

# RUMOURS IN BOTKYRKA

## – A STUDY OF COMMON RUMOURS WHICH HARM AN INTERCULTURAL BOTKYRKA

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## BACKGROUND

The Multicultural Centre has been commissioned by the Municipality of Botkyrka and the Council of Europe to make a study of the common rumours which are circulating in the municipality and which impede the development towards an intercultural Botkyrka. This report is a step in the anti-rumour work which Botkyrka wishes to develop, following the work against rumours carried out in recent years in Barcelona, Spain.

The report is based on an Internet questionnaire on rumours in Botkyrka which was carried out within the Botkyrka municipal district in July and August 2103, and on an analysis of a number of relevant studies previously carried out by the Multicultural Centre with a focus on the situation in Botkyrka. The report presents a qualitative analysis where the common rumours circulating in Botkyrka are identified.

### What is a rumour?

A study of rumours requires a basic understanding of what a rumour is. A rumour can be described as information spread by word of mouth and which is often presented as an alternative truth to what is said in more official sources. Nowadays, the Internet also functions as an ideal medium for rumours. This type of information dissemination can be interpreted as a marginal phenomenon in a society which considers itself to be modern and rational. It requires however considerable thought to realise that rumours are in many ways a central medium for the dissemination of information even in these societies. Rumours affect many of the most central modern institutions – and they can influence everything from political elections and success for companies to peoples' choice of home and school<sup>1</sup>

Research into rumours gives no unambiguous definition of the phenomenon. There are however several basic features which are found in the literature.<sup>2</sup> The following items summarize the central features of that which characterizes rumours and the effects they may have on society, and it may be an advantage to have these in mind in any anti-rumour activity:

- A rumour is the dissemination of information which is presented with the intention of persuading, often also as an explanation of something which is uncertain.
- A general understanding is that a rumour is related to the dissemination of false information, but the information spread through a rumour can also be correct. It can also spread exaggeration, simplification or a message that mixes both false and true information.
- There is often no clear author or source from which the rumour emanates. It may arise as the result of what can be described as a collective discussion on a theme which creates insecurity. In this way, it can be seen as a collective creation of an opinion.
- A rumour can be consciously used to achieve a certain purpose. Actors can consciously plant certain rumours to harm an opponent.
- A rumour is often presented as an alternative to a more official truth or explanation.
- A rumour does not spread at random in the society. Different rumours are spread in different groups.
- The rumours which are the most easily spread in a specific group are those which confirm the perspective and norms which dominate in the group. By studying the rumours circulating within a given group, it is possible to identify the dominating norms and the world outlook shared by the group.

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<sup>1</sup> Kapferer 1998, Bunar 2001, Bunar & Kallstenius 2007

<sup>2</sup> The following presentation is based on Shabutani 1966 and Kapferer 1998

- By spreading a rumour, the togetherness of a group can be confirmed and transferred to daily life.
- Since rumours often relate to information which has not been officially confirmed, the credibility of a rumour is often related to the status within the group of the person spreading the rumour.
- If many persons repeat a rumour, this is also taken as a certificate of its correctness, when “everyone” says that it is so.
- The denial of a rumour can in practice spread the rumour to groups which have not previously come into contact with it. When the rumour is presented as a “truth” which may not be mentioned publicly, the denial can also be taken as evidence that the rumour is in fact an unpleasant truth.

Another relevant item for this preliminary study is that the spreading of rumours is a central feature of the mechanisms which exclude and stigmatise different exposed groups in the society. The rumours which circulate relating to exposed groups spread negative prejudices and stereotypes, and this helps to legitimise and naturalise oppressive power relationships, through for example casting suspicion or dehumanizing minority groups. Historical examples of this are the rumours which have circulated in Europe, in some cases with roots in the middle ages, concerning Jews and Romanies, rumours which have contributed to a dehumanization of these racial groups and which have led to the most terrible expressions in pogroms and the holocaust during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of how the spreading of rumours contributes to the dehumanization process and the casting of suspicion on certain minorities can also be found in present day Sweden. In the early 2000's, for example, a rumour circulated in the country that asylum-seeking families starved their children or gave them drugs so that they should fall into an apathetic state, in order thereby to increase their chances of obtaining a residence permit. These children came to be called the apathetic children in daily talk. Suspicion was publicly cast upon them and their families by the mass media and political statements, where rumours as to how the children and their families simulated symptoms were gradually accepted as the truth by many persons. When the journalist Gellert Tamas investigated how this idea and the suspicion cast upon the parents could be accepted as the truth, he was able to show how certain rumours about the apathetic children circulated among and were given legitimacy by politicians, journalists, and right-wing extremist groups as well as by single doctors and psychiatrists.<sup>4</sup> In the report on children with the resignation syndrome<sup>5</sup> published by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare in 2013, it was found that many of the rumours which certain actors established as truths, e.g. that the phenomenon with apathetic children was previously unknown, inexplicable and unique for Sweden, and that the children's symptoms could in most cases be explained as manipulation by the parents, were not true, could not be proven or lacked research support. It was for example shown that medical descriptions of children who exhibited these symptoms have been in existence at least since the middle of the 1950's, where there have also been links with traumatic experiences.

## Botkyrka as a context

Research into rumours has shown that these cannot be understood outside the the social, cultural and economic context within which they circulate.<sup>6</sup> The rumours which are identified in this preliminary study are linked to the socioeconomic pattern which characterises Botkyrka as a municipality.

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Hsia 1998, Glajar & Radulescu 2008

<sup>4</sup> Tamas 2009

<sup>5</sup> *Barn med uppgivenhetssyndrom*, Socialstyrelsen 2013:12

<sup>6</sup> Shibutani 1966:23 ff

Botkyrka is the most resource-poor municipality in Greater Stockholm measured as income per capita and also has the third youngest population of all Sweden's municipal districts. During 2010, Botkyrka became the municipality which has the largest proportion of citizens with a foreign background, 53.2 per cent, in the whole country. Most of those with a non-western-country migration background live in the northern part of the municipality, usually called Northern Botkyrka. This geographical region is both geographically and symbolically separated from the southern part of the municipality. Southern Botkyrka has a longer urban history, while the greater part of northern Botkyrka has been developed more recently within the framework of the so-called million programme.

From the 1980's and particularly during the 1990's and onwards, the immigrants who have settled in the northern part of the municipality have increasingly come from lands other than the western countries. Now, the three administrative districts in northern Botkyrka, i.e. Fittja, Alby and Hallunda-Norsborg, are among the most racialised and resource-weak municipal regions in Sweden. In northern Botkyrka, more than 65 per cent of the population have a foreign background, and in some parts the figure is 90-95 per cent. Of these, almost 70 per cent have a non-western background. The majority in the southern parts of the municipality have a Swedish background, and they also have on average a higher income per capita and a better attachment to the labour market.

## Rumours which make an intercultural Botkyrka difficult

In this study, the focus is on rumours which can hinder the development of an intercultural Botkyrka. The municipal authority has adopted an *Intercultural strategy* which describes why an intercultural perspective is important for Botkyrka, and this indicates three areas to be given priority.<sup>7</sup> In the document, these are defined in the following way:

**Anti-discrimination:** The municipal authority shall ensure that all the citizens, on equal terms and in an equal manner have access to power and influence in the municipality and are received well and offered good municipal service.

**The municipality as a place:** Men and women, regardless of social and ethnic background or faith, have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to education and work. All the citizens in the municipality shall also, regardless of background, feel at home and trust each other and democracy

**The municipal authority as organisation:** The distribution of managers and workers in the municipality shall in the long term reflect the proportions of men and women with different ethnic backgrounds among the inhabitants. The municipal authority shall also engage in a dialogue with the citizens and their associations in order to ensure that the municipal authority's funds are distributed in a just manner.

These three primary fields are used in this preliminary study as a basis for identifying rumours that hinder the work of creating an intercultural Botkyrka. Starting from the above formulations, the analysis will consequently take note of rumours which mean

1. that the municipality's inhabitants do not in an equal manner have access to power and influence in the municipality.
2. that citizens are not met by a good attitude and do not receive a good municipal service.
3. that citizens with different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds do not have equal opportunities and conditions in matters relating to education and work.
4. that some of the municipality's inhabitants do not feel at home in Botkyrka and lack a sense of trust in each other and in democracy.

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<sup>7</sup> Botkyrka 2010

5. that the managers and officials in the municipal authority do not reflect the multiplicity of different ethnic backgrounds to be found among the municipality's inhabitants.
6. that there are weaknesses in the dialogue between the municipal authority and the inhabitants and their associations which seeks to promote a just distribution of the municipality's resources.

This list is a tool for the identification of rumours. It is when a rumour contributes to one of these items that it will be considered relevant to be given attention.

## Method

The time devoted to this study has been limited to correspond to one month's working hours for one person, and this has made it impossible to carry out a more systematic investigation of rumours in Botkyrka. In order nevertheless to guarantee the relevance of the results, the study has been methodologically based on a triangulation of data.

Data triangulation means that different source of information are used in order to increase the reliability of a study.<sup>8</sup> The idea is that if similar results are obtained from studies carried out with mutually independent groups of informants, this can be taken as an indication of high relevance and validity of the results. Data from different studies of the same phenomenon that do *not* give the same result are also of interest, since they contribute to a more complex understanding of the phenomenon.

Of the four studies that are considered in this study, only one explicitly deals with rumours, a statistical internet-investigation carried out by the Botkyrka municipal authority. The other studies are qualitative studies based on group discussions of related subjects, the intercultural society, the understanding of intolerance and the occurrence of racial and ethnic discrimination in Botkyrka. The fact that the qualitative studies do not explicitly deal with rumours in Botkyrka is not considered here to be a disadvantage since the discussions have to a great extent provided opportunities when the informants have been able both to discuss and spread rumours related to their respective themes. This means that these studies offer good material for developing a qualitative understanding of how rumours are articulated and given legitimacy in group discussions, i.e. when people present argumentation for their opinions based on a certain understanding of their situation.

## SUMMARY OF THE STUDIES

### The internet questionnaire on rumours in Botkyrka

During May 2013, the Botkyrka municipal authority carried out an internet questionnaire on the theme of rumours in Botkyrka. The questionnaire was sent in digital form to the Botkyrka municipal authority's citizens panel which comprises approximately 650 Botkyrka residents from all parts of the municipal district. At most, the questions in the questionnaire were answered by 180 persons, and this reply frequency is judged to be too low to permit conclusions to be drawn regarding the extent to

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<sup>8</sup> Flick 1998: 229 ff

which the replies are representative of the different population groups. On the other hand, the rumours identified and described in the open questions provide a qualitative material which, when compared with the rumours formulated in the other studies, creates a clear pattern.

The Botkyra Municipal Authority's internet questionnaire asks the question: *Do you know of any rumour about Botkyrka and its inhabitants?* This question was answered by 180 persons. A majority of those replying, 69%, said that they knew of a rumour about Botkyrka. Those replying were given an opportunity to describe this rumour in a free-text question. Thereafter, they were asked if they knew of any other rumour about Botkyrka. This question was answered by 119 persons. Of these, 37 % (44 persons) said that they knew of yet another rumour. Again, an opportunity was given to describe the rumour with a free-text question.

106 persons chose to write in free text regarding the first rumour and 35 persons chose thereafter to describe the second rumour of which they knew. After scrutiny of the content of the rumours described, a number of commonly recurring themes could be identified. The replies were coded on the basis of these themes. A single reply could contain several different themes. The most common rumour themes mentioned in the replies are presented in the following.

### **Criminality**

The most common themes among the replies referred to criminality. A total of 42 replies dealt with this. Rumours of criminality could be reported to deal with the whole of Botkyrka or to various parts of Botkyrka, and they dealt primarily with the northern parts of the municipal district and primarily with the youth. It was also common that the criminality was associated with the immigrant category. The following replies can be given as examples:

- That northern Botkyrka is a criminal region because such a lot of immigrants live here.
- I often hear when I am in the city centre and have a coffee with persons from e.g. Lidingö that they have heard that all the young people in Botkyrka have committed crimes.
- That the majority of those living in northern Botkyrka are receiving grants, are unemployed and are criminal.
- I have heard a rumour about Botkyrka that it is a large ghetto of criminal persons (northern Botkyrka).

### **Specific parts of the municipality**

It was also common, as already indicated, that the rumours described were linked to special parts of the municipality. This was the case in 33 replies. In these cases it was most commonly "northern Botkyrka" that was particularly linked to negative rumours. This was the case in 19 replies. The following examples illustrate this

- A lot of criminals in northern Botkyrka
- Don't set your foot in northern Botkyrka
- That one cannot travel to northern Botkyrka, people who have not been here believe that they will be mishandled if they come here.

In the replies, "southern Botkyrka" was mentioned in only 5 cases. In all these cases, southern Botkyrka was mentioned in contrast to or in connection with a mention of northern Botkyrka; for example:

- Insecure in the northern part, but now also in the south.
- In most cases the rumours relate to different regions such as north and south, but they are also related to people of different nationalities, backgrounds, skin-colour etc.
- That Botkyrka is a place where idiots live. In northern Botkyrka live only the criminal and unemployed whereas in the south live those who have a better situation, i.e. the south and Tullinge.

Following the same logic of an over-representation of northern Botkyrka in the replies, the districts in northern Botkyrka are mentioned more often in the replies than the districts which lie in southern Botkyrka. Norsborg and Hallunda are each mentioned once, Fittja three times and Alby four times. Most of these replies are linked to negative rumours such as:

- Norborg is a dangerous place
- How can you live in Hallunda, that's where a lot of criminal types live. You can't go out there because then you get mugged or robbed etc
- That inhabitants in Fittja and Alby disregard the environment and make a mess everywhere.

Two of the replies which mention Alby can perhaps be seen to be more positive. These replies deal with coming investments which are said to be taking place in Alby.

- That large investments are being made in e.g. the Alby district, e.g. that 100% of all the young people would be offered a summer job.
- That a home for the elderly is being built behind the Alby underground station and kiosk.

The first reply above was written by a person living in Grödinge. This means, in other words, that it can also belong to the category of rumours of an uneven distribution of resources in the municipality, which is discussed later.

Only two replies mention districts in the southern part of the municipality; Tumba and Tullinge are each mentioned once. Grödinge is not mentioned in any reply. Only Tumba is described in negative terms. Tullinge is mentioned as a district which in contrast to northern Botkyrks is inhabited by a resource-strong population.

- That Botkyrka is a place where idiots live. In northern Botkyrka live only the criminal and unemployed whereas in the south live those who have a better situation, i.e. the south and Tullinge.
- Tumba is dangerous and disorderly in the evenings.

## Immigrants

A third very common theme in the replies is that rumours are linked to "immigrants" or corresponding categories. This applies to 31 of the replies. These replies could refer to everything from that this category dominates in the Botkyrka population to that it is this category that is responsible for criminality and insecurity, for example:

- Only babbes<sup>9</sup> live in Botkyrka.
- That there are only immigrants and high criminality here.
- Dangerous and disorderly. Too many immigrants. And "dark".

## Insecurity

Another commonly occurring theme in the replies was that Botkyrka was linked with insecurity, disorderliness and fighting. This was mentioned in 25 replies. This theme is closely related to the thread of criminality and many replies combine these two themes. The two themes are however kept apart, since the replies which express a sense of insecurity do not only deal with criminality.

- That it is not safe to live in certain parts of the municipality.
- That it is disorderly and it is due to the number of immigrants.
- Dangerous to stay in Botkyrka.

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<sup>9</sup> The word "babbe" is a derogatory name used for a non-white in Sweden. It is related to the word baboon. The word is one of a vast number of words and expressions used in Sweden in a derogatory sense, by which persons are racialised in contrast to whiteness as the norm (Hübinett, Hörnfeldt, Farahani & León Rosales 2012)



## Poverty

Many replies linked Botkyrka and its inhabitants with various expressions of poverty. This was done in 24 replies. This thread was also in many replies linked to the themes of criminality and insecurity.

- Everyone in Botkyrka lives on social welfare grants
- That everyone is unemployed.
- Criminal, many need subsistence support, dangerous to go out at night

## Municipal activities and resource distribution

The next rumour theme focused on the activities of the municipal authority. Approximately 16 of the formulated rumours were in one way or another related to this. Half the replies mentioned rumours relating to the situation in the municipal authority's schools. Examples of replies which mentioned rumours about schools are:

- That young people leave school and create a lot of problems such as graffiti and shop-lifting.
- Rumours about the quality in schools. Rumours about northern versus southern Botkyrka.
- To many do not meet the school requirements; all is shit if one is in northern Botkyrka.

Almost as many, 7 replies, said that there appears to be an uneven distribution of resources in Botkyrka. This is primarily related to the distribution of resources between the regions called southern and northern Botkyrka.

- That northern Botkyrka gets all the money and the other parts get nothing or much less.
- All the money/measures are directed towards northern Botkyrka and nothing to southern Botkyrka!

In ten of the formulated rumours, the category of young people is named, either as a group about which rumours circulate, or as a group which itself spreads rumours.

- There are rumours that all the damage done around the region is due to young people.
- That all the young people in Botkyrka are trouble-makers and that none of them manage their schooling.
- Young people who spread untruths about each other.

**From the Botkyrka municipal authority's internet questionnaire on rumours in Botkyrka**, it has been shown that certain themes dominate when the respondents identify and describe rumours, and that the most common rumours form clusters of related terms. In the replies, poverty, insecurity and criminality are primarily linked to the category of immigrants and the like. Young people also occur in relation to these rumour themes. Even if it can be said that these themes stain the whole of Botkyrka, the rumours are primarily linked to the northern part of the municipality.

There are also rumours related to the activities of the municipal authority. Here, the predominant theme was the rumour of an uneven resource distribution in the municipality, which finds expression in many rumours that the northern parts of the municipality are given a larger portion of the resources.

## The report on *White Swedes in Greater Stockholm*

This report is the Swedish contribution to the project *Engaging Marginalised Majority Populations and Communities* which is being carried out within the *Open Society Foundation's* project *At Home in Europe*, with the purpose of carrying out research and influencing public opinion in order to promote equal rights and social solidarity in a climate of increasing multiplicity, political tension and global recession.<sup>10</sup>

The report is a study of the conditions for the Swedish majority living in the southern part of the Botkyrka municipal district. It was carried out in 2013 and is based on a study of statistics, policy documents, 22 interviews with various interested parties and 12 focus group interviews with a total of 70 residents in southern Botkyrka. The aim of the report is to reveal and discuss the experiences and situations of persons who identify themselves as majority Swedes in discussions of social sustainability and solidarity. The focus is on the views of the majority population and their relation to the tensions between the population majorities and minorities, and the political actions at the municipal, regional and national levels in these questions.

In this preliminary study, the focus group interviews have been studied with a particular focus on rumours in Botkyrka. The focus group interviews were carried out in April and May 2013, with 2 to 10 participants in each group. Of the 70 participants, 28 were women and 16 were under 30 years of age. Each focus group discussed a theme decided upon in advance. The themes that were dealt with included identity and belonging, education, employment, housing, care and welfare, the police and security, political and citizen participation, and mass media.

### Rumours

A study of the focus group interviews shows that many of the rumour themes identified in the municipal authority's internet questionnaire are also mentioned here. There is an emphasis on rumours relating to immigration, the northern part of Botkyrka and criminality. The dominant theme in the focus groups was however that which can be described as a sense of injustice in the distribution of the public resources.

### Immigrants

Rumours linked to persons with an immigrant background and all the negative effects of their presence in the municipality were expressed in seven of the 12 focus groups. A common rumour is that persons "with different cultures" cannot live together, which is presented as an obvious fact and as an explanation of why there are so many problems in the society. A variation on this theme is that women who are understood to come from different cultures are described in generalised terms as being the victims of oppression. This is exemplified in the following quotations:

- Different cultures cannot live together. There are too many immigrants in northern Botkyrka and thus too many cultures in one place. We in Sweden think wrongly here, since people from different cultures who have other mentalities cannot be met directly in the same way. There are those who belong to cultures which do not believe in doing things together, such as in an association. Instead they think only in terms of their own purses and in the first place of themselves.
- We do not have the same values: one must have something to gather around – the community must be based on solidarity and togetherness – and we experience a split – people pull in different directions – and we have problems with so many immigrants in our

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<sup>10</sup> Hübinette & Hylén-Cavallius 2014 (in press)

municipality – society must be built on common values such as freedom of speech, equality.

- Girl from other cultures don't play football or are not allowed to?
- It is frightening that people in the north almost drive away so-called Swedes so that they can create their own town and the result is just rubbish, it must be mixed. And when it is a question of women who are not allowed to do anything because of their culture, the Swedish society must do something, but one cannot say anything because then one is interfering.

Another thread among the rumours relating to persons with a foreign background is linked to education and language. This is a question of a spreading rumour that “immigrants” in Botkyrka are uneducated and that they do not learn the language sufficiently well so that they can function in the society.

- It is mostly uneducated persons who come here.
- They are immigrants and they will not therefore manage our country as we do – and then if they become more numerous than we are, they will work and take care of the elderly as they do in their countries and not as we do in Sweden. They come and are poorly educated.
- If 40 per cent of those who work in the health service cannot speak Swedish, what will happen then?
- Immigrants do not want to learn the Swedish language

A third thread among rumours in the category of immigrants is that this category of persons is a burden on the society's economy.

- I do not believe that we shall be able to afford basic care in the future. They bring their families here also – it is not only the young but also the elderly who come.
- We have too large an immigration of relatives. They don't pay tax quickly enough. It takes seven years.

### **Criminality and insecurity**

The rumour of criminality arose in only four of the 12 focus groups. When it is mentioned, it is often linked to the situation in the northern part of the municipality, even if the participants in the discussions consider that the conditions can stain the whole municipal district, or as one person expressed it: “It is simple. In the media, Botkyrka is synonymous with robbery, theft and fraud, the same as Rinkeby”. Many people believe that the mass media create a strong understanding of the municipality:

- People think of gangsters when Botkyrka is mentioned. But that picture disappears immediately when people come here.
- Before I moved here, my picture of Botkyrka was that it was extremely dangerous. But when I moved here I understood that there are no dead persons lying on the ground here.

It is persons with a foreign background and young people who are linked to criminality

- There are many with foreign names who are held by the police at night, but one can't so say so – then people get angry.
- Botkyrka is known for cultivating its own criminality among the youth.

In one of the groups they said that they felt that the criminality and insecurity which characterise the northern part of the municipality was a difference between civilisation and non-civilisation.

- I am strongly in favour of dividing the municipal district. I thought: set up a barbed-wire fence by the fire station so that they can manage themselves there.

- Unfortunately northern Botkyrka is mentioned in the media regarding fires, burglaries and the devil knows what. I usually say that I come from the “civilised part”.

### Threatened Swedish traditions

Another type of rumour evident in the studies was related to the feeling that the Swedish culture was threatened or that Swedish traditions are beginning to disappear. This theme has been very evident in the Swedish society in recent years, where many feel that the debate about the book *Tintin in the Congo*, the *Lilla Hjärta* figure created by Stina Wirsen and the removal of the black doll from The Walt Disney film shown on Christmas Eve are examples of how Swedish traditions are being threatened and disappear. In the local context in Botkyrka there are a number of recurring examples such as the assertion that the Swedish flag may not be flown at certain schools nowadays.

- The Swedish flag is not flown at certain schools in order not to offend certain pupils. This is completely wrong, they would not do so in another country. One cannot celebrate the school end-of-term in the church, but one capitulates for the demands for a call-to-prayer etc.
- It is somewhat disturbing that one cannot sing a hymn at the school end-of-term and cannot fly the Swedish flag; I find it rather disturbing in fact. That is what I meant by accepting the customs of the locality.
- Swedish traditions, it is important that we show them. Many are very enthusiastic and want to learn and they cannot understand why we want to forbid the flying of the Swedish flag at the school end-of-term and the church at Christmas.

### Resource distribution

The rumour theme which recurred most in the study of southern Botkyrka was that one feels and describes an unjust distribution of resources in Botkyrka, where the northern part of the municipality is given priority at the expense of the southern part. This theme was mentioned in nine of the twelve focus groups. Some of the participants noticed that rumours circulated about themselves, and they noticed a certain distance:

- My child was in the seventh grade. They had cooperation in Alby and visited them, and sometimes they came to Tullinge. Everyone in Alby had an own laptop. And the others had a large screen that everyone had to share. The whole class got a different picture of Alby because they had laptops and it took six months before this was the case in Tullinge. This created a “we and them” attitude and aggressiveness. This encourages the picture that people have of Alby and that they get everything free.
- The Tullinge party says that all the money goes to northern Boykyrka. But this is not true, money among other things goes to Tullinge.

Other participants could however themselves articulate this rumour and present it as a truth in discussions.

- Not much goes to Grödinge, Tullinge, Uttran. Most is done in problem regions in northern Botkyrka. There should be a little more over the whole of the municipality.
- Then I feel that they waste a lot of money, several million, on Subtopia and Cirkus Cirkör. But this money could be used to renovate ball courts and to support other activities.
- The association activities in southern Botkyrka suffer from a lack of premises. There is nothing, only the church. Much too much is spent on northern Botkyrka because everyone shall be integrated.

**A survey of this study** has shown that the same rumour themes as were common in the Botkyrka municipal authority’s internet questionnaire also appeared here. This study gives however a more qualitative understanding of the rumours which are spread relating to the immigrant category. It is a

question of generalised way of thought regarding immigrant culture which is described as being incompatible with Swedish culture, and that Swedish traditions are gradually disappearing. It can also be noted that that which was a minor rumour theme in the internet questionnaire, the rumour of an uneven distribution of resources within the municipality, is one of the most frequently recurring in this study.

## Intercultural Research Circles

This project was carried out within the framework of *European Cities against Racism*, with financing from the *European Union's Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme*, between May 2011 and March 2013.<sup>11</sup> This was a cooperation between five European cities: Berlin, Madrid, Graz, Växjö and Botkyrka. The idea of the project was to make it possible for the cities to investigate new ways of working with racism and discrimination. In Växjö and Botkyrka, investigations were made into the possibilities which research circles on racism and discrimination with the inhabitants of Botkyrka could offer in developing the work with these questions.

Five research circles were formed. Three of the circles consisted of inhabitants from the northern parts of the municipality with different ethnical backgrounds. These circles studied the role of schools in racism and discrimination. Another studied the role of the municipal authority and the last studied the role of the civil society with regard to the same questions.

In addition to these three circles, two circles were formed through direct contact with the local association, OPAD (the Organisation for Poverty Alleviation and Development), which organises Swedes with an African background in Botkyrka, and the Islamic Association, which organises Swedes with an Islamic faith. The purpose of these two circles was to create an opportunity for members in the groups concerned to discuss their experiences of discrimination and racism in the municipality together with persons exposed to the same type of discrimination, i.e. to focus particularly on the discrimination experienced by Muslims and Afro-Swedes. About 20 research circle meetings were held between September 2011 and March 2012, with a total of about 40 different participants.

In a survey of the documentation of the discussions in these circles, it is evident that the participants give expression to the negative aspects and the limitations involved in living in a part of the municipality which is generally stigmatised and the subject of many negative rumours.

One participant in the circle regarding the municipal authority mentions for example that northern Botkyrka has such a bad reputation that her own children, who are university graduates, want to move away from the municipality because of this; they are not happy here. A participant in another group says that she has developed the strategy of not saying where she lives when she is working and meeting people, since there are so many prejudiced questions and comments if she does.

During the discussions, it was sometimes noted that a somewhat opposite picture of Botkyrka has developed during recent years, where the name Botkyrka gives rise to more positive associations. On the other hand, the participants felt that there are still a lot of problems related to violence and insecurity, which mean that people do not feel safe in the region. It was the experience of all the groups that the mass media surveillance tends to reinforce the sense of insecurity, since they often in a biased manner take up negative events in the region. This creates and reinforces the negative picture of the region.

A discussion which arose in several of the groups dealt with how some associations in Botkyrka function in matters related to integration. Here a picture was painted of an activity based largely on the members spending their days playing cards. This is considered to be unjust since the availability of premises is limited in the municipality. In the groups, other rumours about how the associations function were also expressed, such as for example that there is a link between grant allocation and

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<sup>11</sup> ECAR 2013

party preferences or that some associations sometimes divide into two in order to receive a larger grant.

A special feature of the two research circles with Afro-Swedes and Islamic believers as participants was that in these groups the participants could exchange ideas and confirm each other's concrete experiences of discrimination. This discrimination was often the result of various rumours and negative stereotypes. In the Afro-Swedish research circle, for instance, the participants said that a problem that they experience is the stereotype of Africans as criminals or drug-addicts. They meant that these attitudes contribute to the municipal authority's and others' distrust of the group. With regard to African women, it is thought that they only sit at home and look after the children, said one participant. These negative stereotypes mean that the group is homogenised, and according to the participants the result is that African women are not treated in the same way as Swedish women, in spite of an official policy of equality.

In the group of Swedish Islamic believers, the participants also talked of the limiting effects that negative rumours about muslims have on their lives. The participants said that the terms "muslim" and "terrorist" have come together in many contexts, not least in news reports. One participant said that he no longer has the energy to read a newspaper since it feels that "someone is standing and barking from behind all the time". It was also mentioned that muslim girls feel that they are reduced to passive victims by teachers who continually take up questions about the oppression of muslim women or problems of honour for discussion in the classroom.

A scrutiny of the documentation from the research group interviews in this study show that the informants in the groups have come into contact with many of the rumours which were mentioned in the studies referred to above. All the informants are resident in the northern part of the municipality and they bear witness in different ways to all the limitations which accompany the stigmatisation which the rumours regarding their region or minority group lead to.

Another thread of rumours relate even here to the distribution of resources in the municipality. In this study, the rumours relate to certain ethnic associations which are considered to be privileged in comparison with others.

## **Masculinity and intolerance - a qualitative study of expressions of intolerance and masculinity among upper secondary school boys**

This study was carried out in 2011 as a commission from the Forum for Living History.<sup>12</sup> The study is a qualitative investigation of the relationship between the expressions for intolerance and prejudice and the expression of masculinity among upper secondary school boys. The material analysed is derived from discussions in six focus groups consisting of boys with both Swedish and foreign backgrounds from profession-oriented and study-oriented upper secondary school programmes. Five of the focus groups consisted of pupils from Botkyrka. The discussions within these groups have been used in the present preliminary study. The guiding questions in the study were e.g.: How do boys reason when they express intolerant opinions? What stereotypes and negative associations are revealed in connection with expressions of intolerance in boys? How can the stereotypes and negative associations revealed by the boys be understood in relation to the power relationships and social hierarchies which mark the rest of society?

A total of 45 boys participated in the interviews. Of these, 21 were Swedes with a foreign background. Of the six upper secondary school programmes which the boys attended, three were of a study-preparation character and two were profession-related. The sixth focus group consisted of boys attending Privik, which is a program-directed introductory course. Two of the groups consisted solely of students with a foreign background, two groups were completely dominated by pupils with a Swedish background and two groups were mixed.

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<sup>12</sup> León Rosales & Eström 2012

The study is a qualitative investigation of some of the results of the Forum for Living History's statistical investigation: *The many faceted intolerance*.<sup>13</sup> In this study, the attitude of upper secondary school pupils to different groups in the society who are exposed to discrimination and negative treatment was studied. The exposed groups comprised non-European immigrants, muslims, Romanies\*, jews and persons with a homosexual orientation.

The pupil groups which had the most tolerant attitude to exposed groups were girls, pupils on study-oriented upper secondary school programmes, pupils at schools with high average grades and a harmonious school environment, and pupils from homes with highly educated parents. The majority of those with a negative and intolerant attitude were boys, pupils on profession-oriented upper secondary school programmes, pupils at schools with "problem-frequent" environments, pupils with low average grades, and pupils from homes with low-educated parents. Boys with a Swedish background had to a greater extent negative attitudes towards immigrants and muslims, and those with a foreign background showed to a greater extent negative attitudes towards jews and homosexuals. Both these groups were united in their negative attitude to Romanies. The results also showed that boys with a Swedish background were in a majority among pupils with extremely nationalistic positions regarding the requirements for who can call themselves Swedish and among pupils with negative attitudes towards immigrants and muslims.

The qualitative study by the Multicultural Centre confirmed the pattern found in the Forum for Living History's statistical investigation, and it could also show that it was the leading boys in the groups who expressed intolerant attitudes in the group discussions. A reading of the focus group interviews shows also how the rumours spread by the informants follow the same pattern. In a preparatory programme dominated by pupils with a Swedish background, one of the boys could for example retell a story of how a shawl can be used to escape from a bank robbery:

F: She said, or I forget who said, that someone wore a shawl to carry out a robbery ... that they robbed something, and a chap had a shawl, and he walked away from it. He managed the customs and everything, he just walked away and left.

A: Do men wear shawls?

F: I don't know, but it was some person, he walked around with a shawl and nothing happened to him, he took off his shawl and went .... he ... he escaped just like that, nobody stopped him  
....

Another theme which recurred in the groups dominated by boys with a Swedish background was that the Swedish culture is threatened by immigration. One boy in the same study-oriented class said that if Sweden lets the immigrants retain their culture, the Swedish culture will be threatened. Culture was thus presented as a zero-sum game, with a place for either the one or the other. Culture was in other words not seen as something changing which is created in meetings and which embodies a multitude of different expressions. It is this static view of culture that can make boys see something positive in the Sweden Democrat rhetoric, although they all oppose that which was described as a one-sided focus on the immigration question: "There is only one thing I like about the Sweden Democrats, that is that they work to retain Swedish traditions, that is the only thing I like about them."

In the groups consisting of boys with a foreign background, there was considerable awareness of the negative immigrant stereotypes to be found in the society. It was also in these groups that rumours containing negative Jewish stereotypes were expressed. One example of this is when a boy in a study-oriented class explained that he had a strongly negative feeling for Jews:

I say so: is someone a Jew, I hate Jews.... because they are disgusting, I have read about them, I know about them... before they die they put their jewels into a piece of bread and swallow it with a glass of water, in order to take it to the next kingdom ... I know that, they are miserly, they are bastards.

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<sup>13</sup> *Den mångtydiga intoleransen*, Löwander & Lange 2011

This boy's hard words were a problem for others in the subsequent discussion, and they are also the coarsest example of how intolerant attitudes towards groups exposed to discrimination could be expressed in this study. The discussions about Jews among the boys in this group were also marked by the fact that several of them had their backgrounds in the Middle East, and their opinions were linked to the conflicts that have long marked this part of the world.

When reading through the transcriptions of these studies it is interesting to note that the clearest examples of the spreading of rumours containing intolerant opinions are in groups consisting solely of boys with either a foreign or a Swedish background. In the mixed groups there were few such discussions. This can be said to point in the same direction as another result from the Forum for Living History's statistical investigation, that pupils having friends with different backgrounds tend to be more tolerant towards persons with these backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>

## FINAL DISCUSSION

In an analysis of these studies, certain patterns have become clear regarding the spreading of rumours that are antagonistic to the intercultural processes in Botkyrka. It is also apparent that certain rumours circulate more amongst some groups than among others.

A challenge in the work has been to find a suitable level of abstraction to identify the rumours. While some of the expressed rumours can be very general and diffuse, others are very detailed and relate to specific persons.

In summary, four rumour themes which it is important to work against are here identified. In the discussion of each rumour theme, a formulation is chosen which can be said to lie at an intermediate level of abstraction. These key formulations are to be considered as a concentrate of concrete rumours expressed in the studies presented above. The idea is that these identified themes can be broken down, made more distinct, and worked against in the future anti-rumour campaign in the Botkyrka municipal authority.

### Criminality

The statistical investigation carried out by the municipal authority showed that when people in the municipality were asked to think about rumours in Botkyrka, criminality, particularly in northern Botkyrka, was a predominant rumour theme. In the replies, this theme was one of a cluster of related rumours around the chain of association: *immigrant – poverty – insecurity – criminality* in different constellations. This chain of association was also apparent in the other studies. People from different parts of Botkyrka expressed it, either in the form of rumours they themselves put forward in the discussions or as rumours which they say that they have heard in earlier situations. This cluster of rumour themes is strongly related to the pattern of ethnic and economic segregation that characterises Botkyrka. The rumour expresses in this case a feeling of insecurity in all parts of the municipality, an awareness of living in a stigmatised municipality, particularly in the northern part, and feelings of fear and suspicion.

It appears to be important to include this cluster of rumour themes in the future anti-rumour work in the municipality. This spreading of rumours can be assumed to contribute to the fact that immigrants with different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds do not have equal opportunities in the municipality, and contributes to the fact that some of the municipality's inhabitants do not feel at home in Botkyrka and lack confidence in each other and in democracy.

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<sup>14</sup> Löwander & Lange 2011:36



Since of a lot of the focus in this case is on northern Botkyrka, and since the rumour of widespread criminality is something which leads to insecurity among many, the following concentrate of the variations on the themes included in the cluster is proposed: *They are criminal in northern Botkyrka.*

## Incompatible cultures

In the municipal authority's internet investigation, many of the replies also suggested that the fact that many persons in Botkyrka have a foreign background as a cause of many negative rumours. The qualitative studies gave further information that the problems with different minority groups, or more generally "immigrants", is often described through rumours based on the idea that they have a culture which is not compatible with the Swedish culture. The understanding of culture in this argument is based on generalised descriptions and often delineates different cultures as being unchanging and incompatible. This was not something expressed solely by persons with a Swedish background, but something which persons with a foreign background could also express in discussions about other groups. This type of rumour spreading is considered to contribute to a situation where the inhabitants in the municipality do not in an equal manner have access to power and influence in the municipality, because certain groups are stigmatised and marginalised. The potential for inhabitants to be well met and to receive a good municipal service is affected if those who represent the municipal authority believe in the negative stereotypes which are described. The rumour can also mean that inhabitants with different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds do not have equal opportunities and conditions in questions relating to education and employment, and that the inhabitants do not feel at home in Botkyrka and lose their faith in each other and in democracy. Finally, this type of rumour can also lead to deficiencies in the dialogue which the municipal authority maintains with the citizens and their associations with the ambition to achieve a just distribution of the municipal authority's resources.

Here it appears to be important to meet each type of rumour with intercultural dialogues, greater detail and argumentation about what it is that characterises culture and cultural processes in the society. For this reason, it is suggested that in the future anti-rumour work the second rumour shall be formulated as: *The culture of the immigrants is incompatible with the Swedish culture. Immigrants do not want to be integrated.*

## Unjust distribution of resources in the municipality

In the municipal authority's internet questionnaire, there is one theme among the rumours mentioned that suggests that the northern part of the municipality receives more resources than the southern part. This rumour theme recurs and is the most frequent in the focus groups which participated in the study of the Swedish majority in the southern part of Botkyrka. This rumour theme means that some of the municipality's inhabitants do not feel at home in Botkyrka and lose their confidence in each other and in democracy, and at the same time it undermines the dialogue between the municipal authority and the citizens and their associations where the ambition is to achieve a just distribution of the municipal authority's resources.

For this reason, it is suggested that the third rumour formulation shall be: *The distribution of resources in the municipality is unjust, the northern part gets all the tax money.*

## The threatened Swedish culture

Finally it has been apparent that the discussions about the problems with "immigrants" in the society are linked to feelings that the Swedish traditions will disappear or may even be forbidden. This rumour theme is judged to be relatively easy to meet and problemise. Its spreading is considered to contribute to the possibility that some of the municipality's inhabitants do not feel at home in Botkyrka and lose their confidence in each other and in democracy.

For this reason, it is suggested that the final rumour formulation shall be: *It is disturbing that the Swedish traditions are forbidden.*

The four rumour fields and rumour formulations presented above are expected to function as a basis for the municipal authority's coming anti-rumour campaign. Each theme can be sub-divided into different variants of the rumours within the theme. Since the rumour themes are often interlinked when they arise, this means that every strategy to eliminate a certain type of rumour will inevitably also touch on the other rumour themes.

The next stage should be to identify the arguments, reasoning and facts that can be used in the work to eliminate these rumours.

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