

ALL ACTIVITIES CENTRES AT THE HEART OF MALMÖ'S COMMUNITIES



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YOUTH EDUCATION
GENDER WELL-BEING
INCLUSION
SECURITY PARTICIPATION
CAPACITY **COMMUNITY**
WOMEN SUSTAINABILITY

1. Context

The idea for the first All Activities Centre (AAC) in Lindängen, Malmö had its origins in the lack of community facilities, low educational achievement and significant levels of insecurity both in school and in the local area. Lindängen is an area on the outskirts of Malmö characterised by high unemployment, overcrowded housing and low household income.

The goal for the new meeting place, providing culture and leisure activities in the school itself, but outside of school hours, was to target all ages, and in particular girls and women who are under-represented in other types of activities centres and the public environment.

In the initial stages of the project, a lot of dialogue took place with pupils of the local school to find out what they would like to do in their spare time. Dialogue also took place at parents' meetings, after-school facilities, the library, the local playgroups and diverse meeting places in the community.

It became clear that the starting point for AAC should be based on participation, on what people in the area themselves wanted to happen, and that residents would have the opportunity to take responsibility for starting and running activities. The first AAC in Malmö opened in 2011.

2. Development

A unique model

The model of AAC is unique, and the following principles for its work are non-negotiable:

- use school premises: after the school day is over, the school itself becomes a community centre
- the centre is for all ages
- it only has activities that have been requested by local residents
- all activities are free
- activities are held every day of the week, including weekends
- residents themselves can start and run their own activities, as can community organisations. Otherwise, the activities are organised by paid personnel
- a close working collaboration with the school

The basis for AACs work is a clear and value-based democratic principal: all the centres' activities have their origin solely in residents' wishes. AACs are not youth clubs or somewhere to hang out, they are a place where all ages can go to do activities that they chose and even run. AACs vision is to rely on people's capacity to decide for themselves, dare to try new things and dare to think outside the box. The motto of AACs is "better to try and learn from our mistakes, than to never try".

AACs ARE CONCEIVED AND RUN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AIMS OF MALMÖ'S CULTURAL STRATEGY 2014-2020, NAMELY MALMÖ SHOULD BE A CITY WHERE IT IS EASY TO GET INVOLVED; IT IS EASY TO BE A CULTURAL PLAYER; THERE IS FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND IT IS EASY TO DEVELOP AND BE CREATIVE.

Goals and strategies

The AACs work contributes to fulfilment of the following municipal goals:

- Malmö residents should feel safe in their city
- Development of the city's meeting places
- Malmö's children and young people should have access to meaningful leisure time and cultural activities.

Furthermore, AACs are conceived and run in accordance with the aims of Malmö's Culture Strategy 2014-2020, namely that Malmö should be a city where it is easy to get involved; people want to be; it is easy to be a cultural player; there is freedom of thought and expression and it is easy to develop and be creative. AACs are organised within the City of Malmö's Department of Culture.

Contributing to Malmö's social sustainability

Another guiding document for development of AACs is the report of the Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö. The Commission began its work in early 2011 and was one of the first local commissions for reduced health inequalities, based on the 2008 World Health Organization report, "Closing the gap in a generation". This report pointed to the social and economic factors that affect how health and wellness is developed throughout life, the so-called social determinants of health. The report also demonstrated that these are largely structural factors that affect the community; living conditions for children, how well equipped they are to cope with school and go on to further education, gain entry to the labour market, have an income and a reasonable standard of living, have a good home, a safe urban environment, feel involved and able to influence their own lives.

For two years, the Malmö Commission's fourteen members, along with researchers and other experts, gathered and summarised national and international research on the social determinants of health and the situation in Malmö. The result was the publication of 30 scientific reports and approximately 300 draft



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strategies. The directives governing the Commission's mandate specified three main areas for it to investigate:

- Children and young people's living conditions
- Social and economic conditions
- Democracy and participation

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AAC fits well with many of the recommendations in the Commission's final report and works directly with the following:

- **Focus on children and young peoples' opportunities to participate and influence.**
- **Strengthening children's, young people's and parents' influence over everyday life in pre-school, after-school and school, by actively including them in systematic improvements in quality.**

AAC has a clear goal that all pupils and residents in the area should be able to influence its work. All activities start in dialogue with pupils and residents; children, young people and adults get a chance to practice the basic principles of democracy and thus have an improved sense of their role in society, which in turn brings a greater feeling of inclusion. This is particularly important in segregated areas, where we know that a sense of alienation, powerlessness and low confidence are factors that hinder the possibility for building a future Malmö which includes all its residents.



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- **Creating more accessible meeting places, especially in overcrowded neighbourhoods.**
AAC uses school premises after school hours. This is not only an effective way to use existing resources but it also helps parents to feel secure in letting their children participate in activities away from home. Most activities take place directly after school hours, which means that students who participate in activities do not need to go anywhere else, as they are already on the premises. Volunteer residents both run and participate in activities on the school premises, close to where they live in the neighborhood.
- **All children and young people in the city of Malmö who complete compulsory school should be able to be eligible for further studies at high school.**
The schools themselves have primary responsibility for academic results, but pupils' performance and feeling of security have improved significantly since the AACs started and became an integrated part of the life of the school.
The Commission's report also reinforced the connection between physical activity and learning processes in school. AAC plays an important part in this context, for several reasons. AACs offer pupils breakfast before the school day begins, and this good start to the day increases children's concentration and ability to learn. After school, AAC then offers a wide variety of activities, many of which are physical.

3. Stakeholders

How do the centres work?

AACs are open seven days a week and offer free activities for residents of all ages in the areas Lindängen, Apelgården and Hermodsdal. The activities are renewed or changed each semester, with summer activities planned separately according to residents' wishes.

Because AACs uses schools' premises, participants can be offered a wide range of activities, ranging from help with homework and language skills to cooking, music, dance and sports. Offering activities in school premises has proven to be a success, as both parents and know the school, but also because children and young people are already in place when the activities starts.

The area's residents are the most important element in the work of AACs. It is their needs that determine which activities are run, and ensure that AACs are living entities, always evolving and changing. Participants are involved in various ways: from young people who help out as additional resources in activities for younger children, to local residents who start activities for which they themselves are responsible.

In addition, specific partnerships with community associations, NGOs and other agencies both within and outside the city of Malmö have been created, based on activities that have been requested.

Good cooperation with the school is essential for the model to work and in agreements about sharing space. It has been of great benefit to have access to employees who have good knowledge of the school's organisation and priorities. At least one activity leader is present at the school premises during the school day, to provide information about AAC, note the pupils' wishes and channel pupils to the activities. Because the activity leaders are present in the school, a wide range of students are reached. Shared personnel bring benefits to both parties, as they have a continual dialogue with the children about the activities, both evaluating the current ones and planning for new ones.

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4. Evaluation

Good practice with good results

In 2013, AAC at Lindängen school was awarded Sweden's Children's Rights in Society prize. Its staff have received various honours for work with gender equality and diversity. AAC is cited in several national reports and handbooks as a model for how community-based centres should be developed.

By actively promoting gender equality, AACs have attracted large numbers of female visitors, with the result that around 50 percent of the participants are girls and women. This is extremely unusual, when compared to other mixed-gender activities' centres and traditional youth clubs.

Lindängen and Hermodsdal schools, where AACs have operated for a few years, have both seen significant and exceptional improvements in academic results, as well as in pupils' feeling of safety. AACs help to create a full school day for students, and they may themselves be involved in design of the activities offered. The newest AAC in Apelgården school opened in late 2018 and has yet to be evaluated.

In evaluations of established AACs, residents in the area express repeatedly their view that the centres contribute to a greater sense of belonging and to the attractiveness of the neighbourhood. They also feel that the activities contribute to safety in the area, offering an opportunity for meeting and socialising with their neighbours which they otherwise lack. AACs have gradually built community capacity and the success factors are clear:

- Having the courage to explore new models for citizen participation.
- Only starting activities based on residents' needs and wishes.
- Believing in people's abilities and strengths and seeing differences as an asset.

The model AAC has been very successful and has received much attention from around Sweden and internationally. Government ministers and other politicians and researchers who have visited have subsequently highlighted AAC as a successful example of integration and field-based work that gets good results at several levels. Work is currently underway to explore the possibilities for opening AACs in more schools in Malmö, even "building in" AAC to new schools.

AACs have also been included in exchanges with other European and world cities, as an example of good practice in socially and economically deprived areas.

THE MODEL OF AAC HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL AND HAS RECEIVED MUCH ATTENTION FROM AROUND SWEDEN AND INTERNATIONALLY. WORK IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR OPENING AACs IN MORE SCHOOLS IN MALMÖ, EVEN “BUILDING IN” AAC TO NEW SCHOOLS.

5. Further information

Website: www.malmo.se/Kultur--fritid/Kultur--noje.html

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