



Municipality of Botkyrka`

Intercultural Profile

Background¹

Botkyrka is one of 25 independent municipalities within the Stockholm county², with a population of 82,608 (2010). The population is growing and it is expected to rise to 90,000 by 2020. It lies to the south-east of the county, some 25 minutes from the city centre, in the direction of Södertälje. The borough is divided into a rural and quite prosperous southern half settled mainly by people of Swedish ethnic origin; and a northern half characterised by dense, mainly post-1960s housing with a large concentration of foreign-born or ethnic minority residents, based upon the five main urban settlements of Alby, Fittja, Hallunda-Norsborg, Tullinge and Tumba-Grödinge.

People of Swedish ethnic background represent 46.7% of the population of Botkyrka, with the other largest (non-EU) national groups being Turkish (9.5%), Iraqi (4.6%), Syrian, Chilean, and Lebanese. The largest groups of European national are from Finland, Poland and former Yugoslavia. Within the neighbourhoods of Botkyrka, Fittja is the most ethnically diverse with Swedes representing 10% of the population, and Europeans as a whole about a quarter of all residents. There are about 100 different languages spoken in Botkyrka.

The area has experienced some economic difficulties but within a wider European context it can still be said to be quite buoyant with unemployment of less than 5% and a diverse range of over 5000 employers, although the majority of the workforce commute out of Botkyrka to their place of work. The municipal Kommun is the single largest employer with more than 6000 staff, and other major employers include Alfa Laval, De Laval and Crane (which is responsible for printing Euro banknotes)

National Context

Sweden has undergone a major social and cultural transformation in living memory. After the end of World War 2 it established itself within the classic Nordic model as a relatively ethnically homogenous, egalitarian and prosperous welfare state. Sweden in particular differed from the pattern in continental Europe in building its socio-economic model on the twin pillars of the state and the individual, whilst down-playing the role of the family, employers and of civil society as deliverers of social services. It is said the Swedish system is a social contract which offers the individual the utmost liberation with minimal moral consequences in return for their compliance with a regime of high taxation to fund a comprehensive provision of services³. In recent years though the all-encompassing nature of welfare state provision has receded to be replaced by a mix of

¹ This report is based upon the visit of the CoE inspection team on 31 August & 1 September 2011, comprising Irena Guidikova and Phil Wood.

² This wider metropolitan region has a total population of 1,974,000 (2008)

³ Roald, A, S (2010) *Multiculturalism in Scandinavian Society: individual and collective rights*. Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration

market and voluntary provision but Sweden still remains, in comparison to much of the rest of Europe, a high tax/high spend state with greater social and economic equality.

In terms of its policies for immigration and cultural diversity Sweden has also pursued a rather distinctive course. After ending a period of taking guestworkers to feed its growing economy, Sweden introduced a clear and robust policy of multiculturalism in 1975 that ranked alongside that of the UK and Netherlands and, some would say, was even more comprehensive. With no legacy of third world colonialism and an international policy of neutrality Sweden took the moral high ground in opening its doors to foreigners, particularly from areas facing crisis or oppression. As well as being granted freedom from discrimination and access to the labour market, immigrants were offered cultural rights equal to those accorded the national minorities like the Sami and Finns. The immigrant, in effect, had the free choice whether to integrate fully within Swedish society or to maintain whatever degree of cultural distinctiveness suited them, and to access public resources in support of this. In contrast with the Dutch and British models however, Swedish multiculturalism has sought to avoid the establishment culturally distinct institutions such as separate schools, but has balanced this with a high level of investment in mother tongue teaching in state schools. Sweden also stood out from its Scandinavian cousins in asserting that integration was, in effect, an issue to be solved by the state whilst in Norway, and even more so in Denmark, the stress was upon the migrants' ability to adapt to the majority.

The Swedish system of multiculturalism was built upon the three pillars of equality (*jämlikhet*), freedom of choice (*valfrihet*), and partnership (*samverkan*). In so far as a dynamic relationship was envisaged in the partnership between groups and the state, it might be perceived that this policy was not only multi- but inter-cultural in its intent.

However, it is argued this period was short lived and that by the mid-1980s Sweden had embarked upon a long 'retreat from multiculturalism'⁴, through a series of legislative measures which claimed to be responding to a perceived risk of 'cultural clashes' between norms and values considered to be 'typically' Swedish - such as the ideal of gender equality - and those held to be alien and external to Swedish society.

So whilst Sweden may be following the general European trend towards a position of 'civic integrationism', it still retains a more liberal approach than most. Sweden continues to reject the widespread notion that integration and citizenship should be tied to the participation of the migrant in programmes of language and cultural learning and tests such as the Dutch *Inburgering*. The Swedish position is that a language requirement would not promote, but rather get in the way of, a process of integration because things are best done through free will rather than compulsion. This official pronouncement from 2010 restates the Swedish government position:

*It is not for the state to lay down conditions for citizenship requiring a passed civic education. Just like a democratic state should do for all other citizens, all citizens should be included generally, blindly and equally, without testing their level of knowledge. Besides, anything else would be a historical breach of the supporting, solidarity-based and inclusive idea underlying the Swedish people's home and welfare state.*⁵

Even though the political climate regarding immigration has hardened in recent years, particularly through the substantial presence of the *Folkpartiet* (Liberal party) and the *Moderata samlingspartiet*

⁴ Borevi, K (2010) 'Dimensions of Citizenship: European Integration Policies from a Scandinavian Perspective'; in Bengtsson, B, *Diversity, Inclusion and Citizenship in Scandinavia*. Newcastle; Cambridge Scholars.

⁵ Report of the Commission on Civic Information for Newly Arrived Immigrants. Stockholm, 2010.

(Moderate Party) in parliament, there have been no calls for language to become a precondition of residence permits in Sweden.

Notwithstanding Sweden's retention of much of its welfare state egalitarianism and internationalist openness, this does not suggest that everything is perfect. For example, it is also suggested that even throughout the period discussed, a level of discrimination and intolerance was and is acceptable in Swedish society, particularly against groups such as the Roma or Somalis. Furthermore it is suggested that the very righteousness of Sweden's anti-racist and internationalist self-image has made it even harder for such cases to be acknowledged, discussed and dealt with. Some have described it as 'boutique multiculturalism'.⁶

Nevertheless, Sweden remains a beacon in migration affairs, and this is confirmed by the latest version of MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) which ranks it consistently first in a list of 31 advanced nations in terms of 7 criteria of immigrant policy and practice. Sweden is particularly strong on labour market mobility and its weakest point is in the political participation of migrants.⁷

Local Context

Botkyrka should be understood within the wider context of metropolitan Stockholm. It is one of a group of districts in western Stockholm where the greatest concentration of the city's foreign-born residents can be found, as indicated by the map below.

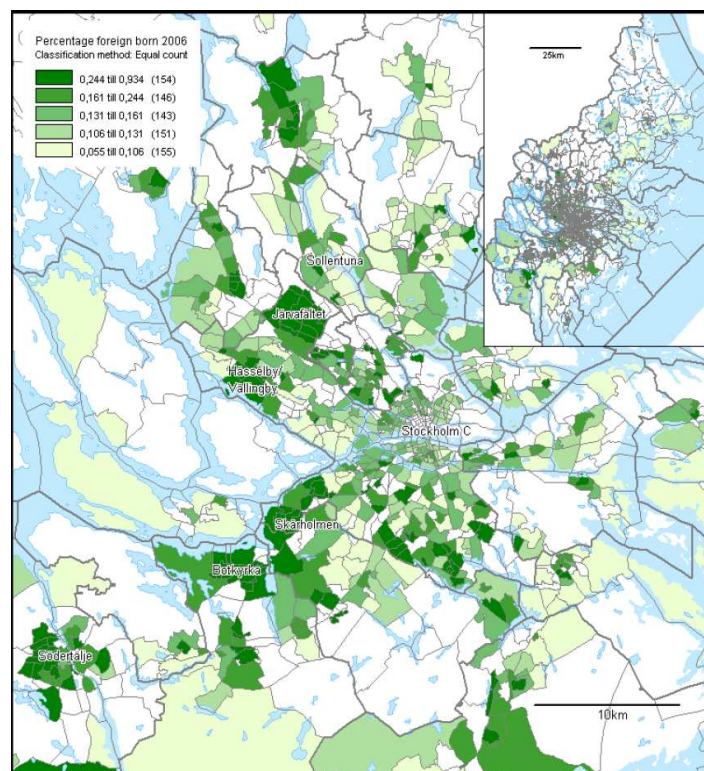


Figure: *The percentage of foreign-born residents in Stockholm County neighbourhoods (2006)*⁸

⁶ Roth, H-I and Hertzberg, F (2010) *Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Sweden*. Florence: European University Institute.

⁷ <http://www.mipex.eu/sweden>

⁸ Andersson op cit.

It is clear too that residents of Stockholm of different ethnic background have profoundly different life-chances and are living in distinctly different places within their country. In short, Sweden is one of Europe's more segregated societies and this is no more apparent than in Stockholm and in Botkyrka. Although there is evidence to suggest that ethnic segregation may have peaked, it is a high peak from which there will be no easy return. Somalis, Turks, Syrians and Iraqis are particularly isolated in certain locations though, as always with these surveys of dissimilarity, one should not overlook the fact that the ethnic group least likely to engage with, or live next to, someone of another ethnic background are members of the ethnic *majority*, in this case white Swedes⁹. Add to this a process of economic segregation which is continuing to rise in Sweden, particularly through housing policies, variable standards of education and other neighbourhood effects, and one can envisage Stockholm taking on a rather distinctive complexion. This is a 'doughnut city' with a centre populated exclusively by the ethnic majority and foreigners from the developed world, with a booming property market and other trappings of neo-liberalism; and an encircling ring of impoverished neighbourhoods in declining housing stock and diminishing educational and employment opportunities and mounting despair – more Paris than London. This is not the reality of Stockholm now, but it is suggested as a likely trajectory if current trends persist.

Taking examples from Botkyrka, between 1997 and 2008, the combined foreign-background and foreign-born population of Alby rose from 65% to 73% and of Fittja from 84% to 90%, making it the most immigrant-dense neighbourhood in Stockholm (although there are parts of Malmö and Gothenburg with higher concentrations)¹⁰.

Foreign migration to Botkyrka has now been a reality for four generations and is no longer remarkable. Indeed, Sweden's first foreign-born mayor was elected in the district back in the 1970s. However, it is notable that whilst its residents feel very much at home in Botkyrka itself, they are less at ease in the city centre, where they will often be mistaken for tourists or recently-arrived migrants. This sense of not feeling entirely welcome in central Stockholm and a growing economic and ethnic polarisation has given the residents of northern Botkyrka a strong sense of distinctive identity, but has also given the area a social stigma. Ironically, measure taken by central government to channel extra government subsidy to the area (180 million kroner over 3 years) has only served to exacerbate the image problem. The stigma has an impact upon the social aspirations of young people and their chances in the regional employment market, as well as the location choices of families and businesses in the region. Tackling the stigma, and the social, economic and cultural factors underlying it, are a priority of the local authority.

There is no doubt that the political and administrative leadership of Botkyrka Kommun are a determined and dynamic unit. It wishes to be a beacon and an innovation leader within Sweden particularly in local democracy and citizen participation, culture and the creative industries and in anti-racism and interculturality. In the last respect it set out its intentions in 2010 with the publishing of an Intercultural Strategy and an Action Plan which requires commitment across the full range of functions and responsibilities of the local authority.

Neighbourhoods and Communities

Like many municipalities around Europe which are the product of administrative rationalisation, 'Botkyrka' exists principally as a bureaucratic entity and it is in the neighbourhoods of Alby, Fittja, Hallunda-Norsborg, Tullinge and Tumba-Grödinge that most residents of the district live their lives

⁹ From Andersson, R et al (2010) *Contextualising ethnic residential segregation in Sweden: welfare, housing and migration-related matters*. Institute for Housing and Urban Research, Uppsala University

¹⁰ Source: Statistics Sweden.

and identify themselves. Secondly, like many municipalities (including some in the ICC network) which are located on the edge of very large cities it experiences some specific characteristics and challenges. Transportation routes follow the pattern of a bicycle wheel giving the area excellent communications in and out of the city centre but with very few lateral connections. This has been seen in London-Lewisham and is particularly pronounced in Botkyrka where it is extremely difficult to travel between the north and south of the district by public transport. Also, like Berlin-Neukölln, there is a traditional socio-economic division with dense, mainly public sector housing in the north and more prosperous suburban and rural areas in the south which with the onset of immigration have also become ethnically divided.

So, as always in such spatially incoherent districts, there is a debate to be had about identity and of the best way to structure and deliver services. Should the politicians try to impose upon the population an adherence to 'Botkyrka' as a way of uniting people who otherwise may have extremely different outlooks in terms of their socio-economic life chances, their spirituality or in how picturesque the view may be from their kitchen window? And should the municipality attempt to reinforce this cohesive identity by delivering its services in a uniform manner across the area regardless of people's very different needs and aspirations?

From an intercultural standpoint it must be as highly regrettable that people in the south of Botkyrka and those in the north lead lives so different and distant that they might as well be on different planets. However, the factors that have driven this state of affairs are, in general, of a metropolitan, national and international scale, and there are only limited measures that a local authority of only 80,000 population can do about it. Surveys by the Kommun suggest that whilst many of the poorer and ethnically mixed people of the north are curious about their southern neighbours, and would like to cultivate more links, the feeling is not reciprocated by southerners, whose mental map of the Stockholm region includes Gamla stan, Sörgårdsplan and the beautiful fjords and archipelago, but probably does not include Fittja.

Nevertheless Botkyrka seems determined to intervene in ways which will attempt to turn the tide of polarisation and segregation, firstly through housing policy. Northern Botkyrka is a product of the famous *Miljonprogrammet* implemented by the Swedish between 1965 and 1974 to build a million new dwellings in a 10-year period, which was seen as a heroic achievement at the time but which is now criticised by many for despoiling the Swedish countryside with huge and ugly Soviet-style developments which have become ghettos. Some say Sweden needs a programme of equal scale to rectify this legacy, but things are no longer done on this scale, not even in Sweden. Nevertheless, Botkyrka Kommun has committed itself to creating neighbourhood diversification through new housing construction and wants to be seen as a national leader in the regeneration of neighbourhoods.

Firstly they observe an emergent middle class amongst the migrant-origin population of the north. These are people with a good education and job prospects who no longer send most of their disposable income back to countries of origin in the form of remittances. The Kommun is concerned that many migrant-origin people see Botkyrka as a place of transit rather than long-term residency. So it wishes to persuade them that they do not need to leave Botkyrka in order to rise socially and is searching for 100 plots of land in the north where it can build homes for purchase, in what is a sea of 12,000 rental properties. It hopes this may also persuade some people from the south to consider relocating. It is also trying to encourage more prosperous people to remain in the district by helping them to extend their properties. Finally it seeks to encourage more low income families to move to the south by building more affordable housing there.

The physical condition of some neighbourhoods is a point of note. We recognise that the *Miljonprogrammet* solved a short term crisis for Sweden but maybe left places like Botkyrka with an onerous long term responsibility to maintain housing and public space of low quality with limited budgets. The strain is now starting to show in parts of the borough, particularly in Fittja. It is laudable that the municipality is trying to achieve social and cultural mixing through new housing development in this area but the question needs to be asked 'If you were someone visiting Fittja for the first time, with a view to setting up home there (through choice rather than obligation), what would be your feeling once you had alighted from the train at Fittja Centrum and walked for 100 metres?' We think most people's feeling would be to turn around and walk back to the station. The condition of Fittja Centrum is poor, and in our opinion unacceptable. The architecture is brutal, the 40 year-old infrastructure seems to have had little renovation or updating, the retail offer is minimal and bland, and the general ambience of the place is scruffy, unloved and unwelcoming. Despite what we know about the municipality's commitment to make this an attractive place, the evidence on the ground is that this place is still neglected and in decline. It is difficult to imagine people feeling enthusiastic about their own life chances and the possibility of making intercultural connections with others, when their immediate environment sends out such contradictory signals of despair.

We note the Kommun is enabling more people to acquire their own gardens through commandeering some of the empty concrete spaces but this seems like a small step on the mountain which must be climbed if this area is to be restored and made respectful of its residents. We would recommend Botkyrka looks to Amsterdam South East and Lewisham for examples of how areas of pre-fabricated, high-density, working class neighbourhoods can be revived with quality but without excessive gentrification.

Education

Sweden operates a system of comprehensive education in which the vast majority of children attend state-managed institutions, with only a tiny private and independent sector. From age 1 to 6 children may attend *Förskola*, followed by a compulsory *Grundskola* from 7 to 16 followed by an optional *Gymnasieskola*. Swedish 15-years-old pupils have the 22nd highest average score in the PISA assessments, which is generally considered in Sweden to be below expectations in relation to the high level of public investment in education.

Botkyrka considers education to be at the heart of its plans to improve the borough and to implement its intercultural strategy. In line with its general policy of citizen empowerment, we were told that the Kommun believes the biggest challenge it faces in education is in changing the mindset of teaching staff and empowering parents to take a more active participation in their children's schooling. We visited Fittjaskolan and Förskolan Örnen for two very different experiences.

Fittjaskolan has 464 pupils, the great majority of whom are of migrant background families. It has been a troubled school in the past with the proportion of children leaving with qualifications and moving onto *Gymnasie* well below average. Many kids were involved in gang culture and had been bringing this into the school with them. Staff morale had been low and some parents were seeking to send their kids to other schools. The Principal explained that she had been obliged to introduce tough measures to restore high standards but this was now paying off. There were now year-on-year increases in the number of pupils achieving merits and general behaviour was improving, although some other performance measures were apparently showing more erratic results. However the Principal had firm opinions upon the ways in which the school should be run, and this did not involve the participation of parents. She thought most parents were not able to comprehend the educational needs of their children and that their largely rural and religious cultural background

meant that most of them had little expectation that they should participate. She and they were in agreement that teaching was the job of the teacher, she said. So although the school was achieving some improvement it seemed to be doing it in spite, rather than because of the policy of the Kommun.

We were rather struck by the atmosphere and appearance of the school. Like the rest of Fittja it is built in an unforgiving modernist style which gives it the outward appearance of a light engineering plant or maybe a suburban call centre. Inside the school the ambience remained consistent with the outside, defined by long empty corridors with no decoration or distinctive features, somewhat like a military barracks. Maybe this is what it takes to achieve results in Fittja but, in our humble opinion, there are other ways too. About 50% of teachers at the school are of migrant background and the school does take account of culture, for example Ramadan, which was happening as we visited. It was not possible to discern a specific commitment to interculturality at Fittjaskolan.

We also visited Förskolan Örnen in nearby Alby which has 130 pupils, 99% of whom have Swedish as a second language. The staff we met described a very deliberate philosophy which defines everything they do. It is rooted in respect for human rights and democracy and principles of transculturalism and social constructionism, connected to the work of Per Dahlbeck, a professor of Pedagogy in Malmö, but also in the work of the Malaguzzi Centre in Reggio Emilia. They aim to encourage in their children values of openness and curiosity and an aversion to nationalism and other absolutes. For example, when dealing with a multi-ethnic class many schools might encourage kids to establish their identity by reference to the national flags or signifiers of their parent countries of origin. They reject this method as it immediately forces kids to select a fixed identity, and would prefer to allow the kid to evolve a hybrid identity which is a more accurate representation of the transculturality of their daily lives, in which everything is in a constant state of formation and transformation. Every kid is treated as an individual rather than the product of an archetypal social or cultural background.

They gave examples of the pedagogic methods which this philosophy produces. Sense of place is important to a child's identity but usually this sense of place is defined by others. Therefore kids are given cameras and invited to explore their neighbourhood and identify places that have meaning to them. They are asked to discuss what makes a place attractive or unattractive, who makes these judgements and why – all at the age of 5! Given our earlier comments on Fittja Centrum and the stigmatizing of place this seems like a very necessary thing to do in Botkyrka. It is generally most unusual of kids in any country of any age to be encouraged in this kind of thinking, and yet how can we expect our citizens to participate in place-making without it?

Another project was even more specifically intercultural, involving a twinning exercise with an all-white school in prosperous inner-city Södermalm. They collaborated on exploring each other's local environment and describing their impressions to each other. Very quickly the kids found that language was not a straightforward mode of communication as many of the Örnen kids had limited Swedish – whilst the Örnen kids were amazed to discover that most of the Södermalm kids had nothing but Swedish, whilst they are multilingual. So they had to evolve many non-verbal means of communication, which will be essential skills for the rest of their lives in a multi-ethnic world. They were also taken to a third, neutral space where they were able to relax in each other's company and work together on making things out of ice.

Förskolan Örnen was one of the most interesting institutions we have visited not only in Botkyrka but throughout the ICC network. Staff acknowledged that it is still too early in the process to discern long-term results and effects on behaviour, and they also admitted to having much more work to do in engaging parents and the wider community in their philosophy. Also we should remember that

this affects only 130 pupils and that other kids in the district have a more conventional pre-school experience. We also wonder whether the experience of transferring from Örnén to a very different regime in a conventional Grundskola at the age of 7 might be rather shocking and disorientating for a child. Hopefully, we will see the Örnén philosophy spreading throughout Botkyrka in the future.

Across the school system as a whole the Kommun is attempting various things to enlarge parental involvement. Every year there is a culture month for all schools to take part in different cultural activities in association with the district's professional and amateur arts organisations. The idea is particularly to get schools from the south and the north to meet and do things together, and to involve parents. One school had great success through changing their way of inviting parents – instead of an envelope that parents were afraid of opening them, they sent a postcard instead, and parents turned up.

Intercultural competence and conflict resolution

We held a lively discussion with a wide variety of professionals engaged in these fields. In general they felt themselves to be swimming against a mainstream orthodoxy in Sweden and Europe that diversity is a troublesome and potentially threatening phenomenon, and that integration on the terms of the ethnic majority was the only solution. Whilst the old model of Swedish multiculturalism needed an overhaul there was fear that it might be completely cast out and replaced with an assimilationist model, so they welcomed a new discourse around interculturality. Within this it would be necessary to acknowledge the areas of potential friction between different groups and value systems and to develop the competence to manage them.

Stockholm was described as one of the most secular cities in the world and that few were in any mood to change this, and yet society and the state needed to acknowledge the growing presence of citizens for whom religion may be the most important thing in life. The matter remains unresolved in Botkyrka but the main thing is that a dialogue is on-going. New places of worship are not a controversial issue in Botkyrka as they can be in other countries – there are, for example, 6 mosques in the district and over 40 in the region as a whole. Religious schools would be a controversial matter however, as would the entry of religious bodies into the political arena. Botkyrka is currently exploring the possibility of forming an inter-religious association and is studying the experience of Barcelona. There was, last year, an isolated incident of a stone-throwing attack on a mosque. Various agencies and associations came together rapidly to discuss ways of defusing the situation, and there was no repetition or escalation, which gives everyone a sense of confidence and pride in the effectiveness of their intercultural network.

The Turkish association has been particularly active in partnership with the police and the one-stop shops to organise parental night walking to engage with youths who hang out in gangs on the street. The Children of Abraham foundation and the Youth Council have also been very active in addressing potential flashpoint issues, as has the youth orientated magazine Shoo

Sport was also briefly mentioned as a field in which effective intercultural mixing has been achieved, but perhaps more could be said about this in the future.

Culture and Creativity

In relation to its size Botkyrka has made a remarkable investment in cultural institutions and opportunities, primarily for their own citizens, but in many cases with a significance which extends nationally and beyond.

One example is the Mångkulturellt centrum in Fittja. This 'Multicultural Centre' is a forum and a meeting place for research and artistic expression relating to migration and social and cultural diversity, and was founded by the municipality in 1987. It is a sophisticated multi-functional operation with 15 staff. It is quite remarkable that such a relatively small municipality as Botkyrka should be the founder and principal funder of such a centre, which is the most important in Sweden and is part of many international networks. One might expect an institution of this kind to be located in a city centre or perhaps on a university campus, but it is set in the heart of Fittja, suggesting that it wishes to retain involvement in everyday reality and avoid becoming an 'ivory tower'. We visited the centre on several occasions during the visit but were slightly puzzled that at no time were we given a formal presentation of what the Centre does and, most importantly, what its role in Botkyrka is and how this is balanced with its wider interests. There will be an opportunity for this to be rectified when it plays host to the first meeting of the group of intercultural centres within the ICC network.

Another example of Botkyrka's ambitions in the cultural field is the municipality's substantial (but politically controversial) financial commitment to Subtopia – a remarkable campus of almost 50 cultural organisations located in a former dairy complex in Alby. It was named with the tongue in the cheek, as the 'subtopia' was originally coined as term of abuse by metropolitan sophisticates to describe the 'culturally dead' that lie between the city core and its edge. The owners wish to turn this notion around, particularly sending a message to the cognoscenti of central Stockholm that the stigmatized Botkyrka can be a place of originality and dynamism. Subtopia's tenants include the circus school Cirkör (which runs the largest circus showcase in northern Europe), Fanzingo a community media training and production company, and the Islamic League including a mosque, and Seniornet providing technology training for the elderly, as well as large meeting and catering spaces.

Subtopia describes its role within Botkyrka as building 'creative confidence' in the citizens. Particularly through their work with children they aim to convey a freedom to be innovative and to be less fearful of failure or of being unconventional. Fanzingo has done a lot of work to increase dialogue between young people resident in the two halves of the borough, particularly through radio broadcasting and publishing the magazine Shoo. They believe everyone has a story to tell but not everyone can tell it in the same way, through conventional literary means, so they aim to find alternative methods.

They are now investigating ways of using technology to narrow the gap between politicians and young people. Councillors will be issued with Ipads which will show them videos of citizens expressing opinion on key local issues before they take their decisions. They are collaborating with the main housing corporation to help them connect young people with the empty properties in the district. The newest project is "KLUMP" which is about encouraging togetherness and 'stickiness' between young creative entrepreneurs by facilitating spaces and platforms where they can collaborate.

Subtopia is heavily supported from public subsidy and, in a time of expenditure cuts, it is not universally popular. The political opposition in the Kommun have said that if they were elected they would sell Subtopia. Its supporters argue that its significance extends beyond the provision of artistic opportunities. The deputy mayor argues that the level of cultural activity in an area is an accurate proxy for the health of democracy itself, which is why it should be heavily supported and should pervade people's lives from an early age. This is why the Kommun's cultural department is also large and influential with many projects. We were introduced to the Botkyrka Open which this year has included the requisition of an apartment in the most challenging part of Fittja, to become the temporary home for a string of artists in residence.

The Media

A free newspaper Södra Sidan has existed for 5 years and is produced by a team of journalists who have left the mainstream media “to tell another story about diversity”. The newspaper appears every two weeks and is sent for free to 45,000 households. Funded from advertisements (including from the Kommun) it has a good readership and an excellent reaction of the public. The stories feature ordinary people in the greater Stockholm region and try to give a positive, optimistic perspective on daily life and diversity.

Governance, citizenship and participation

Botkyrka likes to be seen as an innovator in the context of Swedish public administration. Much of the delivery of public services has been devolved to neighbourhoods and the Kommun is seeking to empower people to take a more active involvement in this through community development work and area-based forums. It was the first place in Sweden to establish ‘one stop shops’ and now there are five in operation, combining local and national services. The aim is for staff to assist residents with a range of administrative issues including social security, national insurance, consumer rights, immigration, legal aid, divorce or childcare – recognising that these are often inter-connected - and they have an obligation to have diagnosed the client’s needs within two visits. A full 30% of all enquiries relate to the Swedish system of payment for pre-school childcare.

Each one-stop shop has a dedicated community development team. They report their principal area of activity at present is concerned with community safety. Apparently fear of crime is higher in Botkyrka than it is in central Stockholm, even though the crime statistics would suggest the opposite should be true. The staff also engage in a lot of counselling of young people around crime, drugs and sexual matters and liaise closely with educational psychologists.

Botkyrka has also tried to be a pioneer in the field of e-democracy but so far it has little to show for it. This is partly to do with a common realisation that creating a genuine participative dialogue, not only in the delivery but the design of services, is much harder to achieve than is imagined. Perhaps also in Botkyrka people generally have a lower level of expectation of public services and of their right to participate and so they are reluctant to take up the opportunities that are offered.

One issue of concern raised to us was that the public sphere in Botkyrka is much less active than it should be, particularly from an intercultural sense. On the face of it this comes as a surprise – there are over 550 voluntary organisations active in the area, for example. It was suggested that too many of these organisations are located in the prosperous south and concerned with limited and rather exclusive interests which make them difficult to penetrate. Whilst in the north there are felt to be far too many households who, for whatever reason, do not participate in activities outside the home or the extended family. Maybe this is an example of a disconnect between Swedish traditions of not privileging the family as a social building block, and the instincts of many migrants, for whom the family unit is paramount.

Most people we asked said they did not feel there was a shortage of facilities in the municipality where people could meet. However we also noted that there seemed to be a rather limited range of larger and outdoor events in the annual calendar which could be said to be generally open to all. Perhaps there may be the need to invent a new event such as a ‘Botkyrka Carnival’ which could be a focal point for normally isolated communities to mix. Botkyrka might like to study the work of Lewisham in organising public conversations, street parties and major events to counter transience and alienation in its communities.

Conclusions

We identified many strengths and positive trends in Botkyrka, including:

- A very strong and enduring commitment by politicians to interculturalism, human rights, democracy and non-discrimination. They resolutely reject assimilationism and are prepared to reform multiculturalism and to stand aside from the conventional discourse which still dominates the Swedish integration debate.
- An intercultural strategy has been voted last year and an action plan has been developed
- A core group of officials with a good understanding of interculturalism and a wish to put it into practice, including a very dynamic co-ordinator of the intercultural strategy
- Several strong institutions such as the Mångkulturellt centrum and Subtopia which both play a key local role in fostering citizen involvement, but also put Botkyrka on the international stage.
- A large and active set of NGOs, including a well-functioning and influential Youth Council
- Long-standing experience with democratic participation, balancing the more paternalistic and bureaucratic traditions of Swedish governance.
- The openness of politicians to new media and new ways of listening to, and engaging with, citizens.

There are also challenges to be faced and some next steps to be taken during Botkyrka's membership of the ICC network, including:

- Whilst the Intercultural strategy is now in place it still feels rather abstract and detached from reality. The next stage should be to map existing policies and initiatives, and to evaluate them through the 'intercultural lens' to assess which are the most effective at achieving the strategic aims.
- So the intercultural action plan should be made more specific, building upon work which is already intercultural and re-orienting the rest.
- Bring the 5800 employees and the 300 managers of the city administration on board will not be easy but is essential. Most still find it hard to understand and apply the concept of interculturality – they need to be coached, trained and involved in debates, preferably across the departmental silos.
- The administration needs to keep driving forward its shift from a culture of service provision and hierarchy to a cultural of empowerment of all citizens.
- Fostering more collaborative working and the creative confidence in the administration (for instance through the "bonus for mistakes" experiment in Copenhagen which we mentioned
- Setting up a broad support group of intercultural innovators to develop a vision for the development of the city based on the 'diversity advantage', conceive communication around it and engineer the involvement of citizens;
- Regularly reviewing the functioning of the Mångkulturellt centrum and Subtopia to ensure they remain focused on involving local residents as well as international networking, knowledge production and artistic excellence.
- Re-focus the intercultural strategy on the north-south divide of the district – there are almost no links, and strong spatial, physical and mental barriers between a poor, diverse, urban North and a better-off, largely ethnic Swedish and more rural South.
- Encourage the single ethnicity NGOs to embrace interculturality;
- Initiate a debate amongst teachers and the wider educational community about the value of intercultural education as exemplified by Örnén. Must it remain an isolated experiment or can it be introduced across the municipality?
- Initiate a related debate on the role which families and the wider community can play in partnership with teaching professional in the education of children.

- Involve the business community in the debate and intercultural policy development – do they see the ‘diversity advantage’ in Botkyrka? The Council for Enterprises should look closely into skills, supply chains, networks and markets for ethnic business. The Turkish community in particular is very enterprise-oriented and business-men and women could act as role models for other communities by acting as mentors.
- Conduct a borough-wide audit of the skills, products and connection of the ethnic business community and make a longer term plan to become the ethnic business hub of the Stockholm region.
- Explore the possibility of one or more major new outdoor events which will attract people from across the district to meet and interact.
- Audit the meeting places i and assess the effectiveness of each as a place of interaction between people of different ethnicity, age, gender and parts of the district.
- A plan should be made to improve the ‘grot spots’ in the public realm, but this should not be through simple intervention by the public authorities but through building partnerships with local citizens and traders to ensure sustainable maintenance.
- One Stop Shops may need to rethink their role. They are very well resourced but are they working at full capacity and doing enough for empowering citizens rather than providing a standard service? They should also try and avoid duplications of tasks by working together with other departments. Location in a shared-service environment (library, school, shopping mall, community centre, housing block, sports centre etc.) could also be an interesting way of opening up this service to a variety of citizens.