



The Peace Walk

1. Mariero: peace on earth, peace with the earth

The peace walk starts in Mariero. The garden could have become a car park but was saved by the Åland Peace Association and Åland Nature and Environment Association in 1993. Today, more than ever, we need to recognise that a balanced ecosystem is a basic prerequisite for human existence. Since 2016, Åland has a development and sustainability agenda, where the vision that "everyone can flourish in a sustainable society on the islands of peace" is the guiding principle for the work on both peace on earth and peace with the earth.

The term 'islands of peace' is often heard in regards to Åland, and in Mariero these words are engraved on a stone table. It was Sune Carlsson, then Speaker of the Parliament, who coined the term when he gave a speech here on Åland in 1984 during the Red Cross's second peace conference with over 100 different participating states. The peace conference was one event among many that at that time contributed to Ålanders becoming more accustomed to discussing peace and seeing Åland as an example of peace. And while we are talking about Sune Carlsson, we can mention that one of the gardeners here is his grandson!

We start here in Mariero to illustrate how multifaceted peace work can be. Peace can be cultivated at all levels of life - where we stand is an example of both how it is created at the political level and how the result affects us at the individual level. Peace activists, environmentalists, politicians, gardeners, artists and many volunteers have been involved in the creation and development of this peaceful oasis. It is worth repeating sometimes - no one can do everything, but everyone can do something. There are many aspects to peace, and much that contributes to the flourishing of peace.

2. Bagarstugan: the town before the town

Bagarstugan is one of the oldest houses in the town. It has been slightly remodelled, but you can still get an idea of what the building tradition when it was built in 1866, just 12 years after Bomarsund was demolished. The fall of Bomarsund contributed to the end of the Crimean War. The peace treaty afterwards was signed by Russia, France, Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire and Piedmont-Sardinia. It is in this agreement that Åland is first demilitarised and because of this, Russia was forbidden to rebuild the Bomarsund fortress or any military installations on Åland.

Just outside Bomarsund, Åland's first town had begun to emerge. Skarpans was burned down by the Russians before the attack, and with the fortress gone, there was no need for a town there anymore. Even before that, many people had expressed the need for a town with a larger harbour. So Mariehamn was founded in 1861, and at that time had only 35 inhabitants, but it grew rapidly and by 1900 the town had almost 1000 inhabitants.



3. Landskapsregeringen. Non-violence

Here we have one of the town's newest outdoor artworks: a replica of Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswård's iconic statues. The statue was created as a tribute to John Lennon's vision of peace. This particular replica was sold at a charity auction where 40 per cent of the sale price was donated to benefit UNICEF's work in Ukraine.

The Åland Example is an example of non-violent conflict resolution. The components that make up the Åland Example are power sharing and decision-making, where self-government comes in; identity, language and culture; and security, including demilitarisation and neutralisation. In this way, our autonomy is part of peace work. The first Autonomy Act was drafted by the Finnish Parliament and was unclear on many points. Self-government has evolved over the years.

The boundaries between the jurisdiction of Åland and the Finnish state are not always clear, new interpretations are constantly emerging, new practices both here and at the state level, and our systems need to be constantly evolved to ensure their functionality in a modern world.

4. Stadshusbacken: a place of large contrasts

The city's newest work of art stands at Stadshusbacken. Created by Swedish artist Birgitta Muhr and installed in 2023, it is made of metal and depicts several overlapping peace symbols. Perhaps this can be interpreted to mean that there are many different types of peace, and that together they build a peaceful world.

The city of Mariehamn is a member of an organisation called Mayors for Peace. Mayors for Peace was founded in 1982 and is led by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mariehamn became a member in 2004.

The organisation Mayors for Peace works for a world without nuclear weapons, and where peace is a priority for every individual.

Below this site is the emergency shelter. This was commissioned in 1979 during the Cold War for crisis situations of all kinds and will accommodate about 1200 people. All of the important equipment is suspended on springs to withstand all possible shocks. Perhaps this is a sign that we on Åland work for peace, but want to be prepared for anything.

5. Julius Sundblom: King of Åland

Julius Sundblom is known for founding Åland's oldest newspaper in 1891, partly as a fight against the threat of Finnicisation and Russification. His political CV is long and impressive. But he is best known for his role in the Åland movement. On 20 August 1917, municipal officials from all mainland Åland municipalities (except Lumparland) gathered and unanimously decided that Åland should submit a request for reunification with Sweden to the Swedish king and government.





Sundblom himself was initially hesitant about reunification, but the civil war and its aftermath made him sure of it. He used his newspaper to lobby for the Åland movement, and after two petitions, a clear majority was in favour.

The Finnish Prime Minister visited Mariehamn in June 1920 to try to convince Åland that the Finnish proposal for an autonomy law was the solution. After the minister's speech in the town hall to all the assembled representatives of Åland's municipalities,

Julius Sundblom took the final word. He said that Åland had not asked for this law, and marched out with the representatives. The next day, Sundblom and Carl Björkman, a lawyer and public official in Mariehamn, were arrested for high treason. They were detained for a month, but the media both in Åland and internationally reacted strongly to their treatment and they were released pending trial. They were sentenced to 18 months in prison but were pardoned before the sentence could be carried out.

The Åland issue had been handled by the League of Nations in the meantime, but not as Sundblom had wished. However, he worked for improvements to the Autonomy Act all the time in his position as Speaker of Åland's Parliament. He also worked actively to maintain demilitarisation when it was threatened during the Second World War.

6. The Bondetåget: Ålanders make their voices heard

Ålanders have a long history of peace work. The year 1938 was a very uncertain time and Finland and Sweden began discussing a change in demilitarisation that would allow a limited militarisation of the southern archipelago. At the same time, Finland wanted to introduce conscription for Ålanders. The so-called Stockholm Plan was not very popular locally. By car, bus and boat, people went into town on 31 October 1938 and gathered to demonstrate against the plans. It is said that around 3 000 people took part. Considering that the population of Mariehamn at that time was around 2,500 people in total, the Bondetåget was a very well-attended event.

The participants walked part of Ålandsvägen and then Esplanaden and gathered outside the Societetshuset where they were welcomed by the assembled county representatives. Carl Carlsson, the 'general' of the procession, gave a speech for all those gathered: 'We firmly insist on maintaining the "status quo" with regard to... our autonomy law and the closely related neutrality convention.' In his speech, Carlsson says that Ålanders understand the connection between the autonomy law, neutralization, and demilitarization, and are determined to keep them all as they are.

Demilitarization means that no military installations, activities, weapons, or forces can be established in Åland. Neutralization means that in times of war, Åland should be kept out of wartime events. Both demilitarization and neutralization are considered to have become customary international law, including for non-signatory states.





7. The GE-Villa. International contacts

Named after Gustav Eriksson, the famous captain and shipowner who lived there from 1915. Nowadays it is the representation house of the provincial government. Self-government requires contacts. It is important to build an understanding of what our special solution means, and of our customary law regarding demilitarization and neutralization. We have to be mindful with our contacts. Across the street from the GE House, there is a sign about Norway's honorary consul, and Åland also has honorary consuls for France, the Netherlands, Iceland, Estonia and the United Kingdom.

8. Mariehamns Church, Anadyomene, Red Cross

The statue Anadyomene was created by Ukri Merikanto in 1991. For the 130th anniversary of the city of Mariehamn, the Culture Committee organized an art competition on the theme 'islands of peace'. On Hiroshima Day, August 6, 1991, the winning sculpture, named after Aphrodite, the goddess of life and love, was unveiled during a peace sermon in the church. Several priests in Åland have worked for the development of Åland and for peace. Stefan Snellman was vicar of the Mariehamn parish and in 1981 established the Åland Peace Association with Susanna Skogsberg and Siv Ekström. During that time the disarmament movement was very active, and many on Åland worked actively with various campaigns, meetings, marches and more with the aim of promoting peace. As previously mentioned, the Red Cross was also active in the peace movement. You can see their Åland office from here. They also work on many levels when it comes to peace. Here on the island, they work with the education of friend families and hold courses in first aid. How we take care of each other creates peace. But of course they also help in crisis situations.

9. The Esplanad. A peaceful place in the heart of town

Mariehamn is often referred to as the City of a Thousand Linden Trees after Georg Kåhre's 1928 collection of poems. Mariehamn's first city plans included wide roads and large esplanades to prevent fires, but in modern times, as cities become more densely built, these areas are important from a sustainability perspective. The trees are a carbon sink in themselves, but the soil also plays an important role in absorbing water and regulating temperature. The area where Esplanaden is now was originally a wetland. Linden trees are often chosen as esplanade trees for several reasons: they don't require much in the way of growing conditions, they can be cut and pruned, and the linden family can live up to 900 years. They are very durable. But beyond that, there is something about linden trees that has established them in popular memory. Perhaps it has something to do with the alleged medicinal properties of the species. In folk medicine, linden flowers have been used as an herbal tea which is said to help against colds and strengthen the immune system, the same applies to linden honey. Or it could be one of the many uses of the tree in crafts: the wood is soft and suitable for carving, it makes a good base for baskets and carpets, and even charred linden can be used as charcoal. One can only conclude that linden is an important tree in our culture. This is also reflected in folk songs and ballads where linden trees are often mentioned. It was written in a book from 1816 that elves and gnomes love to stay under the linden trees. We find peace under linden trees, which helps us to create an inner peace.





10. Russian Consulate, Ukraine Aid

The house was built in 1899, and before that it was said that this area was Mariehamn's best spot for cloudberry. They like wetlands. The house itself was sold and became the Russian Consulate in the early 1940s. Russia's consulate is here on Åland because of an agreement signed during World War II and its role, according to the agreement, is to monitor demilitarization. The Ukraine demonstrations are currently the most recent long-running example of Ålanders making their voices heard. Every day, someone has been here for over a year to make a statement against the war of aggression in Ukraine.

But that's only part of the work done for Ukraine. Ukrainahjälpen, a group of private individuals, has organized collections of goods and transports down to Ukraine, organized transports for people here to Åland, and they also help with friend families, accommodation, clothing, etc. So the peace work for Ukraine includes both a demonstration against the political regime, but also direct and practical help through person to person aid. Many people in Åland are involved in working for peace at many levels.

11. Åland Islands Peace Institute

The peace association was founded in 1981 and carried out a broad range of activities with various campaigns, camps, meetings and calls to action. The association's work, in conjunction with many others, led to the founding of the Åland Islands Peace Institute in 1992. Sometimes it can feel as if the times we live in are hopeless, that each person is so small and that you can't influence anything yourself. The activity of the peace movement shows the power of action and hope. They gathered like-minded people and organized themselves. Ålanders have the power to act! Thanks to their efforts, we have an institute that works on a broad front both in practical matters and in research on peace.

The Peace Institute's logo can be interpreted in many different ways. Some see a sun with hope for new beginnings and new ideas. Others think it represents the center and the periphery, and a network reaching outwards. And another interpretation is that it represents a cogwheel symbolizing movement, and that many actors are needed to create movement.

