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## Forbidden Culture Week



DEMOCRACY ARTS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
KNOWLEDGE  
HISTORY HERITAGE  
EDUCATION CITIZENSHIP  
PARTICIPATION MEMORY

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### 1. Context

Malmö is Sweden's third largest, fastest growing and southernmost city. It faces out towards greater Europe and is linked by a 16km bridge to the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

Freedom of expression, including artistic freedom, is a cornerstone of Swedish democracy and society. But this freedom is increasingly threatened here, as it is in the rest of the world, by extremism. Cultural expression in all its forms, stands in the front line for these attacks.

### 2. Malmö and culture

Malmö is Sweden's third largest city, and home to 357,000 people, of whom half of are under 35 years old. People from 186 different countries live here and roughly one-third of its residents were born in another country. The percentage of residents born abroad has increased in Sweden as a whole. There are more people born in other countries living in the large cities in comparison to the rest of Sweden.

This is particularly the case in Malmö, where a sizeable minority of the city's foreign-born population have, both recently and in the past, come to Sweden to escape repression, war and poverty. Malmö is a compact but nonetheless segregated city, where 25% of children grow up in poverty.

Malmö's social and economic sustainability depends on creativity produced in the cultural sphere. Cultural life offers spaces for expression and fellowship and is driven by a strong commitment from institutions, independent professionals and community-based culture. The sector embodies an entrepreneurship that is beyond the monetary, encompassing values such as community and understanding, curiosity and questioning, alternatives and new perspectives. In addition, culture can play a compensatory role, particularly for children and young people who lack social and economic opportunities.

### 3. Project goals

#### Main aim

The purpose of Forbidden Culture week, 20-26 November 2023 is to draw attention to and increase knowledge about artistic freedom of expression and censorship and raise awareness of the limitations of artistic freedom in Sweden and the world. In addition, Forbidden Culture Week aims to strengthen the democratic conversation between Malmö residents.

#### Specific goals

- To highlight and safeguard forbidden culture from a historical and contextual perspective.
- To provide a forum where Malmö residents can experience and discuss freedom of expression.
- Strengthen the democratic discourse through culture
- Increase awareness of the limitations of artistic freedom in the world, and in Sweden
- Strengthen collaboration and cooperation between the City of Malmö's cultural institutions, and with independent cultural actors and community groups.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE FORBIDDEN CULTURE WEEK IS TO DRAW ATTENTION TO AND INCREASE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ARTISTIC FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND CENSORSHIP. IN ADDITION, IT AIMS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC CONVERSATION BETWEEN MALMÖ RESIDENTS. \_\_\_\_\_**

### 4. Development of the project

Imagine that the librarian tells you that the book you wanted to borrow has been removed because of depictions of racism or LGBTQI themes? Then put yourself in the situation where you are forbidden to play a musical instrument because of your gender, or that story time for your children is cancelled due to external threats against the storyteller. It may seem absurd but is very real in many parts of the world – in some cases even in Sweden.

During Forbidden Culture Week, which will reoccur annually, Malmö residents will be able to participate in different forms of culture that at some point, somewhere and for some reason have been censored, banned or otherwise forbidden. The idea is that the event will raise awareness of such culture from an international, national and historical context.

Freedom of expression is currently threatened in many parts of the world, and cultural practitioners and artists are often particularly vulnerable. The City of Malmö prides itself in keeping the conversation about freedom of expression alive, but this can always be improved. The aim is to continue to offer cultural experiences that safeguard the free formation of opinion and other democratic rights. During this week, Malmö's cultural institutions, independent actors and community groups will collaborate to provide a broad and exciting range of activities for Malmö residents to participate in.

Events are being planned for both schools and the general public. The city's Dawit Isaak Library for Freedom of Expression will, among other things, offer school visits on free access to culture, where Malmö's artists in refuge will talk about the situation of cultural workers around the world. There will also be an extensive programme for all Malmö residents to take part in free of charge, including special tours of exhibitions, story times about forbidden literature, writing workshops where young people can create their own texts, book circles, concerts, film screenings and author talks.

As a foretaste of Forbidden Culture week, the Dawit Isaak Library has recently opened a new section with Ukrainian books that have been censored or banned at different times. In connection with the



launch, the library arranged an evening on censorship of Ukrainian literature, freedom of expression and Soviet literary history. Librarians have made the selection of literature with help from Ukrainian cultural workers and tips from Malmö residents.

## 5. Impacts and evaluation

By focusing attention and resources on issues of freedom of expression, the Department for Culture hopes to gather the city and others interested in questions of free and unfree speech today and historically and raise awareness both within Malmö and in a larger context. An increased awareness of and wider conversation on freedom of expression has a strengthening effect on democratic society at large.

Evaluation will be done quantitatively through statistics on the number of visitors and activities and qualitatively in conversations with participants and the working group for the event. Depending upon the outcome of the evaluation, it is hoped that Forbidden Culture Week can return every year and grow into a national and international event.

**FREEDOM OF EXRESSION IS CURRENTLY THREATENED IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS AND ARTISTS ARE OFTEN PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE. MALMÖ PRIDES ITSELF IN KEEPING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT FREEDOM ALIVE, BUT THIS CAN ALWAYS BE IMPROVED.**

## 6. The initiative in the global frameworks

Forbidden Culture Week should be regarded as part of Malmö's continuing commitment to Agenda 21 for Culture and Culture 21 Actions and work towards attainment of the SDGs. Specifically, the commitment to "mechanisms, instruments and resources for guaranteeing freedom of speech" (Agenda

21 for Culture) and “the rights of all individuals to freedom of speech, access to heritage, values, and identities, and active participation in cultural life. They are the foundation and guarantee of the coherence and legitimacy of policies. Cultural rights are an integral element of human rights and guarantee access to the knowledge necessary to exercise other rights, freedoms, and responsibilities.” (Culture 21 Actions).

Furthermore, in line with the Malmö’s continuing work for Sustainable Development Goal 11, wherein Target 11.4 is the aim to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.

## **7. Further information**

This article has been elaborated by Fiona Winders, Development Coordinator, Culture Department, City of Malmö, Sweden.

Website: <https://malmo.se/>

Contact: [fiona.winders@malmo.se](mailto:fiona.winders@malmo.se)