

Surviving Globalisation

A Newsletter from John Alexander



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Most Swedish? IKEA, Recycling or Coffee Breaks?

If Swedish people think 'lagom is best', what would non-Swedes vote as the most positive aspect of Swedish culture? More than a hundred international students, researchers and scholarship holders from 26 different countries had their say...

Every year the Swedish Institute provides study scholarships for international students and researchers. Most of the scholarship holders come from developing countries – from Africa, the Balkans, Türkiye, Pakistan, Russia, Ukraine and many more. At this year's Diploma Ceremony more than a hundred scholarship holders represented 26 different countries.

The SI arranged the Diploma Ceremony to provide this international group with a chance to gather, and meet for a final time their friends and colleagues from so many different cultural backgrounds. Also they had time to reflect over their stay in Sweden and the 'Swedish ways' that they might consider taking back to their own countries.

I'd met his group two years earlier when they first arrived in Sweden, so for this final session, together with the SI, I'd arranged a simple survey with questions like: 'What do you find most positive about Swedish culture? Which aspects of Swedish culture would you describe as most 'exportable' to your country? What are the least positive features you have encountered?'

When Swedish radio listeners had been asked which Swedish words best represented 'Swedishness' the final result was:

1. Midsummer
2. Lagom (moderation, balance, 'just right')
3. Allemansrätt (public right of access)

So what did visitors staying in Sweden over a two year period vote for? The final list was:

1. fika (coffee break)
2. IKEA
3. källsortering (recycling)

What makes the Swedish coffee break (fika) so special? In the latest edition of *How Swedes Manage* I devoted a whole chapter on the unique qualities of the Swedish coffee break: 'Never Say No to Coffee...' Some people I have interviewed from Swedish companies and organisations have suggested that the Swedish 'fika-paus', with its emphasis on 'being together', 'team spirit', 'positive gossip', 'work-related

small talk' 'group participation' and 'the principles of democracy and equality', underlies the success of Swedish companies on the international market. Now, it seems, the Swedish 'fika' is all set to become an export commodity.

[How Swedes Manage is available at the Sweden Bookshop:
www.swedenbookshop.com]