bus is to run through the area or outside it, when the after-school club is to be open and themselves help develop plans for a family centre creates self-determination and independence. Active clubs and societies are important, as are types of activities where initiative can be taken on the ground where people live. Soon it will be time to invite the politicians in again before the autumn 2010 election.

Text: Kajsa Wiktorin



Creative women at Träffpunkt Oxhagen.
Photo: Thomas Gustafsson

We want facts!

“My parents grew up in a poor village in Turkey. They moved to Sweden to give us a better life,” says Dilan. “The people who come here, who move from their homelands, do it because they have problems, because things are tough,” Jeanette continues. “How can you say that people who might have made it here across seven national borders are weak?” wonders Niklas. Racism and in this case Islamophobia, has much to do with the image of “the other” and what we actually know about each other, or don’t know. They all agree that more knowledge is needed.

Openness, equal value and democracy

Niklas Lundsten, Jeanette Hellström and Dilan Renhal are on the social studies programme at Katedral-skolan, a school with an excellent reputation in the centre of Uppsala. The students have been to a lecture on Islamophobia organised by the Sensus study association and the Discrimination Office in Uppsala. The aim was to shed light on the debate about Islam and counter static images and negative generalisations about Muslims. The project, which also incorporates theme days for secondary school pupils, youth conferences for young people in upper secondary school and multi-religious guidance, has the overall aim of encouraging young people to work for openness, where everyone is of equal value and with respect for the ideas of democracy.

Just ask!

“The best way of crushing prejudice is through research and results.” Historian of religion Mattias Gardell, one of the lecturers, presented statistics that ran counter to

all their prejudices and impressions people had from watching television and reading newspapers. “We’d like more lectures like this. You realise that not everything you believe is true. You have to examine the picture you get from the media. Just how Arabic is translated into other languages says something about the way Muslims are viewed. We learned a lot. Now we know that not all Muslims are terrorists, as you might easily think if you watch the news.”

At the end of the summer, attention was focussed on the suburb of Gottsunda, just outside Uppsala. The police reported burning cars and rowdy gangs rampaging about in the area. Similar reports came from other suburbs with a high immigrant population during the summer, in Sweden and in the rest of Europe. The pupils think the police are wrong, that they are the ones who are prejudiced. “They ought to have a lecture like the one we had. When you don’t know what the situation is really like, that’s when you get prejudice.” Three Muslim girls from Gottsunda took part in the panel debate during the lecture. They said that the people who live there feel accepted by each other but not by the people who live elsewhere. A sense of belonging and a sense of respect are important. “If you want to know what the young people in Gottsunda think, don’t ask the police or those of us that don’t live there, just ask them!” says Jeanette.

No-one wants to be racist

Niklas, Jeanette and Dilan say that it can be difficult to talk about issues to do with immigrants and Swedes. It



Dilan Renhal, Niklas Lundsten and Jeanette Hellström want more facts to enable them to stamp out prejudice about “the other”. Right Katedralskolan.

arouses so many emotions. Everyone is afraid of being seen as a racist, although maybe you just want to express how important it is that everyone helps each other. It isn't just Swedes or just immigrants who have to take responsibility for making it work. It's a joint responsibility we all share.

The teachers at the school are also pleased with the lecture and appreciate the initiative by the study associations and other civil society stakeholders. On a limited budget it's hard to organise events with researchers and experts. The lecture coincided with a school project about fanaticism, which the students started working on in the autumn. Niklas, Jeanette and Dilan were inspired by the talk and are continuing to collect facts so that they know what they are talking about and hope to have more lectures in the future.

Text and photos: Kajsa Wiktorin

World music and dance in Skåne!

After the 2010 election, folk musicians from across Sweden came together to demonstrate against racism and xenophobia. Many folk musicians don't want to see folk culture become taken over by nationalism where performers in the Swedish folk culture tradition are automatically assumed to support a xenophobic cultural policy whether they like it or not. Instead they want to emphasise that Swedish culture develops and is enriched by encounters with different cultures. In Malmö dancers and musicians gathered together to demonstrate. Pia Qvarnström, a music teacher who specialises in rhythm and enjoys singing Vietnamese folk music, was one of them.

Pia heads the project World Music and Dance in Skåne. The project focuses on world music and world dance and was launched in Skåne and Västra Götaland. It is the brainchild of a number of organisations and groups on the music scene as well as the study association Kulturens Bildningsverksamhet. The project works to raise the profile of music and dance in the region by focusing on youth groups, networking, encounters with the audience on their home ground and leader training. All to make music and dance from as many cultures as possible accessible to as many people as possible.

Honest encounters through music and dance

"When we communicate through music and dance, we reach each other in a way we don't really manage through words alone. We might not speak the same language or have the same experiences, but our meeting becomes more honest when we involve our bodies and our souls," says Pia. "If we first come together through sharing a music or dance experience, which also enriches the way we express ourselves to each other, it can then be easier to move on and understand each other on other levels too."

How many people know that Calle Jularbo was Roma?

"Music and dance are about living traditions that are constantly developing through new encounters. We performers want to share what we have learned with others, learn new things and see what happens next," says Pia. How many people know, for example, that accordion player Calle Jularbo, famous on Swedish dance floors in the 1950s was from the Roma community? It is said that it was he who brought the accordion out of hiding, turning it into the pop instrument of its day. There are many such examples. Today we have plenty of artists whose cultural backgrounds lie elsewhere than Sweden, where the meeting of different cultures creates something completely new which is then often picked up and becomes "Swedish".

Pia and Kulturens Bildningsverksamhet are behind an evening to be held on 5 December 2010 in Malmö celebrating the unique and shared past and present of Roma and Swedish music traditions. "The night will bring together fantastic musicians in exciting collaborations." The situation of the Roma in Malmö will be highlighted by special guests and interviews. "We will be talking about the link between integration, participation and the future and are hoping to attract a varied audience. Young and old, different musicians and lots of different cultures all coming together."

Joint marketing

To help the people of Malmö to find world music and world dance, teachers have also joined forces to market themselves. "We're in contact with an Albanian women's organisation, Chilean and Bolivian dance clubs and Iranian musicians but now we're bringing them all together in one place and reaching out to a wider audience. That will make things easier for everyone. We have booked in a performance and taster day at Musikhögskolan with hands-on courses where everyone is welcome."

Text: Kajsa Wiktorin Photo: Bengt Wihlberg





Every year, millions of Swedes meet in various forums to share knowledge, exchange views and discuss opinions. The forum could be a course or a study circle, and the subject could be painting or Italian, botany or how to run a democratic organisation. But the result is always the same. When people whose paths would not normally cross meet in this way, new ideas and new insights inevitably come to light. A kind of cross-fertilisation occurs, and this contributes not only to the development of those present, but also to the development of society as a whole. This mix is a crucial element of a successful democracy – and is therefore crucial for Sweden.

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