

Study Circle: Reclaiming Power

Swedish Subsidiarity

2025

Facilitator's Guide: Leading Conversations on Systems Change

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Facilitator's Guide: Leading Conversations on Systems Change

Welcome. You are holding the toolkit to start a conversation that society desperately needs. This study circle is not about party politics. It is about **systems literacy**.

Your Role

You are not a teacher. You are a **gardener**. Your task is not to provide the answers, but to ensure that all voices have the space to grow.

Structure (4 Meetings)

1. **The Diagnosis:** Why does everything feel so sluggish and bureaucratic?
2. **The Compass:** Measuring Power, Knowledge, and Vulnerability.
3. **The Solution:** What actually is Subsidiarity (Local Governance)?
4. **The Action:** What can we do right here, right now?

Golden Rules

- **Systems, not People:** If someone complains about “Politician X,” redirect to “What incentives drive Politician X?”
 - **Round the Table:** Ensure the quiet voices are heard.
 - **Fika:** The most important technology for Swedish collaboration. Coffee/tea is mandatory.
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Before You Start - A Guide to Hosting

How to invite (without sounding like a cult)

SMS/Email Template:

“Hi [Name]! I’m gathering a few neighbors/colleagues to talk about how we can make our daily lives better—not by complaining, but by thinking differently about how society functions. There will be fika, good company, and no requirements to ‘believe in’ anything specific. Interested in giving it a try? [Date] at [Time] at [Location]. Let me know if you want to join!”

How to answer common questions:

- *“Is this politics?”* – “No, it’s about understanding systems, not parties.”
- *“What does it cost?”* – “Nothing, except maybe bringing some fika to share.”
- *“I don’t know anything about this...”* – “Perfect! Then you have no preconceived notions.”

Room Prep (The Swedish Magic)

1. **Chairs in a circle** – no head of the table, no back row.
2. **Fika station** – coffee, tea, something to munch on (shared responsibility works well).
3. **Tools** – flipchart/paper, pens, sticky notes, and a **silence button** (can be a bell or just “raising a hand”).
4. **The Temperature** – Swedes function best at 20-22°C, not too hot.

Your First Five Minutes (Exactly What to Say)

“Welcome everyone. Thank you for coming. I’ve invited you here because I believe we need to start talking in a new way about what isn’t working in our daily lives. Not by complaining about individuals or political parties, but by looking at the *systems*—how decision-making works, where knowledge is located, and how we can become more self-sufficient right here where we live. I don’t have the answers. But I have some good questions that I think can lead us somewhere new. And I have coffee. We will meet four times. Today, we start by simply noting what feels off. Next time, we will learn a tool for analysis. The third time, we look at solutions. The fourth time, we decide on something small that we can actually do. The only thing required of you is that you listen and share what you feel comfortable sharing. No one will get homework or be interrogated. Shall we start by everyone saying their name and one word about how it feels to be here tonight?”

For the Circle Leader - The Art of Leading Swedes in Conversation

Time Discipline (Swedish Punctuality is a Superpower)

- **Start:** Exactly on the scheduled time (even if only two people have arrived).
- **The 90-Minute Rhythm:**
 - 0-15 min: Check-in + coffee
 - 15-40 min: Discussion
 - 40-50 min: Exercise/Activity
 - 50-85 min: Summary
 - 85-90 min: Check-out + next steps
- **End:** Exactly on the scheduled time (people have babysitters, buses to catch).

Handling Classic Swedish Challenges

1. “We already tried this in 1978...”

- **Response:** “I hear that you have experience. Can you tell us what we can learn from that attempt so we don’t make the same mistakes?”
- **Transform:** From cynicism to experiential knowledge.

2. “But isn’t that the law?” (Rules mindset)

- **Response:** “Absolutely, and laws are important. But tonight, we get to play with the question: *If we could change one rule—which one would it be and why?*”
- **Transform:** From compliance to creativity.

3. Silence is not disinterest

- Swedes think before they speak. Wait 7 seconds after a question.
- **Tip:** “Let’s take 30 seconds of silent thinking time before we start sharing.”

4. “I don’t have an opinion...” (The Law of Jante/Jantelagen)

- **Solution:** Use **sticky notes**—everyone writes down thoughts first, then reads them out anonymously.
- **Phrase:** “There are no stupid answers, only different perspectives.”

Four Roles You Play (And None are “The Expert”)

1. **The Timekeeper** - “We have 10 minutes left on this point.”
2. **The Summarizer** - “So what I’m hearing is that several people are saying...”
3. **The Facilitator** - “Who haven’t we heard from yet?”
4. **The Connector** - “What Lars said about the school reminds me of what Anna said about healthcare...”

When It Gets Emotional

- Swedes rarely get loud, but can become silent with anger/grief.
- **Phrase:** “This is an important topic that affects many. Let’s take a break and drink some water.”
- **Rule:** We discuss systems, not people. If someone mentions “Politician X” - “What system do you think creates incentives for Politician X to act that way?”

The Swedish Consensus Magic

1. **First Round:** Everyone gets to say what they think without

discussion.

2. **Second Round:** “What themes do you hear?”
 3. **Third Round:** “Can we agree that X is a problem we want to address?”
 4. **Conclusion:** “So our shared understanding tonight is...”
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After the Circle - From Conversation to Community

Closing Rituals (For the Swedish Soul)

The Final Meeting:

1. **Review the “Treasure Map”** – see what resources you actually have.
2. **Choose ONE thing** to do within 30 days (small, concrete, possible).
3. **Write a “30-Day Contract”** on a paper that everyone signs.
4. **Set a date for “Meeting 5: Follow-up”** (if you want).
5. **Celebrate with extra fika** (could be semlor, punsch, something festive).

30-Day Contract Template:

“We, the participants of [Group Name], promise that before [Date], we will do the following: [Concrete Action]. We will return on [Date] to share what we have learned. Signed: [Signatures]”

Options for Continued Engagement

Option 1: Continue as a Study Circle

- **Theme:** “Subsidiarity for [your city/district]”
- **Focus:** Go deeper into one area (food, energy, care).
- **Resource:** Request special material from svensksubsidiaritet.se

Option 2: Start a Practical Project

- **Food:** Buying club, allotment garden community, “eat together” evenings.
- **Energy:** Solar panel group-buy, energy savings club.
- **Safety:** Neighborhood watch ring on WhatsApp, “walking bus” for children.
- **Support:** Pattern library at svensksubsidiaritet.se

Option 3: Become Ambassadors

- Invite the municipal councilor/regional politicians to a meeting.
- Write a letter to the editor in the local newspaper.
- Start a circle in the next neighborhood/workplace.

How to Share Your Learning (So Others Can Grow)

1. Go to svensksubstiaritet.se
2. Click “Share your circle’s experience”
3. Fill in a short form:

- Which area are you from?
- Which system did you focus on?
- What worked well?
- What would you do differently?
- Which action did you choose?

Why this is important: Your experiences become **patterns** in our library. The next group in Kiruna or Malmö can learn from you.

When It Feels Too Big...

Remember:

1. **No one expects you to solve the housing crisis.** A neighborhood cooperation around potatoes is a revolution on its own small scale.
2. **Silence is okay.** The group might sleep for a while and wake up in the spring.
3. **You are not alone.** Thousands of other Swedes have the same questions. Your thoughts feed a larger movement.

The Final Word (To You as Circle Leader)

Thank you. You have done something brave—you have said “maybe there is another way” and created a space for others to explore that together.

Regardless of what happens now: You have planted a seed. It might sprout immediately. It might lie in the soil over the winter. But you have broken the ice.

The Swedish “Folkhemmet” (People’s Home) was not built in Stockholm. It was built in rooms exactly like this one, with coffee, silence, and the stubborn belief that doing things together is better.

The material is open to use, change, and share. The only thing we ask is that you tell us what you learn along the way.

More resources, tools, and inspiration can be found at:
svensksubstiaritet.se

Meeting 1: The Swedish Paradox

“We have built the world’s most efficient systems, but we lost the human being in the process.”

Introduction (15 min)

Sweden is world-renowned for its systems: Healthcare, Education, Welfare. But in recent years, something has shifted. Queues are growing. Staff are burning out. Rural areas are emptying.

Tonight, we will discuss why **centralization**—which worked so well in the 20th century—has become our biggest problem in the 21st century.

Reading (10 min)

Reading aloud from “Manifesto for Distributed Systems Literacy” (Part 1).

Key Concepts: * **Monoculture:** Doing the same thing everywhere (efficient but fragile). * **Complexity:** When problems are unique and changing (requires local solutions).

Discussion Questions (45 min)

1. Where do you encounter “The System” in your daily life? (Social Insurance, Health Centers, Schools?)
2. Do you feel that the decisions affecting you are made close by or far away?
3. Can you give an example of when a “standard solution” did not fit your unique situation?

Homework

For next time: Bring an example of a local resource (a person, a place, or a skill) that the system “misses” or fails to value.

Meeting 2: The Proximity Compass

Introduction

Last time, we discussed the problem. Now, we will learn to **diagnose** it. We will use a tool called “The Proximity Compass.”

Exercise: Mapping the Power (60 min)

Choose a local issue (e.g., “School Lunches,” “The Bus Route,” or “Elder Care”). Draw a triangle on a piece of paper and discuss the three corners:

Corner 1: Power (Where?)

- Who decides the budget?
- Stockholm? The Region? Or us here in this room?

Corner 2: Knowledge (Who?)

- Whose knowledge counts?
- The expert's statistics or the experience of those living it?

Corner 3: Resilience (What happens in crisis?)

- If the internet/power goes down, does it still work?
- Are we dependent on imports, or can we sustain ourselves?

Discussion

- What is the "shape" of your problem? Is it a sharp triangle (centralized) or a broad one (local)?
- What would it take to move power one step closer to us?

Meeting 3: What is Subsidiarity?

The Concept

Subsidiarity is a complicated word for a simple idea: *"No power should be higher up than necessary."*

Or in plain English: **Local Governance.**

Examples of Local Governance

Discuss these examples. Are they possible here?

1. **Food Guilds:** Instead of just shopping at the supermarket, 50 neighbors combine purchasing power to buy directly from a farmer.
2. **Neighborhood Houses:** Instead of everyone owning their own drill and lawnmower, the block has a shared tool library.
3. **Safety Circles:** Neighbors with a WhatsApp group walking evening rounds are more effective than a police car passing once a week.

Discussion (45 min)

- Which of these examples feels most appealing?
- Why aren't we doing this already? (Is it laws that stop us, or just habit?)
- "Lagom" (Just Right) is Swedish. How do we find the balance between state security and local freedom?

Meeting 4: From Words to Action

Introduction

We have complained, we have analyzed, we have dreamed. Now we must do something.

Mapping: Our Assets (40 min)

We are going to create a "Treasure Map" of our area. Fill in:

- **Hands:** Who can build? Who can grow food? Who knows the law?
- **Places:** Is there an empty room? A basement? A plot of land?
- **Hearts:** What do we care about collectively? (The children's safety? The food?)

Decision

Choose **ONE** small thing you can do within 30 days. * *Example:* "Start a buying club for potatoes." * *Example:* "Invite the municipal councilor to a meeting about the Compass."

Closing

Thank you for daring to think differently. Go to **svensksubsidiaritet.se** and register your group to receive more support.