The feasibility study
Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania

Report
28 May 2012
1. FOREWORD

In Europe, as in Scania, events takes place that attacks the principle of the the equal value of every person. Far away and too close to us people are violated because of their faith. No one should have to experience xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia.

It is reported in the current investigations of hate crimes have increased in Sweden. We see a dramatic rise in the number of websites with anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish content. In foreign and Swedish media Malmoe, the biggest city in Scania, is described as a religious hot spot, unique to the country.

Scania has long offered venues for people of diverse religious beliefs. A welcoming attitude is and has been a major reason for Sweden's success. Today, many Scanians are concerned about the threats to the welfare and the democracy.

Compassion is a powerful motivator in the world's religions and an important resource for promoting social cohesion. All can benefit from the society when the spirit of community is strengthened. Especially for those who have difficulty getting their part of the welfare, those without the feeling of togetherness and optimism.

A good social climate not only promotes personal maturity, but also to socieal development. A strong social cohesion provides competitive advantages for every city and region that wants to develop their business and labormarked, especially in an international perspective.

The feasibilty study Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania is an attempt to initiate a dialogue and collaboration across traditional barriers, in order to mobilize non-believers and believers in Scania in a common quest for greater social cohesion.

The 102 interviews and the five think tanks that were carried out in the feasibility study shows that regional and local actors in the public and private sectors perceive the religious communities as key partners in efforts to uphold human dignity and an inclusive society.

With this initiative for social cohesion and confidence, Region of Scania, municipality of Malmoe and the Church of Sweden through the Diocese of Lund developed an interaction, which is unique and which clearly demonstrates the need for dialogue and common action, across ingrained borders and patterns.

The report concludes the preliminary study Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania. At the date, the form of a continuation of the project Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania is unclear, concerning principal responsibility and funding.

The document, besides material from the interviews and think tanks, also includes the result of discussions held with the feasibility study's management team and collaborators. The content and proposals in the document expresses the author's own thoughts.

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2. INTRODUCTION

In December 2009, under the guidance of the bishop in the diocese of Lund Dr. Antje Jackelén, an interfaith delegation from Scania attended a conference in Melbourne, Australia, hosted by the Parliament of the World's Religions.

In 2010 the bishop was contacted by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), with a proposal about the City of Malmö and Region of Scania's possible involvement in a project on social cohesion.

The model for the project bears the name *Diverse Communities in a Shared Society: Utilizing Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation to Foster Social Cohesion*. The project plan has been developed by CPWR, which has a substantial understanding of interfaith work. The organization has in recent years gathered valuable experience through a global network of work for social cohesion in cities.

2.1 The feasibility study

The plan includes a proposal for the implementation of a pilot study, as a first step in the project. Together with representatives of a group of religious organizations the bishop applied in 2011 for funds to municipal and regional participation in the feasibility study.

In autumn 2011 the organization took shape. In mid-October, the business was started. The feasibility study was completed during the following spring. The overall work was guided by a steering committee of Eva Alterbeck, Vice President of Scania City Mission, Bishop Antje Jackelén and the director at Scania City Mission Birthe Wallin. The management team consulted with an open reference group for the feasibility study development.

The daily work was led by a project manager, consultant Aldo Iskra. The journalist Natacha López participated in the interview process. Maiwor Nilsson took notes during the think tanks.

The information collected from the interviews and the think tanks lays the foundation for further work on the project Social Cohesion in Malmö/Scania.

The study was funded by the Region of Scania, City of Malmö and Lund Mission Society. Scania City Mission managed project funds and acted as an administrative support of the project staff efforts.

2.2 The Project

Guiding the work of the feasibility study were the thoughts on the content and approach that is in the plan for the project Social Cohesion in Malmö / Scania. The selection of interviewees and participants in the think tanks was based on the description of the project's operational goals (see below).

The four-year project is scheduled to start in autumn 2012 and extends to the summer 2016. The project method uses religious communities as an important resource in the construction of a sustainable society, especially in the creation of innovative cross-border networks.
The project will study the integration and xenophobia and the challenges involved in many European cities. It is also important to share good practice in the work for diversity and openness.

The project aims to support the development of a good social climate in Scania. The starting point should be that religious diversity is an asset, not a problem and that faith communities have a public, personal and private part to play.

The project provides opportunities to achieve synergies in the work already done in different places and at the same time raises questions of social connectedness to a wide circle of decision makers, setters and opinion makers.

2.3 The operational goals
- to encourage the development of interfaith work undertaken in Scania
- creating structures that counteract extremism and violence, and allows for a supportive action through involvement in issues and conflicts
- to increase knowledge about religion, about interpretations and the importance faith can play in people's lives
- to promote increased security among people through enhanced cooperation between associations, organizations, agencies and authorities, such as the Police and the Fire department
- to collaborate with municipal and regional efforts to develop Malmoe and Scania to socially and culturally open and innovative city and region
- to contribute to the positive publicity of Malmoe and Scania in national and international media

3. WORK AND EARNINGS

In accordance with the plan, the feasibility study was the first step in the project and a listening phase. More than a hundred people were interviewed and a handful of think tanks /dialogue meetings have been conducted. The interviews contributed with reflections and proposals on the spiritual and religious Communities role and importance to a good social climate. The interviews also gave suggestions and valuable contributions to contacts with new persons to interview.

Among those who were interviewed and/or participating in the think tanks were predominantly influential persons, but also the people at the grassroots level. The selection based on discussions in the reference group and the interviewees themselves. Question number 5 in the interview template, about key people, guided and influenced the composition of the people both in the interview series and the think tanks.

Elected officials and representatives of non governmental organisations got their voices heard, as well as individuals with involvement in social issues. Business representatives and union representatives were contacted. Employees at the governmental level and people who work in the municipality or in the regional authority were asked. People with positions in the public life and men and women in more anonymous roles participated in the talks. Different faith communities are represented in the interviews. Non-believers were also heard.
Overall, more than 200 people participated in the feasibility study activities. People with knowledge, experience and networks that are crucial to the religious communities collaborated with secular actors to develop their contribution to a stronger social connectedness in Malmö and the rest of southern Sweden.

3.1 The interviews
The interviews lasted about 50 minutes. The written interview was sent to the interviewed person for approval. The questions were as follows: 1. What is most important about what you do? 2. How do you see what you do as a contribution to a positive social climate? 3. What motivates you to make this contribution? 4. What is your perspective on the current challenges of diversity in the municipality/region? 5. How does your religious/spiritual community or organization contribute to a positive social climate? 6. Who are the key players in your community or organization? Or in the broader society related to creating a good social climate? 7. What is your perspective on the current role of religious and spiritual communities in the municipality/region? How can religious and spiritual communities contribute to a positive social climate? 8. What else would you like me to know?

The first interview took place 21 October 2011. The feasibility study last interview was held 11 May 2012.

102 people were interviewed. List of participants and interview responses are collected in an appendix.

3.2 The think tanks
The think tanks were conducted in collaboration with partners with different missions and roles in society. This is to get diverse perspectives and the opportunity to develop new and existing networks.

All the think tanks took place in Scania City Mission premises in Malmö. The sessions were intense and relatively short, about three hours. The agenda/questions were based on the project's business goals and worked out jointly between the partner and the project manager. It was determined in consensus who would be invited. The think tanks were conducted during the winter/spring 2012.

52 people attended at the think tank activities. List of participants and notes are collected in an appendix.

Think Tank No. 1
Theme: The story of Malmö affect us. How do we affect the story?

In the current investigation, it is reported that hate crimes in Sweden have increased. We see a dramatic increase in the number of websites with anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish content. In foreign and Swedish media described Malmö as a religious hot spot, unique to the country. The image or story of Malmö affect us citizens in Scania negative. How do we affect the story/picture?
The think tank was carried out in collaboration with Ibn Rushd, a muslim study association for adult education. Representatives of the Swedish Radio and the Swedish Television in Malmoe attended the think tank. Participated did also people responsible for the communication issues in the city of Malmoe. The association Al-Salam was represented, as well as the training center Medina and Sofielund's study association. The Fire department was represented. Among other participants there were representatives from Ibn Rushd and people from Malmoe's religious communities. Think Tank was held on Thursday 16 February.

**Think Tank No. 2**  
Theme: Welfare work on religious grounds in Malmoe - today and tomorrow

An important part of people's religiosity is expressed in consideration of those who are most in need. Altruism and solidarity with the needy is practiced daily by the faithful. But ignorance of the religious Communities efforts for people in poverty and exclusion is significant.

The think tank was conducted in collaboration with the Church of Sweden in Malmoe. In a unique performance and at the initiative of the think tank, a presentation was made on the Church of Sweden social work in Malmo (fiscal year 2011). The purpose of the think tank was to inspire the visibility and development of social work in Malmoe and Scania. How can we cooperate in efforts to reach more people and be used in the best way? Can social work be conducted differently and in new areas? Can the cultural life participate?

The think tank was attended by a researcher from Malmoe University. The cultural administration in the municipality of Malmoe was represented. The network Social Economy Scania, Scania City Mission and staff from the Church of Sweden's Office in Malmoe participated in the think tank. Evening Post's political editor was represented, and Swedish Radio's news department in Malmoe. Among the participants there were also people from Malmoe's religious communities. The think Tank was held on Tuesday, April 3.

The report/presentation about the Church of Sweden’s social work in Malmoe in 2011 can be ordered as an attachment.

**Think Tank No. 3**  
Theme: Internal and external security in a troubled Malmoe. How do we get the feeling of trust and confidence to spread?

In the media, you can easily get the impression residents in Malmoe are ruled by fear and apprehension. In fact, daily life in Malmoe is characterized by routines and a relatively high quality of life. We live in a functioning society where most people are feeling good. Still, there are too many people living in social and physical insecurity, in undignified conditions and without faith in the future. How do we get the experience of trust and confidence to spread to everyone?

The think tank was conducted in collaboration with the Fire department and the Police. The think tank was attended by a researcher from Malmoe University. Malmoe municipality's Security and safety department and the Police department were represented, as well as the International Women's Association, Yalla-stairs (an association for unemployed women) and the muslim student
association Al Hambra. Among the participants there were also people from Malmoe's religious communities. Think Tank was held on Thursday 26 April.

**Think Tank No. 4**
Theme: The willingness to give - can it get Malmoe to grow?

Exclusion is often associated with material deprivation, but also loneliness and spiritual alienation exists. It takes various actions and collaborations to strengthen people's sense of belonging.

A Malmoe characterized by community and optimism strengthens the individual's well-being, and develops the town and business life positively. The willingness to give - to work long term and in solidarity with the people of alienation may be a good starting point for a Malmoe with a strong social cohesion. Good forces need to cooperate and innovation must be given space. In business social responsibility is expressed in individual workplaces and in society at large. The religious communities, with a diversity of faiths and traditions, represents an important part of the internationalization of Malmoe.

Can the business community and the religious communities together to strengthen Malmoe residents' experience of community? The willingness to give - can it get Malmoe to grow?

The think tank was conducted in collaboration with the South Swedish Industry and Commerce Chamber. The chamber was represented by a person in a senior position. City of Malmö was represented by a manager from the business office. The Think Tank was also attended by Swedish Television Malmoe. Among the participants there were also people from Malmoe's religious communities. Think Tank was held on Monday, May 7

**Think tank No. 5**
Theme: The interview responses! - How can the religious communities contribute to a positive social climate?

102 people were interviewed. Among the interviewees, there were a wide range of decision makers, setters and opinion makers. Different faith communities have been represented. Non-believers have come to speak.

The interview responses need to be discussed, analyzed and used as the basis of individual religious communities, businesses and in the continuing work on the project Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania. The answers were the starting point for the conversation in the think tank.

An administrator from the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities attended at the think tank. Among the participants there were also people from Malmoe's religious communities. Think Tank was held on Tuesday, May 15

**3.3 The Reference group**
The first planning meeting was held on 26 April 2010. It took place in Lund, at the diocese’s office. The host was Bishop Antje. Participants included reverend Dirk Ficca, head of the office at the
Parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago, the president of Malmö City Council Kent Andersson and a handful of representatives of religious communities. The undersigned attended the meeting as a consultant for Region of Scania. Reverend Dirk Ficca introduced the working model for the project Social Cohesion in Malmö/Scania at the meeting. While working on the feasibility study there has been an ongoing dialogue with reverend Dirk Ficca, who had an advisory role and participated in several reference group meetings.

Four reference group meetings was carried out during 2010-2012. Among the participants were people who represented the political leaders in City of Malmö and the Region of Scania. Following organisations were also represented; the Integration Council (Region of Scania), Culture department (City of Malmö), Dialogue Forum, (City of Malmö), Police department, Fire department, Malmö University, Red Cross, Scania City Mission, the association Yalla-stairs, the study association Ibn Rushd, the project The Peace House, the network Faith and Tolerance, Malmö Chan Buddhist Temple, the Jewish Community of Malmö, Islamic Center in Malmö, the Mission Church in Malmö and the Church of Sweden. Since the feasibility study's start, two more reference group meetings were held, with the participation also of Bait-ul-hand Mosque, Bosnian Islamic Assembly, Hare Krishna, Buddha Ways/Yi Gah Cho Dzong, Baha'i, Sikh Cultural Association, the German congregation in Malmö, the Evangelical Free Baptist Church, Rotary Scania, Medina education center, student union ABF, the association Al Salam, the union movement LO, the association Street Voice and Face, the network The Flying Carpet and the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities. The last meeting was held in conjunction with the feasibility study's end, 28 May 2012.

Some sixty people have been involved in the reference group.

3.4 Special activities
The feasibility study has started important discussions outside the churches, mosques, synagogue and the other temples, even outside the borders of Scania.

The work has been carried out without outreach marketing. It was the consequence of a conscious decision, since the feasibility study would provide a listening phase. Nevertheless, the preliminary study faced a strong interest.

Presentations for the Government and the City Council
In the second of the five tanks a report on social work on religious grounds was presented. The report *The Church of Sweden - Diaconal work in Malmö in 2011* has attracted interest in the government. Swedish Church in Malmö have been invited to present the document for the responsible minister later this spring. The report will also be preferred in the town hall in Malmö the responsible councilor.

Interest from authorities
In addition to police authorities and the Fire department also the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities took part in the feasibility study. An officer from the commission participated frequently in the feasibility study activities.

Meeting with the U.S. Ambassador
Mark Brzezinski, U.S. Ambassador in Sweden, visited Scania on 1 March 2012. The stay included visits to the Jewish Community and the Islamic Center in Malmoe. One of the trip motives was to study issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The national and international media declared Malmoe as a religious hot spot. Ahead of the Scanian journey the U.S. Embassy contacted signed for a meeting.

Ambassador Brzezinski and his staff participated in a discussion on the feasibility study and the situation of Jews and Muslims in Malmoe, along with Aslihan Ekinci, Chairman of Alhambra - Malmoe Muslim Student Association, Bjorn Håkonsson, deacon, Our Savior Catholic church, Hakan Jälmby, vicar, Eriksfälts Assembly, the Church of Sweden and signed.

**Bishop Antje participating in Almedalsveckan**
Work on the feasibility study has also been instrumental in Bishop Antjes participation in this year Almedalen Week. The most important media and political gathering in Sweden. The bishop participates in the Öresund Committee's opening seminar in Visby on July 1.

**Media attention**
The report *The Church of Sweden - Diaconal work in Malmö in 2011* led to a mini-series of reportage in Swedish Radio and a leader in the Evening Post.

In mid-May of this year signed was contacted by the BBC World Service for information and interview about religious tensions in Malmoe's vulnerable areas.

**4. REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

Many of the people who participated in the feasibility study are already working, through their organizations and networks, in various ways with dialogues across cultural and religious boundaries, with the aim of achieving social cohesion.

Apart from Malmoe's Dialogue Forum, the Region of Scania’s Integration Councils there are a small number of local and regional actors working within networks and with issues of diversity, religion and social inclusion. These networks are supported partially or fully by individual enthusiasts. The networks Faith and Tolerance and Forum for Interfaith Cooperation in Malmoe should also be mentioned, as well as the newly formed association Agora. The level of activity in the networks and associations have been changing over time.

Major initiatives concerning diversity are currently taken by municipalities in Scania, and by the Region of Scania, the County Administrative Board of Scania and the Oresund Committee. In cooperation with the religious communities it will be possible to authorities and institutions to develop a stronger social cohesion in Scania.

**Coordination and cooperation**
What is needed is a sturdy structure that can work continuously for a long period of time, and linking initiatives from local, regional, national authorities and from independent operators. Among the independent operators there should also be included important associations in the civil society.
and companies as well, as trade unions and business organizations. An important issue to work on would be social work, which comes to expression in churches diaconal activities.

In and outside the pre-study interview series and think tanks is an explicit agreement that it might be worth trying out the idea of coordination and cooperation, not least because of synergies.

**Information and knowledge**

Inter-religious dialogue has a relatively long history in Scania. The network Faith and Tolerance was founded in 1993 in Lund. The following year, their first meeting was held in Malmö. The networks and awareness of different faiths and traditions are well developed among Malmo’s religious representatives, at least among those in leadership positions. This knowledge needs to be disseminated to the parish members, but also to the circuit outside of the believers.

There are already structures in order to develop and test methods for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue in different parts of Sweden. In Örebro an inter-religious council were created 2007. A similar council started its operations in Gothenburg on 1 January 2012. The municipality of Gothenburg finances the interfaith center with 1 million over 3 years.

The need for information and knowledge about religion and what religious life can mean is significant in several cities in Scania. Cities like Malmö, Landskrona, Helsingborg, Kristianstad, Lund and Trelleborg are clearly marked by diversity. Scania is a meeting place for people of different cultural and religious affiliations. But ignorance of the faith and the lack of respect for cultural and religious differences easily lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and conflicts.

Harassment against Jews and Muslims in Scania has become an issue discussed both nationally and internationally. To the gloomy picture can be linked recurrent violence practicing with xenophobic overtones, such as the shots that led to deaths in Malmö last year. Discrimination and hate crimes requires commitment from everyone in the community.

The school’s role is crucial. A dialogue between religious leaders and students, teachers and other school staff may be the single most important measure to combat xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

More knowledge is needed about different religions, both among believers and non-believers. A kind of knowledge which disseminates information, provides training and advanced courses could be established, in order to facilitate public meetings and to stimulate curiosity and broadened perspectives.

**Democracy and Advocacy**

"The most negative experience is not found in the radio and television, but in the social media on the internet. Where violation of people and hateful outcomes are common. Why do young people write insulting comments on each other? "The quote is expressed by a participant in one of the think tanks in a discussion on Islamophobia."

Jews, Muslims and other believers can testify that violations related to religion are commonplace. Violations can be conveyed on the street, surprisingly and spontaneously. The experience of abuse may also appear in the public debate, by established debaters and with great force in the media.
Freedom of speech is secured in the constitution and a fundamental part of a democracy. Democracy presupposes an open debate where different beliefs come together, where all voices can be heard. Even the religious voices!

Increasingly, people are asking questions about the positions of the religious leaders. What do they think about women's and men's rights? Can violence in the name of a religion be justified? Do religious people care about the environment? There are many questions and concerns. Religious representatives often have answers to questions about the meaning of a good society. In the formulation of ideals is also a repudiation towards what is perceived as negative. A clearer presence in public debate would give a better understanding of people's beliefs and values. Facts would be made available in a greater extent than is the case today. It does not mean that the differences of opinion fails, maybe the opposite? Democracy presupposes differences and options.

Opinions by the religious representatives could be based on a common basis. They could act like lobbyists and participate in the public debate. It would address the need for clarification, and address important societal issues. In addition, they could be campaigning on matters of broad consensus exists. One of the people in the feasibility study's interview series says, "Who else than the religious should stand up for the principle of equality of all people?"

Projects or initiatives?
The project plan for Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania contains concrete proposals on activities and a schedule. The feasibility study is a listening phase and after that follows the project itself, which in itself can accommodate ongoing activities and new innitiativ. In the discussions that took place during the work, it is clear that initiatives that gets people to meet across traditional boundaries are requested.

Scepticism towards new projects is obvious among people working on diversity issues. "345 projects with a total budget of 319 million, has started in Rosengård since the turn of the century. The goal has often been to segregation, getting people into work and raise grades. It's been like that, not so succesfully. "Published in Sydsvenskan (the local paper), on 5 April 2012. How can a new initiative contribute positively to the work already done?

The need for knowledge about the importance of religion in people's lives is palpable. Throughout the interview series and think tanks people expressed the desire to know more and a desire to establish contacts with religious representatives. The need for contact is mutual. Creating networks has been a stimulating and successful part of the feasibility study. Among those interviewed, many voices have been raised and calling religious leaders to participate more clearly and more often in the public debate.

Overall, one can say that the needs described above might be satisfied with the creation of a center that provides facts on issues about religious life and mediate contacts across contexts and belongings.

The working model that combines interviews with interaction with think tanks have met a lot of appreciation. More than 200 people have participated in the feasibility study. With the approach of the feasibility study and the project Social Cohesion in Malmoe/Scania considerably more people can get involved.
5. SUGGESTIONS AND THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

The proposals as formulated below are primarily addressed to the City of Malmoe, Region of Scania and the Church of Sweden, which together enabled this study.

5.1 Develop the work interview series and the think tanks

An advanced work with interviews and think-tanks as tools would broaden the networks. Then you can get in dialogue with people who appear further down in the hierarchies and on levels where the contacts are too few or need to be developed.

The think tanks can in greater extend be focused on distinct issues, which dwells on a particular event or a particular issue. The think tank about social work on religious grounds in Malmoe is a good example of such a distinction.

Both interviewees as participants in the think tanks were selected. A stimulating development would be to expand the network to a wider audience. Open think tanks and conferences would vitalize the process. Conferences could be implemented in cooperation with cultural institutions, to get an audience friendly setting and content that emphasizes the value of meetings between people.

Availability and experience of inclusion is crucial to succeed in reaching a wide audience. The target audience may be, for example teachers, medical staff or police. But even people outside the labor market or in publicly funded activities.

5.2 Pay attention to religious festivals and invite to party

Clarifying the cultural and religious diversity is crucial to increase interest in and knowledge of people's differences.

Among the cities which are regarded as role models when it comes to diversity and inclusion is Leicester. A city of Malmoe's size, which is located in the UK. Leicester City Council has taken the initiative to annually fill the city's streets and squares with religious parties.

The attention of this kind show that the society "sees" its citizens and respects their cultural and religious affiliations. Corresponding initiatives would be welcomed by many believers and non-believers in Scania and be an important building block in the quest for a strong social cohesion.

Cultural institutions have an important role in the shaping of our time. A developed dialogue between culture and the religious life would be revitalizing for the whole community. A dialogue that not only focuses on the festivities but also in existential themes, morals and ethics, and issues of spirituality.
5.3 Establish a center that takes the necessary initiatives and is responsible for a coordinated response

A sustainable structure, in the form of a tighter network or a "center", is needed to continuously and over a longer period of time link the initiatives of local, regional, national authorities and from independent operators. It would affect diversity work positively through better use of resources, while the center provides important expertise in religious matters.

Besides being a kind of knowledge bank the center could also promote network building, provide links crisscross of context and belongings.

The center, consisting a few people, could develop the model from the feasibility study in which individual interviews were combined with participation in think tanks.

The center can be an important resource for the further work on Social Cohesion in Malmo/Scania.

To mark religious independence, the City of Malmo and the Region of Scania should finance the center.