

“A meeting of minds” – the first Epihealth conference, Skanör, May 2010

After what has been a busy ten months of tele-conferences and delegation of workloads to lift the concept of Epihealth from the drawing board into reality, the first face-to-face meeting of collaborating parties took place on 4th-5th May 2010.

The chosen location was the village of Skanör, southern Skåne. Just 25 km from the city Malmö, the area is renowned for its natural beauty, flora and fauna, including a huge bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The conference was held in Lund's “studentgård”, a large traditional Skanör villa left to the student Nations of Lund by Edla af Klercker, a professor at Copenhagen University in 1938.

During the two days of the conference, most of the 35 participants (all experienced researchers in their respective fields) took turns in presenting their most recent findings and methodologies. Research groups from Lund, Malmö, Jönköping and Uppsala were represented; the subjects discussed reflected the numerous ways epidemiology is used in differing research fields, from social epidemiology and multilevel analysis of contexts, to identification of genomes and triggers for various non-infectious diseases and conditions.

All this was done in the spirit of collaboration. By sharing ideas, including past successes and failures, the Epihealth group hopes to build up a network “hub”, which provides epidemiologic support in the shape of data access, education and experience.

The conference also provided an opportunity to discuss an “Epihealth” collaboration research project (most likely a meta-analysis: subject topic to be confirmed).

One of the proposed ideas when applying for Epihealth funding was the formation of a new research cohort. The recruiting of middle-aged and elderly individuals intended to be participants in the “Epihealth Research Cohort” was also an interesting topic for discussion, especially regarding how to avoid the low (20%) participation rates, as seen in the recent LifeGene project, which targeted younger subjects aged 0-45 years.

All in all, this first “meeting of minds” was considered a success by all concerned, as well as an important first step towards achieving the ambitious aims of the Epihealth project. What is important now, however, is to maintain the momentum of the conference and start putting into place the first foundations to build on the many good ideas discussed.

The next conference of this kind will be organised by colleagues at Uppsala University in the spring of 2011 – we look forward to meeting and discussing an interesting variety of topics once more!