

# Think.

An inquisitive magazine from Umeå University × No. 1 2018

**TROLL FACTORIES  
AND THIS AUTUMN'S ELECTION**

**THE LEFT-WING UNIVERSITY  
- an echo from times gone by**

**USING LIES AS  
A POLITICAL STRATEGY**

DEMOCRACY  
IS NO  
GUARANTEE  
OF PEACE

# DEMOCRACY

- CHALLENGES, THREATS AND POSSIBILITIES



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY



The next Swedish general election will be held on 9 September 2018.

## KEEP UP WITH UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

You can follow the University on social media.



Think is the Umeå University magazine focusing on research. This issue puts extra emphasis on democracy and public participation, and the threats, possibilities and challenges with which democracy is faced.

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# UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

# Democracy under threat

**T**he public sector is governed by a set of core values, in which democracy is mentioned first among the six basic principles. Its superior

position clearly stipulates

that all public power in Sweden proceeds from the people. For governmentally-run higher education institutions, this means that all employees should be aware that the Swedish population is our employer, and that our organisation is funded using tax revenue, but also that we should act for democratic ideas to be the guiding principles in all areas of society.

Democracy is something that is often taken for granted in Sweden. But that hasn't always been the case. In 2018, it was 100 years since Sweden introduced universal suffrage in municipal elections, that is equal rights to vote, and this can be seen as the decisive step in providing Sweden with a democratic form of government – even if it took another year before the Swedish Riksdag decided on universal suffrage for women and men also in the general elections.

**DEMOCRACY, HOWEVER,** is not taken for granted in other parts of the world. Great parts of the global population live in countries without democratic elections and where public participation isn't high on the agenda. Moreover, in many of the democracies around the world, participation and

freedom of opinion are two things that are being increasingly tarnished.

Is democracy under threat? Yes, unfortunately. This can be seen on many levels, even in our vicinity. It's shown by restrictions in citizen freedom, and also through restrictions and even prohibitions against vital institutions in countries where democratically elected bodies are governing.

**ANOTHER FACTOR** is an increasing distrust in politics, which results in reduced turnout at elections, which in itself indirectly undermines democracy. The question if political elections can be manipulated is also remarkably topical and the occurrence of such is yet another threat both towards system credibility and democracy itself.

2018 brings with it another election in Sweden, which is fitting for the 100th anniversary of the introduction of universal suffrage, but it also brings forward the question of the stability and future of democracy. In this issue of *Think*, we have gathered a number of Umeå researchers who give their view on what democracy involves, what's important for upholding democracy, and what the threats to democracy are.



**Hans Adolfsen**  
Vice-Chancellor  
of Umeå University

Photo: TT and Elin Berge



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**POLITICAL ACTIVISM PAST AND PRESENT**

Research fellow Bore Sköld and Professor Emerita Marianne Liliequist, active in the student rising in 1968, compare how students' political commitment has changed.

**DON'T MISS!**  
The change in the meaning of the word *democracy*

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# HOW TROLLS WILL AFFECT THE ELECTION

Fake news, produced by foreign troll factories or domestic groupings spread virally through social media, will impact the 2018 Swedish election. That's what several researchers believe.

Text: **Bertholof Brännström** Illustration: **Jenny Sjödin**  
Photo: **Per Melander, Elin Berge and Christer Sturmark**

**F**ake news was a key part in the last American presidential campaign. Fictitious events and messages were spread via social media. And Russian troll factories, with links all the way up to the Kremlin, were pointed out as the origin.

Ever since, similar meddling has been suspected in other general elections in the Western world. So when Sweden is now approaching election time, it's common belief that net trolls will try to influence.

The basis of fake news can be found in online culture such as on Facebook and Twitter, where you can have direct communication with individual users. Ultra-fast and emotionally controlled.

"It's no longer about convincing a few hundred people in an open-air rally or publishing a polemical article in a national newspaper. Instead, it's about getting hundreds of thousands of internet users to share your post," says

Simon Lindgren, professor in sociology at Umeå University.

"Whatever has great reach online is what people will talk about. It'll be hard for parties to avoid. In that way, an organised online campaign would certainly make a difference to the election."



Simon Lindgren

**SIMON LINDGREN** is studying how the increasingly interactive and user-driven online communication affects and changes power relations. It has its good points –

like, for instance, the extremely viral #metoo campaign, but also sometimes bad points. For example, when foreign troll factories step in to influence

the US presidential election and the EU referendum in the UK.

"Even if these troll factories probably aren't involved in the Swedish

election yet, we can at least be certain that what happens on social media will have a huge effect."

Simon Lindgren is backed up by media researcher Jesper Enbom in Umeå, who rather than Russian troll factories sees



Jesper Enbom



Asa Wikforss

domestic political groupings, particularly by the far-right and the far-left, as the most probable sources of fake news.

"At least remarkably angled news items. Those are spread much quicker than the nuanced ones," he says.

**ASA WIKFORSS**, professor in philosophy at Stockholm University, is convinced that planted and viral fake news will affect this autumn's election. And this includes foreign troll factories.

"What's worrying are the psychological mechanisms in the users," she says.





## Umeå University takes a stand against sexual harassment

Heidi Hansson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of education at Umeå University, is pleased that discussions on sexual harassment in the academic community are now being brought to the table. “At a university where the vision and objectives state openness, thirst for hunger and freedom, no part of the organisation should be characterised by abuse of power and silence. We are jointly in charge of calling attention to and reacting to bad conditions so that all students and employees can rest assured knowing that if an undesired event should occur, they would get the support they need,” she stated in the University’s management blog.

Photo: Mattias Pettersson



300 people participated in last year’s March for Science in Umeå. On Earth Day on 22 April 2018, the success may have a follow-up. #keepmarching

## More immigrants ready for work

There’s a shortage of qualified teachers and preschool teachers, and Sweden does best in safeguarding the competence that many newcomers have brought with them. This is why, assigned by the Swedish Public Employment Service, Umeå University is offering what is known as a Fast Track, *Snabbspår*, an intensive 26-week course offered since 2017. At the end of last year, forty new teachers were ready to enter the Swedish labour market. The next course starts in spring 2018.

## Toning down trolls’ significance

The role of Facebook as an uncritical conveyor of fake news in the American presidential election has been heavily criticised. The company has promised to increase transparency to make it more difficult to use the network for political purposes. Going forward, users should be able to spot what news originates from troll factories.

## Your responsibility too

**Take it easier.** Never share something you haven’t read or thought through. If you are unsure of the source or the truthfulness, refrain from sharing.

**Question more.** If you see something questionable or fake that others are sharing, inform them of its potential false nature.

“It’s the general public that shares and spreads the messages, often based on emotion and speed, without reflection.”

“We’re rubbish at applying source criticism when we like a news item. Studies have shown that six out of ten people share posts without having actually read the content.”

And when something goes viral, you can’t take it back, the researchers suggest. Even if traditional media and established politicians can show that there is something wrong, corrections are often seen as just another proof of how the elite are lying and hiding things. ✕



## Faculty celebrations

The Faculty of Social Sciences turns 50 this year. From 16-23 November 2018, a Jubilee Week focusing on democracy will be held.



## Algorithms can reduce disturbances

Umeå researcher Olumuyiwa Ibidunmoye has developed automated algorithms to prevent long-term delays or disturbances to services in which data is stored on a cloud server.

Photo: Mikael Hansson

## AIMday focuses on democracy

In autumn 2018, Umeå University is holding its fifth AIMday – this time with democracy as its theme. AIMday is an event where questions from corporations and organisations are matched with researchers. Together, questioners and experts seek solutions during an hour-long session.



## Food for all

Since 2017, there's a popular restaurant serving predominantly vegan food at Umeå University.



Photo: Mikael Hansson

Future social robots will help dementia patients communicate.

## DEVELOPING ROBOT LANGUAGE

In the EU Socrates project, 'social robots' were developed for geriatric care with the objective of, for instance, helping dementia patients communicate with care providers and others. Suna Bensch is one of the Umeå researchers involved in the project.



Suna Bensch

"The robots are not intended to replace carers, but to support and give

service by interacting with patients on human terms. Using natural language, we should be able to tell the robots what we want and need, such as 'clean up' or 'make a coffee'. The robot won't just be a machine, but a form of companion to talk to," she says.

Photo: Mikael Hansson

## Accessible education is more democratic

Umeå University offers flexible study programmes that can be tailored to students' lives.

"This makes education available through every stage of life. It's not just an issue of geography – distance learning is also necessary for students in campus locations," says Heidi Hansson who is Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University and responsible for education, inter-

nationalisation and equal opportunities.

Soon, new educational programmes will also be launched for studies from home in contact with campus.

"It's a matter of democracy: offering only completely distance-based studies or entirely campus-based studies poses a risks segregating certain groups of students. This is where flexible study solutions can bridge the gap."

# DEMOCRACY IS NO GUARANTEE OF PEACE

Democracy is often an important part of making peace, even if the road there can be violent.

Anna Jarstad is studying peace processes that were initiated during the 1990s and the events that affected the forms of peace that developed.

Text: Markus Välimaa

Photo: Johan Gunséus

**M**any peace researchers are focused on conflicts and issues of security. Together with nine colleagues in the research programme 'Varieties of peace', Professor Anna Jarstad at the Department of Political Science instead wants to study peace beyond war, and focus on how peace is created and maintained.

"There are many forms of peace. In certain countries there's only peace in certain parts of the country. And there are great differences between how people perceive peace."

About twenty years ago, many countries began terminating conflicts through peace treaties instead of military victories. In the peace talks, the agreements were based on compromise demanding political reforms.

"The 1990s became the start of a new

'Varieties of peace' is an eight-year research programme funded by the Swedish Riksbank Jubilee Foundation with SEK 43.2 million (2017-2024).

peace-building era, and now we're finally able to study that form of peace from a long-term perspective," says Anna Jarstad.

**EVEN IF** democracy is no guarantee of peace, democracy offers institutions and regulations a peaceful way of handling antagonisms. This makes democracy desirable and an important part of peace-making," says Anna Jarstad. "But the correlation between peace and democracy is com-

plex. Democracies don't tend to go to war with each other, but the road to democracy is often violent."

"Peace is affected by international initiatives such as mediation and aid. The UN has generally failed in achieving democracy through international interventions after wars: only three out of the 27 countries where the most extensive peace missions have taken place are democracies today." ✕



Anna Jarstad



The Swedish Parliament in Stockholm.

# THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM DECIDES THE WINNER

If the British electoral system had been applied to the 2014 Swedish election, the Social Democrats would have received a two-thirds majority.

“The Moderate Party would have taken the other seats in Parliament, apart from a few seats won by the Sweden Democrats,” says mathematician Klas Markström.

Text: Anna-Lena Lindskog  
Photo: Shutterstock and Mattias Pettersson

**H**e studies how election systems affect results, and explains that the British electoral system is rigged in favour of the biggest party. “About 30–40 per cent of votes

could in principle be slung straight in the bin.”

The Swedish system with elections based on proportional representation works better for a society with more than two parties. The qualification threshold of 4 per cent of votes to enter Parliament stops the conjugation

of too many parties at the same time as it encourages tactical voting.

**THE BRITISH** system – just like the American one – is completely different from ours. The objective of the British system is to obtain a clear majority in Parliament. Each constituency gets to vote one member into Parliament. The person with the highest vote in each constituency wins the seat.

“If only two parties have candidates, it could, in theory, result in one party getting 49 per cent of the votes and still not get a single seat in Parliament,” says Klas Markström.

In the US, it’s quite common to have a president who isn’t supported by a majority of the population. That’s due to the Electoral College, which in turn elects the president. The number of electors per state was established shortly after the US claimed its independence and hasn’t changed since.

“That means that if you live in a state that happened to get many electors from the start but has suffered from a declining population, your vote will have more of an effect in the election.”

**FROM A** mathematical perspective, you can analyse how sensitive electoral systems are to voting mistakes, for instance, if someone ticks too many options.

Klas Markström describes how calculations have shown that direct majority voting without weighting and constituencies leads to the least risk of inaccuracies.

“One example is the presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore, where invalid ballots from Florida caused an uprising. The candidates were so close that the invalid ballots actually did make a difference.

If a majority vote had taken place across the entire United States, these ballots would have made no difference, and another winner would’ve been appointed.” ✕



Klas Markström



Professor emerita  
Marianne Liliequist

Research fellow  
Bore Sköjd

# THE STUDENT RISING

*- political activism past and present*

A few years ago, you could read a statement along the walk bridge by the university pond that read, 'Welcome to the left-wing university'. An echo from revolutionary and activist times gone by. How many students are familiar with that statement today?

Text: Per Melander Photo: Johan Gunséus

What I didn't know before listening to Marianne Liliequist and Bore Sköld talk

about their past and present activism was that I'd also get an explanation as to why the statement was posted there, 40–50 years after the left-wing activist era. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

In 1969, Marianne Liliequist arrived in Umeå from Frostviken in Jämtland, Sweden. She was one of the first in her family to pursue university studies, and she started, according to herself, 'at the most left-wing department of them all – social work'. She describes her arrival in Umeå as if the whole world was at her feet.

"I still bear that feeling with me. Every time I leave and return to Umeå, it makes me think, 'How wonderful to be at the centre of the world.'"

**DURING HER** upper-secondary years in Strömsund, Sweden, she didn't feel she fit in amongst her middle-class peers. She was only seen as a working-class kid from 'a Lappish hellhole'.

"But in Umeå and at the University, I suddenly felt that I fit in. Being a girl of the working-class with an interest in politics and who enjoyed a good ponder was just right. I haven't quite got over that shock yet."

Studying meant reading, discussing and questioning everything. All the time, common fronts were established against



practically all of academia, society and the world.

She joined book circles that took on Marx, Mao and Lenin. But in the end, she grew weary saying, 'it started resembling a free church'.

"When the Swedish Communist Party was formed, I thought their reasoning made sense. If we want a Swedish revolution, we need to approach the working class. We can't just walk around at uni and fuss about. We need to proletarianise and spread propaganda at workplaces."

In Marianne Liliequist's case, this led to some friends and her seeking employment



## Bore Sköld

**Born:** 1988.

**Does:** Research fellow at the Department of Public Health and Clinical Medicine, Unit of Epidemiology and Global Health. He is district chair of the Left Party in Västerbotten, and through his political career has realised the importance of communication.





Photo: Private

For a period, Marianne Liliequist worked at an ironworks in Luleå.



## Marianne Liliequist

**Born:** 1950.

**Does:** Professor emerita in ethnology at the Department of Culture and Media Studies. She has always incorporated a politically independent political edge to her teaching and research.

at the ironworks in Luleå. There, one of her achievements was to fight the craze for Stalin.

“Because of this, a prelate of the church came up from Gothenburg and excluded us from the party – all but one. That guy can probably still be seen outside a Luleå liquor shop selling *Proletären* – a weekly Marxist-Leninist newspaper. He was even a real Stalin look-alike,” she says chuckling.

**AFTER THAT PERIOD**, Marianne Liliequist describes how she got tired of it all and felt disillusioned. Her path back

to Umeå and academia took place through ethnology.

So far, Bore Sköld has been sat listening patiently on the red sofa. What Marianne Liliequist is saying makes it easy to understand why Umeå University is called the left-wing university. But what’s his impression? He was born nearly 40 years after Marianne Liliequist.

**What associations do you have of ‘the left-wing university’?**

“I grew up in this city in the 1990s and 2000s and through parents and older siblings I’ve realised that politics is close to people’s hearts here. Particularly through

activism – that’s how I know politics.”

“It’s made me think that politics is a part of society and something to be engaged in.”

In his early work in student politics, Bore Sköld was committed to making it easier for working class youth to study at the University. Then, seemingly from out of nowhere, he starts talking about ‘the left-wing university’ and I understand that he is referring to the statement on the walk bridge.

“The idea behind it was to strengthen the left-wing confidence within the University. As an element of recognition



Marianne Liliequist moved to Umeå at the end of the 1960s to study. “It felt as if the whole world was at my feet,” she says.

and reminiscing over the history, which is important in order to take politics one step further.”

**BORE SKÖLD** tells us about when the Left managed to win the students’ union election year after year. His description was of a resurrection of the political spirit in the academic world.

“Recently, students have been a driving force in the protests against the selling off of municipal public housing in Umeå. And it feels natural to be mobilising.”

“In Umeå today, it’s apparent that the left-wing students also raise subjects like feminism and LGBT issues in a way that we never did – we were too busy pulling

off a revolution before we could do anything else,” says Marianne Liliequist.

What really separates the past from the present is the activism found in social media. There, the reach is wide and posts get wide attention.

According to Bore Sköld, it’s good that internet activism exists, but it can also sometimes lead to the debate suffering in nuance and intellectuality.

Marianne Liliequist points out that the humanities play a significant role here. In continuing to safeguard fundamental democratic issues such as anti-racism, equality and feminism, for instance. ✕



Photo: Harry Lindwall/Västerbottens-Kuriren

Demonstration in Ålidhem. The Battle of the Grove in 1977.

## Past and present

- In 1968, Umeå University had 2,000–3,000 students.
- Today, the number has increased tenfold to more than 31,000.
- In 1968, the University had one campus.
- Today, it includes Campus Umeå, Umeå Arts Campus, Campus Skellefteå and Campus Örnsköldsvik.
- In 1968, Umeå municipality had just passed 50,000 inhabitants.
- Today, the number is over 120,000.
- In 1970, lunch at the newly-opened restaurant in Universum cost SEK 5.50.
- Today, lunch costs SEK 83.
- In 1974, the annual Brännboll Cup premiered in Umeå. In the first year, 44 teams played.
- In 1997, the Brännboll Cup got world championship status and more than 1,000 teams took part.

# LANGUAGE - THE KEY TO INFLUENCE

Swedish pupils are amongst the best in the world when it comes to knowledge on democracy and society. But acting in a democratic way is a whole other story.

Text: **Ingrid Söderbergh** Photo: **Mattias Pettersson and Mostphotos**

**A**ccording to the international survey ICCS 2016 that was published in the autumn 2017, Swedish grade 8 students (14-year-olds) have very good knowledge of democracy and society, and positioned themselves, together with Denmark, Taiwan and Finland, at the top of the survey.

“Hearing that Swedish students have good knowledge of what democracy entails is both gratifying and crucial. Nevertheless, children and young adults need tools and plenty of practice in order to actively be able to participate and



Eva Lindgren

become sharp democratic citizens. In this sense, language is key,” says Eva Lindgren, senior lecturer at the Department of Language Studies and head of research at Litum – literacy research specialising in educational sciences.

**IN SWEDISH** schools, democracy is often the topic of discussion. Students frequently study democratic issues, but spend little time practising using language to make a change. They write articles giving rise to a debate, but the focus often lies on learning to read and write,” says Eva Lindgren.

“Schools need to be more aware of

what writing can achieve, for instance, through socio-political writing where students make arguments for their case and express their views.”

By working more hands-on with language to strengthen the individual’s abilities, school education can be improved to prepare young people for participation in democratic processes.

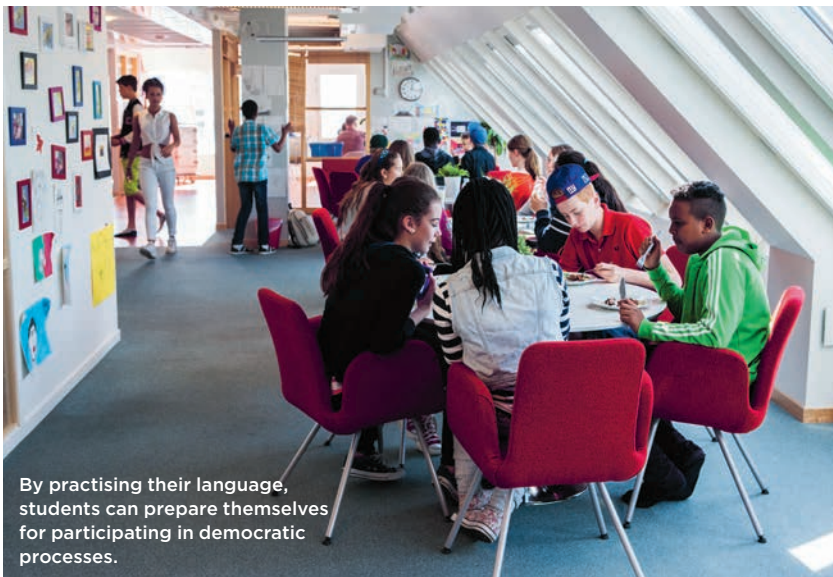
“Being able to argue, debate and adapt your language to the receiver, but also to listen, juggle your thoughts and see things from other perspectives – these are democratic abilities,” says Carina Hermansson, senior lecturer at the Department of Language Studies and deputy head of research at Litum.



Carina Hermansson

**WE LIVE IN** a text-based society where much of our information and communication is conveyed through the written word. When reading others’ texts, there’s always a sender and a purpose behind the text.

“It’s important to take a norm-critical approach to the content and be comfortable with it. That work can start early, preferably already in preschool. When browsing through a book together, the teacher can reflect upon the children’s own thoughts about their surroundings, things that seem unfair for instance, and provide tools for how to act,” says Carina Hermansson. ✕



By practising their language, students can prepare themselves for participating in democratic processes.

## Proficiency test

ICCS stands for International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. In the latest study, Sweden participated with approximately 3,500 students from 155 schools together with pupils from 20 other countries. Each country took part with a random selection of schools and each school participated with one or two classes in grade 8. Within ICCS, students’ democratic and civic understanding is tested.

# TRUTHFULNESS WINS THE ELECTION

The party that delivers the most credible description of reality is likely to succeed in this autumn's election.

That's one of a few prophecies that political scientist Magnus Blomgren is fairly confident about.

Text: Ola Nilsson Photo: TT and Mattias Pettersson

**W**ith eight parties in the Riksdag, and also the Feminist Initiative up and coming, there's no lack of political desires on topics for the agenda. But who actually decides what should be the big political issue

in this election? Politicians, voters, journalists – or maybe political scientists?

“Or pure coincidence,” says Magnus Blomgren who is head of the Department of Political Science at Umeå University.

“Sometimes, unforeseen events have affected the election outcome, for instance the deadly virus that struck seals or a news scope revealing how election workers used racist language. In today's connected society, reactions don't wait, and that makes predictions even harder.”

Still, political parties are able to raise their most important topics in the debate.

“Healthcare is something the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats will highlight. They'll probably succeed as well. Issues on healthcare concern a big

group of voters,” says Magnus Blomgren.

“With the election approaching, it's primarily not about launching solutions, but to talk in a way that voters recognise themselves, and about picking up on people's fear, anger and frustration. It's more important to talk about Agda who isn't getting her hip replacement rather than presenting technical solutions to restructuring specialist healthcare.”



Magnus Blomgren

**MIGRATION IS** always an issue, but the global situation decides whether it will really become a main topic of debate. The same goes for violence and criminality.

Regional politics shouldn't become such a big issue, if you ask Magnus Blomgren.

“Partly, many voters live in big cities and aren't interested in regional politics, and partly, national politics currently don't possess means of control since most aspects are funded using EU means these days. Furthermore, parties are scared of getting involved in discussions on levelling out, as it involves taking means from municipalities with a big group of voters and giving to those with fewer voters.”

The outcome of the election is partic-

ularly uncertain this year. Several parties live dangerously close to the qualification threshold of 4 per cent to get seats in the Riksdag. At the same time, voters are now more willing to change.

“A paradoxical effect is that parties are becoming afraid of speaking their minds. They want to appear as the best, without having said too much that can scare voters off.”

A big issue in the upcoming election is the political *Who takes whom?* Few people think





## What's to come, my fears and expectations

What we've learnt about election campaigns is that they're hard to predict. Voters are deciding later, and what happens in the weeks prior to the election date can be decisive.

Prior to the election, the situation is certainly unstable. I imagine an election campaign characterised by discussions on the ability to run government, who should join forces with whom, and about the Sweden Democrats as both a joker and a dividing power. One credible guess is that the Alliance will dissolve, but maybe after rather than before the election. And I picture endless comparisons of how much different groups in society will earn depending on the winning party, and debates will layer personal attacks with visions, although no one will quite dare to talk about the problem and injustices we face in the fear of appearing as too negative to be chosen.

**WHAT SCARES** me is that we'll lose hold of the election campaign this time around. That it'll partly be overrun by undemocratic powers – within and outside of Sweden – that want to turn the agenda in a direction filled with hatred, and stop at nothing. Where lies, slander and threats are not undemocratic but pragmatic strategies to bring the conversation in the direction you wish. Call me paranoid if you like, but Sweden is interesting enough to right-wing extremists and won't be spared from fake news.

**WHAT I'D LIKE TO** see is an election campaign that addresses political issues that stretch beyond individual citizens' own wallets. That makes use of the political power that the #metoo campaign is showing, covering power and injustices, about how schools and workplaces are different depending on if you're a boy or a girl, depending on the colour of your skin, and whether you grew up in or outside the city. And I'd like to see politicians who dare to admit that they don't have all the answers, who stand up to a vision and want to debate factual matters with their opponents. And I'd also like to see journalists who seriously scrutinise party politics, who see through when targeted groups turn against each other, and thus turn their attention to those who benefit from a certain political discussion. ✕



**Malin Rönnblom**  
political scientist

that any of the traditional political blocks will get the majority.

"It's not unique to Sweden to talk less about factual matters and more about the political game. It's somewhat inevitable in the current parliamentary situation. Meanwhile, I hope the debate in the upcoming campaign will be about how to use the power gained, and less about who to share it with." ✕

**6,290,016**

people took part in the 2014 general election, which was 85.8 per cent of those eligible to vote.



# WHAT IS DEMOCRACY AFTER ALL?

OVER HALF OF THE  
COUNTRIES IN THE  
WORLD NOW COUNT  
AS DEMOCRACIES.

Democracy has become the most common form of government around the world. But democracy doesn't just happen. People sacrifice their lives to achieve something we take for granted: freedom of speech and the right to vote anonymously in general elections.

Text: Lena Eskilsson, associate professor, and Kjell Jonsson, professor emeritus, in both history of science and ideas at Umeå University Illustration: Felicia Fortes





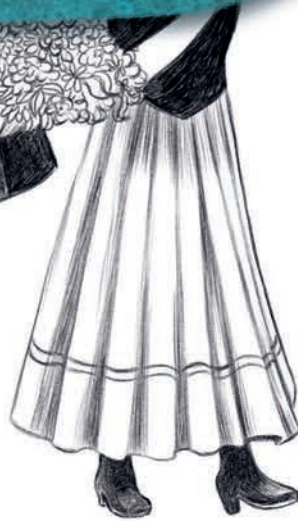
**T**he word democracy comes from the Greek word meaning ‘rule of the people’. What that actually means has been discussed for thousands of years, but there’s still no unequivocal definition. That’s because democracy is constantly changing. Nevertheless, a lot

of people agree that some important characteristics are: human rights, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press and freedom of speech, legal equality as well as free and fair elections.

The word democracy can be used as a term for processes on several levels and areas of society. For instance, economical and political democracy, but it’s the latter that is discussed here.

Political democracy is first and foremost a form of government, a way of reaching political decisions to deal with a society’s shared concerns. This is also in close relationship with the original democratic term, which meant that the people had the power over their own doings. Here, one can see a development from a direct democracy, where citizens reach political decisions together, which is currently unusual but takes place for instance through referendums to an indirect democracy where citizens choose representatives to reach decisions.

**POLITICAL DEMOCRACY** has gone through many phases of development. The first phase took place during the classical era in about 500 BCE, when the city-state Athens had direct democracy for adult free men who were citizens. Women, immigrants and slaves weren’t allowed to participate in public decision-making. In fact, the well-known philosopher Aristotle was denied to partake in democracy since he wasn’t born in Athens.



## What votes count?

A central part of political democracy is the general right to vote. Previously, the right to vote was often limited. Underage citizens, foreigners, women and the poor had no right to vote. New Zealand was the first nation to introduce voting rights for women in 1893. The last country in Western Europe to introduce the same was Liechtenstein. That took place in 1984.



A similar form of government, but with significant restrictions, could also be found during the Roman Republic between 509 and 27 BCE.

**THE NEXT** step in the transformation of democracy came at the end of the 1700s, first in North America and later in Europe. Now, representative democracy was born, in which citizens – though for a long time only adult men – chose who were to decide on political issues through majority resolution. The old, God-given or nature-provided, social order started being questioned by a group of philosophers who instead saw society as a human construction. What was created by man could also be changed by man, was the idea. With their concept of society being built up by individuals, not primarily families and civil status, these enlightenment philosophers paved the way for their political ideologies that developed in the 1800s.

Democratic views were shared by conservative, liberal and socialist thinkers, although these views didn’t always include all individuals and very rarely women. In the 1900s, particularly after World War I, democracy spread through the introduction of the general right to vote, which gradually started to also include women. The right to vote for all men and women in general and municipal elections was introduced in Sweden in 1918–21, which was after its Nordic neighbours and other parts of Europe.

Representative democracy is nowadays the dominating form for political democracy. Over half of all countries in the world now count as democracies.

**MORE RECENT** studies of democracy suggest that a further transformation of democracy is taking place brought about by the rise of supranational entities, such as the EU. As we find ourselves in the middle of this change, it’s rather hard to foresee what this might mean in the future.

Currently, not everyone seems to share democratic ideals either. In a large survey from a few years ago, 26 per cent of young adults aged 18–29 thought it would be good or reasonably good if Sweden was ruled by ‘a strong leader who didn’t care about the Riksdag or elections’. And one in five young Swedes would consider selling their vote for a small amount of cash. Hence, we probably shouldn’t take democracy for granted. ✕

# DEMOCRACY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

Architecture is an important part of democracy. But it's not enough to simply mix glass, concrete and green spaces.

It's the relationship between the private and public space, built up and green areas, that holds the key to stimulating democratic processes.

Text: **Mattias Grundström Mitz** Photo: **White Arkitekter** and **Mattias Pettersson**

**K**atrin Holmqvist-Sten, acting head of department at the Umeå Academy of Fine Arts, Umeå University, sees architecture both as a catalyst and energy source for developing a democratic society.

"If we build housing to prevent segregation, plan for equality and include users in both planning and maintenance, we can achieve a socially-sustainable society. Urban spaces, or public spaces that

are accessible and inclusive, often play an important part as a democracy setting."



**Katrin Holmqvist-Sten**

The Swedish government has also come to realise this and as a result wants to take a holistic approach to architecture and design as a cohesive area that shapes the human living environment. The idea is for these parts to contribute to more sustainable societal development and bridge the increasing economic, social and geographical gaps in society.

"The recipe for creating the means for a sustainable and democratic lifestyle is to

set up a selection of housing with different forms of renting and owning, in various sizes, and that also provides inhabitants with the opportunity to obtain life necessities without the use of a car," says Katrin Holmqvist-Sten.

**ONE PROBLEM**, as far as city planning and democracy goes, is that districts with only one form of buildings are being built, for instance, large estates of only single-family homes.

"In Umeå, but also in other central locations and in big city regions, housing has rapidly increased in price over the last decade, which excludes large parts of society. Many people simply can't afford it. That's segregation."

Simultaneously, there's a development in the contrasting direction in other areas. A mixture of accommodations is being set up to create spaces full of life throughout the year and around the clock. One example in Umeå is Campus Umeå.

"I'd love for more accommodation to be built on and around campus. But I'd also like to suggest developing more services such as nurseries and shops. At the same time, I'd like campus to maintain its character as a park-like space. The condensation of the city that is underway also requires green and open spaces."

The complexity of a growing city is a challenge for future architects and something that Katrin Holmqvist-Sten points out in the Architectural Programme, which borders between the artistic and the scientific.

"The probably most important result is for students to graduate with humbleness and sensitivity to different needs, that they abolish prejudices and keep an open mind. It's crucial that we dare to talk about the role of architecture and architects for responsible and sustainable community development in the long term." ✕



Umeå Arts Campus is one of four campuses at Umeå University.



## Keabnekaise on campus

Recently, Umeå University's new supercomputer Keabnekaise was inaugurated. It has a maximum capacity of 728 teraflops, which means that 728 floating-point operations followed by 12 zeros can be executed every second. A supercomputer is a very powerful computer that, for instance, can be used by researchers who need to process and analyse large amounts of data, or for data simulations to complement theory and experiments.

## Umeå Institute of Design at the top

Umeå Institute of Design is still world-leading in the Red Dot Ranking and the iF Design Ranking.

# 10,000

years is how long there have been whitefish in Stora Lögdsjön Lake in Västerbotten county. This according to new research at Umeå University.



## Podcast success

Over 300 episodes of the podcast Mediespanarna have been broadcast by media researchers Erik Lindenius and Jesper Enbom over the past six years.

## Experienced and competent teachers

Umeå University has the second highest number of merited and excellent teachers in Sweden. More than 100 appointments have been carried out since 2013.



## Dadaism at Bildmuseet

The Bildmuseet exhibition Dada is Dada is open until 20 May 2018 and highlights the Dadaists' anti-nationalism, border-transcending network and questioning of established systems and structures. Dadaism is one of the most influential art movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and began in about 1916 in Zurich as a reaction to the ongoing World War I, nationalism, bourgeois social conservatism and conventional aesthetic ideals.

Photo: Kurt Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg / Copyright 2017

## Social innovations for a sustainable society

Social innovations are innovative services, products, processes, collaborations and methods aimed at meeting societal challenges. Umeå University co-organises the annual conference Social Innovations in the North through a research network in the field.

Anna Sandström Emmelin at the External Relations Office is coordinating the event, and two doctoral students at Umeå University have shown huge commitment to the issue. Aditya Pawar at the Umeå Institute of Design has worked in co-creative design and suggests that innovation should be a part of an open system that takes into consideration



Aditya Pawar, Anna Sandström Emmelin and Maxim Vlasov

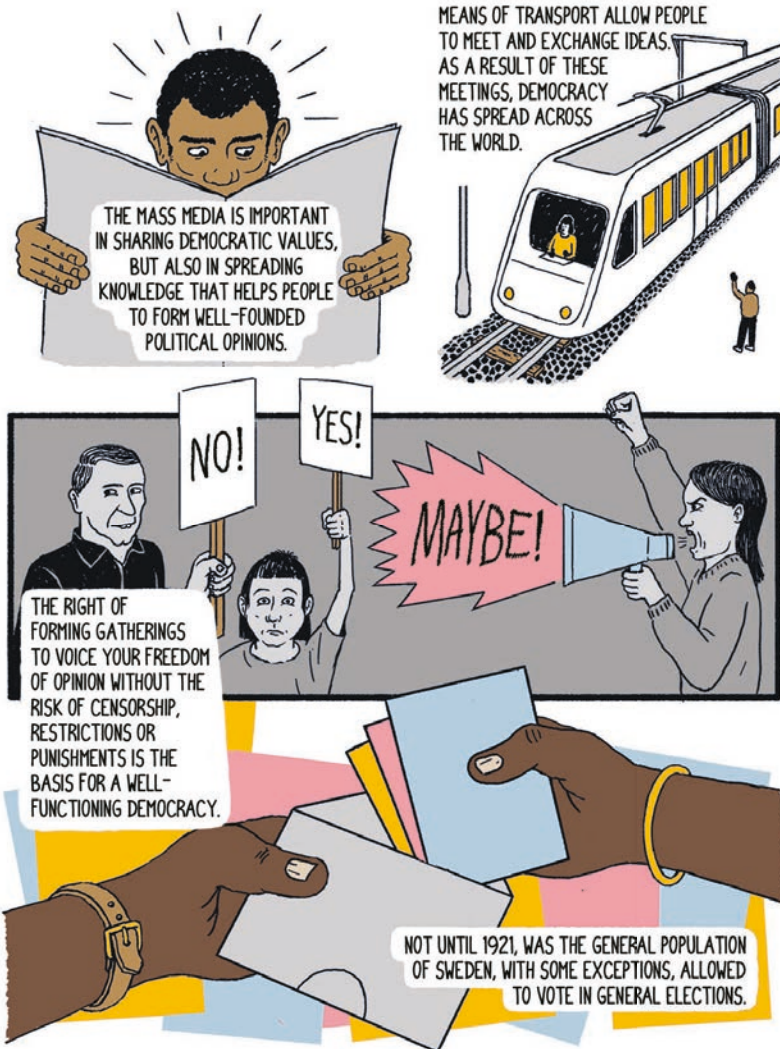
society's heterogeneity and human agenda. Maxim Vlasov at the Umeå School of Business and Economics studies grassroots innovations for sustainability that develop and spread globally.

"Technological innovations take the most amount of space, but social innovations may be even more important. Technical solutions may be necessary, but

they're not enough to reduce the human footprint in nature. Social innovations can aim towards behavioural changes in everyday life."

Photo: Mattias Pettersson

# DEMOCRATIC SYMBOLS



Democracy means 'rule of the people'. But who has been classed as 'the people' has changed over the years.

Text: **Camilla Bergvall**  
Illustration: **Kalle Johansson**  
Photo: **Mattias Pettersson**

**PARTICULARLY SINCE** the 1700s, an increasing number of groups of people have been included in the political community.

"Democracy isn't just a form of government, but a fundamental approach," says Christer Nordlund, professor in history of science and ideas at Umeå University.

"From a history of science and ideas perspective, democracy has primarily been about achieving increased freedom and equality. Some phenomena and inventions have been of great importance in this ambition from a historical perspective. However, it's been double-edged as they've simultaneously facilitated for populism and anti-democratic propaganda."



## Christer Nordlund

Professor in history of science and ideas at Umeå University. He conducts research and teaches scientific and global environmental history.



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