

PART 1: BASIC DATA

Title of the experience: Medskapande medborgardialog i Mörsil / Co-creative citizen dialogue in Mörsil		
Name of the city/region: Mörsil, Åre kommun/Åre municipality, Jämtlands län/Region of Jämtland		
Country: Sweden		
Institution presenting the candidacy: SKR (Swedish Association of Local Government and Regions)		
Start date of the experience: 2019-12-01 –		
End date of the experience: – 2021-01-28 (End of phase one – implementation ongoing)		
Type of candidacy	New experience	x
Type of experience	Council	x
	Workshop/meeting for diagnosis, monitoring, etc.	x
Objective of the experience	To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation and to incorporate diversity as a criterion for inclusion	x
	Community empowerment	x
	To empower non-organised citizens	x
	To increase citizen’s rights in terms of political participation	x
	To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy	x
Territorial area	Neighbourhood	x
Thematic area	Local development	x
	Social inclusion	x

PART 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Objectives

Main objective of the innovative experience:

Our dialogue took place in a community called Mörsil in Åre municipality and was focussed on the question ‘How do we want to live together?’ The main aim was to contribute to a more cohesive Mörsil, build on the collective capacity of the local community and to increase the participation and influence of the community in local democracy (in particular new arrivals to Sweden). An added reason for the process was to establish and develop contacts and interactions between newcomers and those who have lived a long time in Mörsil. This strengthens integration and acts as a counterweight to segregation and conflict.


How have you achieved this objective?

The project has conducted a perspective gathering process ‘in 360 degrees’, where we interviewed over 70 Mörsil residents, elected representatives and officials at Åre municipality on the focus question ‘*How do we want to live together in Mörsil?*’.

The process emphasised finding the voices that are not usually heard in citizen dialogues in Sweden and provided many different perspectives on the issue. Based on the collected perspectives, we then formed a small working group with citizens, elected representatives and officials who represented different perspectives.

This working group met digitally on four occasions to jointly prioritize which areas were most important to focus on and produce proposals for action. We succeeded in developing proposed activities that were urgent, meaningful and feasible - that would make a real difference - both in the short and long term.

Examples of activities being implemented now include a joint cleaning day to bring residents together, the creation of an umbrella organisation to represent the community and efforts to make the local school more accessible as a meeting place.

The dialogue has set up the foundation for a very different form of collaboration between the citizens of Mörsil, elected officials and civil servants for the future.

To what extent has this objective been achieved?

Through interviews with participants we have found that for many of the new arrivals in Mörsil this has been the first time they have found themselves in meetings and conversations with the "majority population". Individuals who recently arrived to Sweden now have important key roles in the continued work in implementing the proposed activities.

In addition, there are now established contacts and contact routes into Åre municipality for various issues and collaborations thanks to the dialogue and ongoing work on the proposed measures. The proposed activities focus on continuing to bridge divides and developing the collective capacity for active participation in Mörsil and the sense of belonging in the local community.

Most of the participants in the working group feel that their involvement in the local community has increased through the citizen dialogue process. A majority of the participants also report that their feelings of confidence in and satisfaction with the municipality's work has increased in during the period of the dialogue. All participants in the working group feel that their commitment to Mörsil as an area has increased in whole, or in part.

Dimensions of the experience

Which is the most innovative aspect of the experience?

In the Swedish context the dialogue is innovative in that it involves thinking and doing *with* citizens rather than *for* – bringing citizens into the early stages of problem formulation and giving them a seat at the table as the participation process is being developed. This perspective has permeated the entire dialogue process in Mörsil.

The citizens of Mörsil have been involved in the entire dialogue and decision-making process - from problem formulation, analysis, solution development, implementing the measures and being co-responsible for the results.

Another innovative part of the work is that it has been based on the idea of engaging in ‘360 degrees’. This approach means drastically expanding the outreach activities compared to most dialogues in Sweden and actively seeking out many different people and different



perspectives on the issue as possible. We have actively reached out to the citizens who are not usually heard in decision-making - often those who do not have the ability, in terms of capacity or resources, to make their voice heard.

In the outreach work, we have also built a broad range of relationships with both "opponents" and "enablers" of the continued joint work. Efforts have been made to empower them to participate in various ways; actively inviting and demonstrating that all perspectives are legitimate, running preparatory meetings to ensure that as many as possible felt safe to participate, provided technical, personal or language support to those who wanted and needed it to be able to participate on equal terms in the dialogue process.

To what extent is the procedure transferable?

The fundamentals of our approach are easy to transfer – both in Sweden and more widely. The mindset and design principles underpinning our co-creative citizen dialogue can be used on many complex issues facing cities by bringing those affected by issues actively into the process of problem formulation, solution development and implementation.

In addition, the approach of involving citizens, elected representatives, and officials in 360 degrees can also be transferred to any issues where it is important to get as many different perspectives as possible to build a better basis for decisions, build legitimacy and to prevent conflicts.

Why do you consider that the experience is feasible?

There are considerable challenges in working in areas that have relatively low levels of trust, both towards government and among resident communities themselves. Involvement and dialogue activities can easily suffer from low turnout or may even end up exacerbating conflicts and divisions.

By its very design the co-creative dialogue placed the deepening of our understanding of the context at the centre of the process. Rather than basing the work on the assumptions of the context from municipal staff and politicians looking at the issues from the outside, or on top-down expert led research the dialogue process explored the context together with the affected citizens.

By inviting as many perspectives as possible into the process, and by supporting those who found it difficult or unfamiliar to participate, we were better able to take the context into account and design solutions which would actually work, and which had the support of residents.

Compared to most participation processes in Sweden the process in Mörsil spent a lot of time on problem formulation and exploring the operating environment. This has paid off in terms of a more grounded process.

How has the experience been coordinated with other actors and processes?

In planning and implementing the dialogue process in Mörsil, we have collaborated with a large number of actors, both internally within the municipal organization and with external actors in Mörsil. Within the municipality, we have worked closely with the relevant department to establish contact with newly arrived people living in Mörsil as well as with the Business Unit in the municipality to coordinate our dialogue with a simultaneous development project with a focus on business issues in Mörsil. We have also collaborated with Fritid Åre (leisure services) in the municipality to gain an understanding of and contacts with the associations in Mörsil.



The citizen dialogue in Mörsil has also been a test bed for further developing the democratic participation processes within Åre municipality. The lessons learnt in Mörsil will be used to help increase the opportunities of citizens across Åre to participate and influence decisions.

The success of the dialogue process so far has been linked to involving and collaborating with a diverse range of actors at an early stage – this has allowed us to establish relationships and build trust internally in the municipality and externally with various citizens in Mörsil.

What has been the level of co-responsibility?

The citizen dialogue in Mörsil has a great degree of co-responsibility at its very core. Through the process, citizens, elected representatives, and officials are co-responsible in such a way that they all participate and take responsibility for defining the issues and problems in the local area. All of these actors are also involved in (and take responsibility for) developing solutions for these problems and then take responsibility for both the implementation of the activities and the subsequent results.

This is a considerable shared responsibility, but the roles and responsibilities of citizens, officials and elected representatives in the differ slightly from each other.

- Citizens are responsible for contributing their thoughts, experiences, values and lived knowledge of Mörsil.
- Elected representatives contribute their political perspective and their responsibility for the entire municipality.
- Officials bring their professional knowledge and expertise in various areas.

Citizens have power of opinion over the municipality, but it is the elected representatives who have formal decision-making power.

In the dialogue all these roles, actors and perspectives are needed and are equally important to bring about a positive change in the local area.

Which evaluation and accountability mechanisms were used?

Åre municipality was the initiator for this citizen dialogue. The 70 or so people who were interviewed as part of the process reviewed the resulting report to let us know if we had missed or misunderstood anything. They received continuous updates via email on how the dialogue process was progressing.

The process was communicated by website, social media, local newspapers and posters at grocery stores, libraries, and similar spaces.

Among those interviewed, about 20 people were then asked to participate in a working group.

After each work meeting, the participants were given the task of going out into their respective networks and check if we were discussing the rights things and if –there were things we were missing or things we should change. At the end of each meeting, we also had a “check-out” where the members of the working group evaluated the process.

After the last working meeting, the participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire – results show that they felt listened to, that they have been able to influence but also that their perspective has changed by listening to others.

They are satisfied with the activities proposed through the process and the shared responsibility in implementing them. Their commitment to Mörsil has increased, but also their trust and satisfaction with Åre municipality. They feel that they have made contacts with



people they usually don't interact with and that the dialogue has contributed to people getting along better with each other in the neighbourhood.

Summary of the experience

Åre municipality has actively worked to receive new arrivals to Sweden to the municipality. Mörsil is one of the areas in the municipality where many new arrivals live.

In recent years, we have heard and seen, especially on social media, negative comments and opinions about newcomers in Mörsil. Tensions have emerged linked to disturbances at schools, housing segregation, and tensions within and between ethnic groups.

Åre municipality saw the situation as serious and realized that it was a complex and tense situation with several different layers and numerous actors involved. We realized that could not solve this in a simple way, or on our own.

Instead, we set the goal of being the unifying force that brought together the different perspectives that exist in Mörsil and took the initiative for the conversations that were needed.

Åre is a member of a Swedish network about citizen dialogues in complex issues organized by the Swedish Association of Local Government and Regions. This network gave us access to a model for citizen dialogues in complex issues which we built on and developed.

Through the citizen dialogue in Mörsil, we wanted to:

- Increase participation in the local community and in local democracy for both new arrivals and those who had lived in Mörsil a long time
- Increase the contact and interaction between new arrivals and domestic-born residents in Mörsil
- Improve contact and trust between citizens in Mörsil on one hand and Åre municipality on the other
- Build on the collective capacity in Mörsil and contribute to a more united Mörsil
- Work to increase connections between different groups of Mörsil residents.

In our co-creative citizen dialogue we placed the principle that those affected are actively involved in defining the problems, making proposals for activities and then jointly taking responsibility for the implementation and results of the proposals as the core of the work.

The first step we took was to interview about 70 people – made up of residents in Mörsil (of different ages, genders, backgrounds and perspectives. on the issues facing the area), elected representatives and officials at Åre municipality.

The interviews focused on the question ‘*How do we want to live together in Mörsil?*’. This allowed the interviewees to define the challenges facing themselves and Mörsil in a broad sense. Following the interviews, a working group was formed consisting of politicians and officials at Åre municipality and residents in Mörsil (also here with different ages, genders, backgrounds and views on the problems).

Jointly, the working group developed proposals for measures that they saw as meaningful, urgent and feasible - measures that would make a real difference to the issues facing Mörsil. Continued joint work is now underway with joint planning and responsibility for the implementation of the measures and their results between citizens and the municipality.

The citizen dialogue process has also been a testbed to build internal competence and capacity in the municipality to develop citizens' participation in a systematic and continuous manner.