

Small Feet Go Far and the Swedish Year of Young Culture

By Leif Pagrotsky, Sweden's Minister for Education, Research and Culture,

"Culture is like a statue. Children's culture is when you are allowed to climb on the statue," Alva, aged five.

"Children's culture is to live, to read, to be able to have an opinion and to think." Iman, age 11.

That is what two young Swedes said in a recent Swedish Government report on culture for children. Almost a quarter of our population is under the age of 18 and it is essential to the cultural development of our country, that our two million young people take part in cultural life, as users and as practitioners.

This is why 2007 in Sweden is our Year of Young Culture – a year that we actively listen and learn from children like Iman and Alva and engage in a national debate to improve our provision of culture for children and young people.

Sweden is alive with cultural activity and we are doing well in our provision of culture when compared to other nations. But we can do better and we want to learn from other countries, their culture providers, their audiences and their children.

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Small Feet Go Far, initiated by the Swedish Embassy in London, is a precursor to Sweden's Year of Young Culture and signals our intent to work with the very best culture providers across Europe and the world. It will provide a significant contribution to our cultural policy debate during 2007 and act as a showcase for Swedish culture in the UK. The project aims to further British and Swedish cultural exchange among professionals and give a unique opportunity for British audiences to meet and exchange ideas with some of Sweden's best authors, film makers and playwrights.

Exchange and collaboration is vital to the development of our cultural policy. The opportunity for Swedish culture providers to meet and exchange ideas with their British counterparts is as important as hearing what British children, families, schools and practitioners think about the Swedish plays, books and films we are putting on during Small Feet Go Far.

I want our cultural policy to be characterised by inclusive professionalism and curiosity. If we can create a society where children and young people can hold on to and develop their creativity from an early age, we increase the scope for a wider, more spirited public debate. Such a debate is the cornerstone of a democratic society. If, via Small Feet Go Far, we can seed this debate with views, feelings, ideas and reactions from British children and arts professionals, then a new dimension is added to our dialogue and our creative possibilities expanded.

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I believe that the year of Young Culture 2007 will inspire many new initiatives and the originators of these initiatives will be young people themselves. Adults and cultural institutions, both in Sweden and abroad, will be able to help our young citizen's imagination and ideas become reality. Small Feet Goes Far provides a fantastic opportunity to get a taste of what is possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Leif Pagrotsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping tail.

Leif Pagrotsky

Sweden's Minister for Education, Research and Culture

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