



Supporting Inclusion

Steps to Resolve Poverty and Social Exclusion in one of Stockholm's Most Diverse Municipalities

Europe is currently dealing with a major influx of migrants and refugees. Every week, thousands of people are risking their lives for the opportunity to create a better future in Europe, notably in Germany and Sweden. Immigration is only the first challenge however. Once basic needs have been addressed, the arguably greater challenge of integration begins.

This Nordregio policy brief presents a new way of measuring segregation – the diversity index – and outlines key steps that Botkyrka, a highly diverse municipality in the Stockholm County, has taken to alleviate Poverty and Social Exclusion, which could be instructive to municipalities across Europe, as they work to integrate new residents.

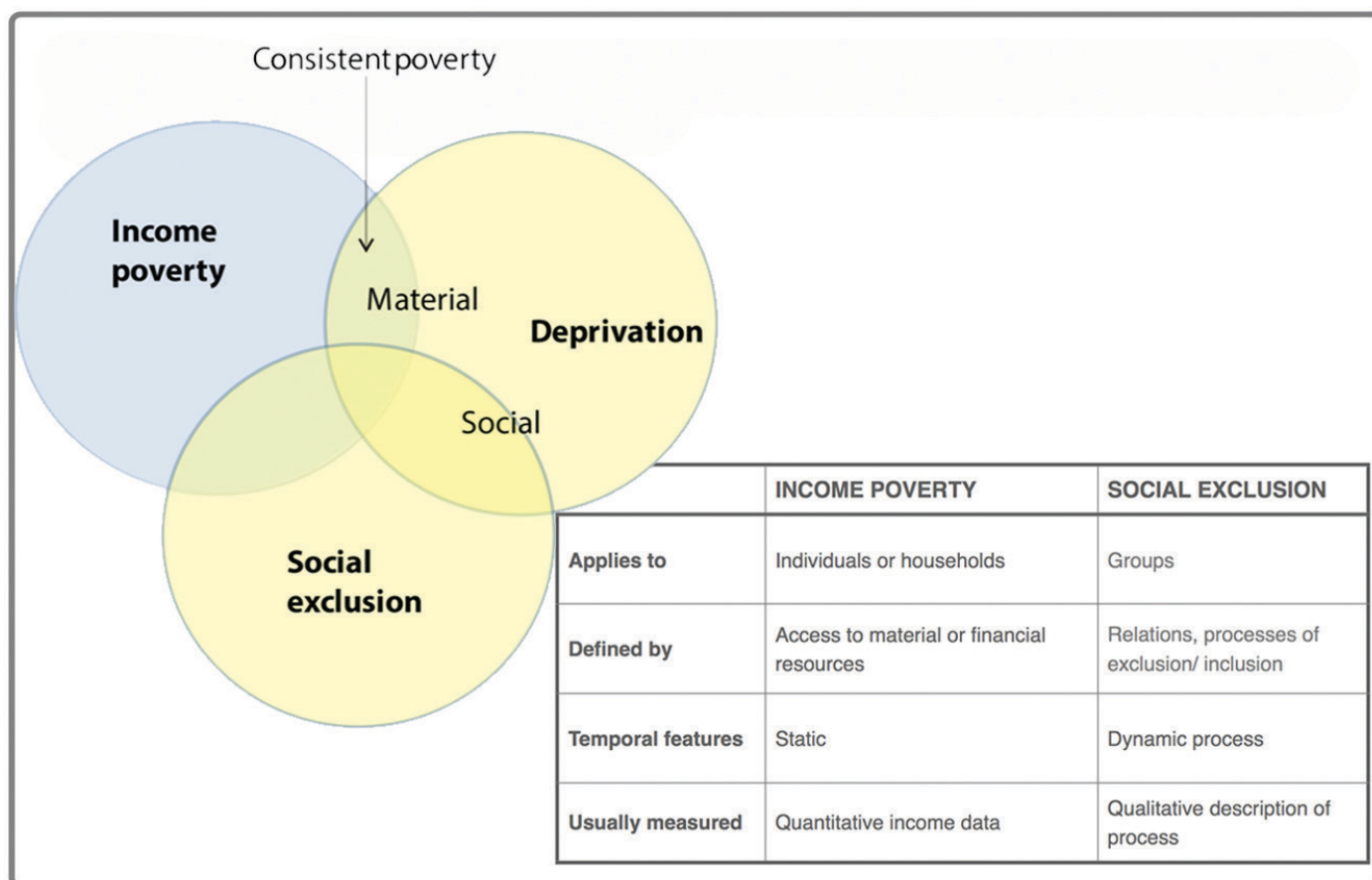
A 2006 OECD REPORT¹ recognized Stockholm as “one of the most successful metropolitan regions in the OECD.” The report emphasized the region’s high quality of life, strong public health performance, high education levels and its low poverty rate. However, the OECD report also identified the most significant weaknesses that could “undermine the

region’s competitiveness in the long run”, including the difficulty of integrating new residents to Sweden.

Foreign born university graduates from countries outside of the EU were found to be much less likely to have a qualified job, with only 40% working such positions, compared with 90% of Swedes with corresponding academic degrees.²

More broadly, the OECD reiterated this challenge in 2012, noting that overall employment rates among high-educated foreign born residents were 15% lower than Swedish born, a number that dropped to 25% for low-educated foreign born residents.³

Compounding this, Stockholm’s urban structure is undergoing a transfor-



Box 1: Differentiating Income Poverty, Social Exclusion and Deprivation

mation where, “the upper levels of society are taking over the central parts of the city”. These tensions came to the forefront in May 2013, when riots broke out in a number of suburbs in Stockholm. A range of elements have been identified as contributing to the unrest; however there is little doubt that Poverty and Social Exclusion factors played a role (see Box 1). Urban poverty and social exclusion are rarely the outcome of a single phenomenon. They result from a diversity of factors, including socioeconomic patterns, discrimination, access to housing, the built form, transportation, social networks and urban segregation.

Rather than dwelling on the challenges however; this Nordregio policy brief focuses on two Poverty and Social Exclusion approaches that are heading in the right direction:

- A Diversity Index that inverts traditional narratives of segregation by emphasizing the range of backgrounds and experiences among residents of areas typically characterized as excluded.
- Policy Implications based on steps that Botkyrka Municipality, in Stockholm

County, has taken to counter its serious poverty and social exclusion challenges.

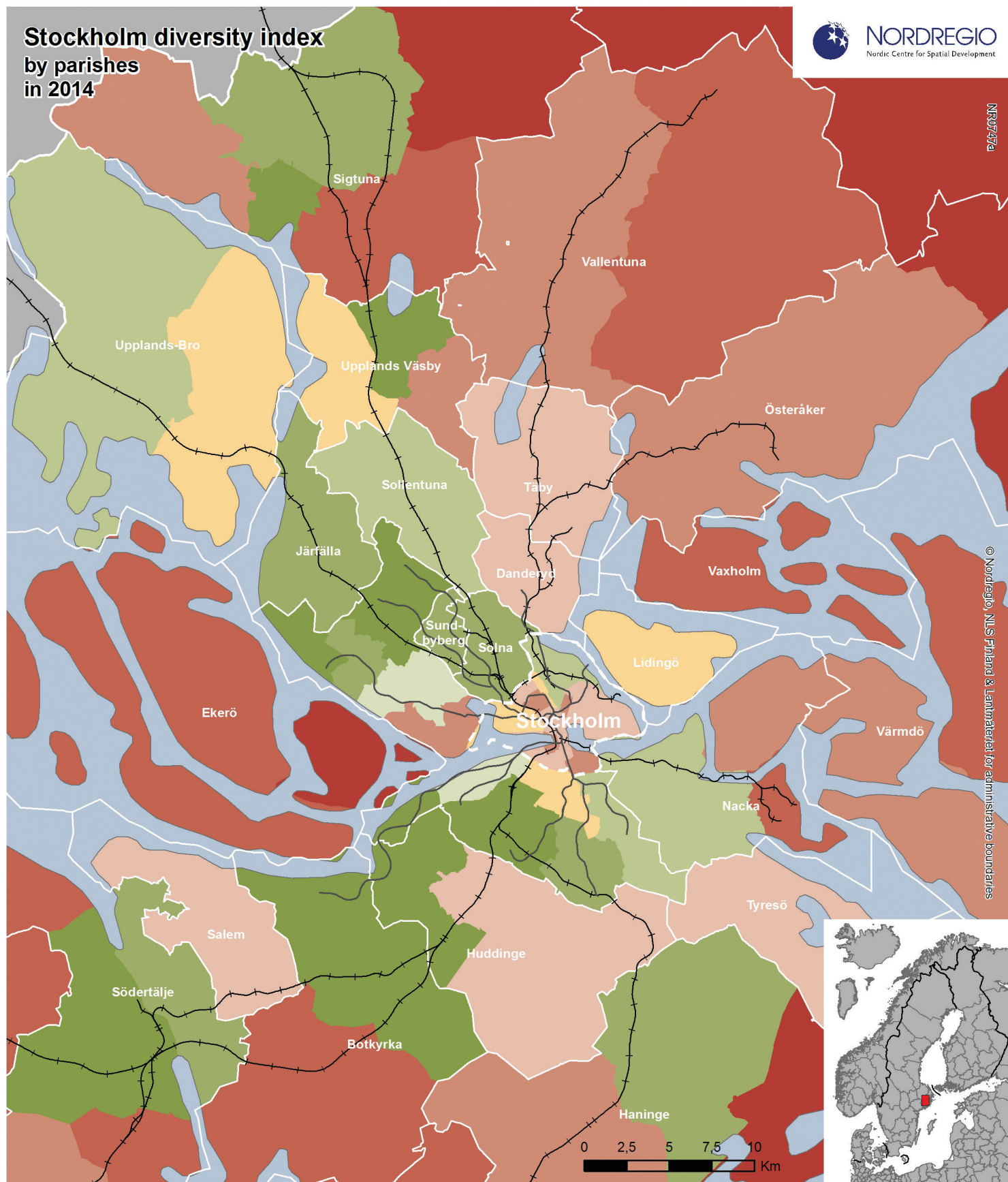
To create the index, the share of foreign-born population by parish¹¹ was multiplied by the number of countries of birth present in each parish in Stockholm County.^{12 13} Results were tabulated for all parishes within the County and the subsequent parish average was set to an index of 100. The Diversity Index found that inner city Stockholm was among the most segregated areas in Stockholm County and that north Botkyrka was

one of the most diverse. This finding holds true for a number of other areas with similar characteristics as well. As such, it appears that more “excluded” areas like north Botkyrka are in fact quite diverse, but the missing piece in the diversity puzzle is ethnic Swedes. However, areas with few ethnic Swedes also often have lower education, employment and income in a regional context. As such, this is not a critique of the locational choices of residents, but to confront notions of segregation that are often portrayed in the media.

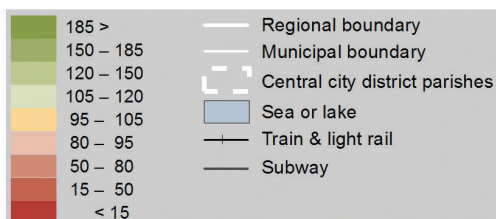
Box 2. The Diversity Index

Discussions concerning Poverty and Social Exclusion in Stockholm County typically focus on segregation and are often centered around the outlying suburbs and municipalities. However, research shows that “The ethnic variety increases when the fraction of the comparatively large Swedish group decreases.”⁵ To illustrate this mix and to highlight the rich variation and backgrounds a “Diversity Index” for Stockholm County was developed at Nordregio. Far from being solely applicable in Stockholm County, the Diversity Index could have broad application for cities across Europe and around the world. In recreating the index in other cities, social planners and politicians have the opportunity to inverse typical portrayals of areas with large concentrations of residents with foreign backgrounds as “segregated”, when in fact they are often more diverse than affluent, centrally located, districts.

Stockholm diversity index by parishes in 2014



**Foreign born share of total
population multiplied by
number of countries of
birth in each parish**
Index 100 = County average



Local district level:
Parishes ("församlingar")
Data source: Statistics Sweden &
Trafikförvaltningen, Stockholms läns landsting

Map: Stockholm Diversity Index by Linus Rispling, Nordregio.

Botkyrka is the first municipality in Sweden to promote interculturalism, an approach that respects different cultures and seeks to harness the strengths that these many different backgrounds offer.



Botkyrka Residents Enjoying Spring Weather. Photo: Mitchell Reardon

Nordregio Research in Botkyrka: Positive Policy Implications

■ By focusing on number of related Poverty and Social Exclusion issues, including employment, education, health, built form and mobility, and segregation at the same time through the lens of wellbeing, multiple challenges can be addressed simultaneously.

■ By focusing on individuals as opposed to groups, challenges can be addressed based on local and individual contexts. This increases the potential for resources to be used

effectively, while actively engaging with individuals at risk.

■ In addition to standard institutional approaches, a variety of avenues can be used to engage with residents, including a space for community meetings, library outreach, drop-in sports and a women's resource centre.

■ Continuous cooperation with local stakeholders and community organizations can im-

prove the delivery of services and support for hard-to-reach individuals and groups.

■ Positive events that celebrate a diversity of cultures while acknowledging tensions that may have roots in another part of the world can foster community cohesion and encourage understanding among individuals and groups who may have few opportunities to engage.

Botkyrka municipality's Efforts to Alleviate Poverty and Social Exclusion

Of the 26 municipalities in Stockholm County, Botkyrka had the lowest median income in 2010 and among the highest municipal concentrations of persons with a foreign background, in a county with one of the highest concentrations of persons with a foreign background in the country. Further, despite solid economic growth in the County, unemployment in Botkyrka remains higher than the county average. This manifests that Stockholm is becoming increasingly divided. I.e. long-standing geographic residential patterns along ethnic and socioeconomic lines are becoming more pronounced in Stockholm County.⁶

Recognizing the socioeconomic challenges that it faced, Botkyrka embarked on a wide-reaching and cross-sector strategy that centres on the wellbeing

of the people who live in Botkyrka and celebrates their differences. Botkyrka is the first municipality in Sweden to promote interculturalism, an approach that respects different cultures and seeks to harness the strengths that these many different backgrounds offer. Botkyrka's approach to interculturalism focuses on the exchanges and interactions between people with different origins. It can be distinguished from the more familiar term 'multiculturalism', which implies a more passive strategy.⁷

These cross-sector, people-first strategies are reflected in the work of the municipality's societal and spatial development unit, which integrates socio-economics, culture, physical planning, the environment, youth and community outreach, segregation and education. This also means that when a development project is proposed, its impact on the community is evaluated, as well as its impact

on the environment. Through these approaches, the wide range of prospects for, and needs of, Botkyrka's residents are considered to a greater extent than is legally mandated.

By simultaneously considering various elements that influence poverty and social exclusion, including social issues, the environment, labour market access, built form and mobility, and segregation, Botkyrka is using its finite financial resources to respond to the challenges at hand. By focusing on the wellbeing of individuals, Botkyrka is trying to meet better the needs of its diverse population, which is underlined by its wide range of community outreach initiatives. Botkyrka's focus on the wellbeing of its residents is further demonstrated by its strong co-operation with grassroots and community groups, which facilitates targeted responses to specific challenges in financially effective ways.

¹¹Parishes are sub districts to municipalities and are based on traditional settlements, where a church was at the centre, rather than being built on today's administrative borders or demarcated around today's developing nuclei. The reason why parishes are still used for demographic data is mainly because the state church until the 1990's was responsible for keeping track on births, marriages, etc. This implies that the geographic boundaries of parishes are still used. In this case, data availability was the central reason that the parish scale was used, as opposed to sub-district boundaries.

¹² For reasons of personal privacy Statistics Sweden has excluded data that fulfills one of the following two criteria. (1) The number of persons with a specific country of birth that is less than 20 in the whole county (2) The number of foreign born are less than 20 in the parish

¹³ The data was captured on December 31st, 2013



A Housing Area in North Botkyrka. Photo: Mitchell Reardon

Fewer children in poverty and new houses by the lake as efforts pay off

There are a number of prominent indications that these efforts are having positive impacts on residents and fostering greater attachment to the area. Of the 30 municipalities with the highest rates of child poverty in Sweden, Botkyrka was one of only two where the trend was reversed and the rate declined between 2005 and 2010, and has continued on this downward trajectory. Between 2000 and 2012, child poverty in Botkyrka dropped from 29.6% to 15.5%.⁸

Unemployment among Botkyrka residents under the age of 25 has declined slightly from 6.0% to 5.3% between 2004 and 2014, while unemployment among 25 to 54 year olds during the same period has only increased marginally, from 5.5% to 6.2%.⁹ These figures in themselves are not astounding, but when considered in the context of a global economic cri-

sis coupled with a significant increase in newly arrived refugee and migrant residents, it becomes apparent that Botkyrka has become a socially resilient municipality.

Further, for the first time since the Million Homes Program, new dwellings are being built in North Botkyrka, and as illustrated by Fittja's Sjöterrassen development (which sold out in record time), they are in high demand. Finally, during the second night of riots in May 2013, the subway station in Fittja was heavily vandalized. In a striking example of commitment to their community, and in an effort to dispel the myth that many local youth were involved in the unrest, 60 14- and 15-year-old students from Fittja (and their teachers) cleaned up the area. As one student, Dilnaza, said, "I felt angry and sad that people had destroyed and trashed things where I live. But it felt great that everyone was helping out to clean up all the glass, erase the ugly

things they had written and make it look nice here again."¹⁰ This degree of attachment, along with the poverty reductions and stable employment figures, indicates that Botkyrka has established the mechanisms to cope with the challenges of poverty and social exclusion. Given the continued influx of refugees to Sweden and Europe more broadly, this is an important accomplishment, and one that other municipalities in the Nordic countries and beyond should consider following.

¹OECD (2006) *Territorial Reviews: Stockholm* (OECD Observer). Paris: Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

²OECD Factbook 2014

⁴Stahre U (2004) *City in Change: Globalization, Local Politics and Urban Movements in Contemporary Stockholm*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(1): 68-85.

⁵Härsman B (2006) *Ethnic diversity and spatial segregation in the Stockholm region*. *Urban Studies*, 43(8): 1341-1364.

⁶Stahre U (2004) *City in Change: Globalization, Local Politics and Urban Movements in Contemporary Stockholm*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(1): 68-85.

⁷Botkyrka municipality (2010) *Strategy for an intercultural Botkyrka*.

⁸Rädda Barnen (Save the Children) (2014) *Barnfattigdom Årsrapport 2014 (Child Poverty Annual Report 2014)*. Sweden: Rädda Barnen.

⁹Botkyrka kommun (2015). *Botkyrka i siffror: Statistik detaljerad*.

¹⁰Chaaban, S. (2013, May 22) *Students clean up Fittja*. *Metro*.

Box 3 – Initiatives to Promote Social Inclusion in Botkyrka

Improving individual wellbeing is a complex issue, particularly in a diverse community. To enhance its capacity to reach a wide range of individuals, Botkyrka Municipality co-operates broadly with community groups. Over the course of Nordregio research, numerous initiatives were identified to support social inclusion and/or combat poverty. Here are some of them:

Bocenter – A Space for Respect and Discussion:

A space for residents and grassroots organizations who want to hold meetings. They can use the premises to hold discussions, workshops and other activities, or otherwise enable or coordinate activities among residents. It is free of charge to use, with the costs covered by a housing corporation and the municipality. As of now 10-12 NGOs have regular meetings within these premises.

Positive Support and Risk-Reduction – Summer Jobs for Young People:

Botkyrka Municipality offers a number of summer jobs for young people. In doing so, the aim is to provide valuable work experience and an income, to help young people find the right track for a future in the job market. In concert with a number of grassroots organizations, the municipality seeks to expand summer employment possibilities for young people. A website run by the municipality offers a range of services to assist young people in finding summer jobs, including how to write a resume and tips for job interviews.

The Women's Resource Centre (KVRC): KVRC is a non-political organization that helps to integrate women (both newcomers and long term residents) in Botkyrka into the workforce, with a particular focus on those who have been out of the labour market for extended periods of time. They offer training for attractive employment skills and guidance on starting a small business, as well as Swedish language training that is more accessible for women in Hallunda & Norsborg. Further, they seek to promote women's rights among local residents through education. KVRC works closely with the public library in Hallunda to encourage literacy and to find the most effective ways to promote education among residents with a diversity of backgrounds.

A Library Beyond Its Walls: Botkyrka Public Library in Hallunda is heavily involved in outreach efforts and continues to extend its efforts into the community. Notably, they recognize that learning takes place in many ways, and in recognizing the range of backgrounds among local residents, place equal emphasis on the spoken and written word. The library is also engaged with numerous local organizations, including KVRC, and will host an EU event to combat illiteracy for libraries that are working to reach out to residents in areas with significant concentrations of people with foreign backgrounds. It also organizes events like the Botkyrka International Book Fair, an intercultural celebration. The library and its employees have received significant acclaim for their work in actively engaging the community.

Risk-Reduction through Drop-In Sports: Botkyrka Municipality pays to staff and maintain sports facilities for young people. Rather than organizing through registration, with the associated administrative burden that discourages some young people, the facilities are open for drop-in. The intention is to provide positive activities with role models who have some oversight as a way to divert young people from spending time on the street or risk becoming involved with gangs. More widely, youth clubs are seen as an important factor in crime prevention and harm reduction.

Using School to Bridge Cultures: There are significant efforts in Botkyrka to engage with both students and parents that have foreign backgrounds. Teachers are offered basic language training in some of the mother tongues of pupils and parents. There is a strong emphasis on engaging with the parents of students to identify successful learning methods in various cultures and to help establish good study habits.



Botkyrka. Photo: Mitchell Reardon



Kids playing. Photo by Åsa Ström Hildestrand

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Further Reading

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Dymén, C., & Reardon, M. (2014). Ethnic and social segregation in Botkyrka, Sweden (Appendix 7 of Annex 4 of the ESPON TiPSE Final Report). Luxembourg: ESPON

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Nordregio is a Nordic research institute within the fields of urban planning and regional development. We provide policy relevant knowledge with a Nordic and European comparative perspective.