

# A world worth living in

Examples from folkbildning 2011



Folkbildningsrådet



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# Introduction



What role does folkbildning actually play? Is it important to democracy? Does it mean that people are given opportunities to influence society and obtain tools to influence their living situation? Does it reduce the educational gaps in the country and improve the participants' chances of getting a job or continuing their education? Do study associations and folk high schools broaden interest and increase participation in cultural life? Folkbildning can answer these and similar questions. They basically concern the manner and extent to which the objectives the State stipulated for the government grant are achieved. In this text, we present a selection of Swedish folkbildning with a focus on Swedish folkbildning's international activities.

*A world worth living in* is a text that concerns global development issues. These are emphasized in the latest folkbildning bill *Learn, grow, change* (Bill 2005/06:192). In it, *public health, sustainable development and global justice* have been added to one of seven prioritised areas of activity for study associations and folk high schools:

*State support of folkbildning shall help its organisations contribute to better public health, sustainable development and global justice by increasing people's insight into the importance of changed values and living habits* (page 43).

In this area, a broad field of activity is summarised that encompasses issues of people's living conditions on the short and long term. Ecological, social and economic aspects are included, and broad perspectives and cross-border cooperation are presupposed. Activities need to be developed that lead to changes in approaches and behaviours. By extension, it is a matter of contributing to a world that is possible – and worth – living in.

This is the challenge folkbildning has taken on. All study associations and folk high schools work with global development issues and in one way or other are involved in international work. These issues are addressed in special courses, study circles and

cultural events and are also woven into many other activities. This is particularly clear in the transnational work of the study associations and folk high schools:

This text is about the work of the study associations and folk high schools within the scope of the seventh activity area in Swedish folkbildning. However, this extensive work cannot be done justice in the limited space available here. The global development issues are practically innumerable and they receive broad attention in folkbildning. There are also many transnational and other international activities that are most tangibly permeated by issues of global justice.

Consequently, the National Council of Adult Education has made a selection. In *A world worth living in*, various transnational cooperation projects are presented in which Swedish study associations and folk high schools have played driving roles. The seventh activity area is in focus. This text also relates projects to folkbildning's social objectives and other prioritised areas of activity. The intention is to show how the transnational work fits into a broader folkbildning context.

The idea of the National Council of Adult Education for the text is to contribute to reflection: What possibilities do the study associations and folk high schools have for contributing to a global development that is sustainable on the long term? What are the strengths of folkbildning in this context? What are its weaknesses? What role can and will study associations and folk high schools play in Swedish development cooperation? Are there any obstacles that limit the possibilities?

Stockholm, May 2011

Britten Månsson-Wallin  
*Secretary-General*  
National Council of Adult Education



Keith Palmroth

## From second class to first class citizens

The Agnesberg Folk High School in Gothenburg is a folk high school for Roma students. It was formally established in January 2010. Here, there are 12 employees and 64 participants who attend general courses on three different levels, from preparation for compulsory school to the upper-secondary school level. Agnesberg was founded, and is now led by Soraya Post, who works as a teacher and information officer at the folk high school, and Keith Palmroth, who is the headmaster and administrative manager.

**“AGNESBERG IS THE FIRST ROMA INSTITUTION,** in all categories, in Europe. Ever. This is the first institution that has been established by Roma, on the initiative of Roma, that is led by Roma and the activities of which are directed at Roma. We are unique,” begins Keith. “Folkbildning is pioneering, at least in the form found in Agnesberg.

“And we are not just exotic, as folkbildning specialists, we are productive too,” he continues.

“An equal number of Roma that find jobs are trained here as in the rest of Sweden combined. Next year will be our fourth year and 18 people will graduate with qualifications to enter university. They started from scratch and were barely at the compulsory school level when they came here. Now this class is that good!

“Today, around 200 people from Gothenburg alone are in the queue to begin studies at Agnesberg. I can hardly bear to think of how many want the same opportunity in the rest of the country.”

“Agnesberg is the first Roma institution, in all categories, in Europe. Ever.”

“The formal school system cannot handle this group. Folkbildning is more flexible. We try different solutions, fail sometimes and start over to arrive at the approach that works for our participants.”

**HOWEVER, IF THE NEED IS NOW SO GREAT**, why do the Roma not apply to other folk high schools? Or other kinds of education programmes? Why is a Roma folk high school needed?

“It is a matter of cultural identity and room to manoeuvre,” Soraya summarises. “There is no strong tradition of education among the Roma. On the contrary, many have a low level of education or almost none at all.

“The formal school system cannot handle this group. Folkbildning is more flexible. We try different solutions, fail sometimes and start over to arrive at the approach that works for our participants. We are supported in this work by researchers at University West. At the same time, folkbildning’s pedagogy works well together with the Roma. In the Roma society, respect for the individual is of crucial importance. Nobody is the boss, everyone is their own boss, and this is how we work together.”

After all, this is also the idea of folkbildning.

Folkbildning’s long historical traditions play a role, for better or worse.

“The Roma have begun a class journey that is about going from second class to first class citizens,” says Soraya.

“History shows that folkbildning used to serve as a springboard for other groups that have made similar journeys. This history provides a sense of security that accompanies one, at the same time that we are convinced that folkbildning’s idea still works in the 2000s.

“Folkbildning can lead to Roma parents finding jobs or going on to further studies. Their children learn that education and work are important. This is how folkbildning opens up for new ways of thinking. It is like rings in the water.

“**FOR THE ROMA**, folkbildning is a way to empowerment,” continues Keith. “Unless the system of rules and traditions limits us, we may soon be the largest folk high school in Sweden. However, in such a case, we first need to have the financial prerequisites to be able to take care of those who want to begin studying.

“People are queuing to attend Agnesberg and the grants should go where the money is needed most. Regulations should also not keep us from developing functional educational programmes.

“Moreover, the participants need to receive real opportunities to complete their studies,” emphasizes Soraya.

“Many begin with us with such weak language skills and such large knowledge gaps that they do not have time to obtain compulsory school qualifications before their student aid runs out. By that time, we have managed to motivate them and instil confidence in the future and suddenly they are not allowed to continue. It is frustrating.” ❄



Soraya Post



Lena Lönnqvist

## Folkbildning is about democracy

Lena Lönnqvist is the headmaster of Sjövik Folk High School. For her, folkbildning and democracy are two sides of the same coin. Folkbildning is democracy and democracy is created by folkbildning.

“I BELIEVE THAT EVERYBODY has the desire and ability to do something good with their life,” begins Lena Lönnqvist. “Basically, everyone is capable. I think this is a natural approach in a democracy. Everyone is of equal worth. For me, this is also what folkbildning stands for.

“In the folk high school, we try to build on everyone’s individual skills. For our participants, the studies here at Sjövik are often not their first attempt to acquire an education. Many have not finished compulsory school or upper-secondary school. We constitute the second attempt, or third, or fourth.

“When the participants come here, we assume that they will make something positive of their time here and for many, it goes fantastically. For example, around half complete the general course on the first try, while others need a bit more time.

“I also believe that the meeting between people is important,” continues Lena. “At this folk high school, there are teachers who teach and classmates to discuss things with.

“But we do not make it prestigious to just be nice. Folk high school studies are not about charity. The time here is not without expectations, but rather we work hard to set boundaries and teach responsibility. If one has not previously learned what behaviour and responsibility a citizen of a democratic society is assumed to be able to handle – it is time to learn it here. And it can get somewhat disorderly sometimes. These can be painful lessons to learn.”

“Folk high school studies are not about charity. The time here is not without expectations, but rather we work hard to set boundaries and teach responsibility.”

“Actually, it is impossible for those who cannot see a place for themselves in society to learn social responsibility. If one has no sense of belonging at all.”

**THIS YEAR IN PARTICULAR**, 2009/2010, has been disorderly. Lena cannot really explain why, but other headmasters have said the same thing. Could it be that exclusion from society has increased?

“Actually, it is impossible for those who cannot see a place for themselves in society to learn social responsibility. If one has no sense of belonging at all.”

“I had a young teacher who formulated it so well. She said that she had long viewed “society” as something different from herself, as a group of “other people”. “They” were the ones who decided that you had to pay taxes, who send papers from the National Social Insurance Office, who want you to pay bills, or who arrange healthcare and demand payment on the bus. This may be the folk high school’s most important task when we talk about democracy,” says Lena.

“Our participants should realise that they are members of society and it is therefore that they need to accept social responsibility. They should take care of themselves, but they should also contribute,” emphasizes Lena.

“‘Participation’ is a word of honour. The folk high school participant who realises this has found his place in democracy. Then, I think the folk high school has contributed to a democratic development.”

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS** democratic participation is not only limited to Sweden, Lena feels. She believes that we must see ourselves as a part of the global society and mentions Kista Folk High School as an example. Kista Folk High School served as a branch to Sjövik between 2007 and 2009. Since 2010, it has been an independent folk high school.

Kista is led by a Muslim board, but is open to all.

“I see Kista as a project in democracy,” says Lena. “Here, education is provided that reaches groups in Sweden that have not found a place in the rest of the educational apparatus. When Kista started, we suddenly had 300 applicants in the queue.

This means that folkbildning now reaches men and women from other cultures that all too often are relegated to unqualified, low-paying jobs because they do not have a (Swedish) education. This way, folkbildning makes a very concrete contribution to strengthening and developing democracy,” says Lena.

“By extension, the folk high school can lead these participants to find more qualified jobs in the future, with higher salaries and a higher status. At the same time, it means that we create an educational structure that their children are also influenced by. If the parents’ place is not at the bottom of the labour market, it will also not be a given that the children’s place is there as well. Then, I’m sure that exclusion, frustration and conflicts decrease.

“As I see it, folkbildning can hardly contribute to the development of a democratic society in a more hopeful way,” concludes Lena Lönnqvist. ❁

## Ibn Rushd – meetings in many senses of the word

**INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN NIHLGÅRD, FORMER ASSOCIATION  
CHANCELLOR AT THE IBN RUSHD STUDY ASSOCIATION**

*Ibn Rushd* was an Arab philosopher active in Spain in the 13th century in a time characterised by mutual understanding between Christians, Muslims and Jews. His philosophy is described as a predecessor to modern secularism. Today, these ideas are a given in modern, Western thinking.

Ibn Rushd is also a study association that was formed in 2002 as a cooperative partner to the Sensus study association. Since 2008, Ibn Rushd has been independent. Ibn Rushd's vision is that it should be natural to be Muslim in Sweden. It should be a given for Swedes and Muslims to meet on equal terms.

“In order for real meetings to be able to take place, the Muslim group must build its own identity,” begins Martin. “This is a process that takes time. We need to create meeting places for our member organisations and the Muslims in Sweden that belong to them. They need time for reflection in order to be able to find a sense of pride. Then it is possible to change. Only then can one participate in equal meetings with other groups in society. The majority of Ibn Rushd's activities are directed at the member organisations.”

The very existence of a study association that gathers Muslim and Islamic organisations involves new kinds of meetings within folkbildning.

“In our boards and management groups at various levels and among the employees, we have a diversity that hardly exists anywhere else,” continues Martin. “At least three parts of the world are represented. It is this organisation that is now taking its place and meeting the rest of folkbildning Sweden. It is also an organisation that provides some weight to Muslim issues and influence to Muslim groups. When our member organisations previously turned to other study associations, it was not a given that their issues would be heard or that they would be involved in the decisions.”

Ibn Rushd also interacts with other parts of Swedish society.

“We have been a discussion partner to count on in issues concerning Muslims and Islam. Other study associations, the Church of Sweden, municipalities and even the police turn to us with questions and proposals for cooperation. For example, we are now conducting a project involving kids from the suburbs and their participation in politics. We also have a small operation that is directed at the public.”

“We count on it growing in the future.” ❁

# 3

## Who should get the bucket?

Opposite Lasse's kiosk, in the middle of Österfärnebo, lies the old, yellow vicarage. It and other old wooden buildings around town are occupied by Färnebo Folk High School with the peace, environmental and solidarity movements as member organisations. For around 30 years, Färnebo has arranged travelling courses that have offered Swedish young people the opportunity to visit countries in Latin America and Africa, including Tanzania.

**THE COUNTRIES AROUND LAKE VICTORIA** are struggling with major environmental issues both in terms of fishing and land use, but also with regard to waterborne infections, HIV, AIDS and malaria. If you look for connections with Österfärnebo in the Swedish region of Gästrikland, where the Dalälven River is at its widest, the trouble with mosquitoes comes to mind first. In Färnebo National Park, there is not yet any malaria, but what happens if the climate gets warmer?

The organisation ECOVIC works to take care of the environment and strengthen the people who live around Lake Victoria, both socially and economically.

In the Tanzanian countryside, there are some 50 folk high schools that have been built up with Swedish folkbildning as a role model. They are coordinated by the Karibu Tanzania Association (KTA). Both the organisations collaborate with Färnebo Folk High School with regard to the travelling courses, including through the visit by a group of 14 Tanzanians to Sweden for three months in 2010, with Färnebo as a base and with the support of grants from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).





“Otherwise, we have been able to invite one or two people, but to be able to welcome an entire group that have each other and can enjoy shared experiences is hugely rewarding. They can come to a different country and see how things work here, which would have hardly been possible otherwise. This also opens our eyes to insights as they see things differently than we do,” says Caroline Andersson, coordinator of Färnebo Folk High School.

**THE SWEDISH-TANZANIAN COOPERATION** has deep roots stretching back to the 1960s. Folkbildning is a given ingredient. A type of education that is based on local roots and the participants’ experiences and needs seems to be able to establish a foothold and contribute to building democracy in the most diverse areas of human development. Sweden’s development in the past 150 years is an indicator of this.

At the folk high school in Färnebo, the Tanzanians meet the young Swedes who are preparing their Tanzania trip. Anna-Karin Björnberg is responsible for the Tanzania course, which has the theme of climate and sustainable development.

“There is a meeting in the classroom between people who have incredibly different circumstances,” she says. “Some come from Tanzania, one of the poorest countries in the world. At the beginning, our interns talked about very large-scale issues, like the Swedish recycling system. When the Tanzanians are there, they ask ‘where should we go with our batteries? We understand that you think they’re dangerous and of course we can put them in a bucket, but who will pick up the bucket?’ Then you think, maybe we have to talk about this on a level that we can agree on? This has been such an incredible experience that they could do this together and that they will also do it together in Tanzania, where they will hold joint workshops. The Swedish course participants have had help in getting a Tanzanian perspective. They meet Tanzania and the Tanzanians right here at home and the Tanzanians and the Swedes have learned a great deal from each other. So they have already made their journey, although they have not travelled yet. People complicate matters. But there is humility in the meeting.”

**IN TANZANIA, AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT** week awaits at Färnebo’s twin school, Ilula FDC, and a number of workshops together with the Tanzanians that have now visited Sweden. The theme is recycling, energy, water and tree planting. The Swedish young people live with village families. Anna-Karin Björnberg says that the Swedish young people may have problems in that they think they have to become experts and master everything, but that it instead is a matter of exchanging experiences and finding solutions together, and that this approach works.

“What is sad is that Sida is discontinuing parts of the intern activities in 2011. Our Swedish participants will be able to continue travelling. They can take out stu-

“The Tanzanians and the Swedes have learned a great deal from each other. So they have already made their journey, although they have not travelled yet.”

“We view ourselves as a part of a global popular movement for global justice.”

dent loans to learn more about the world and life. However, the possibility of bringing participants from other countries who would otherwise be unable to do so is disappearing. Our evaluations show that one wants to have long-term relationships, closer cooperation and stronger reciprocity. Being able to invite people strengthens the understanding of who we are as a school and what Sweden is. It is clear that it is not all easy sailing here in Europe. One gains another perspective of our problems and what we are struggling with. In Sweden with its gaps, there are also many who rely on the folk high schools today, that they will play a greater role in democracy and that one will also find alternatives when the political parties are no longer popular movements,” according to Caroline Andersson. “We view ourselves as a part of a global popular movement for global justice.” ❁

## PERSPECTIVES

### Folk high school pedagogy

In the National Council of Adult Education report *Folk High School Participant Survey 2010 – Folkbildning for all?*, the participants describe the most distinctive traits of the pedagogy of the folk high school:

- The slow pace of study
- The teachers’ personal treatment
- The adjustment to the prerequisites of the individual
- The sense of community with one’s fellow students
- The shared learning in the group

The heterogeneous study group is emphasized as a central aspect of learning. Within the folk high school, the participants meet many people and groups that they otherwise would not have come in contact with. The perspectives of each person are thereby broadened. At the same time, the group’s common search for knowledge is enriched by the diversity of experiences and ideas. Respect and consideration become necessary approaches.

### Goals of the transnational work

The report, *Cross-border folkbildning – about the transnational work of folkbildning*, examines what study associations and folk high schools want to achieve with their transnational activities. The answers are grouped under three headings:

- *Giving*: This is the most common objective. These activities often mean spreading Swedish values, democracy or the idea of folkbildning to other countries. They can also involve establishing folkbildning organisations and activities abroad. The Swedish folkbildning practitioners work in an expert or advisor capacity.
- *Receiving*: Activities with this emphasis are less common. They often mean that Swedish folkbildning practitioners or participants in folkbildning will learn more about the living conditions in other countries. Folkbildning practitioners travel out as anthropologists.
- *Exchanging*: The third group of activities involves the parties learning from each other or learning together. This mutual nature is emphasized, as is the equal meeting.

### Folkbildning in Tanzania

The cooperation between Tanzania and the Swedish popular movements extends back to the middle of the 1960s when Tanzania gained its independence. The Tanzanian government then identified a number of areas that the country needed to work on, which presupposed massive adult education efforts. Inspired by Nordic folkbildning, several folk high schools, or Folk Development Colleges, were started with financial support from Sida and in cooperation with Swedish folk high schools and Linköping University. The Karibu association was established around 30 years ago to promote collaboration between the different countries and between twin schools.

There are currently 60 folk high schools in Tanzania. Several of these have twin folk high schools in Sweden.

*(Cross-border folkbildning – about the transnational work of folkbildning)*



Claes och Lotta Toreld

## Hoes and pruning shears

The Hjalpesten farm has been farmed by eight generations of the Toreld family. The origins of the farm's name are just as mysterious as the world-class petroglyphs a few kilometres away. Tanum is home to a world heritage site like San Agustin, Columbia, although San Agustin has stone sculptures. Both tell about daily life 2,000 years ago or more. Today, small farmers work the land in both San Agustin and Tanum. Through the study association, Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, the Toreld family had the opportunity to participate in an exchange trip to Columbia. The project is about ecology and cooperation under the working name "Farmer meets farmer".

**"WE WELCOMED FIVE COLUMBIANS** in 2009 and then visited Columbia in November 2010," says Lotta Toreld.

"Now as the eighth generation is taking over, we saw a chance to have an exchange with colleagues who live under completely different circumstances than we do. We are all small-scale farmers who need to think along new lines and we could learn from each other," adds Claes Toreld.

Before the trip, Lotta and Claes studied Spanish and Columbia as a country as well as its political situation. The country is four times as large as Sweden in terms of geography and population, and is marked by armed conflict between the government, paramilitary forces and the Farc guerrilla. The conflict is often financed by cocaine production.

### Swedish study associations in the world

*Cross-border folkbildning – about the transnational work of folkbildning* describes where in the world the Swedish study associations conducted their transnational work in 2010. Most of the activities presented took place in Europe. In Latin America, 19 activities were reported in nine different countries.

## Common values

Another one of the seven activity areas that is emphasized as a priority in the folkbildung bill 2005/06:192 is common values:

*State support of folkbildung shall contribute to fundamental democratic values, such as the equal worth of all people and equality between the sexes, permeating the activities' content, structure and organisation. (page 25)*

“It is a beautiful country. The Colombians want to show that they have a great deal more there than problems and conflict. They have an agricultural system that is commercially viable and growing, but they do not have the tradition of selling ecological products in the country. It is important to find export markets. However, it is also a matter of organisation. Coffee farmers are well-organised compared to the fruit farmers,” explain Claes and Lotta.

“**APROFRUSA IS A COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION** that comprises 100 fruit farmers. They receive support through the project. For example, the women receive micro-loans,” explains Lotta. “Most of those we met when we visited three districts were men, while the women served us the food. Once, we sat so that we could only see the women and then all the men moved and sat behind their wives! The women could have a garden patch for their own money and the men accepted this. When they were here with us, nobody reacted when I served breakfast and did the dishes. But one day when Claes did it, suddenly every man wanted to wash his own dish! Gender equality is a part of the project.

“They are small, freehold farmers and in that sense, we recognise our own district. Small owner-farmers have strengthened our democracy. This has its origins in cooperation and respect for others and I think this aspect is important. One cannot really rely on others in a country with conflicts and large differences between different groups. It is a question of democracy, relying on each other, beginning to build up trust and doing business. It is a simple thing to think about. They said so too: we should stop fighting and begin doing business with each other.”

With all due deference to organisation and knowledge development, Lotta and Claes felt the strongest about the farmer’s everyday problems, as they call them.

“This includes the fact that he needs tools,” says Claes. “Hoes and pruning shears, you could see right away that they would make things easier. I remember that myself when I began farming 40 years ago. These simple tools that were so easy to use. A light-metal shovel instead of one made of iron, that was a revolution! You should think simple and practical, not just about the big things.”

**ONCE BACK HOME**, Lotta and Claes lecture to the most diverse groups: in Vuxenskolan, at yearly meetings, pub evenings, heritage associations, schools and pensioner associations. They send around a piggy bank and if they ever receive any payment, it all goes to hand tools in San Agustín. They would like to bring a stone sculpture here to generate interest with the help of the shared cultural heritage. Claes is studying to become a Fair Trade ambassador. Few municipalities are aware that Fair Trade not only concerns ecology. It involves fair conditions for workers and the use of pesticides as well.

“This journey has made a major impression on our lives in many ways. We are not going to preach truths. We do not want the idea that you should do what we do, but rather for our experiences to interact through reasoning. Everyone has their own story, if we could only take it in.” ❁

## PERSPECTIVES

### **Folkbildning and Swedish university education in various countries**

In its transnational work, folkbildning often focuses on different parts of the world than higher education does. Participants in the long-term courses at the folk high schools mainly chose to study in Africa (38 per cent), Europe outside the Nordic region and the Baltic States (26 per cent) and Latin America (13 per cent).

Information from the Swedish Central Student Grants Committee (CSN) shows that university students mostly studied at universities in Europe outside the Nordic region and the Baltic States (52 per cent) and in North America (18 per cent) in 2009. Only occasional university students studied in Africa or Latin America, while hardly any folk high school participants chose North America.<sup>1</sup>

These patterns reflect in part the folk high school’s long tradition of solidarity work in countries in Africa and Latin America.

*(Cross-border folkbildning – about the transnational work of folkbildning)*

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<sup>1</sup> Nor does folk high school mobility follow the aid map. Sida’s support to non-governmental organisations in 2009 primarily went to countries in Africa, but also to Latin America and Asia. Most grants went to organisations active in Mozambique, Tanzania, Afghanistan, Kenya and Palestine/West Bank. That same year, the most common exchange countries in folk high schools were Tanzania, India, Germany, the UK and Finland.



## “One is integrated with the soul, from within”

Headmaster Hazrat phoned his friend, Headmaster Per-Inge, to wish him a Happy Christmas. Can we not do something for my country, he said, can we not establish a folk high school? It was 2001. The country was Afghanistan, which had been invaded by the U.S. in the search for al Qaida. The reason was the World Trade Center disaster in New York on 11 September of the same year. After decades of fighting, several generations have no education. Headmaster Hazrat’s own experiences of Swedish folkbildning gave him the idea to offer his countrymen the same opportunity of learning and development.

**WORDS WERE TRANSLATED INTO ACTION.** After a pre-study and a Sida application, the project was able to get started with the Hyllie Park Folk High School in Malmö as the organiser of an extensive Swedish-Afghan network. Per-Inge Andersson is the headmaster of Hyllie Park Folk High School. Elisabet Mörnerud is the activity head for Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) and the contact person for Hyllie Park in the “Adult Learning and Education Facilitation” (ALEF) project, which was initiated in 2007 and forms the working framework for folkbildning work in Afghanistan. Sweden’s man on site was Johan Karlsson, who speaks both Dari and Pashtu, the two prominent languages in the country:

“We call them training centres. There is one in Kabul, one in Kandahar and one in Faizabad. They are run by Afghans who are leaders and in cooperation with

### **The challenges of a multicultural society**

Another one of the prioritised areas of activity emphasized in the folkbildning bill concerns the challenges of a multicultural society:

*State support of folkbildning shall help its organisations contribute to people with different backgrounds meeting, obtaining greater understanding for each other and exchanging experiences so as to counter exclusion, segregation, conflicts and discrimination (page 27).*

volunteer organisations. The idea was to represent another type of learning. It did not matter what subjects were covered; that has grown forth in various rounds and various ways. Some English training, computers, management, alphabetisation, vocational training, bare-foot midwives, business training. It is important to work with something people see a need for and really want to learn,” says Johan, who worked with the project in Afghanistan for five years.

“One of the many stakeholders in the project, the Swedish-Afghan Network for Afghanistan (SANA), has meant a great deal to me personally and to so many others that it is almost hard. After 11 September, it was terrible both for Afghans and Afghanistan. The entire country was bombed and you couldn’t do anything. So the project gave us the hope that we might be able to direct our will and energy towards something positive,” explains Hamida Nabi, SFI teacher and one of the people behind Hyllie Park’s method of mother-tongue based SFI. She came to Sweden from Afghanistan as a teenager. She continues:

“I think what we do differently is that we use Afghans who live in Sweden, their knowledge and ideas, together with Swedish folkbildning knowledge and experience and the experiences of the Afghans who live in Afghanistan. They know about the possibilities in Afghanistan today much better than we who live here. And we know much more about other possibilities that can improve quality of life and fairness than what they know there. So the project means that we can better find channels so that we can supplement each other. Build and come up with something new.”

**OVER THE YEARS**, many trips have been made within the scope of the project. In 2010, a folkbildning conference was arranged with Swedish involvement in Kabul and the same year, three Afghan leaders visited Malmö. They represented different ethnic groups and two different languages.

“And when they walked around and talked with us, we are from the north, the south and Kabul and they asked how we met? How do you work? Can you work together? That is what is so good with this project,” says Hamida, “it gave us possibilities to meet each other, sit together and be able to talk with each other in different ethnic groups. I think this is the best effect for us Afghans here in Sweden. One is integrated with the soul, from within. It is not just a question of laws and rules. Firstly, respect for each other’s differences. Then, equality is created. Believing that the other person can too is the main thing and that is also what happens in Afghanistan.

**IN THE VILLAGES IN AFGHANISTAN**, the elders have spoken and consulted with each other to arrive at a solution since time immemorial. Johan says that these folkbild-



Elisabeth Mörnerud

“Society is built by people. If people are not afforded the opportunity to build something of their own, then I do not think you have succeeded.”

ing concepts definitely exist there, but that they have not been applied in schools. However, there is a readiness and openness to trying because it is something they are already familiar with. Elisabet Mörnerud points out that there are also models in the home for passing on the knowledge of how to embroider or prepare a certain dish:

“Once we manage to explain that this is something they already have although they might not be aware of it is when it gains strength. Folkbildning has to take root in the Afghan soil, after all. This project is a small sapling that needs to grow for many years; it won’t happen over night. The earth is very hard, but then you begin watering it and it blooms like this. As it stands today, the project has survived many knocks as well as successes. It is still fragile. But now there is something owned by people who live there that has taken a foothold in their thoughts. This is a very good beginning. We do not know how it will go in the future and it would not necessarily be a failure if the project were discontinued, because it will live on in other forms. We are working to obtain more Sida funding at least for a while.

“All development comes from people,” concludes Hamida Nabi. “Society is built by people. If people are not afforded the opportunity to build something of their own, then I do not think you have succeeded. I think it will take many years to achieve democracy, just like after the first folk high school was built in Sweden. That was 140–150 years ago, but it is still going strong, even growing into Afghanistan. I hope that in 100 years, they will be building democracy there, which is huge. Compare that to bombing democracy to pieces for more than ten years and what has been gained? Nothing.” ❁

## PERSPECTIVES

### Folkbildning as a meeting place

Folkbildning gathers participants of different genders, ethnic backgrounds and ages, those with and without disabilities and those who are in socially and economically different stages in life.

However, the fact that the participant population as a whole is mixed does not necessarily mean that those with different backgrounds meet in study circles or folk high school courses. The proportion of men, the participants’ age composition, the proportion of participants who are immigrants and the proportion of participants with

disabilities vary widely between different study associations and folk high schools. Participants with different backgrounds and circumstances do not always mix in the actual activities.

This is not necessarily a problem. People with shared needs and interests have in the past formed associations and sought out folkbildning to strengthen their identity and seek out the like-minded. This is still happening. A challenge for study associations and folk high schools today is to combat segregation, i.e. to prevent an involuntary division of different groups.

*(National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010)*

### **Participants with a foreign background**

In 2010, approximately 16 per cent of the participants in Sweden's study circles had a foreign background. The proportion varied widely between the study associations – from 82 per cent at most to 7 per cent in the study association with the lowest proportion. In 33 per cent of the circles, there were both participants with Swedish and foreign backgrounds. In 51 per cent of all study circles, all participants had a Swedish background, i.e. were born in Sweden and had at least one parent born in Sweden. In the rest, 16 per cent, all of the participants had a foreign background.

In the folk high schools, participants with a foreign background accounted for 38 per cent of those in the general courses and 14 per cent of those in the special courses. Of these participants, 80 per cent were born abroad. The proportions also varied widely among the folk high schools – in general courses, this varied between 99 per cent participants with a foreign background and none at all, and in the special courses, it varied between 59 per cent participants with a foreign background and none at all.

*(National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010)*



## “Everything we do should be thought out”

On the street of Bangårdsgatan, across from the Central Station in Uppsala, lies the café FOKUS, an activity within the Uppsala County international women’s network, NBV.

FOKUS stands for the Swedish equivalent of “forum for women’s development and independence”. One Monday evening in December, participants meet for tea and coffee. It is a warm and vibrant atmosphere.

“A GREAT MANY WOMEN work to promote women’s development in various areas with different things. A network is needed to obtain stability and feel like one is a part of something. This café is a place we can meet, share knowledge and help each other with decisions that need to be made. Give each other strength. We have discussions, dance, laugh and cry,” says Talin Ghadimi, consultant and network coordinator.

One of the objectives of FOKUS is an equal distribution of power and influence, and another is economic equality. A third objective is an equal distribution of unpaid home and care work.

“A great deal involves the law, often individual legal discussions. Many women do not know that they can have their own bank accounts. They have a man who makes investments, and so it goes. Finances are an arena where women lose out and this is also true of Swedish women. Financial independence is important; it is a question of having power.

“We should recognise that it is very difficult to get a job in Sweden as an immi-

### Folkbildning’s influence objective

Folkbildning’s second objective involves making it possible for people to influence their living situation locally, regionally and nationally. It is about empowerment – about people taking power over their own lives, in their residential area, at the workplace and in daily life. Folkbildning should also contribute to creating commitment and interest in influencing the development of society.

### Meetings between men and women

Men and women do not always meet in the study circles and courses of folk-bildning:

In 26 per cent of all study circles in 2010, women accounted for 10 per cent or less of the participants, and in 22 per cent, the proportion of men was 10 per cent or less. This means that nearly half of the circles were essentially single-sex circles.

The proportion of women in the folk high schools' long-term courses varied between different folk high schools, from 33 to 97 per cent (one folk high school). At a majority of the schools, the proportion of women in the long-term courses was larger than 60 per cent. (*National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010*)

grant. If on top of this one must wear a veil, it forms a double handicap. We won't pretend that we will be able to turn things around a full 360 degrees, but we should make sure something happens, in terms of each one of our circumstances and we do so in the network. Like the network, I have extensive experience, and a burning desire, strong will and passionate sense of responsibility are needed. This feeling is also shared by the café's committed volunteers and they are irreplaceable."

**AT REGULAR INTERVALS**, lectures on honour and virginity are held as a part of the fourth sub-objective, the end of men's violence against women. These are more than well-attended by school counsellors, teachers, social workers, private individuals and many students.

"If one has insufficient knowledge in the professional groups that meet children and young people, one might speak to boys and girls in the wrong manner, adopting a family perspective. Here, we talk about the rights of the child, not the family! We also work against forced marriages and have lectures on human trafficking for sexual purposes. You cannot see the ties unless you look behind the controlling mechanisms. Power. Men's violence. Patriarchy. I usually ask: what category is it that there are no special laws to protect them? The answer is: White men! The laws exist for them. Who wrote the law? When and why did the Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services come about? Is it related to there being more women in the Swedish Parliament than before?"

"I see adults who have come to Sweden walk in line through town behind their SFI teacher, who is going to show them what it is like in Sweden, like a guru. We don't do that here. We ask, what do you want? Check yourself, you can do it! We turn over the responsibility."

**"I AM CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT POLICIES** in which we are in the midst of losing the humanist perspective, which degrades our schools and healthcare system. Folk-bildning is one of the few types of education that is left. Folkbildning has a responsibility. Here in Sweden, we have had great poverty. There, folkbildning is one of the major pillars that meant that people were given the opportunity to get an education and develop further, that allowed them to have their voice heard. Folkbildning is an arena where we can have an influence, but we have to have a well-prepared idea. Everything we do should be thought out." ❄

### **Folkbildning moves into the cities**

Today, folkbildning serves as nationwide infrastructure for culture and formative education. The study associations offer activities throughout Sweden, in every municipality, and the 150 folk high schools conduct activities with government grants in 160 municipalities. Folk high school participants are recruited from the whole country.

Some changes have taken place in terms of the geographic distribution. Between 1997 and 2011, the number of local chapters of the study associations decreased from a total of 642 to 333.

Among the folk high schools, an urbanising trend can be distinguished. During the period 1991-2010, 23 new folk high schools were established. Most of them, 13, were established in one of Sweden's large towns. This development is strengthened by three of the existing folk high schools moving operations from the countryside to the city. At the same time, comparatively many folk high schools established new branches in cities or suburbs. In 2010, just over 51 per cent of the folk high schools' long-term courses were held in major cities, suburban municipalities or large towns.

*(National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010)*

### **Women participants in folkbildning**

There are more women than men in folkbildning, just like in other types of adult education. In 2010, women accounted for 57 per cent of the study circle participants, 64 per cent of the participants in other folkbildning activities, 57 per cent of the study association's cultural programmes, 60 per cent of the folk high schools' general courses and 66 per cent of the special courses. This gender distribution has remained virtually unchanged in most of the activities of folkbildning for at least the past ten years.

The distribution between male and female participants varies: The proportion of women varies between 67 and 45 per cent in the various study circles of the study associations. One of the folk high schools has only women in its general and special courses. The folk high school with the lowest proportion of women indicates that women account for 25 per cent of participants in the general course and 33 per cent in the special course.

*(National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010)*

# 7

## Folkbildning foxtrot

### Life-long learning

Another prioritised activity area in the folkbildning bill concerns life-long learning:

*State support of folkbildning shall help study associations and folk high schools contribute to the realisation of the possibility of life-long learning for adults, alternative routes to achieve upper-secondary school competency and further studies as well as professional education. (page 32)*

“We have a problem, Håkan.”

“Oh yeah, what’s that?”

“We have a hundred people who registered for a computer study circle.”

“One hundred? We just came down!”

**HÅKAN CHALTO IS THE OMBUDSMAN** in the Fybodal Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), which was offered the chance to do something in terms of folkbildning with the Uddevalla workers’ association in Busovaca, a town in the strongly segregated Manitravnic area in Bosnia.

“The children are already separated in preschool. Croatians live there and Bosniaks, or Muslims as they are called, live elsewhere. In the school, Croatians have the morning shift and the Muslims have the afternoon shift. It is actually only in the WEA that they are together. This is both frightening and promising. After visiting the WEA, people continue spending time together afterwards. It unties some knots.

So it involved starting a WEA in Bosnia. A young Bosnian delegation came for a visit in June, training was held in August, as well as a study circle leader training on site in October. At the next visit in Sweden, the Bosnian’s wanted the WEA’s help. They thought this was so good.

“It was not a given for us to begin work down there. We saw that there was a need, but we had let so many staff members go here at home. It was a difficult decision, but with support from our regional unit, we decided to do it. In July 2004, we went down and formed the ABF Busovaca. They chose to call themselves ABF



Håkan Chalto

“Old professors are taught by their former students. Two 18-year-olds, a girl and a guy, had the mayor as a student.”

(Swedish for WEA) instead of the Bosnian term ROS. Silly to change something that’s good, they thought.

**THE FIGURES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES:** ABF Busovaca arranges 60-70 study circles a year in many subjects. Computers, English, German, the Internet, decoupage, jewellery, dance and needlework. Needlework for professional activities has led to some newly started companies. The circle leaders are young, highly educated students between the ages of 18 and 30 who receive pedagogic training from the Swedes. Most of the participants are also significantly younger than in Swedish study circles.”

“Young people welcome their previous teachers in English and computer study circles, for instance. Old professors are taught by their former students. Two 18-year-olds, a girl and a guy, had the mayor as a student.”

Statistics indicate that there are more women than men among the participants, just like in Sweden. In terms of percentages, there are as many Muslims as Croatians and the circle leader group is multi-ethnic. One exchanges with the healthcare centre, which comes and holds lectures on breast and cervical cancer and receives computer training in return. On the initiative of the mayor, there is collaboration with Sida for waste management and in 2011, they are beginning an environmental and climate venture together with a Swedish company.

“In Sweden, we study associations, and perhaps the WEA in particular, have blinders on with regard to the corporate world. Down there, we are more a study association than a WEA. However, we do not ignore the folkbildning aspects and the staff we have in Bosnia is probably just as well trained in folkbildning pedagogy and ethics as we are here.

**“AFTER ALL, THIS IS A QUESTION** of using our methodology, our pedagogy to explain that we do not say yes to a single member organisation if it is not multiethnic and democratic in its structure. We have told many associations no, purely Muslim, purely Croatian, just because they do not accept all groups. We work indirectly with building a society that is there for all of its residents. We have experienced certain effects that are headed in this direction, but we do have such examples that go in the completely opposite direction. It is a little of a foxtrot, two steps forward and one step back.

In 2012, ABF Busovaca is meant to be able to stand on its own two legs as that is when the project period ends. There is no lack of passion or core supporters. Continued survival is a question of financing: participant fees, social support, corporate collaboration.

“Folkbildning can play in many arenas. This is what I think is important: we try not to make them do what we do. However, it is important that Swedish experience meets Bosnian folkbildning.” ❁

## PERSPECTIVES

### Participants of different ages

Study associations and folk high schools attract slightly different age groups. The study associations’ participants are generally older than those in folk high school. Statistics from Statistics Sweden show that 52 per cent of the participants in folk high school long-term courses were 25 years of age or younger in 2010. The corresponding figure among the study associations’ circle participants and participants in other folkbildning activities was 23 per cent. Of the study circle participants, 33 per cent were 65 or older, however. In folk high schools, only 7 per cent of the participants had reach retirement age.

The National Council of Adult Education’s circle participant surveys show that the proportion of older circle participants has increased over time, in pace with population growth. According to Statistics Sweden’s information, however, the proportion of circle participants who are 65 years of age or older is significantly larger than this group’s share of Sweden’s population – 33 per cent compared with 18 per cent of the population.

*(National Council of Adult Education’s annual report with the report on operations 2010)*

### Folkbildning’s teachers and leaders

In the government grant conditions of 2007, it is established that the study circle leader must be approved by the study association and must have undergone introductory training. Through the implementation of *step G*, there are now jointly accepted minimum requirements for what should be included in the basic training of a study circle leader. In the 2010 national report on folkbildning’s quality work, the National Council of Adult Education confirms that around 40,000 of the slightly more than 100,000 circle leaders in total took part in *step G*.

The folk high schools decide themselves what pedagogical competencies the teachers should have. The requirements set are generally high. In 2010, the proportion of

teachers in folk high schools with a degree in education was just as high as among teachers in municipal adult education and upper-secondary school.

The folk high school's teaching staff are also experienced folkbildning practitioners. On average, the teachers have been employed at the folk high school for 11 years, and at study associations for one year. Mainly in the special courses, it is often a prerequisite that the teachers have professional vocational experience, such as being an artist.

*(National Council of Adult Education's annual report with the report on operations 2010)*



## The Swedish National Council of Adult Education

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education is a non-profit association with certain authoritative tasks delegated by the government and the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament). The Council distributes government grants to study associations and folk high schools, submits budgetary documentation and annual reports to the government and follows up and evaluates folkbildning activities. The Council also works with certain assignments from the members.

The National Council of Adult Education has three members: The Swedish Adult Education Association (SAEA), the Interest Organisation for Popular Movement Folk High Schools (RIO) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The National Council of Adult Education's office is located in Stockholm, at which some twenty people are employed.

For more information, please visit [www.folkbildning.se](http://www.folkbildning.se).

**In *A world worth living in***, various transnational cooperation projects are presented in which Swedish study associations and folk high schools have played driving roles. This text also relates projects to folkbildning's social objectives and other prioritised areas of activity. The intention is to show how the transnational work fits into a broader folkbildning context.

**The idea of the** National Council of Adult Education for the text is to contribute to reflection: What possibilities do the study associations and folk high schools have for contributing to a global development that is sustainable on the long term? What are the strengths of folkbildning in this context? What are its weaknesses? What role can and will study associations and folk high schools play in Swedish development cooperation? Are there any obstacles that limit the possibilities?

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