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Successes and failures in an unorthodox neighbourhood project

By

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Introduction

This paper describes an experiment in which a city district ward tries to improve communication with the residents of a densely populated, multicultural inner city area. The experiment is performed in a situation where the labour market is falling seriously and where the dependency on social aid is large. It is an area with serious problems. Many of its residents feel alienated from society and neglected of the decision makers. One goal of the experiment is to adapt the governing of the area to the needs of its population. Another goal is to develop a structure furthering dialogue between authorities and residents.

The experiment has two main ingredients. The one is what we call the Action Plan Process and the other is Linkwork. In practice the first one is dependent on the second one. We describe these methods and reflect on their usefulness and relevance. We also discuss what appears to be applicable in a wider context. Metropolitan districts where the inhabitants feel alienated and neglected is no unique phenomenon.

The material for this paper comes in part from participant observation and interviews with residents, city officials and other actors in the Seved district. The material was conducted during the years of 2004 – 2005 and consists of about 40 tape-recorded qualitative interviews. The observations were performed during the Seved Forum monthly meetings as well as during serial meetings, e.g. meetings gathering residents, politicians and city officers in order to discuss the future of the area. In addition, it contains material and experiences from our evaluation of what is called the Metropolitan Project, a project that goes back to the year of 2000

The City

Malmö is a former industrial city situated in the south of Sweden. It has about a quarter of a million inhabitants and is the third largest city in the country. The city is also one of the principal centres in a densely populated metropolitan region, crossing the nation border into Danish territory. As an industrial city Malmö had a peak period stretching from the end of the Second World War to the oil crisis in the 1970-ies. At that time, Malmö was a homogenous Swedish-ethnic city, although heavily segregated in a socioeconomic respect. From the 1960 and onward larger parts of the more affluent households migrated to houses in the surrounding municipalities, resulting in housing vacancies.

The housing vacancies in Malmö caused a new sorting where the Swedish-ethnic households tended to be concentrated to the old middleclass districts, The old worker-areas and, not least,

the newer multi-flat areas in the outskirts of the city were filled by young people that could get their first own dwelling here and by immigrant households.

In the 1980- and 1990-ies, the industrial crisis deepened, yet the inflow of immigrants continued. At this time, the immigrants, mainly political and economic refugees, came from Chile, Turkey, Iran, Former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Iraq. Other significant groups of immigrants were Romans from Eastern Europe and Albanians from Kosovo.

During the 1990-ies Malmö shifted from a city dominated by the wharf industry and manufactures of various kinds to a city dominated by IT, high technology and higher education. This transformation owes much to the building of a university, which expanded rapidly and today Malmö University has more than 20000 students. New problems arose, mainly in the form of lack of personnel to go with the newly established structure. The major part of the municipality's labour supply consisted of relatively low educated people, people who became unemployed when the heavy and the light industries were liquidated.

In addition to this development, the influx of political and economic refugees seeking a harbour in Malmö increased far beyond the city's capacity. This is per se nothing new, it is a well-known fact that people are attracted to metropolitan areas. However, partly due to its location in the South of Sweden, and partly due to the fact that there were many dwelling vacancies, Malmö received a disproportionate large part of the immigrants. Among the refugees there are to be sure some highly educated but also several with none or very low education. Practically all of them have difficulties with the Swedish language, which make them less attractive on the labour market than those that have Swedish as their mother tongue.

The Area

Malmö has always been a segregated city. During the last two decades the segregation has increased, especially ethnically. The area, Södra Sofielund, which is the target area for our study, is located in the outskirts of Malmö's inner city. This area used to be a pronounced worker district, with the no longer existing factories and shops within walking and bicycling distance. The old industrial buildings of the city have been converted into warehouse, stores, offices, and sometimes, spaces for spare time activities or voluntary associations.



Aerial photograph I over Södra Sofielund

Södra Sofielund consists of relatively idyllic blocks of small single-family houses and comparably stable parts of multifamily houses that are well managed by the municipal housing enterprise. But there are also very problematic parts with absent private landlord who mismanage their estates. The rate of inhabitants who have foreign background is higher than in the city district as a whole, as is the ratio of unemployed people who are dependent on social aid. The area is populated with households consisting of both single households and households with three or more family members. The outdoor environment is not child friendly, many of the residents perceive the traffic situation as dangerous, especially for children. Addict problems and insecurity are significant problems in parts of the area.

From table 1 can be seen that the area today has a population number close to 4500, which is about 1500 fewer than was the case in the year 1961.

But we can also see that the area has went through a development in which the population number 1981 only was about 3000, which is barely half of the number twenty years earlier. The area has thus gone through large demographic changes during its existence

Table 1 Number of inhabitants in Södra Sofielund 1961-2004

Year	Number of inhabitants	Year	Number of inhabitants
1961	6091	2001	4073
1971	4567	2002	4213
1981	3081	2003	4332
1991	3232	2004	4398

As the original Swedish worker population has moved away the dwellings have been replenished with people coming from immigrant groups who are dominant today. The comparatively largest group consists of people that have Arabic as their native language, followed by people with Bosnian, Albanian and Somalian as their languages. It can be noted that the group with Polish background (see table 2) to a large extent has a dialect of Romany language as their native language. There are also many people among other nation groups, which have roman origin.

Table 2 shows that altogether 59 percent of the population in Södra Sofielund are either born abroad or in Sweden but with both parents born abroad. The corresponding figure for Malmö as a whole is 33 percent.

Table 2 Foreign background of the population in Södra Sofielund (1 Jan. 2004)

Country (the five largest groups)	Born abroad	Born in Sweden with both parents born abroad,
Irak	262	38
Bosnien-Hercegovina	245	42
Jugoslavien	198	52
Somalia	148	107
Polen	93	32
TOTALT	1987	636
Andel av folkmängd	45 %	14 %

A few more figures shall here be given in order to describe the character of the area. The employment rate is of course important. It appears that 41 percent of the population aged 16 –

64 years are employed in Södra Sofielund. The corresponding figure for Malmö as a whole is 63 percent, which by certain also is a low portion. Each third person over 16 years of age in Södra Sofielund got social aid during 2003. In Malmö as a whole the same was due to each 10th person.

Another circumstance, which has appeared to be important for the situation in Södra Sofielund is that close to half of the dwellings have private renting as tenure form. It is usually small properties that have some ten or twenty units each.

Table 3 Tenure forms in Södra Sofielund (1 jan 2004)

Tenure	Total	%
Renting, Municipal housing	510	23
Renting, Private landlords	1007	45
Cooperative housing	566	25
Owner occupied houses	138	6
Sum	2221	100

The Metropolitan Project

The important background to the special project, which we will evaluate in this paper, is "The Metropolitan Project", a large-scale plan for integration, carried out in Malmö and two other metropolitan areas in Sweden since 2000. The project was initiated to counteract and relieve consequences of segregation and to find ways out of the situation described. So far, the Swedish government has invested 200 million Euro and the cities concerned have agreed to invest the equivalent amount of money and to realise extensive local plans of action. Most of the money has been directed to the introduction of immigrants into the labour market and for education purposes, especially language training. Some of the invested money has been used to facilitate integration by means of democratic participation, cultural communication, increased security and better health conditions in districts with a high rate of immigrants. The district offices have been allowed to design these "democracy projects" on basis of local conditions and policies.

In Södra Innerstaden, which is one of Malmö's 10 districts with its own administration of the "soft" sectors such as schools, elderly care and social work. The distinctive feature of

development work in the Metropolitan project has been an ambition to get a close dialogue with the inhabitants and to design activities and methods according to the needs and wants that are expressed in this dialogue. In Södra Innerstaden this motivated the management to organise five “Neighbourhood Upheavals”, spread out in different parts of the district, in locals where staff was available to give information, service and help in organising activities. To facilitate the communication between authorities, organisations and individuals, the personnel functions as link workers, (Andersson et al. 2003a)

The experiences of linkwork and of cooperation across sectors have been good. When the decision makers in Södra Innerstaden discussed how the remaining money from the metropolitan project should be used, it was decided to allocate a larger portion of it to Södra Sofielund, which was “the residential area that altogether had the largest problems in the district”.

It was also decided that the contributions here should be made according to the expressed need of the population and to be distributed in co-operation with existing civil services and local actors. Regular money was also put in the project in order to guarantee that the project can continue on longer terms. From 2006 and forward the project will go on with funds from the regular budget of the district.

The Design and Organisation of the Project

The aim of the project is according to official minutes in the district “to break the social, ethnic and discriminating segregation in Södra Sofielund and work toward equal and equivalent living conditions for the inhabitants.”

More specifically the goals are:

- To get a general picture of Södra Sofielund so that the city ward of Södra Innerstaden can adapt its administration to the needs of services, information and knowledge that are found in the area.
- To develop structures for dialogue between authorities and residents.

Under these basic goals effect goals have been formulated that concern Work and Education, School and Language, Democracy and Involvement as well as Security and Health.

The design of the project is directly consequential of the experiences from earlier metropolitan projects. The method, link working, which was used in many of these projects shall also be used in this effort. In order to support needs for dialogues and co-operations between residents as well as between residents and different authorities and institutions, the idea is to work locally as well as across sectors.

We thus have a city ward, which runs two different models for administration. On one hand there is the relatively traditional form of public administration that is valid in the ward as a whole. On the other hand there is the model being developed for Södra Sofielund. If the former, the traditional one, can be described as consisting of several sectors and governed by rules, the latter is sector- transcendent in the sense that the model works to involve the citizens, striving to furthering co-operation between citizens and authorities and institutions. One of the questions evoked in our evaluation relates to issues concerning how this unconventional attempt, inherent in this model, will influence the work of the city ward more generally. This aspect will not, however, be discussed in this paper. Instead, we concentrate on the analysis of the situation and the development of the project area.

Apart from the challenge of engaging the ward administration, politicians, voluntary associations and other local actors in the border transcending work inherent in the Södra Sofielund project, there is also the challenge of the partition of local and central public administration in Malmö. We think that one of the prerequisites of the present design of the effort in Södra Sofielund is that Malmö is divided into city wards. Because of this the local conditions and experiences have got a heavy breakthrough and it has been possible to establish cooperation across different sectors. The divided areas of responsibility are a concurrent problem. The district ward has responsibility for “soft” sectors such as “Employment and Support”, “Children and Youth”, “Individuals and Families” while the responsibility for sectors such as Physical Planning and Environment lies central. In order to ameliorate the traffic situation, the outside environment and parts of housing situation there is a need to establish cooperation with some of the central organs or to make the central administration and politicians aware of that these issues have high priority locally.

Figure 1 gives a general view of the organisation of the project as it appeared in spring 2005. At the centre there is the “*Unit for the Seved Project*”¹ which is a subunit to the department for Employment and Support (not in picture) in the district ward of Södra Innerstaden. The unit coordinates the project, takes initiative actions and executes the ward’s decisions about the project area. The unit is also organiser of the staff (linkworkers) on the *Meeting Place*.

A unit chief, who has a general responsibility, heads the unit. The chief sees to that the political committees in the city and in the different departments of the district ward have knowledge of the Seved Project. This is done through the Political Steering Group and the Operative Steering

¹ The project is often called the Seved Project after the name of the central part of Södra Sofielund.

Group respectively. The unit chief has responsibility to summon these groups and present the items on the agenda. The Political Steering Group consists of members from a number of different political committees (The committees of Leisure, of Environment, of City Planning, of Technical Matters and of the Ward Council of Södra Innerstaden). The Operative Steering Group consists of the principals for the different civil departments in the ward and is headed by the top principal of the ward administration.²

A project leader is in charge of the operative leadership in the field. This person has also the responsibility to lead Seved Forum, which is an organ where several of the local institutions of Södra Sofielund (preschools, schools, the department for economic support etc) and local voluntary associations are represented. In Seved Forum, which up till now has met almost monthly, there has been given continuous reports of what is accomplished in the project and what is planned for the near future. The forum has also to decide of how certain funds shall be distributed to different subprojects inside the frame of the Seved Project. The grants have been able to be given, after application, to internal (that is internal to the district ward) as well as to external projects (e.g. to a local voluntary association)³

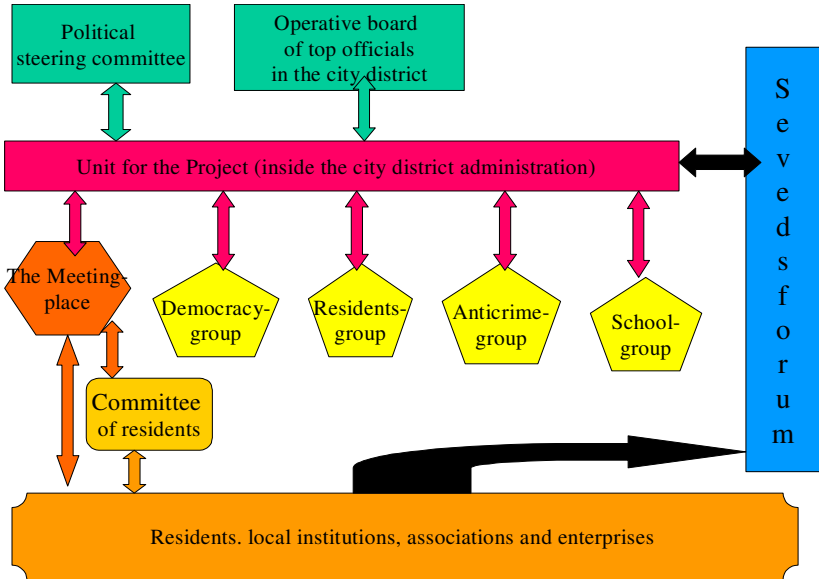


Figure 1 Schematic picture of the organisation of the Seved Project

² The departments are Employment and Support, Children and Youth, Individuals and Families. Other members are representatives from Malmö University, the Municipal Housing Company, the Youth Council, the City Planning office for east Malmö and a local sport centre (private).

³ During 2004 this fund had only about 150000 SEK (16000 Euro)

The Meeting place consists of some small rooms at street level on the local square in the area. During the year of 2004 two civil servants had their place of work here. These officers were responsible for keeping the rooms open for residents and to facilitate the contacts between the residents and the politicians and the other civil servants in the ward. Attached to the Meeting Place there is also what has been called *Committee of Residents*. It is a group of volunteers from the area who in different ways have shown an interest in the Seved Project. These persons have accepted to be engaged in a more organised kind of collaboration with the staff at the meeting place.

Finally the picture shows that there are four groups, here mentioned as the Democracy Group, the Resident Group, the Anticrime Group and the School Group. These groups are central to the project and in co-operation with the project leader, they are responsible for preparing and accomplishing what is called the action plans of the project. The groups vary in composition of officials and residents.

The Action Plans are, in fact, the central ideas of the Seved Project. In the process of formulating the action plans there have been repeated meetings. These are called *Future Scenarios* and *Reconnection Seminars*, to which representatives from residents (see Committee of residents in figure 1), voluntary associations, local officials, officials from the ward administration and politicians have been invited. Between 50 and 100 persons have participated. On the Future Scenarios the most important task has been to arrive, in dialogue with the participators, to what positive and negative visions that can be held about the development of the area and what actions might produce the most positive visions in reality and hinder the negative ones. In practice the dialogue was performed after that the participants had been divided into smaller groups, which first discussed the situation in the area. Each group then summarized in plenum of what had been said. The summaries were formulated in short sentences or labels, which then were sorted under different headings according to content and written on the whiteboard. Each participant then had to place marks on two paragraphs, which in their opinion were of particularly importance. By this procedure prioritized topics came forward as result. Finally the participants were instructed to place themselves at the prioritized topic they wanted to work with. The sessions have ended with decisions of which topics that will become action plans and which persons that shall be responsible for that the plans shall be carried out. The groups of Housing, Democracy, Crime prevention and School have been created in this process.

On the Reconnections seminars the results of the work to accomplish the action plans have been followed up and discussed. The action plans have also regularly been on the agenda in the meetings of Seved Forum.

As have been pointed out earlier in this text, the work inside the project is carried out with what is called the Linkwork method. This method implies that hired professionals, called linkworkers, function as a mobilising force and uniting links to residents in the neighbourhood. The linkworker shall “connect” and in an intelligible way communicate and transfer messages from context to context.

The need for linkworkers can be understood if we think of society as an immense network of relations, formal and informal, which develop on different levels and in different subsystems.(Andersson et al. 2003a; Somerville and Steel 1999) Some networks are well connected and included in a conglomerate of networks whereas others are more isolated. The sub-nets are in different distances from those who have power and influence over society and the welfare of people. The more distant in the periphery relative to the important subsystem as a person is situated, the less influence and the less access will he or she have on resources that can be distributed through the different subsystems. The more restricted a network is, the more weak the contacts between different subsystem, resulting in difficulties for people belonging to one subsystem to understand the rules, norms, intentions and demands that are formed in another subsystem, or contrary to this, to make needs, wishes, reactions, problems and resources evident for another subsystem. Of decisive importance for a good development and integration is therefore that links are created among different subsystems, groups and persons.

In today’s situation, the linkworkers (there are four) who work in the Seved Project function as communicating, transferring and mobilising links. Besides the professional linkworkers that we focus in our study there are also linkworkers in voluntary associations and on a more informal level.

Reflections of the action plan process and of the linkwork method

Characteristic for the organisation of the Seved Project and for the work within is the disposition to change. This disposition can be seen as a sign of both strength and weakness. It can either be dependent of that the results wanted are missing or be an adaptation to what is achieved. In this presentation we give an overview of the development of the organisation and the linkwork method. We focus on the linkwork method as an effect of experiences made and as an adaptation to what has been accomplished. Added to this is the changes that have been necessary due to economic factors.

Having limited space and time, we direct our attention to discussions related to the most important constitutional elements comparing these with what we consider to be conventional administration and political steering in Swedish municipalities in general.

The Action Plan Process

Joining together citizens for consultation and decision making on a City Square as was customary in antique Athens is not realistic. In modern democracies it is more realistic to adapt to an order consisting of recurrent elections of representatives, who in turn, appoint council and committee members among themselves. For the ordinary citizen this is seldom a problem as long as living conditions are tolerable. In more prosperous residential districts people activate themselves locally discussing issues they find important. Generally speaking however, political activity tend to be slow between elections. In such districts processes like the one going on in Södra Sofielund is hardly necessary.

Most probably there is a Södra Sofielund area in most of world's big cities. E.g areas with an ethnic heterogeneous and poor population, a population having difficulties to assert their interests. Naturally a dream would have been come thru if these people could provide for themselves. However, having the current development on the labour market in mind, it is wishful thing. The consequences of the current situation in the form of alienation, aid dependency, criminality, destructive gang, drug addiction, vandalism, insecurity, etc., are well known facts and we need not go deeper into them here. In such areas experiences from the experiment of action plans are relevant.

In our opinion the project has been a success, at least this far. This optimistic view is based on our experiences with the project. Furthermore this view we share with the personnel in the project. In addition, the politicians have decided to permanent the experiment. It will receive grants drawn from the regular budget. This means that the project no longer has to rely on temporary grants.

To be able to use the specific techniques inherent in the project in other areas with similar problems, adjustments have to be done, which is a processional work. The most important aspect of the linkwork lies in our opinion in the free action mandate of the linkworker and it is also our belief that this freedom is the key to success, a point we will return to.

The basic process has been the arrangements of the *Future Scenarios* in which the residents, civil servants from different sectors of the district ward, and politicians in dialogue with each other have decided upon *action plans* for the area. These plans are then prepared and implemented by working groups who continuously report to Seved Forum and to Reconnection Seminars. Yet as the project continued, changes have been made including the formation of two steering groups. One of these consists of politicians from several of the sector steering committees of the municipality whereas the other consists of top civil servants of the sector administrations in the

district ward. This way of joining together sector cooperating organs and decision making of hierarchical structures facilitates the action plans. At the same time it also works as a means to draw the attention of politicians and civil servants to conditions in the area. In this way the decision makers in the various organs are made aware of the work of other actors and that even comparatively moderate investments can make big differences when they are added together. Without this awareness the risk is high that each actor think that it is meaningless to do anything for the area.

Another important factor is the recurrent reports of the advancement of implementations of the action plans. It is important to note, that these reports address assemblies, which include a whole spectrum of actors and interest groups. In this way the focus on the goals settled ranges over a time span exceeding the time span of former procedures. In addition, these reports function to assure the assembled members that measures are taken. Furthermore, the reports also function as a means to give the members updates as to why the measures were ineffective. Taken together such a procedure gives a general feeling of that the development of the area is good. We have also observed that the image of the area in mass media also becomes more positive. This is a healthful contrast to the more frightening pictures that else have been numerous.

We think it is an important result of the project, perhaps, in a sense, the most important in the long term perspective that the local social community has begun to be strengthened. It is perhaps a bit premature, but, in our opinion and judging from today's situation, the progresses are overwhelming. Today we have several local groups, often ethnically mixed, gathering around various different common interests. This development indicates and instils hopes that these groups will continue to grow and multiply.

Many things still remain and there are of course still many things to consider, and among these, the high rate of unemployment is perhaps the most urgent one. This issue has so far not shown up in the action plans. The reason for this is probably not that it has been seen as insignificant. We guess that the issue has been avoided because of its large complexity. Nobody has probably been able to see how the unemployment issue could be solved through actions taken by a neighbourhood assembly.

The action plans have many high priority issues, regrettably some of these are modest in progression. One example is measures taken to improve co-operation between parents and local school personnel. The situation and the behaviour and the results of the pupils in school are among the worst in Malmö. The difficulties with respect to this area are to a large extent dependent on the fact that a very large portion of the children is first or second generation

Swedes with low Swedish language skills. Another contributing factor relates to cultural differences. The experiences from other parts of Malmö show that such obstacles are surmountable if the school personnel make an effort to alter things⁴. Due to a variety of different factors, initializing a positive development in the local school of Södra Sofielund is hard. One factor has been defective leadership in combination with a resistant teaching staff. We know from several other cases that the attitudes of the leaders and the ability to inspire the subordinates are decisive for the outcome of the process of change.

In Södra Sofielund the population in general feels alienated from the political process. This was the starting point of the experiment, which we describe and discuss here. One of the project's main goals is to change this. In our opinion, advances have been made. These advances have to a large extent been contingent on that good communication channels can be opened up between residents on one side and politicians and civil servants on the other side. In this the method of link work plays a decisive role - advertising or distributing leaflets is not enough when the goal is to involve residents in the future of the area in which they live. The residents must be convinced that their efforts are worthwhile and they must be tempted to participate. This observation uncovers a circumstance, which may appear deterrent to those persons who in a dogmatic way associate democratic processes with the idea that democratic organisations function only if the representatives come from and are elected by political units. Such ideas emanate from wishful thinking. The residents involved in the action plan process have, more or less consciously, been hand picked by "linkworkers". We have hard to see that it could be otherwise in the start. In the longer run of the project this, however, will be something worth questioning from a democratic point of view.

The linkwork method

The linkwork method, with professionally employed personnel called linkworkers, constitutes the essence for cooperation in the Södra Sofielund project. Without the linkwork many of the today's contacts would not have been established and the building of existing networks would not have been possible.

The natural starting point for the linkwork in the project Södra Sofielund is a place called the Meeting Place situated in the centre of the market place Sevedsplan. The Meeting Place is a

⁴ We here think of the successful work with linkworkers, in this case high-educated immigrants, which have been performed in other immigrant dense schools in the municipality. See our report Liedholm, M., & Lindberg, G. (2004). Linkworkerprojektet på Munkhätteskolan (pp. 29). Lund: Sociologiska institutionen, Lunds universitet.

necessity in order to get in close contact with the residents and develop confidence. The linkworkers tied to this meeting place function on the one hand as a direct link between project members and residents who visit the meeting place. On the other hand the linkworkers also mediate between and take contacts with individuals, groups and institutions outside the project. In addition to the development of activities whose prime aim seems to be individual well-being, which indirectly also favours the district and society, there is a growing trend towards initiatives and activities directed at society at large. Examples are the fact that Swedes and immigrants are working together in projects concerned with helping children with their home works and women who arrange daily leisure-time activities for children. In addition, two Swedish boys and three immigrant boys are working with the production of a video picturing the local environment, and Swedes who are taking part in conversational groups helping immigrants with the Swedish language. Furthermore, one housing group, through directly addressing the residents and through distributing inquiry sheets, have managed to construct a picture of the living situation in some of the most problematic housing areas and have succeeded to establish fruitful dialogs between the residents and the owner of these houses.

The purpose of the linkwork is not merely to motivate engagement and cooperation. Developing links and creating dialogs between residents and white-collar workers, politicians, associations and networks, both inside and outside the local arena are equally important. For this purpose and in this context, the presence of active, sensitive and persistent linkworkers who can inspire, plan and give rise to meetings is an absolute necessity since hierarchies and structures are difficult to penetrate. The meetings taking place between residents and politicians and authorities on the Meeting Place increase possibilities to open up and further dialogs. Furthermore, the symbolic value attached to meetings arranged in the local area of the residents should not be underestimated. It is a gesture encompassing status for the residents at the same time as it also gives politicians and other authorities a human face. In order for dialogs to be productive the politicians and the authorities must contain efforts showing the residents the sincerity of both parties, otherwise the result may be the opposite, e.g. furthering distrust and passivity among the residents. Hence, meetings arranged in the local area of the residents in combination with creating a productive dialog are challenges for the parties involved. It is too early to say anything about concrete results of these meetings, but through them have questions, both such constantly discussed and others more seldom talked about, come up on the agenda.

Debates concerning power and power relations within the social sciences consist of four dimensions; power related to decision making processes, power related to agenda setting processes, ideological or system power and finally power over the discourse (what kind of man is

created). Steven Lukes (Lukes 1974) discusses the three first mentioned faces of power, Peter Digeser (Digeser 1992) gives, within a constructivist perspective, an additional face (the fourth). Of utmost importance for the continuation of the dialog is of course, factors related to the continuation of the initiated meeting and the ways in which the issues discussed during the meeting are handled. Relevant questions in this regard, concern the residents' experiences of the meeting, and issues related to such things as if their voices are heard, and if the meeting leads in desired directions. Relying on the results from the latest feedback conference there is hope, since the results, contrary to previous conferences, show that the residents were very active in the discussions, both giving the ongoing democratic process their admission and demanding responses from the politicians.

Worth mentioning and considering is the fact that professional linkworkers through their piloting works and efforts are the main carrier when it comes to conferences held and agenda setting plans. Hence professional linkworkers can be seen as key persons when it comes to establishing continuity and expansion of network arenas.

The role as linkworker demands special competence such as social and cultural skills as well as advanced language skills. In addition, linkworkers must be respected *by all parts*, have *face-to-face contacts* and a mandate to *act relatively independently*. Lack of respect, trust and power undermines the linkworkers. Without mutual confidence and respect the linkworker can not do the job. Face-to-face contact is the bases for shaping understanding, trust and respect. Without power to initiating activities and taking responsibility activities, the linkworker becomes uninteresting and meaningless. Crucial responsibilities for professional linkworkers relate to abilities to motivate and engage people. Ever so often linkworkers are dealing with people, or groups of people, who have no experiences of being seen or noticed by others or how to show concern for other people, for that matter. In this regard professional linkworkers have to deal with and handle human barriers of various kinds in order to create constructive dialogs. Some investigation indicates that withdrawing formal external obstacles is not enough for increased participation. Inner obstacles have to be influenced and broken to transform the opportunity to a real ability. (Lukes 1977). In this perspective both the face-to-face work and a rich network are of great importance. Working close to other people means taking on a more active role. Professional linkworkers consequently must enter the field, taking active part in peoples lives and activities.

Granted the above discussed premises concerning trust, respect, face-to-face contact, and independency and based on our experiences of the Metropolitan project we have evaluated, the linkwork is essential to achieve successful integration (Andersson et al. 2003a; Ewert et al. 2004). It is our belief that perspectives within the tradition of the Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer

1986 (1969); Cooley 1902 (1922); Mead 1934) much to offer when it comes to understanding the inner mechanisms and forces of the linkwork. The kind of identity loss inherent in the process of leaving ones home and country makes, in our belief, the individual more open to a socialisation process, where the linkworker may get an important position as “the important other”. It is a common fact that immigrants often sense that they are invisible to the majority people and hence feel neglected in their contact with a society where alien rules and norms prevail. Things they have accomplished such as academic degrees and work life experiences or other statuses they had in their previous lives do no longer count. In order to be able to form a new life and a safe identity, immigrants need the help of others, preferable persons who have established a foothold in the new country. With the help of these people the immigrants stand a better chance in the process of meeting the demands and expectations of the larger society. Our research has shown that projects involving mentor programmes, often give better results than projects without ambitions to tie people closer to one another in the way projects involving mentor programmes do. However, the linkwork and its potentials do not stop with the immigrant perspective. In a pluralistic society the shaping of the meaning of ones live, ones activities and potentials as well as the ability to specify needs and aims have high and mutual priority. The linkworker mediate knowledge to both sides. Of utmost importance is also to be more nuanced in discussions concerning the concept of immigrants. As we all know, immigrants do not consist of a homogenous group of people, but consist of a heterogeneous lot of people and the interaction between and within different groups of people are sometimes non-existent. As a result, the integration processes varies wildly both among groups and among individuals within them. Furthermore, within immigrants group, with the same background and culture, there appear fractions or ideological differences splitting and dividing the group members. Having said this, it is important underlining the fact that these factors do not undermine the linkwork as a method. Speaking in general terms and in the light of the tradition of symbolic interaction, linkwork stands for helping individuals, groups, networks of different kinds and on various levels, to “hook” to one another, communicating understanding and respect.

When evaluating the Metropolitan Projects we have discussed the importance of weak and strong ties in the integration process and their strategic use to increase integration. When talking about strong ties one thinks of relatively small and well-defined groups, while weak ties relate to more diffusely composed groups, which consist of extended non-intimate contacts. (Granovetter 1973; Granovetter 1982). Characteristic for the function of weak ties is connecting people without either enclosing or excluding people. Consequently, weak ties connect the individual to a much wider community than that of the inner circle. In the weak network one may gather around a

need, a theme, an interest i.e. but also use the network in instrumental and pragmatic ways, making weak ties effective with regard to communication and practical needs.

At examination the integration strategies used in two different urban districts in Malmö we, with bearing networks in mind, have found different approaches. In the one district, Hyllie, a district with several homogeneous migration groups, a strategy encompassing the existing solidarity, benefiting and relying on existing strong network, has been used. In the other district, Södra Innerstaden, characterized by ethnic multiplicity and with few distinct group formations, the strategy used consists of a) trying to attach the residents, on the basis of their interests and needs, and b) on geographical space. (Andersson et al. 2003a; Andersson et al. 2003b) This means stimulating the rise and development of weak ties. In our opinion both strategies may be effective in the beginning of the integration process, but there is a risk of inclusion and exclusion united with using strong network. Without developed weak ties we risk to get a fragmented society. Consequently, it is important that the uniting and linking function of weak ties is finally emphasized. It is an important task for the linkworker to, on the one hand, stimulate and encourage the strong ties, on the other hand, support weak ties.

... the point is that weak ties serve important life-needs of individuals, which cannot ordinarily be met through strong ones. In addition to emotional needs, these connect the individual with a wider community than his immediate circle, making possible mobility, opportunity, participation in community-wide activities and organisation, and a general sense of integration into wider community. (Granovetter 1982)

Noticeable in the district of Södra Sofielund is a great ethnic splitting. The Somalis associate in “clans” or with groups of similar kinds. The Arabs prefer people of Arabic origin. The Romanies have not much contact with non-romanies. Swedes, especially those living in the mainly Swedish-owned one-family houses, are content with their isolation. Why then try to link over the boundaries? Why not restrict linkworkers of different ethnic origin to mentor programmes within their own ethnic groups? Why not strengthen the position of each group separately, abandoning the idea of a society consisting of well-developed weak ties? The answer to these questions is that many empirical examples show the strength in Granovettters’ thesis that weak ties unite the society. Fragmentation gives rise to categorizations and misunderstandings, and weak ties are important in job searching and information seeking. To shape a peaceful and safe area you may cooperate. In a community of interest you may get an associative identity (Roth 1996) and the categorical identity you are given at distance may be replaced of a personal one. The utmost goal of the project of Södra Sofielund and the linkwork developed in this area is to stimulate integration of people living in this area. In addition it, hopefully, can give rise to ideas and impulses for projects in a wider context.

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