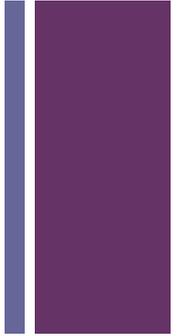




# Student engagement and activism in Sweden

Jenny Börjeson

# + Why am I here?



Student perspective; experiences and reflections

- Malmö Student Union, Malmö University
- 3 years full time in the student union
- International, bilingual, student union with full time board and administrators
- Overview of student engagement and activism in Sweden
- Malmö University for Refugees



# Swedish student engagement: the basics



- Universities are by law required to have student representatives in all decision making and decision preparatory bodies concerning education (like the majority of the EU countries)
- Up until 2010, student union membership was obligatory
- Student elected positions
- Full time positions (at most universities)
- National organisation of student unions, SFS
- Principal challenges: Low voter participation, economic dependency on the university, difficulty to engage students



# Diversity in student activism: 4 examples



## ■ *Academic focus*

The Feminist Association at Malmö University

- Quotes from student about the lack of gender perspectives in their education put up all over the university
- The vice chancellor publicly met the criticism, meetings
- Gender perspective was (partly) back in focus

## ■ *Students' situation*

- Sleeping in tents on university grounds
- SFS - #heltsjukt

## ■ *Study relevant*

Asylrättsstudenterna

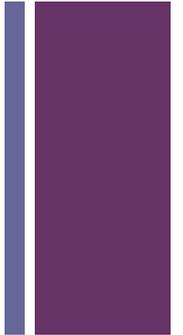
- Law students in universities all over Sweden
- Legal advice for refugees

## ■ *Civil society*

- Students engaging in everything from local to international NGOs
- Eg. Volunteering, donating to charity, organising demonstrations

# + Malmö-

## Student Union, University and City



- Malmö
  - Old industrial city turned intellectual innovation hub
  - A city with at least 182 nationalities
  - Almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the population under 35
  - Activist, engaged, innovative, creative
- Malmö University (20 years old this year!)
  - All but 1 faculties have Society in their name
  - Migration, environment, equality, DIVERSITY
  - More than half are first generation students
  - Majority of programs “close” to society (Nursing, Teaching, Dentistry, Sociology....)
- Malmö Student Union
  - The first and only fully bilingual Student Union in Sweden!



Malmö Central station,  
fall 2015





Then the photograph of Alan Kurdi's dead body spread over the world



Then this  
happened



And then this!





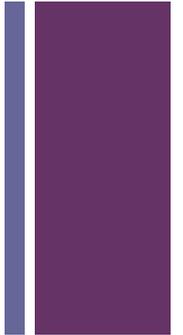
# Malmö University for Refugees



- The students, student union, university, and university staff coming together
- Creating a platform for initiatives
- Lifting questions on how, as an academic institution, the university could help
- What triggered it?
  - Both students and staff were looking for ways to help, not knowing where to start
  - “New” demography in the group of refugees: plenty of academics; Researchers, doctors, nurses, teachers, students...



# Different kinds of initiatives



- Language café
  - students, and some staff, meeting up with newly arrived refugees to help them learn both Swedish and English
  - The Student Union provided the location, the Uni provided books on how to learn Swedish
- Union gathering money at events, to a staff run Christmas Bonanza
- Toothbrush donations:
  - Dentistry Student who gathered over 50 000 toothbrushes
  - Most were distributed at asylum housing around Malmö, which included a short information on dental hygiene and your rights as an asylum seeker to receive dental care
  - The rest distributed around Sweden, and some even in other countries
- Gathering toys, books etc. for refugee children
- Red Cross donation:
  - Everything from students and staff donating, to Student Union gathering money at events, to a staff run Christmas Bonanza – almost 7000 Euros

# + Academic initiatives

- How could we facilitate for all the newly arrived academics, students and prospective students?
  - → this question was brought up at every faculty board meeting, university board, management groups... More or less every meeting across the university, and soon at regional and national university meetings
- This led to...
  - A cooperation between the University, the student union, and Arbetsförmedlingen that organises guidance for newly arrived refugees who intend to start or continue their university studies
  - Regional and soon after national focus on making the entrance to Swedish Universities more accessible for newly arrived refugees, but also immigrants in general (validation of grades, studies etc.)
  - Regional and national focus on “fast tracks” for people with an education from outside the EU who need to eg. learn Swedish law, education system...
  - MAU allocated money specifically for research focused on refugees, immigration and integration

Malmö, together with a couple more universities, now has a fast track for teachers where you start in Arabic, at the same time you are learning Swedish, and by the end of the year, you will finish your education in Swedish!



# Student Union and University working together in activism



- We didn't make it political; under the MUFRA flag, we never officially spoke for or against the asylum laws. We all concluded that there are people in Sweden who we can help, and maybe even more importantly, people who are needed in Swedish academia. Additionally, we, students and staff, recognised that it is our *responsibility* to act. May it be the criteria of 'sharing your research with the public', or may it be ensuring the right of higher education for everyone.

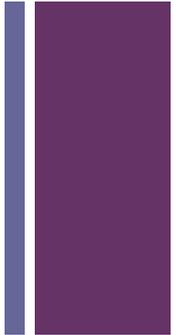


# Challenges (and opportunity for discussion!)



- Responsibility/ Ownership of the initiative
  - The Student Union full time board members have to fulfill their main mission (according to our statutes and to our contract with the university); student influence and making sure that all students at Malmö University have the best possible experience, academically and socially. What time or money could we possibly allocate for the cause?
  - The University, similar to the student union, have their main responsibilities, and just like us, most staff are already stretched thin.
  - Volunteers are crucial, but, someone needs to recruit them and, at least to a certain extent, manage them.

# + Conclusion



- Student activism takes many forms
- Students, Student Unions, University, University Staff *can* and *should* take on some issues together
- Necessity of allocated time and money from both parties

AND, Malmö University for Refugees is one of Malmö University's (and mine!) proudest accomplishments!