

Botkyrka: Good Practice Case Study

ANTIRUMOURS CAFÉ

Summary description

This initiative creates a public platform to discuss and explore rumours and prejudices.

Background, Goal and Target

The Botkyrka C41 steering group decided to start the initiative by encouraging citizens to brainstorm about common rumours. The need for such an intervention was regarded as significant as rumours about Botkyrka are widespread, as is awareness of these rumours and their effect among citizens. Against this backdrop, creating a platform for dialogue was seen as essential.

Since the municipality had adopted an intercultural strategy, the libraries were seen as a valuable communication/event platform. Libraries are well attended by the target group, comprising young people between the ages of 18 and 25, thus offering a valuable forum for C4i activities, including the anti-rumours cafés, as they spend a lot of their time there.

The intercultural approach is one of the major strategic focuses of the municipality, fitting well with the initiative to counter the spread rumours.

Actions, Timescales and Resources

After identifying and summarizing some of the rumours through scientific research undertaken by the Multicultural centre, the rumours were divided into four themes.

The first anti-rumours café was run in January and began with a brainstorming event to listen and explore rumours with citizens and key persons. The concept continued until September and evolved to become “theme-specific” in response to the research reports.



All libraries have a public space within them, though they vary in size. During the cafés, participants sit informally in chairs since tables would occupy too much space. One table is reserved for coffee and some buns, and this aids a convivial and informal setting

The initial theme-specific concept was “Criminality” (the most prominent theme of rumours in Botkyrka) and continued in the same way with the others. The local coordinator organized questions before and during the cafés about rumours in an individual, national and a global context. The cafés took place once a month, sometimes linked to celebrations as such as “Samian day”. The explanation introducing the cafés stressed the importance of focusing on minority groups specifically in Botkyrka but also generally in Sweden.

A web-based voting system in one of the cafés proved an interesting way of communicating among those attending. This session was run by “Botkyrkas roster”, one of the partners in C4i that had developed the system as a new communication tool. The session was organised electronically, mainly through smartphones, by downloading a QR reader enabled participants to vote on different choices, such as “I agree”, “I don’t agree” and “I don’t know”. The main purpose was to enable voting results to be viewed on a screen and to discuss the outcome. It generated a stimulating atmosphere for both positive and negative reflection, some agreeing and others disagreeing. Platforms like these are generally necessary and beneficial for citizens, since meeting and having a dialogue moderates the effect of rumours.

Challenges Encountered and Learning along the way

One of the biggest challenges faced was to stimulate and encourage participation between each café.

Levels of interest varied depending on the day and themes. The rumour-theme, “Swedish culture is under threat”, was among the most visited café. This can be explained by the political situation in Sweden 2014. The populist party, Swedish democrats, had recently achieved their best election result to date, raising questions for citizens all over Sweden, not least the citizens in Botkyrka. This notion of a threatened ‘Swedishness’ is often illustrated by the feeling that Swedish traditions are no longer being celebrated or carried out as they used to be and that “all the old” is dying out.

However, irrespective of the level of interest in a rumour theme, attendance by the majority Swedes was poor. Part of the explanation may relate to the effect of the rumours themselves: When the cafés are organized in Alby, Fittja and Norsborg/Hallunda (areas of high immigrant populations), the level of interest among majority Swedes is lower. Statistically, majority Swedes prefer to attend the cafés in Tumba and Tullinge, with lower concentrations of immigrants.

This challenge was addressed by organising “extra invitations” addressed to target groups from different demographic areas (Tullinge and Tumba). In addition, invitations and information about all the events were disseminated through social media (facebook, internal web etc).

This intervention provides us with an overview of the rumour themes that stimulated most discussion and a demographical overview of where the numbers of participants was greatest. The anti-rumours café is a unique forum for enable people to interact and to find the courage to talk about rumours and prejudices that may be perceived as uncomfortable.

Outputs and Outcomes

The number of attendants for each café was between 20 and 30 and varied according to the theme. The theme attracting most participants was “Swedish culture is under threat” where the web-based tool was used. **[How many cafés were run in total? What was total attendance?]**

Evaluation forms were distributed at the end of every event to measure the outcome. These summarized the general views of the participants and provided ideas for future refinements and additions. The main goal of each café was to encourage people to talk about rumours that they usually feel uncomfortable discussing, and the survey indicate that this goal was accomplished. The participants reflected on how “true” the rumours all over Botkyrka were and gave examples from their own lives. One general outcome was a widespread belief that rumours lead to depression and that the need of dialogue is huge!