



# VÅR FESTIVAL

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## ABSTRACT

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Vår festival focuses on community building from a participatory design perspective within a multi-ethnic small town in Sweden where 7 to 9 year old children are deprived of participating in their local community and influencing its culture. During this project, I used my position as a child culture designer to investigate the realities of child participation and aimed to expand children's agency and belonging in their neighbourhood.

In this project, I am exploring the possibilities of curating a public festival with children. The goal is to democratically imagine, together with children, the shape and the form of this social event that would invite the local community to participate, triggering the self-driven exploration of new festivities and community culture.

Over ten weeks, the festival was created by a design team of adult and child designers in Skillingaryd and was celebrated with the local community at a creative recycling centre- ReMida.

Keywords: community building, social innovation, participatory design



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BÖLL I HINKEN

VÅR  
FESTIVAL  
2022

# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

I came to Sweden in 2018. From the ever-bustling, busy Bangalore, I landed in a bit too quiet tiny town of Sweden called Värnamo. The first time in the western part of the world, it was a BIG shift for me; nothing here was faintly similar to the systems they have back home. Even the door locks opened in the other direction. It was like two countries were wired in entirely different ways, and some things are still too hard to get used to.

It has been a journey of many confusing, a few bitter and some delightful experiences of longing and belonging for me, leading to quite a lot of cultural chaos in mind. This made me wonder if this was my experience of moving as an adult and how easy or difficult would it be for a child. Especially when one has little control over the 'culture' existing inside or outside the door as a child. During my interviews with children, I found that the caregivers' social circles highly influenced children's sense of place and people. And in most cases, social circles were not diverse. The project is my attempt to investigate how these circles can be made more expansive and more inclusive, expanding children's agency and belonging in their own neighbourhood.

Skillingaryd is a small town in the south of Sweden with about 13,500 inhabitants. It is part of Vaggeryd municipality that has welcomed many immigrant families into the community. Although the group has lived in the city for a long time and, in many cases, has jobs and driving licences, there is a feeling that they are not part of society. The social bonds they have formed are often limited to people from cultural backgrounds. Why even after being in place for such a long time, the community member is still strangers to us.

Over the years, they have made contacts, but these are often limited to people from the same background, leading to cultural prejudice and widening the gap. What if children could bridge this gap? Could the festival I envision with children be an arena where these encounters could occur and the sense of collective belonging be realised?

Mamma, pappa,  
Tanya.

lilafst her\_jil Adithi.



Sagagågen lek park.

Best park



I dont lik to fit.

to get At tim to wak  
up in tim.

Ven i get to 9 to  
Slepovr.

Veh i fit vit  
friends.



6-year-old Tanisha, who moved to Sweden from India when she was two, makes a list of her favourite people. All of them share a similar cultural background. Same as parents' social circle.



C H A P T E R

# LITERARY REVIEW

## LITERARY REVIEW

Immigration occurs for various reasons. Whether the decision to move from one country to another is motivated voluntarily or forced because of social or political oppression and unrest, exposure to new people, cultures, and customs is inevitable. Migration from one's homeland to a foreign country can be described as an exciting journey of new challenges or as something that causes despair. As an intricate psychological experience, the immigration process impacts an individual's sense of self and his/her perceived identity (Nekby, Rodin, Ozcan, 2009; Paat, 2013)

According to a report published on 'Statistics Sweden', in 2021, just over 90 000 persons immigrated to Sweden (SCB, 2022). The consequences of immigration become more visible when (some) people's feelings of belonging are increasingly disconnected from the locality and the local community. They tend to experience localities and local communities not as 'locals' but as 'strangers', and of course, this implies that the places in which people do not feel that they belong as 'locals' are also likely to be shared with others who they consider to be 'strangers'. As Sophie Watson (2006) has pointed out, the more such discourses of fear, risk, and danger get to circulate, the more they produce the circumstances they speak. So, for example, as broadcast news and social media sources emphasise 'us v/s them' more, we move towards segregation in society.

According to Fincher and Iveson (2008), to encourage a positive perspective on diversity, expanding our own identities through engaging with diverse identities is essential. They introduce a conviviality concept that describes stranger encounters with specific intent or purpose. These encounters may be short, but they depend upon the settings in which strangers can explore identities through shared activities.

The essay is based on developing a participatory design project that focuses on social innovation emerging from bottom-up design processes. It uses Research for Design and Research through Design approach, which involves developing and testing tools and generating knowledge from design experiments.

In this project, I am exploring the possibilities of curating a public festival with children. The goal is to democratically imagine, together with children, the story and the form of this social event that would invite the local community to participate, triggering the self-driven exploration of new festivities and rituals.



## Why a Public Festival?

Because a planned public festival can create opportunities for encounters to work towards diversity in cities, the festival holds power as a disruptive event where everyday hierarchies and norms are momentarily suspended or even inverted. The notion that the festival offers a glimpse of an unconventional world conveys a hope that through participating in a festive disruption to everyday life, people are not confined to prescribed identities and roles but rather are free to explore potential identities and share this experience with strangers. (Fincher and Iveson, 2008)

Festival and celebration are familiar concepts, and for centuries, they have brought people together (maybe in more familiar settings). For example, in 1982, Lokmanya Tilak, an Indian freedom fighter, started a public celebration of the Ganesh festival to gather people and instil nationalistic fervour among Indians to fight the British. Through participation in festivals, different community members could produce a more authentic form of being together as the festival can encourage them to be their playful selves.

The Intergroup Contact Hypothesis by Allport (1954) also suggests that contact between members of different groups (under certain conditions) can work to reduce prejudice and intergroup conflict. Prejudice is the biggest hurdle in connecting with others; this hypothesis seems to be the key to my process. Since Allport first formulated his contact hypothesis, much work has confirmed the importance of contact in reducing prejudice. Crucially, positive contact experiences have been shown to reduce self-reported prejudice (the most common way of assessing intergroup attitudes) towards Black neighbours, the elderly, gay men, and the disabled - to name just a few (Works, 1961; Caspi, 1984; Vonofako, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007; Yuker & Hurley, 1987). Thus, it is safe to speculate that the contact hypothesis would be influential while working with children.

Pettigrew (1998) proposed a three-stage model to take place over time to optimise successful contact. First is the decategorisation stage (as in Brewer & Miller, 1984), where participants' personal (and not group) identities should be emphasised to reduce anxiety and promote interpersonal liking. Secondly, the individuals' social categories should be made salient to generalise positive affect to the outgroup (as in Johnston & Hewstone, 1992). Finally, there is the re-categorization stage, where participants' group identities are replaced with a more superordinate group: changing group identities from 'Us vs Them' to a more inclusive 'We' (as in Gaertner et al., 1993). This stage model could provide an effective method of generalising the positive effects of intergroup contact

Another voice that I find relevant for my design work is Brian Sutton-Smith and his



**[Image 3]** Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned Ganesha Chaturthi from a private celebration to a grand public event.

discussion on the rhetoric of the identity and imaginary. Sutton-Smith's discussion helped me understand that if we look beyond the pleasures of participants, then play is seen as a means of confirming the power and identity of the community of players. The rhetoric of identity examines the identity of communities through play as a form of bonding, family interdependence, and cooperation. Cooperative play can create feelings of identity within the group, and it is especially evident in the cultural practices of tribal communities, especially during their celebrations.

In addition, the rhetoric of imaginary illustrates that fantasy play as more than just belonging to the realm of childhood. Adults engage with fantasy in many ways, yet it is viewed as more restrained than children's "chaotic" imagination. Embracing that both children and adults use fantasy to understand the world, our emotions, and our innate desire to play validated the project intention. Empathy and imagination often go hand in hand. If you have the capacity to imagine, you can attempt to understand people's feelings, even those who are different from you. This attitude can help minimise prejudice and make us more open to unfamiliar ways of being, moving one step closer to an inclusive society.

"If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." – African Proverb

## Why Participatory Design?

The article 'Small projects/large changes: Participatory design as an open participated process' by Ezio Manzini and Francesca Rizzo discusses the need for citizens' active participation and design initiative to realise large-scale sustainable change as social integration. However, the question becomes who we consider citizens to use their local knowledge and expertise.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international agreement setting out every child's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, regardless of their race, religion, or abilities. Article 12 in the convention speaks about children's right to participate in society, respect children's views, and the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. And yet the necessary shift from 'children's services' to 'children's spaces'. (Moss and Peirre, 2002, p.9) is not visible in the design world. It often has a top-down approach, and children's role remains limited to 'consumers' and 'testers'. There is a need for children to have opportunities to practice participation to be understood and acknowledged as competent and engaged citizens in their community, not as the object to be protected, not the citizen-in-waiting or citizen-in-training. Moss and Peirre also note that the concept of 'children's space' as more 'public space' does not imply a set of physical spaces. Instead, the concept of 'children spaces' means the cultural, social, discursive spaces through which children and adults can engage with one another, 'where there is a room for dialogue, and confrontation (in the exchange of exchanging differing experiences and views), deliberation and critical thinking where children and other can speak and be heard' (Moss and Peirre, 2002, p.9)

Two childhood developmental stages are crucial for the project as it is situated in the context of co-designing a process of experimentation with a designing an encounter-Public festival in the direction of social integration:

Children's ability to "include others in the self" (IOS, i.e., to spontaneously identify oneself with ingroup members and others) develops during middle childhood (i.e. 5 to 9 years). Social categories are no longer understood simply about overt physical characteristics (e.g., dark skin) but increasingly in social psychological terms (e.g., norms, values). This "concrete" to "social-psychological" shift appears to be an important developmental milestone that makes social identities significant to the self by the end of middle childhood (Barenboim, 1981; Livesley & Bromley, 1973).

Another important stage is the beginning of ethnic group constancy in early

to middle childhood (i.e., 3-9 years: Ocampo, Bernal, & Knight, 1993; Rutland, Cameron, Bennett, & Ferrell, 2005). Its mastery makes the child seek out appropriate information about their group, thus enriching the meaning of their social identity while confirming their biases.

Though children's participation in a design is a useful starting point, Greg Mannion argues that it should consider the key outcome: improved relations between children and adults and a key context: space and place (Mannion, 2007), as feelings of agency and belonging, are intertwined with a sense of ownership children or adults have in the context.

For all the above reasons, I, as a child culture designer, want to involve 5 to 9-year-old children living in Skillingaryd. I believe a public festival imagined and organised with children can provide opportunities to 1) broaden childhood friendships by getting acquainted with new people of different backgrounds and experiences; 2) find acceptance, belonging, recognition and status in social groups; 3) trigger new playful ways of seeing and engaging with the community; 4) includes children in the changing and making of the future society.

## Similar Practices

I would like to describe a few design practices that significantly influenced the design constraints for this project.

### MANGO PARTY

Ranga Shankara is an art theatre in Bangalore, India holding the mango party since 2013. The party was initially held at Shankara and Arundhati Nag's farm on the outskirts of Bengaluru as the couple believed mango was a family fruit best enjoyed when eaten in the company. It is an event where apart from exchanging and eating mangoes, discussions of mango varieties, poems and stories on the fruit and competitions for mango dishes are also celebrated. People eat, talk, and breathe mangoes at the party.

The event is free and open to all, but it needs an unusual entry ticket- a bag full of mangoes. This simple instruction democratises the art theatre context, which otherwise belongs to an elite audience. It brings different mangoes, different children, different adults, and even pets together- all cherishing and sharing the same joy.

### THE DESIGN CLUB

Another example of design practice relevant to my project is The Design Club initiative by the Röhnska Museum of design and Art started in 2021. Here the field of design is used as a tool of social change as the contribution to equalisation of opportunities and upwards social mobility.

A design club is a meeting place for children and young people in Biskopsgården. Children try different ways of creating design and art together with various designers and artists. One of the inspiring projects was Biskopsgårdens flagga, which emerged as a way to move away from the negative media representation of their Biskopsgården area and foster an alternate, more positive image of the place. They organised a workshop where each participant designed their own flag to show what was best about Biskopsgården. All sixty flags were photographed and put together into one big common flag!

I aim to create opportunities for children to be part of communal identity by actively participating in local culture during vår festival. This will contribute to their sense of agency and make them better "readers" of their culture and more self-reflective and critical of the culture they occupy in society. They will indulge in the community by being part of the community.

Based on the described practices, I envision my project having three main phases:

- In the first phase of the project, I'll gather insights through reading literature, analyzing existing similar practices and projects, and conducting discussions and workshops by using participatory design research methods and tools to get familiar with children and the context. Form a dedicated team of children and adults to design the festival.
- In the second phase, we (the children & adults' creative team) will co-decide and co-design the festivities through collaborative workshops.
- The third phase is building the pilot version of this festival/social event together with the children.

And then it would be a time for Celebration!! Celebrating this festival would be the actual time test of the final design we built to investigate if our ideas work the way it was predicted and whether the festival becomes a place of shared joy for the community.

**[Image 4]**  
Mango party 2015 at Rang  
Shankara Bangalore



**[Image 5]** Design Club project by Röhnska Museum



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## CONCLUSION

The project's long-term goal is to potentially affect the social dynamics of children and adults, reduce prejudices, and foster curiosities about culture and identity.

The short-term goal is to dream and celebrate the festival curated by children and cultivate feelings of agency and belonging.

This project aims not to build a new utopian world but to expand the sightlines of children's view of "Home".

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C H A P T E R T H R E E

# METHOD DESCRIPTION

## METHOD DESCRIPTION

The journey of making the Vår festival was not linear. It had some uninterrupted, broken, and overlapping phases of explorations, experimentations, investigations, and presentations, embracing the messiness of the curious research method (Farwash, 2022). (Refer to the map to follow the process more easily)

In this part of the paper, I will briefly describe the main processes conducted in the 3 phases of the project.

### 1. INITIAL RESEARCH

The main goal was to read relevant literature, explore through design experiments and apply knowledge to the practical part of the project. Design experiments also helped me get familiar with the context and build trust with potential co-designers.

#### 1.1 Literature

1.2 Interviews with children investigating children's sense of place

#### 1.3 Observation

#### 1.4 Design experiments

### 2. DESIGN

The main task of the second phase of the project is to dream the shape and form of a festival together with the children through collaborative workshops. Planning for the experience of designing the festival was important in this phase and was vastly influenced by children's capacities and interests.

#### 2.1 FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

I begin this phase by conceptualising a creative community of children and adults through a speculative design method named Festival Committee. It is a committee that co-operates in inventing, enhancing, and managing fun experiences for the public festival for the Vaggeryd community.

#### 2.2 DESIGN FOR CO-DESIGN

As a method to recognise children's interests, I decided to use Generative tools. It allows collaborating partners to create artefacts that can be used to communicate their thoughts, feeling, and ideas. Elizabeth B.-N developed it for co-designing.

I wanted to explore children's feelings about their past experiences of a festival, so I used an emotional toolkit: Image Collage. It contains a background on which they work together, with many simple and ambiguous components that can be arranged and juxtaposed in various ways. The visual elements are pretty diverse as they range from photographs to sketches to coloured papers cut in shapes. The components' meanings can be extended using pens, crayons or markers. Words and phrases can be added as per participants' wishes.

Findings from produced artefacts concluded the other themes for collaborative workshops.

### 2.3 COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOPS

The collaborative workshop method would allow me to add openness to my participatory design approach and help me observe and collect in-depth information on children's interaction with other committee members and the environment. In practical terms, workshops were used to dream, draw, model and build different festival experiences with the Festival Committee. We referred to these workshops as "Festival Committee meetings", making them sound more "important" and equalising the power dynamics. Somehow "Workshop" often comes with the notion of adult/s organising something for children (e.g., craft workshops). In contrast, the meeting is a place where everyone engages actively on the subject of discussion. Language, in subtle ways, acts as a reminder for adults to 'uncontrol'.

### Ingredients for designing the workshops

Simone Nicholson's 'loose parts' inspired me to use workshop materials with no previous specified purpose. He defines 'loose parts' (1971) as materials with no specific directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. Variable components can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart, and put back together in multiple ways. Examples: sand, stones, shells, pieces of wood, papers etc. This ambiguity of the meaning of materials can simulate creative possibilities for working with the workshop themes.

Another source that inspired me to open up children's roles as equal contributors in the meetings was Loris Malaguzzi's 'Hundred Languages' (Malaguzzi, 1970, From Cagliari et al., 2016). This concept enables the facilitator to open more possibilities to communicate with children. This was especially important since I have limited verbal capacities in Swedish (a common language for the other members) as a facilitator, so multiple ways of 'expressing' and 'listening' can make us (festival committee members) more mindful and engaged in the process.

Self-determination theory (E. L. Deci et al., Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour) has also played an essential role in designing the activities and the instructions for meetings. This theory suggests that people can become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled.

- **Autonomy:** Committee members need to feel in control of their behaviour and goal. Therefore, I tried designing for themes rather than specific outcomes in the meetings. I intend to create instructions that allow multiple interpretations and possibilities of outcomes. Also, children should be able to see the materialised effect of their effort. (

maybe not exactly as one child's idea but as the amalgamation of all)  
Competence: Recognizing children's physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional. Capacity and designing the workshop tasks accordingly.

- **Connection or relatedness:** Creating opportunities for a festival committee members to connect by making together. E.g. working in groups for tasks and keeping those groups fluid. I also plan to create objects that help in fostering group identity.

The well-played game has nothing to do with who wins or loses. It's all about how we play together  
- Bernard De Koven

Bernard De Koven and his discussions on play and playfulness have been the most inspiring in conceptualising the idea of the festival and as well as in the collaborative process of design. FUN would be central to all the collaborative workshops designed. I hope that the 'Festival Committee' becomes the 'play community', that cares more about the players than about the game and extends it to festival visitors. (2011)

I will briefly explain the structure and intentions of the festival committee meetings through the overview (page 33). The reasons for selecting specific themes would be more apparent in process documentation.

The Process section under Project Documentation of this paper will describe my methods in action, referring to the reasons behind design choices and their implementation.

### 3. BUILDING FOR THE FESTIVAL

The main goal is to build the conceptual design suggested in the second part. I would try to involve children to whatever extent possible. As I might not get enough hours for the festival meetings, I am prepared to build the outcome objects independently and involve children virtually. The thorough designing process through participation of the will hopefully trigger a sense of ownership over the public festival and reflect on the day of celebration!!

### METHOD FOR ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis was conducted after each meeting and after the celebration of the festival. It involved a brief discussion with the co-facilitator, going through video recordings, taking notes, and comparing them with the initial intentions. Festival Committee reporters will make a ground report on the festival's happening, which might help capture their own feelings of agency and belonging. I also plan to conduct interviews with the site stakeholder and festival committee members, which may shed light on their perspectives on the process and outcome.

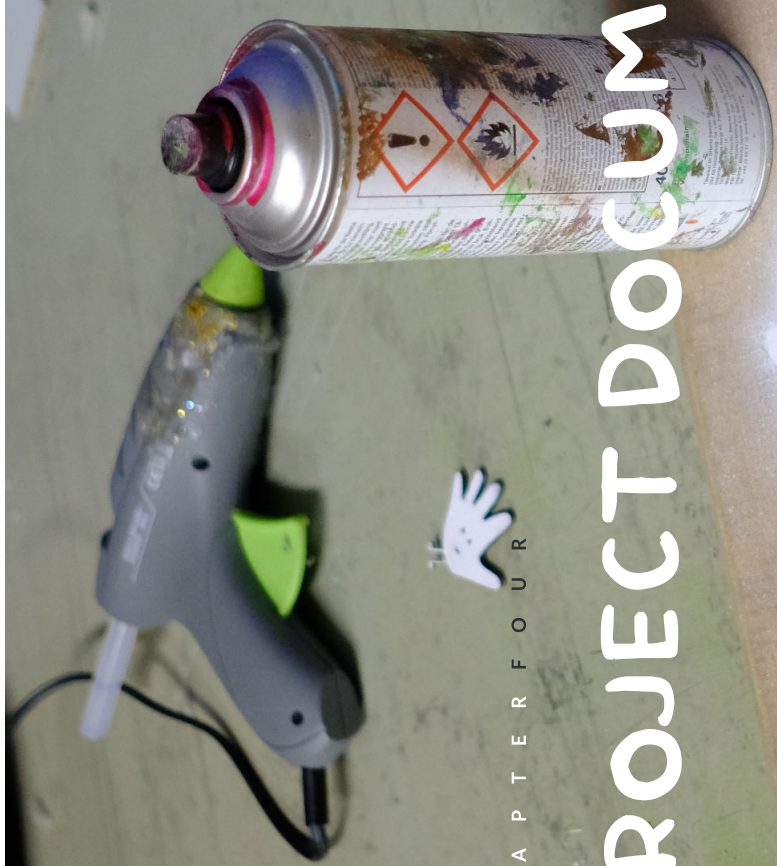
*(next spread)*  
overview of the meetings that were held during the design process.



Meetings	Date	Duration	Tasks	Participants
Meeting 1	Mar 1, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Ice Braker Activity Dream about a festival/carnival	9 x children 1 x facilitator 1x co-facilitator 1x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 2	Mar 1, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Design Brief with the Story Crafting flowers for decorations	12 x children 1 x facilitator 1x co-facilitator 1x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 3	Mar 17, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Inventing games	11 x children 1 x facilitator 1x co-facilitator 1x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 4	Mar 18, 2022	1day x 3hrs	Dance performance Discuss and draw – Festival Name and identity and playful ways to fika	5x children 1 x facilitator
Meeting 5	Apr 7, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Redesign festival games to collaborative festival games Voting for the Identity	8 x children 1 x facilitator 1x co-facilitator 1x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 6	Apr 12, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Model making for playful fika Model Making for Cookies	9 x children 1 x facilitator 1x co-facilitator 2x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 7	May 2, 2022 May 3, 2022	2day x 1hrs	Playtest for flower game	5x children 1 x designer
Meeting 8	Apr 21, 2022	1day x 2hrs	Creating fabric portraits	11 x children 1 x facilitator 1x teacher(assistant)
Meeting 9	May 2, 2022 May 3, 2022	2days x 2hrs	Baking cookies Sharing Responsibilities	5x children 1 x facilitator

C H A P T E R F O U R

# PROJECT DOCUMENTATION



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## Key Question

How can co-design of a "public festival" (process and outcome) enable children aged 7 to 9 in building community and consequently develop a sense of agency and belonging?

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## Design Question

How can tools and narratives enhance opportunities for democratic participation when a child's perspective is included in the planning and designing of a public festival?



**Intelligent materialval**

"...dvs ett material som inte tvingar barnen i en viss riktning utan som ställer frågor, lockar fram hypoteser och en önskan att experimentera."

Att göra lärande synligt s. 67

(In English)

Intelligent material selection "... is a material that does not force the children in a certain direction but asking questions, eliciting hypotheses and a desire to experiment."

Making learning visible p. 67

## Stakeholders

During the research phase (autumn 2021), from the design experiment 'weaving together', I realised my limitations and struggles in organising adults and children for workshops. Therefore, I was looking for an Institutional partner that could support me during the organising process. I came across Remida's booth at the Vårnåmo carnival, where they had displayed sculptures made from recycled material, a 3 in A Row game with buttons and pieces of ceramic tiles etc. and some information about sustainability goals. I approached them, and they were open to collaborations. And I continued the design experiments (practice workshops) with them. Observing Remida's ways of working and the diverse-rich neighbourhood it is in convinced me to extend our collaboration from design experiments to partnership for the festival project.

### ReMida

ReMida is a creative recycling centre in Reggio Emilia that started in 1996, and since then, it has started up ReMida centres around the world. ReMida in Vaggeryd was begun in 2011 as an EU project with rural development money from LEADER Västra Småland. The entire business is based on reusing and reducing consumption. They get materials from about 90 companies in the municipality. Residual and waste material, which companies intend to throw away, ReMida uses as educational material in preschool, school and after-school centres.

Sustainable development goal 12 is about sustainable consumption and production, and two of the sub-goals are very close to the business they currently have at ReMida.

12.5 Significantly reduce the amount of waste: By 2030, the amount of waste will be significantly reduced through measures to prevent, reduce, reuse and recycle waste.

12.8 Increase public awareness of sustainable lifestyles: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the information and awareness needed for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Though ReMida has existed in the town for more than ten years and yet not many in town know about their initiative or work, so Festival was an opportunity for them to reach out to more people and create awareness.

The physical office reflects Reggio Emilia's approach; a place is welcoming and aesthetically pleasing; it embraces nature and is filled with lots and lots of purposeful materials, inspiring. This Environment added so much to the interactions with children; it played an essential role in encouraging them to be equal contributors in the design process.

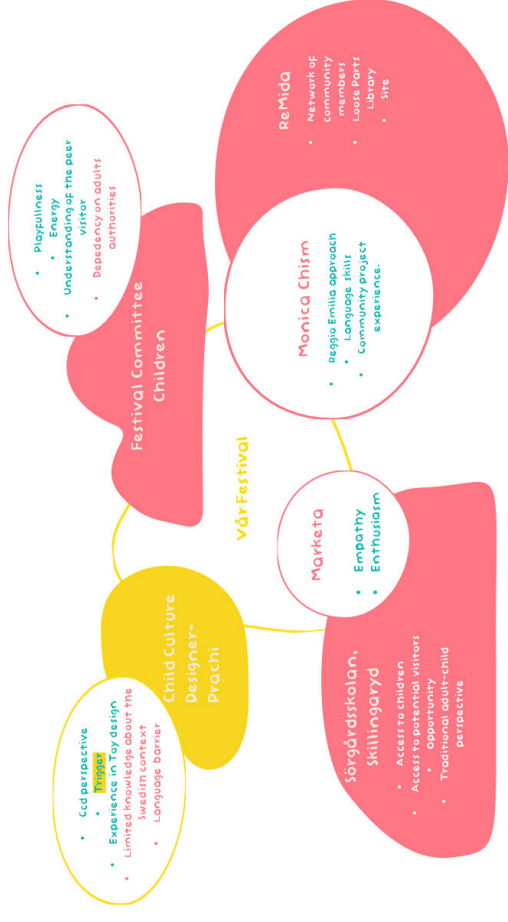
**[Image 6]**

One section of available materials at ReMida's office at Vaggeryd.

## Sörgårds skolans Fritidshem, Skillingaryd

Sörgårds skolans Fritidshem is an afterschool centre in Skillingaryd. Their vision is to work for inclusion and participation, which reflects in all their activities. The centre is culturally active and always has some projects with different artists. Skillingaryd is a locality situated in Vaggeryd Municipality, Jönköping County, Sweden. It is an old industrial town characterised by multi-ethnicity, cultural production, and excelled carpentry. So naturally, teachers and students also had diverse cultural backgrounds. The staff supported the festival project throughout the process and was even involved in some parts of the organising of the event. Marketa Zawadil, a teacher from the school, helped me distribute the communication poster and get permission from the school authorities and parents.

Every year, Fritidshemmen's Day is celebrated to draw attention to the important pedagogical work done within the after-school centres. The theme for the day is "learn, live, develop". It was proposed by Sörgårds skolans afterschool centre to combine Vår festival with the Fritidshemmen's Day. It didn't make any material difference to the workings of the festival committee. Still, it reduced the load of organising the day on the teacher's behalf and made it easier to 'present' the centre's involvement in cultural projects to parents.



Each actor involved brought their gifts as well as emotional baggages to the process.

## PARTICIPANTS

The festival committee consists of members ranging from 7 to 50 age group. The committee has diverse social actors who brought in new ways of imagining a festival for their neighbourhood using their different expertise and knowledge.

The committee consists of a child culture designer, i.e., me. I initiated projects, but my role also extended as mediator and facilitator by designing and supporting different co-design activities to make communication among members as clear as possible and develop concrete ideas for the festival.

It has an adult project coordinator from Remida- Monica Chism, who has a long experience working as a pedagogue at Regio Emilia Institute. She was present in almost all workshops. As Swedish was the common language for all the participants, I often felt limited by the language. Monica helped in facilitating in Swedish when needed.

In a 6-year-old child's life, the idea of communal celebration is often linked to religious festivities or decided by other authorities (e.g. town carnivals) and never by the children. Starting participatory projects to design a public festival that engages young children as equal contributors could help set a new standard for children's participation and make a visible impact on the community culture they are part of. It would increase self-esteem and self-belief and bring more willingness to exercise their right to be heard as they grow older, making them active citizens.

I recruited Child designers from the sörögardschools afterschool program. I designed a recruitment poster for the festival so that interested children could sign up to be part of the committee. So from the very beginning, children get to decide whether they want to be part of the project, rather than parents or teachers determining whether a child will participate. The poster invited children to work as designers and gave information about the workshop series. We have six core child designers on the committee and five rotating ones. Here is a little more about them.

1. Klara Svensk- Age 7 bilingual
2. Ida it Saisuwar- Age 7 bilingual
3. Elin Johansson-Age 8 bilingual
4. Lia Vrnborg-Age 8
5. Alexia Fluturu -Age 7 bilingual
6. Lejla Cirkic- Age 6.5



[Image 7]  
from the left, Alexia, Lia, Prachi,  
Ida, Klara outside ReVida.

Adult project partners - We also had some occasional helpers from the community, Asa Karlsson, who supported plucking materials, cleaning up and organising Remida's office space for workshops, Marketa Zavaclil, a teacher from the school, helped get permission from the school authorities and parents. Janitors from the municipality made a wood workshop available to build the festival's tools.

## The process

In this part of the thesis, I will focus on the project's second phase. The main task of this phase is to go through the design process together with the children to determine and visualise the elements of the festival. Different participatory design methods were used in 9 collaborative workshops with children to get details about the other festival elements. I will not describe each workshop's structure and content but instead break it into the most important tasks from the children's participation perspective.

## Design for co-design Activation

### Festival Maker's Kit

The bag was inspired by a carpenter's tool pouch belt and symbolic of the 'let's get to work' emotion. I wanted to play with the idea of the bag being the committee's uniform that shows a sign of authority but at the same time has a functional purpose. Though it served a less practical sense, it carried a tremendous emotional value for committee children and became a common link between all the young and old members and brought us to a level playing ground.

#### WHAT IS INSIDE?

A waist bag, a small notebook, pencil with a flag, flower pin and a badge.

Production Process: Stitched discarded fabric swatches to make the rectangular bag, held by fabric belts and (unidentified usage) elastic snap buttons.

#### ACTIVATION:

Festival committee members took an oath and received the kit in the second meeting. The kit acted as an invitation to spark excitement. It helped children identify themselves as part of the festival committee member and brought a sense of belonging to the committee. It even became a part of the festival designing ritual.



[Image 6.]  
Lia and Ida Flaunting their kits.

[Image 9] →  
Festival Maker's Kit



Waist Bag

Flower pin for customizing and identification

Notebook and pencil

Name Badge

## Our Oath

"I am part of the Festival Committee and I pledge to co-operate to make our festival fun for everyone."





## Collaborative workshops

### DESIGN BRIEF THROUGH FICTION

A fictional story as a method acts as a trigger for activating the process. Just as children usually do when they play, a theme a context is set in this story, which becomes our common myths about the festival. I would pick elements from the 'image collage' that children made in past meetings and plant them in the narrative. So that story has some part of 'things they already like about festivals' and the mystery part that is open to interpretation. The story would have some unresolved elements which festival committee members would figure out in the coming ways that contribute to the different aspects of the festival. The story was a way to acknowledge and respond to children's contributions using ambiguity as a resource. It helped me communicate the design brief playfully.

## Mystery of Maja

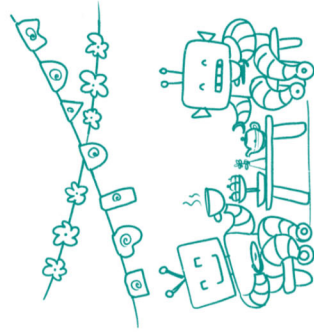
"The other day on the bus, I met an old lady, she was about 90, very old and wonderful with her wrinkled skin and warm with her soft voice. Her name was Maya. She told me a wonderful story about the festival she attended in this village of Vaggeby. I will do my best to tell the story as she said it to me. Still, she could not remember everything. You see, my Swedish is not so good, so I had dig culture understanding the details. I came here because maybe you can help me understand what I heard from her. Do you think you want to help me with that?"

So Maya lived on the outskirts of town. One day, while playing blind man's buff with her friends, she went a little too far and fell to the ground. She took off her buff and realised she was in the middle of a forest. Curious, Maya stood up, looked around and realised that it was a beautiful deciduous forest, not a dark and evil forest. It was the middle of the day. Young Maja moved through the woods, heard sounds, and saw animals running around, but she did not get scared.

After a while, she saw one gravel road, looked to the left and then to the right. Finally, she decided to take the gravel road to the right. She came across a gorgeous landscape. There were meadows where there were sheep and cows. Suddenly she sensed the smell of buns. She followed the smell and soon saw some houses. She walked towards the houses and arrived at a small village. She walked around the street there. The smell got stronger and stronger, and finally, Maya saw a bakery. Still, just before she was about to enter the bakery, she heard children's voices mixed with some groovy music.

When she arrived, she looked at a wall that said "Festival." She went inside and looked around. She saw robots having a tea party, some strange games with giant wheels, music machines, and lots and lots of ovens with eggs of all different colours and shapes. It was such a fun festival. Everyone was playing and having fun with all the strange things there. You could not recognise the adults from the children, as everyone was just jumping with joy.

But you know what happened next? I never got to know as Maya had to leave because her bus stop had come. And then I could not understand what the eggs and decorations looked like, what robots were talking about at the tea party, or how you play games with giant wheels. But maybe we can figure it out together to make our festival as fun as this. So what do you think? Should we do that? Should we start?"



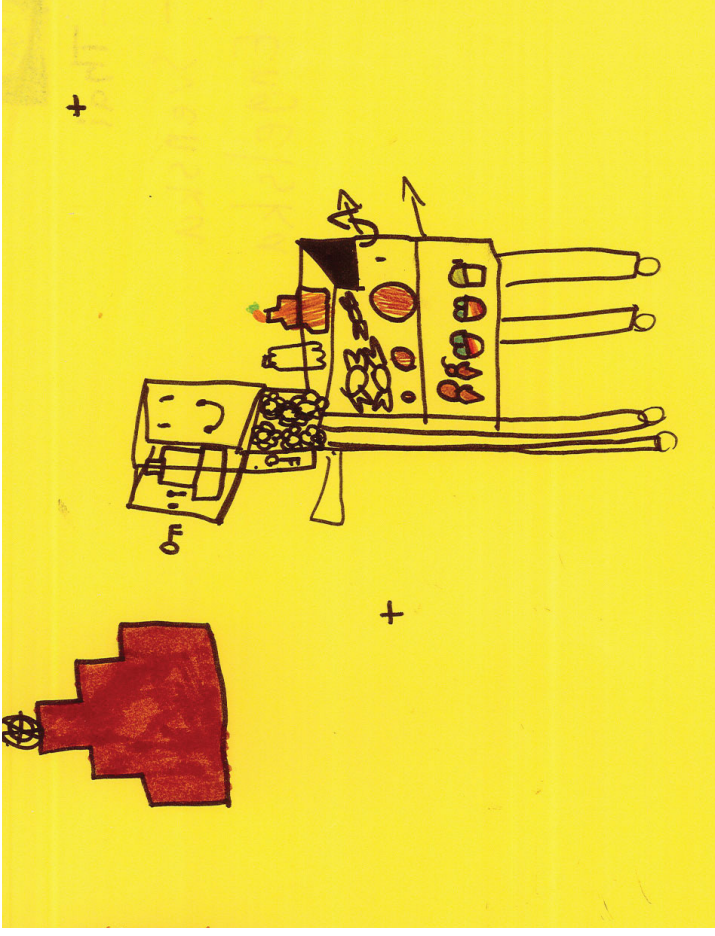


**[Image11]**  
Festival Committee children found a way to straighten the paper roll.

### Task: Flower Craft

Monica narrated the story of Maja to all. They all receive the bag and get ready for the mission of solving Maja Mystery. We discuss the story in brief. I explain that we will work on the decorations just like the festival in the story. What do they think it looked like. They can choose to create however they want. I show some of the craft techniques that I tried earlier.

Tools: Curated loose parts; paper in all sizes and colours; wooden frames, buttons, plastic bottles, sticks, and flags.



**[Image 12]**  
Ida's idea about the cake serving Robot.

### Task: Playful Fika

We discussed the story of Maja if children remember any part of it. They were followed by a discussion about the festival's name, food to be served at the festival and playful ways of doing it. The task was to have conversations around these topics, ideate and use drawings to communicate them.

Tools: WPapers, sketch pens, pencils



**[Image 14]**  
Group testing stacking

Examples of few of the dialogues during the task:

- #1 "Ida: this is too easy we need more logs"
- #2 "Elina : No I don't want to use bobbins. I making my own game"

**[Image 15]**  
Kia Fixing the hurdle for the balancing game.



**[Image 13] (left)**  
Group discussing about the points in the game.

### Task: Inventing Games

We discussed children's favourite games. I shared some examples of carnival games and encouraged them to explain how to play them. The task was to create games to be played by the festival committee members present, inspired by the trigger word their group received

Tools: Words (Kasta, stacka, sikta, balans). Choose and pick the loose parts from all the available materials at Remida.



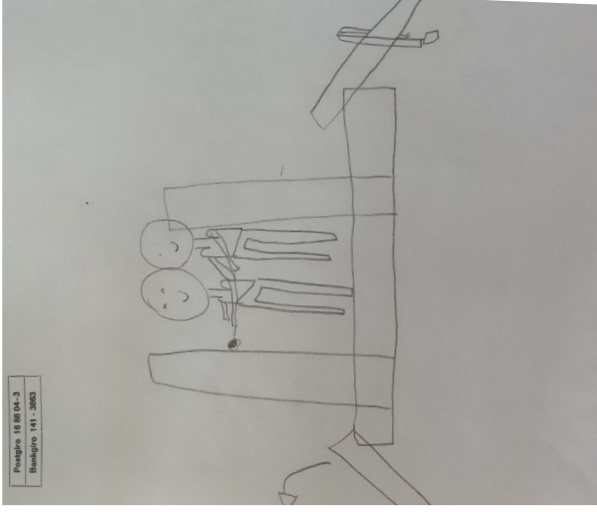
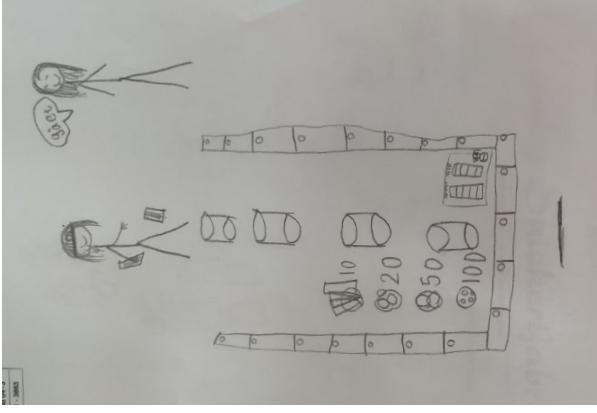
**Image 16j**  
Ida and Lia trying to balance a ball on the wooden track.

### Task: Re-designing games

I shared some examples of cooperative games. Children explain how to play them. We discuss what is common in all the examples = "co-operation". I shared photos of the games they designed. The task was "Change the game in such a way that you need two players to work together to win the game".  
 What if your parents wanted to play this?  
 What if your siblings wanted to play this?  
 It should be fun for everyone who comes to our festival."  
 They can draw their ideas and discuss them with the group before testing.

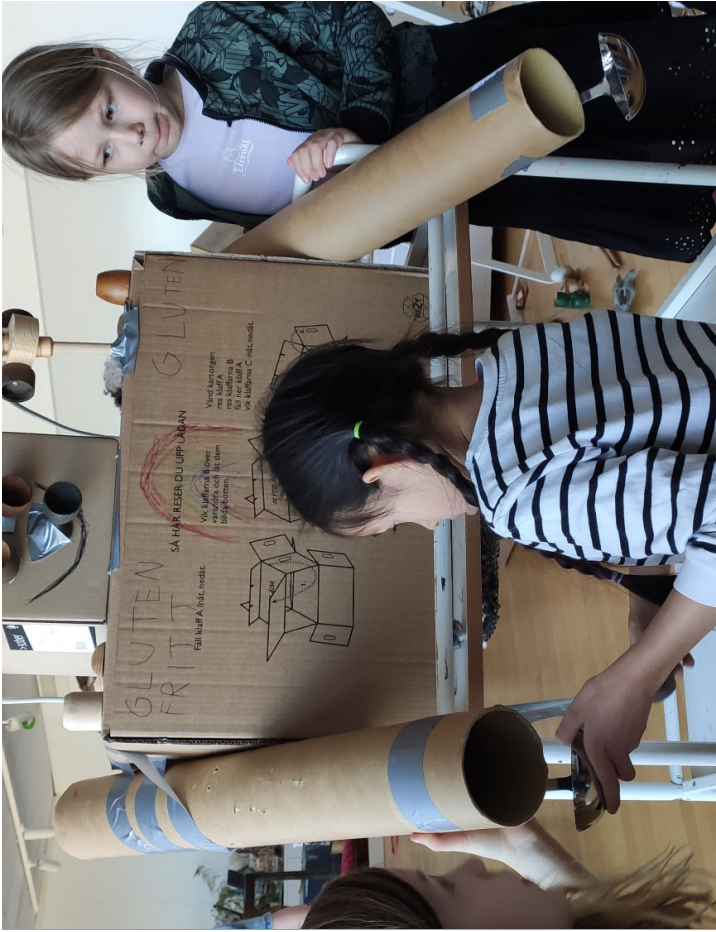
#### Tools

Choose and pick the loose parts from all the available materials at Remida



Examples of few of the dialogues during the task:

- #1  
"Ida: If a person thinks its scary then the other one can guide by touching their shoulders or use the guiding stick."
- #2  
"Lia: I have an idea what if we mixed and this (Idas idea) and this (lejla idea) Lejla and Ida: yaaa that would be fun"
- #3  
"Ida: but then only people with same height can play this"
- #4  
" Lejla: yaa I think my papa can play this game"



**Image 17 (left)**  
Ida, Lia and Linea figuring out the correct angle to slide the cookie.



**Image 18)**  
Loose Parts in action

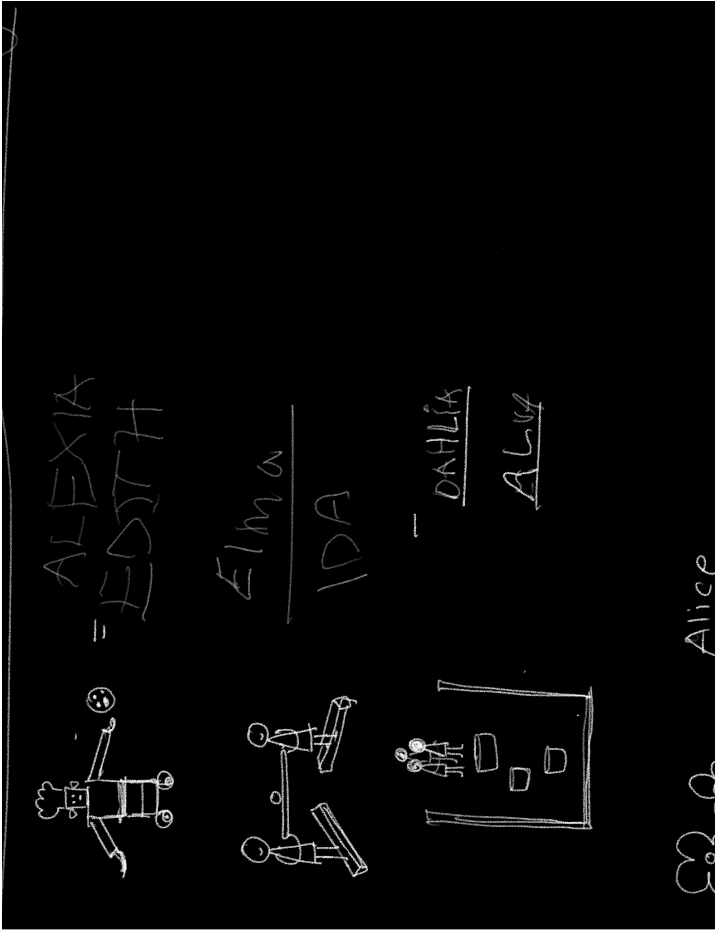
### Task: Building Robot

I explained Prototypes, and we discussed their need, followed by some examples of the prototype. I share some of their drawings of the 'cookie machine' from the last session. Girls that were present in the previous session helped me explain the drawings to the rest of the group. The task of this meeting was to build a model of the cookie machine that stores the cookies, slides the cookies and hides the operator.

Tools: Metal Food cart and Curated loose parts like a cardboard box, tubes, wooden furniture parts, egg cups, graters, wheels, cardboard boxes, tubes, spatulas, candle holders, buttons etc

Examples of few of the dialogues during the task:

- #1  
Lia: Look how cute our robot is. It has food ticket collecting box here for the smaller ones and one here for the adults.  
Also you get to choose if you will have gluten or glutenfri cookies
- #2  
Me: are you allergic to gluten  
Lia: No  
Me: Do you know anyone who is allergic ?  
Lia: yes, Melvin, alva, nora and I think her parents too are allergic
- #3  
"but then only people with same height can play this"
- #4  
"ya i think my papa can play this game"



**Image 19 (left)**  
Shared decisions about stations at the festival

### Task: Sharing the responsibilities

We discussed and wrote all the stations and activities we will have at the festivals. We wrote two committee members that are responsible for each station. Everyone wanted to run the cookie machine. They will take turns running different stations. We discuss the dance performance and schedule for the day of celebration.

Tools: iPad, pencil



**Image 20 (right)**  
slide used for sharing the options with the team.

### Task: Voting For The Logo

We discussed voting and the importance of voting in a democracy. I asked if they remembered the discussion about the logo we had in the past. They don't, so we discussed the elements that make our festival special. Then I share alternatives to the logo I have created and ask them to vote. The task is to choose the options they think represent our festival elements. They write the number on a chit and put them in the box.

Tools: projector, paper chits, voting booth, box



**Image 21 (left)**  
Klara making a portrait of her horse.

### Task: Makers Bunting

I explained my plan for making the fabric bunnings for the festival and needed their help creating them. I ask if they have made self-portraits, and one girl knows, so she explains it to the group. They start by looking into the mirror and drawing on the sticker sheet. Then they pick a fabric swatch for the background, then stick the paper onto other fabric swatches to cut the face and facial details, which they cut with scissors and fix on the ground with the help of pins. They can sew the pieces if they want.

Tools: fabric swatches in various colours, pins, needles, sticker sheets, and sketch pens.

## Design phase : Learnings

I will briefly describe the intention and the impact of tools and narratives used in the collaborative workshops.

### The Importance of Loose Parts

I intended to keep workshop plans flexible. I wanted the children to feel like they directed the workshop content and, in that way, also had a sense of ownership over the process. The discussion and drawing task, for example, started with the discussion about the festival logo. Still, when children seemed not interested in the topic, we moved to another equally important issue of their interest: fika and playful ways of serving it. Drawings produced in this meeting were used to inspire the next workshop- Modelling a cookie machine, where we provided an extensive collection of loose parts available at ReMida with a metal food cart. Loose parts ranged from wooden furniture parts, egg cups, graters, wheels, cardboard boxes, tubes, spatulas, candle holders, and buttons. This encouraged children to imagine stories & scenarios, and in the process of hacking the food cart, children brought their drawing cookie machine to life.

I realised that the children were most engaged with the task when they felt like experts, and play was their most intuitive way to express themselves. Having a range of 'loose part' at ReMida opened up. Therefore, I tried to provide a variety of objects to allow for different kinds of games and give the children an opportunity to shape the experiences of the festival.

### Imagination to empathy

The child-led activities were important observation moments for me because we could note how the children used and appropriated the materials and environment to develop their own stories or conduct their own investigations. The adults played a supportive role during these activities, providing objects, lifting heavier furniture and joining in on the play.

The children used the loose parts and triggered words to create single-player games and played them with Festival committee members present in the 3rd meeting.

Children improvised the same game to be a multiplayer game in the next meeting, considering everyone who comes to the festival, young and old. In both the sessions, they converted ReMida's office into a space for play, but the transition in their stories and dialogues in the process was notably different. They appropriated the difficulty level, techniques and materials for a wider diverse pool of players.



[Image 22] Lejla made a hat with the colander



[Image 23] Colanders became trashcans

Here are a few examples. Lia's idea for the balance game is that one player closes her eyes and the other guides her on the raised platform. They start testing this idea when Ida adds "if someone is scared to close their eyes and walk, they can choose to be held by the shoulder."

In the meeting about building the cookie machine, children think of a way to collect the food coupons. They role-play a younger child and ask one of the teachers to play the adult to test the height of the collecting box.

Children were using objects to pretend-play the festival environment, which encouraged them to consider and discuss other possibly opposing opinions and grew the ability to listen and include multiple perspectives. It was great to see that the festival committee had become a safe space for children to express their opinions. This also justifies Bernie de Koven's argument about how imagination helps in expanding empathy.

### Cooperation to collaboration

Child designers in the committee knew each other since they all went to different classes but the same school. So even before the committee was formed, they were already acquainted with each other. So even in the meeting that happened initially, they cooperated. For example: in the flower crafting task, where the sheet of paper is too big for them, they help each other carry it, straighten it work with it. To some extent, cooperation is driven by the object's materiality. Still, in the last few workshops, it was noteworthy to see that they were being respectful and attentive to each other's ideas, negotiating differences, being inclusive, and even feeling in for each other for responsibilities at the festival. They were collaborating in an absolute sense.

### Germination Time

My finding has shown that designing with children through a participatory process takes much more time. Firstly, all the actors must trust each other. Building trust to create a safe space for expressing persons' views and opinions is an essential transition needed for participatory design, which needs constant encouragement and longer duration. During the actual process, negotiating a diversity of meanings to make shared decisions may be complex and demands significantly more time than what I had. Hence, the festival committee's design process involved a combination of children's independent findings, adults' independent decisions and adults- children's co-decisions.



### No art without heart

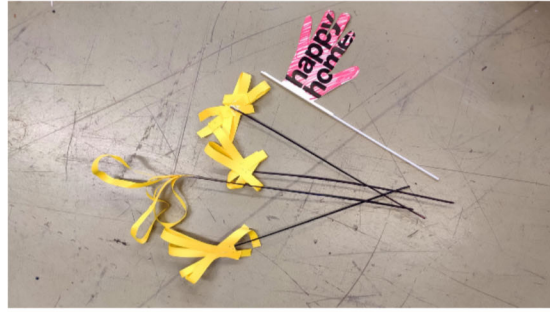
Motivating children to do things was sometimes challenging, primarily when the workshop focused only on crafting. The children used loose parts like a variety of colourful papers, buttons, sticks, wires, hooks, and bottles to create flowers and children were not interested in exploring the materials and mostly used the technique I used, resulting in a monotonous similar.

In another meeting where children made self-portraits from scrap fabric swatches (that I planned to sew together to make bunnings and use them for the festival decorations), they were more invested in the process and even extended looking flower the assignment to creating portraits for the siblings, pets and even their favourite music band.

**Image 24** (left)  
Flower produced in the workshop.

While openness in the material is essential, having a theme that allows self-expression to complement their competency is also necessary for intrinsic motivation among children. Showing them trust and allowing them to share their knowledge and experience was empowering and was visible in meeting that inclined to Play.

**Image 25** (right)  
Portraits created in the workshop. Difference in the motivation of children reflects in the produced artefacts.



### What's in a name?

Another learning about motivation was regarding the topic of expression. In the beginning, when children knew very little about the festival, they were keen to know the details of the festival in more conventional ways, e.g. what are the costumes for the festival, what is the name of the festival etc. but when we started the actual working on the festivities, and they were keener to participate in designing activities for the festival, it became an open playground to experiment with materials. And then when I tried having their opinion on the festival's logo, they were not so interested. As stated earlier, they would rather talk about playful fika than discuss the name or the festival's identity. I realised that things that are important from an adult designer's perspective might not be important from a child designer's perspective. As a solution to this problem and with my intention to include their views in making the festival identity, I created alternatives for the identity (derived from our previous conversations in the meeting) and asked the committee to vote. This method seemed to work slightly better as they were happy to see the result but not necessarily eager to know the voting results. This was meaningful learning in recognising their interests in different aspects of participation.

**Image 7**  
Vår festival in English is our festival but also as spring festival, both the meanings are close to the project.



## Building

In the third phase, the main goal was to build the conceptual design suggested in the second phase, possibly together with children. A significant amount of work was needed for the building before the celebration; much of the building was done independently. Children from the committee were keen to bake the cookies for the festival. Hence, we dedicated time to baking with them.

### Task: Baking

We each take a spot at the table. Monica shares the proportions, and the children start measuring and mixing the ingredients. Children work in pairs. Once mixed and kneaded, they start making the shapes as they want. Few children start decorating the cookie. Monica puts them in the oven.

#### Tools

Butter, flour, sugar, jam, cookie decorations, baking essentials



**Image 26j**  
Edith and Alexia kneading the dough.

The Building process occurred at ReVida's warehouse and Vaggebyrd municipality's wood workshop (used mainly by their janitors). Although I worked independently, I kept the festival committee updated by sharing pictures. There were the following components to be produced:

1. Cookie machine
2. Cookies
3. Play tools for balance game
4. Play tools for the ball in the basket game
5. Play tools for the flower game
6. Bunting
7. Visual collaterals: posters, invitations, tickets, food coupons etc.
8. Microphone for the reporter.

Once again, the main goal was to build the conceptual design extracted from the collaborative workshops, improvise them from a product design aspect, test the functionality, and set them up as per the floor plan for the celebrations.

## Children's Design for the balls in the basket

### How to play?

Three players -tied together by rope around their waist, walk on the path drawn on the floor. They carry three balls together and try to aim at the baskets on the floor with the help of a butterfly net.

### Problem areas

Three adults who are strangers to each other might not feel comfortable being so physically close. Tying-untying can become a hassle at the event. It becomes too easy to put the balls in the basket with the help of butterfly net. Cooperation is limited to walking on the path.

### Improvements:

A-frame that keeps 3 individuals together and maintains a safe distance between them. If the net is an integral part of the frame, then all 3 would have to work together to manoeuvre it to drop the ball at the right moment, forcing them to cooperate.



## Co-designed Balance game

### How to play the game

Two players hold a wooden track (Ikea's floating shelf for photos) at the ends with a ball rolling in between. Players walk on Styrofoam logs while trying to balance the ball in the middle section of the track.

### Improvements

But in this setup ball tends to fall a lot, this might increase the work of the children conducting the game, therefore I tried replicating the same action with material that allow more control.



[Image 27.28] →  
Tool designed for balls in the  
basket game  
Balance game Set.00

## Microphone For the Reporter

The Reggio Emilia approach to documentation informed the decision to stress the importance and need for documentation during the project. The Reggio Emilia approach considers documentation central to primary education, especially when documentation is child-led and organised. Documentation is used as a means of collaboration and sharing between children, teachers and art teachers (Schroeder Yu, 2008).

The "Vår festival reporter" concept is my attempt to try this approach. The Microphone uses a wooden leg of a table and a go pro camera. The camera does not have a display, which adds to its ambiguity making it more comfortable for the reporter and the responder.

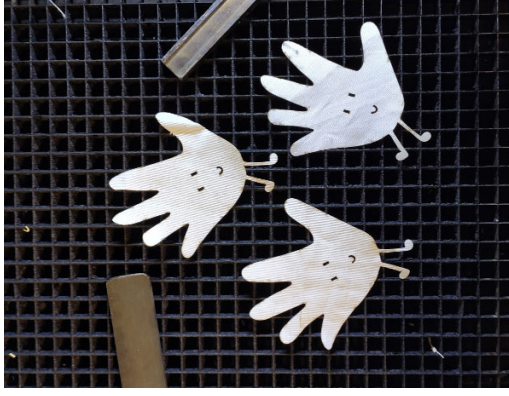
**Image 29 (left)**  
Produced Microphone for the festival Reporters



**Image 30**



**Image 31**



**Image 32**



**Image 33**

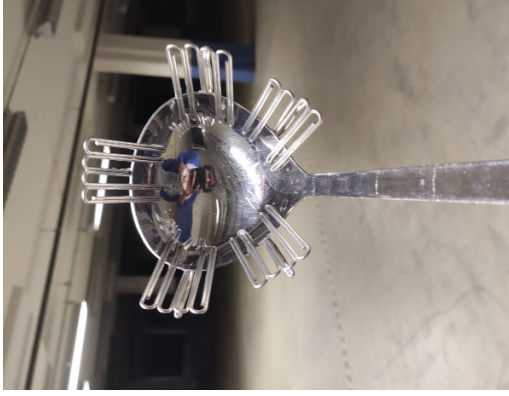




[Image 34,35,36,37,38] → Building stages of the cookie machine.

### Shared Decisions about Cookie Machine

- Cookie machine has two arm, one shooting the gluten cookies and other shooting gluten free
- Cookie machine should have rotating head
- It has space for storing the cookies.
- It has a chef hat
- It has buttons to operate the machine
- It accommodates tall adults and short children for collecting the coupon
- It has a garbage disposal on the back.
- Fika stickers will be used for Food tickets, and they will be pasted on the display board that is reachable to both adults and children



**Image 397**  
Cookie Machine Ready for the  
festival



# DESCRIPTION OF RESULT

VÅR  
FESTIVAL  
2022



"Play, Laugh, Chit-chat and Eat... everything together!" This poster was used for publicity and promotion in the neighbourhood. It was put up in the local library, cafes, and busstation.

## Celebration!!!

Vår festival was a public festival designed together with children. The festival was primarily celebrated as per the plan, with many surprises that participants added. It still has many areas that could grow in the future. Therefore, I would like to look at this festival as the pilot festival for future festivals to be planned by the Festival Committee.

The festival took place on 10 th May 2022 at ReMida's office. The earlier plan was to have it outdoors but was moved inside due to the weather conditions. Bunting, flowers, built objects, posters, and signages were set up to visually communicate. Different stations at the festival. One game station was set up in the outside arena, inside the tent. The festival committee had an orientation before we began the celebrations. I shared the master plan and all the necessary information with everyone. The intention was to let children lead in managing the festival and support them wherever needed.

There were around 50 Visitors! Most of them were Festival Committee Children's friends. Many younger siblings and a few teenagers also joined. Adults who visited were primarily children's parents, teachers and a few others working in the same building as ReMida's.



## Learnings

### Struggles with the stakeholders

The festival had some major points of tension with my intention to give more power to children. It was partly due to a lack of communication with all the adults at the event but also due to the adults' urge to control children's play. Not all teachers from the afterschool centre were aware of the intentions of forming the 'festival committee' and the project; they were more in the "teacher" role than the 'visitor's role' at the festival. In hindsight, I feel the strategy of communicating our festival as a fritidhemmens day celebration was not ideal, and it hindered the purpose of the festival.

### Role of a tool in child-led documentation

The reporter's role and responsibility were appreciated by the children at the festival. And I would like to conclude that it was primarily influenced by the tool and technology associated with it. During one of the workshops, I introduced the role of a reporter, where children had to document the happening on paper (Festival News) with the help of drawings. Children were confused and not interested. Whereas at the festival, most children were enthusiastic to report and respond about the things around them (even the non-festival stuff). The reporter tool helped capture children's perspectives on the experience of the festival. It was yet another way of enhancing children's participation. Documentation also gave more access to their views and feeling about the festival.

### Power of memories

We had a short presentation on the loop projected at the festival. It was a compilation of photographs that focused on the 'Making of the Festival' involving our milestones, children's drawings, models etc. It was a way for the festival committee to see their progress and cherish it but also for the adult visitors to learn about the actual 'makers' of the festival.

Child designers were so happy to see this compilation; they spotted themselves in the photographs, sharing their memories of the day and proud to show it to their parents.

Loris Malaguzzi points out that through documentation, children "become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved" (Malaguzzi, 1993). Documentation of children's ideas, thoughts and feelings is a great way to stimulate memories of experiences. This was visible at the event, and even in the "review meeting" I had with the committee children, photographs evoked their feelings of agency associated with the process of designing the festival.



[Image 41] Lia reporting the pre-festival fun



[Image 42] Edith and Alexia busy looking at their pictures!



[Image 43] Festival Committee Children welcoming to everyone

## Ownership

Festival committee children were eager to manage different stations at the festival. The sense of authority was pronounced by how they welcomed visitors and explained what they could do at the festival. The way they "did the inauguration ceremony" was impressive. Seeing the ideas 'alive' at the festival reinforced their sense of achievement and competency. The festival had become a safe space to experiment and lead. Children helped the confused parents at the event. And yet when the area for the fika stickers ran out on display, Lia felt the need to ask me an adult partner for possible solutions. It made me realise how many more participatory projects are needed to overcome the normative adult-child power relationship we have engrained as a society.



[Image 44] Alexia and Elin at the Entry Ticket Station. Mutually choreographing their interaction with the visitors!



[Image 45] Visitor placing the fika sticker on the display to get the cookie.



[Image 46] Mushroom Station - Foam Bath

### Mushroom Stations!!

At the event, along with the station that we had co-designed, a few more fun stations emerged like mushrooms from nowhere. Child visitors at the festival found new meanings to co-designed objects and all the loose parts they were surrounded by at the ReVida's office. It enabled the transition of their inner world to the outer world through play. Child visitors used these materials, appropriating them to make new meaning for their play, reflecting their agency and belonging in the space.

### The Forgotten Maja

The fictional story that I had used as a way of communicating the design brief was forgotten by the children. I would like to believe that story did have some influence at the beginning of the design process (e.g., children's idea of a robot serving cookies). Still, neither Maja nor her festival made ever an appearance in children's conversation (at least not in my presence). Though the story had elements that had emerged from children's interests, it was not rooted enough in the context or the design process. Cookies and cookie machines were the most cherished subjects of fun and interaction during the festival and post-festival.

### Gender Roles?

Another observation was the difference in the interests of boys and girls. Almost all the constant and rotating child designers were girls. During the workshops, none of the boys in the vicinity showed any interest in joining the festival committee. On the contrary at the festival, girls and boys were actively participating in all the activities. This observation is not enough to conclude anything concrete but an exciting point to investigate further



[Image 47] Edith found a new way to play Balancing Game



[Image 48] Balance game broken to be played as Lava Game



[Image 50] Elina and Lia running the Cookie Machine



[Image 49] Playful Fika in action.



[Image 51] Flower station- game improvised by the visitors



[Image 52] Adult Visitor being playful at the festival.



[Image 54] Children writing suggestions for the next festival.



[Image 53] Balls in the basket game

# CONCLUSION

## Vår Festival Review Meeting on 27th May 2022

FESTIVAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT :  
IDA, LIA, LEJLA, DAHLIA, EDITH AND PRACHI

There was an insane amount of discussion about cookies and cookie machines. Children were super excited to talk about things that happened at the festival. It was impossible to include everything, but here are some highlights from their conversations.

**What is vår festival?**

"The Festival was good. It was so fun. It was the tradition at the school (Fritidhemmens dag), but this time we made it at ReMida, it was so much more fun." Lejla

"It was fun there were many things to do and so many cookies we showed a top film and danced and had ice cream. That was fun." Alexia

"One thing that was not good was that everyone came to the backside of the cookie station. That was very irritating." Lia

"yes so irritating. they should only have fun, we were supposed to take care of things: they were coming in between our work" Edith

**What is a festival committee? Who is part of it?**

"Me ! " everyone joins.

"Everyone who is present here and Remida" Lejla

**The children who helped us at the festival do you think they are also part of it? Like the boy who was DJ for quite a long time he\_ would you say is part of the committee?**

"I would say half because though he was not part of the committee, he took quite a lot of responsibility, but he also came behind the robot therefore only half."

**Do you remember all the meetings we had and what did we do there?**

"I remember the one with face and fabrics" Lia

"Prototype" Edith is proud that she remembered the word she explains further.

"The one with paper drawings and collage" Dahlia

**If we were to make a rulebook for the festival committee, do you have any suggestions?**

There were a lot of suggestions regarding the event so I emphasized about rules for meeting.

"Man måste samarbata "(People must cooperate) Lia

**But how?**

"Everyone should speak and listen to others not run" Dahlia .... starts running"

**We had almost no boys on the committee. Why do think it was the case?**

She points out that there was 1 in the beginning.

"It's nice to have a few girls and boys but boys in our class only like football . they are not interested in anything else." Lia

"Like boy things" Ida chimes in.

**Do you think we should have invited people from other schools to the festival? Would it have made the celebration more fun?**

" Yes " everyone

" Maybe It would be fun, but it can get awkward too. If more boys come and become friends with other boys, they take over. But then it's good to make more friends , too...so maybe" Lia

" No No No this should be only for us" Lejla

My perception from the discussion was that they certainly had a feeling of ownership over the festival and were very much invested in the process at the same time were not not completely sure about sharing this experience with

## Vår Festival Review Questionnaires for ReMida Date : 27th May 2022

RESPONDENT: MONICA CHISM PEDAGOGUE AT REMIDA AND PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR FOR THE FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

What is your festival for ReMida?

Ett fint tillfälle för barn och vuxna att komma samman under lustfyllda omständigheter.  
(A great opportunity for children and adults to get together in pleasurable circumstances.)

What is a festival committee?

Den här gruppen var den drivande motorn till festivalen. Det var den gruppen som utvecklade innehållet i arrangemanget.

This group was the driving force behind the festival. It was the group that developed the content of the event)

When were you most nervous during your collaboration?

Jag var inte nervös någon gång eftersom jag har lång erfarenhet med att arbeta projekterande med barn. Det kommer alltid finnas oförutsedda saker och då får man ha lite "kort" i bakfickan som man kan plocka fram. Finns inte den öppenheten utan att det blir för styrt kommer barnen snabbt tröttna.

(I was not nervous at any time because I have long experience of working with children. There will always be unforeseen things and you need to turn the situation around. You have to be open to changes other wise children get tired)

What was the most exciting part for you?

Att se hur barnen och föräldrarna tog sig an aktiviteterna. Att få se hur planering och all rekvisita fick liv.  
(To see how the children and parents took on the activities. To see how planning and all the props came to life.)

Could you observe any limitations due to our choice of age group?

Jag tänker att det är en bra ålder då de fortfarande är mer öppna för nya och kreativa tankar.  
(I think it's a good age as they're still more open to new and creative thoughts.)

Did one of our members teach you anything special/ new about ReMida?

Tänker på tjejerna som hade övat in sång och dans uppvisningen helt självständigt. Här tänker jag att det är så viktigt med att få gehör för sina idéer. Tänker också hur fint de öppnade upp festivalen och välkomnade alla. Helt utan att vi eller dem hade övat in de. De hade verkligen koll på hur festivalen var uppbyggd.

(Thinking of the girls who had practiced the song and dance show completely independently. Here I think it is so important to get a hearing for their ideas. Also thinking how nicely they opened up the festival and welcomed everyone. Completely without us or them having practiced them. They really knew how the festival was structured.)

As you've seen, involving children is complex and quite hard work with a lot of responsibility, is it worth it? Could you give us two reasons why?

Absolut är det värt de. Jag tänker att det här är ett demokrati projekt och för barn är det så viktigt att som världsmedborgare få en känsla för att man kan vara med och påverka. Den andra anledningen är att barn behöver få vara i kulturella sammanhang där man får erfara gränsoverskridande aktiviteter där alla får plats och är en arena för nya möten.

(They are definitely worth it. I think this is a democracy project and for children it is so important as a world citizen to get a feeling that you can be involved and influence. The second reason is that children need to be allowed to be in cultural contexts where they get to experience cross-border activities where everyone has a place and is an arena for new meetings.)

How do you think a project like the Vår festival benefits the local community?

Jag tänker att få göra saker ihop är väldigt fullt för medborgarna, det sammanför och skapar en vi känsla vilket ökar värdet och gör att man får ett starkare band till sitt närområde.

(I think being able to do things together is valuable for the citizens, it brings together and creates a we feeling which increases the value and makes you have a stronger bond to your local area.)



## Conclusion

I intended to expand my knowledge of designing a bottom-up community culture with children. Starting point hypothesis based on the literature was that codesigning with children at a public festival would lead to building Community and consequently foster children's agency and belonging in the place.

After the festival celebration, I realised that the festival was most important for the people who made that happen, and they had built their community in the process. Of course, this was true for active members but also for the actors who were indirectly involved. Undoubtedly visitors had fun at the event and would have made contact. However, for that contact to mean something and grow into a social bond, multiple festivals and encounters are required, which was not the case for most visitors.

This is especially interesting in terms of the indirect partners this project involved. For example, the visiting educators and artists at ReMida often shared small talks and were curious about the project's progress. Teresa, a janitor at the municipality, was happy to see another woman working in their other male-dominated workshops and having lunch breaks with me. These community members became indirect actors, expanding social bonds and building a creative community. The festival meant more for indirect actors than the visitors who were not involved. It made me realise that community building happens through building a community. For a Public festival to become a platform for positive intergroup contact, the community has to be involved in making too and not just in the celebration.

Coming to the makers of the festival, it was evident that during almost 13 weeks, our feeling of WE have grown within us. We who have worked for the festival designed it for our community (limited to our friends and families). Through children's conversation, I felt this feeling of 'we' is not yet very inclusive of all the others in the context. "Festival Committee" feels more solidarity. However, this again has a danger of perpetuating the same dividing attitude we are working against. Hence, I believe involving varied community actors in the process would help in making WE more inclusive.

The process added a lot to learn about involving children as equal partners. My initial aim to democratically imagine a public festival was flawed in the project's planning. I soon realised that the language barrier helped in so many different ways. Firstly it was humbling as it bought me 'an adult designer' on a level playing ground; second, children felt more competent and confident around me, willing to work with my shortcomings. Third, they were patient with my communication struggles, reminding me to be patient with their attention spans and interests. Many such instances led to a shared understanding of our skills/gaps and were valuable for co-design but made the process slow. Going forward, I would like to

dedicate more time to collaborative workshops as 2 hours never felt enough, and I had to fast forward some of the decisions and improvement plans of outcomes because of the time crunch.

I tried to acknowledge and respond to children's contributions by ensuring that their ideas and interests were reflected in the different elements of the festival. It seems to have worked because, for example, Lejla, in the self-recorded interview, explains to her mother that "we made it, we did it so that Prachi can design this stuff" reflects the shared agency she had over the festival. Materials and environment also had a considerable role to play in this. Everything we used during the design process (and even for making the festival object) was made from recycled materials, and most materials were queer-open with possibilities. Therefore, my independent explorations and the ones I did with children were driven by these materials, making it a more democratic to find affordances together. We genuinely felt that we could make a material difference in the environment leading to children's (and even my) agency and belonging in the Remidas' space.

## Child Culture Design Perspective

The play culture created in this context was evidently being channelled through the informal network of children. Children were self-organizing themselves without any adult intervention. Different stations at the festivals became places for different children to bring different experiences, skills, and knowledge to space and an opportunity to share it with others. It allowed children to re-interpret the context as they wished. It encouraged children's natural ability to interpret objects beyond their intended functionality and form, with their own rules, games, and culture around and beyond the play objects. Hence it is safe to say that a public festival co-designed with children such as the Vår festival facilitates culture by children. It supports children in developing their own culture, fostering their agency, and belonging in the place. Learnings from the project would be valuable for the future projects that involve children and children's participation.

Festival committee children owned the festival in the real sense; they were immensely proud of creating it, organizing it and running it. It inspired non-committee members to actively participate in the event, 'environment as an educator' was effectively in practice at the event.

Vår festival created that rich context that allowed children to find their own "affordances" at their own festivals and with their own people.

## Tusen Tack!!

This project has given me much joy and love. I have met so many beautiful people of different ages, generations, and nationalities. Everyone so unique and amazing! To see the joy in their eyes, both during the creative process and the event, witnessing children's transition from "I can't" to "we did it!" was fulfilling.

Being in a community, a part of wholeness, was a fantastic experience. Vår Festival is one of the most meaningful projects I have ever been part of!

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## Reference For images

- All Chapter Page Images  
Vartak, S. 2022. Vår Festival.
- Literary Review Page Image  
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- [Image 4]  
Mango party 2015 at Rang Shankara Bangalore
- [Image 5] Cesquatum resimmped
- [Image 6] One section of available materials at ReMidas's office at Väggeryd.  
Patil, P. 2022. ReMidal.
- [Image 7] to [Image 9]  
Vartak, S. 2022. Vår Festival.
- [Image 10] to [Image 11]  
Patil, P. 2022. ReMidal
- [Image 12] Ida's idea about the cake serving Robot.  
Patil, P. 2022. Sörgårdskolan
- [Image 11] Festival Comitee children found a way to staighten the paper roll.  
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- [Image 19] to [Image 20]  
Patil, P. 2022. Screenshots  
[Image 22] to [Image 25]
- Patil, P. 2022. ReMidal
- [Image 26] Edith and Alexia kneadig the dough.  
Patil, P. 2022. Sörgårdskolan
- [Image 27] to [Image 54]  
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