

GOVERNANCE UNCOVERED EPISODE 58 TRANSCRIPT

Exploring Governance in Gothenburg: Initiatives on Sharing Economy, Citizen Engagement, and Integration

Hello and welcome to Governance Uncovered, a podcast brought to you by the Governance and Local Development Institute at the University of Gothenburg. This podcast is supported by the Swedish Research Council.

Today, we have something different for you as we have shifted our geographical focus for a while and decided to really look at governance locally by turning our focus to the city where GLD is based, namely, Gothenburg.

First, we'll hear about a collaborative effort by Chalmers, the University of Gothenburg, and the City of Gothenburg to identify the potential of sharing economies at the household level.

At that point you were very interested, from the city, in being able to identify what to prioritize really. So we have to take some actions regarding the sharing economy. But we have this constellation of products that can be shared. We have this constellation of different individuals in the city that have different conditions, different interests.

Then, we learn about the Gothenburg Proposal, an e-petition platform enhancing local democracy and citizen engagement.

So the Gothenburg proposal is a method that you call E-proposal or E-petitions international. And it actually what it says is a citizen can get their petition or the proposal on the political agenda to discuss if it gets 200 votes and it actually is the same way as politician to demand or suggest proposal to their committee or board to discuss. So it's actually directly way for citizens to put their question or their proposal on the board of the politicians in Gothenburg.

Finally, we learn about Swedish Development Partner Gothenburg, also known as "IM Gothenburg," and their work with local integration in the city.

So we make a point of being in the areas where there is a need for our activities. IM Gothenburg's activities are located in Tynnered, Lundy, Gamlestan, in places where there is a socially, economically disadvantaged areas. And all our activities are free to participate in, and the activities we have with youth, which are weekly, are usually costly or things that you might not have the money or resources to do yourself.

We hope you enjoy this episode on local governance in Gothenburg; more information about the guests and topics discussed can be found in the episode description!

First up in this episode on Gothenburg, we're going to hear about research on sharing economies at the household level. Conducted by Chalmers University of Technology and the University of Gothenburg in collaboration with the city itself, this research shows significant attitude-behavior gaps in sustainable sharing practices. Joining us to discuss this research and sustainable consumption in Gothenburg are Divia Jiménez Encarnación, Emma Öhrwall, and Erica Metheney.

Divia is a PhD student at Chalmers University, and her research focuses on quantifying the sustainability benefits of sharing economy initiatives at the local level.

Emma works at the Department of Democracy and Citizen Services at the City of Gothenburg. At the time of the research project discussed in this episode, she worked on a project called Sharing Cities Gothenburg.

Interviewing Divia and Emma is GLD's Erica Metheney, who works as a Statistician and co-leads the Data Team at GLD. Erica, along with Divia and three other scholars from Chalmers, wrote the paper that came out of this research, called "Revealing patterns in household product consumption and sharing: An approach to support urban governance towards a sustainable sharing economy."

Welcome, Divia and Emma. So excited to talk about our new paper about sharing economies. To get started, can you tell us, what is a sharing economy?

Yes, of course. So the sharing economy, it's usually considered an umbrella concept. So that means that depending on who you ask, you will have very different definitions. And this happens in research. Definition that I want to concentrate on, is a definition that helps us consumers in the city be able to reduce the amount of new things that we buy. So how do we do that? We do this by being able to use the capacity that already exists out there. What products are out there? How do we access them? We could loan them. We could rent them, we could exchange with other people. And this comprehends all types of products. So we can be thinking about tools, we can be thinking about kitchen equipment, and clothes, and so on.

It's great. So one of the things I love about this paper is that not is it only about Gothenburg, where we're all currently sitting right now, but it uses data and research questions both from academia, from the Chalmers University of Technology and from the City of Gothenburg itself. As I understand, this is a pretty long-term collaboration. It started quite a long time ago. Can I get a little history about how this came about?

Yes, between 2018 and 2021. It was this test bed called Sharing City Gothenburg, and it was a part of a national programme called Sharing Cities Sweden. So we were one of four cities enable sharing economy to be a part of: how can we create a sustainable city? And some years ago, I met Leonardo, And who's Leonardo, Divia?

So Leonardo is my PhD supervisor.

Yeah, yeah. And he mentioned a method that could give us data about households in Gothenburg kind of consumption and productions and environmental impact, with focus on the local sharing economy. And we thought that was interesting. So that was how it began.

Yeah. And then at this point, I started my PhD program. So from the beginning, we knew that we had the possibility to collaborate with you, with Sharing Cities Gothenburg, and be able to exchange data, we could somewhat influence the questions that would be in this survey, so I was able to see the survey that you were going to send out and you were able to see the survey that I was going to send out as well. And then once this process is finished, once we have this data, so then I realized I need some dear support in the statistical analysis side, and then that's how I started trying to find someone who was right for this. I contacted a group of women scientists in Gothenburg and that's how I found you, Erica, working for GU.

Yeah, it was a great experience. Just happened upon your post, honestly, and to get to do something, local governance focused, which is what I do at GLD, in my day job, but something relevant to the city I live in. So that's how the data came about. So we have these two different surveys, one collected by the city, one collected by academia, and together, you also co-produced some research questions, some questions that the city wanted to have answers to in order to be able to better govern their sharing economy. Can you tell us a bit about what those questions were and why they were so important to know?

So I can start with this. At that point you were very interested, from the city, in being able to identify what to prioritize really. So we have to take some actions regarding the sharing economy. But we have this constellation of products that can be shared. We have this constellation of different individuals in the city that have different conditions, different interests. And so at that point, you were asking how do we go about prioritizing. So who do we focus on first? And back then you thought that it was quite relevant to take three focuses, so what products could be prioritized? What demographic groups could be prioritized, and which geographical areas were prioritized?

And also because Gothenburg is a segregated city, so we know that there is different groups of citizens, and their income could be very different where they live, and also their consumption is affected by their income. So, or us, it's interesting to know the needs and interests in different groups of households. We needed knowledge, we needed data.

And you got it. You both did your own surveys, which incredibly, I mean, they were collected in very different methods, and yet somehow they're very comparable. A lot of that comes down to the strong methodologies that you both used. And put in place and we were able to get a lot of really cool insights from that. Can you give us some highlights of the things that you found in regards to those three questions?

Yeah, of course. One thing that I thought was particularly interesting and that really dictated how the paper came about, how it progressed, was that we had this initial viewpoint of who to prioritize, what to prioritize, right? So we're thinking about we have this potentially ideal scenario of some product or some type of person, who if we focus on this, then we will be able to tap into the

sustainability potential of the sharing economy. So initially we were trying to find, for example, groups of people who had very high consumption, who were interested in reducing this consumption and who were also interested in the sharing economy. So then they could tackle that through the sharing economy, right. But then what we did see throughout the process of the paper, was that there was a lot of variance in cases and also a lot of contrast. Focusing on the products, we saw that these products that did have a high consumption usually not the ones that were present in the most interesting being shared. So we can say that for clothes. Almost 100% of the respondents marked that they had purchased clothes during the year, right. But then when we look at the interest and the participation of sharing them, then this was comparatively very low. While with tools and with hobby equipment, so hobby equipment can be, for example, sports equipment and tools. So we see with this that we do have an interest there in sharing this and to a certain degree we also have participation and sharing this. But on the consumption side, there is not so much consumption of these. So then that brings us to think it's the sharing economy appropriate to reduce consumption from this if there is not such a high consumption? So then we get into, there are other reasons why it might be interesting to share tools from a sustainability perspective at least. And then something also that we saw on the demographic side was that if we come back to this point that we are looking maybe for types of individuals, types of populations that had this high consumption wanted to reduce it and we're interested in sharing. If we think about, for example, gender, we saw that men in comparison to women, they were less likely to believe that they owned too much and also less likely to be interested in sharing. With different age groups we see that as age progresses, we see a tendency to think that they own too much, so then this could actually be a opportunity for sharing. We could say that if they do think they own too much, they could act as providers in the sharing economy. They could lend out their products to other people, but it also turns out that the older groups are not so interested in sharing in comparison to the younger population, of course. But one particular case that I thought was super interesting was in regards to education. Those with post-secondary education were more likely to think that they own too much, that they wanted to reduce consumption in comparison to those with only high school education. And this group also had very positive attitudes toward sharing. And then the little point of possibility that we see there is that this result did not match with their participation. They were very interested in it, very positive attitudes, but the rate of participation did not match here. So then we also see, let's say, a pool of potential. So if we get highly educated people on board, then we could bring more people who could reduce their consumption through sharing.

Right, and that's, I believe in the paper it's called the attitude-behavior-gap, right?

Exactly, yes.

So people know what they should do, right? Especially, we see this a lot of the times with different demographic groups, right? They know the right answer, but that doesn't mean that they're doing the quote-on-quote right action.

And we also saw this in terms of the products. So in terms of tools, we did have the most participation with tools and hobby equipment. We also did have the most positive attitudes toward

sharing. But then there was also the biggest gap in terms of behaviors and attitudes. So while many people are participating, there's even more people who are interested in partaking and who still don't do it. So then that's also a pool of potential.

Very nice. So you've highlighted a little bit different kind of barriers that people are facing in order to, actually participate in the sharing economy, so one is just they don't believe that they need to, right. So we have these people who don't believe that they own too much, who don't have any interest in reducing their consumption. You have people who have this attitude behavior gap, so like they're well informed, but they're not doing it. And maybe that's an infrastructure problem. They don't know where to go to do these things. Maybe those places don't exist or they don't know they exist. So that has to pose some interesting challenges for the municipality trying to decide what types of problems you're equipped to solve. Can you give us an idea of what types of solutions the city has already tried and and maybe if there's other things that they're interested in?

In our survey, we ask what would make you participate in the sharing economy and the the most common answer to that was it need to be close to my home or where I work or where I go in my like daily basis. So I think that's one of the main challenges it needs to be accessible in people's daily life. Otherwise you need to be very motivated. If there is only one toy library, for example, maybe you need to travel a bit to go there. So I think the key is to make it in people's nearby where they live or work. So that's the biggest challenge. How can we have a lot of initiatives and organizations and businesses in our city, so the citizens believes it easy for them to make lifestyle changes? So it's it should be easier even than to buy new things. And how can we get there then? We need a lot of citizens who would like to start toy libraries and tool pools and those kind of things. And we have very engaged citizens in our city, it's fantastic to see that people are creating things that they think are missing, but what can we do to enable these kind of initiatives? And what we saw during the test bed was, for example funding, so they can be sustainable over a long time and also access to space, close where people are instead of like getting a space far away and there may be no public transport there or something like that because the rent is low. That's two main things that we saw could enable the local sharing.

I understand there's also there's a map in Gothenburg write that the the city has put together to help bridge this information gap of people who want to engage but don't know where to go. Can you tell us a little bit about that initiative and and what that product looks like?

It's called 'Smarta Kartan', so the Smart Map, and it started, it was an citizen initiative 2015 and also collaboration with the City of Gothenburg. What we did was visualize all the different initiatives in Gothenburg so you easy can find where's my closest bike kitchen or free shop. So it's been many years since it started, time goes. It's constantly new content and now there is also second hand shops and repair shops. I think it's important to visualizing what common people don't know, it's under the radar. It's not common concepts, so we need to show.

If I can share something interesting about that is that when I am teaching in Chalmers, I have a lecture about the sharing economy, explaining the concepts of sharing economy. But then I'm also presenting them a little bit how it looks in the city. And then at the end, when I asked students what have they found, that was the most interesting about the lecture. Invariably, every year people are telling me the smart map, so they think it's very interesting and they didn't know about it before.

It's nice to hear, and it's exactly the same thing that I hear every time. I never heard anything negative about smart map. Everyone is like: what, I didn't know this exist where I live! Yeah. So you shouldn't underestimate the visualization and the communication so people can find what's close to them. But still, we can communicate, this is existing in our city, but we also need more initiatives and and more services in the same time if we want to normalize this.

If we have some listeners who maybe have started some initiatives in the city, is there a way for them to get added to the smart map?

Yes, if they, there is some criterias to be shown on the smart map. So they can just contact the smart map and they will be added, and there is this civic organization who's responsible for the smart maps called 'Kollaborativ ekonomi Sverige.'

Amazing. Well, it's so cool to hear about everything the city is already doing and that they have invested so much time and resources to collecting this data, but it's certainly not over. You have identified, from the municipality, that one of the biggest things is that people need close access, but this paper hasn't fully addressed that. Do you have any intentions to study this question further?

Yes, definitely. So as I mentioned before, we were working with three questions, products people and geographical areas. So now I'm moving towards the point in which I think about geographical areas. So how is interest in sharing distributed across the city? How is consumption distributed across the city? And also how are these services that are in the smart map distributed across the city? So in my upcoming paper, I will be analyzing this, I will be taking urban form into account. So how is our city constructed and is the city facilitating actually access to sharing points, sharing initiatives with things that people are interested in that are close to them that they can access it in a reasonable walking distance or biking distance, and this way we can also identify what areas are maybe lacking in services that would be quite relevant to them.

Well, I can't wait to see the results of that paper and how hopefully we can see some changes happen, get people the things they want and the things that they're asking for.

I want to thank both of you for the work you've already done on this incredibly important topic and thank you for letting me be a small part in this as well, and I just wish you both the best as you keep pursuing this and I can't wait to see how it develops in the city and I'm definitely going to be looking up the smart map to see what I can start sharing as well. Thanks.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Next, I met with Åsa Aguayo Åkesson from the Department of Democracy and Civic Engagement at the City of Gothenburg to talk about one of the methods the city uses to promote local democracy and citizen engagement. This method is called "Göteborgsförslaget" and translates into the Gothenburg Proposal, which aims to increase citizens' influence in decision-making and political agenda-setting.

It functions as an e-petition, where users submit their ideas on how life in Gothenburg can be improved. The idea or proposal is submitted on the City of Gothenburg's website, where one can read about other people's proposals, comment, and vote for them.

I asked Åsa about the problems the Gothenburg Proposal intended to address when it first started, its positive effects and some of the challenges in getting citizens to use and understand the service. We also spoke about other ways the municipality works to enhance levels of democracy and citizen engagement in Gothenburg.

Hello, Åsa. Thank you for joining us today. We're going to talk about the Gothenburg proposal or 'Göteborgsförslaget' as it's called in Swedish, which is what I understand one method that the city of Gothenburg uses to promote and enhance civic engagement and democracy. Am I right about that? And can you tell us a little bit more about what The Gothenburg proposal is?

Of course. Thank you for having me here today. The Gothenburg proposal is a democratic tool that gives the citizens opportunity to come up with ideas or proposal, how the municipality needs to develop from the needs of the citizens. Gothenburg proposal is an idea or a suggestion from the citizens to the city of Gothenburg's politicians. The proposal will be published under municipalities websites if it is a proposal that politicians of Gothenburg have the decision to take, it will be there in 90 days and during those 90 days you can vote for the proposal or you can comment on it and if the proposal gets 200 votes or more, it sends directly to the responsible politician committee or board that has the mandate to actually take it up for a decision. So the Gothenburg proposal is a method that you call E-proposal or E-petitions international. And it actually what it says is a citizen can get their petition or the proposal on the political agenda to discuss if it gets 200 votes and it actually is the same way as politician to demand or suggest proposal to their committee or board to discuss. So it's actually directly way for citizens to put their question or their proposal on the board of of the politicians in Gothenburg.

So it is a way for citizens to get an equal voice in the political agenda then?

Yeah, I can say so.

And I understand that this started already in 2014. The initial discussion about it and that it had to do with the city needing to be more digitalised. Is that correct?

Yeah, exactly. It was municipality council that took a decision in 2014 to implement the the Gothenburg proposal and it actually was a decision made in a package of decision to digitalize the municipal services and the opportunity to democratic participation for the citizen in a digital way. And the proposal got implemented in in 2017, though we started 2017 with the Gothenburg proposal.

OK. And what problems did you at the Department of Democracy and Citizen Services identify that the Gothenburg proposal was intended to solve or address at least?

The decision to implement the Gothenburg proposal was actually not my department, it was the municipality council that took that. And it was like I said, in a package of doing the service and also the participation for the citizens more digitalized. What we have done, in our department, from the commission that we have, the Department of Democracy and Citizens Service as my department called, has in their regulation the Commission to support other committees and administration in Gothenburg City in creating the condition for the citizens, democratic participation and influence in Co-creation with other actors. So that what we intend to solve, in quotation marks, is to create a structure now, a structured way to work with citizens participation for the whole city of Gothenburg, where the Gothenburg proposal is one of the tools of one of the instruments or methods to engage citizens, to participate in the decision making. So it's just one of many, but what is a strength with the Gothenburg proposal is that we have had it for six years now, so we can learn a lot about it, both how it works for the citizens, but also how we can work better to to work together inside the municipality of Gothenburg, when we engage our citizens in our decision making.

That's nice. And considering then that it's been a thing for six years. Yeah. Can you see any ways that it has been successful? Can you mention any good examples, maybe or has it brought up discussion among politicians that maybe not would have had happened before? Or can you see any positive changes connected to this?

Yeah, yes, of course. I mean, the Gothenburg proposal is discussed and I think it's a good thing. And even if it's discussed in a good way or a bad way, because it's engaging people because it's it's a tool to affect the political agenda. It's a democratic tool. So it's not like just one way. I mean, it's about to discuss and open up for discussion and it doesn't mean that your proposal will get implemented. But what it is is that you have the same opportunity as an elected politician to have your proposal discussed in the committee or the board that actually have the mandate to take decision in that proposal, if you get 200 votes for your proposal. And that's a thing that we have to spread, that the tool works like that, because even though you don't have your proposal implemented, the politician have discussing it, and sometimes we have seen that the politician takes this with them and in

further discussion about how to prioritize the money or the budget, because we have 54 different administration or municipality companies in Gothenburg City. So we, everyone have their money to work with, then the Gothenburg proposal that we have seen that been successful is that the politician also use it as a tool to see, OK, what's engaging, what's interesting, what do the citizens really want? So, so even if your proposal doesn't get implemented or it the decision would be a no, it could be, how do you say, a direction for the politician, your proposal, to take decision further on.

That sounds great, but I can imagine then if you, as a citizen, propose a proposal that does not get implemented right away, it might take one year or five years until you can see some sort of effect from the city, is that a challenge of yours to communicate that process to your citizens or the ones using the service?

Yes, because neither we that work with the Gothenburg proposal can all the time see that, OK, this proposal that got neglected, 2020 may be given effect that actually get done in 2024, I mean, we don't really know that because we don't know in what process and what discussion. And the politicians have. So it's it's hard to see the direct effect and that's a challenge that's not just a proposal of Gothenburg, Gothenburg proposal has. I mean that's in an all work we do to engage citizens and using tools or method to make the citizen more participated in the decision making of the of the local government. I mean it's always hard to show the direct result or effect. So yeah, it's a challenge, but we have to, like you said, the feedback is so important. So what we can work with with the Gothenburg proposal is getting better in giving the feedback. Why did the politician said no, or why did they say yes? I mean, what's the discussion around the table, the politicians table and in the committee. To say yes or no, and that's actually something we working on every day. How we can write down a motivation to the decision and a little bit of the discussion in a transparent way explain for the citizen or the person that's been voting for the proposal. How come the politician decide and the way they decided to do.

Yeah and I guess that also is another type of challenge in using a language that is accessible for everyone.

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, because we're always talking about writing in a simple way, and that means that in the time when the politician take the decision ,and if it's been an investigation to make the decision, the civil servant had actually done the investigation to help to give a good material to the politician to take a decision, this investigation has to be like clear and simple. And we're not used to that as a civil servant. So that makes the language more complicated and the decision will have a motivation that's complicated for most citizens to understand. And we can't interpreter the the decision we have to say what the decision said. That's a real challenge for us to do when it comes to do the feedback into the citizens, and it's a it's a work we have to do together, politician as as civil servants to make it more handleable for the citizens.

And I know that you have had a campaign going on since February this year, which is created by youth, young people in Gothenburg, and is also aimed for young people in Gothenburg. Is young people difficult demographic group to reach?

Yeah, that's also a good thing of having the Gothenburg proposal for six years, because now we can see some statistics which kind of groups we can reach, or we have been reaching. And if it's some areas that we don't reach with the Gothenburg proposal. And yeah, we could see that in some areas that it's less proposals given. It's also some age groups, and we have seen that actually the age group that most of the people that put in Gothenburg proposals is between 30 and 50 years old. So yes, we have a problem to reach the youth and we also have a problem to reach economically and social marginalized areas in Gothenburg. Still, we at least have one proposal from each area of Gothenburg. So like two years ago, it was some areas that had none proposal made, so we have to work more towards these areas or these age groups and that's what the campaign wanted to do, because we haven't had a communication campaign since we implemented Gothenburg proposals in 2017. So we thought it was the time to do that. And what's really nice with the Gothenburg proposal is there's no limit on age to put the proposal down and that's also what we want to spread out to the young people. We actually work together with four young adults in the area that it's not that many Gothenburg proposals made. And this was really engaged young people that had big social networks, we were sitting down with them and we worked in the same way as we want our structural way of working with citizen engagement. It's working with the citizens and not just for them and see them as an expert on their daily life and their needs. That's what we wanted to say with the campaign. And I also want to mention that it wasn't just they work with those young adults that we were doing, we actually, the whole campaign, the idea of the campaign was actually coming from students from the journalist and communication program in the University of Gothenburg. So we actually work with them for two semesters. They got an Commission from us to work to find a campaign towards young people, because we're not that young that works at the Gothenburg city. And we wanted like, we're more touch of like the whole graphic design will be more towards the you people. So the concept, what are you an expert on?, it's actually coming from a group of students that was studying in 2022 at the communication and journalism program.

And so I know that you do a lot of other things. The Gothenburg proposal is just one of many methods, as we mentioned before. Would you like to tell us about some of the other methods or ways of working for democracy that you do at the City of Gothenburg?

Yeah, I would love to because I think it's important when you see at the Gothenburg proposal, it's a method, but it's not a method for everyone. I mean, you will always have people that, maybe not trust in the digitalization. There could be people that not really trust in our institutions or in the municipality. Then you have to work in a totally different way. And yeah, we have widespread of methods, just to mention some that works a little bit different, it's citizen guides that we work with. It's a face to face method where you actually work with people in the local areas in Gothenburg and they they have a social network there, but they also have really wide range of language and culture competence. And they are helping us with handing out information, consultation. So this is a two way communication that's helping us a lot. We have a lot of participatory budgets going on, now we try in Gothenburg City, I mean in the municipality it's so many methods and so many departments

and and municipality companies that work with different kind of methods or project to engage the citizens. But what we try to do now is that we have to work in a structured way to involve the citizens. And continue to change the mindset to look more at the citizen as an expert and we actually need them and their expertise in our decision making. And so the all the methods that we working with, like for example participatory budgets, we just have them in like small areas now. But we have a lot of conversation with Helsinki, for example, that have it for the whole city. And we can learn a lot from other countries, and other municipalities in other countries in the whole world, because they've been working much longer with participatory budgets and also, for example, the method citizen assembly, or we call it international, also, citizen juries. And we're just here in Sweden, actually Gothenburg City is the first municipality to work with that kind of method. Is for participating in environmental and climate questions. It's in the beginning and we are really proud to start doing it. We're learning a lot from other countries and a lot of other municipalities in other parts of the world. But these methods may be worked there in a certain way, but we have to contextualize it here to the Gothenburg context or the Swedish context, and that's what we are trying now with the Citizens Council. Also, yesterday we were talking a lot about the participatory budget. Because it works really well in a lot of countries, it has been going on for 30 years in Latin America and South of Europe. But we have some problems here in Sweden because we have just three months where we have a weather that make it easier to come together and discuss and the participatory budget is a process. It's not a method, it's a process to engage the citizens. But that means that you need to meet and it's hard to meet in Sweden like seven months of the year if you would like to be a big group.

When it's dark and cold.

Dark and cold. So we really, in Sweden, have to look for, it's so much out there, methods and research that we can use and we have to start trying it here and try how do we do it here in our context with the people that live here.

I think that sounds great, looking more globally and learning from other countries, being humble towards that, but also then looking inwards and seeing what works here locally.

Exactly.

I want to thank you so much for coming here today to talk to us. I've learned a lot about the city that I live in. There's so much going on that I didn't know about. I hope that someone else learned something from this as well. Thank you so much Åsa for coming here today.

Thank you for having me. It was great. I really think it's important to share the work we do in local governance. We have so much to learn of each other and I hope I could give something today.

Yes, you surely did. Thank you.

Thank you.

Our final guest for this episode is actually GLD's program coordinator, Saga Cambon. However, she is joining us today in her role as a Chair of Swedish Development Partner Gothenburg, which is a non-profit, idea-driven organization that works globally in collaboration with local actors for an equal and humane world. They work with topics like justice, democracy, anti-racism, feminism, poverty alleviation, and integration - which is what Saga and Ellen spoke about in relation to Gothenburg.

The organization's Swedish name is "Individuell Människohjälp" and is usually called by its initials - IM. Moreover, Saga works with the organization locally in Gothenburg, so therefore, Ellen and Saga will refer to the Swedish Development Partner as "IM Gothenburg."

Saga, thank you for joining us today to talk about IM Gothenburg and the work that you do there which addresses some of the social divisions within Gothenburg, the city itself. So maybe we can start just by having you describe what are the social divisions that we see in Gothenburg?

Gothenburg is highly segregated city, being a big city, it's one of the most segregated in Sweden. We can see that with the housing segregation in particular. Usually people with higher income live in certain areas and in the suburbs of Gothenburg, we have social groups that have lower income and different housing situations. So it depends on for example, if you have a rental or if you buy, and it's very evident in Gothenburg the housing segregation in the different areas.

So a lot of people, I think, especially not in Sweden, would think of Gothenburg as filled with blonde hair, blue eyed Swedes, right. And when you're talking about class segregation, where we have higher income people in one area and lower income in another, does it go beyond simply just being about class segregation and housing segregation? How does that fit into some of the other kind of ethnic diversity that we see in Sweden today and also in Gothenburg specifically?

Gothenburg is actually a city which is very diverse. We have many people coming from many different countries and it's also a big site for asylum seekers or displaced. We have in IM Gothenburg, an asylum, housing and right now we have many people from Syria but also other countries.

In my observations is we also have like a fairly sizable Somalian community. We have Iranians in in Gothenburg, people who have come from Iran or their parents have, we have a lot of different groups and again, I think that it becomes sort of a norm. We expect that if you're living here, but I don't think everybody would necessarily have imagined that it was as diverse as it is. And so is it

correct to say then that when we're thinking about the housing segregation, that it's not only that we have people of different class statuses in different parts of the city, but then we also have areas which, for example have larger second generation or immigrant communities in them, whereas in other places we have people who are longer histories of being in Sweden?

Yes, yes, that's correct to say and it's a phenomenon we see in many suburbs. And I think the inequalities that we have in Gothenburg are only heightening these.

Social divisions in a sense, right. Yes, yeah.

These social divisions, exactly. And it's something that we are working on.

Before we get to the work you do, is it also the case that it's not just about where people live, but also how people see each other? So is it fair to say that there's an extent to which people see each other as othering? So they see each other as being very different, a certain degree of prejudice or stereotyping that takes place.

Yes. And I know that there's research that has shown this with travel patterns, that citizens of Gothenburg have. So if you live in a certain area, you're more likely to only travel in that certain area and maybe not visit other parts of Gothenburg as much. So that heightens the segregation between the different areas, because people from different social classes don't interact with each other.

They don't even see each other really right. I mean, and I actually have to be honest, I mean, I sort of have a fairly standard path to work and back and stay in neighborhoods. And then there's times when for some reason, I go to a very different neighborhood, I'm like, whoa, this is a, you know, it can feel like you've gone to a very different place, right. I mean, these neighborhoods have a certain rhythm and and dynamic to them that can be very, very different. So tell me a little bit about IM Gothenburg. What do you do?

IM in general as a whole is a human rights organization. We work globally, but with local actors. In Sweden we have 12 different branches that are local in Sweden and we work with integration, social and economic participation and inclusion locally in Gothenburg.

So what are some examples of activities that you do?

We have several weekly activities. For example, we have Swedish language cafes. We help with homework, we have asylum housing which we visit each week, and we also have sort of social or

sports activities for youth and especially people that are new to Sweden, the youth that are, yeah, newly arrived.

So it's helping those who are newer or more recent arrivals to be able to integrate into Swedish society more generally, speak the language. Do you help them to get services or to be able to access public services? Is that part of what you do?

At some of our language cafes we have so many good volunteers, but the volunteers are often willing to help with so much more. Usually, they've been teachers or they've worked in other parts of society with helping, so it's possible that they can help with, you know, do you need help with 'Skatteverket'? Do you need help applying for your daughter's school? All of those things that also require Swedish as a language. So yes, we do help with that as well.

About how many people are you helping and about how many volunteers do you have?

It's different because we don't really take the, it's a part of what we do that we don't take stats on this, because due to new laws in Sweden with us having to, possibly in the future, turn in people that don't have any paperwork. Everyone should always be free to come to us, so we don't ever take any names or stats more than maybe gender. Some activities are more frequently visited than others, so for example, when we do sports for the youth and we're going bowling that week, then we can have up to 100 participants that week and other weeks maybe in like the language cafe, there only comes three people that week, so it's different each week, and it's also a challenge that we have that we don't know how many will participate each week.

Right and about how many volunteers do you have? Do you have stats on that?

Yes so in 2023, we had 220 volunteers during that year and some of them have worked for IM for many years and some just come for three months and then they they move on.

We've talked a lot about learning Swedish, which is obviously very important. But can you tell us a little bit about how you're addressing issues of social inclusion and economic inequality?

So we make a point of being in the areas where there is a need for our activities. IM Gothenburg's activities are located in Tynnered, Lundy, Gamlestan, in places where there is a socially, economically disadvantaged areas. And all our activities are free to participate in, and the activities we have with youth, which are weekly, are usually costly or things that you might not have the money or resources to do yourself. So in the summers we have camps for people to go out in nature in the woods. I think we're doing a good job with the economical participation by offering activities

for youth to participate in freely, and the social inclusion, we really emphasize on creating meeting points that are natural, so that volunteers and participants can interact, and integrate naturally.

What challenges do you face? What are the sort of obstacles that you face in terms of either getting participate, or in terms of volunteers, or other challenges that you have?

One of the main challenges that we have is getting volunteers that are reliable so we can have a continuation in some of the activities that we have, but also as of recently, participation has dropped and it's still a lingering effect from COVID. When we lost a lot of the participants, obviously due to having to pause our activities. So we're still, even though it's 2024, trying to regain the popularity in coming to some of our activities. Another challenge that we face is actually reaching the target groups that we want to reach. That's something we've been working on for years. How do we reach people that are in need of our services, but maybe don't know it, or haven't heard of us? So we've done a lot of work with visiting schools, SFI courses and justice, sometimes just in general, posting posters in areas that we haven't been to before. It's a challenge getting more people because we know it's such a big problem. We know that there is a need for learning Swedish and that there's many people that want to, but sometimes we don't understand why we don't have more people showing up when we offer these services.

Do you coordinate with SFI for example, which is the essentially, sort of one of the institutes that are teaching Swedish for foreigners, do you have coordination with them specifically or is it run by itself?

No, this is separate from SFI, but we have sort of collaborated with them before in exchange of information.

So if you were to think about the things that you've learned over the last years in terms of either how to get target populations to know about your services or to be able to manage and recruit volunteers, what would you say are the most important strategies that you've learned, or things that people who are, maybe not working with IM but elsewhere, could use and take for their own interest?

I think youth is key and it's also a challenge that we have. We have lovely people that are engaged in IM, but it's sort of a growing group of people and we really need to focus more on the young people of Gothenburg because they have so much strength and engagement and they care. We just need them to find IM.

And you mean find IM as the people who are going to be using the services or also as volunteers?

Both, I would say because volunteers come with new ideas, which we need, also sort of relate to topics maybe, these are things that we're doing right now, but that doesn't mean that we can't evolve and do other things that we haven't done before. So this is working, but do we want to catch up with what Amnesty or Greenpeace or other local actors are doing that do have more youth volunteers and youth participation? I think the key is, and that's a lesson we've learned is to bring in more young people. I'm trying to recruit them everywhere I can. If they're clever and they seem keen, I I tell them to to join in in any way they can.

That actually leads to my my final question for you, which is that if people do want to help or to work with IM, either to help provide services and be a volunteer, or if they wanted to get in touch or find more information because they wanted to use the services, what's the best thing that they can do? How can they do this?

We have an Instagram and a website which you can visit and contact us. You can also contact me directly. I can help you in the right direction. Right now we need volunteers, for example, for our language cafes, we're starting a new one in a new area. So yes, contact IM Gothenburg and see what we can do.

Perfect and we'll put that into the show notes so that everybody can find it. And again, thank you very, very much. This is really interesting and very important work. Thank you.

Thank you.