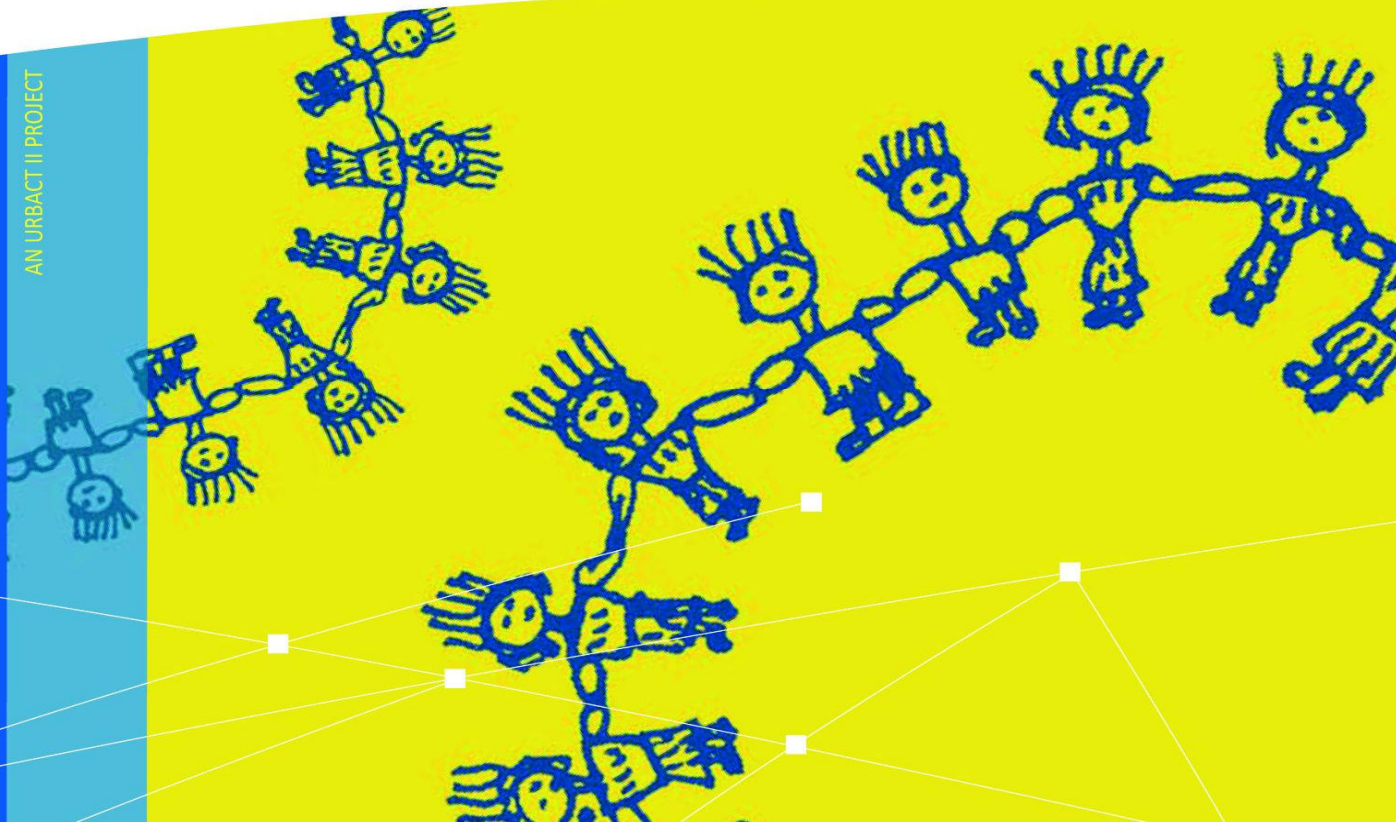





Lead Expert's Report on Meetings in Botkyrka

May 2011

AN URBACT II PROJECT



 <p>TOGETHER Territories of Coresponsibility</p>	<p>URBACT II</p> <p>LEAD EXPERT'S REPORT</p> <p>MAY 2011</p>	<p>Report from visit to Botkyrka</p>
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Background

Botkyrka is an edge city. It lies on the south-western tip of Stockholm around three quarters of an hour by train from the city centre. It is composed of five distinct centres which are concentrated in the northern half of the municipality, with a much more scarcely populated and rural southern half. Botkyrka is very much a product of the famous Swedish government initiative of the 1960s, the One Million Houses Programme. This saw the modernisation of the country's housing stock with one hundred thousand new housing units built each year for a decade. Prior to this programme Botkyrka was a small municipality of around 15,000 people. Between 1970 and 1975 figures more than doubled, growing from 26 000 to 57 000, with the new population largely concentrated onto major public sector owned housing estates. In Alby alone 3,337 apartments were built by the Municipal Housing Company housing more than 8,000 people, out of a current population of 12,000.

These new developments were particularly concentrated in Fittja, Alby, Hallunda and Norsborg on the northern rim of the municipality, nearest to Stockholm but considerable housing and population growth also occurred in Tumba and Tullinge. For the following two decades the overall population grew steadily and today the municipality grows with between 800-1,000 people per year. Currently, it is estimated that the population of the city has reached almost 83,000.

Multi-ethnic population

Initially, the newcomers to Botkyrka were ethnic Swedes, working class people from the capital and from other regions of the country attracted by the prospect of new, modern flats built on greenfield sites on the edge of the city close to lakes, parkland and forests. The ethnic composition of the population has changed significantly over the decades, particularly in the last ten years and especially in the two northern districts of Alby and Fittja. Initially, migrant workers, e.g. Turks and refugees, e.g. Chileans but newcomers from conflicts across the world have followed, so that today it is estimated that more than fifty languages are spoken by the schoolchildren of Alby. Those not born in Sweden or whose parents were not born in Sweden form the majority of the population. As Leif Magnusson, the Director of the Multi-cultural centre, explains,

“Botkyrka has had the largest influx of migrants and refugees proportionately, of anywhere in Sweden.”

Shifting the nature of public services

The council is led by the Social Democrat party in alliance with the Greens and the Left party, while currently most neighbouring municipalities and the Stockholm region are led by the parties of the Right. The council has a good reputation. As Ola Bergstrand a Gothenburg academic working on social economic issues explains,

“this is one of the most forward-thinking and progressive municipalities in Sweden.”

The council has tried to adapt its services and working practices to the latest contemporary thinking over the last two decades. Originally, it followed the traditional top-down model of service provision based around professional service departments – schools, social services etc,- with the housing handled by an arms-length company wholly owned by the municipality. Over time, it has introduced some consultative mechanisms within these services, for example listening to parents and service users. Gradually, it has introduced a territorial dimension into its service provision by organising on a community basis. Thus, it has set up territorial organisations in each of the five main centres within Botkyrka seeking to weave activities together across the municipality and to break down the vertical structure of council organisation. To facilitate citizens’ access to council services the first one-stop shop was set up in Fittja in 1989 and this has been followed by five more across the municipality. This has been supplemented by a more systematic community-based approach pioneered in the Alby district and the granting of small budgets for new community-based initiatives. One major aspect of this move to community development has been a more systematic engagement with citizens via meetings, discussion forums, consultations and seminars. This has culminated in the development of a community strategy for the district agreed after a lengthy consultative process in 2009.

Senior officials within the municipality are realistic about the progress that has been made. Bengt Eliasson from the Mayor’s Office has been working in the municipality for twenty-five years.

“We are trying to get co-operation across services; to involve other public bodies like the police and to link with citizens. There is much more discussion now than there was two years ago.”

Yet he and his colleague Lars Olson, Chief Planning officer responsible for the Alby plan, know that much remains to be done. The professional departments still hold the purse strings. Out of a total council budget of four billion krona each district only receives two hundred thousand krona. As Eliasson expresses it,

“We need to get a better balance with the districts. In the departmental silos, there can be quite some mistrust.”

The Role of Civic Society

One of the most notable features of Botkyrka is the existence of an extensive civil society with a wide variety of organisations, many of which are engaged in a process of dialogue and consultation with the council. This is especially true in Alby. Here more than twenty voluntary and community associations are organised in Council of Associations. Ali Khan, who came to Sweden from Pakistan in 1974 runs the Pakistan Cultural society and is the chairman of the Council of Associations. It acts as the main voice for the voluntary and community sector in the district and organises a number of community activities including an annual Alby Festival.

One of the biggest community organisations is Konya Sports. It organises thirteen football teams from the ages of 8-18 as well as a professional football club currently in the Swedish 2nd Division.

The origins of Konya Sports lie in the Turkish migrant community, particularly concentrated in Fittja but today its teams reflect the multi-ethnic reality of Botkyrka. Looking at its Under 12 team sheet, there are players of Kurdish, Iraqi, Pakistani, Bengali, Syrian and ethnic Swedish as well as Turkish origin.



The club gets an annual 200,000 Swedish Krona grant from the municipality to cover the use of the football pitches for training and games – it's a modern artificial pitch – and it works closely with the council. Its education and development officer, Hasan Uludag, is working on ambitious plans to expand the current facilities as well as linking closely with other associations on a potential joint social economy initiative.

One example of a different type of partnership between the council and civil society is the Subtopia initiative. More than a decade ago, recognising the need to stimulate and encourage new economic activity in Botkyrka, the council set up a company to develop the creative industries and gave it the use of some disused industrial premises. Subtopia opened in 2002 with four organisations. Today, forty-five organisations and companies are based on the site; 3-400 work there and in addition, each year 38,000 people attend conferences and seminars.

Jonas Boutani Werner, the film and media co-ordinator, is enthusiastic about the progress that has been and continues to be made.

“Our job is to attract creative industries to work here and we have been really successful above all with circus and performing arts but also with film and media.”

Companies are attracted by cheap rents – 500 kr. Per square metre a month – and free wi-fi, plus the ambiance. As Werner recognises, this is a slightly unusual project in that

“we're growing it from the top down.”

Effectively, the council makes available the premises; manages the overall operation; but gives the opportunity for companies and cultural associations to base themselves in Subtopia and to develop in their own way with no restrictions placed on them. Thus, the council acts as the springboard for economic development, particularly for the small and micro business sector.

Community Development and the TOGETHER Project

Dennis Latifi, the council's District Development Officer for Alby works closely with all these associations and initiatives as a central part of his job of promoting effective community development within Alby. Along with Ingrid Ramberg from the Multi-Cultural centre, he co-ordinates the engagement of Botkyrka in the EU URBACT TOGETHER project. The TOGETHER project and its ideas of co-responsibility and citizen engagement from the bottom-up coincides with the broad community development approach which is being pursued in Botkyrka, above all in Alby.



The Local Support Group which they have convened to oversee the project reflects the diversity of the Alby district with a mix of local associations, representatives of youth groups and migrant organisations, teachers and council officials. At the meeting on 12th May the group confirmed the

range of focus groups which it intends to set up to do the first phase of the TOGETHER project, with the open-ended questions on well-being and ill-being. These need to be completed by the end of the summer so that the policy analysis can be completed by the time that the TOGETHER partners meet in Botkyrka in September. Additional support with data inputting was offered by Bengt Eliasson.



The group also began to explore potential pilot co-responsibility actions which it could usefully pursue including an initiative on security issues. One idea which will have interest across the TOGETHER project and beyond is on the procurement of services. The idea is that council officials will work with local civic organisations on the criteria for the contracting of local services such as the cleaning, catering and security of community facilities and council buildings. Together, they are looking to draft specific criteria that will root these services much more closely to the communities they are designed to serve with the expectation that locally-based community organisations will win the contracts, so that the work will go to local people. Project work on the criteria is already underway. The thinking behind the proposal is aligned closely to the co-responsibility approach and is geared to helping disadvantaged communities in low income neighbourhoods both to find work and also to strengthen their own social organisations.

Conclusion

What makes the Botkyrka case particularly interesting is that the municipality has already established processes for community engagement but is seeking to strengthen these. The TOGETHER project offers the opportunity to inject new practices into these processes with the potential to deepen the democratic engagement of the local community and its organisations. If successful, this would indicate how both bottom-up processes and co-responsible thinking can contribute to the advances which one Swedish local authority is already undertaking. It will be important to see how this thinking helps influence practice in Botkyrka and whether the Council of Europe's method can be adapted to the community development programmes currently being undertaken.

Jon Bloomfield - 13th May 2011