

Exit processes and empowerment

– a study of social
cooperatives in
the Vågen ut! project



GÖTEBORG UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work

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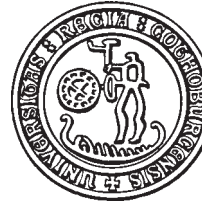
Swedish Prison
and Probation Service



Social enterprise
– a way in to the employment market



EUROPEAN UNION
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Tryck: PR-Offset AB, Mölndal
Grafisk form: Susanne Frössling Griffin

Göteborg University
Department of Social Work
ISBN 91-86796-57-7

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The Vägen ut! project has, in many ways, been a relatively broad one. In particular, many people in a variety of roles have taken part in the activity. Neither the project nor this study would have been possible without them.

We wish to express our sincere thanks to the cooperators, trainees and users in Vägen ut! cooperatives. They have generously shared their experience of everyday work in the cooperatives. Following the group process and the work of the cooperatives has been both exciting and instructive.

We also wish to thank all the interviewees in the steering group and development partnership for the Vägen ut! project. They have patiently answered our questions and acted as discussion partners during seminars and meetings.

We also wish in particular to thank Pernilla Svebo Lindgren, Leif Tjernström and Eva Laurelii, who by taking part in countless meetings and discussions have paved the way for both the project and our appraisal study.

Finally we wish to thank the Prison and Probation Service Research Committee and the Swedish ESF Council, which through their grants have provided the basis for this study.

Gothenburg, December 2005

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Chapter 1.

The start and growth of the Vägen ut! project

The project “*Vägen ut – från fängelse till socialt arbetskooperativ*” (EXIT! – from prison to social cooperative) was launched in August 2002 with the aid of funds from the Swedish ESF (European Social Fund) Council. (Some central and local government organisations also supported the project through appropriations or co-financing; see section 1.5.) The project is part of the Equal programme within the EU Objective 3. It belongs to Theme 1 of the programme, the aim of which is to facilitate entry and re-entry into the labour market for people who have difficulties integrating or re-integrating into a labour market that must be open to all. Like other projects in the Equal programme, *Vägen ut!* has been organised in the form of a development partnership with 15 participating partners from NGOs and the public sector.¹

1.1 The background thinking to the project

If we analyse the main application to the ESF Council (from April 2002) and other documents from the creation of *Vägen ut!* some circumstances stand out that all contributed to the start and growth of the project in their own way.

Various reports from BRÅ – the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention – and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service have documented the *problems of inmates in conjunction with release* (BRÅ 2000, 2001, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service 1998, Månsson et al 2002). These reports show that prison inmates have more serious social problems than the rest of the population. They more often have experience of interrupted schooling, inadequate compulsory education and work training, periods of unemployment and difficulties in supporting themselves (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2000). The social situation of inmates does not appear to improve during their prison stay: instead the opposite seems to occur. On release, nearly half are unemployed, a fifth have work and another fifth receive temporary disability pension or pension (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2001). In addition to difficulties in finding work and supporting themselves financially, they often have problems finding accommodation and have conflicts in their family relationships (Månsson et al 2002).

A more recent report describes how prison and probation services tackle the problems of inmates' education and working life. When released, former inmates experience no noticeable

improvement in their situation (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2001). Six months after their release, many (about half) remained unemployed and lived on social security benefit, in some cases supplemented by illegal cash-in-hand work or crime. Only one fifth supported themselves through work. Many former inmates have large debts, both to enforcement authorities and private individuals. It is a well-known fact that the problematic situation after release often leads to relapses into substance abuse and criminality, resulting in new prison sentences (Ekbohm, Engström and Göranson 1999).

Women sentenced to prison often have a poorer social situation than men (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service 1998). Women are often in a worse state due to substance abuse when they enter prison and are more harshly stigmatised by society's attitudes to female substance abusers and female criminals (Kolfjord 2003). They experience greater difficulties than their male counterparts in finding work, accommodation and supporting themselves (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service 1998, Svebo Lindgren 1999). More women than men also have mental health problems as well as their substance abuse, and family relationships steeped in conflict in their social network (Fridell 2002, Skårner 2002). They have often been subjected to violence from a partner with drink or drugs problems, or their children have been taken into care and placed in foster homes (Trulsson 2003). These women, who often can only find work in traditionally

“female” professions such as in health-care, welfare services and the retail trade, have greater difficulties than men in entering the labour market after completing their prison sentence. The proportion who support themselves through work is even lower than among the men. Temporary disability pension/pension, sickness allowance or social security benefit are the dominating sources of support for these women (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service 1998).

Research from the end of the 1990s and onwards unequivocally shows that both men and women have major social problems on release from prison. The target group appears largely excluded from the labour market, and the needs for creating new ways of entering the labour market are obvious. It also seems that the target group's situation worsened during the 1990s due to a downturn in the economy and cost cuts in the public sector. The increase in the number of homeless people in Sweden's three major cities during the 1990s indicates such a development (Swedish Government Official Report 2001).

In the mid-1990s Alec Carlberg and a few visionaries from user organisations started one of the first Swedish social cooperatives in care of substance abusers, *Basta på Södertörn*. The Basta Work Cooperative in eastern Sweden was structured according to a model from San Patrignano outside Rimini (Meeuwisse 2001). In both organisations, drug abusers are rehabilitated back to drug-free lives via work, social control,

¹ NGOS (non-governmental organisations) were previously called voluntary organisations (or non-profit organisations). One of their characteristics is that they can be formed and dissolved on their members' initiative and are independent of central government. Two main types are humanitarian organisations that work on providing support to vulnerable individuals and groups, and self-help organisations (or user organisations) that work for their members. See Swedish Official Government Report SOU 1993:82 or Lundström & Svedberg 1998 in the social science journal *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 1998/3-4.

solidarity and self-help. San Patrignano started on the estate of an Italian entrepreneur at the end of the 1970s and has developed into an extensive business operation with quality production (wine, handicrafts, clothes and horse breeding) for the market. The operations at San Patrignano have been financed through production and sales as well as gifts and donations from private individuals, but no public funding. The cooperative has received several thousands of drug abusers who have been rehabilitated from their drug abuse, totally without professional treatment. The rehabilitation chain from apprentice to responsible cooperator has produced very good results, and the concept has spread throughout Europe (Hansson & Wijkström 1997, 1998, Meeuwisse 2001).

The Swedish Basta cooperatives have followed similar basic principles, but with certain important differences. Responsible work, quality production of benefit to society, environmental awareness, self-help and solidarity have been fundamental principles in the cooperative. Basta has succeeded in creating an interesting rehabilitation concept with a strong position in Swedish care of substance abusers. It is notable that the successful rehabilitation has taken place entirely without professional treatment or psychotherapy. However, relapses into substance abuse have sometimes led to problems for staff at Basta, and the needs of the rehabilitation versus the needs of the social cooperative are a subject of discussion, for example by Meeuwisse in her evaluation of Basta

(Meeuwisse 2001). Basta initially aimed for financial independence of public funding. The idea was to be self-sufficient through own production of goods and services. This independence has however taken a long time to achieve, and the ambitions have been modified in certain respects along the way (see the debate in issue 4, 2003, of the social science journal *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift*). Through study visits to Basta and Carlberg's dynamic writing, the Basta Work Cooperative has been recognised as a model in Swedish care of substance abusers. From the start Basta constituted a clear role model and source of inspiration for the *Vägen ut!* project. Several leading principles have been adopted from Basta, although there are also important differences that we will describe later.

Another foundation for the emergence of the *Vägen ut!* project was the self-help work that had started among a number of user organisations in the Gothenburg region at the end of the 1990s. The people who had the idea of creating social cooperatives were mainly members of the *Bryggan* and CRIS in Gothenburg organisations (CRIS – Criminals' Return into Society). The *Bryggan* society was started in 1998/99 by former inmates together with staff from prison and probation services to support people released from prison, former substance abusers and their families. The Gothenburg branch of CRIS was part of the national Criminals' Return into Society organisation that was created by former inmates to support and help people

during and after their time in prisons and on probation. CRIS's activities consisted solely of solidarity and self-help work among inmates and former inmates (cf Hjemdal et al 1996, Karlsson 2002).

With the impetus of *Bryggan* and CRIS, an organisational network of user organisations was formed during the course of 2000. These user organisations offered advice and support, a sense of community and leisure activities to former inmates and their families. But they had no resources to tackle the most tangible problems facing former inmates and substance abusers: the lack of employment/work, accommodation and means of support. Daily, they met former inmates who found themselves in a vulnerable social situation and needed these concrete resources to change their situation in life. The organisation's need to further develop its supportive and self-help work – adding measures to create employment, work and accommodation – was by no means a new one and it was in keeping with the organisation's existing activities. Starting the *Vägen ut!* project was a natural extension of ongoing self-help work (Hjemdal et al 1996).

1.2 Self-help organisations took the initiative

Four self-help organisations, each with a slightly different focus, took the initiative for the *Vägen ut!* project. We would like to present these organisations in brief before describing the actual project.

Many of the initiators of *Vägen ut!* were from the *Bryggan* organisation,

which was founded in the late 1990s by inmates and a visionary, Anki Hallström Svensson, who had previously worked as a prison nurse. Gradually the organisation's players gained contact with increasing numbers of inmates and their families. Anki Hallström Svensson succeeded in obtaining funding from prison and probation services and social services in Gothenburg to rent an office in the city centre as a hub for the organisation's activities. Its activities were aimed at inmates and recently released people as well as their families, partners/spouses and children. The activities were linked to what was known as the *Barnuppdraget* (Children's Remit) that the Swedish Prison and Probation Service received after the report *Barn med frihetsberövade föräldrar* (Children of prisoners), 1998 (Hedin 2000a). The activities at *Bryggan* comprised three parts:

- Social support to individual inmates, and study circle activities at prisons and for people in custody, such as parent training courses.
- Personal support and occupation for people who had been recently released and attended *Bryggan* during the day, taking part in various activities.
- Advice and group activities for families of inmates, such as activity groups for teenage children of prisoners, or summer camps for parents released from prison and their children.

Bryggan's activities expanded rapidly between 1999 and 2002, and the number

of people registered with the organisation increased. However, the organisation's group of players never exceeded about 30-40 in number. *Bryggan* was initially a public sector activity, funded by prison and probation services and district councils in Gothenburg. But an organisation board was eventually appointed, statutes for a NGO were adopted, and annual meetings and members' meetings were held, etc. The formation of the organisation and consolidation of its activities therefore took place in parallel. For the period 2000-2003, the organisation applied for and was granted funding for its activities from the Swedish Inheritance Fund. In the spring of 2001 Pernilla Svebo Lindgren started work at *Bryggan* as an extra resource and to assist Anki Hallström Svensson, the founder of the organisation. Relatively early on she started disseminating the ideas for social cooperatives among other players in the organisation. Since the start of the new millennium, *Bryggan* organisations have been established in other locations in Sweden, and these have been organised in a national association called *Riksbryggan*.²

The first CRIS – Criminals' Return into Society – organisation in Sweden was formed in the mid 1990s by inmates at a couple of prisons. CRIS in Gothenburg was established in 2000, and the following year a nationwide organisation was created for all local CRIS activities. Today CRIS is located in more than 30 places

in Sweden and has about 5,000 members. Several other countries also have CRIS organisations.

CRIS in Gothenburg is a NGO, with a board made up of former inmates. They provide support to their peers, but also run preventive activities. The foundations for CRIS's work are the concepts of honesty, no drugs, friendship and solidarity. The activities at CRIS in Gothenburg consist of visiting men and women in prisons and in custody to inform them of CRIS and what the organisation has to offer. It also includes various types of group activities in prisons and a prison release collection service, which consists of someone from CRIS collecting the former inmate to prevent a rapid return to old behaviour patterns. The activities include sober socialising with others at CRIS and taking part in their friendship support programme. CRIS also visits schools, companies and other NGOs and talks about, among other things, the consequences of substance abuse and criminality. In Gothenburg, CRIS runs preventive activities as well, including a ten-week motivation programme for young people who have landed in or risk landing in criminality/substance abuse. CRIS is one of the primary organisations that are part of the Equal project *Vägen ut!* and it works actively with the social cooperative *Villa Solberg*.

The organisation called *Föreningen Vävstugan* (literally: weaving cottage)

was formed in the early 1990s as a drop-in activity within the framework of prison and probation services. It was intended to act as a refuge or haven and activity centre for women with substance abuse problems and a criminal past. Female inmates at the Lindomeanstalten open prison for men and women (later it became the Sagsjön closed and open treatment and correction centre for women) were also granted leave according to Section 14 of the Swedish Act on Correctional Treatment in Institutions, to visit *Vävstugan* in order to weave and socialise with other women. It could also be regarded as preparation for release after a long prison sentence. The activity was only open to women, and there were work stations available for 10-12 women in the basement of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, located in central Gothenburg. It was appreciated as it provided an opportunity for relaxation and creativity in an otherwise monotonous prison existence. The supervisor Karin Sanengen was a secure central figure, who had the ability to see and encourage the women's talents. The Prison and Probation Service granted funds for the rent of the premises and the post of supervisor, and social services gave financial support to drug prevention work.

In the autumn of 2000 the Prison and Probation Service announced that the activity was to be discontinued for cost cutting reasons, and the decision was met with dejection and protests by the women. Some of the women had the idea of converting *Vävstugan* into a

social cooperative and of running the activity through local authority support. A start-up grant for a social cooperative was applied for, but was rejected. After several protest meetings and reports in the media, the *Vävstugan* activity was saved for the time being through an agreement between prison and probation services, social services/the municipality and the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. *Vävstugan*'s continued existence was therefore enabled without the formation of a cooperative, but the idea of starting a social cooperative had taken root in some of the players involved.

The Half Way House foundation (HWH) originated in the client organisation the RFHL (the National Association for Aid to People Addicted to Drugs and Pharmaceuticals), which set up treatment homes for both women and men in the late 1960s. The Half Way House is the only remaining activity for women in this organisation. It is today an independent foundation and is no longer linked to the RFHL. The Half Way House is led by a board of seven women with knowledge of psychology, social work and educational theory. The board also includes the founder of the RFHL, attorney-at-law Anna Moffet Spak. Between 10 and 20 women take part in the activities and the centre is open four days a week. The women are aged 20-40 and most have taken drugs in the past or have some kind of social problems. The activities are tailored to suit the group's needs, but often include handicrafts, group discussions on various themes and study visits.

² *Riksbryggan* and the member organisations mainly work to support the children of criminals and to promote contact between inmates who are parents and their children.

The basic approach in the activities is feministic. The time spent in the foundation ranges from six months to a couple of years, and the aim is to end treatment by creating a constructive platform for the women. This was one of the reasons for founding the *Ateljé Trädet* studio in 1997. The Half Way House offers more treatment-oriented activities, while the studio focused right from the start on artistic work and a sense of social community.

On closer inspection of the four user organisations, CRIS appears to be the only one that has started and grown entirely separately, without the involvement of public sector organisations. Both *Bryggan* and the Half Way House have a prior history as publicly organised activities before a decision was taken to become self-help organisations. This does not apply to *Vävstugan*, which has always been publicly organised and financed, although the users have organised themselves as an association. We can therefore see that several of the user organisations are actually hybrid organisations, in which voluntary and public sector elements have been combined. (Lundström & Svedberg 1998).

1.3 The ideas for an EU project start to take shape

At *Bryggan* discussions started on how the activity could be developed and how volunteers' and employed members' specialist knowledge and own experi-

ences of substance abuse and prison sentences could be optimally used. The local branch of the ESF (European Social Fund) Council in Gothenburg was contacted and an application for financial assistance for skills development in the workplace was submitted. A "future workshop" was one of the activities run; it took place on the island of Resö in the spring of 2001 and was attended by staff and volunteers. During the workshop, the ideas concerning social cooperatives for former inmates were clarified and disseminated to a wider audience. After the workshop a study visit was made to the Basta Work Cooperative in the Södertörn region of east Sweden. This boosted enthusiasm and the ideas assumed a more concrete form.

Players from the organisations also initiated negotiations with GFC (Gothenburg's NGO Agency³) to support an application to the ESF Council for financial assistance for development work. This was submitted in the summer of 2001 and was granted. Merger and preparatory work ensued for a pilot project within the framework of the European Structural Funds, Growing Power, Objective 3. Funds for planning and preparatory work were obtained in November 2001, and a more active planning phase was launched at the end of 2001/beginning of 2002. A network of contacts in various public sector organisations was formed. Since then this network has been the

foundation of the partnership in the *Vägen ut!* project. A new "future workshop" was held in Marstrand in January 2002, and several large meetings of association and authority representatives were held during the winter of 2002. In April of the same year a clear network of associations as well as a contact network of representatives from public sector organisations had been established; together they formed a partnership for the project.

In April 2002 a detailed application was submitted to the ESF Council in Stockholm, requesting funds for a three-year pilot project to start social cooperatives for the target group of people with past experience of crime and/or substance abuse. About SEK 9 million was requested for the work to train cooperators and launch four social cooperatives in the Gothenburg area. In addition funds were sought for equipment, the rent and furniture, etc from the City of Gothenburg. A total of 15 development partners contributed equal sums of money to co-fund the project. Some of the NGOs and the public sector organisations were very convinced and enthusiastic about the project, while others had doubts and felt uncertain. They doubted the ability of Gothenburg's NGO Agency to lead the project, the type of activity and its management.

1.4 Project aim

It is worth highlighting the description of aims for the development partnership. The following is an extract from the application for funds submitted to the ESF Council in April 2002:

The activities of the development partnership aim to lead to:

- models for how people with substance abuse problems and/or a criminal history can establish themselves on the labour market by starting and running social cooperatives
- forms of cooperation between the social economy and the public sector
- methods of cooperation between the various public sector units that are responsible for granting social allowances to individuals
- changed attitudes in society towards people with drug problems and/or a criminal past
- through the partnership in the *Vägen ut!* project, demonstrate ways of exercising influence at individual, organisational and societal levels.

The project is described in the summary as follows:

"Based on the user activities of *Bryggan*, CRIS, *Vävstugan* and HWH (Half Way House), cooperation is being developed with other players in the social economy, and with the public sector and private business sector. The aim of this cooperation is to develop new ways for people

³ Gothenburg's NGO Agency is an umbrella organisation of more than 100 non-government organisations. The agency changed its Swedish name from Göteborgs Frivillig Center to Göteborgs Förenings Center during the project period.

with drugs problems and/or a criminal past to find routes to work and means of supporting themselves.”

“The whole partnership in *Vägen ut!* is based on a very clear empowerment perspective. The activity is to be based on cooperators and apprentices in the social cooperatives, and they themselves are to become responsible for the development of the cooperatives and be involved in the entire project process. The partnership includes several self-help organisations with members from the target group; two of these are activities solely for women. This gives equality in the activities central significance. Equality is also to be prioritised in the steering group and in the work groups.”

“The public sector parties in the partnership assume a supportive role. They are to enable the social economy to try new routes to work and self-support for people with drugs problems and/or a criminal past. The public sector can thereby test an alternative approach to the target group by being supportive rather than nursing and looking after them.” (From the project application, April 2002, Pages 5-6.)

The above illustrates that the *Vägen ut!* project has an unusual aim and structure by Swedish standards. The main aim is to break the pattern of discrimination and exclusion from the labour market and find ways for people with a record of

crime and substance abuse to enter the labour market. Work in social cooperatives is to give people the chance to try new ways of finding work and self-support. Four self-help user organisations constitute the driving force in this change work. The public sector partners in the project only have a supportive role. The initiative for the project came from the user organisations. The work had a wider aim than usual: to change general attitudes in society towards people with drug problems and/or a criminal past. The intention was also to find new approaches in public sector organisations and their employees towards these groups; that the organisations are to provide support rather than nursing and taking care of people in the groups. The project is to be run from a clear “own power” (empowerment) perspective in which involvement and own responsibility are the most important factors.⁴ Through its ambitions, basic ideas and method, the *Vägen ut!* project differs from many other similar projects in the public or NGO sector.

1.5 Project organisation

In May 2002, the Swedish ESF Council granted funds for a three-year pilot project. The requested amount had however been cut by a couple of million Swedish kronor, and the project budget therefore had to be trimmed right from the start. The information accompanying the decision stated that the project was well in line with the aims of the

Equal programme. It included clearly formulated goals and a well thought-out plan. The “own power” and bottom-up management perspective was also clear. Self-help and “own power” had been emphasised in the application. The project organisation was perhaps somewhat complex with its 15 development partners. The ESF Council granted SEK 7 million to the project, and public sector organisations were to contribute about SEK 10 million of co-funding. This meant that the project had a budget of about SEK 18 million to distribute over the three years of its duration (cf Chapter 4).

The *Vägen ut!* project had a complex organisation that has gradually been simplified. Three levels can be discerned in the project:

The management level with the project's steering group and working committee. The steering group contains the four cooperatives; *GFC* (Gothenburg's NGO Agency), *Kooperativ konsult* (Gothenburg cooperative support organisation) and units within the City of Gothenburg. When the steering group meetings were convened about once a month, about 10-15 people attended. After about six months this organisation felt too unwieldy, and the steering group appointed a working committee with the task of leading the project. The working committee contains just five people as well as a coordinator and a financial manager who are also usually summoned to the

meetings.⁵ The working committee meets about once a month to discuss and make decisions on day-to-day work.

The cooperation level containing the 15 development partners who cooperate with each other and underpin the project. These development partners consist of NGOs and public sector organisations. The NGOs include several of the initiators, such as *Bryggan*, Criminals' Return into Society (CRIS) and the Half Way House (HWH). The public sector organisations include the City of Gothenburg, the prison and probation authorities, the county labour board and the social insurance office in Västra Götland. The 15 development partners usually meet at development partnership meetings about once or twice per six months to obtain information about the development of the project and discuss important principle issues. About 25 people attend these meetings. The partnership meetings have also been good opportunities for feedback and discussion of research findings.

The national and transnational level comprises the organisations that the project has worked with, such as the Swedish ESF Council and the transnational development partnership *Le Mat*. However, there are cooperation groups with other Equal projects in Sweden, for example within the NTG network and with the Equal projects NESE (New Economy and Social Entrepreneurship) in Gothenburg, *Egenmakt i Baronbackarna* – EmBa

⁴ “Own power” and empowerment are not exact synonyms; see the section on empowerment in the next chapter on theoretical perspectives.

⁵ The working committee contained two cooperators (members of the cooperatives) and representatives of Gothenburg's NGO Agency, Kooperativ Konsult – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation and the City of Gothenburg; five people in total.

(Empowerment in Baronbackarna) in Örebro and *Mersmak* in Skåne (cf Chapter 7 of this report).

To clarify the project organisation and increase its transparency, the steering group gave the coordinator the task of outlining the organisation in a presentation that could be used to inform external parties. The first outline describes the organisation simply and clearly:

It must be emphasised that the project organisation looks more complicated on paper than it has actually been in practice. The central groups in the projects are the working committee and the steering group with a core group of seven to eight people who work together daily and know each other well. The members of the working committee are the engines in the activity. The larger development partnership of 20-25 members only meets a few times per six months. The outer circle of cooperating bodies acts as a contact network, in which a large array of resources are mobilised for the project and the social cooperatives. It is also worth highlighting that before the project received EU funding there was already a core group of players who knew each other relatively well and who were very involved in forming the cooperatives. The project organisation therefore contained a subjective element, which has been very significant to its success and has constructively propelled the project onwards. The people cannot simply be seen as representatives of their organisations, but as committed players and visionaries (Phillips 1988).

1.6 Concluding reflections

When we analyse the growth of the *Vägen ut!* project some details stand out that are worth thinking about:

- The project only affects a relatively limited and specific group of users, in other words, people who have completed a prison sentence and are to be re-integrated into normal everyday life and the community. About 10,000 people serve a prison sentence in Sweden each year, and about five to ten per cent of them are women. We already know that this group has a vulnerable and weak social situation. When they leave prison they encounter major hardships in finding work, accommodation and a means of support. There is reason to assume that many of them also have problematic family relationships and a reduced social network (Skårner 2002, Månsson et al 2002). We do not know however how many in the group of people on probation have a similarly vulnerable situation, nor do we know how many people in the group that consists of substance abusers and the homeless have similar problems to tackle. The central user group of the project is therefore limited, but there may be other groups with similar social situations who would also benefit from the experiences gained in the project.
- The ideas of starting social cooperatives developed in some of the self-help organisations within the user group. But several of these organisations are hybrids, including both professional and voluntary visionaries who worked to realise the ideas of starting coop-

eratives. The users from the self-help organisations would have probably found it difficult on their own to apply for EU funding and start social cooperatives. It is likely that they did not have the specialist knowledge and contact networks required. Without help and extensive work by professionals at, for example, Gothenburg's NGO Agency and the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation, the project would probably not have got off the ground. A number of professional players and a group of visionaries from NGOs took the initiative for the project. The project is very much a joint venture involving public sector professionals and players from the NGO sector. Without the great commitment and close cooperation of both these parties, it is likely that the project would not have been launched!

- The group of parties has had a very strong focus on mobilising resources from various parts of the public sector to build up and finance preparations and the start of the cooperative enterprise. They applied for EU funding from the Swedish ESF Council for the project's organisation and basic activities, municipal funds to finance rent of the premises and equipment, and central government funding to pay the salaries of employees, etc (also see Chapter 4). Public funding that has been re-localised and used in a different way than in the past therefore constitutes the resource base of the project. The idea is that the social cooperatives will eventually become self-sufficient by providing care services – accommodation or work training – and

various forms of production, selling their products in their respective markets. But while building up the social cooperatives, public sector funding – from both central and local government – is the main type of funding that has been mobilised and has formed the foundation of the project activity.

- The project has a different approach and work method to those commonly used in public sector organisations. Approaches have been taken from voluntary self-help organisations; self-help and active participation have been used to mobilise the target group's resources. Some approaches have been borrowed from models used abroad. The concept of *egenmakt* (own power) is part of the Swedish self-help tradition, but has been combined with empowerment from the American civil rights and women's movements (Forsberg & Starrin 1997). The project has also been inspired by the Swedish Basta Work Cooperative, which in turn is based on an Italian model from San Patrignano outside Rimini (Meeuwisse 2001). The project's ambitions and approaches include a combination of several different elements from Swedish, European and American social movements and self-help organisations. In later sections of this report we will describe how these elements of ideas have influenced the project and shaped the work of the cooperatives.

Chapter 2. Earlier research and theoretical perspectives

2.1 Work-oriented rehabilitation for people with experience of crime and substance abuse

In this chapter on earlier research, we will focus on Sweden, and give a short description of research on activities which have a similar focus to that of the *Vägen ut!* project. In other words, projects aimed at individuals who have experienced both crime and substance abuse, and which place emphasis on employment as an important part of rehabilitation. Not very many research reports fulfil these criteria. Here we will present two from the *KrAmi* programme, and two from Basta Work Cooperative.

KrAmi in Örebro

Lidberg and Soydan (1993) conducted an evaluation of the *KrAmi* programme in Örebro. The concept of *KrAmi*, which was later developed in other parts of Sweden, began in Malmö, where a drop-in programme for young people with severe sociomedicinal problems was started in October 1980. One of the criteria was that the young people had to be in current contact with social services, the employment service, and prison and probation services. *KrAmi* in Örebro was started in 1987.

The results show that all the participants had very positive experiences in their contact with staff, and that out of the 29 who had participated in the programme, 24 people were in a significantly better social position in terms of employment,

family relations, substance abuse and self-esteem, compared to their position prior to the *KrAmi* programme. The authors of the report also believe that one of the most important results was that the programme succeeded in repersonifying the participants, by creating a level of directness in their relations with staff. The authors define “repersonifying” as the opposite process to that of “clientising” – the process to which the young people had been subjected in their relations with all the other authorities they had had contact with. Rather than of strict adherence to detailed rules and regulations, which leads to an indirectness in client relations, *KrAmi* instead used framework-based management with flexible use of rule systems, resulting in a more direct and more personal type of contact with the young people.

Problematic areas of the programme were primarily a result of uncertainties in the relationships between the various parts of the organisation. The management perceived the staff as being too independent. They did not always adhere to the decisions made by the management group. The evaluators also noted that staff members’ knowledge of and use of consequence-based teaching varied widely.

KrAmi in Malmö and Örebro

Nyström and Soydan’s evaluation (1999) focused on the *KrAmi* programmes in both Malmö and Örebro. The material for the study was gathered through fully structured interviews with around sixty participants, with the help of ASI¹ instruments. The first interview was carried out at the start of the programme, and the second one year later.

The results show a positive mean index change in four of the six areas on which the instrument focuses. The largest positive change had taken place in the field of employment, where around 70% were in a better position than they had been previously. Crime and drug use had also decreased over the year. On the other hand, physical and mental health remained the same or even deteriorated. The researchers think these were probably not actual cases of health deterioration, but rather that they were related to the participants’ experience. Old ailments, in the context of a more socially ordered situation, are perceived in a different way from before. It was primarily those who had previously used narcotics and alcohol who had a more negative trend in their health, compared to those who had not had those problems.

Basta Work Cooperative, evaluation 1

Hansson and Wijkström (2001) carried out an evaluation of Basta Work Cooperative. In their results, the authors of the report are relatively critical of certain areas of the Basta programme, including

the rhetoric used by Basta in describing itself as a “user-owned” cooperative. Basta is presented in all contexts as a programme where those who come for rehabilitation may eventually have the opportunity to become one of the people who own and manage Basta. And for an apprentice, as new arrivals are called, this represents an important symbolic indication and a promise of a future career. The authors believe, however, that when one looks at the actual figures, it is hard for Basta to live up to these promises. Of sixty co-workers at Basta in spring 2001, five of them were “cooperators”, making those five the organisation’s only owners. Of those five, only three had been apprentices at Basta. The other two had been there from the time that Basta was established. Being a cooperator in the organisation entails not only more power and responsibility, but also a normal salary. The only material benefits which apprentices receive are pocket money and payment in kind. The authors predict that user influence and ownership will be one of the most central issues for the future of Basta.

The question of Basta’s autonomy is another important issue. In the beginning, the Basta Vision was to become more and more independent of selling places in rehabilitation, through increased goods production. These original plans have had to be changed, and currently around half of the funding for the programme comes from selling rehab places to social services in various areas of Sweden. The

¹ Addiction Severity Index

term “autonomy” has later been revised to refer to service sales, in competition with other service companies.

The authors conclude that Basta is an interesting combination of public sector and private industry. A cooperative which behaves like a profit-driven private company, but which also has traits of a municipal rehabilitation institution. This contradiction also creates internal tensions, which must be solved in some way in the future.

Basta Work Cooperative, evaluation 2 Anna Meeuwisse (2001) was also commissioned to investigate Basta Work Cooperative as a human service organisation, on the basis of the roles and relationships which are developed there.

In terms of the results of rehabilitation, the statistics are not great. Meeuwisse states that in terms of relapse frequency, Basta is no better or worse than other programmes of treatment for substance abuse. There is a relatively high turnover of apprentices. However, a relatively high number of these come back to Basta again. The positive element which the author perceives in the rehabilitation process, is that people get to stay at Basta, and live their lives in a miniature society, with real work and tasks which demand responsibility. It is not only the actual work which is important at Basta – positive emotional experiences, such as pride, purpose and a new sense of belonging, along with other similar experiences, are also important. An important ideological and emotional foundation is

the Basta Vision, which includes promises of a good future as a self-employed, drug-free individual – a vision which the world outside can hardly offer.

This evaluation also took up the question of power. Power over the programme lies with the cooperators, but few apprentices question this system. Meeuwisse believes that this may be because the work is managed by representatives of their own group, and that the promised part-ownership also plays an important role in this context. At the same time, she states that the cooperative has grown, but that the number of part-owners has not increased in any notable way. The reason for this, according to those responsible at Basta, is that becoming a part-owner demands greater economic and social stability. Meeuwisse poses the question of whether there is an unwillingness to share the power. Some of the participants interviewed say that they were not able to advance as quickly as they wanted to. Attempts have been made to solve this dilemma, partly by creating new career paths within the system in the form of trial co-operators, and partly by creating paths out to wider society. Meeuwisse concludes that Basta sends out a hopeful message that people with substance abuse problems can achieve a great deal if they are just given a proper chance.

Comments

How should these programmes be viewed in relation to the *Vägen ut!* project? An important difference is that the users of the *Vägen ut!* programme become self-employed, while participants in *KrAmi* were shunted out into the employment market.

User power is an important foundation of both Basta and *Vägen ut!*. The participants themselves, in as independent a manner as possible, create a new life through, among other things, getting real jobs. However, extensive support from the authorities has been absolutely essential in building up these programmes. The difference is that at Basta, apprentices can stay as long as they want, which is not possible on the small-scale *Vägen ut!* project. Basta is also an established programme which left behind its project phase long ago – *Vägen ut!* is still in this early phase.

The results of these evaluations are interesting, and show that through collaboration with various authorities and extensive support (financial and other) and a democratic, participant-oriented way of relating, it is possible to help many users to create a more independent life, free from crime and drugs. However, these programmes are not without their problems (as shown by the Basta case), and they bring up questions of power and influence within the programmes. These questions are also interesting for *Vägen ut!* since the project has Basta as an important role model.

2.2 Marginalisation and opposition – empowerment with advocacy

In many Western countries, great economic and material wealth can be created, and in a certain sense these can be called welfare states. However, the important question is how this welfare is divided. It can be stated that despite this prosperity, there are still individuals and groups for whom it is difficult to have their most basic needs met, including needs in terms of housing and employment. There are various mechanisms in society which have an exclusive, oppressive and othering effect on a large number of individuals and groups. These arise as a result of factors such as social class; gender; religion; ethnicity; age; mental, physical and social health; sexual orientation; lifestyle; personal history and so on. Within what is known as anti-oppressive social work, the focus is on oppression which comes about as a result of belonging to a particular group or orientation (Dominelli 2002). It is in the light of this that we can observe the various Equal projects. They can be seen as an attempt to even out such disparities by creating better opportunities for entry to the employment market for certain groups, using various methods including social cooperatives.

2.2.1 The question of gender

In modern gender research, the question of power is discussed in similar terms. One of the most prominent figures in research on men, Connell (1995), believes that there is a prevailing global patriarchy where the social order places men above women, but that this social order also places some groups of men

below other men. He makes distinctions between different masculine positions and relationships, partly through the lens of gender-related factors primarily to do with the physical body and sexual orientation. These factors lead to hierarchical relationships of *hegemony/dominance, participation and subordination*. He also examines these distinctions through the lens of other social relationships which have nothing to do with gender – authorisation and marginalisation. These positions are connected with social groupings such as class, race/ethnicity and so on.

Connell's theory relates primarily to relations between men, and he has been extremely cautious about broadening his conclusions to apply to women. Dominelli (2002), however, discusses power and the creation of hierarchies between women in a similar way, and it is clear that power and the use thereof is not a one-dimensional issue among women either:

“The potential for the same individual or a group of people to be both oppressing and oppressed can be illustrated in the following interaction between women. A black middle-class woman, privileged along the class dimension, may oppress a black working-class woman on the basis of class or other social division, such as age, religions or faith adherence (Shah, 2001). Similarly, a white middle-class woman, who enjoys racial privileging but is oppressed on the basis of gender, can oppress a black middle-class women

with regards to ‘race’ (Ware, 1992), thereby racialising the latter's experience of gender and class.” (Dominelli 2002:16)

Dominelli points out the relationship of dominance between the sexes, but also oppressive mechanisms in relations between women, linked to different types of characteristics or social groupings, such as race/ethnicity, religion, faith, class and age. An important question in both Connell's and Dominelli's discussions of the subject is that no-one is perceived as being entirely powerless, and that everyone can occupy both positions – that of the oppressed and of the oppressor. The position of being “100% victim” does not really exist, and neither does the position of having absolute power. That is not to say that all members of society have equal power – of course there are differences between, for example, a thirty-five year-old, white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class man and an older muslim woman with neither education nor employment. It is not however necessary to use such obvious examples in order to understand the implications of different social groupings and characteristics on the opportunities available to individuals in our hierarchical society. For example, if you look at the individuals for whom the *Vägen ut!* project was created, their social exclusion in areas such as employment is based on factors including gender, social groupings, physical and social health, experience of drug addiction, and experience of crime. And in many cases, one

and the same person has experienced exclusion on the basis of a combination of several of these factors. Dominelli believes that it is important not to see these variables separately, but instead to be aware of how they work in combination.

2.2.2 Empowerment

The interesting thing about the term “empowerment” is its movement from being a term which was used in the 1970s to describe radical collective social movements, to becoming a buzzword used even by people who one would not usually associate with political radicalism, such as Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. These days, empowerment can also refer to individual development. This is due to the fact that “empowerment” is a many-faceted term, which can be used in many ways and in many different contexts. However, in the majority of definitions, empowerment is seen as a process by which individuals, groups or local societies can attain a greater level of control and decision-making power over their own lives. (Forsberg & Starrin 1997)

Empowerment-oriented social work goes against the prevailing paternalistic mind-set, which creates dominance and subordination in relationships between people, primarily in the context of the relationship between the expert (who has the skills and knowledge) and the patient (who does not). It can be seen that from this perspective, the individual is “pathologised” – the focus is placed on the unwell and dysfunctional elements of the individual's life. With the empowerment perspective, however, the user comes

first, and as such has the right to define the issues which affect him/her. Similarities can be seen with a more health-promoting approach (Antonovsky 1991). In other words, all individuals are perceived as having different types of resources, but there are factors at different levels of society which prevent them from using these assets. These obstacles can be within the individual, perhaps to do with self-perception and identity. But these obstacles also exist in relation to other people, at a group level, an organisational level, and finally a societal level. (Dominelli 2002)

However, one may wonder whether all processes whereby individuals, groups or local society attain a greater level of control and right to decide over their own lives can be called empowerment, in the more radical and user-power-oriented sense of the word. We agree with Forsberg and Starrin that the paternalistic nature of current support measures hardly create an ideal environment for empowerment. Therefore it is not only the goals and results which are important, but the route towards them. Adams (1996:5-7), in his definition of empowerment, focuses on the ways and means used in order to reach goals. These include: democratising processes, advocacy, normalisation, increased awareness, user-led activities, radical social work and non-oppressive work experience.

One can see that when users exercise greater control and exercise their right to decide over their own lives, from their own starting points and through their own activity, both the process and the goals attained have a more lasting value, compared with a system of division of resources, which by nature places users in a passive position. A process which is democratic and which increases the awareness of its users does not only create resources in the short term, but also capable individuals and groups who can look after their own rights in the long term.

2.2.3 Empowerment and power

An important part of the complex word empowerment is about power. But even the word 'power' is a many-faceted word. Weber, for example, (1972:28¹) defines power as *"the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."* In this definition, there is a conflict between two or more parties, who are visible and tangible. But power is not only used when the parties in an open conflict use different resources in order to carry out their own wills. Gaventa (1987) discusses power in three different dimensions, based on how aware people are of the power wielded by others over them. In the third dimension, the individuals are unaware of oppression and are passive despite what Gaventa calls "glaring in-

equalities in their social situations" (p27). This has to do with ideologies, myths and legitimisations which enable powerful groups to define various issues on the basis of their viewpoint, and in this way retain power, without this leading to open confrontation. Gramsci (1967) and Connell discuss the issue of hegemonic power in a similar way. Since these types of symbols permeate both language and other cultural expressions, it is difficult for a powerless group to see through these messages. This can lead to split consciousness, powerlessness, and passivity, says Gaventa. In the second dimension, individuals and groups are more conscious of their situation but still find it hard to take action because of their expectation of defeat. In the first dimension however, we find ourselves in Weber's more open conflict, with competing resources and relatively well-defined issues which divide the parties.

Power can be seen as a zero-sum game, played with limited assets, where one player wins and one loses. But power, and certain resources, can also be perceived as expansive – through co-operation instead of antagonism, they can be released and caused to expand. (Forsberg & Starrin 1997)

Regardless of the type of assets concerned, or what view one has of power, it is nonetheless important that the parties in these discussions and negotia-

tions are able to fight for resources or create cooperation on relatively similar terms. We can dig deeper into what these terms are by taking a semantic look at the word "power". It is interesting that there are many synonyms in the Swedish dictionary (Malmström & Györki 1980; Palmér & Friedländer 1986; Wessén 1982), and that the English term "power" is a broader term than the Swedish word "makt" (Danielsson 1983). Through this analysis, we can find four different types of definitions for the word power, all of which can be described as a type of resource.² We call these potential power resources, since no resources can automatically be treated as power, in the sense of carrying out one's will despite resistance (Grozier & Friedberg 1977), and since they hold important potential in negotiations on power.

1. Words such as *kraft* (physical power), *styrka* (strength) and *energi* (energy) can be linked to physical, natural characteristics, but also to the *physical and emotional potential* of the human being, including physical and mental health and strength. For example, among the users of the *Vägen ut!* project, there are individuals with varying levels of these resources. There are people who are healthy and able to work, but also those who have various types of health-related problems. However, it must be said that the terms "health" and "illness" are seen in this context as social constructions. The concepts of being ill and unfit for work have to do with the way the employment market is constructed. At the same time, it can be stated that even if

a person's physical and mental potential can be perceived as relative, this potential should, in our current society, be regarded as an important individual resource which can be used to develop power in a social context.

2. Words such as *kunskap* (knowledge), *kunnande* (skill) and *förmåga* (ability) have more to do with knowledge and other types of skills. The saying "knowledge is power" is an interesting one, even in the context of the *Vägen ut!* project, where the knowledge and skills of various different groups come into contact with one another. A person with knowledge and language skills is in a better position to make themselves heard or state their opinion and carry out their own will in different social situations. If physical power, strength and energy are one important individual element, knowledge and skills constitute a way of organising and directing this potential towards different goals.

3. Words like *hop* and *massa* (both of which mean crowd) have connotations of groupings of people which, through characteristics such as their size, create power – strength in numbers. User organisations are a good example of this. Democratic systems, with their institutions, are also based on the idea of the power of the majority. In this context, it is also important to note that the strength of a group is not determined by the number of individuals involved, but by their individual potential, their knowledge and skills, and above all their coordination and aspirations to the same goal.

¹ Macht bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht

² In French, Italian and Latin there are two different words for power – one for potential and one for realisation. (Peterson 1987:13).

4. Words like *befogenhet* (competence), *rättighet* (right), *myndighet* (authority), *bestämmanderätt* (right to decide) and *auktoritet* (authority) are strongly linked to institutional resources, within formal and informal structures. From a user perspective, one can discuss issues such as statutory rights of clients and patients. The same rights can also be perceived as laws and resolutions, whereby in the first phase, the authorities' interpretation takes precedence, and in the second phase the legal entity's own interpretation takes precedence. Formal institutional power which lies outside the realm of the authorities is more often than not connected to the financial, market-steered sphere.

It can also be said that the formal institutional powers and their representatives, for example within state authorities, have a strong position in society (Järvinen 2002). This is partly because this power is made legitimate by the fact that we live in a welfare state with a representative democracy. The institutions partly build on these foundations, but the internal life and power structure within these organisations also influences how they are designed.

On the informal side of institutional power, we can see general cultural and social value structures which are closely linked to the status and authority of the dominant group, and the invisible power which Gaventa discusses. Connell and Dominelli discuss superordination and subordination in similar terms, and they also note the connection we have already discussed between these more or less open power

relations and "othering" factors such as class, gender and ethnicity.

By way of summary, we can say that this division of potential power resources into four types, partly on an individual level and partly on a group/structural level, offers us the possibility to analyse power as a complex process and relationship between different parties. This discussion can also be connected to the issue of empowerment. By this we mean that strengthening users' potential power resources is both a valuable approach and an important goal in terms of the process of empowerment. This strengthening, however, does not always need to be in the form of an actual increase in the potential power resources of an individual. It can also be in the form of a relative increase, for example, that through changes in the system, opposition and factors which cause marginalisation can be reduced at institutional level, in both formal and informal institutions.

2.2.4 Empowerment and advocacy

In our highly specialised society, we often need different types of representatives – people who present the case of someone else, lawyers, ombudsmen and lobbyists, to name but a few. In this report we will discuss a particular group of representatives – advocates. These are people who speak on behalf of weak or disempowered individuals or groups in society. Payne offers the following definition of advocacy:

"Advocacy is the act of striving to represent the interests of powerless clients in relation to powerful groups and social structures." (Payne 2002:353)

Advocacy in this sense is an extremely important activity, not least in its role of supporting and affirming empowerment. But what are the real reasons for an individual or group requiring this kind of support? We have already mentioned the complexity of society and the specialisation therein. In this context too, the issue of power is important, and we can discuss the potential power resources. The fewer resources a person has, the greater their need for measures such as advocacy on their behalf, which can compensate for lack of resources. For example, if a person lacks knowledge and skills in the area of how to defend their own rights, it is important that that person receives help in this area. Often, however, the support given may be in the form of some sort of service, in which case it may not necessarily have any connection to empowerment as we define it. In actual fact, the client can be made passive in a process where he or she is not actively participating. For this reason, the way in which advocacy is conducted is extremely important. In order to affirm the empowerment and independence of individuals and groups in society, the goal of the advocacy process cannot be simply to get as much as possible out of the social insurance system (Payne 2002:359). Instead,

empowerment-oriented advocacy should be directed towards users strengthening their different potential power resources, in order to be able to represent themselves in various contexts in the future. In this sense, advocacy is about a process of growth and learning, where the users themselves are activated and developed.

Since the advocate is a person who moves in and between different worlds and power circles, the other part of the process is about communicating the knowledge and needs of the user in different ways, including in negotiations with opposing parties such as authorities. This may be in relation to one specific issue, but may also be in a much more general sense, where the interests of a group are being represented. In order for an advocate to be able to represent clients, the users must have confidence in the advocate in relation to the issue at stake. What we mean by this is that an important principle of empowerment-oriented advocacy is that one cannot represent someone who has not given you a mandate to do so, either formally or informally. Working on behalf of a user group on the basis of one's own assumptions of what is best for them is a non-democratic, patriarchal way of relating, which cannot be associated with empowerment in the more radical sense of the word (Forsberg & Starrin 1997).

There are many different actors who can be advocates. *Users* can represent their own interests, either as individuals or as a group. The client organisation CRIS (Criminals' Return into Society) should be mentioned here, as a significant and pioneering advocate for prisoners and former prison inmates.

It is not unusual that *officials* represent clients in relations with their superiors or with political committees. For example, a social welfare secretary may work together with a client and reach an outcome regarding their benefit arrangement which goes against that of the social welfare secretary's superior, or the opinion of a committee.

In the case of projects such as *Vägen ut!* which do not come under the administrative management of the authorities, it is not unusual for there to be one or more persons in a management role who can also fulfil the role of *professional advocate* for the target group. Often such people have a good education and years of experience in this field.

To sum up, we can say that the question of empowerment and advocacy is complex and many-faceted, and as such is also interesting from a theoretical point of view. But perhaps an even more interesting question is how these issues are handled in practice, within the *Vägen ut* project.

2.3 Regarding the process of breaking old behavioural patterns

For former criminals and drug users, working in a cooperative brings up issues

of how to leave behind a criminal lifestyle characterised by crime and drugs, and change the direction of one's life, bringing in new activities and content. This transformation process is an extensive and often painful one, lasting several years, which is needed in order to attain a new balance in life. This may involve regaining abilities and resources which had been lost during a person's involvement with drugs, but may also be a case of acquiring new experiences and new relationships. The process also involves using knowledge and earlier life experiences in a new way, for example within a user organisation, or by supporting friends who are at the beginning of the transformation process (Meeuwisse 2001).

In recent years, a number of social science researchers have become interested in this type of transformation process, which is often called the "process of role exit" (Ebaugh 1988). The course of events is studied in different stages or steps, observing which elements each stage consists of and which factors influence the process. Some researchers emphasise the "recovery" nature of the process: regaining lost abilities, improving one's self-confidence and redressing weaknesses and situations of oppression. Others see the process more as one of adapting, adjusting, and coping better with different situations, as well as learning new things, developing new skills and building new relationships (Kristiansen 1999, Topor 2004).

According to Helen Ebaugh, the American sociologist, much research has been dedicated to the study of socialisation, that is, how people take on new roles in life, for example through education, employment or parenthood. Gender is a social construction, learned in a social and cultural context (Connell 1995). In the field of sociological research, much attention has been given to the question of how people acquire stigmatised roles or roles which deviate from the norm – roles such as mentally ill, criminal or drug abuser (Goffman 1981). But less attention has been given to the process of how people break behavioural patterns and leave behind central life roles, acquire new experiences and build up a new identity (Ebaugh 1988).

Helen Ebaugh and her research group therefore took up the task of studying various types of what Ebaugh calls "breakaway", using in-depth qualitative interviews with 185 people who had left behind a central role in their lives. These people were known as "exiters". When the results were analysed, the researchers found that these exiters had many points in common and many similar experiences, even though they were breaking away from quite different things. On the basis of these findings, Ebaugh constructed a general model of the course of events, with a description of the four phases of the exit process:

- *preliminary stages of breakaway, when the person realises that he/she has chosen the wrong path in life, regrets their decision, feels bad, considers other possibilities and asks relatives and friends for advice.* Further on in the process, the person may attempt a trial breakaway in order to see how it turns out, or they might use a more planned strategy in order to get change the direction of their life. In this early phase of the process, the support of close friends and family for the change of direction (or indeed their opposition to it) has a very significant role.
- *following lengthy preliminary stages, the person comes to a turning point, where he/she leaves the path they have chosen, often in a sudden and dramatic way as a result of an event which acts as a trigger.* The person may be compelled to make a dramatic change by a situation which makes the breakaway necessary, or by hitting rock bottom and having had enough of negative experiences. Access to a support person within the person's immediate network of friends and family may also be a significant factor which makes the breakaway possible. It is important for the person that the change is clear and official, that there is no way back, and that there are alternatives available for help (Ebaugh 1988).
- *the turning point is often followed by a certain emptiness, a marginal situation where the person feels lost and misses the life that has been left behind. Everything may feel empty and meaningless.* The person may also feel ambivalent and unsure of whether he/she has made the



right decision. It feels impossible to get started with a new lifestyle, when different living environments and paths of contact seem closed. The person is at their most vulnerable in this marginal situation and a relapse into drug abuse or crime is within reach. Living in a marginal situation for a long time is unhealthy. Crisis reactions and mental health problems are common, and the person needs a great deal of informal and professional support (Hedin & Månsson 1998).

– *after some time, something happens which makes the person feel that they are on more solid ground, and can begin to build up a new life.* This transformation is most likely to come about as a result of both internal adaptations and external changes which have taken place, which make it possible to move forward. Getting housing or employment, or a sense of community at work, or new friends in the context of studies are important parts of being able to build up a new life. In order to be able to establish a new way of living, the exiter always requires material which affirms their identity in the new role (Biernacki 1986). Studies, employment, parenthood, new friends or new interests are meaningful components of a new life. In practical work with clients, the focus is often placed on the first phase in the breakaway from, for example, drugs. But later stages in the process, and the nature of these stages, are also of great importance (Blomqvist 2002, Hedin & Månsson 1998, Kristiansen 1999).

Ebaugh also describes a series of variables which influence the course of events and the results of the breakaway process. Some of the most important variables to be mentioned are:

Whether the process takes place by compulsion or as a result of a voluntary decision. The majority of breakaways of this sort are motivated by elements of both compulsion and free will, and it is possible to observe a continuum between these two poles. A person may choose to depart from their professional career voluntarily, but an element of compulsion might be the risk of being fired, the risk of unemployment or a change in working conditions. A decision to break away from a criminal lifestyle demands strong motivation and the ambition to transform one's own life. But elements of compulsion from society, such as the process of trial, sentencing and time in prison, can influence this decision.

The centrality of the person's life role is another important variable. Certain roles are extremely important for us, and can be closely tied to the core of our identity. Leaving behind such roles can have major (and devastating) consequences for a person. Ebaugh's interviewees included mothers who had left their children in the care of their husbands in order to get out of an unhappy marriage. Afterwards they missed their children enormously, and often regretted their fateful decisions for many years. Also some people who experienced a career change, whose

identity had been closely linked to a position of high status in their working life, often found it difficult to leave behind the benefits of their old role and adapt to a less prominent role.

Naturally, a major part is also played by the length of the process, and how much control the person concerned has over the course of events. Certain lifestyle changes must take place quickly. A person may only have a matter of hours or a couple of days to act. There may not be much time to think or to try out the new role. Any thinking and trying out must have taken place in secret, before the change is made. This is the case, for example, for many women who abandon an abusive relationship, or for young women who run away from a pimp or trafficker. The emotional and cognitive processing of what has happened comes later, during the marginal situation and the building up of a new life (Hedin & Månsson 1998, Holmberg & Enander 2004).

In many cases, the person breaking away has full control over the course of events, and can choose for themselves how fast or slow the breakaway process is carried out. But there are other types of breakaway where societal or organisational factors affect the length of the process. The person does not have full control, as there are certain sequences within the breakaway which have to be carried out in a predetermined way. This applies, for example, to the gender change process, which is surrounded by medical and legal regulations. It also applies to some people breaking away

from crime or drug abuse. A person who is sentenced to jail or to psychiatric care cannot go on leave or move to another care unit on their own initiative. Such decisions must be taken by various bodies within the legal system.

A fourth important variable is whether the breakaway takes place individually or as part of a group. Many people who break away from a central role in their lives do so as an individual decision, as a result of feelings and thoughts which are relatively hidden from their surroundings. Only afterwards does their turning point come to light, and as such it can provoke surprise or disappointment from those surrounding them. For example, this might apply to a couple who decide to separate, or a career change which is not seen as socially desirable. A breakaway which takes place as part of a group may be more talked about. Exiters can give and receive support from one another, and resources can be mobilised from their surroundings. In her book, Ebaugh describes how nuns who left their convents in the early 1970s supported each other through the different phases of the breakaway process. Of course, similar experiences can be found in the various organisations of the AA movement (Karlsson 2002).

A fifth important variable is whether the act of breaking away concerns only one element of a person's life, or whether it is really a break from several elements at once. In some cases, breaking away from a central role actually entails many breaks which are part of the same



primary phenomenon. People who change gender often have to leave their place of work, and many relationships are changed. The person who changes gender may find that certain people in their social network distance themselves, and that certain skills and knowledge from earlier in their life can no longer be used. The primary breakaway leads to consequences on several levels. People who break away from substance abuse or crime describe similar experiences: many skills can no longer be used, and many old friendships feel alien or uncomfortable. During a certain phase in the breakaway, many exiters feel newborn. There may not be much knowledge or many skills or relationships which the person can take with them into their new role in life. A new life must be built from the ground up (Kristiansen 1999).

One variable which also affects the process of breaking away is *whether the breakaway is socially desirable or the opposite: a socially stigmatised breakaway*. When the act of breaking away is socially desirable – for example leaving a life of substance abuse, crime or prostitution – there is often an institutionalised way out of these roles. There are support resources and help organisations connected to the breakaway. Projects like *Vägen ut!* and groups which form part of CRIS and AA are all examples of support resources which are institutionalised in order to facilitate the process of breaking away for exiters. People who break away from a life role with high status to something more mediocre often cannot count on the same level social support,

but rather are met with surprise, disappointment and dissociation from their surroundings.

Ebaugh also points out that the level of awareness plays a major part in the breakaway process. Some people who break away are extremely conscious of what they are doing, and break away following intense consideration, weighing up of pros and cons, and periods of testing the new role. These conscious exiters often implement their breakaway in a slow and gradual manner, but adapt better to the new role after careful consideration. Others slip into a breakaway without having thought about it much beforehand. They are guided by chance, and choose the path which seems most feasible in that moment. These people may, after their turning point, realise that they have made the wrong decision, and that they are not happy with their new role, which results in several breakaway acts in a row. When working to create an institutionalised path for the breakaway process, awareness is an important variable to work with. People who slip into a breakaway process may also get to experience things which they had not realised earlier and thus benefit greatly from these new experiences.

The breakaway process can therefore vary considerably between different people, depending on which individual or group variables exist in each situation. The exit process never follows as linear a course as has been described. Rather, it is common that people move back

and forward between the various phases over the course of the breakaway. The support or rejection of close friends and family is also very significant for the process. Close friends and family who believe that the person has chosen the wrong path and make this clear to the person concerned can put a stop to a breakaway process which has already begun. Affirmation and social support from professionals is also a significant factor for the self-confidence of exiters, and for their prospects of making progress and establishing new lifestyles.

2.4 Social economy and social enterprise

The term “social economy” has been used in a new way since the beginning of the 1990s. This is a result of it being made an official EU term in 1989, with its own special section in the EU Commission (Olsson 1994). At a time when the welfare state is being deregulated, and confidence in the ability of the state to organise social initiatives is on the decrease, the need for alternative solutions is growing. At the Social Democratic Party Conference in autumn 2005, a decision was made to include social economy as a new policy area.

The term “social economy” has become an umbrella term for socially motivated activities which take place in non-profit organisations and enterprises. In Sweden, it was stressed early on in the debate that any such initiatives should be for the public good, and should have a limited interest in profit.

The discussion on “social economy” has at least two elements. The first concerns civil society, and has to do with the importance of civil society for the functioning of society as a whole. As such, it is dependent on what we mean by civil society, and its relationship to the state and the private sector. Civil society is often seen as the polar opposite of these two, as civil society is made up of the relationships and activities which are not part of the state or the private sector. The second element is the connection between social economy and the issue of privatisation of the public sector. The questions of economic efficiency and democratic control of economic activities are central in this context. It has been the case that certain activities have ended up under the management of the authorities because, for various reasons, it was not thought possible for other enterprises to meet the expectations which were considered to be desirable from the point of view of “society” or “the social economy”. The debate on privatisation has its origins in two problems: on one hand the public sector’s inadequate ability to provide democratic management and efficiency, and on the other hand the difficulty of financing activities in a way which wins legitimacy.

At the same time, hopes and expectations regarding the social economy originate from vastly differing political standpoints. On the one side, a right-wing point of view sees civil society and private enterprise as routes towards reducing the involvement of the state, while on the other side, a left-wing critique seeking alternatives to the “nanny state”.

In terms of usage in the Swedish language, the term “social economy” has won some ground. In Swedish, the term “economy” has, in part, been bound to different meanings than in the dominant languages. The Swedish word “ekonomi” is connected to its original meaning as “housekeeping” or “economic management”. Different prefixes added to the word “ekonomi” denote the economic management of different levels or sectors. The Swedish word *företagsekonomi* translates to English as “business administration”. *Nationalekonomi* is simply “economics”, and *samhällsekonomi* does not have a direct equivalent in English, but is sometimes translated as “social economics”. In France, there are different traditions in terms of economic terminology, which are probably more in line with the terminology used in the EU (Trädgårdh 2000).

Terms such as the Swedish *miljöekonomi* (environmental economics) or *sociälekonomi* (social economics) are somewhat trickier. One can certainly understand what is meant by economic management (or housekeeping) of the environment or of social conditions, but as a rule, the majority of ideological traditions have

regarded the environment and social conditions as restrictions to economic development. Alongside economic goals, environmental and social goals must be set up – goals which are not automatically reached as a consequence of economic development. It is also far from clear what is meant by the terms “environment” and “social conditions”. Normally, these terms are connected with the notion that concern for the environment and human relationships may either slow down of economic development, or be dispensed with in the name of economic development. In this way, concern for the environment and social concern can easily be perceived as being in constant opposition to the interests of economic development. There are also opposing ideologies in this area. Some devoted liberals believe that economic, environmental and social development goals are in opposition to each other. Most others believe this in one way or another.

Obviously, this has implications for the meaning and significance conferred upon the term “social economy” (cf. Laurelli). Is it a part of the set of problems facing commercial development, or is it more to do with the economic conditions which restrict the development of the public economy?

In England, for example, the term “social enterprise” is used to describe companies for which social goals are important. We should also bear in mind that both the term “social” and the term “enterprise” have slightly different meanings for us

in Sweden. This is a result of the fact that our societies are built up in different ways. The relationship between authorities and citizens, or between associations and firms, looks different as a result of the countries’ histories and the way the nations have been built up. It is doubtless important to bear this in mind. At the same time, we shouldn’t fool ourselves into thinking that looking to another country makes the terminology become clearer and easier to understand.

Even though the term “social economy” is now used in the context of EU policy, the same applies to this term as to so many other terms and concepts within European integration policy – that key terms such as this will be perceived slightly differently in different countries, as a result of differences in political, cultural and social scientific traditions. At the same time, in many development projects, both at national and European level, the term has become an important catchword.

“Economy” is primarily about production and creating useful goods and services. “Social economy” has, on one hand, come to mean the “output” achieved by civil society (sometimes known as the informal economy), and on the other hand, the organisation of social initiatives into companies, cooperatives or associations.

Of course, not all the useful or necessary things in society are produced as goods and services by private companies or public sector suppliers. Even with the addition of governmental authorities, at both local and national level, that still does not cover it. A great deal of work is carried out in a non-profit context, in different types of associations or other loose alliances, such as neighbourhoods. This voluntary work is obviously not work in the taxable sense, but it can still be seen as work in that it fulfils a useful function which is important for the well-being of society. This type of work could be anything from involvement in sporting initiatives or musical activities, to social support or environmental maintenance work. Sometimes these border on activities which perhaps should be seen as taxable work, and as such could almost be called “black market employment”. Many non-profit associations have difficulty knowing where to place the line between paid and voluntary work.

Obviously there are other forms of informal work, which are more or less well-organised in form, where there is doubt as to whether the work contributes to the welfare of society (for example, patronage), and where the negative side effects can be significant. Of course, this also applies to other types of activity. But with informal production comes the problem that it cannot be regulated by legislation or by the authorities which exercise scrutiny over formal production (Ingelstam 1994).

Trying to define what can be called the social economy in terms of voluntary work would probably meet with significant problems. At the same time, there is something of a paradox in regarding non-profit work and neighbourliness as a part of the economy. Putting a “production” perspective on what we do outside the “production sector” may also mean that we choose to see our commitment in a different way, as a part of our duty to produce.

The other side of the social economy concerns social measures which seek to solve social problems through creating different types of enterprises. These may be political authorities, organisations or associations in different areas.

Political decisions open the market to competition in the area of social service, in order to support the creation of new enterprise. The motivation for these decisions is either that companies are more efficient and have a better capacity for rationalisation, and/or that this opens the way for more free and less bureaucratic solutions, with more room for democratic participation and “empowerment”. In the context of these political endeavours, a wide variety of “social enterprises” has begun to blossom.

These are often private companies which see new markets in areas which were previously the domain of the public sector, or public authorities and government offices which have converted to being private companies. Then there are the larger help organisations, which now view commercial solutions as a way to

transform their activities, or smaller client associations which see new possibilities for self-help in social cooperatives or other forms of client-run enterprises. A characteristic of Sweden, with its strong welfare state traditions, is that these are often strongly influenced by government initiatives and the decisions and funding of the authorities, and often work in areas which the public sector traditionally claimed power over.

The social economy, then, can cover a broad spectrum of activities. What these activities have in common is that they prioritise a series of ethical considerations, and that the work is close in nature to the voluntary or non-profit sector. Issues of how economic considerations can be defended from an ethical point of view, and whether these considerations can be compatible with the goals of the work, are often on the agenda.

A common question is whether economic profit as a driving force is compatible with the social goals of the work. This is by no means unexpected, bearing in mind that the tension between social and economic goals has been a prominent one in the major ideological traditions. In the socialist tradition, especially in Marxism, economic profit is seen as the result of exploitation of the workers by their employers. Those who own companies, through their ownership, deprive the workers of some the work which is theirs by right. Profit as a driving force for companies is in clear opposition to the interests of the workers.

But also in economic liberalism, commercial profits stand out as something which, in the ideal case scenario, would not exist. When the market is in equilibrium, all net income is liquidated in salaries and capital costs. Companies break even and do not make a profit. This is a result of price competition. Only when the market is not in equilibrium will some companies make a profit, while others make a loss. This may be a result of a company gaining some sort of monopoly position, or having a technical advantage over competitors. In certain cases, a profit can be the market's reward for hard work and honesty, while in other cases, it is attributed to cheating and dishonesty. Still, the act of striving to maximise profit is still seen as the primary task of a company.

There are good reasons why it is fairly common to experience tension between striving to maximise profit and striving to have ethical goals as a central part of the company's activity. But the question is hardly unique to social enterprise. Few companies should have profit maximisation as their only task (cf. Hodgson 1988). In almost all companies, there is a series of different goals, which sometimes come into conflict with one another. Some of these can be called ethical goals. Weighing up conflicts between different goals should, therefore, be a daily occurrence in almost all companies. But at the same time, it is clear that there is a difference between companies who produce in order to earn money, and companies whose existence is justified by the fact that they fulfil a

social or ethical role. For the latter, meeting ethical goals is what comes first, and their legitimacy depends on it.

When the communists planned to abolish capitalism and build a socialist economy in the 1920s and 30s in the Soviet Union, the question of how to get rid of economic gain as a driving force was obviously an area of debate. There were some who felt it was wrong to reward those who worked more hours than others with a higher salary. It was thought better that they got a moral reward rather than an economic one. Others thought that it would be deeply unfair if workers did not receive remuneration for their labour. The debate between “economic” and “moral” incentives carried on for decades, and both systems were tried out. Systems involving moral incentives (such as honorary appointments, awards and medals) enjoyed moderate success, and were also periodically met with irony from the people. The significance of these systems declined in the latter decades of the Soviet system. Now that the Soviet system is dead and buried, it is instead the capitalist world where discussions of “moral incentives” have begun, but with other words and terms: recognition and appreciation of employees.

In the Soviet Union it was also discussed whether it was right for an activity to strive to make a profit, or whether that would make it into a capitalist company, and as such signify a return to the exploitation of the workers. The point of view which eventually won ground said that it could not be wrong to strive after

producing a surplus in a society which aimed to eradicate poverty. The exploitation inherent in capitalism was, after all, that the ones who appropriated the profits were not the ones who worked. The central issue is who has power over the economic surplus, and how it is used (cf. Dobb 1970 for a discussion).

It is likely that the majority of social enterprises have to reason in this way. If the enterprise does not make a profit, then it has very little room to manoeuvre, and becomes vulnerable to economic pressures. It is almost always important to try to create larger financial margins, in order to be able to start new initiatives, expand the existing work or carry out improvements in areas of weakness. It is hard to imagine social enterprises that don't also strive for good financial management and as a result, also profit. However, the crucial ethical question must be how decisions are made regarding financial issues: who has what power over the income generated?

These scenarios bring up many questions, and there is no simple answer to the question of how power should be structured. In such discussions, however, the issue is often expressed in a way that centres on the question of whether the enterprise should pursue profit or not. We believe that the focus of the

discussion should instead be the power structure of social enterprises, and the question of how decisions are made. Which people are part of that process, and which are allowed to be? This is particularly important in situations where there are competing enterprises. This also applies to companies which have a social purpose. In a national economy where competition so often forces companies to carry out cost-cutting and productivity-increasing measures, a key issue is how to handle these pressures. This applies particularly to social enterprises, where the employees must be properly protected against such measures, if the purpose of the enterprise is to be preserved.

It is therefore important to return to the hopes and expectations associated with the social economy. These expectations are linked to the erosion of the welfare state. Expectations of the social economy (in the sense of social enterprises) are therefore high, and include demands for both economic efficiency and democratic forms of management. But the basis for the social economy must also be the legitimacy and support it can mobilise from civil society.

Chapter 3. From idea to functioning social enterprise

In this section we describe the development of the different social cooperatives from the idea stage to functioning activities. The cooperatives in *Vägen ut!* (EXIT!) were prepared during the first year of the project and gradually got under way during the second and third years. The focus of this section is on tasks, organisation and activities. But we also want to describe group processes in the cooperatives and the development that has taken place. Initially there was only one group of 13 cooperators (members of the cooperatives). Since then, apprentices (employees) and stationed users have joined them; the activity has grown and production has increased. We want to try to answer the following questions:

- How were the ideas of starting social cooperatives developed?
- What happened during the training and preparatory phase?
- What different tasks do the social cooperatives contain and how are they allocated?

3.1 Training and preparations

The first group of cooperators (members of the cooperatives) was formed in the summer of 2002, and the members started their training at *Kooperativ Konsult* – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation in August of that year. The training lasted for about six months and finished in March 2003, thus taking up

a large part of the first project year. The future cooperators studied for half of each week and worked in parallel on preparations, for example, forming a co-operative organisation, adopting statutes and electing a board, looking for suitable premises, purchasing office equipment and applying for grants and funds.

The cooperator training included several stages led by staff from the *Kooperativ Konsult* – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation. The main elements covered social cooperatives and social economy, how to build up a cooperative company, production, marketing and sales, how the work should be organised, how to handle financial matters and accounting, etc. A large section of the training constituted group dynamics to create functional work groups in order to form the cooperatives. Three instructors from the Co-op Development Agency were responsible for the different parts of the training.

Opinions and comments on the cooperator training vary among the participants. Some thought that it was an all-round and very good course that prepared them well for various future tasks. Others said that the course content varied; some parts were useful while other parts contained information they already knew and did not give them a great deal of new knowledge. Prior knowledge and prior training are naturally significant. Some people stated that in particular the parts on financial matters and accounting were complicated and boring. They could not see the value and use of

these sections. Later when production at the social cooperatives got under way, the value of this training was easier to see. They also say that these parts of the course would have been better if held closer to the start of the activity. The modules were held too early on and participants could not fully utilise their content. But they were given a foundation to stand on and were later able to revise what they had learnt and study the subjects in greater depth.

Several participants emphasise that the spin off effects of the training were considerable. They got to know each other in the groups, were able to allocate tasks appropriately and were able to plan future work in more concrete terms. A couple of the groups also went on study trips abroad to social cooperatives that were part of the transnational Equal cooperation. These trips were very inspirational and brought the group even closer together (cf Chapter 7.1).

The preparations for forming and starting the social cooperatives were made in parallel to the cooperator training. The winter of 2002-2003 was a period of intensive preparations, organisation and mobilisation of resources. This work took place at several levels. There was a lot of discussion in each cooperator group, statutes were proposed, an inaugural annual meeting was prepared, a board was elected and the cooperative was

registered with the Tax Board, etc. Resources that the new social enterprise needed in order to get started also had to be mobilised: the team had to find suitable premises, buy requisite office equipment, print brochures and set up a website, etc. Besides the extensive preparations within each cooperative, there were extensive meetings within the *Vägen ut!* project, with its steering group, development partnership and various work groups.¹ The cooperators' schedules were soon full, and preparations continued well into the night.

Three groups emerged during the very first round of training: early on, three men already had plans to set up accommodation, a halfway house, for men who had recently been released from prison. They later formed the social cooperative *Villa Solberg*. The three cooperators also had plans to start a café in central Gothenburg. This was the embryo of the cooperative that later became *Café Solberg*.

Six women were more focused on starting work training for women in difficult situations, and they later adopted the name *Karins Döttrar* (literally: Karin's daughters).² The third social cooperative kept its original name *Ateljé Trädet*, and there the four cooperators intended to continue the handicraft production that they had already established in the market.

There has continually been a lot of contact and exchanges of ideas between the *Solberg* group and *Karins Döttrar*. This was facilitated by the fact that most of the cooperators in both groups were from the *Bryggan* organisation and many already knew each other. Both groups were mainly focused on the production of services, i.e. offering accommodation or work training to recently released people or those in contract care. The group from *Ateljé Trädet* had a different direction; they were clearly focused on handicraft production (silk painting), and were already established producers in the market. The group also had a more heterogeneous composition than the others.

To summarise, we can regard the first year of the project as an important merger and development period, when the cooperator groups were formed and important basic knowledge was acquired, both individually and as a group, for the cooperative work (Olsson 1998). The cooperator training took a full six months, but the cooperators had very varied prior knowledge and professional experience. The training was required to homogenize the knowledge within the work groups and highlight different skills that could later be used in each cooperative. The training also constituted an adaptation process, in which the individuals got to know each other and got used to working together. The sections on group dynamics and interplay as a

group were thus important to the future function of the group. The training was perhaps slightly too compact, and some modules could have been scheduled later, closer to the start of each cooperative. A somewhat shorter course with certain recurring further training courses would perhaps have been more efficient. However, the cooperator training given was both a necessity and an important foundation for the future work.

In the following section we would like to describe the day-to-day work of the cooperatives in more detail, based on visits and accounts given by the cooperators in interviews. We can discern a preparatory and establishment period in each cooperative that has taken a short or long time. After this period the activity has started to function and flourish. The cooperatives often began by making various kinds of products, and did not develop the sale of care services such as accommodation or work training until later.³ During the final year of the project, activities were functioning and had certain clear characteristics that illustrated each cooperative's style of work and that were permeated by the cooperative's ideology. The approach used determines the style of work in each cooperative.

¹ At the same time in the project, work was in progress to draw up a graphical presentation of the organisation and simplify the project with fewer bodies and meetings (cf Chapter 1).

² The name alludes to the legendary founder of the Västugan weaving cottage Karin Sanengen, who has been a secure central figure and a committed source of support to many female substance abusers.

³ Three of the cooperatives follow this pattern, while the fourth, *Villa Solberg* started selling accommodation places as soon as it moved into the building: this cooperative does not sell products on a large scale, although it does grow some plants in greenhouses and gardens.

3.2 The halfway house Villa Solberg

When reviewing the different social cooperatives to describe their establishment and activities, it is natural to start with *Villa Solberg* (the halfway house for recently released men) that got under way first and started in September 2003. Here, the cooperators in the *Solberg* group devoted extensive work to securing a tenancy agreement for the building with all the requisite permits. Then they faced the tough task of renovating the building to make it habitable. Negotiations, permit applications and renovation and equipping the building took about eight months during the first part of 2003. One of the cooperators explains the state of neglect that the house was in when the cooperators became its tenants in the spring of 2003 and all the work that was needed to get it into shape:

“It hadn’t been looked after, and the organisation had not run any activity there for the past six months. We went out to look at it and it was in a total state of neglect. Terrible to neglect a building in that way. The building had been owned by the municipality for 13 years and several activities had been run there, but no one had been interested in it at all. It really is scandalous to neglect a building in that way. Dirty and not maintained. Paint flaking off, rotten windows, rotten walls. It was newly renovated, painted and clean in 1990. And since then nothing whatsoever had been done to the exterior. And the interior looked terrible. In the greenhouse, weeds had grown up to waist level. No one had done anything. And reeds grew on the lawn as well. It

was awful! We have naturally had huge amounts of work to do. We’ve got a lot left too. We have painted two sides of the building; next year we’ll scrape old paint off the other two sides and repaint them. Then we’ve all the out buildings to paint as well. That hasn’t been done in the past 13 years either. We have built an entire outdoor stairway: the old one was totally rotten. You can’t describe the state it was in.”

The halfway house *Villa Solberg* only sells accommodation to people who come from prisons or have nowhere else to live after their release. Buyers consist of prison and probation services in the western region of Sweden, social services in Gothenburg or other municipalities in western Sweden. Several of the cooperators emphasise the significance of the selection: that they receive people who have the ambition of staying drug-free and who want to take part in the work procedures at *Solberg*. It is important that the staff at *Solberg* can choose their residents with care, and not simply accept the people social services send them. Among other things, this is important to maintain control of the activity. One of the cooperators describes the people they select to come to the cooperative:

“When we meet them at the prison they are willing, seem good and interested. But fairly quickly they reveal their true selves. We’ve been taken for a ride occasionally, but that always happens. And as soon as he reveals his true personality and doesn’t follow the rules

we have set up, he has to leave. We also set a level. The idea is that people have to think it through more than once before applying for a place with us. We don’t want people who want to get out of prison quickly and avoid spending the last few months of their sentence inside. We take urine samples and do our usual tests. We want to receive the people who have a serious attitude. We don’t accept people under the age of 35; younger ones aren’t ready yet – they have a couple of sentences left!”

The coordinator also emphasises the importance of creating an effective work organisation, in which the resources of every individual are utilised and complement the other employees. The work organisation must also include a clear system of rules, which must be communicated to surrounding cooperation partners.

3.2.1 Everyday life at Villa Solberg

The cooperators often stress that *Villa Solberg* is a halfway house and not a treatment home. The guests must be willing and able to keep themselves drug-free and take responsibility for their everyday life and accommodation. They must also have a clear ambition and will to change their lives and shed attitudes and actions that are linked to drugs and a criminal lifestyle. The residents themselves choose to come to *Villa Solberg* because they want accommodation, work and, if possible, drug-free friends, which enables them to change their lives. Initially the intention was to receive people who had been drug-free for a while and were undergoing social rehabilitation. In practice

many residents come directly to the halfway house from a prison or detention centre in western Sweden according to Section 34 of the Swedish Act on Correctional Treatment in Institutions. Some have also come via social services in their home municipality. Most residents at *Villa Solberg* are former drug addicts (narcotic drugs), but a few are also alcoholics; many have served long or several prison sentences. Inmates aged 30-50 are prioritised, because many in this group are tired of a life of crime and want to change their situation in life. They are therefore in the process of turning away from drugs and crime.

Being free of drugs is the most important basic rule in the building. To keep the whole building free of drugs, the staff take regular drugs tests together with the residents. Anyone who takes drugs in *Villa Solberg* or who comes back from leave under the influence of drugs is discharged from the building or has to go back to prison – if he was staying at the halfway house in accordance with Section 34 of the Swedish Act on Correctional Treatment in Institutions. Others are discharged to some kind of temporary housing. The cooperators say that being drug-free is a central issue. The residents must be able to count on the building being drug-free so that they can work and change their life patterns. Nor can other rules and routines be followed in everyday life if one or more of the residents are under the influence of drugs. It would create anxiety and conflicts between residents and would lead to the halfway house rapidly gaining a

bad reputation. Staying entirely drug-free is central to enable the creation of unity in the group and a tolerable everyday environment (Hedin 2003).

Another important rule at *Villa Solberg* is that the residents must be active and participate in work or studies, house meetings, physical exercise and other activities that are organised by the residents and staff. Participation in NA meetings is compulsory, as is the physical exercise a couple of times a week. Residents are not allowed to opt out of the activities or lead a more passive existence in the house. Structure in everyday life is important, and the cooperators require various sorts of active work from the residents. Residents must also help to take care of the building: clean, perhaps do repair work and paint as well as tending to the greenhouses and gardens. Some residents have jobs or study in Gothenburg and commute daily to work or college. Others are in the City Property Department's OSA group that works nearby.⁴

A cooperator describes the daily life of those who work in the OSA group: "They are to be ready and have changed into their work clothes by 8am. There is a break during the morning and lunch is 12.30–1.30pm. There is an afternoon break and work ends at 4pm. If you can't manage a full day, you can do half an OSA placement. You can't live at *Villa Solberg* and play TV games all

day. We require that residents have a job or studies. We don't accept anyone who doesn't have anything; it doesn't work out – the group doesn't work. They are responsible for the building, they clean their rooms and the house. They have to help with the cooking and that type of thing too – it's not a hotel! If they think that, they have to leave. How can you stand on your own two feet if you don't learn how? We discuss these issues at the house meetings each week: things that are good and things that are not. No, the key is for them to learn to take responsibility."

An apprentice describes how the work is central during time spent at the halfway house, both as a foundational structure in daily life and as the starting point for conversations and a sense of community. Working together shapes daily life and enables people to get to know each other well and talk about important things. The work is therefore an important means of achieving change and steers the residents in the right direction (cf Meeuwisse 2001). The apprentice says:

"When I start working, I forget that I'm a member of staff and that the other guy is an inmate. We talk about life, and then end up discussing issues that are a bit sensitive and that you might not otherwise talk about if you sat opposite each other at a table. This enables you to help these guys change. There are lots of ways."

A third important element in everyday life is that the residents must be open to change and be able to alter attitudes and behaviours that are linked to substance abuse and a criminal lifestyle. Based on their own experiences they clearly recognise the signs when a resident is heading towards a relapse into substance abuse or has reverted to his former life patterns. There are often clear indications, for example that the person tries to avoid mutual activities, tries to find reasons for travelling into central Gothenburg or contacts his friends in drug user circles. But a relapse into substance abuse is not the only thing that creates critical situations in everyday life. Unwillingness to change and shed the attitudes and behaviours of life as a substance abuser is also problematic.

Another of the apprentices describes this:

"*Villa Solberg* is an excellent idea, also because the drug-free rule is so strict. Attitude too: if you don't change your attitude you get discharged for that as well. That happened to a guy last spring. He didn't want to take part and just complained and complained, never tried a new way of thinking. And he wasn't willing to change and try something new at that point. And that spread bad 'vibes' in the house."

People who display other forms of "prison mentality" are also reprimanded by the staff. A female apprentice worked in the house for a while and prepared lunches for the residents. She was subjected to offensive comments by certain residents, but the cooperators stepped

in and initiated discussions with the residents about what the comments represented. Degrading attitudes to women were not tolerated in the group.

The cooperators emphasise the importance of the residents working on their own attitudes during their stay to try to get away from prison mentality and attitudes of substance abusers. Attending AA or NA meetings a couple of times a week is compulsory during residents' stay at *Villa Solberg*. You must be ready to scrutinise yourself and work on your inner feelings to achieve change. One of the apprentices describes what he considers is important in the work with residents:

"The clients who come here are very challenging. They're not guys who are ready, who have undergone treatment. Instead they come straight from prison with long prison sentences and they need a huge amount of care. And I look at many of them and see how they're starting to get their life back together. How they get that glow, and that's what makes it fun to work on this. Of course there are many who don't get better, who end up in substance abuse. But for me, those people who want to grow up, and when these changes happen – that's what gives me energy. That's what I live on!"

Being drug-free, work and other daily activities as well as conversations and working on your own feelings, thoughts and actions are central elements in everyday life at *Villa Solberg*. There is more to living at the halfway house than coming

⁴ OSA stands for offentligt skyddat arbete (public protected work) and is a form of work that is frequently offered to people who have a socio-medical work disability, see Lindqvist & Hetzler 2004.

from prison and having somewhere to go: residents must be drug-free, have work discipline, take part in the house's residential group and work on changing themselves during their stay.

3.2.2 Knowledge and approach

Both cooperators and apprentices emphasise the significance of their own experience to the work of the cooperative. Most staff members are former substance abusers and lived the life of substance abusers for many years. They have experience of various treatments and the fact that they eventually succeeded in giving up their substance abuse and building up a new life pattern. One of the cooperators says that this knowledge base is necessary in their work. It is also unique knowledge that is rarely useful in other contexts.

"Own experience" consists of several different elements: partly general knowledge of the living conditions of substance abusers and criminals, partly the ability to interpret various critical situations in which they understand how the residents feel, think and react based on their specific experience. They also understand that the substance abusers above all need clarity and structure to cope with the inner chaos that they often feel. One of the residents at *Solberg* explains why he thinks that own experience is such important knowledge at the halfway house:

"The important thing is that they're bloody clear about the drugs issue. Everything is a drug, even if it's subutex, which is com-

monly used in different places. They've come so far that they can be clear in what they say. They can say, 'you've got to pack your things and leave, because you've come home high!' All of that. They're clear, they know what it's all about. They have long experience of being dependent on a drug or crime in different ways. That's why you can talk to them. They understand what you're talking about right away."

But "own experience" also includes commitment and a type of solidarity with the "guys" in the group of residents. You are not superior to the users in the target group, whose resources and talents must get the chance to develop. One of the cooperators says:

"We're like role models too, of course. But in this, the key is not to be too full of your own importance. OK, maybe we do mean a lot in a way, otherwise the cooperative wouldn't have started. But on another level we're not actually worth more than they are. We've just got a bit further. That's what we try to point out: you can, you will get this far too in a year or so. It's a matter of time."

The coordinator describes the supervisor of *Villa Solberg*. She says he has a very good ability to understand and meet "the guys". *"The secret is that he likes the guys and cares about them, and they see that clearly. And he's got a great sense of humour."*

The management of the cooperative also includes people who do not have experience of substance abuse but have other skills that the cooperative needs. An apprentice with previous experience of drugs clearly sees that the group needs heterogeneity and many different skills:

"I know, because I have undergone treatments, so I can imagine it's about trust. That you trust a person more who has been in the same situation as you than someone who has only read about what it's like in a book. It's important to have experienced these things yourself. However I think it's important that an organisation includes people who have not taken drugs. It's important to have both. It's not good to have only substance abusers in an enterprise. It's good to have Pernilla, Leif and others who haven't taken drugs. They have different ideas. They have completely different experience to us. That shouldn't be rejected. We've experience of the practical side and they have other angles which are extremely good. A combination is extremely good."

At *Villa Solberg* every staff member is responsible for being the contact person of one of the residents. The task of being a contact has not been allocated to just a couple of people like in the *Karins Döttrar* organisation, and instead most people on the staff team have this task. Being the contact of a resident is an important and delicate task that involves getting to know the resident well and trying to support him as much as possible during his stay. In other respects,

the staff try not to steer and control the residents too much. It is better that the residents are more "self-propelling", are able to develop their interests and participate in different activities. Joint decisions are made at weekly house meetings about various leisure activities and visits in Gothenburg.

One of the cooperators describes the empowerment-based approach that permeates the residence:

"I think it's extremely important that you propel yourself towards your goal using your own power. It's about self-confidence and that you feel you are good enough. It's worth a lot more if you move towards your goals using your own power; it's worth something and you take better care of it. You look after it more. Then you prove to yourself and others that you are someone!"

3.2.3 Concluding reflections

The activity at *Villa Solberg* has certain characteristic features:

- *Totally drug-free environment* – free of all types of alcohol, narcotics and addictive medication.
- *Active participation in work, studies or work training*. The work is of central value in the ideology and residents cannot opt out of it. Each person must contribute to the cooperative's work according to their abilities. The residents should preferably work full time, but part-time work is also accepted for residents with health problems.

- *Active participation in AA or NA meetings* in residents' free time, and that residents work on their own issues and personal problems during their stay at the halfway house. Here the focus is above all on problems resulting from substance abuse, such as problematic family relationships, destructive attitudes and debts.

- *Propensity to change* must be shown, i.e. that residents listen to the staff who have own experiences of substance abuse and crime and see them as role models for how to break with the past and build up a new life. Motivation and ambition to live a normal life must be clear to those around them.

- *Participation in the activities* that are run at *Villa Solberg* – everything from repair work to the house, growing produce in the greenhouses, cleaning and cooking to other activities like physical exercise. This also involves residents being prepared to shed old attitudes from their substance abuser lifestyle and contributing in a positive way to the living environment at the halfway house.

The cooperators often stress that *Villa Solberg* is not a treatment home. By this they mean that they do not work systematically on residents' psychological problems that may be at the root of their crime and substance abuse. However, they work a great deal with the problems of substance abuse and the lifestyle that is connected with it. In this way *Villa Solberg* is similar to other residential centres and institutions that

are linked to AA/NA organisations. They also strongly emphasise the value of work and opportunities of building up self-confidence and identity through work. There are therefore two central pillars that support the activities: being totally drug-free, and work. However we look at it, *Villa Solberg* is similar to other cooperatives, institutions and organisations that have a social-educational basis, such as the *Hassela* movement, the *Tvind* schools in Denmark or the *San Patrignano* social cooperative in Italy.

3.3. Café Solberg

Another social cooperative has developed from the *Solberg* cooperative and runs a café in central Gothenburg, *Café Solberg*. One of the cooperators at *Villa Solberg* had plans early on of starting an art café in Gothenburg, in which not yet established artists could exhibit their work and visitors could buy coffee and sandwiches at reasonable prices. He therefore rented former business premises himself in a small industrial area in central Gothenburg. There was a market for sale of sandwiches at lunchtime and catering for companies and offices in the area. He gained the support of the other *Solberg* cooperators for these plans, but while establishing *Villa Solberg* there was no time or energy left to start yet another cooperative. The café plans were put on hold for a while.

It was not until late winter 2004 that the plans were revived in the *Solberg* group. By that time people had arrived at *Villa Solberg* who were interested in working in a café. These consisted of one apprentice and one user at *Villa Solberg* who both had professional experience from the café and restaurant industry. Three people from *Solberg* – two cooperators and one resident – started renovating the premises and planning a café during the spring of 2004.⁵ The premises were run down and a lot of work was required to renovate them. In addition, chilled display units, a coffee machine, cooker and other equipment had to be purchased, and were financed through an organisation grant from Lundby district council.

After intensive renovation work during the spring of 2004, planning and direct preparations for opening the café were made during late summer. A slightly unusual product range was planned, including vegetarian sandwiches, fruit drinks, Italian coffee and relatively healthy cakes. (Gothenburg has a great many cafés and you need to find your own niche to survive in the extremely tough competition.) The café was inaugurated on 1 October 2004, and about 100 guests from public sector organisations and NGOs in the development partnership came with presents of flowers and sampled the sandwiches and coffee.

After the inauguration, work started that autumn to produce advertising leaflets for distribution to companies and offices in the area. The café did not have regular opening hours (9am-3pm) or provide catering for meetings and other events until the winter of 2005. The key is to make good, quality products, while ensuring that the cost of ingredients is not too high in relation to the price of the products.

3.3.1 Major competition in the industry

At present (autumn 2005) two women work in the café, with a cooperator from *Villa Solberg* acting as manager. He also distributes products in the catering side of the business and is responsible for sales. Office work, including invoicing and accounting, is taken care of by the *Vägen ut!* project's office. The long-term plan is that the café will also be able to employ two people who do work training in the café – either people continuing work training from the *Karins Döttrar* organisation, or people recently released from prison. However, people in work training need a contact who guides and supports them in their work. At present none of the cooperators or apprentices can be spared from their production duties for this task. The sale of work training places will therefore have to wait until the café's establishment stage is complete and a functioning activity has been established.

⁵ This group is the only mixed-gender group of the four cooperatives: three women and two men have periodically worked in the cooperative.

The system of rules and basic ideology of *Villa Solberg* also apply at *Café Solberg*: no drugs whatsoever, active work on own sobriety and personal lifestyle (according to AA/NA patterns) and hard work within the framework of the co-operative, in which knowledge building, professional experience and learning are important elements. As the activity is so new and is in a start-up phase it is very easily affected by the well-being of the participants and the way they work. The cooperative does not dare take any risks. An apprentice who previously ran a café in another city describes how the business is subject to tough competition and is very sensitive to differences in quality. The industry requires a great deal of work and top-level performance to generate a profit.

The café activity is still developing after its first ten months. The café needs to become known in the area and gain a regular clientele of visitors and lunch guests. The catering business, providing long open sandwiches and savoury gateaux to offices and companies, is important to increase revenue and generate profit in the activity. The coordinator of the project also emphasises that the café activity is in a start-up phase. The participants are learning by trial and error and do not really know how well it will work in the future. It is still too early to determine whether the activity will manage in the tough café market with major competition from other similar companies. *Café Solberg* is the only mixed-gender cooperative of the four *Vägen ut!* cooperatives. A male coopera-

tor is the supervisor and there are two to three apprentices; most of the women work in the activity. But there has been friction in the relationships and some conflicts have developed. The chemistry is not working between the participants, and there are conflicts and fuss about trifling matters. One of the apprentices explains:

“There’s something about Lasse; we don’t get on. And when I say to him, ‘I don’t understand what the problem is between us’, that sets him off, and he is really aggressive towards me. I’m given the cold shoulder, and I’ve told him that. When I noticed this, I backed off. It ended up as an argument about paint-brushes when we went shopping. He said, ‘What are you going to use them for?’ I backed off and told the others that he’ll have to steer this himself from now on and tell me when he needs my help. There’s no reason to subject myself to that treatment.”

There seems to be a lack of clarity in terms of responsibility and distribution of tasks between the cooperator and the apprentices. As we have mentioned, the café is in a start-up and establishment phase, in which every participant must be able to work alone and independently and be inventive. There are no functioning procedures or organisational contexts to fall back on. Personal experiences from other workplaces may also affect the different players’ perceptions of their current work situation.

The *Café Solberg* cooperative has concrete plans to move the activity from its current premises in a central industrial area to a residential area in the west of the city. The idea is to run the café together with a housing association and use premises in the area. This would also involve cooperation with the local school and leisure time centre. The supervisor and employed apprentices would enter a new organisational context and the café would gain other groups of customers; from school children eating breakfast, to parents, teachers and association members. This relocation is planned to take place in the late autumn of 2005.

3.3.2 Concluding reflections

The *Café Solberg* example shows that social cooperatives running production activities require several years of preparation and development. It takes about a year to establish a functioning work organisation, in which all the different tasks are distributed and done efficiently using the different skills of each individual participant. Good professional knowledge of the composition and development of the industry is also required in order to focus on the right things and hold your own in a specific product market. You need capital for equipment and establishment and grants to pay the rent and salaries during the relatively long establishment phase. Specialist knowledge of financial management and accounting, etc is also necessary.

We will discuss gender relations in a later section (see 5.3), but the events at *Café Solberg* clearly illustrate that the relations between men and women in the cooperatives are by no means simple. People’s previous experiences from their time as substance abusers probably also play a part, as well as the current different models for gender relations. There is also a risk of repeating conflicts and gender patterns from other parts of working life (Wahl et al 2001).

3.4 The handicrafts cooperative Karins Döttrar

A relatively long start-up period seems to be necessary to get an activity up and running at social cooperatives. This is also evident in the experiences of the third cooperative *Karins Döttrar*⁶ that got under way in the late winter/early spring of 2003. It was founded by six female cooperators to run handicraft production and offer work training to women with past problems of substance abuse.⁷ The cooperative currently produces both goods and services, but the services are the most financially profitable activity (cf Chapter 4). The work training places are sold to social services in the municipality and prison and probation services, which pay a fee per day for women who undertake work training in the cooperative. These women usually have experience of substance abuse and/or crime and have had long periods of unemployment. The work training usually spans six to twelve months, and the women

⁶ The name alludes to Karin Sanengen, the legendary founder of the Vävstugan organisation (cf Chapter 1)

⁷ There are currently six cooperators. One woman was first an apprentice and became a cooperator in 2004. Another woman has temporarily left the cooperative due to health reasons.

use this time as preparation for looking for a job in the labour market or for further studies.

Three periods of development can be discerned in the social cooperative:

- *Separation from the drop-in activity, Vävstugan*, organisation and preparations. Creative activities and motivation work at detention centres and prisons also took place during the first few months (autumn 2002 to spring 2003).
- *Start selling services (work training)*, information work and PR as well as a lot of marketing during the second year (autumn 2003 to spring 2004).
- *Functioning activity: handicraft production and work training* for five women as well as *work to create a halfway house for women* (during the third year, autumn 2004 to spring 2005).

Compared to *Villa Solberg* it has therefore taken somewhat longer for the cooperative to become fully operational and offer production of both goods and services. We think that this is due to organisational and psychological reasons. The female cooperators devoted a lot of time and care to forming a functional work organisation. They have also had to tackle several organisational problems. *Karins Döttrar* underwent a long and trying separation process from the drop-in activity *Vävstugan* during the spring and autumn of 2002 which was a test of patience.

3.4.1 Long takeoff run

In the newly formed cooperative there were plans to acquire own and more suitable premises for the activity. But buying premises is a long drawn-out process that could have delayed the start of the activity considerably. The cooperative decided to stay and rent a couple of rooms in the basement of *Vävstugan*, i.e. continue to share the premises. This decision solved the cooperative's problem of premises in the short term, but led to organisational consequences in the future.

In conjunction with the replacement of the supervisor at *Vävstugan*, the activity was put on hold for a time during the spring of 2003; the premises were renovated by the cooperators and the staff at *Vävstugan*. When the activity re-opened in the summer of the same year, more structure and a clear focus were introduced into the drop-in activity at *Vävstugan* with a clear drug-free policy, work schedules and fixed times, as well as the opportunity to socialise at mealtimes.

Some of the cooperators ran creative activities and "motivation work" during the first year at the Sagsjön treatment and correction centre for women about 20 km from Gothenburg. They gained good contact with the female inmates and realised that the activity met a major need. Later the activity was also expanded to include those in detention at the police station. Now (in the spring of 2005) creative work is still ongoing for women at the detention centre and is

led by a cooperator from *Karins Döttrar*. Prison inmates often have a wide range of social and psychological problems that burden them during their time in prison (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service 1998). They have often had several traumatic experiences and have lost important relationships and contact with close family and friends, for example through divorce or their children being put into care (Svebo Lindgren 1999). The creative activity offers the women opportunities to deal with their experiences and provides relief from daily prison life. The activity can generate strength and energy for rehabilitation. A cooperator who served quite a long prison sentence explains:

"I painted every day for so many years; it was my lifeline in jail. I call the house over there (she points to it) my dolls' house; I made it out of paper. My pristine home! I first made it in custody and then later when I did time at Hinseberg. I've had a home, but it all disappeared. I didn't understand when I made it that it was so symbolic, that it was my home! Now I'm living in a real home again – maybe I don't need to build my miniature homes. I don't need to now! When I was in prison I needed to find strength from the happy parts of my life that have represented security and things like that. Because I didn't paint any dark pictures during that time, there were a lot of colours and so on..."

Another cooperator, who has led the creative activity at Sagsjön, describes the situation of female inmates: "What most of them want more than anything is to change their lives. And they are so worried about their children and others who are on the outside. For the women it's twice as hard as for the men, because the women don't usually get any visitors either. The men usually have a woman who visits. But the female inmates have no one to bake cakes for them and come to visit. And no one who brings the women's children. They often have no close family, so it's really hard for them."

Despite difficulties concerning financing, the cooperators at *Karins Döttrar* have continued to run the creative activity and motivation circles, which have become an important part of their sale of services within the prison and probation service. They say that these circles meet a major need among many inmates that prison and probation services often overlook. The creative activity also enables contact with inmates to be established at an early stage, and that a seed is sown that can germinate later: here there are opportunities for work training and rehabilitation, to get away from life as a substance abuser.

During late winter and early spring of 2003 the cooperators at *Karins Döttrar* worked a great deal on their own organisation, role allocation among the cooperators and utilisation of all the resources and abilities of the group. In May the cooperators, supervisor and

coordinator went on a trip to Rome to visit Italian social cooperatives and learn from their experiences. The trip to Rome brought the group even closer together and was a memorable experience for all involved (cf section 7.1).

3.4.2 Every individual in a work organisation is important

In the spring of 2003 a functional work organisation was also drawn up, in which the resources and abilities of each group member were used. The key was to allocate the right task to the right woman. The six cooperators have a very heterogeneous background: Four have had substance abuse problems, three have served prison sentences, two have seen their children taken into care and placed in foster homes, and two have had close family members with substance abuse problems. But five of the women also have different professional qualifications and sound professional experience from healthcare work, teaching adults, HR administration and artistic work. The group therefore includes considerable skills from different fields of work and professional areas. This knowledge and these skills have been very useful in the development of the different roles in the cooperative.

But the women have also been able to discuss individual differences and personal weaknesses in the group. They are not afraid to object, and communication is direct. One of the cooperators says:

“The fact that communication has been direct has been a defining characteristic of this group the whole time. So direct that we’ve been totally dumbstruck on hearing some things. But somehow it’s: just say it, and then...then people are humble too. Maybe I didn’t do it particularly well, or this went wrong. What can we do better? And that’s how we manage to put a solution together. I’d like to say that we’re very skilled in a way. We’ve got the flexibility to be open to new solutions. We want to be serious and we are professional.”

The cooperator describes a learning process that not only includes theoretical knowledge and practical skills but also a great deal of people’s personalities. Sales of work training services were quite slow during the autumn of 2003. The local cooperation with *Vävstugan* seemed to have an impact on the sale of services at *Karins Döttrar*. A major conference was organised in October 2003 together with the *Vägen ut!* project and the Kvinnoforum Women’s Forum to inform of the target group’s situation and the *Vägen ut!* project as well as market the social cooperatives, and especially the services of *Karins Döttrar*.

The conference was called *Tusensystrar* (literally: a thousand sisters) and was attended by about 200 delegates from various public sector organisations in west Sweden, mainly from social services and the prison and probation services.⁸

The cooperators from *Karins Döttrar* described the vulnerable situation of women during their time as substance abusers, in prisons and in the culture of substance abuse. They also presented the cooperative’s range of services. Researchers from *Kvinnoforum* reported on studies of the situation of female substance abusers after time spent in treatment homes or prisons. The presentations generated a great deal of interest and response from the audience; later the cooperative received a series of study visits from the audience’s organisations.

After the conference the cooperators contacted social services in Gothenburg and marketed the cooperative’s services more systematically. Two cooperators were responsible for this marketing activity. The first woman to do work training at *Karins Döttrar* started in the autumn of 2003. During the winter another woman was given a work training placement, but the activity didn’t make further progress. It was not until late summer in 2004 that the situation changed and a group of five women were given placements and started work training at virtually the same time.

3.4.3 Structure and social support

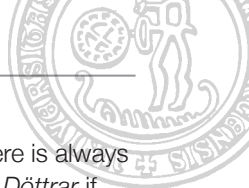
The working week for women undergoing work training at *Karins Döttrar* is structured so that each individual has a personal work schedule that can be altered if necessary. It is designed to reflect the woman’s work capacity,

goals of the placement and her private situation in life. Several of the women (all aged between 30 and 40) have school children aged between seven and nine and want to adapt their work training to their children’s school hours. A common working day is therefore 9am to 4pm every day. Some of the women also take part in another activity in parallel, such as physiotherapy or community service. The women learn how to weave, cook – to prepare the lunches they eat together – or work on drawing, painting and handicrafts depending on their own individual interests. Some items on the agenda and group meetings during the week are compulsory, such as cleaning the premises on Mondays, planning meetings on Wednesdays and joint study visits or excursions on Fridays. One of the women on a work training placement says:

“Yes, on Mondays we do the cleaning; we divide it up into different areas. Then we do our ongoing activities: we weave, or are in the workshop. Or prepare food if it’s our turn that day. Weaving is great fun. People like different things here. Some are really keen on weaving while others prefer to be in the workshop. On Fridays we usually go on a trip. We’ve been to gather driftwood and shells, Or have been to the swimming pool. We usually discuss what we’re going to do on Fridays during our midweek meeting.”

⁸ The Tusensystrar conference – about women’s way out of substance abuse – was held on 20 October 2003.

⁹ Two of the cooperators act as contacts for the five women who are on work training placements.



Each woman has her own contact who is one of the cooperators and with whom she plans her work training. The contact provides help and support and follows up the woman's progress.⁹ The contact is also present at meetings with the woman's social welfare officer or other officials from the social insurance office or the prison and probation service. The main task is to act as a supervisor and source of support during the woman's term of work training. The contact person provides information, advice and encouragement and tries to suggest solutions when problems arise.

The women have a lot of baggage from their earlier period of life as substance abusers and other traumatic experiences that resurface in their minds from time to time. All the women on work training placements have had substance abuse problems with either narcotic drugs or alcohol, a couple have also spent time in prison or at treatment centres. We asked one of the women whether you can compare the cooperators with staff at a prison, and she answered:

"Compare them to staff at the prison? My God! It's...you can't compare them. It's not the same thing. They're warders, more or less prison guards, aren't they? It's a storage facility. They're not there to make sure that you manage or to support you. It's more like...they harass you, so that you feel like you're in prison. They're not people who... that's what they're there for. It's really...no, you can't compare them!"

The women also say that there is always someone to talk to at *Karins Döttrar* if you're feeling low and need to get a problem off your chest or need advice. Nearly all the cooperators have own experiences of substance abuse or mental health problems and know what it feels like. They are therefore always ready to listen and provide support. As well as talks with their contacts, all the women take part in AA or NA meetings depending on their type of former substance abuse. This means attending meetings one or more times a week. Like *Villa Solberg*, the *Karins Döttrar* organisation thinks that participation in AA or NA meetings is important: participants address old attitudes and change their personal lifestyle in the long run.

We also asked the women what they had learnt during their placement time, and vast majority state various practical skills, such as weaving, drawing or cooking. Some also state skills that are related to structure and work discipline, e.g. getting up on time in the morning or keeping to work hours. Others state skills linked to social group relations, such as cooperating in a group or listening to other people. But the women also state changes that concern addressing painful experiences and personal development. For example, one of the women says that she has learnt to accept help and listen to others, which she could not do previously.

"I have learnt to accept help; I couldn't do that in the past. That involves quite a lot, simply learning to accept help. It encompasses an awful lot of things. That you're not superman, and that you're vulnerable. You're a human being. And you can ask for help. People are really kind and are very keen to support you. And that's a major experience. There's a lot that is awakened inside you ... that you haven't accepted it in the past, because you had to be this tough type of person. So that means a lot in itself."

The women's stories reveal that the lessons learnt are on several levels. They involve learning to work in a workplace after a long period of unemployment, being patient, undertaking monotonous or unexciting tasks (such as cleaning) and working effectively and getting on well in a work group. But work training also includes the development of practical skills such as learning to weave, draw and do handicrafts. Above all, work training includes addressing and changing previous experiences and attitudes. The key is for the participants to analyse the baggage they bring with them from their time as substance abusers and to work on solving their specific hardships bit by bit.

From their perspective, the contacts, cooperators, at *Karins Döttrar* explain the guidance and support that they give to the women: Their guiding function includes several factors:

- Creating structure in everyday life and creating a stable work situation as a foundation for learning and tackling approaches/behaviour
- Teaching practical skills that the women may find useful in various work situations
- identifying the specific difficulties that their former lifestyle has caused and finding different ways of controlling and dealing with them
- Listening, supporting and advising the women when they deal with difficulties that are linked to their experiences and former lifestyle
- Listening and supporting the women in their private and personal problems that may affect their situation in life

One of the contacts also thinks that there are a lot of fluctuations in the women's motivation and work capacity. They must be patient and support the women on this "rollercoaster". To manage this multifaceted and relatively complicated role of supervisor (i.e. providing guidance), the staff need own guidance on the work process and their own work methods.

3.4.4 Concluding reflections

The activity at *Karins Döttrar* is permeated by a similar ideology to that of *Villa Solberg*: a strict drug-free policy, the central value of work, participation in all activities and the women addressing their own problems and changing by taking part in AA/NA groups – these are all important components of the women's rehabilitation. However, *Karins Döttrar* differs from *Villa Solberg* in certain respects and has more specific distinctive features:





– One of these features is *the strong emphasis on women's problems in life and roles*, e.g. motherhood as a central role for women. There are relatively regular discussions on how repression of women is structured in society and how it manifests itself to women as they turn away from drugs. Differences in attitudes and self-confidence between women and men are often discussed, as is the way in which women are treated by welfare organisations such as social services or the social insurance office. Cooperators are therefore very aware of the oppression that affects women in general and female substance abusers in particular, and that we must try to tackle this oppression and teach women how to deal with it. The cooperators are therefore interested in learning more about empowerment at individual and group level in order to use this method in their work with the women on work training placements.

– Another distinctive feature is that the female cooperators are keen to ensure *that the women address their issues thoroughly to achieve profound changes*. They work on mutual support and self-help within the group, but this also involves confrontations and calling things into question when necessary. *Karins Döttrar* encourages participants to learn through trial and error, practise

and gradually develop their abilities, and improve in various areas.

– A third distinctive characteristic is linked to *sharing the premises with Vävstugan and organisational problems* that they have constantly had to tackle. The cooperators have been forced to set limits on the other activity at *Vävstugan* and market their own activity. This initially delayed the work on marketing *Karins Döttrar's* services, but also led to development of the latter's own profile. The team was forced to work on various plans and visions for the future at the same time as building up the cooperative.¹⁰

– A fourth characteristic, which is linked to the quality requirement, is *the endeavour to achieve a high level of professionalism* in the work, i.e. basing your work on theoretical knowledge and own experiences, and using proper work methods and approaches in your work with users and in making art and craft products. Together, the cooperators have several different professional qualifications and request new knowledge in a series of areas. They realise that own experiences do not suffice to guide people who have major problems of their own. They also need theoretical knowledge, useful methods and guidance in their work. *Karins Döttrar* is therefore in a professionalisation process, in which improvements are gradually being made.

¹⁰ In June 2005, the *Karins Döttrar* cooperative moved to new, larger premises in central Gothenburg. There the cooperative has space for weaving, other handicrafts, offices and rooms for small meetings. *Karins Döttrar* has also received a basic grant from the ESF Council in western Sweden to start developing plans for a halfway house for homeless women in another part of the city.

¹¹ The description applies to the early part of summer 2005.

3.5 Silk painting at Ateljé Trädet

The *Ateljé Trädet* studio is a social cooperative within the *Vägen ut!* project that has developed from a former women's organisation, HWH – the Half Way House (see Chapter 1). *Ateljé Trädet* had a long takeoff run before the cooperative was fully established and its activity could be further developed. Now the studio has established handicraft activities and produces tapestries, paintings, scarves and other products.¹¹ The cooperators also give day courses and run study circles for people who want to learn how to paint on silk.

The history of *Ateljé Trädet* is interesting and shows that several factors can affect the formation of a cooperative and lead to a long start-up phase. For a long time the women in the organisation had divided views on the value of forming a social cooperative and joining *Vägen ut!* The organisation's board initially opposed the plans to form a cooperative. But after a few months an inaugural meeting was held in the cooperative organisation, a board was elected, statutes were drawn up and requisite permits were obtained. Another factor that further delayed that start of the cooperative was that the organisation's tenancy agreement was terminated in July 2003 and the cooperative was forced to find other suitable premises for its activities. All equipment and materials had to be put into storage, and the activity was mothballed throughout the autumn of 2003 while the cooperators looked for premises all around Gothenburg.

In December of that year the team found suitable office premises in a rental property in a residential area at Norra Älvstranden. The premises were very suited to handicraft production, meetings and study circles, and to selling work and products to passers-by. The cooperators spent the winter of 2004 painting, decorating and equipping the new premises, which were inaugurated at the end of March 2004. They and other members of *Ateljé Trädet* spent the rest of the spring and the summer advertising and marketing the studio's activities. They principally aimed their work at local residents, various cooperation partners in *Vägen ut!* and organisations in the former organisational network.

3.5.1 Handicrafts and courses

After the cooperative was inaugurated, various organisations came on study visits and were given a presentation of *Ateljé Trädet's* products and activities. These included a couple of international study visits in May 2004 within the *Le Mats* transnational network. The cooperators gave visitors an introduction to silk painting technique, helped them make their own works of art (such as painting a silk scarf or tie) and treated them to lunch. This took place during the spring and summer of 2004. The cooperative's activity was not fully operational with production of various painted silk products and courses in silk painting until the autumn of the same year.



One problem that *Ateljé Trädet* faced was that the cooperative only had one supervisor and three cooperators working on the activity during the spring of 2004. The cooperative therefore had to recruit new apprentices and volunteers to the activity, train them and make them familiar with the work. The cooperative was firmly against the idea of selling services (work training or rehabilitation) in a healthcare market. The skills in the cooperative were related to silk painting and handicraft production. In these areas they already had a high level of expertise as well as a good reputation and legitimacy in the industry. Neither cooperators nor project leaders felt ready to receive former substance abusers or female criminals and supervise them in work training. This required a different kind of specialist knowledge.

The *Ateljé Trädet* cooperative differs from other cooperatives in *Vägen ut!* in certain respects. Several participants say that they do not belong to the target group of the *Vägen ut!* project and do not want to or cannot feign any feeling of belonging. They do not have experience of substance abuse or crime and have instead joined *Ateljé Trädet* for other reasons, e.g. in conjunction with sick leave. One of the cooperators describes her introduction to the activity:

“I went there a few days later. And was well looked after. It really was a new world. I thought that I could come and meet women of my own age, but I’d

never be able to paint. Then Eva who was our supervisor said, ‘Why don’t you paint today?’ I replied that I didn’t dare. ‘Yes, just...everyone can paint’ she said. So she fixed a scarf to a frame. And I felt such responsibility, because the silk is expensive. I thought, ‘Imagine if it goes wrong!’ But then I painted and it actually looked good. And I was incredibly happy, because I had made a scarf. It was sold quite soon afterwards too. And that was great too, of course. So, that’s how I got started!”

The *Vägen ut!* project has also displayed reservation in its contacts with *Ateljé Trädet*. This is illustrated, for example, in the financial contribution that *Vägen ut!* has made: of the four project leader positions within *Vägen ut!* three have been allocated to *Villa Solberg* and *Café Solberg* and one to *Karins Dötrar*. *Ateljé Trädet* has only been allocated funds that correspond to a third of a project leader’s position. Neither of the two supervisors works full time. The cooperative therefore has quite weak resources for work management and supervision. If the cooperative were to start selling care services the supervisory function would have to be strengthened.

During the past year of activity, work at *Ateljé Trädet* has developed significantly. Additional cooperators have joined the cooperative, and three new co-workers have been recruited who regularly take part in the activity. The enterprise now encompasses five cooperators and

three to four volunteers.¹² The creation of painted silk products and other handicraft products still forms the basis of the activity. The range has been broadened to include a couple of new products, and the organisation has found good marketing and sales channels. The courses in silk painting for local residents and others who are interested have proved popular. The drop-in evenings and one-day courses are the most popular, in which participants learn basic silk painting techniques. They can then try their hand at painting on silk and perhaps make a scarf or other painted product.

The business activity, i.e. using part of the premises as a shop and selling works of art directly over the counter, has increased somewhat. *Ateljé Trädet* has also received orders for larger projects such as tapestries for a couple of museums and decorations for meeting halls, exhibitions or theatre productions. The organisation continues to use its existing channels for marketing and sale of its products. The income from handicrafts is increasing, and *Ateljé Trädet*’s finances have improved during the past year. The activity is however still not self-sufficient. The organisation receives financial assistance for rent of the premises and the salaries of two supervisors (who work part-time) from Lundby district council. Without this assistance, the activity would not be able to continue. The revenue from products sold covers the purchase of materials and paint, etc. There is also some surplus, which is normally used to pay for a joint study trip each summer to encourage participants and enable

them to acquire new knowledge. Cooperators and participants work for free when making products. If the cooperators claimed salary for their work, the enterprise would have to find completely different types of production to finance the activity.

The *Vägen ut!* project will end after the first six months of 2005. But the cooperators at *Ateljé Trädet* are determined to continue along the same track and further develop their activity. They have benefited from the cooperation in *Vägen ut!* and its large contact network, for example in the development partnership and in the transnational work. But now the key for the team is to become independent and develop the activity themselves. They are for example trying to find additional major clients and sales channels for the cooperative’s different products.

3.5.2 Concluding reflections

We can see that as a social cooperative *Ateljé Trädet* differs from the other cooperatives in *Vägen ut!* in its composition, activity and the perceptions (thoughts and feelings) in the group. *Ateljé Trädet* has several distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from the other cooperatives:

- *Ateljé Trädet* has a *more heterogeneous composition of members* than the other cooperatives. The target group of former substance abusers or former criminals is not dominant at *Ateljé Trädet*, instead the cooperative is dominated by women with physical or mental health problems. Many members are generally not identified with the target group of

¹² Information dated June 2005

former criminals and former substance abusers. Instead people in the group are not familiar with such groups and are slightly afraid of bringing excessively different and “rowdy” members into the cooperative.

– There has *never been broad agreement* among the participants about membership in *Vägen ut!* Instead have been two different camps, for and against, who have discussed the issue with each other. This discussion has by no means finished and continues in the cooperative and its activities. It has also led to certain issues never being studied in depth, nor have members specialised in certain subjects. Instead the cooperative has participated to a limited extent in various work and project groups within *Vägen ut!* *Ateljé Trädet* has been represented by the two supervisors and a couple of the cooperators.

– The cooperators at *Ateljé Trädet* have mostly been satisfied with being able to run their creative and artistic handicraft production and to sell their work through various sales channels in a market for such products. Selling services – work training and rehabilitation for a health-care market – has been perceived solely as difficult, something that would take energy and resources away from the handicrafts. *The sale of rehabilitation services is essentially a social form of work*, that people perhaps feel they lack knowledge of and interest in.

– It is also clear that the cooperators in *Ateljé Trädet* perceived *Vägen ut!* for a long time as a *hierarchical and bureaucratic superstructure*, that they didn't understand or feel solidarity with. All meetings, written communication and co-funding certificates strengthened the feeling of an EU bureaucracy, in which *Ateljé Trädet* was a small cog in a large machine. Furthermore, relatively few cooperators took part regularly in the *Vägen ut!* meetings. It was not until the cooperative settled in its new premises in the winter of 2004 and its activity flourished that the cooperative's contacts with *Vägen ut!* started to improve (during the last year of the project).

3.6 Dilemmas in the work of social cooperatives

In this section we have described the four social cooperatives in *Vägen ut!* their growth and their most important activities. The first year of the project included training and important organisational and practical preparations. Differentiation and work allocation within the cooperative groups also took place. During the second year, three of the cooperatives were able to launch their activities, consisting of handicraft production and the provision of services, such as accommodation or work training. The provision of services involves several tasks, such as advertising the cooperative's activity and selling its specific profile, developing the content of the services and guiding the users who have been given a place in the cooperative. Developing legitimacy and trust capital in

the organisations who buy the services and building up suitable administration are other integral tasks.

The key in the third year of the project was to stabilise and develop the ongoing activity and disseminate information on the work of the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives as well telling other public sector and non-government organisations in the Gothenburg region about the model. The fourth cooperative, which runs a café, is also in operation, but is still building up its activity.

We can also see that there are *a number of important dilemmas* or contradictions that are “built into” this type of activity.

The first dilemma concerns *homogeneity – heterogeneity* in the target group for the activity and the collective ideology that determines the foundations of the work. It is clear that the central target group for the *Vägen ut!* project's activities comprises former convicted criminals and people with substance abuse problems who need rehabilitation and social integration in the labour and housing market. The most common user in *Vägen ut!* is therefore a recently released man or unemployed woman, who have both had problems with narcotic drugs in the past. People with different backgrounds are also represented among cooperators and apprentices, and they are a major asset to their cooperatives. However, if there are too many such people in an activity, they change the homogeneous composition and identification with the target group and its problems (which

happened in *Ateljé Trädet* for example). At the same time, heterogeneity appears to be a major asset, for example in guiding and supporting the users in their process of change when they put their old lifestyle behind them. Self-help is not the only effective solution, because other (more professional) skills in the fields of treatment and care are very useful.

Homogeneity is also necessary for the central ideology that has been built up in *Vägen ut!* It is a basic ideology of being totally drug-free and using self-help by developing your own resources individually and in a group, which is quite close to the AA/NA approach. This ideology is effective in relation to the target group, but lacks substance in relation to other types of users who have health problems, for example. It can probably also be perceived to some extent as formal and oppressive if people do not have experience of prison and probation services or the subculture of substance abusers' lifestyle (Hilte 2002). The content of the central ideology is also an interesting issue, because it contains democratic and authoritarian elements; the weight of certain elements differs among the cooperatives.

The second dilemma involves the *self-help thinking* that forms the basis of AA/NA philosophy and also permeates the parent organisations that *Vägen ut!* has developed from. Self-help is a central element in empowerment at group level (Adams 1996). Self-help involves mobilising resources in the target group, but also from the surrounding society,



and together building up organisational alternatives and activities that the group's members need. Self-organisation and self-help have been and are an often tried and tested work method among marginalised groups with meagre resources and a vulnerable position in society, such as various groups of people with disabilities (Adams 1996, Hjemdal et al 1996, Jeppsson Grassman & Svedberg 1995, Payne 2002).

But the knowledge and methods of self-help are not always enough in the development of new avant garde activities, and must be combined with other types of knowledge and specialist expertise (Karlsson 2002). This is also evident in *Vägen ut!* From a self-help core, the participants have developed a series of skills: guiding and supporting users, organising a constructive "therapeutic" environment as well as developing the rehabilitation concept and disseminating it to different organisations in the public sector. Each cooperative therefore contains a series of different skills that have been developed on the basis of personal resources and interests. The cooperatives are based on self-help – both individually and in a group – but different types of learning processes constitute another important dimension in the development of the activity.

The third dilemma is naturally the *production of goods and services versus ending substance abuse and developing and rehabilitating the participants*.

Individual professional knowledge and collective skills in the group have also played a major part. Finally, the different opportunities of members to devote time to the cooperative work have also played a part. Some cooperators have worked full time according to schedule, but also a lot of overtime in the evenings and at weekends. Other cooperators – women with sole responsibility for children and family – have not been able to spend a lot of time on the establishment and work of the cooperative. There are also cooperators who still feel the after-effects of former lifestyles or who have health problems that do not enable them to work extensively. Social cooperatives differ from other workplaces in the open labour market, because the abilities and needs of every participant must be taken into account in a social cooperative. However, the social cooperatives are also social enterprises that must generate profit to survive.¹³ This appears to be a clear dilemma; they need adequate production of goods and services to survive as social enterprises. But they have workers with various health problems and weaknesses, who need a slower work tempo and a lot of group meetings and social support. Production and rehabilitation entail clearly opposing needs in the cooperatives. What is prioritised? (Cf a similar situation and reasoning in the Basta Work Cooperative, Meeuwisse 2001.)

A fourth dilemma is *the production of goods versus sale of services* and the different markets that the cooperatives' production targets. It seems to be easier to establish a small-scale activity to make products, while the sale of services requires larger resources in the form of suitable people and requisite skill. We can see that most of the cooperatives in *Vägen ut!* (except for *Villa Solberg*) started by producing goods to build a foundation for a business activity. Later the cooperatives have developed the provision of services for a public health-care market, when the skills, resources and work allocation of the cooperatives had developed sufficiently. One of the cooperatives has settled on only making products (handicrafts), because it did not have resources to develop the provision of services.

The sale of services requires much more specialised skill, established regulations, and content and quality of services, as well as auxiliary resources such as training and guidance/supervision. However, the sale of services in a healthcare market is also more profitable and can constitute the framework of a sound financial position (cf Chapter 7). It is more difficult to generate enough profit by only making products, which means that the activity is constantly dependant on public funding to survive. Some types of products are also available on submarkets that are already saturated, and the social cooperatives find it difficult to compete. The production of goods therefore relies on a thorough market survey before start-

up, and the participants must work on establishing themselves in a niche with weaker competition (cf the discussion of Basta's financial situation, Hansson & Wijkström 2001).

The fifth dilemma is *independence versus dependence in relation to the public sector's various organisations*. The initial ambition of the Basta cooperative was to break away from public funding in the long term and become self-sufficient through selling goods and services that the cooperative produced (see Hansson & Wijkström 2001). This ambition has gradually changed, and the cooperative now counts the sale of rehabilitation services as an important source of income alongside the sale of the cooperative's own products. *Vägen ut!* never had the expressed ambition of independence of public funding. Instead a partially public-funded model is being built up with many different types of tax-funded assistance, such as EU grants, municipal funding, salary contributions and OSA positions (public sheltered work) within the labour market's range of support measures. Only a small proportion comes from solely producing goods for a market. This issue of independence of or dependency on the public sector is one we will come back to in the next chapter.

¹³ See Chapter 4 for information on profits and the financial situation of the cooperatives.



Chapter 4. Establishing and running social enterprises

4.1 The financial profitability of the project

Over the three years that the *Vägen ut!* project was in operation, between 2002 and 2005, the project was awarded a total of SEK 8 million from the Council of the European Social Fund. However, this is only a smaller proportion of the resources which were put into the project. The project was structured as a partnership, and a condition for those entering into the partnership was that they contributed to co-financing the project. The total sum of this co-financing was greater than the amount allocated by the ESF Council, so the total resources of the project were considerably greater. Thus, including this co-financing, the total amount invested in the project is SEK 20 million. In addition to this, further voluntary donations were given by participants and other parties. Was the project worth these investments? We want to ask this question directly, but we cannot answer it as directly.

Many are naturally interested in this question, from various different perspectives. The EU want to know that tax money is being used in a responsible and productive way. The various national and local authorities who contributed to the project have similar interests. The cooperatives which were part of the project want confirmation of their own conviction that the initiative was useful, successful and profitable for the national economy. Participating organisations

would like to know if they are participating in a successful initiative which strengthens their legitimacy, and will continue to work in the same way, or if they are backing initiatives which are doomed to fail. But there are others, apart from those who are directly involved, who have an interest in how the project goes. There is also a general political interest in whether social enterprise is a feasible way of solving social problems and solving the financial difficulties encountered by the state in maintaining the welfare system.

4.1.1 Profitability for the national economy?

In contexts such as this, it is unusual to seek answers in terms of whether measures which are taken or supported are “profitable for the national economy”. What is of interest when seeking to answer this question is whether the total social revenue is greater than the sum of the social contributions which have been made.

The source of this interest in profitability for the national economy is the observation that there are activities and types of output which are profitable for society as a whole, but which are unable to be made commercially profitable, and as a result are impossible to manage in a commercial context without significant levels of support. The situation may also be the opposite – that projects which are commercially profitable give rise to significant social costs. Hence the political interest in profitability and efficiency in terms of the national economy. This interest governs what is politically desirable.

However, the question of what is meant by “profitable to the national economy”, or unprofitable for that matter, is not easy to answer. It is not at all simple to define what the interest of the national economy is. What should be seen as a cost and what should be seen as a profit is up to the decision-makers – perhaps not entirely, but certainly to a high degree. It is also somewhat arbitrary what should and should not be included in the calculations.

There is also a time dimension to this, which is not insignificant. Something that appears profitable in the short term may not be so in the long term, and vice versa. In everyday communication, it is often the case that a long-term view is regarded as being more important than a short-term view. Therefore, the concept of an initiative’s benefit for society may get mixed up with the concept of its long-term benefits. These concepts can become confused. Long-term and short-term outcomes are valid dimensions to be considered, both for commercial interests and for society as a whole. Sometimes it is impossible to deny that it is the short-term financial result which is of interest, both for commercial interests and for society. At the same time, it is doubtless the case that all of us are interested in long-term benefits and sustainability. Unfortunately, it must be stated that evaluating long-term effects in the present is significantly more difficult for the simple and rather banal reason that the future is never entirely predictable.

In this chapter, what we aim to do is to look at how the financial resources of the project have been built up, and how the grant from the ESF has been spent. We will also take a closer look at what the project does in relation to the activities of the different cooperatives, and what can be seen as the productive contribution of the project. These questions are justified on the basis that the different cooperatives cannot be said to focus on one central activity, but rather several heterogeneous ones. Therefore the profits or benefits of the project have several different dimensions which must be weighed up.

4.1.2 ESF grant and co-financing

The *Vägen ut!* project has been built up as a partnership, where the various parties involved have invested different types of co-financing resources. These resources have included paid or voluntary work, financing premises, giving cash, and various types of remuneration for the participants in the project. The last of these was primarily wage subsidies and various types of reimbursement from the social insurance office or the county employment board. Government bodies and local authorities have been the main sources of co-financing. Apart from the social insurance office and the county employment board, the local authority in Gothenburg has been involved on several levels, as have prison and probation services. The main contributions were towards salaries and premises. Apart from this, some associations and companies have participated by investing in the project.

In February 2003, the management of the project presented the following financial plan to the ESF Council¹:

Financial Plan

<i>Funding type</i>	2002		2003		2004		2005		Total	
	SEK	%	SEK	%	SEK	%	SEK	%	SEK	%
Public										
co-finance	862126	46,9	2964620	41,3	4634874	62,3	2367949	66,4	10829720	54,1
Private										
co-finance	99398	5,4	95508	1,3	771000	10,4	385500	10,8	1351423	6,7
ESF	876482	47,7	4122606	57,4	2029725	27,3	815150	22,8	7844095	39,2
Total	1838006	100	7182734	100	7435599	100	3568599	100	20025238	100

As can be seen, the project was built on the idea that the funding at the beginning would come primarily from the ESF Council, and that in later stages ESF funding would decrease. Once the cooperative got going and began to generate an income, the co-finance proportion would increase. Obviously the purpose of this was to gradually become independent of project funding from the ESF Council. The co-finance was divided into two types for accounting purposes – public and private. Public co-finance came from various authorities, while the private co-finance came from non-profit organisations and companies.

It was planned that as early as 2004, the partners in the project would provide 72.7% of the income, primarily in the form of participant remuneration for the apprentices in the new cooperatives. So it can be seen that a high level of co-finance was one of

the financial goals of the project, and not only as a demand of the ESF Council.

Is it then possible to assess whether the project developed as expected in a financial sense? It is certainly possible in one respect. We can state that in 2004, the level of co-finance actually reached 68.5% of the project's total income.²

Bearing in mind the difficulties of being more precise in determining the actual nature of the co-finance, and taking into consideration the uncertainties attached to the work, the project can be regarded as having reached the goals set for it. The important element is that over a relatively short time, extensive co-financing was established, primarily in the form of remuneration for participants, which, from a project finance point of view means that the cooperatives had begun to function.

There are several difficulties when it comes to estimating the actual extent of co-finance coming from this type of partnership. One can see that there is a motivation for participants to overestimate their contributions, so that it looks like they have done more than they actually have. There are particular problems with evaluation when it comes to accounting for hours worked and contributions in kind. Problems can arise, for example, in distinguishing between work carried out for the project, and work which would have been done in any case.

Neither can one ignore the fact that there is motivation for underestimating a contribution. This can result from conflicts within the project, or fear of control or supervision. It may even result from a concern that the organisation may find participation in the project to be too costly. In several cases, it has not been easy for the project leaders to get hold of the required proof of co-financing.

However, in our case, the main segment of co-financing is direct financial input, in the form of remuneration for participants and grants from the local authority. This means there is less room for over- and underestimating.

But there may be other causes for uncertainty in estimating the value of co-financing. Sometimes it is not certain that the expenses which are registered as co-finance would not have been paid regardless of whether the project existed or not. There are also problems with demarcation, in the sense of deciding to what

extent a particular contribution should be regarded as belonging to the project.

4.1.3 Use of the ESF funding

In terms of the ESF funding, we have made lists of the requisitions made for the project. We did this on a six-monthly basis, since the project was running for three years and this was divided into blocks of six months. The report for the final six-month period has not yet been submitted.

It is clear from the table that by far the largest item is salaries. This applies to salaries for project leaders and project coordinators, as well as salaries for administration of the project, and transnational coordination. For the majority of the time, the project has had five full-time employees and five part-time employees. In addition there have been a couple of shorter periods of employment. Towards the end of the project, some project leader positions were moved over to the cooperatives. However, the conditions of employment varied fairly widely. This was to do with the fact that the different employees went into their jobs on different terms. Funding from the ESF Council only covered part of the salary costs, so various forms of transfer systems were also used to co-finance the appointment of staff. Towards the end of the project period, several project leader positions were also transferred to the cooperatives.

The principle was that the monthly salary of each individual project leader should be SEK 1000 more than their previous salary. In this way, the income each employee received from the project was entirely

¹ Summary, budget, co-financing, final 2003

² Executive committee requisitions 2004 in the annual statement

Requisitions, listed by six-month period

2002-2004 – Nationally

	2002 II	%	2003 I	%	2003 II	%	2004 I	%	2004 II	%
Salaries/ remuneration	479041	60,0	755211	42,1	680114	40,6	696118	43,2	343960	38,1
Premises/office administration	57488	7,2	256846	14,3	252128	15,1	221536	13,8	84771	9,4
Goods purchased	15088	1,9	41857	2,3	19973,5	1,2	9391	0,6		
Travel	16925	2,1	64125	3,6	44360	2,6	34609	2,1	4053,5	0,4
Dissemination/ lobbying	76700	9,6	32070	1,8	38737	2,3				
Services purchased	81248	10,2	239676	13,4	270577,5	16,2	259257,5	16,1	212345,5	23,5
Follow-up/ evaluation			210685	11,7	115666	6,9	192844	12,0	114840	12,7
Seminars/ conferences	5822	0,7	20700	1,2	8865	0,5	10880	0,7	9541	1,1
National total	732312	91,8	1621170	90,4	1430421	85,4	1424635,5	88,5	769511	85,3

2002-2004 – Transnationally

Salaries/ remuneration			51950	2,9	101272	6,0	62223	3,9	74202	8,2
Premises/office administration	1464	0,2	11555	0,6	22553	1,3	11061	0,7	12966	1,4
Goods purchased			467	0,0						
Travel	6604	0,8	103028	5,7	47739	2,8	63010	3,9	42187	4,7
Dissemination/ lobbying										
Services purchased	41261	5,2	1049	0,1	72234,5	4,3	2691	0,2	3090	0,3
Follow-up/ evaluation							46480	2,9		
Seminars/ conferences	16178	2,0	4045	0,2	1006	0,1				
Transnational total	65507	8,2	172094	9,6	244804,5	14,6	185465	11,5	132445	14,7
Total requisitions	797819	100	1793264	100	1675226	100	1610101	100	901956	100

determined by the terms of their previous position. Those who had a low salary when they started continued to receive a low salary, and those who had a better salary continued to earn more. Of course, whether this procedure was “fair” is open to discussion. The disparities between staff members remained. Of course, this depends on how one defines “fairness”. This is another point upon which people involved in the project must agree on. There must be some common point of departure, and it can be difficult to motivate people to participate if the economic terms of participation are altogether too poor. The dilemma is familiar in many types of recruitment contexts. It may also have been difficult to ascertain the significance of the different economic terms the participants had. In this context, it is important to mention that as far as we understand, there have been open discussions on these issues, and conditions which have been perceived as unjust have been corrected, or at least modified, along the way.

Another area where the ESF grant played a crucial role was in education. This is accounted for under “services purchased”, which to a large extent refers to the purchase of various types of educational services. Training of cooperators was the main form of educational initiative, and this was provided throughout the course of the project by Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation. In addition, the project also included a series of smaller educational initiatives, in areas such as data processing and IT; accounting; editing and driving lessons. These educational initiatives have provided train-

ing for individual project workers, in order for them to be able to take on new tasks in the cooperatives. The project leaders and project coordinators have also had access to a certain amount of guidance and supervision. There is every reason to believe that these educational opportunities have had crucial significance for the prospects of the project as a whole.

A large amount of project funding has also gone to the hiring of premises, during the starting phase of the cooperatives. The purchase of materials and equipment has also been important, both for individual cooperatives and for the project as a whole. Running costs of a purely administrative nature, such as the costs of telephones and paper, also form part of this sum.

The fourth significant expenditure sum is for evaluation work, which has been a source of pressure throughout the project's period of operation.

Travel expenses constitute a somewhat smaller proportion of expenditure. The project has involved quite a number of trips. These trips have been to destinations both within Sweden and abroad. Network-building, conference participation, and study visits to other cooperatives have been some of the reasons for trips. The opportunity to travel is also likely to have had a significant impact on project participants, who have been able to broaden their horizons, gain inspiration from other initiatives, and raise awareness of their own context and the role of their own project.

The ESF grant was used to cover expenses which, over a course of time, the project could work towards covering, gradually moving away from dependency on project funding. The money was used for various types of start-up costs, and when the programmes get going, it is quite reasonable to also move the responsibility for covering the costs to the cooperatives which are expected to become self-sufficient. This also means, however, that the coordinating role of the project diminishes naturally over time, and either disappears altogether or is replaced by something else.

4.1.4 The place of the cooperatives in the project

Another question is how much the different cooperatives have gained from the *Vägen ut!* project. Naturally, this question could be a starting point for many discussions. Was one or other of the cooperatives treated unfairly? A discussion like this is not simple. It is partly a matter of what

has been gained from various quarters, and partly a question of what expectations of the project were reasonable. The table below is based on a budget drawn up at the start of the project (2002). It shows that the different cooperatives joined the project on different terms:

This list is a few years old, and should be viewed as a planning document. Some of the cooperatives have changed their names, and some have also had a slightly different focus than what was planned at that time. *Half Way House* became *Villa Solberg*, and the hostel is now *Café Solberg*. This process has caused gradual changes in the terms. The budget was drawn up with the help of Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation, before the start of the project. Nevertheless it shows a couple of important features of how it was thought the project would develop.

Proposed budget for the *Vägen ut!* project, by area of activity

	Total budget	As a proportion of the project budget	As a proportion of the ESF grant	Co-finance proportion
	SEK	%	%	%
Whole project	18 038 594,00	100	100	61,2
Vävstugan	4 802 318,75	26,6	3,5	95,0
Trädet	2 497 906,25	13,8	0,9	97,4
Half Way House	3 315 500,00	18,4	17,1	64,0
Hostel	2 315 850,00	12,8	6,7	79,8
General (shared)	4 033 333,33	22,4	57,8	0,0
Transnational	1 003 000,00	5,6	14,4	0,0

Firstly, the variations in the budget hint at the fact that it was thought that the co-operatives making up the project would be of different sizes. One cooperative (*Vävstugan*) was judged to be able to be twice the size of another (*Trädet*). The size of the cooperatives was primarily determined by the co-financing. This assumption is clearly important in the context of discussions concerning, and expectations of, the cooperatives.

Secondly, levels of ESF funding were different for the different cooperatives. The intention was that some of the cooperatives were to receive most of their funding from co-financing from the beginning, while others (primarily *Half Way House*) were to be funded by a significant amount of the ESF grant. At this stage, it is important to point out that the success of an application for project funding depends on being able to demonstrate solid co-financing. As such, there is a risk of overestimating the cooperatives' access to co-financing.

Thirdly, it was planned that the greater part of the ESF project funding would be put into shared funds and transnational work. In this way, all the cooperatives (or at least the management bodies of all the cooperatives), through being part of the project management group, were to participate in decisions on how this funding was to be used. In this way, it was assumed that a significant factor in determining how the funding should be used would be the activities, drive and power of initiative of the different cooperatives within the project structure.

4.1.5 The cooperatives' share of ESF funding

This also sets up a framework in terms of how much it is possible to discuss the extent to which the different cooperatives have got enough out of the project. We have attempted to divide our allocation of ESF funding between the different cooperatives and shared activities within the project. However, this has not proved to be straightforward, since there are many shared activities, and some of these (such as courses or trips) are very difficult to ascribe entirely to shared costs or to divide between individual cooperatives.

We will not attempt to present a detailed breakdown of these costs, as there is a risk that the result of such an attempt may be rather arbitrary. What is clear is that *Solberg*, by obtaining property, also ended up laying claim to the full amount of resources allocated to it from the beginning, and that a large part of the costs for the premises and its equipment were financed by ESF funding. It also happened that *Karins Döttrar* held numerous individual training sessions for cooperators. As a result of this, they also received a relatively large proportion of the project funding, at least in relation to what was originally planned in the budget shown above.

Nevertheless, it does not appear that the *Trädet* cooperative lost out – they received the proportion of project funding which was expected in the planning stages of the project. It seems more likely that the “shared expenses” fund has not received as much as was intended at the beginning. As has been stated, however,



it should be remembered that it is not easy to separate shared expenses from the expenses of individual cooperatives. In a project such as this, a great deal of work is done together.

The fact that we have chosen to report these impressions is partly because there have been some discussions where it has been suggested that “the men” received more of the shared resources, and that this is an indication of gender inequality. This is possible. It may indeed be the case that this is apparent as far back as the first budget, where the men’s claims were articulated more clearly.

Our belief, however, is that things have progressed in such a way that the process itself created this inequality. In one cooperative, clearer needs and financial demands were created as a result of the greater number of project leaders; the result-oriented work in obtaining the house; and the work of fitting out the villa. The activities being carried out become visible, and in this way generate new needs and demands. The project’s decision-making process also rewards activity and the presentation of proposals. If this had not been the case, the entire project would have been hindered, as would the opportunities to develop the cooperatives.

This may have something to do with the gender balance or gender inequality. It is perhaps easier for men to be comfortable in structures and decision-making processes such as these. As such, they perhaps have a greater opportunity to make their voices heard. It does not have to be this way

though. Nonetheless, in this type of collaboration between different actors, someone or some people will always gain a certain advantage over others by being the first to make proposals or lay claim to funding.

4.1.6 Some questions on the scope of the project

There are many different ways to assess the scope of the project. One way is to discuss how much money, and what sort of money, is in circulation in the project. Another way would be to discuss how many and what sort of people have been involved in the project in different ways. In this case, it would also be important to consider to what extent, for how long, and under which conditions these people had been involved. Whether one sees the project as “large” or “small” depends very much on what one chooses to look at.

A snapshot from the middle of September 2004 might give a idea of this. It formed the answer to a question posed by the finance officer on what size the project was. At that time, there were 18 cooperators in the four cooperatives which were in existence. All of them had been through the cooperator training programme, and had paid a contribution to their respective cooperative. A further 50 people, who at that time were in prison, had completed a shorter cooperator training programme. In addition to that, around a hundred prison inmates had received information about the *Vägen ut!* project over the course of various prison visits.

At that time, there were 18 cooperators (members of the cooperatives) in the four

cooperatives which were in existence. Of these, ten were employed through some form of official transfer support (wage subsidies, officially protected employment, activity compensation, etc)³. There were four to five users at *Villa Solberg* and the same number at *Karins Döttrar*. At the *Trädet* workshop there were three to four “voluntary” workers. *Café Solberg* had not yet opened.

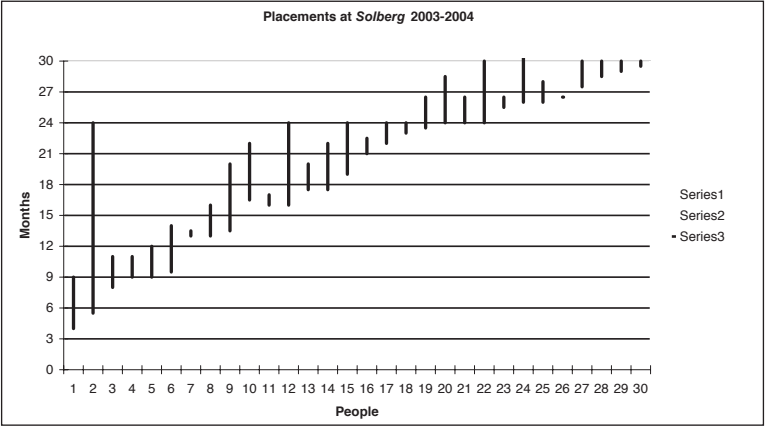
At this time all four cooperatives, as described in an earlier chapter, were in operation, and there were just over 20 people working in the cooperatives. It can also be said, however, that at least two were in an introductory phase, where the work had not quite taken shape yet.

Another way to look at the project is to review how many people were placed in the different cooperatives by prison and probation services and social services. For at least two of the cooperatives, recruiting apprentices via this type of

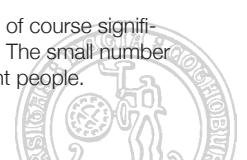
placement has been an important ambition. This was part of their business concept, so making it a reality was naturally important.

After an intensive period of work, *Villa Solberg* came into operation in the summer of 2003, and over the course of 2003 and 2004 a total of about thirty people were placed there and lived in the house. The length of the placements varied, of course, as can be seen from the diagram below.

Every person who has had a placement at *Solberg* is represented by a vertical bar. The length of the bar shows how long their placement lasted. The longer the bar, the longer the placement lasted. It should also be pointed out that the later the person came to *Solberg*, the shorter their maximum time there can be, since we did not follow the people beyond the end of 2004. The people have received numbers in the order in which they were



³ We do not specify how many were on each type of transfer support, although it is of course significant whether these people were moving “upwards” or “downwards” in this system. The small number of individuals involved means that it would be altogether too easy to identify different people.



placed at *Solberg*. Those who came in early 2003 have the lowest numbers, and those who were placed there towards the end of 2004 have the highest.

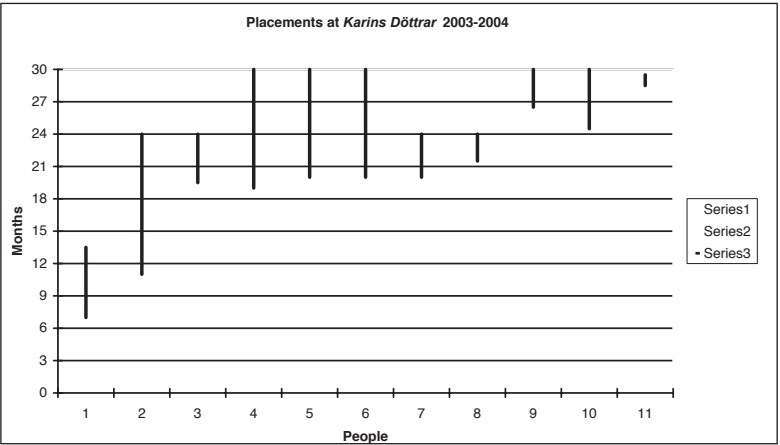
The vertical axis measures the number of months, so “0” stands for the end of December 2002, and “24” for the end of December 2004. If you read the number of bars along the horizontal lines which are placed at the end of each quarter, you can see how many were placed at *Solberg* at different times. At the end of September 2003 (at number 9), one person moved out of *Solberg*, two continued to be placed there, and two new residents arrived. From reading the different quarterly lines, one can see that *Solberg* has always had between three and six residents.

Sometimes the length of a stay at *Solberg* is very short, and other times it may be longer. Naturally, the reasons for this vary. In some cases, the placement has been stopped because of failure (usually a case of relapsing into substance abuse,

or conflict with the resident and/or their relatives). In other cases, it has been stopped because the guest has moved on to another residence. It goes without saying that recruiting residents is no simple matter. There are sure to be high demands and expectations on both sides. Keeping an even number of places filled is doubtless a delicate task. Since there are a limited number of places in the house, there are also very narrow margins for planning.

However, the placements are of vital economic interest to the cooperative. The cooperative receives a reimbursement of SEK 1300 (not including VAT) per 24-hour period. This means that one bar between two quarterly lines in the above diagram represents an income of around SEK 120,000. If we simply add together the bars in the diagram, this adds up to an income of just over SEK 3,000,000.

A similar diagram for the cooperative *Karins Döttrar* looks completely different, as follows:



Here we can see reflected the long planning stage of the cooperative, and the difficulties with premises and with the aims and directions of the operation. The diagram shows that no new bars begin between 12 and 18. This means that no new placements were received in the first half of 2004 - and only two had been taken in before this. When the activities get going in the second half of 2004, more people quickly become involved. This cooperative does not offer housing, so its intake limits are not as sensitive, and as such it is easier to take in more people.

When we look at the income from these placements over such a short period, it is of course not as high. The daily reimbursement from the social services is SEK 630, which could probably become a significant source of income.

4.2 Different types of production in the cooperatives

The aim of the project, and of establishing the cooperatives, is to stimulate the development of the social economy, and the productive initiatives linked to the social economy. Production in a company is never one individual process, but rather different productive processes which work together. The project is based on “empowerment”, and the educational process is central. As a result, the productive results of the project are closely linked to the learning process which has taken place. There are also good societal reasons to have this as a focus (Brown & Lauder 2001). In this project, at least three different types of production can be discerned within the cooperatives.

Firstly, there is the production of different types of handicrafts – silk painting, weaving, silversmithing, gardening and visual arts. Also in this category is some of the training in craftwork, which was most successfully put into practice at the *Trädet* workshop. Secondly, there is another type of work which involves habilitation or rehabilitation services, for which there is a demand from various institutions within the welfare state. The third type of productivity, which is less visible but certainly a defining element of the project, is the work of training people as entrepreneurs, innovators and administrators, primarily as part of the social economy, but also with potentially wider application.

4.2.1 Craftsmanship

The production of handicrafts is a central subject of discussion in most of the co-operatives. However, this production has a different part to play in each cooperative. At the *Trädet* workshop, it is absolutely central, and people working there have several years’ experience. The production of handicrafts also plays an important part at *Karins Döttrar*, where the work is rooted in the experience of *Vävstugan*. At *Villa Solberg*, discussions on this subject seem to have been rather more “up and down”, since the housing itself is the main element of this cooperative, and the people who have been placed here have primarily been encouraged to find a way in to the employment market beyond the social cooperatives.

One reason why the production of handicrafts is a central activity in many

rehabilitation contexts is because of its therapeutic function. San Patrignano in Italy has garnered much attention, and has become something of a role model for social enterprise. They have a number of productive activities, such as various types of fine carpentry; upholstery; cattle breeding; food production; leather work; and wine production. Various types of craftsmanship and similar activities have almost become synonymous with “therapy” in Swedish welfare institutions too.

This often provokes mixed feelings. Some in our cooperatives have quite purposefully chosen to distance themselves from terms such as “therapy” in this context. It is certainly something to think about. It is nevertheless important that craftsmanship is a type of work in which one can find pleasure and meaning, which gives tangible results and rewards hard work and dedication.

However, there is also another side of our work with handicrafts. This is the importance of good quality, and quality awareness, both in terms of developing skills and in terms of creating a new identity:

“Quality awareness is the opposite of the “disposable” mentality. An active substance abuser’s life is characterised by uncontrolled consumption and use of disposable, throwaway items. Interest in quality – with the possible exception of the quality of the drugs – is minimal. The results of this aspect of substance abuse are many (though varying in degree) and include carelessness with food; neglecting

one’s own health; broken friendships; poor hygiene; and a constant series of broken promises to children and other relatives.” (Carlberg 2001:27)

In this context, learning to produce handicrafts has several positive dimensions. The question is, how are the market conditions for production of handicrafts? Is it possible to produce handicrafts on economically acceptable terms? The development of the industrial society has been largely based on replacing hand-made products with mass-produced substitutes. For example, there is a huge price difference between a hand-woven rug and an industrially produced rug from a country where salaries are much lower.

Nonetheless, there is of course variety of possibilities for selling handicraft products and craftsmanship. Firstly, there are customers who prefer craftsmanship to mass-produced goods. Hand-crafted goods are seen as “the real thing”. This applies to many different areas, from horticulture to interior decoration. Secondly, there are customers who want to shop in a “socially conscious” way. Thirdly, craftsmanship is undoubtedly seen as an attractive and enjoyable pastime, so it would be quite reasonable to believe that there is a decent-sized market for training courses. The *Trädet* workshop, for example, has held successful courses in silk-painting.

It is hardly a question of whether there is a mass market for these types of products and services. Rather, it is primarily a matter of producing suitable items in

small production runs or as one-off items. The size of the market also depends to a large extent on marketing. In this area, our cooperatives are only at the beginning of a long process. To give an idea of what is involved in this process, it is helpful to look to the shop at San Patrignano, which shares many similarities with Måltidens Hus (The Nordic House of Culinary Arts), in Grythyttan. Marketing work must be carried out from a long-term perspective, and should be based on creating an excellent reputation for handicrafts, and establishing good sales channels. There is a strong awareness of this. (Castelli 2005:98-99)

In terms of costs, it is naturally the case that the production of handicrafts is labour intensive and depends on the cost of labour. The great advantage of social cooperatives in terms of costs, is that the cost of labour is relatively modest. Working hours are paid by the social insurance system and by voluntary contributions, and only to a lesser extent by contractual salaries. Naturally, this creates a special competitive strength.

4.2.2 Habilitation and rehabilitation services

The second type of production which the cooperatives carry out is the production of services which are primarily on offer to the public sector, supporting people who are seeking to re-enter the employment market (Bartilsson et al 2000). These activities have grown in scope, and are likely to continue to expand over the next few years. There are several reasons for this.

One is that the Swedish national social insurance board has increased its efforts to get people who are on long-term sickness benefit back into the employment market. The increasing pressure on unemployed people and people who live on state benefits has also caused a growth in demand for help to return to the employment market. Education is not enough.

What cooperatives like *Villa Solberg* and *Karins Döttrar* have to offer is a form of support through companionship and self-help. What is on offer is not what is traditionally accepted as professional help. The cooperatives are based on people with shared experiences supporting each other and showing the way to a better life with greater freedom. At the same time, people develop their own professionalism.

Again, this means that it is possible to benefit from lower salary costs. Income will naturally depend on a combination of voluntary support and the contributions which authorities and non-profit organisations are willing to pay. Still, it is highly likely that there will be a continued willingness to pay for these services. People who have become passive recipients of benefits, not to mention drug addicts and criminals, are associated with high costs for the state. The most likely threat to funding is the state’s capacity to pay.

4.2.3 Entrepreneurial training

One aspect which is less visible is that the activities of the project and the cooperator training programme also contrib-

ute to increasing participants' abilities to run a company. For many participants, the project can be seen as a learning process in how to run a company. The cooperators have a complex set of responsibilities. It is not only a matter of taking care of the financial running and administration of the company. One must also learn the skills of cooperation and conflict resolution. It is sometimes necessary to wrestle with authorities and other companies, which helps to develop an ability to negotiate. Furthermore, official visits and mass media appearances have created an awareness of and ability to conduct marketing.

These skills may not come to all – it may be primarily the most ambitious and proactive members who develop in this area. But it is an expectation that some members of the collectives will become role models for others.

These skills are expressed not only in the form of an ability to run the cooperatives which form part of the project, but also an ability to go further, to start new companies and function as a social entrepreneur. It is a matter of being able to find new business concepts, design new systems, and create new opportunities to form projects.

Of course, there is a natural tension between the innovative business spirit and the need to maintain and keep an eye on what has already been achieved. In a worst case scenario, we may see a new form of economic short-sightedness, where new social enterprises spring up quickly but prove to be short-lived, when

their founders and visionaries encounter too strong an incentive to go off and create something new. In order to be successful, social enterprises such as this must be based on trust and building up skills in the long-term.

It is hard to see how the process could happen in any other way. After all, the point of empowerment must be that people make the most of their skills and continue to develop. Without this side of entrepreneurial development, the whole process would undoubtedly be wasted.

4.3 Summary

The *Vägen ut!* project is a development project. Just like other "investments", it takes a long time to estimate its costs and returns. In a project like this, there are many different types of costs and returns. We have been able to show that the project kept its promise in terms of establishing the enterprises and mobilising co-financing.

The entire project can be seen as an investment in educating people to be able to start a company and run a cooperative. As such, the activities established through the project should make a meaningful contribution to society in terms of helping people back into the employment market and creating new enterprises. The project itself has undoubtedly provided important training for several participants, as much through the problems they have had to handle as through the educational elements of the project. However, it remains unclear at this stage how stable the enterprises will become.

Chapter 5. Personal development within social cooperatives

Around 60 people have been involved as cooperators (members of the cooperatives), apprentices or users within the *Vägen ut!* cooperative activities. The project's target group is those who have lived a life of drugs and crime, but have chosen to break the cycle and create a new life for themselves (Svebo Lindgren 2002). This change is brought about through work and participation in one of the *Vägen ut!* social cooperatives. All the project information publications refer to the target group. However, an examination of the participants' backgrounds reveals many different experiences and life situations which have led them to the project. We have asked ourselves the following questions:

- What specific development has participation in the cooperative led to?
- What factors and relationships contributed towards or hindered growth and development?
- Are there any gender differences between women and men in how this development takes place?

As previously, the interviewees' accounts form the basis of the text, together with our comments and analysis.

5.1 Breaking with the past and recovery

The cooperators include people who have lived with substance abuse for many years. They have finally reached a limit, whereby their life of substance abuse no longer brings any fulfilment and they experience a kind of burnout. With increasing age, physical problems and "bad trips" become ever more common. When drawing comparisons with old friends who are no longer abusing substances and who now have jobs and families, their own lives appear meagre and empty (Blomqvist 2002, Kristiansen 1999). The substance abuser appreciates that he or she must resolve to make a change, or face premature death. One of the cooperators describes these feelings of being burnt out:

"I believe that it actually has a lot to do with age, because as you start to get older you see that death is not far off. And if you want to do more with your life, you need to get a move on! There's not much time left. I think that with substance abuse you reach a kind of burnout phase."

Feelings of dissatisfaction, weariness and being burnout also grow stronger on seeing how one's relatives suffer and experience the ill effects of one's substance abuse. It is not at all good for children (and grandchildren) to have a mother who is a substance abuser. One

¹ "Life trajectory" is now an established term to describe the course of life. See e.g. Giele & Elder 1998 or Jeppsson Grassman 2003.

² Here, "association" means one of the four user associations which together formed the *Vägen ut!* project (see chapter 1).

causes one's relatives disappointment and sorrow, which gradually provides a motivation for change.

The group of cooperators also includes people who have never abused substances. However, for various reasons they have become involved in criminal activities and committed crimes, resulting in a prison sentence. One cooperator explains that she was unhappy with her monotonous job, and dreamed of having enough money to study, which could lead to a new job. When the opportunity arose to earn a large sum of money through a profitable "deal", she could not resist the temptation. While in prison, her social life broke down. She was evicted from her flat and became excluded from her previous social network. When she was due to be released, she realised that her chances of finding somewhere to live and a job were significantly lower. Her self-confidence had also been affected by her time inside, and she found it hard to go out looking for work on the open job market again.

There are also participants in the project who do not have first-hand experience of substance abuse or crime themselves. They have had relatives or friends who have experienced these problems, but they themselves have had more normal life trajectories¹ in terms of education, work and family. For example, one cooperator describes her art-school training and various jobs on the side which she took in order to support herself until having a family. She came into contact with the *Bryggan* association through a close

friend in connection with signing off work sick. He proposed that she should lead art study groups for the association.

Many of the participants in the *Vägen ut!* project have experienced a downward life trajectory during the years immediately prior to joining the association.² Their life trajectories have included substance abuse problems, legal proceedings and punishment, financial difficulties, time off work due to sickness and strained social relationships. A number of parents have also experienced their children being taken into care; they have had the opportunity to visit them in the foster homes and cooperate with the foster parents. Others have avoided social intervention, but have been dependent on the support of relatives in order to resolve their situations. They have witnessed their downward life trajectory themselves, and have devoted much thought to how to break this pattern. They have grown tired of their former problematic lives, and have experienced a strong desire to start something new. They have gradually resolved to try a new route in order to change their life trajectories and, if possible, bring about an improvement. One cooperator describes how he reached a turning point in connection with a prison visit.

"But late in October 1999 there was a knock at the door from the police, and I was taken in. I was in custody for three weeks before being put on probation. While I was inside, I realised that I had reached a crossroads and that I now had the opportunity to make a change.

This crossroads was all about a way of living. I was faced with a choice and I made my choice. Then came the trial, and I was sentenced to one year's probation. It was then that I contacted my friend. He'd been nailed. The police came in November and he was put on probation, combined with contract care. So he moved in with the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. We stayed in touch. We went to *Bryggan* together, and started going daily. We started to go out and do talks in schools, him and me. And we went out to institutions and had group sessions."

Other people believe that a long period without drugs is what is needed in order to be able to make a decision and change one's life; whilst abusing substances, one cannot see that there is a choice. A woman who was sentenced to a long prison sentence explains how the enforced period without drugs became a turning point for her:

"Whilst abusing substances, I didn't feel that I could make a choice. It's only once you've been free from drugs for a long time that you can make a choice. And I went for three and a half years without getting parole or anything. So that was important for me, along with the meetings with some of the prison employees during my stay in prison."

Several of those interviewed describe a kind of knowledge or understanding of standing at a crossroads, and that now they have to choose a different path to that taken previously. The consequences

of different choices are clear to them. They make the choice to break out from a life of substance abuse – a choice which then affects their actions for a long period of time. They can also turn to NA/AA groups for help with sticking to their choice. Both the decision and their subsequent actions show those around them that they have made a choice (Ebaugh 1988). A woman explains how, while staying in an institution, she worked on self-improvement:

"But I took a different route (to the twelve-step programme) – I chose a treatment centre, and spent three years in therapy with a psychiatrist at the institution. I did a hell of a lot of work in there, and then chose a treatment centre which followed Eastern philosophy – more like yoga, meditation, breathing techniques and personal development."

Some accounts describe the turning point as extremely dramatic, almost fateful. In other cases, however, it is more of an everyday experience. There can be a fear of being excluded and different which prevents those who have been recently released from going out and looking for work.

There are a number of elements present in the accounts:

- *External events or changes* which set in motion a course of events (e.g. detention, imprisonment, children being taken into care or serious illness).

- Through this course of events, the substance abuser reaches a *feeling or understanding* that a change is necessary. Here, the person experiences both emotional and cognitive elements.
- The substance abuser *makes a decision* to break out and act differently to before, which also affects and controls his or her actions.
- The decision and the subsequent actions and change of attitude are noticed by *those who are close to the person in question, and who are prepared to give support and help*. These people are sometime relatives, but can also be professionals working in various institutions.³

The course of events is not necessarily as linear as we have described it. Other researchers maintain that there are three different inter-related processes: an emotional process, a cognitive process and an actual release process through actions. They have studied women leaving violent relationships and have found these three different processes of breaking with the past. Here, the actual process of breaking with the past occurs first, with the cognitive and emotional release coming much later (Holmberg & Enander 2003).

Several interviewees describe how, after release or the turning point in substance abuse, they felt insecure and afraid to be out among ordinary people again. They were afraid of questions about their backgrounds or that people would be able to see in them how they had lived previously. It was much more secure to come to a self-help group where there was no need to hide anything. Here, the others knew roughly how their lives had been before, and they didn't have to explain as much. They often understood one another without needing to say anything. It is this unspoken understanding which is thought to play a key role in all self-help, whereby one's own experience allows one to know what it is like for others and to understand without much in the way of questions or descriptions (Karlsson 2002).

An apprentice describes how she found it hard to express herself among ordinary people, and was afraid to ask when she didn't understand. But among similar people, there could be open, direct communication. She describes the advantages of self-help:

"In these ten months that I've been out there, I've really improved (my self-esteem) and this is largely due to being in a situation where everyone has had the same experiences. There you can share your failings, you don't need to sit there in silence and feel stupid, and you can ask what things mean, what people are try-

ing to say and how to do things. So you can be open and honest, and you don't need to be... it feels safe and you feel comfortable, so you're not afraid to talk about other things at the meetings, too. That's how I feel now. At first, I sat there completely silently. I don't talk much, but I can give a view or a comment. I found it safe and comfortable."

Some people relate how they brought their own interests and activities to the self-help group and were able to put these to use for benefit of the group. This cultivation of people's interests within the framework of the group can be seen as a salutogenetic way of dealing with the life situation (Antonovsky 1991). One uses one's interests and resources to build bridges between two lives and identities. This skill can be seen as a form of expression which has helped people to survive difficulties, such as in prison. And now this form of expression is used again to build up a new life.

Others use the time spent in the self-help group to develop themselves and work on their remaining problems (which existed before and during their life of drugs) such as by participating in NA or AA groups, or by undergoing psychotherapy. (The official view within the project is that they are necessary in order to keep participants drug-free and are a great help to them.) However, among the cooperators there are different views on the value of NA/AA groups. One cooperator describes how she got real help through the AA group, and she also takes all the users in the

cooperative there. Another cooperator believes that the AA/NA groups are good to begin with, but insufficient in the longer term: later in the process, a need arises to deal with personal problems in greater depth than is possible with these groups. She points out that it is ongoing work over a number of years which is needed, but that this comes later in the process of breaking with the past:

"My personal view on this is that not everyone can start therapy – they may perhaps need to start working and start to work until they're tired and have structure and so on. But then I believe that you reach a point where the need arises. I don't believe you can escape it in the end. But it's not always true that you should start with it. It's not right for everyone."

After a couple of years of working with groups, those involved had recovered and had started to build new lives working or studying, often with new family relationships as a foundation (Kristiansen 1999, Topor 2004). Alongside the association activities, there were other areas and relationships which placed demands on them. Several people also mention that after a few years it felt as if this work had stagnated and no progress was being made. Among the members of the self-help groups, a feeling of dissatisfaction with the activities arose which was probably also related to current social conditions. They saw many friends with no job, means of support or place to live. The support which could be gained from the group was like a drop in

³ In relation to the phases of the process of breaking with the past, see section 2.3 of the report (Ebaugh 1988 or Hedin & Månsson 1998)

the ocean for those who had access to so few resources. They therefore wanted to do something about the fundamental problem and find accommodation or employment for their friends.

The plans to build social cooperatives seem to have arisen simultaneously with in the various self-help groups. Several members of CRIS's management had plans for a halfway house, and attempts were made to realise such a project with the assistance of individuals who wanted to donate funds. At *Bryggan*, it was felt that there was a clear need to develop activities further and to be able to offer somewhat more: accommodation or employment for newly released members (cf. chapter 1).

In conclusion, it can be seen that the self-help groups were of great importance to the prospective cooperators during a transitional period when they felt insecure in their new roles and different to ordinary people, which is a result of stigmatisation and marginalisation in society (Goffman 1981). The groups offered a clear, strong community with other people in similar situations. The communication felt simple, and they were able to express themselves as before. Many understood how it felt, even without the need for words (Karlsson 2002). At times when they have felt low, different ways of dealing with feelings have been accepted, providing that they have not expressed themselves in de-

structive ways such as through violence or relapse into substance abuse. Within the groups, they have also made contact with old friends, as well as making new friends who could fill the gaps in their social networks (Hedin 2002).

As group members, the prospective cooperators developed different activities which were important for their own treatment, such as developing creative ventures or giving talks in prisons and school. But they also found meaningful tasks within the group, such as motivating and supporting their friends who were still in prison or abusing substances. They also found new, stimulating tasks such as giving talks, giving briefings at the meetings and leading youth groups. These new tasks offered responsibility and training in new roles. The new tasks and roles also led to a shift in perspective, whereby they became aware of how situations seemed to their friends in the target groups. Before forming cooperatives, several had held positions of responsibility in the groups, such as chairman, treasurer or secretary. A number had found work outside the group or experienced a change in family situation, which contributed towards development. It is clear that many were already undergoing *significant personal development* when the ideas emerged for social cooperatives.

5.2 Personal development in a cooperative

When the ideas of starting social cooperatives arose, primarily within *Bryggan* and CRIS, certain people felt ready for this and immediately welcomed the proposals. They had worked for several years in the self-help groups, and recognised the needs which existed among members and others in the target groups. Other people had long had ideas about a halfway house, but had less faith in all the plans put forward. They did not believe that the ambitious plans could be realised, and remained cautious. Once the plans started to become more concrete, they were surprised and thought about playing a more active part.

Others lacked self-confidence and were unsure of their abilities. They had to be convinced by the project leaders that they would be able to manage. They needed social support in the form of information, advice and persuasion in order to have the courage to take on the task. One cooperator explains how she was eventually persuaded to come onboard with the project:

"I was supposed to go to the employment service, and they just pointed to a computer – I thought 'I can't do this'. I just left and felt that it was such a big step. Then P (the coordinator) said: 'But O, we're applying for funding, this is great. We need someone like you – you

can start working on this project.' That's how it was. So I said: 'I don't want to – I can't do it!' 'Of course you can,' she replied."

Thirteen people were recruited for the initial cooperator training, which started in late summer 2002. Three different groups of cooperators were formed in connection with starting the training (cf. 3.1.). The training entailed new knowledge and teaching new skills. The prospective cooperators also learnt to overcome and manage their various individual difficulties.⁴ One cooperator talks about this:

"Then I have a bit of a problem – I'm dyslexic. So I have to take it easy. I'm not that quick when it comes to computers. And this is everyday stuff. I had to write it down – I'd never done it before. I didn't panic like I sometimes do. There are times when it's worse – sometimes I can do it, and sometimes I can't. I get these anxiety attacks, just like having a migraine. And when I relax. It feels like such an enormous responsibility. Particularly a month ago, I was really down then and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to keep up. I feel calmer now, now that I know that B (a member of the management team) is coming too. Although I'm the treasurer, I don't have all the answers. I need to know what the issues are. It's like launching headfirst into the unknown. But it'll be OK of course. In fact, I think it's fun!"

⁴ Overcoming and managing difficulties and problems is usually referred to as coping – see Eckenrode 1991.

The first year of training and forming cooperatives brought a wealth of new knowledge. The new tasks forced the cooperators to increase their awareness of new areas and to try new tasks which they had never tried before. They now had to learn about subjects which they had previously found uninteresting or hard to grasp. Every *Vägen ut!* project meeting therefore meant increased knowledge. At first they were not bold enough to discuss matters with the representatives from public bodies, but soon learnt to speak for their cooperatives and started to learn the language of these officials.

Gradually, representing cooperatives became a more natural and meaningful role. This can be seen both as a development of knowledge and as a process of socialisation in a new role and culture. The cooperators were forced to acquire new social and cultural capital in order to operate within the new project context (Bourdieu 1986, Skeggs 1999). The four project leaders in particular quickly became advocates for their cooperatives, and assimilated ways of working and knowledge which fitted in with the public sector.

In connection with building cooperatives, the cooperators formed closer working relationships with one another within the associations. Respect and understanding for others within the cooperative often flourished. One woman has the following to say of her friends in the cooperative:

“But I still think that our combination was a good one. We wouldn’t have been able to cope without each other. There’s actually a great deal of mutual admiration and respect. These women are some of my greatest heroes! I think they’re amazing for having made the break from drugs and crime in the face of such opposition. And against all odds. And re-establishing parenting! They’re so admirable – I have nothing but respect for what they’ve done. It’s not just anyone who can get out of that kind of situation. From such a life crisis, whatever form it may take. And that’s what they’ve done. I reckon I learn a lot everyday from the others!”

But there are also accounts – albeit few – of how the increased cooperation led to disagreements between people and power struggles. For example, there were groups of people which did not work well together. One interviewee describes a working situation which proved difficult early on. At her cooperative, there was a woman who tried to assert herself by making decisions over the heads of others. The others took offence, but did not dare to challenge her. Another cooperator then stepped in and attempted to limit her exertion of power. This led to confrontations between them, which everyone found unpleasant. Eventually, the woman left the cooperative, much to the relief of the others.⁵

Former substance abusers who have not overcome their problems sufficiently can lead to highly destructive processes within the group. There are cases where this can lead to the suppression of differences in opinion. One cooperator who previously witnessed such a process in a user association says that it is important to deal with destructive tendencies quickly and early on, before they are able to escalate (cf. Hedin 2003).

Most cooperators and apprentices say that early on in the cooperative they acquired new knowledge and skills, and learnt much from collaborating with other cooperators. This also included learning a lot about themselves. They were also able to use existing knowledge from earlier times in their lives. One cooperator explains:

“In my previous job, I was never able to use the wealth of knowledge I’d accumulated, that’s to say the wealth of knowledge from having spent thirty years as a substance abuser and still being alive today. So I obviously have a great deal of knowledge. When you’ve lived the kind of life we have, you’re certainly enterprising. In order to cope out there on the street and survive, you have to be enterprising otherwise you become a – as I tend to say, otherwise you get left on the bench.”

But success comes at a cost – in the beginning, there was hard work and a lot of overtime. In some cases, the cooperators’ families complained about the amount of overtime. One cooperator tells how much work there was early on:

“But it was also something that we were aware of when we committed to this. We knew that there would be a lot of work and a lot of meetings. And I’m very lucky in my situation – it’s just me. No family, no wife and kids asking when I’m coming home. It’s different for P. And S also has a family who are always nagging him.”

During the second year, the production of services began in a couple of cooperatives, and this presented the cooperators and apprentices with fresh challenges. Now was the time to accept new people who were in the earlier phases of the process of breaking with the past and guide them in terms of accommodation or work training. For example, residents were taken on from Solberg who had been drug-free for a relatively short time, and certain difficulties were encountered.

This work gave cooperators and apprentices a kind of staff role in relation to the users, who did not always feel at ease. One cooperator who ran study groups and motivation work at a correctional treatment establishment describes the reactions of the inmates and her own feelings. She sometimes met old friends from her days of substance abuse, who accused her of having “betrayed” them and having changed sides, which made

⁵ Certain details have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

her feel ill at ease. She chose to hand over the motivation groups to another cooperator who lacked her previous experience.

Through the production of services, the cooperators also came into closer contact with public sector officials who placed their clients in accommodation or work training within the cooperatives. For the cooperators, it was a matter of gaining legitimacy and faith from among the officials of the prison and probation services and social services. In general, the cooperators were treated well, but were often asked about their personal backgrounds and their professional ability. Heterogeneity in the training backgrounds and professional skills of the cooperators was therefore an advantage.

Among the cooperators, some participate more regularly in the various work groups and collaborate in the development partnership within *Vägen ut!*, e.g. the four project leaders. They have another role as advocates for their cooperatives. They become accustomed to providing information, speaking at various meetings, negotiating with politicians and officials, and representing their friends in various respects (cf. chapter 6). Acting as advocates also gives them greater insight into how society works than they had previously. Above all, they find it interesting to participate in and affect discussions and decisions, and they have a degree of influence which they never had before.

One project leader mentions that this is a difficult role, but that they have enjoyed strong support and assistance from the project's coordinators. She has advised, supported and encouraged them constantly. Without her support, this enterprise could not have succeeded. A third project leader mentions that it feels good to be seen as an example by his friends, but that this also brings great responsibility. There is always the worry that the enterprise could fail, or that he could do something disastrous as a leader. He describes a nagging worry which is always there:

“Deep down inside, all this feels a little scary – it's all gone so quickly, it's so big and there are so many people involved. There are huge demands on us to be somewhere or other, and for us to hang around – the project is so far advanced that it would be a real problem if someone jumped ship. Now it really feels like we've painted ourselves into a corner. We can feel a slight panic, as it's also this addictive personality which sometimes makes me feel afraid. I have to fight my feelings to make it through the day and to cope with many of the situations I encounter. And it's really useful then that I'm constantly aware of it.”

In conclusion, it is clear to see how the individual development of many cooperators and apprentices is assisted by working in the social cooperatives. The final phase of the process of breaking with the past, which many of them have

reached, is about building a new role for their life and dealing with the aspects of their former life which will always remain (Ebaugh 1988). Through the work, the cooperators and apprentices gained a wealth of new material with which to build these roles (Biernacki 1986). These are both professional roles developed within the cooperative and informal roles in the groups. This is particularly common among the project leaders, who of course also represent their friends in a variety of contexts. They learn to speak in meetings, talk to various groups of people, meet journalists and give interviews (Adams 1996). They are advocates for their friends in the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives and thereby have an influence which extends far beyond the reach of the cooperatives (cf. chapter 6).

Cooperators and apprentices also obtain *identity material for their new roles*, e.g. through acting as contacts and supporters for the users. But the cooperators are also entrepreneurs, and must develop other roles such as salesmen for products or care services, internal administrators for the cooperative and not least negotiators with various public bodies which buy services from the cooperative. It is thus a multifaceted role of producer, entrepreneur and care giver which the cooperators must develop, with each facet involving a number of skills. The material shows that many of the players believe this is a real challenge, and stimulating too!

It can also be seen how *the various phases within the process of breaking with the past assume the character of an institutionalised career*. There are set steps and phases within the process, and what should happen in each phase is reasonably clear to all involved. A general knowledge is taught of the process and the obstacles and difficulties which may be encountered. Gradually, a general model is developed for removing oneself from substance abuse and crime, which is widely accepted both within and outside the target group. The advantage of a general model is that it can be distributed among the members of the group and can be a recognised tool when breaking with the past. Another advantage is that public sector resources can be associated with the various stages, such as accommodation and treatment options. One disadvantage with such an institutional career is of course that those who deviate from the general pattern can find it hard to obtain recognition for breaking with the past and sufficient help along the way.

5.3 Gender differences in terms of method of working

One notable aspect of the work of the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives is that the majority of cooperators and apprentices have always been women. Thirteen people – ten women and three men – registered for the initial cooperator training, which started in late summer 2002. Two women and three men participated in the second round of training. There are now around twenty cooperators and apprentices taking part in the project, but these are

still predominantly women – around two thirds are female. The gender distribution among the users is more balanced. There are five work training places at *Karins Döttrar* and seven places at the *Villa Solberg* halfway house. Since Solberg has seen a greater turnover of residents, men dominate in the numbers of users (cf. chapter 4).

From the beginning, the cooperators chose to have single-sex cooperatives, and there are now three single-sex cooperatives and one which is mixed. It was recognised that women and men have different needs and, to a degree, different working styles and attitudes, i.e. gender differences within the group were seen and acknowledged and an important variable within the organisation. *Vägen ut!* has thus chosen two different models for organising gender relationships, a *single-sex model* and a *mixed model*. We will now review the models and the differences in ways of working.

One obvious difference which is quickly discerned is that the three male *Villa Solberg* cooperators built up their cooperatives more quickly and were quickly running halfway house activities. Plans for a halfway house existed early on during the cooperator training. The group focused on starting to look for suitable locations, and thus found the old house outside the town and opened negotiations on authorisation, renovation and equipment. As early as September 2003, the house was ready for business and was able to take in five residents. During the first six months of operation, the

work distribution schedules, residential rules and work concept were drawn up. The renovation of the house, opening and starting work were extremely labour intensive.

One of the cooperators recalls how starting up the cooperative required considerable efforts from everyone, but that they were satisfied with this despite the challenging pace and all the overtime work. The intensity suited their temperaments, and cemented a new identity within them. It can be seen that the men were bold enough to invest in the concept even though the full details had yet to be agreed on and it was not known how the care market would embrace this new accommodation. The basic features for the work and the system of rules for the work were also gradually drawn up while these activities were in progress. A number of mistakes were made, and lessons were learnt from these.

The men worked quickly and energetically, and took more risks initially. However, the women sometimes point out that the men also had more in the way of support, back-up and material resources when setting up *Villa Solberg*. For example, three of the project leader posts were within the Solberg group (cf. chapter 4). The cooperative's launch was also marked by a grand inauguration ceremony with around 200 invited guests and media coverage.

Both the female cooperatives worked more slowly and thoroughly on developing the concept for their activities. The first

woman started her work training at *Karins Döttrar* in the autumn of 2003. The working organisation and work training activities had not yet been finalised, and much of autumn and winter 2003/04 was taken up with this work. The groups of cooperators were larger, with six and seven members initially, and everyone had to find their own tasks and roles. With the *Karins Döttrar* cooperative, a great deal of time was spent on group discussions on previous experience, key tasks, various organisational structures, feelings and attitudes. The men also perceived that there was a great deal of conflict among the women in the cooperative. One of them says:

"I really admire Anna (the supervisor) who has remained resolute, despite everything these conflicts involved. I don't know if women are more temperamental; at any rate, their mood swings are quite clearly different to those of lads or men. I think that we men bite the bullet when there's a problem. We don't just throw our toys out of the pram and say, 'No, I don't care anymore. I'm off. I'll be back in a couple of days when I've calmed down a bit.' We stick with the problem and solve it."

Group discussions within the cooperative were needed in order to get the group working, but were also provocative and hard going. The women did not let each other off lightly – they formed a very close group and dealt with various individual abilities and idiosyncrasies. In the long term, this means that they learned to deal with cooperation issues and conflicts, and

got to know each other well. *Karins Döttrar* also received guidance from *Kooperativ Konsult* – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation in these group discussions. One cooperator highlights the differences between the way in which the men and the women worked:

"It was very lively, just how it tends to be with blokes: from point A to point B, with no bloody beating around the bush. Not looking at anything else. They had a goal, so they headed straight for that goal. And it had to succeed straight away! They needed results, fast! Whereas we spend a lot of time talking. We have long, long discussions with lots of thought and feeling. It's a bit more confused. But I think that way it works out better in the long run, if you've worked through the difficult relationship stuff. The guys will have to deal with that later, I reckon. When things don't work and they start falling out, then they'll have to talk about it. That's just a theory – it's not been proven."

Another cooperator believes that the *Karins Döttrar* group discussions were important for the group's working environment and security, as well as for developing various work skills and finding a constructive role for everyone. Clear gender differences can be seen in the cooperators' work descriptions. The men work towards the goal faster and with a greater focus on action. Personal idiosyncrasies and feelings are put to one side, and they concentrate on building up the cooperative and its key tasks. Only personal idiosyncrasies which directly affected the work in hand

were discussed. The men discussed to a lesser degree their feelings and experiences which did not relate to the area of work. The women worked more slowly and thoroughly, and devoted a lot of time to conversation and discussions within the group. These dealt with previous professional and family experiences, the trauma of substance abuse and each person's different work resources and abilities. Since the women's way of resolving and dealing with problems often goes beyond *narrative and group social support*, these discussions were important for the cooperative's working environment and performance (Hedin 2003, Trulsson 2003).

From research into women's and men's development and socialisation, we know that women are often more relationship-oriented than men (Chodorow 1978, Trulsson 2003). Boys are raised to focus on independence, individuality and their own achievements, whilst girls are raised to be sensitive to the needs of others, caring and responsible. Women therefore become more focused on the needs of those around them and do not pay attention to developing their own abilities. Many women also seek fellowship and security – with partners or friends – and feel insecure and vulnerable on their own (Björling 2005). Many women with experience of substance abuse testify that the loneliness is worst after giving up the drugs and treatment centre visits (Hedin 2003, Kristiansen 1999, Trulsson 2003). The gender construction leads to individuality, goal focus and practical treatment in men, and relationship focus and

responsibility for caring in women (Skeggs 1999). The different ways of organising the work in the cooperatives is therefore a reflection of the gender constructions which still prevail (Hirdman 2001).

The interview material shows that not all women were comfortable with the roles of the traditional gender construction. Some felt impatient during all the group discussions and wanted to press on with the work and progress. They focused on tasks other than those which are traditionally female. Within the cooperative's activities, there was also room for many different roles and skills.

Other research into working life and care for people shows us that women are often highly ambitious, demanding much of themselves and wanting the work to be as good as possible (Björling 2005). Despite initial uncertainty and lack of self-confidence, women in empowerment-focused labour market projects demonstrated perseverance and were able to develop activities despite external difficulties (Björling 2005).

The short three-year project period for *Vägen ut!* here goes against women's need for long-term situations. The *Karins Döttrar* cooperators have long supported plans to start a halfway house for homeless women, and have made a number of state and municipal funding applications for such an operation. In June 2005, they were notified that an initial grant for such an operation had been awarded. The plans to start a halfway house for target group homeless women can now

start to be realised. *Karins Döttrar* has also left its former premises – which were shared with *Vägstugan* – and moved into larger premises in central Gothenburg in June 2005. The lengthy planning and construction period, which the women worked on in order to develop the operation, is now starting to bear fruit.

5.3.1 Labour management and social support

Within the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives, both women's and men's need for labour management and social support have been taken care of. Cooperators and apprentices have had many individual experiences of difficulties in their working life, time off work due to sickness and periods of unemployment. A kind of double management has therefore been arranged within the cooperatives, with both management from project leaders and coordinators within the cooperative and guidance from specialist advisors from *Kooperativ Konsult* – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation. One project leader describes the coordinator support:

“Yes, she's good. I think she's excellent. She's a real source of support for me. And I actually think that I'm a source of support for her sometimes, with different situations.”

As part of the work training, the users also say that they get a lot of social support from the cooperators, particularly from their contacts, to overcome difficulties and develop their abilities. All kinds of social support are provided: a clear structure and stimulating tasks, as well as discussion about specific difficulties (House 1981).

Another gender difference is that women often have less self-confidence and find it harder to stake their claim and ask for resources for themselves, such as better pay or the further training that they need. This has been well documented in other areas of professional life, where women have found it harder to get better pay and conditions for their jobs (Forssén & Carlstedt 2003). Feeling less valued and requiring less in terms of resources and space is of course reminiscent of women's downtrodden position in society and family life for hundreds of years (Forssén & Carlstedt 2003).

Certain such signs of female subordination can be seen in the female cooperatives where, for example, *Karins Döttrar* did not demand its own premises for the cooperative work, but was forced instead to share premises with another similar operation. This led to a series of problems.⁶ One of the cooperators describes how the women found it hard to “help themselves”, but gradually improved. She says:

⁶ This constraint was primarily financial in nature, since at times there were insufficient funds to hire premises for the cooperative.

“Between the Solberg cooperative and us. The guys weren’t content to sit in pokey offices or accept tatty furniture from the attic. The guys wouldn’t be satisfied with that or... I don’t think that I personally have a problem with all that equality stuff. But it’s a bit like guys have to stand cap in hand and beg.”

Since the work has developed, however, the need has grown for separate premises and additional resources for further training and activities. The *Karins Döttrar* cooperators have demonstrated their ambitions and desire to develop by completing a series of further training, which was essential to the work of the cooperative.

There are also other signs that the women are no longer content with fewer resources and benefits than the men. Some women also describe how their self-confidence has grown through working in the cooperative. One cooperator says:

“It’s giving my life meaning and it’s given me companionship – I have friends now. I actually feel a little bit important. Things are changing. It’s nice when you feel like that occasionally. Yes, friendship within the cooperative, and everyday life has a purpose. It’s not just empty. And then it provides a sense of self-confidence. Strong self-confidence, which has grown. And you get a new sense of identity, too. It’s a bit nicer when I meet other people – I can say that I work for a social cooperative, and I don’t have to say that I’m on benefits. Because this is nothing to do with that...”

Since three cooperatives are single-sex, inter-gender working relationships and problematic attitudes or behaviour towards the opposite sex have not become apparent. The predominant picture which we get is that a good sense of friendship and cooperation has prevailed between the members of the male and female cooperatives. For the inauguration of *Villa Solberg*, the female co-operators helped to decorate the premises and serve refreshments. And when the *Karins Döttrar* premises needed to be repaired and decorated, the women had some help from the Solberg men. They saw the need to swap services and support each other. But there have also been statements to the effect that the women believe that the men received preferential treatment, particularly at the beginning of the project, and that they enjoyed advantages because of their gender.

It can be seen that, in the early stages of the project period, the women fought to be equal to and have the same benefits and terms as the men. They fought for equal proportions of salaries and other material resources as the men. They have gradually become more able to demand better benefits, which is probably as a result of improved ability and greater self-confidence. While working in the cooperative, the women’s skills, work experience and knowledge have been boosted to another level, which has promoted their individual and collective development and has strengthened

their self-confidence considerably. The project has thus seen both a battle for equality and an empowerment process running simultaneously, to a varying degree depending on the project period being reviewed (Dominelli 2001).

In the mixed-sex cooperative, there were a number of problems in terms of attitudes and treatment. These related to difficulties in the women and men working together, and a certain dissatisfaction with the working environment. One apprentice describes “personal chemistry” problems when decorating the premises together.

Another apprentice expresses dissatisfaction with the management, and believes that sometimes she did not get enough management support.

It appears that when cooperators and apprentices have had their hands full with building up the social cooperative, they functioned well, providing high quality services on a sound financial footing. There was probably insufficient time and energy left for discussions about attitudes and behaviour between the genders. These old oppressive patterns of superiority and subordination between men and women require detailed gender-role training (Hirdman 2001), as well as active and patient change management in order to overcome remaining elements of sexual oppression (Dominelli 2001, Langan & Day 1998).

In conclusion, the working-life research shows that, through their acquired relationship orientation, women usually have a great need for social support, encouragement and feedback, as well as healthy working relationships and the opportunity to discuss any problematic situations which arise. Many care-related jobs require both concrete labour management for the tasks and guidance for ethical dilemmas. If insufficient labour management or guidance is provided, staff feel neglected (Franzén 2003). Employees are left alone with a number of different requirements, difficult tasks and competing pressures from various standards within the organisation. Men can be left alone without social support and advice more than women, but they too suffer from a lack of labour management or stimulation and feedback. Greater requirements, a lack of work supervision and a lack of stimulation and social support are all distinguishing features of a poor working environment, which leads to stress and ill health (Theorell 2002). Women are particularly sensitive to poor working environments and conflicts in the workplace, and are signed off work more often due to work-related ill health.⁷

When organising the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives, attention was paid to the differing needs of women and men. It was noted that women and men need different preparation periods to develop the

⁷ Interview with researcher E Palmer on Aktuell (television programme) in January 2005

cooperative activities, and attempts were made to support the cooperatives with various resources, including equipment and material resources, and training and guidance. Various kinds of stimulation were provided as needed, and attempts were made to develop cooperators and apprentices based on their individual requirements. There are many examples of both women and men improving their abilities, gaining strong self-confidence and changing their self-image while working in the cooperative.

5.4 Concluding reflections

A number of reflections can be made immediately. An initial reflection is that *the recovery appears to be facilitated by working in social cooperatives*. Many of the users who came to *Villa Solberg* or *Karins Dötrar* for accommodation or work training still found themselves marginalised after giving up drugs (i.e. in the third phase of the process of breaking with the past). They may demonstrate various crisis reactions and psychological systems after long-term substance abuse and serving prison sentences. They are often vulnerable and insecure in the new drug-free situation, with extremely low self-confidence. They express ambivalence towards both their former lives in the culture of substance abuse and their new lives as ordinary citizens. They also demonstrate a number of psychological symptoms connected to the marginalised situation in which they find themselves between two different worlds (Hedin & Månsson 1998).

When they come to the social cooperative, they find themselves in a *support structure* where, due to their own experiences, the participants are familiar with their problems and can understand their reactions and the difficulties they encounter. There they have access to *spontaneous and informal social support*, which is important in an excluded, vulnerable situation (Eckenrode & Wethington 1990), as well as *various forms of formal support*, such as treatment options, social security benefits or other forms of protected work through the development partnership contacts. There are also links to a number of other public sector resources. This means that they get access to a secure environment of like-minded people who speak the same language and understand their situations, whilst also placing suitable demands on them. Demands are placed particularly in terms of freedom from drugs, strong motivation to change their lives and real efforts to change their former lifestyles and social relationships. This means that not only does the situation include support, security and understanding, but also demands and challenges which these users must be able to adapt to and fulfil. Once the users have overcome the initial difficulties of the marginalisation phase, work training or accommodation within the cooperative means that they get a wealth of material for the new life patterns which they are busy building up (Biernacki 1986, Kristiansen 1999). The material comprises new knowledge and skills, new ways of behaving, and interests and activities relating to the work of the

cooperative. Their personal resources, which had previously been used for destructive activities or which had not been used while abusing substances, can now be used in work. The interview material includes many examples of personal abilities which cooperators and apprentices have been able to develop from their new roles, and which mean that they gradually build up a new identity. Self-confidence gradually improves, and contributes to the process.

There are also examples of people who work very well within their cooperative, but who still battle each day with incredibly low self-confidence. In other words, their self-image and self-confidence lag behind, which constitutes an additional difficulty for many. They may also have residual features of their former role in their repertoire of roles, creating difficulties in certain situations or in certain types of relationship (Ebaugh 1988, Topor 2004). But working in a cooperative requires a range of new knowledge and skills which prevails over these role residues and gradually reduces their influence on the personality. Feedback from others also affirms the abilities and resources required by the work. Moreover, they experience less stigmatisation from those around them when they are able to present themselves in a new role (Goffman 1981).

Another closely related reflection is that there appear to be *gender differences* in how the changes come about sociopsychologically in men and women. It seems that in difficult situations

men take the concrete solution to the problem first, applying themselves to thought, resolution and emotional work in later phases. During periods of energetic work, they focus on their tasks and leave aside social relationships and surrounding conflicts. They may be forced to take the problems onboard and resolve them during a later phase. But then work routines and systems of rules have already been drawn up and can provide clear grounds for everyday life. Women seem to depend more on dealing with the emotional and cognitive arrangements along with the tasks, so that various abilities follow and form a kind of whole. The women also seem to need to discuss and work through matters together in groups, which has led to many discussions within the cooperative relating to various work elements and decisions. The women also seem more troubled unless various decisions and attitudes are supported by their colleagues and labour management, which could be due to the relationship orientation which women experience during the early stages of socialisation (Trulsson 2003). The way in which women deal with matters through language and men through practical action highlights gender differences in ways of working which need to be understood and heeded in a working organisation (Rönmark 1999). It can be seen that the male *Villa Solberg* cooperative was initially given a larger proportion of the project funds in order to be able to build their halfway house. At the same time, the *Villa Solberg* project leaders had both the training and work experience needed to form



the basis of an operation selling accommodation services to prison and probation services and social services clients. Several of the men in the Solberg group had a fair amount of work experience. Among the women in *Karins Döttrar*, there was a greater degree of heterogeneity within the group, and less collective work experience which could be applied to rehabilitation work. More skills development was therefore needed in order for *Karins Döttrar* to be able to create a co-operation operation selling work training services. The project's short lead time (three years) for commencing cooperative work meant that it was important to use the available resources in the best possible way. It was therefore natural to begin investing the project funds where the conditions were best. The women's skills gradually improved through various types of training, and the work training had increasingly more placed users. In the long term, the difference in resource allocation between the cooperatives has been evened out (cf. chapter 4).

A third reflection relates to the *empowerment perspective* which formed the basis for the project work. Through this perspective and the advocacy which exists at various levels of the cooperatives' work, the cooperators and apprentices were able to take more responsibility than in normal professional or study situations. This includes responsibility for younger friends who had not progressed as far in the process of breaking with the past, and acting as a role model and an example. Advocacy related to negotiating with politicians, public sector officials and experts from various EU bodies. Certain cooperators also had significant contact with the media, gave interviews, took on study visits and took part in radio and television programmes. Through discussions, advocacy, negotiations and democratic decision making, which are part of the empowerment process, the cooperators and apprentices took on greater responsibility than citizens normally do, both for their own development and for group development in the cooperatives (Adams 1996). In this way, many of the cooperators experienced power and the ability to exert influence. They participated in a democratic process, and this boosted their self-confidence and gave them new knowledge of how society works (Dominelli 2002).

Chapter 6. Relationships in the Vägen ut! project

Relationships in the *Vägen ut!* project have already been discussed in the previous sections. In this chapter we focus on other important relationships. It can be said to be impossible to overestimate the significance of relationships for a person's life and well-being. Personality development, self-esteem and creation of identity are often brought about in interaction with other people. Dominelli (2002) believes that a kind of constant act of comparison takes place in these encounters, where dissimilarities are emphasised, but where similarities are also significant. These are based on physical, mental, social, economic and other comparisons, which also create positions of superiority and inferiority between people. In other words, identity and self-esteem are created through constant comparisons and negotiations with other people, which means that the identity is not fixed and uniform, but variable and to some extent context-bound. This means among other things that a person who has often "lost" in these negotiations can obtain material for new self-image and identity through new encounters and considerations, collectively or singly. The following sections on the various relationships in the *Vägen ut!* project should be read in this light.

6.1 The relationship between Vägen ut! cooperatives and basic associations

One of the reasons why the *Vägen ut!* project was allocated project funds by the Swedish ESF Council related to not just the development of social cooperatives but the fact that the project was innovative due to the fact that the voluntary associations were to play an important role in this process. They were to act as a kind of "plant nursery", and the idea was also that all members were to be offered the opportunity to train as cooperators. Another important aspect was the associations were to be responsible for the project. It was therefore also natural that Gothenburg's NGO Agency, an organisation that works with and acts for non-governmental organisations in Gothenburg, was given a coordinating function.

Attention has also been paid to the important role of the associations in the appraisal, in which one of the questions concerns the relationship between the *Vägen ut!* project, the cooperatives and the basic associations, for instance, how the cooperatives influence the associations, and what type of process of change is initiated within the basic associations on the basis of their involvement in the project.

In this chapter we discuss the relationships between the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives and the basic associations, what these relationships have been like and what form the process has taken.



6.1.1 The initial conflicts

We have presented the activities of the basic associations in a previous chapter. We shall now discuss them in a slightly different context. The associations have different histories, organisational structures, target groups and activities. The interesting feature is that regardless of these differences, some type of conflict has arisen in all cases, principally in the initial phase when the cooperatives were being formed.

At the start of the project there was strong criticism in one of the associations, where some individuals openly expressed their anger and disappointment with their cooperators, feeling for instance that:

“The cooperators (members of the cooperatives) are almost never here, but just turn up and make decisions. The information they’ve given has been poor... This has been a good programme of activity and has provided security, it’s been possible to go away for a while and then come back.”

Several interesting aspects emerge here, such as who has the power in this relationship, the basic association or the cooperators, the significance of security and how it is linked to changes in the role of information and communication in this process. The latter is also evident in the next quotation from a prospective cooperator in another association.

“We were busy forming it (the cooperative). We were busy with the preparations and were almost finished. Then we had to have a meeting with the board. But they

hadn’t realised how far we’d got. They didn’t understand that we’d reached the stage we had. (...) I don’t really know what happened. All I know is that it was a terribly unpleasant meeting and we were really annoyed when we left, or when they left us. Because it was at our place... We felt terribly offended, we did. We’d drawn up rules... And instead of saying well done girls, but there are just a few things you need to change, a minor error here and here... Instead of that they made us feel really small! (...) No... it’s all in the past now, but it took us more than six months to get over it.”

In this case it is the association’s board that has reacted for instance to not having received information in good time. It is also possible to read the aspect of power into this reaction, which relates to who takes precedence in developing the activity, that is to say who holds the formal institutional power. In other words, deficiencies in communication were not the only cause of conflict, and tensions in the relationships related above all to issues of power and loyalty.

“It was very turbulent for a while. And it had a great impact on us. (...) We attended meetings during the autumn that were quite dreadful. They said that everyone should know that you don’t bite the hand the feeds you. You should be loyal and not do anything else. The whole thing was sick. Some people have an incredible ability to spread...”

In most associations it was often the most active and dynamic people who were interested in the idea of joining the project and forming cooperatives. Conflicts with other strong individuals in the association could lead to a complete breach and to the loss of people who were important to the association, which would in turn exacerbate the conflict.

What relationship the cooperative and the basic association should have with each other has been an important topic throughout the process. It has been questioned whether the cooperative is to be an integral part of the activities of the basic association or have a freer role. When it has proved impossible to reach a consensus, this has led to a battle that has been waged with various weapons, among which threats and complaints have been quite commonly used.

“And I was publicly called an idiot (laughs). For idiots, I think we’ve succeeded in building up something very interesting here. If I hadn’t been an idiot, what could I have achieved? But we didn’t come to blows and didn’t have any discussions, we didn’t indulge in any bullshit. And in the end we come out on top, with the prison and probation service and the municipality and everything else. They’ve come to see that now. They (from the association) phone me and say: “We’re thinking about withdrawing from this project, if we do will the whole thing collapse?” As if their activity was something we needed.”

Powerful emotions were aroused during the process, and it was not uncommon for the causes of conflict to be linked to the personal characteristics of some individual. Both parties have tried to look for scapegoats and to pin the blame for problems on individuals. One person has been regarded as an idiot, troublemaker or mentally disturbed, another has been called power-mad, and so on. But motives have also been seen at other levels, and it has been understood that change and separation processes of this type quite often lead to strained relations. But regardless how the disputes have been viewed, they have all, at least at the start, been so extensive that the cooperators have had to receive guidance from Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation.

“I’d produced a lovely timetable for what we were to look at, but I feel we didn’t entirely follow it. Among other things, we were to talk about gender roles and things like that, but they were so obsessed with this business with conflicts relating to the parent associations, or with the parent associations. About this business of how it was to go and how they were to handle the situation. We talked about it a lot, and tried to find strategies. Then there was a lot of frustration about the problems that came up, and at times it became focused on people far too much, I think.”

The cooperators received professional support, which helped them to move on in the process. But how is this discord actually to be understood, is it individually based, as it is ultimately the individual who acts, or are other causes at play? It is probably a combination of several factors, and several interesting terms linked to this discussion emerge in the material: separation, change, security, aggression, jealousy, complexity, communication and power.

6.1.2 “This has been a good activity and has brought security”

To obtain a better understanding of some of the emotional reactions initially aroused both among the cooperators and among the members of the basic associations, it is important to note that most of these people have a background of psychological or social problems. They are also in various phases of the rehabilitation process. These factors have probably contributed to the need for security and stability in the associations. The cooperatives have been regarded as a threat to this security, and aggression has been focused on those who have urged change or have left the programme of activity. They have been regarded as deserters. Jealousy is also raised in some interviews. One of the members openly discusses there being a sense of jealousy behind her anger at not herself having been sufficiently mature to start as a cooperator. For many people, this role has provided good opportunities for development and a certain position of status. The feeling that what is important and interesting happens in

Vägen ut! and not in the association, and that the cooperatives can also affect the future of the association has led to a desire among association members for information that is continuous and easy to understand.

6.1.3 Complexity and communication

The question of how the information from the *Vägen ut!* project and the cooperatives to the basic associations has worked is fundamental to their relationships. As indicated above, some people feel that the information has been inadequate. It is difficult fully to interpret what is behind these perceptions, an emotion in the recipient or actual deficiencies. Some conceivable factors are discussed here.

Firstly it may be noted that the *Vägen ut!* project is concerned with a very large and complex process in which even the most initiated do not know in more than broad terms what will happen in the longer term. Living in some kind of uncertainty with regard to the development of cooperatives has been a characteristic feature of the activity. It has sometimes been a matter of looking for suitable premises or waiting for important permits and decisions etc. The uncertainty has very often related to economic issues. This has led to no-one actually having been able to see the complete picture and predict the future with certainty, and the information given to the basic associations has thus been deficient.

The problem of complexity has also been concerned with the formation of cooperatives having impinged on a number of areas of expertise and knowledge which have required the involvement of individuals from many different professions. In this sense, the *Vägen ut!* project can be described as a thorough learning process, in which many phases have demanded some type of specialist knowledge. And it is not just cooperators who have gained insights into new areas of knowledge, people representing authorities and others have also learned a great deal in these contexts.

The information between the *Vägen ut!* project and the associations has been provided in various ways, through cooperators who have reported on the activity, by e-mail, for instance minutes of meetings of the steering group and development partnership, in which representatives other than cooperators from basic associations have also been allowed to take part, and through public seminar days. The problem has not always related to the quantity of information but to the level and content and how it is conveyed. To be able to value and put the often complex and fragmented knowledge in e-mails and in meetings in context, it is necessary to have a complete picture, something that only the most initiated in the project have had. Attention was drawn to this by the project management, and a greatly appreciated seminar was held in Skandiahuset on 10.4.2003, where the possibility of gaining a more practical idea of what the whole *Vägen ut!* project entails was

created through various presentations from cooperators and project management.

If it is to be possible for the information to be understood, it must also be presented in a way that corresponds to the level of knowledge that exists. Many of the cooperators feel, for example that they have informed the basic association but that it appears as though people do not listen or understand. This may be a matter of not having succeeded in translating the multifaceted knowledge produced the whole time in the project into simpler language. Nor is this communication made easier by a number of English words that are sometimes used in EU contexts and also in *Vägen ut!* Empowerment, benchlearning and franchising are just a few examples.

The demand for information has not always been concerned with wanting to know everything that happens in the project and in the cooperatives but more about how this affects one's own situation in the association in which one has found one's secure base. As discussed above, changes can create anxiety in groups where security is closely linked to stability and non-changeability.

6.1.4 Where is the power?

It is clearly apparent from various types of material that the basic associations were to be an important driving force in the project. At the beginning it was felt that the prospective cooperators were also the representatives of the association in *Vägen ut!* But relatively early on conflicts arose between the coopera-

tives and the basic associations, and the trends towards separation in some cases became increasingly clear as time passed by. The longer the process went on, the more obvious it became that the cooperators could not be viewed as legitimate representatives of the associations or vice-versa. Gothenburg's NGO Agency noted this at a relatively early stage and tried to activate the association representatives who were not cooperators in the *Vägen ut!* project.

It may be noted, however, that the direct association representation in the *Vägen ut!* project has not taken place in the steering group but through the meetings in the development partnership. This organisationally more peripheral function has not strengthened the associations' participation in the project. An important question in this connection is therefore why the original aspirations on the role of the associations have not been fulfilled, and why the conflicts have not led to total separation and battle for power in some cases. It is not easy to find the answers to the questions, but a number of factors can be identified that may have been significant.

Without discussing who has done or said what in this conflict, it can only be stated that it eventually led to a breach between those who were involved in the formation of cooperatives and the others in the parent association. The consequence was that basic associations had less power over how the cooperatives were governed. A contributory cause relates to the scope and complexity of the

project, which has led to the creation of a relatively large and self-reliant organisation separate from the associations in which management and control issues have been very important.

It can also be said that three years is a relatively short time in view of how large the project is and what level of aspiration there has been. The objective of creating independent and financially sustainable cooperatives has necessitated an enormous input of commitment and time. It has gone very quickly, sometimes too quickly in view of the original idea of the active and mature participation of the associations and their members.

But it is not just lack of time that has contributed to inadequate endorsement among the basic associations, but the form of financing, in which co-financing accounts for half the project funds. The more associations and authorities take part, the sounder the financial basis that is created for the project and the cooperatives. The activity requires a certain minimum level to be able to have good content and quality, in view of the cooperator training courses and everything else that has to be funded. Not starting the project until all the associations are at the same, relatively high level of awareness is perhaps not realistic, nor is it always worth aiming for in view of the fact that people are also developed in processes of this type. At the same time, it is important to note that excessively rapid development in which the other members of the association do not have time to mature perhaps does

not contribute either to empowerment for people other than those who are included in the project.

Once the *Vägen ut!* project had created an organisational centre with the principal task of safeguarding the cooperatives and their activities, and when the process of separation had gone sufficiently far, it was no longer possible to view some of the cooperatives as association representatives but more as competitors with the parent association in a care market in which services are sold and grants are sought. It is also against this background that conflicts and discussions on disloyalty can be viewed. There has been concern in some cases that the cooperative will take over the entire basic activity.

At first it was planned that once the cooperatives were developed all the members of the basic association would have the opportunity to become cooperators. As a result, development opportunities would be created which the association could not offer its members within the framework of current activity. The reason why this idea could not be put into practice is partly that it did not prove possible to create a consensus with what was left of the basic association. There were uncertainties, for instance about what would happen with those individuals who did not want to or did not feel sufficiently mature to take part in the cooperatives. In some cases the plans were also inadequately implemented among those responsible for the association and its management.

6.1.5 What happened then?

We have been principally discussing the initial phase and the intermediate period of the project. The question is how relationships between the cooperatives and the basic associations have developed since. It can be said that the process has moved in different directions.

In an association in which the conflicts were mainly concerned with deficiencies in information between the board and the cooperators, the communication has become better and relationships have normalised. The formation of the cooperative has not threatened the market relationships that exist between the members and the management after the initial phase either. This relates among other things to the fact that the cooperative has not in any way changed or threatened the association's usual orientation and activity, as they previously constituted a relatively independent unit. Nor has the aim been, as in other cooperatives, to create a financially self-sustaining unit, but to continue as previously with handicrafts, social get-togethers and self-rehabilitation as foundations for the activity. The interesting thing, however, is that there have always been cooperative elements in this unit through joint production and sale of goods and courses, but mainly with the aim of being able to purchase new material in order to be able to continue with the handicrafts. Other expenditure has been paid for not through these funds but through municipal grants. Another aspect which differentiates this cooperative from others is that one of the unit's

two employed guides has represented the cooperative in various contexts together with the members. This model has signified a slightly reduced role for the members in *Vägen ut!* This obviously poses a problem from the point of view of empowerment.

In another association the early conflicts are now over and the collaboration now takes place in a positive spirit. This is partly to do with changes in the personnel composition of the basic association and the association and cooperative not being competitors in the same market, even though they work with the same target group. The basic association is sustained mainly by grants and the cooperative through the sale of residential placements. Positive collaboration also takes place here through the cooperative placing individuals in work training in the parent association. (The interesting aspect is that according to the project plans it ought to be the other way around, with parent associations acting as a landing site prior to placement in the cooperative. However, this has not worked in any association.) The constructive relationship is also to do with one of the cooperators still taking part in board work in the parent association. This obviously provides good opportunities for mutual information and collaboration with regard to users. This was intended from the outset, although in reality it took on slightly different forms.

In two associations the conflicts have been entirely resolved but have changed character. In one case the conflicts were serious and led to a situation where early and total separation was the only answer. There were both battles for power and conflicts of loyalty here which were partly to do with having competitors in the same market and partly to there being strong individuals trying to move in different directions. The cooperative has found a favourable market niche and some stability in its activities. The parent association, on the other hand, went into a serious decline, with a low intake of clients. This process finally led to activities being closed down completely and the association ceasing operations in the spring of 2005. This is paradoxical in view of the important role the associations were to have in the development of cooperatives and vice-versa. The cooperatives were intended to give a boost to the associations and contribute to them surviving better.

In the second case the conflict has led to premises no longer being shared with the parent association since June 2005. Living under the same roof as a similar target group, yet with separate activities and different management, was not a good solution. Those who were previously visitors in one activity suddenly became responsible for activity in the cooperative with its own users. In the parent association, on the other hand, there was a trained social worker who was responsible for activity. Different ways of looking at treatment issues have also contributed to differences of opinion.

In this situation many uncertainties and problems of demarcation between the activities arose. To summarise, it can be said that a separation has been a good solution, to be preferred in this complex and complex-filled cohabiting relationship.

Another interesting aspect is that although a number of conflicts have occurred between the cooperatives and the basic associations, this does not mean that the whole *Vägen ut!* project would be permeated by this. As discussed previously, Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation has been involved as a professional conflict resolver, and Gothenburg's NGO Agency has acted as the representative of its member associations. It has therefore been possible for everyone to attend the development partnership meetings, and this has started to work increasingly well as time has gone by. At the same time, the question arises whether another type of organisation with a stronger link to basic associations might not be able to resolve some of the difficulties associated with the basic associations in many cases having ended up on the margins, with regard to the development of the project and the cooperatives. At the same time, it can be imagined that this would probably have caused other problems, as the association and the projects have such different objectives and ways of attaining these. However, it has been found that after the first phase collaboration is possible if the circumstances are right, and the conflicts have not developed into bitter personal battles.

6.1.6 Reflections

We have discussed above the relationships between the basic associations and their cooperatives. It has been found that none of these relationships has been entirely smooth. It appears that various types of tensions have been built into the processes of change and separation regardless which ones have been involved. But as Lennér-Axelsson and Thylefors (2004) discuss in their theorisation of groups, the way in which these reformations are handled takes on a different appearance depending on whether the group is open or closed. As we have noted, self-help associations are quite often characterised by being closed due to some fractiousness between the members, and security is therefore often prioritised ahead of development.

In addition to this psychological perspective, it is important to look at how circumstances at more organisational levels can be imagined to have contributed to the tensions. These are factors that relate to *organisational domicile, the relationship between the collaboration groups and the roles of actor* (Boklund 1995). A central and independent organisational unit was created for the whole *Vägen ut!* project with its cooperatives. This arrangement further reinforces the differences with regard to organisational ideologies between the basic associations and the cooperatives. The *Vägen ut!* project has been primarily oriented towards rapid change and the creation of financially independent cooperatives over a relatively short time, while the associations have been focused more on



traditional and long-term low-threshold activity for at-risk groups, mainly funded through municipal grants. There is a built-in opposition between these orientations which it is not so easy to bridge, principally in a situation in which success is not achieved in communicating with one another.

These more organisational conflicts have quite often been played out between individuals who have had an informal or formal position of power. With regard to non-governmental associations, the question of distribution of power may be a complex issue involving various actors, members, employees, the board and the responsible authority which are linked to the activities. In this case there are additional cooperators and employees in the *Vägen ut!* project. The question is whether this complexity in distribution of power has been one of the stumbling blocks, partly in view of the scope and short time of the project. There quite simply has not been sufficient time to communicate and create consensus among the most important participants in the process. It can be stated in this context that Basta, a social cooperative formed ten years ago on Södertörn, had a planning period of five years before the actual activity was started (Meeuwisse 2001). It can also be asked whether it is always possible to create a consensus. It is, perhaps, entirely natural that the break with the old and the creation of something new and above all separation, which actually forms part of various types of rehabilitation and development processes, is a course of events that

always creates oppositions. The most important issue in this case is how to handle the antagonisms in a constructive manner. We have discussed above a case in which collaboration works well after some initial problems. This is principally to do with communication having been developed at management level and there not being conflicts of interest but gains from the collaboration.

In a previous chapter we discussed empowerment at individual group and structural level. With regard to empowerment at the individual level, the results point to more positive dimensions, particularly with regard to cooperators and project managers and to them also having been strengthened in the process as a group. At the structural level, the exposed situation of the target group, but also their resources, have been highlighted and discussed in various contexts, especially in the media. At the same time it must be noted that the empowerment perspective has not affected the basic associations and their members in the same positive sense. At the start of the project the aspirations were that everyone in the association in due course would, if they wished, be able to become a cooperator. This provided a positive belief in the future, at the same time as the conflicts, the shortage of funds and time due to the project nature of the activity, have led to it not having been possible to fulfil all these expectations. It has been found that the cooperatives have had difficulty in recruiting new cooperators due to shortage of resources. Energy has been

spent on attending to those cooperators who are already involved in the activity. All this taken together has contributed to a negative empowerment spiral having arisen in some associations, instead of the anticipated positive effects the cooperations were meant to bring for the activity.

To summarise, it can be said that with regard to the direct role of the associations in driving the development of the cooperatives, it has not turned out as intended. Some of the associations may, however, have a function to fulfil in this process, for instance through the relationships that exist between them and the cooperatives. An interesting question for the future is what relationships between the cooperatives that remain after the project period and their parent associations will be like, but as mentioned this is a matter for the future.

6.2 Relationships between cooperators (members of the cooperatives) and people in authority

The relationship between officials and users is a delicate issue in many different ways. There may be good relationships and consensus here, but there may also be severe conflicts on various issues. In the latter case the question of power becomes very clear. But as discussed in the chapter on theory, the outcome of these meetings is never pre-determined. At the same time it can be noted that those who hold most potential power resources *physical and mental strength, knowledge and skills, the strength of the group and institutional power*, are well

placed in these negotiations. We therefore consider that empowerment-oriented activity should always be focused on strengthening all these resources for users and reducing obstacles, opposing forces. A project such as *Vägen ut!* signifies an interesting opportunity to press for increased empowerment in this way. And the relationship between users and officials is one of the most interesting in this work.

The *Vägen ut!* project is discussed below as a process in time, but also as a process with regard to relationships between the various participants, in particular cooperators, principally represented by project managers, and people in authority. At the start of the chapter we discuss a number of important basic requirements for this relationship.

6.2.1 Basic requirements

An important question in the project is concerned with how success has been achieved in asserting and keeping the idea of empowerment alive in situations and the meetings at which the users meet the representatives of the world of authority, people who are well used to meetings and communication and who have strong formal and informal institutional power. They also possess a large share of the project funds through co-financing. It can be said that there are a number of different circumstances that have affected how this relationship has been formed. These exist at different levels, from personal qualities of the participants to the basic ideology of the project.



6.2.2 Motives

To understand the basic requirements for this relationship, it must be asked for instance why the parties are willing to invest time, work and financial funds in the project at all. On the user side this is principally to do with a wish to be able to improve one's personal living conditions but also those of the group. For people representing authorities, it is a matter of creating the necessary conditions for their clients for a more independent life away from authorities, and in so doing reducing the authority's costs. The financial motives of these authorities were also clear to certain users:

“It's very interesting working with the Social Insurance Office. They see benefits with this, getting people going. And they have a requirement of halving incapacity rates. Those are utopian things, but all the same... It's good that they look so matter-of-factly, working on the problems that exist. And they're only interested in measurable results. Main points, how many people are back at work and so on. And that's understandable, everyone has their own agenda in this. What we try to bring about is to cooperate for example with the Social Insurance Office, the employment service and the municipality, social services. Because they're the ones who deal with the same people, and to some extent the prison and probation service.”

It can be said that there are many common features in the motives and objectives of the users and the authorities, but differences and antagonisms also occur, as discussed later in the chapter.

What projects authorities choose to support is also to do with the quality of the arrangement and who the other participants are. The project areas initiated and supported by the EU often have good status and are based on a good resource platform. Although some EU projects have taken a battering in the media, they nevertheless appear among more initiated people to have a good reputation and provide a kind of quality guarantee that it is a well thought-through experiment, even if no one can really know at the outset whether the project will be successful or not. The prison and probation service in particular, which quite often receives negative attention in the media, is cautious about the contexts in which it is prominent. At the same time they have great responsibility to develop new ways of working with the multifaceted problems their clients have. In other words there is responsibility for the clients in the actual assignment, all the authorities participating have to take account of that. The question is simply which are regarded as one's clients and which belong to someone else's area of responsibility.

6.2.3 Representatives of authorities as individuals

It is not unimportant who represents the authority in question. What is interesting is that the term advocacy can also be used in many cases with regard to the officials who have taken part in the project. This is partly to do with many of them having previously had knowledge and experience of complex client problems. This is not so remarkable with regard to the prison and probation service or municipal social services, where a good number of clients have this set of problems. But at the employment service and the social insurance office too, which mainly have a different type of activity and clients, there are people whose task is also to work with this group. These people have sometimes been actively sought out for the *Vägen ut!* project. One of the users reports:

“We did a good job during the endorsement phase and when we found representatives for these partners in the partnership. And those people there having an interest in this too and thinking it's good. That's important! Because you can't get endorsement for it at your own workplace if you don't think it's a good idea.”

It is not unusual for these representatives of authorities in their own activity representing perspectives and experiences that differ from those of the organisation, for example with regard to the co-operators. The basic understanding and also the approaches of the participating representatives of authorities have mainly been user-affirming.

6.2.4 The project leaders

If people from authorities are selected, it can also be said that it is not chance that has decided which ones have become project leaders. All four had already previously been dynamic and active individuals in their associations. Nor does the term advocacy take us any further here. They do not just operate on their own account but for a while have also safeguarded their rights which have not come so far.

An important factor with regard to support for the user perspective is in the organisational structure and in the fact that the project administratively may be located at Gothenburg's NGO Agency. Nor can the role of the project coordinator be overestimated in this context. Without exaggerating, it can be said that this has been one of the most important functions in the development of the project. With regard to safeguarding the user perspective, the role of coordinator is viewed by many as being very important in the project. The term professional advocacy can be used here, where experienced people who have long worked with different types of client groups act as agents in relation to the world of the authorities.

6.2.5 The basic ideology of the project

Another basic requirement for the relationship between users and people from authorities is concerned with the project ideology, for instance in the form of the EU's control of the project through certain

tenets such as gender equality and empowerment. This has also influenced the project application, where the following can be read:

“The whole *Vägen ut!* partnership rests on a very clear empowerment perspective. The activity is to be based on cooperators and trainees on placement in the social cooperatives, and they themselves become responsible for the development of the cooperatives and participants in the whole project process.” (p. 5)

This perspective has generated interest among both users and people from authorities, because it presents opportunities for the users to become more socially and economically independent and because dependence on official grants can be reduced as a result. As promises are given here that all parties gain from this collaboration, it has also become a popular concept in all circles. This should also be viewed against the background of the traditional authority-based work with clients not always taking place in dialogue, or being particularly effective.

“What’s most interesting about the project is that the initiative and responsibility are where they belong. It’s tedious working with people who sit there with their arms folded and then say it wasn’t a success. It’s important to battle and take the initiative and in that way retain your dignity as a person.”

Clients and officials have similar experience of well-meaning projects having failed because the people they is concerned with have not themselves been involved in their own development and rehabilitation. On the basis of this understanding of empowerment, increasing client responsibility, it is easy to understand that the professionals are happy to be involved in developing new forms. The question becomes more problematic in contexts where relationships cannot be developed in which both win, for example when a limit is reached where someone has to share the institutional and financial power. This situation may very well arise in the affirmation of empowerment, where the users make use of their organisations (the strength of the group) to try for example through increased grants (tax funds) to create a more independent and enriched life for themselves.

It is also important to note that with regard to empowerment ideology *Vägen ut!* is not the first experiment either in Sweden or abroad, which also reinforces the credibility of this perspective among both parties. In Sweden there is, for example, a widely noted enterprise, the Basta cooperative, which in turn has taken its ideological inspiration from San Patrignano in Italy. Without discussing in more detail here how empowerment is affirmed at Basta, it can be noted that it exerts influence in Sweden through its existence and the rhetoric on user power.

6.2.6 The project as a free zone

A further important consideration for the relationships between users and people in authority is that *Vägen ut!* is a project with a limited time. This makes it possible to create a different type of relationships and groupings within the context of authority. From the point of view of empowerment, it can be said that both parties enter a project space, a kind of free zone, where the usual relationships between client and official do not apply, or in any case not fully. At the same time it is important to remember that people from authorities take part in these conversations with more power resources in the form of institutional power and financial funds. They take precedence in definitions and find it easier to impose their will in the event of disputes.

To summarise, it can also be stated that the circumstances for developing empowerment in relationships between users and people in authority have been relatively good, from the basic ideology and the organisation to the people who have taken part in the activity. Let us now discuss how this has turned out in practical activity.

6.2.7 The initiative for the project

The user power in the empowerment perspective is concerned among other things with an active approach to formulating one’s living conditions, in this case from the outset to finally planning and implementing the *Vägen ut!* project. The important question is how the users have succeeded in retaining their positions throughout this process.

The initiative for the *Vägen ut!* project arose in *Bryggan*, which is a user-oriented but not user-controlled non-profit-making association. This enterprise had been created by three people, one of whom later worked as an employee working with inmates and the other two had experience of having held that position. The association grew, and more people were taken on and developed the work in various ways.

But it can be noted that such a large project as *Vägen ut!* was not born in the twinkling of an eye but is a long process in which many people, both users through their associations and professionals, are involved. However, it is of great symbolic value for the credibility of the project as a user-oriented activity that the initiative has come from a user association. The involvement of employees and professionals in this phase is therefore viewed as a slightly suspicious factor. One of the officials reflects:

Do you think that the idea of empowerment comes across well in the *Vägen ut!* project?

“Well, from what I’ve seen so far, I think so. I think it’s very difficult to express what is real empowerment, when authorities are involved. It’s very difficult to know whether the actual idea and power comes from the ones who are to carry on with it. The idea came from a support association, but there was also a person who was employed, who in some way

(was involved). (...) But I still think the core of it (the project) comes from the users now. Well, that's the way it feels."

The apprehension that emerges in these quotations is perfectly justified and has to do with experience that formal, institutional power together with specific knowledge are factors that quite often lead to the professionals taking over this type of project. But if the initiative comes from the "roots", there is a greater prospect of it also being controlled by the users. With regard to *Vägen ut!*, the "employee" who is talked about here is not a person representing an authority, but in the role of coordinator for the whole *Vägen ut!* project can be called a professional advocate of the client group.

6.2.8 From idea to plan

Many people with experience of substance abuse and/or crime have a great deal of energy and also ideas about various types of projects. At the same time it is not always easy to implement these plans. In many cases special knowledge and skills and in particular financial resources are required to reach the next stage, the realisation of these thoughts. One of the users comments:

"Empowerment is a very modern word, you hear it all over the place. But few people know what it entails. The idea actually is that there are associations which are each meant to deal with it, but it's technically impossible with all the requirements that have to be met with paper management and applications. An association has to have all the expendi-

ture first and then request money. This means that the association has to have money. And no association has it. That's required to be allowed to take bank loans and so on. Projects can easily end up in the wrong hands. Then end up with professionals who know this way of thinking and these rules. And they don't benefit the actual target group."

The journey from an idea to a thirty-eight-page application for funds from the Swedish ESF Council is not a simple matter that a user organisation with its limited resources can manage on its own. It is not sufficient just to have energy and commitment, professional knowledge is also necessary to cope with producing a good plan and application which compete successfully for project funds. Some of this expertise existed in the Gothenburg's NGO Agency, which helped produce the first application for funds in order to be able to plan more extensive activity. Leif Tjernström discusses:

"*Bryggan* is a member association of the Gothenburg NGO Agency, so that's entirely natural. The attitude from our side has always been that if we are to be involved in this, it has to be based on the associations. It doesn't have to be Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation or the Gothenburg NGO Agency that searches for and has ideas. We have to help these associations. Then we have to arrange good support for them and be able to put all these ideas they have into practice. That was the whole idea behind this."

Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation was also involved early on, as the project was to be concerned with creating social cooperatives for former prisoners who found it difficult to enter the labour market.

In both quotations above there is a realism about what knowledge is required to put together an application, and there is an awareness at the same time that the projects must be located in the associations to affirm the power of users. Another interesting aspect is that this was not the first attempt to obtain funds for such an activity in collaboration with Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation.

"I don't remember where we applied for money, but in any case we produced a project description about how development could be arranged for a social cooperative on the basis of the target group and with *Vävstugan* as a basis. But nothing came of it. Now I think it was two years ago I got an e-mail from Pernilla: Now you can dust it off. Then she was on her way again. And it was also the cooperation with *Bryggan* that had been established, a whole gang of them came along to Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation and we started discussing how a project could be arranged, what they wanted and so on."

It is clearly apparent here that the project in a sense has long roots since similar attempts to obtain funds have been made previously. This experience has

presumably not been unimportant in creating a good-quality and mature application. The ones which can be regarded as active at this stage are the Gothenburg NGO Agency, Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation, Pernilla Svebo Lindgren and some others from the *Bryggan* association. It can be said that in this phase many professionals are involved in the process, and the users are more in the background. The question is what success has been achieved in having the ideas of the users themselves taken on board. An important opportunity was given, however, for all potential partners to present their ideas through a two-day future workshop. One of the users reports on their experiences of this meeting.

"Before this Equal project started, we tried to start a half-way house, but that didn't work out. (...) But I have always had this idea, the idea of a half-way house, and now the opportunity presented itself. When we were invited to the future workshop for the first time, I hadn't decided at all to get involved in this. I was there at the future workshop and the chair of *Kris* was there too, and each of us put forward ideas, but then we thought there was too much wooliness. And some of them had had some preliminary meetings earlier, and I think this first phase was applied for and they had a little money, they had a future workshop for it."

The idea behind the future workshop was to be a kind of think-tank where everyone, regardless of affiliation, could present their thoughts and ideas. This occasion, as the quotation indicates, could be regarded as quite woolly, particularly when there someone already had advanced thoughts about a half-house house they wanted to put into practice. It is also of interest that this type of activity today is a functioning cooperative in the *Vägen ut!* project.

Another important dimension with the future workshop was that the users and representatives of authorities could come into close contact with the framework of the *Vägen ut!* project. An official describes this phase:

“They brought together the authorities they thought to be affected by this, and the prisons and probation service is included of course to a very large extent as it was the clients of the prisons and probation service it affected. (...) I had to go to Marstand for a future workshop, and it felt very exciting, and we were there for two days working, and they were really good days. It was a new way of working because we were mixed. There was *Kris* and *Bryggan* and other representatives from various support associations, user associations and a gang from other authorities, and we were put into mixed groups and had to work together. It was very exciting. (...) There were prejudices too .. I mean there are prejudices on both sides. It isn't just from one direction to the other but in both directions. That emerged right at the start.

But it sorted itself out well. (...) At the end of the future workshop we had split into groups we were to take part in. When we left, we had the social insurance office, and the employment service had already decided that we should meet. Then we met a few more times until the actual application was sent off and we twisted and turned on certain things, how we should imagine it and so on.”

Various discussions and meetings were regarded as something new and exciting. Not least the meeting with the users (clients) who officials rarely meet in this type of context. Although some of the prejudices decrease in both parties, the quotation shows that continued planning among the officials took place in the main in the usual groupings, together with other people representing authorities.

The future workshop was also regarded by the users as a rewarding discussion forum, where they were allowed to join in planning future activity. The users are also allowed to join in with the process in other respects.

How much were you involved in the actual planning of the application. Pernilla and Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation were active in this, weren't they?

“Well, they were the driving forces when it came to the application. They were the ones who did most work, in fact. We had indeed.... we were there, you see. She (Pernilla) always come and

asked us how she should design various things... whether we thought it looked good, whether we thought it was right. She was helped by us, she did that when certain areas were concerned. But for the most part she and they were the ones who were used to that kind of work. Although we had to stop somewhere, so we stopped. It was the meetings, lots of meetings with various... Then we had the future workshop where we met all of them, the existing partnership, where we met somewhere and we had two days from the future workshop where we looked at what form it should take and steering groups and working groups were set up, in that way we were very heavily involved.”

It is clear that the power linked to knowledge and skills is perceptible in the application phase and means that the professionals bear the main burden. It is evident at the same time that the project management and above all the coordinator are anxious to ask for the views of the users on various issues. The future workshop has served as a democratic platform, while people from authorities have had a certain advantage in the discussions through their institutional position and greater familiarity with meetings of this type.

6.2.9 From plant to reality

When the application was granted and the project was started, there began a hectic period. This phase of the project has been much concerned with discussing and taking decisions in various types of meetings: everything from partnership

meetings and steering-group meetings to work committees and working group meetings. Out of the users, it is principally the four project leaders who have attended these meetings, principally with regard to the working groups and the work committee. In the case of the partnership meetings and steering-group meetings other cooperators have also been summoned and have attended fairly frequently. In other words, with regard to user participation in different types of project meetings, it is principally the four employed project leaders who have most intensively followed the whole process out of all the cooperators and who have taken part in various contexts and discussions. For some of the project leaders, there has been work in certain phases in several different group settings. And it is no exaggeration to say that this first phase which also contained educational measures was a very hectic time for them and was very demanding.

With regard to the organisation of the *Vägen ut!* project, many regard it as complex and large. At the same time, no one can actually identify what it is that is unnecessary. For project leaders, these meetings have been important from various points of view, firstly to learn various things and secondly to represent the interests of the target group.

“I can image that from the point of the view of the target group we aim at, it's important that I'm involved. Whatever I have and pass on, it's important that I'm there, and that each person represents their target group, so to speak. It has

been both interesting and exhausting, sometimes, interesting and uninteresting, but necessary in fact. We have attended many seminars, and there we try to represent. (...) Otherwise nothing would have come of it, otherwise it would have been done over our heads. So I think it has been inspirational to take part in it.”

With time there has been better structure and content to the meetings, and the roles of the groups have also become clearer.

“Today everyone knows why we are there and what the purpose of the group is. So we work accordingly, the roles are quite clear. And that’s good. At the beginning it perhaps wasn’t entirely so. But now a lot happens routinely, it feels fine.”

It is apparent from the quotation that development also takes place through the meetings, through increased knowledge and skills, and everything takes place more as a matter of routine. As a result, greater power is also obtained in relation to people representing authorities.

But it is not just the general meetings that have taken time. Once the cooperatives have started, these too have necessitated various types of organised meetings. The meetings and other activity have been so demanding that not only have people started making heavier demands on themselves, they have also started expecting this with regard to people representing authorities.

“I think they are very laid-back, they don’t phone when they don’t attend their meetings. I’ve really surprised that people who represent an authority can behave like that. I think it’s really odd. (...) You know, for many years I was forced to live on social assistance, that was the confused life I led as a substance abuser. I sometimes thought oh dear, it was today I was supposed to go to the social worker. They were always like: You’ve missed your appointment, so you’ll have to wait a fortnight. That’s what they said to you, so I thought: Aha, here they sit (laughs) the ones who have been trying to raise you and they’re not so damned good themselves. It’s a little dig at x. (...) People may have an awful lot to do, but if you miss a meeting you phone and say I won’t be able to make the meeting. Don’t you?”

In the quotation, criticism is directed at certain authorities which, particularly at the start of the project, did not give priority to the *Vägen ut!* project. A number of meetings were missed without apologies for non-attendance being sent. A certain sense of revenge apparent in the quotation cannot be overlooked. Different logic applies in the project room in comparison with social services. Here the person representing an authority can suddenly be perceived as deviating, the one who breaches the general standards of decency. In some sense a reversal of roles can be perceived here, while the people representing authorities do not risk anything other than their reputation in the project group when they fail to phone.

6.2.10 Power in meeting situations

The researchers have attended a large number of partnership and steering-group meetings throughout the project. It was clearly apparent that project leaders and cooperators kept a relatively low profile for quite a long time, then becoming increasingly prominent the longer the project went on. This is due to a number of different factors. At the beginning the project was less practically oriented, and questions for which various experts in particular had the answers were handled in the meetings. It was therefore often people representing authorities and other professionals who spoke. However, the project leaders have also had regular inputs in these contexts through presentations of the various cooperatives.

A very important topic, which was related both to the cooperatives and to the *Vägen ut!* activity at large has been finance. On matters which have affected acquisitions for the cooperatives, everyone has been able to be active in the discussions, while the more overall financial questions such as co-financing have principally been discussed by those affected. At the same time it can be stated that even though everyone has not always been active in the discussions, the meetings have been important from the point of view of information and knowledge. For the uninitiated, it has been good schooling in how meetings work. With time the discussions at meetings have been increasingly concerned with issues which relate to existing cooperatives and there

has been “more workshop than talk”, as both the users and people representing authorities have put it.

Time and the many long discussions have, however, meant that knowledge of each other and also understanding of and respect for each other’s knowledge has increased. This is partly to do with an active approach on the part of authorities not to take over too much.

“Empowerment from this point of view is not wrong to have, perhaps coming up with ideas and answering direct questions, how it works, then you can answer of course. It has to be guided by the users themselves.”

Awareness that is not an authority-guided but authority-supported activity has contributed to an active attempt to think about this in different situations. This is also due to the project having been regarded as professionally run and the project leaders having taken part in the activity as capable and energetic people. This has been appreciated by the project leaders.

“That’s what’s good, it actually works. It works. And it’s great that they have really dared to give up some of their power-based thinking. It’s a form of trust we have and you have to safeguard it of course. Empowerment is a very important aspect, and *Vägen ut!* has to be permeated by this. It’s for the target group, to the target group, so to speak. It isn’t to be at a very high level and think that’s what they’re to do. No, it comes

from below. What is it we need to have for this to work? We know the needs. So they should listen to us. Not the other way round. And we know damned well that it works. It's great that it's in our project!"

6.2.11 Talking for your cause

With regard to the users, it has emerged that the closer to the centre of the project one has worked, the greater the experience of empowerment and self-realisation has been. What benefit it has been possible to draw from this work has also depended on what personal power resources one has been able to take into the project in the form of physical and mental potential, as well as skills. Many people who have participated in the project have learned a great deal and developed in various ways, but the process has been easier and most rewarding for those who have brought some resources with them. This also emerges in studies of class travellers who in particular describe the significance of the communication, the language on this journey. (Trondman, Kuorsmanen 2001) One of the users has the following experience:

"It's like that in all sectors, people chatter on, they chatter on about things that not everybody really understands, there was so much of that at the first seminars. It was always the same people who had so much to say about everything. So I thought, what do they do to change things? No, I reckon we do something really good."

In all groups and social classes there is to some extent a distinct language, a way of talking and terms which outsiders at first do not understand the meaning of. But it can also be a matter of more or less unexpressed attitudes and codes which often take a long time to get used to. In *Vägen ut!* it has mainly been the language and values of the "middle class" which have served as a kind of standard, and which have also influenced the users who have taken part in the activity.

"I'm learning things the whole time. I even talk differently. I discover that when I meet old friends, I think to myself, it's as if we lived on different planets. You don't even speak the same language any longer. (...) But I do think, you change, you change because you've taken a decision to give up drugs, so it's clear you change a lot."

Living with a kind of double identity and in two different worlds is an experience that class travellers or others who leave an ingrained social role behind them have (Ebaugh 1998, Skårner 2001). Sometimes it is, perhaps, easier to leave the previous life behind completely. At the same time, this very experience is an important basis and very valuable in the *Vägen ut!* project. It is as mediator of this knowledge between these different worlds that most benefit is created for the target group one comes from oneself.

Before acquiring the new knowledge, one is often silent and adopting a listening pose. But among cooperators who attended certain meetings there

were also people who had previously been active in a profession and were accustomed to discussing various issues and could therefore be more questioning and inquisitive in various contexts.

"The working group works well but I have wondered slightly what we get out of it. If I am to be really honest it's.... It's a bit like that at the start too... didn't really know what they were talking about. I don't know anything about the working methods of the employment service, I don't know anything about the working methods of the social insurance office and what laws they operate under. I have no idea about that, I have to ask. I had to ask the others, do the others understand this, and nobody did understand it, but nobody said anything. I wondered what why we were sitting there. (...) But nobody asks. Well, it was the social insurance office I went to that time... And he said to me that we take down a bit of background, but that he can't take down too much because it would take too long. I said I don't need to be here then, I don't know anything about it. And then he said to Pernilla, he thought it was good that that I had said what I thought and he had thought about that. And we know about each other's job, and that's something. But that nobody says anything, because everybody can't know about everybody else's jobs either."

An important issue is raised in this quotation, silence. In this case it was a matter of most people for some reason not wanting to ask even though they did not understand what it was all about. There

may be many underlying reasons for this unwillingness. People did not dare to ask so that they did not give themselves away. If you ask questions, the others might perhaps think your understanding is poor. But it may also be a case of not succeeding in formulating a question on what you do not understand. This situation may arise if too much of what is presented is unknown. This situation is reminiscent of what Gaventa considers to be present in individuals who have been exposed to a power discourse which is not open. Another explanation for the silence may, however, be not knowing that there is no need to keep up to date with all the minor details when you are fully occupied with practical work in the cooperative. Whatever the reason, there are dissimilarities between people representing authorities and users in understanding of the content of the information and the consequences of the decisions taken. This does not, however, apply to all cooperators to the same extent. Some of them, as mentioned previously, are experienced and skilled in different ways and can ask the right questions on the basis of their own needs.

Once the practical activities are set in motion, the need for support from the authorities is reduced, and some of the users start to ask whether it might not be time to abandon this relationship of cooperation:

"I think we're a little weak sometimes, there's a need for a bit of a telling-off and to understand the need to have a dialogue. We go in quickly and think what

on earth are going to do with them, we can manage on our own, as it were. But at the end of the day we're not the only ones. There are those who are to come after us, and we've always done it... almost everything has worked so I don't care about them, I can cope on my own. There's also something you work on through this personal inventory they do at NA. You write about the different stages and run through these states. You make a thorough inventory and can't get away from it. But there are many important pieces in this: You have to cooperate with these devils. But you also have to work with an attitude."

Clear tensions emerge between the users as private individuals and as representatives of the user group, which the person in the quotation is also aware of. With the assistance of NA he has succeeded in breaking with the previously more individualistic lifestyle and has created more of an approach of solidarity and in this way has swapped his own benefit for the collective orientation. The attitude towards "those devils" who were previously regarded as opponents, has been changed in this process. In other words, both the approach and the social network have been broadened.

6.2.12 In the protection of the project space – and outside

As discussed previously, the project space means a temporary free zone from this type of relationships which exist between clients and officials. At the same time this is a conditional freedom because ultimately it is based on

client relationships outside the project. These aspects are always there in the background, and are concerned with economics in particular. Everyone, not least authorities, has expectations for some kind of return for participating in the project, which is clearly evident in the next quotation from a user.

"I was jumped on when I was at the authority. (...) I was with my assistant because I wanted to talk to her about my continued... and she said they had had a chat about something having to be done and they (in the *Vägen ut!* project) would have to come up with some money so that I could go out on a job. And I'm not ready to get out on a job. So I asked to talk to x myself. And x was a bit overbearing and said "Well, there needs to be a bit more, we're in it (the project) and want a bit in return." It was wrong first of all to jump on me, and I wasn't really bothered by it personally, but I felt, I think the famine in Africa is my fault, I've lived my whole life, and I felt that I saw the problems for the group for the projects when the authority starts to argue, it was me they were arguing about. Then we talked, and it means that I lose out financially if work on an OSA scheme [sheltered work in the public sector], so I can't do that. There needs to be some moderation. It's still the case that what I give I give voluntarily, I can't cope with a compulsory role yet... and things like that are, I think. Then x thought that I understood that he was talking to me as... colleague, although I was there on another matter, as x was an authority for me."

Other rules and laws and above all economic realities prevail outside the project space which govern activity. The roles that have existed in the project, as a kind of colleagues, do not necessarily apply outside. The person who represents the authority in the project suddenly has to become entirely an official on the basis of the context at the authority. This has to do with the fact that even if there are certain latitudes in exercising the profession it is the authority code that ultimately applies with regard to the way clients are treated. And for the officials to be able to represent the interests of the *Vägen ut!* user, the results of the project must be in line with the rhetoric and objectives that apply in the various authorities. At the social insurance office, for example, good results involve the client getting away from their benefit systems, for example on OSA schemes. The employment service, in turn, likes to see the users move on from services provided by them to other forms of benefit or support. The people representing authorities are eager for rapid changes to differing degrees, however, depending on what pressure they experience from their colleagues and superiors. In some cases it appears as though a kind of private venture enterprise is being operated in which one participates and works for the *Vägen ut!* project or another project.

"I'm risking a little by having said that this is a good model for the future, the new thinking. Loosen up, we've been sitting here since the seventies, thinking vertically. Now along come empowerment and the horizontal dimensions and

have the future for themselves. And it's clear that it's no fun for yours truly if you can't show results. They say, come back when you have some results. I take that personally, it takes a second, it's a reflex."

The scope for action is a matter of the support one receives from one's organisation. If one has an independent role it entails certain freedoms but also great responsibility. This means that when the resources of the authority and one's working time are devoted to an authority, one would like it to show good results. All the authorities which take part in the project have these aspirations. The dividing lines are concerned with what is meant by good results and how quickly they have to be achieved.

"We as an authority have to accept that kind of thing, and we have to make the effort so that everything runs smoothly, I think that's important. But it's a matter of the whole time of the authorities' finances too, how much money there is and where the money is to be spent. How quick solutions you want. I think you have to be patient in any case when working with people with that background, generally. It's sometimes the case that some authorities want fast results. It can be seen that not many people are actually involved altogether (in the *Vägen ut!* project in 2004). There is a lot of money but few people, that's the way it looks today (2004). And it might be thought that that is a rather meagre result. But there's also this aspect of systematic impact, you have to try to change that too."

The officials who have experience of working with complex problems also have more realistic expectations of results. In some cases a successful result in a project may be managing to keep the problems at the same level. On the other hand, in the case of authorities where the majority of clients have relatively ordinary and simple problems, which anyone at all may be affected by, there is less understanding of multifaceted problems and the expectations of results are consequently also greater.

However, it is not just economic considerations that can pose problems outside the project space, these may also relate to the institutional power linked to laws, rules and statutes that govern systems. In one case the project participants tired of the inertia they perceived within the municipality, and instead of waiting they went straight to various authorities and contacted officials and politicians at various levels to discuss their needs for permits and support. However, here the unconventional and rapid solutions of the project ideology clashed with the orderliness and ordinary line organisation-based thinking that exists in various authorities. This tactic sometimes produced quick solutions, but also aroused some irritation over the fact that the normal procedure was not followed. This finally led to the users being informed how the municipal organisation works and how things proceed in various types of cases.

To sum up, it can be said that there have been some dissimilarities and differences of opinion between the users and officials, but that they have not been insurmountable. It has been possible, through countless get-togethers and discussions, to increase understanding of each other's circumstances and worlds. In this way it can be said that a certain level of "system impact" has been generated here in both the users and the people representing authorities who take part in the project.

6.2.13 Who owns the project?

A not unimportant question concerns who owns the *Vägen ut!* project. Is it the baby of the users or is it someone else who should take the credit for this. It is not unusual for projects that start to show good results to attract people who at the start were dubious about becoming fully involved in the work.

With regard to *Vägen ut!*, the coordinator together with other professionals in the management has pressed for the users themselves to report on and represent the *Vägen ut!* project in different contexts. This has sometimes been done together with people representing authorities who have taken part in the project. An official reports:

"Last week we were in Stockholm at a conference and it was an invitation that had come through the project. It felt as though we all came from the same direction. Here we are from Gothenburg. There were some from authorities and some from user organisations. It is also

slightly interesting that in some contexts people represent their various authorities or associations, they have more of a voice. But the more you cooperate like this, the next moment you're sitting around a table having a coffee break, as they say. The role of authority and the role of association have then been put aside and you sit there as a group of people instead. Regardless where you come from, regardless of your background, and it feels as though it becomes clearer, it's confirmed more when you do projects like this."

Not just through countless meetings but also through joint trips the users and people representing authorities meet one another. By going on visits to other towns and cities you suddenly create a common identity, "us Gothenburgers". On these trips the project leaders have also noted that although many Equal projects have empowerment as one of their tenets, this does not appear to be apparent in the representation and who represents the projects, which the users themselves in particular have noted:

"I have to tell you that when I have been at all those meetings that have been about various EU projects, there has never, well from Baronbackarna there has been one person along with us, who's has come from the background we come from. It's nice that in the *Vägen ut!* project Pernilla has given us titles, has said that we are to be project leader and that kind of thing. In these projects it's people with a lot of knowledge, with a background in schools, who are

project leaders. The only thing we have is experience of life, no schools at all. We notice that when we've gone off to other meetings and come across other projects, so I think that if there's anyone who takes up empowerment it's us, you can see that. I reckon it's just us who are users and project leaders. I feel that I have very great control in this project, that our views are well respected. I think that's great, it's unusual, that's what I thought when I came to the first one. Well, this project and that project, and there were social welfare officers, and the head of Basta, for me there was no employment in that they are going to sit there and say that people have to make use of empowerment, that's really odd." (laughs)

It can be imagined that the link to EU funds attracts many professional project workers. This high representation of professionals may also relate to the fact that in the other projects empowerment is perceived in the same way as it is in *Vägen ut!* But it may also be due to the people the projects turn to not feeling prepared to argue their own case. Whatever the reason might be, it is nonetheless surprising that user representatives are mainly from Gothenburg. Another user from *Vägen ut!* comments on these meetings as follows:

"In our project there really is empowerment. It's been a flagship that people like to point to (from the Swedish ESF Council). We have to make a presentation of ourselves and so on, but then they also lend us support."



The interesting aspect is that empowerment here is perceived not just as an opportunity for the users but also as a wish on the part of the Swedish ESF Council. When this wish is fulfilled, they are represented in this way and goodwill is created for them, something should also be obtained in return.

As discussed earlier, empowerment is a concept for which both the users and the other parties, for example the European Union, can give their backing. The question is merely whether the concept is perceived in the same way with regard to market issues. If both parties win in the collaboration, there is no problem, but when it involves taking over parts of institutional power, the issue of empowerment can alter. It is only in situations of this kind that it is possible to test what the various parties actually mean by this perspective. Whether, for example, it involves words that do not commit to anything, or whether it has a more radical meaning with regard to distribution of power.

The concept has been practised in various ways in *Vägen ut!*, for instance by the users having to present their project in different contexts instead of the professionals, as appears to be the case in many other similar projects.

6.2.14 Concluding phase of the project

All projects come to an end, including *Vägen ut!* The officials return to their normal activities and perhaps take part in other development projects. In some cases the users also return to their normal everyday lives, while in others they have been able to create a platform for themselves in their lives, for instance through those social cooperatives which are sustainable after the project period. What has happened in the project can be described in many different ways and will be further developed in other sections. In this chapter the focus has been on the relationship between people representing authorities and the users. The question is what the parties take with them with regard to this dimension.

With regard to the perceptions of the people representing authorities about the users they have mostly dealt with in the project, nothing but positive judgements have emerged in the interviews and in other contexts. Many of the officials also relate that this is the first time they have taken part in an activity in which they have cooperated in such a close way with the users. The users and in particular the four project leaders also have similar experiences.

"I feel that we have gained the trust of authorities, and it isn't the criminal drug addict X or Y who you can't rely on, but we feel that we gained, built up trust towards authorities. That's what I feel this project has led to, and those other

parties, those people from authorities can see that it really works, that former inmates can look after things, that it works."

Gaining trust from authorities to which one has previously had a more antagonistic attitude is regarded by many users as very valuable and as being one of the gains with the entire project. This is interesting in many different ways and can be interpreted both at personal level as a kind of redress and acknowledgement, but also as a hope that the whole group will acquire better status. Not just in relation to people from authorities but this type of response is important in general, as shown by the following quotation.

"You get an opportunity to influence things, there's scope for that. You only get that as a result of others listening to you, and if you feel that you get a response. That you are taken seriously. They were such big words (empowerment). If you feel that you're taken seriously, and that your views count for something. So clearly that it strengthens your self-esteem and that you grow with it. That's empowerment, I think. Whatever happens with this project...I would now dare to try something different. If we say that this would fall apart, I would probably look for something else instead."

On the basis of an individual empowerment perspective, it is a very good result that one has been developed oneself to the extent that one can continue regardless what happens to the social cooperatives.

One of the last joint actions which the users and people representing authorities did under *Vägen ut!* projects was the dissemination meetings for public-sector officials during the spring of 2005 in Stadshuset [City Hall] in Gothenburg. Both parties reported on their experiences of the activity from their own perspectives, while it was clear that there was a kind of us others, "we who have worked with and made the project possible". An interesting result and further development of the *Vägen ut!* work entails cooperators, representatives of authorities and the coordinator continuing the collaboration in a new reference group in a project called *Vägen in!* ["The Way In"]. The objective is to carry on with the work by supporting the positive process which has been created in the various cooperatives and creating new cooperatives.

To summarise, it can be said that those who have been close to the centre of the project in particular are relatively satisfied with the relationships that have been created between officials and users. This can be regarded as a good result, but it also shows that constructive relationships can be created in all cases in a project space. The important question, however, is the extent of this experience in time and space. This is a question that cannot be answered in the framework of this evaluation which is limited in time.



6.2.15 Discussion

The focus in this chapter has been on relationships between users and people from authorities in the *Vägen ut!* project. It can be justifiably claimed that these relationships are in many ways very important and interesting, especially from the point of view of empowerment. As is apparent from the depictions above, many cooperators have had prolonged and often conflict-filled relationships with various authorities. One may perhaps have long been supported by the social services or the social insurance office and continue to be so. In some cases the children have also been taken into care by social services. The police and the prison and probation service have also become known to many people over the years. In the accounts given by the users it is rarely the service functions of the authorities that emerge, and the repressive side of their activity is emphasised instead. At the same time there is knowledge and realistic perceptions among them about there not being many bodies other than these authorities that have the resources and opportunities, at least in the initial phase, to make it possible to build up social cooperatives. And as a result to create a more self-reliant life independent of authorities.

With regard to officials, nor are they devoid of preconceived ideas when they enter the *Vägen ut!* project. Many have had experience of complex client cases and projects with user attachment that has not worked well. There are few really successful projects aimed at people with multifaceted problems. At the same

time new initiatives and thoughts are welcomed, as their own regular activity in most authorities works poorly for clients who need many different types of rehabilitation measures at the same time (Lindqvist 1998).

These are the points of departure from which the parties set out on their journey in the project, with a long-term common goal, to become independent of one another. How has this collaboration affected the various potential power resources that constitute an important basis for the development of empowerment on the basis of the user perspective? It can also be asked how the users' actual situation has changed through this collaboration.

Let us first discuss the individual potential power resources linked to *physical and mental* factors. It can be noted that the cooperators who have attended the meetings with the officials have, in the main, had positive experiences in them. Over this period they have increasingly entered discussions and have also received positive acknowledgement of their capabilities and input from the representatives of authorities. The fact that they have themselves had to represent *Vägen ut!* in different contexts has also contributed to greater self-esteem and in so doing has contributed in particular to mental well-being and strength. It is important at the same time to remind ourselves that the positive and protective environment of the project space does not extend so far outside its boundaries. However, confirmation and praise from the

officials is probably of special value since they have felt less appreciated by authorities outside the project and earlier in life.

Of all positive power resources it is without doubt *knowledge and skills* that have increased most. As also discussed in other chapters, it can be stated that *Vägen ut!* is much of a knowledge project alongside its more practical purpose of creating social cooperatives. And knowledge and skills in our modern knowledge-based society are important resources. Knowledge on all issues and deficiencies in these were important factors with regard to participation in various discussions and decision-making. In this process many cooperators have gone from silence and passivity to increasingly asking questions and providing their own input. Some of them have also been brave enough to hold presentations in front of audiences numbering dozens and even hundreds. What is interesting in this context is that knowledge in many areas is a perishable item and related to rapid changes. What is important is therefore not just to have factual knowledge but skills in searching for knowledge, an ability that officials are trained in. It was also noticeable that some cooperators in this process adopted some of the middle-class ways of communicating and relating to different issues, which prompted a certain degree of alienation in relation to the user group outside. The positive aspect of this process is that people try to move away from the environments that have not always been so constructive. The problematic aspect is that the cooperators perhaps

move so far away that it is difficult for them to act as the group's legitimate representative. The art in this role is in being able to relate to both environments without being trapped by either of them.

To summarise, it can be said that the co-operators who were closest to the centre of the project have acquired a great deal of factual knowledge and boosted their skills, particularly their ability to communicate. These increased resources naturally also contribute to the mental potential discussed above in a positive manner. Knowledge and skills create security in various social situations and contribute to increased self-worth and self-esteem.

How then is the *strength of the group* affirmed in these contexts? In many cases the attachment to the association one comes from has been weakened when starting to act as a cooperator. In this way the collective power the association has constituted has also been weakened for a certain period of time. With regard to the cooperators, however, these too have formed new groupings and have consequently been able to boost their positions as a group in the *Vägen ut!* project. The interesting aspect is that in some contexts the officials and users have also formed a kind of group communication, for example on joint trips to conferences or in presentations of the *Vägen ut!* project. Groupings of this type are limited in time, but certainly create positive experiences among both the users and the officials. The question is how the cooperators, after the project

has come to an end, can continue to utilise this group community and its strength in other contexts. It can also be imagined that, together with other cooperative programmes in Sweden, the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives could form an even stronger lobby group.

How has the collaboration between the users and officials succeeded in influencing institutional power? If we look at the formal side of the matter, there is not much in the material to suggest that the authorities would have changed their activities or system of rules on the basis of experience from the *Vägen ut!* project. What has actually happened is that the officials who have taken part in the activity have reported to their superiors and colleagues in their authorities about how the project developed. Before the cooperatives got going, this information was not always so positive as there were no constructive figures to show. There was “a lot of money and chat but not much workshop,” as it was put. In the last phase a number of positive changes have taken place as a result of cooperatives having moved for example from sickness benefits to production-linked benefits, for instance pay supplements and in some cases pay support. This information has been regarded as signifying positive results by the authorities. It is important to note in this context, however, that the *Vägen ut!* project, seen from the point view of the huge authorities taking part, is not a particularly large programme and can easily be overlooked as one trial project among many others. The greatest systemic im-

pact is probably related to the personal experiences participating officials have had in the project. It is conceivable that they take these with them and in various contexts can support activities in which empowerment and user power are tested.

With regard to the informal institution-like, cultural conceptions, these are concerned among other things with ideologies, norms, myths and prejudices about different groups of people. People are ranked in different orders of status through these, often spontaneous perceptions. A good reputation may be an important potential power resource in society at large, or the reverse. Criminal and drug addict, for example, are two such concepts that convey a particular negative aura. This means that people who have had problematic lives in this way also find it difficult to escape from their marginalised position because of general prejudice. Complications in this process are also concerned with many people finally internalising these prejudices and creating strong self-loathing. In other words, when the “criminal drug addict” wants to make the journey back to being an ordinary member of society, there are often strong opponents, this person him or herself and some of the people around him or her. The question is whether and how collaboration between users and people in authorities has been able to influence these conceptions.

It is clearly apparent that the appreciation and trust the users have gained from the people representing authorities is valuable. This is partly to do with the

change from the antagonism of previous years to dialogue, but it probably also relates to receiving recognition from the representative of society, an advocate who also has good social status. This appreciation has great symbolic significance and affects self-image in a positive way, but it also provides purely factual advantages as the officials have economic resources to distribute through their authorities.

The collaboration between users and officials which exists in more general and positive contexts, at seminars and through certain brochures issued by the *Vägen ut!* project, as well as in newspaper and magazine articles, may perhaps in some way reduce the general negative images of these user groups.

Finally it should be mentioned that the prejudices which both participating parties had about each other have decreased as a result of a diversity of meetings and countless discussions. Both users and officials presumably take this favourable experience with them to various contexts in which similar issues are dealt with. One of the problems with this good experience, however, is that it is based on meetings with a relatively limited group of people. The question is whether even more users could have been involved in the key positions.

To summarise, it can be noted that with regard to the potential power resources, which constitute an important basis of empowerment, positive changes have occurred as a result of the cooperation

with users and officials, particularly in relation to the knowledge and skills of the cooperators and their mental resources in the form of increased self-esteem and well-being. However, with regard to institutional formal and informal power, experience has shown that it is more sluggish than other levels. It is also interesting to note that these levels are not isolated from one another, either analytically or in real life, which means that changes at one level affect all the others. However, it can also be noted that this collaboration is complex.

What is interesting and important about the *Vägen ut!* project is that the focus has not just been on ordinary rehabilitation, where the individual's emotional and cognitive development is focused on, but that the important system world linked more to institutional power has also been included. There is a fundamental realisation in this formulation that it is not just the individual who is failing but that there is a complex interaction between individual and environment, where the systems tend to have much more power than fellow citizens. It was therefore also a good organisational solution for the project not to be located in any authority. The fact that both users and officials were guests at a more neutral site also created the necessary basis for freer and equal discussions.

6.3 Advocacy

The more theoretical foundations of advocacy have been discussed in Chapter 2. In this section we approach this special activity on the basis of the various participants in *Vägen ut!* As discussed previously, advocacy has strong and interesting links to empowerment-oriented social work. Another issue to note in this connection is that advocacy can actually be exercised by anyone, the user him or herself, the official in an authority and a professional person appointed to perform this task. The *Vägen ut!* project is a good example of all these different types of advocates. We discuss below the terms of advocacy in a project context and on the basis of these different positions.

6.3.1 User advocate

It is the four project leaders in particular who at various meetings and in other contexts have acted as advocates for the user group in the *Vägen ut!* project. At the same time it can be stated that the general get-togethers and information days arranged during the course of the project have served as a platform for other cooperators to exercise advocacy too. The sometimes very personal and poignant presentations made by cooperators have also served as important information with regard to the whole target group. Acting in this way for others has also provided personal satisfaction.

“Yes, you do something for your sisters in misfortune. That’s the main purpose, I suppose. That’s the first thing. Yes, comradeship in the cooperative, everyday life

gains a meaning. It isn’t just empty. And then it provides self-confidence. It’s like I said: I feel significant sometimes. It’s boosted my self-confidence! It’s grown!”

As well as information through these personal appearances, project leaders and some cooperators, together with the project management, have also worked with various types of written lobbying, for instance in the form of brochures, but also through letters and consultation comments to politicians. Mention can also be made of the countless articles in newspapers and magazines to which the project leaders in particular have contributed, providing information on the project and the needs of this user group.

As discussed previously, the project leaders have been able to represent themselves and the user group more directly owing to their proximity to representatives of authorities. They have done this in a good way, and they have been perceived as skilled and energetic people. This relates in particular to the dual expertise they have developed over the years and during the project period, by having moved in different worlds.

“I find it enjoyable to have something as multifaceted as this, so many different things. I like that! You’re in so many different rooms! Different situations and different people! You may be at Högsbo at the correctional facility one afternoon, and before that I have met a senior official from the local authority. It’s such a change! And it’s great fun, I like it. (...) But also the fact that I’ve been in prison

can make people listen to me. There are these different areas: the fact that I’m so socially accepted that I can get in there. And speak for myself, as it were. I think that’s interesting. It means there are more like me. And then you can view the others as an asset too! So that we get this target group going that doesn’t just get banged up in prison... but that you get a fresh chance. If people get a bit of faith in the future, they work much better... than listlessness and powerlessness...”

One of the most important conditions to be met for advocacy is that you know the users’ current situation and needs. It is therefore necessary to be let into these worlds, which they often are with their own experience. Another condition to be met is having an ability to present this knowledge in completely different contexts. And conversely, it is important to be able feed knowledge back to the users. With regard to user representatives, they often, as the quotations above show, have proximity and a sense of solidarity with their sisters and brothers. This constitutes an important dimension in empowerment-oriented advocacy.

Some of the cooperators have already been accustomed, prior to their participation in *Vägen ut!* to commuting between the different worlds, but by no means all of them. This has meant periods of uncertainty before feeling to some extent comfortable in the alien worlds.

“I felt very small at the start when they talked, and then I thought of a thing I wanted to say. But I don’t say it. Then I

discovered that he was from the county administrative board in Stockholm, then he said the things I was thinking of. So I thought I must say it, it’s not so stupid after all. You’re really scared with these people, they’ve been to school, loads, see? I’ve lived on the street for twenty-three years and gone to school for six years and played truant in the eighth and ninth years.”

It can take time to get to know the culture of both worlds and become credible in what one says in all contexts. One is at home in one’s own block but a stranger in the next block down. At the same time it can be noted that the problem is the same for many officials who perhaps have lived a relatively sheltered life and rarely met users. They too can feel out of place with people and in environments in which the language and culture are unfamiliar to them.

This type of transition problem is similar to those faced by immigrants at the start of a period of residence in a new country, for example in Sweden. Compatriots who know the language are interpreters and advocates for those who do not have a voice. As time goes by and with a lot of practice, most people finally learn the language and can find their way around in the new environment, and as a result become more capable and self-reliant individuals. Once they have learnt the language and become more visible in society, in particular through their organisations, immigrants have been able to make greater demands on society, but also become more accepted by those

around them (Kuosmanen 2001). This process bears great similarities to the endeavours of other marginalised groups to be accepted and become valued members of society. One of the users describes this process:

“We former inmates were given a chance through the EU project to show that we could really deal with this in some way. We were given a chance to grow as people, open up paths and open up doors to people from the authorities who are very conventional and have been so confined, and we hope that those doors will be open to others who start something like this. We’re forerunners and have succeeded with something that’s a little different, *Vägen ut!* won’t be like that after 2005, it’ll be scrubbed out, but the concept will remain. The actual name is quite impudent too... So we’ll be associated with *Vägen ut!* for a long time.”

It is not just as individuals that the cooperators have acted as advocates for themselves and other users against “powerful systems” in society but in particular as a group, “we in *Vägen ut!*” However, the quotation expresses a fear about how long this effect will last. Does it solely concern those who are included in the project, or will others also have more open doors? This is a very important question which it is not, however, possible to answer within the confines of this appraisal task which is limited in time. However, there is much to suggest that the open doors are mainly personal on the basis of the contacts created during the course of the project.

6.3.2 People representing authorities as advocates

As discussed above, people from authorities frequently end up in some kind of advocacy when they work with clients. The relationship with users can be shaped in very many different ways depending on which authority is concerned. But it is not at all uncommon for officials also to have a personal relationship with clients they meet over a prolonged period.

“Well, the authorities are accustomed to a... to people not wanting help and being enticed and so on, and maybe it isn’t so easy where the boundary runs and so on. When I finished with this social benefit I’d been on for ten years, they’d all embrace me and that kind of thing, it was great enjoyable, great fun in fact. You can see if a person is so significant, like, it isn’t that often they have the chance to help someone.”

The relationship between a person representing an authority and a client is, however, often characterised by a duality where laws and ordinances and not least finance are governing factors. Without deepening this discussion it can simply be said that when things come to a head it is usual for the official to choose loyalty to the authority. At the same time, it can be observed that she or he can also interpret the rules to the benefit of the clients. This also relates to what support one has in one’s work.

“The immediate boss is good, she’s the office manager. She’s really good, but she also complies with all the laws and sections. She perhaps can’t deviate from them, as I do sometimes. It has happened that you stretch things a bit. But nothing has happened about that yet, no reprimand or anything like that. But it’s needed, I don’t think anyone is harmed by it, it’s just the systems that creak a little at the seams. Sometimes it can happen that if you’re doing things on the computer and it says no, you just can’t do it. But I also think that if you don’t do anything outside the limits there’s never any development either. But it’s easy to get things endorsed in my office, as long as you have good motivation as to why you do things, it usually works. (...) You have to try to link things together for the individual, saying that this particular thing points the way forward. (...) Well, that increases the prospects of re-entering the labour market.”

One way of acting for the users and influencing the systems is to stretch the limits. However, this approach is not possible in authorities with stricter managers and rigorous control systems. The question is also whether this type of influencing of the system is too personally dependent. When the employment of the “anarchist” ceases, the system perhaps returns to its everyday existence. At the same time as it can be noted that there are a sufficient number of boundary stretchers to create group power, the rules will cease to be changed.

As discussed in previous chapters, the project space constitutes a zone temporarily free of formal control, which means that people representing authorities may be slightly freer in their relationships. It has also emerged that the vast majority of them have had positive experiences of the meetings with project leaders and cooperators, as well as other relationships in the *Vägen ut!* project.

It is not just the meetings with the users that have contributed information, discussions with other authorities have also provided valuable knowledge. This had provided an important basis for raising the problems that have arisen within one’s authorities and other contexts but also for presenting positive results. To summarise, it can be said that the support of the representatives of the authorities in different forms and their advocacy has been valuable for the development of the *Vägen ut!* project.

6.3.3 Project employees as advocates

As well as the advocacy exercised by the users and officials, there are two different types of project workers as professional advocates. Those who have fixed employment with the task specifically of acting for the weak groups in society: Eva Laurelli of Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation and Leif Tjernström of Gothenburg’s NGO Agency, and a coordinator employed for the *Vägen ut!* project, Pernilla Svebo Lindgren. In comparison with representatives of authorities, these positions permit a different approach to the users, because there are no similar relation-

ships and ties of loyalty to a central or local government authority. The difference between the professional and user advocates is that this target group is not entered, there is a similar commitment to represent this group.

With regard to Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation, for example, they have been commissioned by central government to develop new cooperative solutions. In this work they come into contact with many different client groups. For Eva Laurelii this was, however, the first time she had worked with the prison and probation service target group.

“The new aspect is the prison and probation service, that’s new to me. But otherwise there have been a lot of previous discussions and projects with the social insurance office and the employment service, especially the municipality, and they haven’t been entirely easy, I can tell you. So I think, I have said this to a few others too, that I thought that this *Vägen ut!* project is very positive from the authority perspective, that I see how authorities fit in here. They are very committed people, and I’m thinking about the social insurance office, I’ve tried for a very long time to get hold of someone here in Gothenburg, and it’s been really difficult to get any dialogue going within the social insurance office. And here I feel that... I’m really pleased that the people who’ve been involved in this from the social insurance office really do so

with commitment, that’s great. Even the ones from the county employment board are active.”

Nor do the professionals always succeed in getting hold of the right people in different authorities. This may be to do with the fact that there are so few people in some authorities whose task is to work on projects and development activities. Having contact with people in authority is essential if it is to be possible to exert influence on these units. Another is, as the quotation shows, that the people you cooperate with are constructive and committed. According to Eva Laurelii, *Vägen ut!* has been successful in this task, and she thinks that among other things this is to do with the social topicality of the issues.

At Gothenburg’s NGO Agency two people have been involved in the *Vägen ut!* project, Leif Tjernström and Barbro Holmström. Barbro has been a valued consultant for the cooperators in financial reporting. Leif Tjernström, together with Eva Laurelii, has chaired the working committee, steering group and partnership meetings. One of the issues they have both been involved in is the administrative and financial regulatory systems which have sometimes posed an obstacle to the creation of social cooperatives under the authority of Gothenburg’s NGO Agency. It is common for authorities to be in overall charge of large projects because they have extensive resources of their own and form part of established networks. The right to deduct VAT reflects this dissimilarity

between the Gothenburg NGO Agency, which is a non-profit-making association, and authority-based operations. Despite these complications, in our view it has been rewarding for the project that it has been located at the Gothenburg NGO Agency, which has experience of serving as a mediating link between user associations and authorities. This intermediate position has also provided opportunities to act relatively independently in relation to both parties. Another positive aspect is that because of the nature of the assignment loyalty is more with the users and their associations than with the authorities.

The role of the coordinator, is very important in project contexts. Pernilla Svebo Lindgren has experience of working in the prison and probation service and also in user associations, for instance *Bryggan*. She was also one of the people who took the initiative for the *Vägen ut!* project. This long experience of different operations, and the network of users and professionals she has built up, have proved a valuable resource in the project. Together with Eva Laurelii and Leif Tjernström, she has also worked actively to emphasise the project leaders and cooperators in the project. As discussed previously, this has happened in various ways during the course of the process. In the application phase the users have been consulted. In addition, they have had to represent *Vägen ut!* in different contexts, to which other projects have only sent professional staff or people representing authorities. The role of coordinator has not been

shaped into that of the figurehead, but has been concerned more with being something behind the scenes, at the hub and holding all the strings. The service has evidently been under-dimensioned, which has also resulted in her not having had time to support all cooperators equally. Eva Laurelii has therefore also been involved in these duties. The problem with an accumulation of tasks in some key individuals, who are also very committed to their work, is the risk of fatigue. The project leaders have also been in this risk zone. The negative consequences of this concentration may be that when key individuals are on sick leave the whole project is affected. There has to some extent been an awareness of this problem in the *Vägen ut!* project and sick leave has been avoided.

Much of the activity, information, writings, meetings and so on of the coordinator have been concerned with acting as advocates, particularly the users involved in the project. A contribution has also been made in various ways through this activity to also representing the issues of this target group in general.

In comparison with other types of professional advocacy, the role of coordinator has entailed greater proximity to the user group. This relates to the fact that Pernilla Svebo Lindgren has been employed full-time on the task, but also the fact that the work tasks themselves have required personal and close involvement, particularly with the project leaders. But in the same way as for the other project employees, advocacy in this form will

be phased out when the project comes to an end. At the same time it can be imagined that experience of this activity, for instance through the professional advocates, will be of benefit in other contexts and for other client groups.

To summarise, it can be said that it is difficult if not impossible to imagine a process of empowerment without some type of advocacy. In this chapter we have discussed three different forms on the basis of the position in which one acts, as user, a person representing an authority or a professional. All these types of advocacy signify some advantages but also some drawbacks.

The great advantage with regard to user representatives is the proximity to and sense of the target group and nuanced knowledge of this world and different needs. Strong ties may also, at the same time, be a concern. Going on trips to other worlds may lead to a faulty discussion. The problem may also be inadequate experience of how to translate this knowledge to influence authorities and politicians. The difficulties may also be at the informal institutional power level and be concerned with common myths about different groups. Criminals, including former ones, have lower status in society than many other individuals and groups, and this also means that their advocates may be perceived in this light.

The advantage for representative of authorities is that they act at the administrative centre of the institutional formal power, in the authority. One can inform

one's colleagues and managers about what is happening in projects one is collaborating in. At the same time, an individual official who does not have a senior managerial position either does not have so much decision-making right. Another problem is the formal and informal structures of the authorities, for instance issues concerned with which clients the authority is to work with. Billquist (1999) in his study of the social services office has shown how the "deserving and undeserving" clients are differentiated through an intake procedure. If one has the right problems one is accepted and receives a certain level of service. The strongly vertical principle of selection which exists in many authorities leads to people with multiple problems easily ending up outside benefit systems and support measures. Acting as advocate for client groups with multifaceted problems, as many of the *Vägen ut!* users have, naturally becomes problematic in these systems. Another discussion which has constantly returned is what results the *Vägen ut!* project can show. And results in most cases means a positive financial outcome. When this has been the case, it has been easily possible to act as advocate for the *Vägen ut!* project for one's managers and staff. At the same time, it can be said that this type of measure can act against the basic idea of advocacy, safeguarding the interests of powerless groups. In addition, a good result from a project may be that passive clients activate themselves and require assistance, support and treatment. This may lead to increased costs for the authority,

in any case during a transitional period. This type of socio-economic analyses and assessments ought also to be done in conjunction with the financial reporting of debit and credit.

The advantage of professional advocacy is that one is in a no man's land from which it is possible to make excursions to both worlds. The professional aspect is concerned with working with proximity and distance in both contexts. This also means having thorough knowledge through training and experience of both worlds. Problems may arise, however, if the proximity of one of the spheres becomes too great. If one becomes one with the users, one has similar difficulties in influencing the systems as those faced by the users themselves. On the other hand, if one identifies with the authorities one will probably not gain legitimacy among the users. The intermediate position may also lead to too great a distance from users and/or authorities. It must be noted here, however, that the professional advocates in *Vägen ut!* have succeeded in avoiding these more hypothetical difficulties.

What has been interesting about the *Vägen ut!* project is that all these three different forms of advocacy have existed in the project at the same time, and have each been able to contribute in their own way to supporting individual users but also the cooperators as a group in relation to powerful systems. The question is what has been accomplished. With regard to project leaders and certain cooperators it can be said that through

their own advocacy and that of others they have created more knowledge and skills and in so doing have formed a stronger individual and group platform in relation to authorities. Can it be imagined that obstacles in the systems and institutional power have also diminished or been changed to the benefit of these client groups? It appears entirely clear that the personal relationships of the project leaders and the professionals with people representing authorities have opened some doors. At the same time it is more difficult to say whether these doors are also more open to larger client groups.

6.4 Concluding reflections

Different types of relationships have been discussed in Chapter Six. In particular we have touched on the relationships between the participants in the cooperatives and the basic associations, and the relationships between the cooperators and the people representing authorities. But other relationships have also been highlighted, for instance those between the cooperators and professional project employees.

In some cases these relationships have been filled with conflict, while in others they have taken place in a spirit of consensus, but whatever charge or content they have had, they have always to some extent been significant for the participants. It cannot be claimed, however, that all these meetings and negotiations have led to an increase in potential power resources for all parties. With regard to

certain basic associations, for example, the formation of the cooperatives did not signify as much of a lift as had been previously planned, and it led instead to strained relationships and loss of members for a period. However, this type of strained relations should not be viewed solely in a negative light, but also as a crisis which in itself may carry a possibility of constructive renewal.

With regard to the relationships between the users and officials who have taken part in the project, no major conflicts have been discovered. Discussions and negotiations have in the main been conducted in a kind of spirit of consensus. We regard this as having been one of the great benefits of the *Vägen ut!* project, providing a free zone where the differences between different potential power resources between the users and officials to some extent are evened out. By increasing the knowledge and skills of the users, and creating a strong cooperative community, both the individual and group resources have been increased, but issues at the informal and formal institutional level have also been influenced. The professional advocates have also fulfilled a very important function with regard to equalisation of the power resources. In many cases they have fulfilled a mediating and interpreting role. The officials for their part have, in any case in the project space, been able to develop more personal relationships

with the users and have a more flexible approach to different regulating systems and the formal institutional market. It has also been shown that even outside this sphere these good relationships have opened certain authority doors. The important issue in this context is that if this type of flexibility applies only to certain selected people and not generally, it naturally threatens legal certainty by infringing the principle of equality of treatment. (Johansson 1992) It can be noted at the same time that constructive changes in regulatory systems can take place by supporting a smaller group which constitutes a good example.

To sum up, it can be said that these relationships and negotiations have in various ways contributed to developing both the project and the individuals who have contributed to the activity. If this process is looked at from the point of view of the cooperators, for example, it can be noted that the discussions conducted and the various role positions taken have contributed to releasing and increasing knowledge and skills, as well as rebuilding self-image and identity. With regard to empowerment and the potential power resources at this individual level, it can be noted that very positive changes have taken place, particularly for those who have been close to the centre of the project, project leaders and cooperators.

Chapter 7. The *Vägen ut!* project in a broader context

Together with five other partners from Germany, Italy, Greece and the UK, *Vägen ut!* has taken part in a *European development partnership* for social enterprise and social entrepreneurship called Le Mat¹. *Vägen ut!* representatives have also been part of a *national thematic network* for social enterprise with other Equal projects in Sweden. The aim of this chapter is to describe the *Vägen ut!* representatives' work within this network and what membership has meant for the project and the social cooperative. We have to a degree taken the viewpoint of the *Vägen ut!* players, and have tried to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the transnational and national work.

7. 1 The transnational Le Mat work

The main aim of Le Mat has been to create "real work" within the social economy for people who are marginalised or excluded from the labour market. The Le Mat agreement sets out the goals for the joint work:

"Le Mat is a European Development Partnership aimed at the addressing the empowerment of women and men who are marginalised and excluded from the labour market. The work plan is based on learning by experimenting in the social economy. The approach involves

initiatives and actors in the field of social entrepreneurship from the extreme north to the extreme south of Europe. Through common work, economic and social strategies can be used to strengthen the whole sector and the quality of the jobs inside the sector. Through experience, case studies and life stories, we can get a clearer picture of the social entrepreneurs' identities, strategies and difficulties, as well as a picture of the policy operated by social institutions, local municipalities, government bodies and the European Commission." (Castelli 2005)

The Le Mat network development partners include two social cooperative projects in Greece and Italy. Both employ people with various work-related disabilities – both physical and mental – in producing handicrafts and services. The cooperative participants also include people with experience of substance abuse and crime. Both these projects have much in common with *Vägen ut!*. However, Le Mat also includes two large German socioeconomic organisations and a British umbrella organisation for improving knowledge and quality within the voluntary sector.

It can therefore be seen that quite different social organisations were involved: Three of the partners were large, established organisations within the social economy of their countries, and

¹ Le Mat is French for the fool, an ironic description of the social entrepreneur who works towards his visions against all odds. Two social organisations have taken part from Germany, and one from each of the other countries (Castelli 2005).

three were projects for building up and developing small social cooperatives with a local connection. These social organisations are also founded on different societal conditions in terms of views on work-related disabilities, local and national policy, legislation and financing. There were therefore considerable differences between the countries and the different types of social organisation (cf. section 2.5).

The transnational aspect is obligatory in all Equal projects, and therefore existed from the outset. The transnational work has also had a specific portion of the budget allocated to it, and there has been a transnational coordinator to co-ordinate and lead the work. Eva Laurelii has worked part-time as transnational coordinator, and in this capacity has also participated in the *Vägen ut!* working committee, steering group and development partnership.²

Within Le Mat, there have been three main tasks:

Thematic work groups dealing with key issues in order to improve social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in the partner countries. Four thematic groups have met regularly every six months and have worked through the project period. The groups have dealt with recruitment and training, franchising, quality improve-

ment and social entrepreneurship.³ A couple of *Vägen ut!* project leaders and working committee members have regularly taken part in a couple of the thematic work groups.⁴

Seminars have been held on national and local conditions and key social enterprise experience in connection with the thematic groups' meetings or study trips to partner countries. The aim has been to develop and disseminate knowledge of the other countries' experiences of social enterprise and steps to combat marginalisation and social exclusion. Two such seminars were held in Gothenburg: one on benchlearning in November 2002 and one on the Swedish labour market policy in May 2004. The first was organised in connection with a meeting for the thematic work groups, which had just started working, and the other in connection with a study trip for partners from Italy, Germany and the UK. Cooperators from the *Vägen ut!* project and public advocates from the development partnership took part in these seminars.

Study visits and study trips to different social organisations in partner countries to learn from each other's experiences and to get ideas for new ways of working and practices to develop social entrepreneurship back at home. A large portion of the transnational budget has been

used for these study trips. Almost all the *Vägen ut!* cooperators (members of the cooperatives) have taken part in a study trip abroad or have been hosts to foreign guests in their own cooperatives. Some of their experiences and impressions are reviewed below.

The Swedish representatives took part in two of the thematic work groups: the one that dealt with recruitment and training, and the one that dealt with franchising. Eva Laurelii was responsible for the thematic work group dealing with recruitment and training. It proved difficult to keep all the partners involved in the work group, and some countries' representatives were not involved in later parts of the project. They took part regularly to begin with, but then encountered various types of organisational problem within their organisations and had to withdraw. During the last operational year, three partners in particular continued and furthered the cooperation. Eva believes that a great deal of motivation and work is needed to be able to get to know each other and to understand the circumstances and structures in the various countries. Six different development partners is too many, with all the various social backgrounds and linguistic and cultural differences that exist. Partners from three countries in the work groups would probably have worked better than five. Eva explains that she hoped to increase understanding of the differing circumstances for social enterprise in the member companies in the work group's final report:

"I was probably being a little unrealistic, but I felt a real responsibility within this group that there should be something tangible. I had talked about documenting forms of support in each country with my work group. And compiling an introduction to this chapter so that we could also understand a little the complexity of the training and recruitment issues relating to these enterprises and how we attract people and how society (works), not to discuss it but so that we could get an overview. But they just laughed at me when I suggested it: 'No, Eva, no! It'll be too much! Just forget it! Just write things down from the interviews instead!' So I was very keen that there should be a framework around it to help people to understand."

The second thematic group, which dealt with franchising, seems to have worked better, with fewer people leaving over the course of the work. Pernilla Svebo Lindgren, a *Vägen ut!* coordinator and one of the project leaders, participated in this work group and found the work to be highly informative and interesting. For *Vägen ut!*, this meant gaining new knowledge of social enterprise, new ideas and a strong sense of self-confidence. One of the ideas was to form a consortium based on the Italian model. Pernilla explains:

"For me and the *Vägen ut!* project leaders, the franchising group's work felt the most down to earth. The other groups worked at a level which seemed more

² Eva Laurelii has worked part-time (20%) on the *Vägen ut!* project transnational work

³ EU language includes many English words and terms, which have become an integrated feature of the EU culture (and a language barrier for non-English speakers). Examples include franchising and benchlearning.

⁴ The work of the thematic groups is described in the network's final report, see Castelli 2005.

abstract to us and the connection with the work involved in building up new co-operatives was less clear. We settled on franchising, as this was a way of avoiding making mistakes and taking advantage of good experiences and knowledge. We see it as a way of spreading social enterprise. Renate Goergen fills you with enthusiasm, and her ideas of creating a European hotel chain of social cooperatives through franchising really interested us.”

The work in the thematic groups was also influenced by how the whole Le Mat network was led by the Italian coordinator (Renate Goergen). She tried to get to know all the development partners and has shown real care for all the participants and players. But it has been an enormous task holding together such a large network with all the development partners and around 70 member organisations (Castelli 2005). The work of the thematic groups will be summarised at a final conference in Brussels in September 2005. Pernilla continues:

“The term ‘social franchising’ is new and has not yet been defined. *Vägen ut!* helped to organise a seminar on this term within Equal, which will be held in Brussels in September 2005. Apart from the Greeks, all the Le Mat partners will be attending, so it will be a kind of final seminar for the transnational Le Mat work. The *Vägen ut!* cooperatives are now members of *Associazione Le Mat*, and after Equal they will continue to collaborate with the aim of launching and, through franchising, expanding the Italian hotel chain in Scandinavia.”

The seminars which were held in connection with the thematic work group meetings aimed to inform and increase the range of knowledge of social enterprise in other countries. Eva talks about the first seminar, which was held in Gothenburg in November 2002:

“And we arranged a seminar here. It was actually an introductory seminar for the project leaders, where we went through a kind of benchlearning methodology to prepare for the transnational work. And at our initiative it was from here in Sweden, as we still believed that it was important for this to be meaningful. Because we have experience of other transnational collaborations, where the results of their transnational work were quite poor.”

In May 2004, a second seminar on the Swedish labour market policy was held for the overseas guests from Germany, the UK and Italy. Together with study visits to the Swedish cooperatives, a wealth of material was provided which led to interesting discussions between the guests.

The study trips to social enterprises in Italy, Greece and Germany were the aspect of the transnational work which cooperators and other participants from *Vägen ut!* appreciated the most. Le Mat has also had a policy of inspiring the participants and getting them to know cooperators from other countries. They have worked with a type of qualitative in-

terview, whereby the interviewer devised the questions, conducted the interview, tape recorded it and, in certain cases, also took notes. The interviews have led to a bond of friendship being formed, and many good ideas being exchanged between the counties.

In May 2003, the whole *Karins Dötrar* cooperative travelled to Rome together with the coordinator and the new instructor from *Vägstugan*. This was a specially-arranged study trip to learn more about cooperative work. They visited the *Albergo Via dei Matteo* hotel chain, which is part of the development partnership, as well as other social cooperatives in Rome, such as the social enterprise with former prisoners as cooperators who tend all of Rome's parks. One of the cooperators describes the week in Rome and how interesting it was:

“We got such a kick out of everything we did and all the meetings, everything we saw. And the response when we arrived. We were just the way we were, just ordinary looking, natural, a fine team. Even though we didn't actually know much. It was so informative, and it was great to get this perspective and these ideas and to take something away with us. When we say ‘Rome’, that's what everyone thinks of. So it's really important to have that base. It's like a marriage or something – there's something that binds us together.”

In autumn 2003, the cooperators from *Ateljé Trädet* and Eva Laurelii travelled to the Greek island of Cephalonia and visited the social cooperatives there: the local café, which is run by a female cooperative, and a couple of handicrafts cooperatives. One of the *Ateljé Trädet* cooperators describes it:

“We were at a cooperative where women sat and did handicrafts. Where women took their things home and sewed at home, then came and brought things back and got paid for what they'd done. And then we visited some cooperatives which were part of Le Mat – this café and then there was a vineyard. Yes, and then we went on a study visit to a cooperative where they made sweets. And there was a cooperative which the women of the island had set up, where they made dates and honey and stuff... It was a lot of fun, actually. It was really interesting seeing the crafts that the women there do. And they were really interested in working together with us here.”

The study visits to Gothenburg where players from social enterprises in partner countries visited the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives involved playing host to foreign visitors and telling them about the cooperative's activities. This has provided affirmation that the activities being carried out are meaningful. The study visits have provided stimulation and added a little extra sparkle to everyday work. Most cooperators come from groups which do not have many international contacts. It is clear that the study trips

abroad and the social cooperative study visits have been exciting and stimulating for the cooperators. They have made contact with interesting people, and have obtained fresh insights into cooperative work. They have also gained new knowledge in a number of areas, and ideas for their own activities.

7.1.1 Concluding reflections

Overall, the transnational work seems to have stimulated the cooperators in terms of building up cooperatives and cooperative activities. They have gained new knowledge and ideas. The study trips to social cooperatives abroad in particular have been useful, and have meant that they have made new contacts, had insights into cooperative work in other countries and learned many new things. The way things were set up with study visits and carrying out interviews in English has enabled the cooperators to take responsibility, use their resources and grow with the task. In other words, the visits have reinforced the empowerment process and their familiarity with a new role. The study trips have also increased solidarity within the work groups in each cooperative, and have strengthened relationships with the public advocates who have participated in the study trips. Participants have come to know each other better within the *Vägen ut!* partnership, and have formed friendships outside the usual meeting arenas.

The Le Mat seminars have been less important, but have been of value in terms of the knowledge process and understanding of the different societal conditions under which social enterprises work and with which they have to contend (cf. Stigendal 2003).

The work within the thematic work groups would seem to have been the most problematic aspect of the transnational work. These groups have also been the source of new knowledge and useful contacts, but it has proved difficult to structure the work, and there has been insufficient time for resolution and reflections. Perhaps the thematic groups should have included partners from fewer countries, in order to have been able to get to grips with and understand the social structure and cultural characteristics of each country better. However, it would appear that the thematic groups worked very differently, and that the outcome therefore varied from group to group.

7.2 The work of the NTG network in Sweden

The work involved disseminating knowledge and experience from the other Equal projects in the country, and trying to persuade various national bodies to support and facilitate social enterprise. Not many people from *Vägen ut!* took part in the NTG work, only people from the working committee, including a couple of the project leaders.⁵

The thematic network was formed in spring 2003 with representatives from six different Equal projects. They came together and discussed which key issues would be interesting to work with further, and agreed on six or seven important areas. In the summer, an application to the ESF council and Nutek was drawn up for funding for this work. As early as autumn 2003, work began in the form of referral work relating to *Samhallutredningen* ("the Samhall report") and *Lönebidragsutredningen* ("the salary contributions report"), which were under consideration at the time. During the winter, confirmation was received that funding for a phase 3 project had been awarded, and that work could begin in winter 2004. Nutek and a steering group were appointed stewards for the project. The project period was October 2003 to December 2006. Eva Laurelii was involved in this work from the beginning, and explains:

"We sat and tried to work on various areas which were important for developing social enterprise and what we had in common. At the first meeting, we agreed on which points were important. These included issues of social support, financing, procurement, training, support structures and socioeconomic assessments, i.e. being able to demonstrate the socioeconomic advantages or

disadvantages. That was spring 2003. Late in the summer, a group drew up this application. It was then processed in autumn 2003, and in spring 2004 we had our first preparatory meetings and discussed it. And then in the spring we set up the work groups."

The network was formed and started to operate in winter 2004. Nutek (the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth), which among other tasks promotes corporate access within the social economy, was the steward for the project.⁶ Nutek supports 25 Swedish local cooperative development centres (LKUs) and also carries out promotional work to develop social enterprise and social cooperatives. In the project, Nutek works alongside FKU (the Swedish Association of Cooperative Development Agencies) and six development partnerships within Equal to improve opportunities for groups which are discriminated against to get a foothold in the labour market through social enterprise. In addition to FKU and Nutek, the six other partnerships are: Slup.se (the County of Stockholm's Development Partnership for Social Economy), NESE (New Economy and Social Entrepreneurship), *Vägen ut!*, *Egenmakt för framtiden* (Empowerment for the Future, Basta), *Egenmakt i Baronbackarna* (Empowerment in Baronbackarna) and Mersmak. A steering group was appointed for the

⁵ Jari Kuosmanen from our research group also participated in one of the thematic groups which deal with assessment and research.

⁶ Tasks from the half-way assessment report

⁷ The role of coordinator was carried out by Lisa Jonsson (75%) and Sven Bartilsson (25%). They carried out this role until March 2005, when they were succeeded by Eva Johansson in a full-time capacity. Nutek's Bo Olsson was project leader throughout.

project, with representatives from Nutek, FKU and the partnerships involved. The chairman and vice-chairman of the steering group were two female members of parliament: Eva Arwidsson from the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Margareta Andersson from the Swedish Centre Party. A great deal of work was carried out within the steering group by a working committee with four members.⁷ *Vägen ut!* was fairly well represented, with two representatives in the steering group and participants in three of the six thematic work groups.

7.2.1 The steering group's discussions

The steering group was formed in early spring 2004, and from the beginning it comprised representatives from the six Equal partnerships and FKU and Nutek. User participation in the network was discussed early on, and two user representatives were appointed to the steering group following discussions. A working committee was also appointed, which initially comprised the two chairmen and representatives from Nutek and FKU. From spring 2005 onwards, coordinator Pernilla Svebo Lindgren from *Vägen ut!* also joined the working committee to represent the partnership.

During summer and autumn 2004, the six thematic groups worked on their own issues. This involved making contacts, collecting and collating experience from the partnerships and presenting these findings to various groups of influential

people, including politicians and officials. Within the steering group, various proposals from the thematic groups were discussed (see below) before making decisions on action plans and measures. In the autumn, the steering group decided to carry out a half-way assessment, and a researcher was engaged to survey the groups' members on the work. This led to an e-mail discussion within the steering group in January 2005. As far as it is possible to tell from various documents, the discussion related to a number of matters:

Which decisions had been taken within the working committee and the steering group, the financial consequences of these decisions, how coordination worked between the thematic groups and the steering group/working committee, and which roles the user representatives and experts played in the work of the network.

Following this e-mail discussion, the steering group met for discussions in February 2005. There was a long and informative debate on information, management, influence and responsibility. A number of queries were discussed and resolved. After this meeting, the steering group's working methods were changed, and the partnerships gained greater influence over the issues. During

the spring and summer of 2005, three more minuted meetings were held and the working and discussion climate improved. The thematic groups continue to work on various reports and proposals which are then submitted to the steering group for a decision to be made.⁸

During the spring and summer of 2005, the steering group worked mainly on a proposal for the national "*Socialt företagande – en väg till arbetsmarknaden*" ("Social enterprise – a way into the labour market") action plan, which summarises the thematic group discussions and includes a number of proposals for structure changes required to support and develop social enterprise in Sweden. The aim of the plan is to devise an instrument for discussions with the government, members of parliament and relevant authorities about necessary changes to labour market policy and economic policy. The plan was presented at a major conference in Stockholm on 7 October 2005. It has not yet been fully developed; it will be added to and expanded during the coming year in discussion with other relevant parties. The steering group's ongoing work for the coming year will therefore focus on the plan and its various proposals. Discussions will therefore be held with other relevant parties.⁹

7.2.2 The thematic work groups

In order to deal with a number of issues which were central to the development of social enterprise and its ability to expand the labour market effectively, the project ran a number of thematic work groups:¹⁰

- developing social support systems for the members of the enterprises
- facilitating public procurement of social enterprises' services
- facilitating financing and skills development for social enterprise members and employees
- facilitating financial support for social enterprises
- developing training and support structures for social enterprise
- disseminating the assessment and research results

We will briefly describe the work of some of the thematic groups where *Vägen ut!* representatives have participated in the groups' meetings and work.

7.2.3 The work of the social support group

Vägen ut! was represented in the social support group by two members, an expert and a user representative. The group started its work early with the referral work relating to the *Samhallutredning* and *Lönebidragsutredning* reports. Both reports included important proposals affecting the target group of people with disabilities. Eva Laurelii was responsible

⁸ Based on documents and interviews with *Vägen ut!*'s steering group members

⁹ The time of writing was October 2005.

¹⁰ According to the information in the half-way assessment report of 1 July 2005

¹¹ Eva Laurelii drew up one lot of referral comments, and Bo Blideman drew up the other.

for drawing up referral comments relating to the latter report¹¹, and describes the energetic work involved:

“And then I worked on meeting with all the development partnerships and writing the referral comments for the *Lönebidragsutredning* report which needed to be submitted in February 2004. So I was working on that at the end of 2003. I was actually tasked with that before the working group had been formed. And then we worked hard on preparing for the bill and lobbying relating to the referral comments, and contacted various politicians and officials at the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications who we then met with. And all this was done on behalf of the NTG network.”

The proposals for both reports worked with three-step models (a kind of rehabilitation ladder) for people with disabilities: First a 1-2 month *mapping phase*, where the disabled person undergoes a work assessment and his/her capacity to work is analysed, then a *rehabilitation or development phase* with training and guidance for 1-2 years, and finally a *more stable position called security employment* with salary contributions which a disabled person may receive with an employer for a number of years. It should be possible for the latter two steps of the model to be with a social enterprise, e.g. a social cooperative. However, the first step – the mapping

phase – should be carried out within a public body, preferably the labour market authorities or the county employment board. The partnership objected to this in its statement. Eva explains why:

“There’s a real difference between being answerable to a social worker and an insurance official, if instead you can arrive at a situation where you have both more influence and a greater understanding of the situation you find yourself in. If for example *Basta* or *Vägen ut!* could have had a mapping phase like that, they too could have offered a situation where the person could feel more at home and dare to get involved. And that first step wouldn’t be such a big one to take.”

The members of the social support group and the steering group had many views on the proposals of the *Samhall-utredning* and *Lönebidragsutredning* reports. The referral statement was compiled and submitted in winter 2003/04 by the NTG network. In order to compile a referral statement on the future position, the social support group contacted many different organisations, such as the Swedish Employment Service, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, Samhall and the National Institute for Working Life. Members visited and held discussions with officials from these agencies. The work of the social support group was delayed by the time spent on the bill. The group then decided to draw up an inventory of almost 100

social enterprises in Sweden and to examine social support for participants and employees. This inventory is currently a work in progress.¹² An analysis was also carried out of the obstacles which exist in terms of social support for those working in social enterprises. A five-point action plan was then drawn up for working strategically to overcome these obstacles. The action plan and its various proposals were submitted to the steering group in June 2005.

It can be noted that the dissemination of experience and attempts at influencing are taking place within a slow-moving system where it is hard to bring about rapid changes. Within the social support group, there seems to have been considerable interest in and commitment to these issues. Both cooperators and experts had participated in work which was relevant to the Equal project’s empowerment target. At times it has been difficult to win sympathy for certain proposals from the steering group, which wanted to reduce the pace of influence and proceed more cautiously.

7.2.4. The work of two other thematic groups

The *Vägen ut!* project was represented by users in two other thematic groups: the *financial support group* and the *procurement group*. The *Vägen ut!* co-

operatives have also been able to follow and influence the work through group participation from *Kooperativ Konsult* – the Gothenburg cooperative support organisation. User representation meant that work in the groups began slowly with drawn-out discussions on terms and definitions. The Gothenburg cooperative support organisation believes that these discussions were necessary in order to map out key issues for the social enterprise.

The *financial support group* commenced work in spring 2004, and has devoted itself to investigating the social enterprises’ financial support and financing requirements. The work of the group is naturally based on experience gained within the various Equal projects. The group first drew up a comparative model of business start-up phases and, with the help of a number of key terms, the differences between different types of businesses could be described. With the help of the model, a qualitative investigation was then carried out of thirteen social enterprises in the Gothenburg area and their financial support at various stages of starting up. Both the model developed and the investigation are presented in a report, “*Finansiering av socialt företagande*” (“Financing social enterprise”) drawn up by the work group (Svensson 2005). On the basis of this

¹² The time of writing was August 2005.

¹³ A growth company aims to use external venture capital to create a better start and faster growth for the company. The need for return is central. The owner and possibly family members work in a livelihood company, with the aim that the company should form a means of support. In a social enterprise, the main aim is to create work based on commitment and democratic ownership (owned by members), and does not have an interest in profit, according to Svensson (2005).



report, the work group also drew up a proposal for support in setting up and developing social enterprise.

The aim of the report was to describe the unique situation in which social enterprises find themselves in terms of financial support, and to propose steps to facilitate the start-up and development of social enterprises (Svensson 2005). Three types of company were dealt with in the model: growth companies, livelihood companies and social enterprises.¹³

The outcome of the social enterprise advocate interviews showed that a great deal of voluntary work had been carried out, particularly in the initial phase before it was possible to obtain financing for the project, but also later on to provide additional support for the project. There also seemed to be a risk of the social enterprises becoming too project-focused and not developing business sense. These enterprises remained stuck at the project phase and experienced difficulties moving from project support to contracts for work and services in the market. In certain sectors, social enterprises were able to enter into agreements with public bodies, e.g. *Villa Solberg* and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. In other sectors, there were problems, such as in caring for the elderly. There seem to be areas where public bodies do not wish to relinquish operational control to social enterprises. This relates both to the social enterprise's business concept and skills and to the services which the municipality wishes to procure.

The investigation also showed that politicians and public authorities were rarely involved when the idea of forming a social enterprise was conceived, but that they entered the picture later on. For normal growth companies, there is a comprehensive, well-developed support structure and political support. For social enterprises, there is only local project support (EU funding, etc.) and advice from local cooperative development centres. Social enterprises are not as high on the agenda and do not receive clear political support. Hardly any of the social enterprises studied had taken loans or received other financial contributions. Capital was accumulated through project funds and voluntary work. But the lack of resources also meant that certain ideas could not be developed. The report concluded with four proposals:

- Develop the support structure for social enterprises through the local cooperative development centres (LKUs). These should have a clearer task of investigating conditions for this type of business and making financial instruments available alongside general advice.
- Inform and educate public officials on what social enterprises are and their unique character. In particular, municipal procurers need more knowledge in order to be able to assess tenders from social enterprises.
- Better knowledge is also needed by the champions and managers of the social enterprises on financial support and financing. Seminars organised by

the work groups indicates significant interest, and that such knowledge is in demand from the social enterprises.

- A complete national strategy is needed for developing social enterprises, including finance, university initiatives and clear support structure tasks. Specific initiatives are needed for financing social enterprises, and a market for social enterprises needs to be developed. Without this market, the social enterprises cannot survive.

These various financial support group proposals were escalated to the NTG steering group, and following discussions were included in the national action plan (see following section).

The procurement group devoted itself to tasks such as mapping social enterprises' experiences of obtaining work from public bodies within municipalities and county councils.¹⁴ A survey was devised in autumn 2004 and distributed to 160 social enterprises providing care services. 67 enterprises responded to the survey (Karlsson & Ternegren 2005). Telephone interviews were also held with representatives from 15 social enterprises and their public partners, often people in purchasing roles. The results show that 58% of the social enterprises are cooperative societies, roughly 30% are non-profit organisations and a few

are foundations or limited companies. The social enterprises are often active within a number sectors, such as caring for the disabled, psychiatry, caring for the elderly, healthcare, caring for substance abusers, drug prevention work, young people's leisure activities, training, rehabilitation and work training. A large proportion of many of the enterprises' income came from public funding. Only 35% of those commissioned were procurers. At the end of the survey, there was an open question asking how the enterprise viewed its relationship with the municipality or county council. Of the positive responses, phrases such as "good communication", "good understanding" and "cooperation and support from officials and politicians" were common. The negative responses related to fear of competition, concern about future procurement and poor communication. There were also comments relating to unclear regulations and uncertainty over which terms and conditions applied to the business, particularly in terms of finance.

Those conducting the investigation have summarised the results as follows:

- Social enterprises may start operating using public funding due to the procurement regulations not being followed.
- Social enterprises have various types of relationship with procurers.
- As a general rule, there is a lack of competition.

¹⁴ According to Karlsson and Ternegren (2005), the definition of social enterprises is: Businesses within a social economy, with the main aim of creating work, which are non-profit organisations founded on commitment and democratic organisation, and which have proved successful in integrating the most excluded groups into the labour market.



– Social enterprises must be able to establish themselves in advance if they are to be able to participate in tendering or have a reasonable chance of winning work.

Among other matters, the report discusses the results in relation to chapter 6 of the Swedish Public Procurement Act (LOU), which deals with social considerations in terms of procurement. Various proposals are also put forward, such as for greater adaptation of direct procurement, giving preference to user organisations on selection due to social considerations, and that an initial non-competitive contract period would allow hiving off (Karlsson & Ternegren 2005).

The procurement group also submitted referral comments relating to new procurement regulations (SOU 2005:22, interim procurement report) and visited the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and other influential players in the field. The procurement group also collated information on social enterprise regulations in other EU countries.

7.2.5 Action plan for social enterprise

The following section briefly describes the *“Socialt företagande – en väg till arbetsmarknaden”* (“Social enterprise – a way into the labour market”) action plan and presents some of its main proposals. It has been calculated that around half a million people in Sweden (510,000 people, Nutek 2005) find themselves

excluded from the labour market due to being unemployed, on long-term sick leave, institutionalised (in prisons and treatment centres) or in various types of rehabilitation or work training initiatives. The majority of this large target group still has a documented ability to work and would, with social support and labour management, be able to participate in a social enterprise. Keeping them in passivity and isolation outside the labour market instead of using their ability to work in social enterprise can be seen as an enormous waste of resources. Both the individuals and society would profit from these people being employed (Nutek 2005). The action plan adopted makes a number of proposals to make it easier for people from the target group to enter the labour market and to be able to work in various types of social enterprise. The main proposals are summarized in point form below:¹⁵

– The social enterprises’ activities cut across various areas of policy. In order to develop the social enterprises, economic, labour market and social policy work needs to be brought together, and the authorities need to coordinate themselves. The wealth of experience from EU structure funds must be transferred to ordinary economic and labour market policy. With stronger public support, the social enterprise can play a greater role for more employment and regional growth than before.

– Labour market policy is strategic in terms of the social enterprises’ opportunities to contribute towards creating new employment. This applies to devising and applying labour market measures. The latest budget proposal includes a number of proposals for significant contributions to social enterprise, such as salary contributions and new forms of employment to complement Samhall and plusjobb. But the Swedish Employment Service also needs to hone its social enterprise skills in order to be able to develop labour market policy.

– Access to jobs with salary contributions is a key matter of principle for social enterprise. Salary contributions can be payable to anyone with reduced working capacity, regardless of disability or other reason. The increased salary contribution can be paid by the social insurance system, e.g. through the contributions and payment which the social enterprise employees receive from the regional social security office or municipality being converted to salary contributions. It is also proposed that “disability coding” be abolished as a basis for receiving salary contributions. There is a need here for coordination between various authorities, such as employment agencies, regional social security offices and social services.

– Empowerment and user choice in occupational rehabilitation are proposed. It should be possible under certain circumstances for individual unemployed people or people on sick leave to choose their own provider of rehabilitation, security employment or other measures.

This is provided that the providers meet certain quality requirements. Through framework agreements and licensing, the number of players within the field of rehabilitation could be increased. Occupational rehabilitation could become a niche for social enterprises.

– The budget proposal for 2006 proposes a three-step model: mapping, development employment and security employment to strengthen the position in the market of those who need specific measures. During 2006, the state proposes to finance 1,400 development employment positions and 500 security employment positions. Financial support will be in the form of salary contributions, and will be accompanied by organiser contributions which, for example, relate to specific management. These contributions should be increased and also be available to social enterprises as they employ people from disadvantaged groups. It is also proposed that a specific forum be set up for collaboration between Samhall, the county employment boards and the social enterprises at national and regional levels.

– Social enterprises are often small with a local focus, but they play an important role in sparsely-populated areas and cities alike. Social enterprises demonstrate that regional policy can be implemented through new forms of collaboration. Those who are discriminated against and their organisations can influence structures and thus create new employment opportunities and social welfare

¹⁵ The action plan can be found on Nutek’s website: www.nutek.se

for themselves. A number of models have been developed within the Equal project. This experience should be used when drawing up future regional and city policy.

– In terms of public procurement, criteria for social considerations can be applied. Even though municipalities and authorities have certain opportunities to promote the emergence of social enterprises through directed support, the public procurement is strategic. Swedish legislation in this field already provides opportunities for social considerations. Authorities carrying out procurement can set contract conditions of a social nature at least when it comes to services. However, this happens extremely rarely; the responsible officials do not know about this option or do not recognise the roles and abilities of the social enterprises. Tendering documentation is made increasingly complicated, and smaller companies find it more difficult to assert themselves. Smaller companies need to be given the same opportunities to participate in procurement as larger companies.

The presentation of the action plan in October 2005 means that the work of the steering group has intensified, and is now of a more outward-facing, public nature. There now remains in-depth work to be done in terms of information, training and influencing, aimed at the government,

parliament and the various national and regional authorities which deal with these labour market and economic issues. The action plan also needs to be augmented and expanded on a number of points.

7.2.6 The work of the research group

The aim of the research group was to assess and research development partnerships, and to capture the results and conclusions of the assessors and allow them to influence dissemination.¹⁶ Another aim was that the scientific results should be disseminated among academics and stimulate research initiatives into social enterprise. In terms of influencing systems, the aim was to hold a conference with one of the universities in order to disseminate the research results among the academic world. In association with this dissemination, another aim was to hold a seminar with participating researchers from the partnership in connection with most of the final reports being written in summer 2005.¹⁷

The work of the research group has given us insight, since the group was represented by Jari Kuosmanen. During its time of operation, the research group met on four occasions, all during the period June to October 2004. An additional meeting was planned for January 2005, but was not held. Even before the autumn 2004 meetings, senior lecturer Hans Westlund had created a model with which success factors and

obstacles in Equal's various development projects could be analysed. The proposed model and associated sorting would involve a considerable amount of work. In certain cases, this would be extremely complicated since the collation of material was almost complete and writing up had already begun. Many of the researchers believed that the outcome measurements and process descriptions requirement would exist in some form in the final reports written. One issue which was hotly debated was who would compile these.¹⁸

As early as spring 2004, a proposal had been made to write a joint report. At the meeting held in Stockholm in October 2004, a decision was also taken by the research group to compile a joint anthology, in which the sub-project researchers would write their own sections and a summary of the effects and processes of the various projects would also be included as a separate chapter. The aim of this anthology was to create and disseminate greater understanding of social enterprise, with descriptions of the processes, mechanisms and results arising from Equal social economy projects. This outline of contents, together with a timetable and an economic calculation of production costs, was presented to the board. Positive indications were received to begin with that this would be both interesting and achievable. According

to the research group coordinator, this idea had the support of both the working committee and the steering group. It later transpired that there were concerns on their part that the conclusions and recommendations of the anthology would not fit with the plans of the NTG network. On this point the researchers stood firm, saying that the results to be presented in the book would not be controlled by others. No funding was granted for the anthology, and the researchers had to abandon this project.

This highlights two problems: an organisational problem and a research ethics problem. The organisational problem relates to the information flow and communication between the steering group and the thematic work groups. It transpired at a late stage in relation to the work of the assessors (summer 2004) that harmonisation of the various assessments was desired. One solution to this would have been for the sponsors to have provided information early on about the format of the assessments. Westlund's model was introduced at a late stage and would create difficulties since the data collation was almost complete and the research work was at the final stage. In other words, there were significant problems and a lack of clarity in the communication between the working group and the steering group.

¹⁶ The text is based on information in the half-way assessment report.

¹⁷ This seminar will be held on 7 October 2005 in Stockholm.

¹⁸ The text of the research group section is based on Jari Kuosmanen's notes from the research group meetings held between June and October 2004.

¹⁹ From Kuosmanen's notes

²⁰ A different type of government exists in the Nordic countries: a welfare state with a long history of collaboration between the state and non-profit organisations. See Kuhnle & Selle 1992.

The research ethics problem relates to the role of the researchers and their ability to carry out a critical and independent assessment of the Equal project's activities in accordance with research plans drawn up and their ethical guidelines. These include the summary of results not being based on political or other sponsor objectives, but providing instead a comprehensive elucidation where even problematic elements are presented and discussed. In assessment projects it is often clear that sponsors' ambitions may conflict with the freer ideals of research. The interesting point is that it is this very freedom which gives the research its legitimacy, a value which sponsors see as important. At the same time, there is clearly some uncertainty here surrounding this freedom, since it threatens a predetermined agenda. In other words, there is an obvious paradox, which in this case led to the researchers being forced to abandon the NTG work.¹⁹

7.3 Concluding reflections

It can be noted that the members of the NTG network, the various Equal projects and their allies FKU and Nutek have set themselves an ambitious task: to disseminate experience of their social enterprise work both horizontally and vertically within the Swedish social structure. They also aim, if possible, to persuade higher levels to take this experience on board and to use it when working on

reform and legislation. The dissemination and persuasion are directed primarily at members of parliament and the government, as well as various civil servants. It is the central and national levels which are being worked with. Experience gained from the local ground work now needs to be transferred to and integrated into higher levels of the social structure. This is therefore an issue of *empowerment at a social level*.

This work is made increasingly difficult by a number of factors, such as entering an arena as a small and inexperienced player, an arena which is already populated by other major players with knowledge, resources and long-held traditions. The arena for occupational rehabilitation for people with disabilities forms part of state and municipal labour market policy, which has been the subject of legislation, efforts and measures since the 1920s (Lindqvist 2001). Players such as the Swedish Employment Service and Samhall (or their precursors) have made various efforts for more than fifty years to get the target group into employment. For the whole of the 20th century, the "work line" was adhered to in social

policy. This was further strengthened in the early 1990s, when employers and regional social security offices assumed overall responsibility for rehabilitation issues for those on long-term sick leave. Only the unemployed with no employers remained the responsibility of the Swedish Employment Service and Samhall. There are already a number of major players in the rehabilitation arena. The Network for Social Enterprise is a new player within this field, and the extent of its resources, knowledge and power is not yet known. Other players have been active within the field for more than fifty years. Social enterprises should also be seen as a kind of hybrid including elements of both public and private businesses in their structures. They represent a kind of intermediate form or link between the normal private businesses in the labour market and the various authorities from which they obtain their resources and legitimacy. Such hybrids are often known in English as quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) (Gidron, Kramer & Salamon 1992).²⁰ The difficulties experienced by the NTG network can therefore be attributed both to the arena in which it finds itself and to the dual nature of the players.

The difficulties which *Vägen ut!* co-operators and professionals have encountered in the context of the NTG network can also be considered. At the national level, there are clearly other discourses where it is hard to gain a presence and make oneself heard with just experience from practical work with social cooperatives. The nature of the issues requires other skills and a different vocabulary. There is also a need for time, the ability to communicate and a desire from higher levels to listen to and take onboard experiences from the local and practical levels. The experiences from the NTG work show that empowerment at the social level should probably be viewed from an extremely long-term perspective.

Chapter 8. Conclusions and discussion

Having followed the work of four of the *Vägen ut!* project cooperatives for more than three years, interviewed key players and users, observed the day-to-day activities during a number of study visits and meetings and read an extensive amount of source material, the time has come to conclude and discuss what those involved and surrounding organisations have got out of all this work. We have also reviewed and discussed the work and results of the project in the research group and have thus reached some conclusions which are presented in this section. The results are discussed below in a broader context, along with which consequences of the project can be observed.

8.1. Some conclusions from the study

The first conclusion is that the work of the *Vägen ut!* project's social cooperatives has been a *constructive form of rehabilitation from substance abuse and crime* for the individual user, apprentice or cooperator. Other studies show that for someone who has recently reached a turning point and decided to break away from a life of substance abuse, day-to-day work in a strong, close-knit work group represents both security and structure (Andersson & Hilde 1993). The initial period after the turning point is, for many, a time of uncertainty and

ambivalence, which brings a host of different psychological symptoms and severe doubts about the choice made. A person who has recently quit abusing substances probably will not have any real capacity to work that colleagues in the cooperative will be able to count on, but it does mean that his or her resources can be assessed and supported by those around him or her. The user's resources and abilities can then be developed during a longer period of rehabilitation. The system within the cooperative of having a specific contact for each resident or user receiving work training also provided access to secure support relationships within the group.

At both *Karins Döttrar* and *Villa Solberg*, a fairly long rehabilitation period of three to six months is aimed for. This is primarily for reasons of planning, but also due to an understanding that recovery processes take time. Feeling marginalised for around a year is common in the case of long-term substance abuse (or crime), and during this period the user is extremely vulnerable and requires a wide range of support.¹ As is shown by exit process research, this phase includes periods of calm, gathering of strength, consideration and coming to terms with previous experiences, and more outward-focused activities in order to build up a new life (Topor 2004). In both cooperatives, it seems clear that there are people who are not suitable for residence or work training within a social

cooperative. These may be psychologically vulnerable people who find it hard to function in a group, or people with narcissistic tendencies who may play people off against each other and create conflict within the group (Hirigoyen 2004). Both cooperatives emphasise that they do not offer regular treatment, and that they lack the skills required to provide more qualified treatment.

For cooperators (members of the cooperatives) and apprentices who have progressed further in their exit process and now find themselves in the final stage – building a new life – working in a social cooperative has brought many challenges, great responsibility and creative development of various skills and abilities. In many cases, it has also required a great deal of hard work and a major adjustment to the wishes and experience of others. We believe that creating and building up a social cooperative is an extremely comprehensive undertaking, which cannot be demanded of just anyone. Firm commitment, thorough knowledge of self and personal choice are all needed in order to be able to endure this development process.

Many have had considerable assistance from the "*Vägen ut! career*" offered by the social cooperative. This is a *form of institutionalised career*,² which means that "exiters" do not need to go through the various phases of breaking with the past all by themselves. Instead, the break is made in accordance with a recognised pattern of how to progress through the

various phases, which symptoms and difficulties are commonly experienced, and what help and support the exiter needs. A positive career with a number of steps is created, which clearly shows how the rehabilitation process can occur from substance abuser to "normal" citizen within society. Individuals who break down get help and support from older colleagues, who have previously taken the same route. This career pattern is by no means new – it exists as a well-established practice in a number of client movements from Synanon to the AA movement (Meeuwisse 2001).

At the same time, the institutional career also means that specific knowledge builds up among public sector officials on the phases and difficulties of the exit process, which can be of benefit to the target group. Various kinds of assistance and organisational resources are developed, such as special treatment teams, drop-in sessions, rehabilitation units, etc. which can provide individuals with support during the process of breaking with the past. It also involves a mobilisation of resources from society as a result of information and influence from the self-help groups. It may also be possible that the stigmatisation experienced in local society diminishes if the exit process is acknowledged and is given institutionalised career characteristics. Institutionalisation can, however, bring difficulties from those who differ from the general pattern or who find it hard to cooperate with organised forms of assistance.

¹ The duration of this period is not certain. Certain interviewees mention being marginalised for longer periods (cf. Hedin 2003)

² With regard to the concept of "career", see Månsson 2002.

A second conclusion is that *the work within the cooperative groups has developed the participants' various abilities and resources* so that most of them have grown as people, been able to take on significant responsibility and developed a sense of community and creativity through their work. Some have focused on educating themselves, reaching a level of knowledge far in excess of their previous ambitions. Others have improved personal relationships with their social networks, for example changing their partners, building up contact with children in foster homes or renewing relationships with their own families. Many of the participants have fought against various kinds of psychological, relationship or social repression, and have boosted their potential reserves of strength in a number of areas. Our conclusion is that the work of the *Vägen ut!* project's social cooperatives has acted as a *suitable route for carrying out the empowerment process, both individually and in groups*. However, the process has not been discussed within the project in theoretical terms; rather, release has occurred through practical work within the cooperatives.

Central project leadership was needed, and was intended to act democratically and be prepared to share power with cooperators and apprentices, delegate decisions and allocate responsibility for the cooperative groups and the work groups in the partnership. For this, competent project leadership is needed with sufficient knowledge and experience, which is secure in its management and

which is not threatened by discussions or conflicts of opinion (Wolfe Morrison & Milleken 2000). In this context, the coordinators' behaviour, ability to delegate tasks and responsibility and ability to rely on the abilities of colleagues would appear to be crucial to the development of the project.

In terms of issues of democracy and power within the project, we have witnessed two opposing tendencies. The steering group and working committee placed great faith in cooperators and apprentices; they ensured that everyone was able to participate in the transnational work with study trips abroad, that different people made appearances to give their opinions in the media and represent their cooperatives in various contexts, that cooperators and apprentices took part in study visits, gave talks or made contributions in connection with the dissemination meetings, etc. We can also see a different tendency, a kind of concentration of power and decision-making among working committee members and the project leaders, who hold power and participate in all types of meeting. It was primarily the project leaders and working committee members who, for example, took part in the national network tasks. This is presumably because the project leaders and working committee members are full-time or part-time employees and are able to devote more time to these issues. But one can ask whether perhaps certain tasks could have been spread out more, for example to more cooperators and apprentices. It is generally the case for

this type of project organisation that after the initial pioneering period the work stabilises in certain patterns. It is then more difficult to break up the organisation again and restructure as more people join the organisation (Olsson 1998).

Within the project, the importance of one's own experiences (of substance abuse or crime) is often emphasised, as is the fact that the work hinges on self-help and solidarity. This type of knowledge also forms the foundation of the work. But within the *Vägen ut!* cooperatives, there are also people – cooperators and apprentices – whose experience of these problems is less immediate, e.g. through relatives in the target group. We want to emphasise that within *Vägen ut!* we have not dealt purely with self-help and participants' own experiences – there has been extensive training and further training of cooperators not only in dealing with substance abuse, but also in administration, finance and IT issues. During the three year period, there has therefore been a *wide-ranging increase in knowledge* alongside building up the cooperative work. The key players in the project are not keen on the phrase professionalisation process, but is that not what is actually happening?

*Is this not a new form of professional social work, which is currently developing and which is based on personal experience and self-help?*³ The work features solidarity and sympathy with other users,

but with the building up of knowledge and skills needed for the practical work. The work of the social worker has many roots and traditions, one of which has grown out of the social administrative work involved in caring for the poor in days gone by, the role which is normally called “the good guardian”. This relates to the social work carried out within a user organisation, and which aims to develop everyone's resources for the common good, i.e. it is *social work based on solidarity*, not on repression. The underlying values of this work are otherwise like a part of the knowledge base. This work involves working against oppression, assisting in empowerment processes, and advocacy (Payne 2002). British social workers and researchers have developed a method of social work called “anti-oppressive practices” (Dalrymple & Burke 1995). It is possible that today's clear class tensions and shifts towards increased marginalisation and exclusion of large groups could also lead to a trend towards different types of professional social work, existing in parallel within our society.

The third conclusion relates to the *gender similarities and gender differences* which we have been able to see in the project. Unlike many other cooperatives, women dominated in the original group of cooperators. Women have also dominated within the leadership of the project. For example, both coordinators are female (cf. chapter 1). Could the emphasis on

³ This form of solidarity social work is now found in a number of other user organisations and client movements. See e.g. Jeppsson Grassman 2003, Karlsson 2002, Topor 2004.

personal relationships within the organisation network be due to this female dominance? It can be seen that both the male and female cooperators have undergone major personal development, extending to many aspects of their personalities.

There seem to be certain gender differences in the way that women and men assimilate new experiences. Women who come from a life of substance abuse and crime often have experience of oppression in their relationships (Trulsson 2003) and, despite considerable resources, often suffer from poor self-confidence. It takes time for them to develop their abilities and integrate new experiences into their self-image. It can be seen that the women in *Karins Döttrar* developed work training more slowly and more gradually under constant discussion. They gradually created an effective work training operation. The men in the group of cooperators came from a different starting point, in terms of both knowledge and work, and were able to get underway with their activities more quickly. Certain differences can also be discerned in the work of the groups: the women tend to hold group discussions on all kinds of issues, while the men tolerate greater individuality in their group.

The gender differences between men and women are not particularly great in terms of the products and the results of their work. Both men and women are able to produce good quality work. But the routes they take to reach the finished products can be very different. The women needed more encouragement,

more social support both from one another and from their advisors, and considerably more in terms of resolution and group discussions. Personal chemistry and how the work groups functioned seemed to be of greater significance to the women than the men (Björling 2005). The latter worked more individually in their group, concentrated on problem solving step by step and were stimulated by their successes. Men and women demonstrate two different working styles, which managers should perhaps recognise and encourage. But cultivating feminine and masculine working styles can also be problematic. Some women do not follow the gender role model, and do not feel at all at ease with contact group discussions and social support. And some men are not individualists, but would rather work in groups and need a considerable amount of support from managers and colleagues. The current balancing out of the gender roles could mean new difficulties and problems when developing working styles and working environments which are increasingly characterised by gender roles.

During the first year of the project, the men seemed to have been awarded more resources from the project funds than the women. This was the case when, for example, three project leader positions were appointed to the Solberg group and when municipal funds were made available for repairing and equipping *Villa Solberg*. This was also the first cooperative to become self-supporting and to start standing on its own feet. The men also started with more cultural and social capital than

the women in terms of professional skills and their network of contacts. But the *Karins Döttrar* women gradually caught up, obtained training and further training, and by degrees developed the work of their cooperative. A balancing out between the men and the women can therefore be seen taking place gradually throughout the project period.

The fourth conclusion relates to *the voluntary social work and significance of committed enthusiasts* who are prepared to work around the clock for the survival of the project. Several of the working committee's members and the project's two coordinators have worked far in excess of the designated working hours, and have thus supported the project during their free time. This is often impossible in other organisations, where staff must adhere to rules and agreements on working hours, etc. The most overtime was worked during the first year of the project while the cooperatives were being built up. This issue has now been acknowledged, and attempts have been made to compensate staff through time off, holidays, etc. *This example shows that innovation requires real commitment and extraordinary effort!*

This also indicates that the project and the social cooperatives belong to the organisational sphere which is usually referred to as *the third sector*. The project was started by four user organisations with support from Gothenburg's NGO Agency (GFC) and *lies at the intersection between civil society/the third sector and the state, making it an incredibly*

interesting project. The relationship between the newly-formed cooperatives and their founder organisations has not been free from conflict. Particularly during the separation phase, when the cooperators broke free, started their training and began to prepare the establishment of the cooperatives, there was sometimes harsh opposition between the prospective cooperators, who were creating something new, and those who remained behind. Once the separation was complete, there followed a period of energetic work all around. And when the social cooperatives had really got started and were producing goods and services, the relationship with the founder organisation returned to normal in many cases.

We believe that the conflicts and the separation process between the founder organisations and the social cooperatives demonstrate a general difficulty in developing a new and dynamic operation within the framework of an established non-governmental organisation. Within non-governmental (and even public) organisations, there is a tendency towards stability and continuity which means that operational changes which are too radical meet with opposition (Hasenfeld 1983). The management often perceives the creative entrepreneurs as trouble-makers who want to start conflicts or break free from the community, and try various strategies to discipline them. This often results in those who are receptive to change actually breaking out and forming a new business themselves. If there had been more room and tolerance for new ideas and activities, the break-

out would never have happened. Such break-outs from parent organisations are commonplace in the business world. The (occasionally) strained relationship between the cooperatives and the founder organisations thus follows the usual pattern. More surprising are the cases where good relationships are successfully formed again and the parties work together to form new cooperatives, as was the case with CRIS and *Vägen ut!*.

It can also be seen that GFC, as an *organisational and founder organisation*, played a significant part in the conception of the project. GFC is an umbrella and resource organisation for non-profit organisations in the Gothenburg area, which was formed in 1995 with municipal support (Hedin 2000b). GFC helped to draw up the first application for research funding to the European Social Fund, and brought the four founder organisations together for a meeting to prepare for the second application. When the project then got underway in autumn 2002, GFC was the obvious meeting place for key players, cooperators and public officials when the steering group or development partnerships held meetings. Throughout the project period, GFC acted as a venue and a facilitator for collaboration within the project. The board of GFC was possibly a little under-involved in the project, and the collaboration depended mainly on the GFC development managers (officials), particularly the development manager who was also chairman of the project's steering group.

Had GFC not assumed management responsibility for the project, it would have been hard to find another non-governmental organisation with the same legitimacy and knowledge. The project would probably have found another organisational home, either as a municipal project within social services, or as an experimental operation within the prison and probation services or the county labour board. It is hard to know how such an organisational form would have worked. However, the empowerment and advocacy profile would probably not have been so successful under, for example, municipal authority. (Most of the various Equal projects in Sweden came under municipal or public bodies.) There was also media criticism of the Equal project due to wasted resources and the fact that the stated goal was not reached, i.e. to integrate people with work-related disabilities into the open labour market.⁴

A fifth conclusion relates to the project's *organisational environment and the significant support from the public sector which the project was able to secure. The project benefited from a comprehensive support structure, which was able to raise valuable funding.* In order to start up and operate a project of this type, a large organisation network is needed along with the mobilisation of resources, primarily at state and municipal levels. Since the project rested on 15 development partners, it enjoyed a comprehensive organisational base and support from both non-governmental

organisations and public bodies. This far-reaching organisational network later proved necessary in order to give the project legitimacy, the expert knowledge needed and, above all, financial resource for salaries, premises and operational costs. Not all the partners within the development partnership proved to be equally important, but the municipality, employment service, regional social security offices and the prison and probation services in particular were instrumental in providing resources and backing.

It can be seen that there was an objective organisational aspect, which relates to the organisation's size, way of operating and ability to influence its organisational surroundings (Hasenfeld 1983). There is also a *subjective and personal aspect*; how the various organisations' advocates have acted towards and committed to the target group and the *Vägen ut!* project. Certain officials within these organisations have been contacts for the project and have acted as the project's advocates and representatives within their organisations (cf. chapter 6). Naturally, it has been useful when these advocates have performed dual roles in relation to the players within the project and internally within their organisations. A number of these advocates have been highly committed, and have been able to contribute valuable resources from their organisations. Others have been more cautious, and have mainly acted as communicators and interpreters between the various organisational worlds.

Within the larger organisations, there have also been "anonymous" figures who have supported the project with their knowledge and their legitimacy, as well as providing resources. In Goffman's words, we can talk in terms of *front stage and back stage* (Goffman 1990). We have all seen the main players of the performance, and have been able to observe how their words and actions have affected the process of building up the cooperatives. The roles of the coordinators and chairmen have been quite clear to many of those who took part in the development partnership meetings. But within the organisations, there have also been essential back-stage roles. These have included senior officials (sometimes even politicians) from the public bodies who have committed to the target group and the project, and who have been able to support the work through essential decision-making and resources. The interaction between front-stage and back-stage players would appear to be absolutely crucial in order to be able to realise a project of this nature.

We have also witnessed an interesting interaction between public enthusiasts, who have acted as pioneers and advocates within their own organisations, and the access to public resources, which were mobilised for the project. The project came about during a time of relative prosperity, when the public bodies had made a little extra funding available from the state for custodial, educational and care services. The government's National Action Plan on Narcotic Drugs focus group was working at the same

⁴ Information from radio station P1 in May 2005.

time, and the government's National Drug Policy Coordinator Björn Fries visited the project, giving it valuable legitimacy. *Vägen ut!* was also awarded a prize by Justice Minister Thomas Bodström for its contributions towards the fight against crime in Sweden. The project therefore received backing and support at government level, which probably had an effect on funding from lower organisational levels. But what if the project had come about in the early 1990s, with the drastic municipal cut-backs of that period? Or what if the project had been run without the backing of the public bodies, just with support from various non-governmental organisations or user organisations? What financial resources would the project have received? And how would it have been viewed by the media and public officials? The question of how factors such as the project's goals and design would interplay under different balances of power within the organisational environment is both complex and fascinating (Hasenfeld 1992, Czarniawska 1998).

A sixth conclusion related to the *project's superstructure at transnational and national levels*. The *European vision* which has been a feature of the transnational work has given all the participants in the project experience of community and solidarity. The transnational work has included collaboration within four work groups dealing with recruitment and training, franchising, quality development for social enterprises and social entrepreneurship. There has also been much in the way of exchanges between the six

participating countries, with study visits to various social enterprises and themed seminars on a number of subjects. Most of the cooperators – and even a few public advocates – have participated in study trips to Italy, Greece or Germany. Certain project leaders and the coordinators have also attended working group meetings in other countries. Many co-operators and apprentices also hosted guests from other countries taking part in study visits and seminars here in Gothenburg in autumn 2002 and spring 2004 (cf. chapter 7).

At the same time, the transnational work has been carried out separately, and has not interfered with the day-to-day work of the cooperatives. It has not impacted upon the practical activities or meant additional work other than for a couple of the project leaders and those taking responsibility for transnational work within the working committee. However, the transnational work has provided a little extra sparkle for the participants, and has provided chances and opportunities which it might have been difficult to obtain alone. It has provided fascinating insight into cooperative work in other countries, such as the Italian prisoners' cooperatives in Rome, or the women's cooperative café on the Greek island of Cephalonia. Participants have also formed contacts with cooperators in other countries, got to know interesting, friendly people and gained experience of living conditions and social conditions

elsewhere in Europe. *The transnational work thus provided the cooperators, apprentices and other players with stimulus and informative insight.*⁵

The national collaboration with the NTG network (the national thematic network) involved working with many important structural issues. This included empowerment at a societal level – communicating the perspectives of the cooperators and the user organisations to higher levels within the hierarchy of society. Only a few professional advocates and a couple of the project leaders took part in this work. The aim was to create awareness of the advantages of social enterprise and to try to improve conditions for this new form of enterprise in Sweden. This work involved holding discussions in various work groups, mapping and investigating conditions for social enterprises, visiting politicians and officials at national and regional level, and compiling referral statements to influence national labour market policy. When half a million people with various work-related disabilities are excluded from the labour market, there is an urgent need for new solutions. Yet labour market policy would seem to have been an institutionalised arena for decades, within which new players and proposals are not welcomed. It has been consistently difficult to contact civil servants and ministry officials and get them to listen to the experiences of EU projects and social enterprises. The first part of the NTG network's work

comprised mapping, investigations and discussions. The second part dealt with an action plan for social enterprise which was presented in October 2005. This will be expanded and developed over the coming year. The influencing work will probably show the degree to which there is a tendency towards change at the higher levels of our society.

8.2 The implications of the study in a broader perspective

We have mainly discussed the concrete results of our investigation above. Here, we would like to raise our sights a little and present the broader perspectives which have arisen from this knowledge. There are three areas which are of interest to this discussion: the social economy, its role, and opportunities to act as an alternative strategy for certain groups to enter the labour market. We will link the significance of the networks, the relationships and the support measures in creating constructive exit strategies from crime and unemployment to this discussion. And finally, we will discuss the importance of empowerment-oriented social work where issues affecting power and power relationships are of key significance.

8.2.1 On social economy

From the start of the 1990s, Sweden became a society of mass unemployment in line with the rest of Europe. This change is of great significance. During the 1970s and 1980s, unemployment

⁵ Some of the key players' transnational tasks brought not only stimulation, but also significantly greater workloads (cf. chapter 7).

in Sweden could be kept down thanks to a large public sector and moderate general economic growth. The low levels of unemployment made it possible, using the labour market tools of a full-employment policy (particularly retraining and temporary employment), to keep open unemployment at a level which was exceptionally low by European standards. But the system was placed under growing strain both from a failing social economy and from difficulties in adapting the traditional means to suit the new groups of unemployed people. The explosive growth in unemployment in the 1990s forced new solutions to be found. The difference between those within and outside the labour market became increasingly obvious. The idea that this growing section of the labour market required more trained staff put training issues in the spotlight.

Authorities and politicians intensified efforts to get various social support systems to work together in order to strengthen the “work line”, i.e. to get more people back into work. The route to and from the labour market thereby grew increasingly complex, both in terms of the types of measure and the participants’ means of support. “Rehabilitation ladders” were created at different levels and in various spheres of authority. The simple goal of an unemployed person finding work was no longer feasible. Various kinds of intermediate target were created so that disappointments would not be too overwhelming.

But new systems create new problems. One growing problem with these public measures can be that the participants are left in the hands of their case officers. Some know about these “ladders” and know the possible targets. Some have the resources and the power to move people between the systems. Seen in this light, the social cooperatives are an alternative strategy for the route back into the labour market: “Social cooperatives are independent groups of people who work together to resolve the need for work and social community through co-owned, democratic enterprise. The subject of profit is secondary to the aim of developing and making use of each and every person’s ability to work and participation in decision-making when it comes to the enterprise’s affairs.” (Laurelli 2002:11). The ideas behind social cooperatives can be said to be partly traditional cooperative concepts and partly derived from the thoughts regarding user influence and empowerment which arose from the reactions against the large welfare systems’ inability to resolve part of the unemployment problem of the 1990s. These originate in the outsiders themselves being able to resolve the problems through involvement – empowerment.

In several respects, social cooperatives can appear to be attractive solutions. Through training and their own organisation, the users themselves build up the activities which form the basis for a means of support. There is less dependence on authorities and individual authority figures, and greater personal responsibility. However, as we previously

pointed out, decision-making and the power structure within the social cooperatives are important. The profit earned is in the form of greater empowerment, and can boil down to the power being transferred from authority figures to enterprise management.

Another attractive aspect of the social cooperatives is that they involve training which depends more on the users’ interests and their own motivation. Without their commitment and motivation, participation in the cooperatives is meaningless. This means there are better opportunities for good training results, while the users are also empowered to take control of their own development. In any case, this is true in comparison with various authorities having control over the work in which people are placed. At the same time, the authorities’ control over and responsibility for where the users find themselves placed within the labour market should be reduced. There are also opportunities for the resulting training process to be broader, socially focused and practical. Members can do many things within a cooperative, not least fighting for the cooperative’s survival.

It is of course too early to say how wide-reaching the social cooperative operations could become. This depends on many different factors. One of these is the political will and ambition of the authorities. Another is the matter of their suitability for various clients and client groups. Since the social cooperatives depend on a market being created for

social services, this will also depend on the competitive situation with other social players (companies and organisations) who can offer similar services. Naturally, how large the overall market could become is also important.

A key issue is of course whether the social cooperatives are able to demonstrate sufficient financial profitability to be able to survive in the long term. Important aspects here include of course the situation in terms of credit financing and marketing. These are areas where it can be said that much remains to be done. But other problems may relate to difficulties which exist in the very nature of such operations. These include issues of scale. The cooperative we have studied have been small. Although there are methodological and pedagogical advantages to running operations on a small scale, this can also involve cost-related disadvantages. Inclination for innovation is also an aspect to be considered. Naturally, one prerequisite for the development of operations is that those involved move forwards and come up with new ideas and new activities. By the same token, this brings a risk of undermining the stability of operations which already work well (not least in terms of staffing). The nature of social cooperative projects therefore creates positive opportunities, whilst also causing problems which risk coming into conflict with the stability which “social demand” requires. These are of course factors which affect both the permanency of individual cooperatives and the general growth of this type of enterprise.

8.2.2 Exit processes from crime and substance abuse

In several sections of this report, we have described *exit processes from crime and substance abuse*, including both theoretical description and analysis (see 2.3) and how the cooperators and participants in the *Vägen ut!* project have described these processes based on their own experiences. A number of studies now exist which depict various types of exit process and recovery after breaking away from problematic situations (Ebaugh 1988, Blomqvist 2002, Hedin & Månsson 1998, Kristiansen 1999, Topor 2004). In a number of cases, a clear turning point can be discerned, whereas in others there is a long line of small changes which combine to cause life to take a new direction (Blomqvist 2002, Hedin & Månsson 1998, Kristiansen 1999, Topor 2004). Theoretical knowledge of the phases of the exit process and the effect of assorted variables, such as whether this relates to breaking with the past as an individual or in a group, starts to spread through the user groups and is combined with members' concrete experiences. In the best cases, members can link terms and phrases to their own experiences. And the users can provide the researchers with new material and additional knowledge for further analysis. Hence, in the best cases, fruitful dialogue can extend beyond the group boundaries.

But there are still many factors and variables which have not yet been researched in terms of exit processes. These include various types of relationship and the different forms of social support needed

by exiters in order to move through all the phases of breaking free. Many users testify to the importance of the close, informal relationships; having a close relative who knows the exiter well, who can follow the entire process and who can be there when crises and problems arise. This key person in the informal network provides many forms of social support, and also facilitates contact with the rest of the network (Hedin & Månsson 1998). The *Vägen ut!* cooperators also included people who described an extremely valuable form of social support which they had experienced while in prison, whereby prison and probation services staff tried to motivate them to stop abusing substances and to start treatment. Staff from social services, employment agencies and regional social security offices had provided important professional support during the later stages of the process of breaking with the past. Here there appears to be a combination of the relationship's specific qualities and the unconventional forms of social support which instilled a sense of meaning and value in the exiter and boosted motivation to proceed with the process of breaking with the past (Topor 2004). Obstacles were encountered, including various kinds of bureaucratic obstacles which the exiter had to deal with and overcome in order to progress. When encountering such obstacles, the people providing professional support played invaluable roles as sources of knowledge and as advocates. But there are also accounts of how older friends, who had been through the process of breaking with the past previously, were

also sources of inspiration and provided energy and essential information in connection with obstacles and various kinds of pressure. Friends who acted as advocates were a key category of support person, providing invaluable assistance during certain stages of the exit process. There would also appear to be other categories of support person who are not interchangeable and who provide specific kinds of social support (Burleson, Albrecht & Sarason 1994).

As far as we know, no comprehensive research has been carried out into the societal conditions for processes of breaking with substance abuse and crime. We naturally have cause to believe that the appearance of institutionalised careers such as those offered by *Basta* or *Vägen ut!* means improved opportunities for breaking away from a life of substance abuse. Exiters are offered the chance to join a strong social community, a drug-free environment with relatively strong management, and socialisation in a new social role (Meeuwisse 2001). Naturally, this also means that the exiter must be able to adapt to a group community, acquire new knowledge and experience and reduce his or her individual need for benefits. Nor have variations in terms of social resources and their significance, i.e. opportunities to obtain work/employment, accommodation and means of support, been investigated in sufficient depth. Even less researched are the effects of stigmatising attitudes, class tensions in different kinds of local society and the influence of various transmitters of values, such

as the media. Here there are therefore many different kinds of societal pressure mechanisms and situations which should be investigated, possibly through action research projects, where researchers work with both individual and societal circumstances at the same time.

8.2.3 Rehabilitation through working in social cooperatives

An extremely important element of the exit process within *Vägen ut!* is the fact that *rehabilitation has occurred through working in social cooperatives*. These cooperatives work not only through work training or employment, where exiters are able to test their ability to work in order then to be placed in the "real world", but also in another way: they include mapping the ability to work and social skills, training various competences and abilities, and testing the resources of the individual and the group. Community and social support are key elements of cooperative work. But the cooperatives also mean that this is "real work" which produces a range of products or services (even if the funding for much of this comes from taxation and the public sector). Three different types of production occur at *Vägen ut!*: the production of handicraft products, the production of services (accommodation or work training) which are bought by public organisations, and the production of "know how" relating to enterprise and entrepreneurship (cf. chapter 4).

Cooperators and apprentices deal with all the tasks involved in normal businesses, such as marketing, organising work,

customer negotiation, administration, accounting, etc. And the social cooperatives are obliged to make a profit – they must be profitable in order to survive in the market – even though the profit is not distributed to shareholders but is reinvested in other projects within the cooperative. The work of the social cooperative thus gives participants practical experience, as well as a strong sense of satisfaction and a high degree of motivation (Meeuwisse 2001). But this also creates a dilemma, since it means that not everyone fits into the operation. Relatively high capacity to work is needed, along with the ability to learn from those working within the cooperative. Social cooperatives are probably not therefore suitable for all prison and probation services or social services clients.

There are financial demands on the social cooperative which the cooperators are well aware of and which mean that staff may encounter dilemmas and difficulties. A good quality of rehabilitation work may come into conflict with financial considerations. Here, too, considerably more knowledge is needed of the social cooperatives' operations and conditions, which can be gained through assessment and research. The social cooperatives get additional support in various ways (in terms of knowledge as well as materially) from public sector organisations: social services, prison and probation services, county labour boards and regional social security offices. The form which this support takes and how it affects the organisation and staff of the social cooperative remains an important

issue to be studied. Many more studies of social enterprise and what is now collectively called social economy are therefore needed.

Working in social cooperatives also brings the benefit that it creates many opportunities for a "normal" day-to-day existence, with regular working hours, social community and meaningful content for day-to-day life. It means that the participant becomes part of a workplace culture, develops new knowledge and skills, and gains access to a new network of contacts within and outside the cooperative. The social cooperatives are part of a wider organisational network of public and non-profit organisations, providing a range of personal contacts. The work also means that the co-operators and apprentices receive an income similar to a normal salary and which allows them to take part in various kinds of everyday consumerism: renting, everyday subsistence, leisure activities with children, going to the cinema, short trips, etc. Support through salary contributions or protected work in public employment does not allow for any large-scale consumerism, but still makes it possible to live a fairly normal standard of living comparable to income from other low-paid work. For many in the target group, the possibility of a normal daily existence for them and their family is a significant goal in itself. Many of the co-operators have told us how important this feeling of normality is to them. They do not need to feel ashamed or to avoid neighbours and friends as they did previously.

People with experience of substance abuse and crime feel clearly stigmatised and cast out from society, even though no such casting out has actually occurred. It is clear that by remaining unemployed, people feel stigmatised and undervalued, leading to feelings of shame (Rantakeisu 2002). Experience of substance abuse and crime probably increase these feelings of shame even more. People probably have others in their social network who transmit values and in the presence of whom they feel ashamed: people who believe that one should work and support oneself, rather than being a burden on society by living off benefits. Extremely old-fashioned values of "worthy" and "unworthy" poor people are probably the reason for these views (Lindqvist 2001). At the root of this is a deep-seated work ethic which has been part of our Protestant cultural heritage for hundreds of years. There therefore needs to be a clear *redefinition* of these people's social roles and *normalisation through work* in order that the stigma of shame should be overcome and they can be accepted as ordinary citizens who contribute to society. By working in social cooperatives, such a redefinition and normalisation can occur, which many in the target group strive after. In the cooperative, goods are produced for a market or essential welfare services are produced for public organisations. One therefore achieves something useful and contributes towards society's production of goods and services. On a subjective level, the work provides a feeling of satisfaction, and the sense of worth, self-esteem and confidence increases.

On an objective level, the person gains a new role and a new everyday existence which allows participation in society. This process of redefinition is therefore a matter of going from social exclusion to social inclusion via working for a social enterprise. Since people's social roles are always construed in terms of an interpersonal interaction, it is obvious that this process of redefinition and normalisation is an extremely important function of the social enterprise in the context of society.

Leaving aside the individual level and reviewing the project from a societal perspective, it is clear that this is a case of *expanding the labour market and finding ways of reintegrating people and groups who have become excluded and marginalised*. By forming social enterprises where people take account of social considerations and are more flexible in terms of ability to work, previous knowledge and experience than other areas of the labour market, attempts are made to find ways into the labour market for marginalised groups. In this respect, the NTG network work is crucial. Here a whole range of changes to rules and structures are being proposed in order to support social enterprise and remove various obstacles to the development of social enterprise in Sweden. Attempts are also being made to change aspects of the social security and benefits system to adapt it to social enterprise, such as the proposal to be able to convert social security benefits into salary contributions if the recipient of benefits still has some ability to work and can work in a

social enterprise. However, the various proposed changes would affect the old labour market policy, which is likely to encounter resistance from a number of quarters. The labour market policy enjoys strong popular support, both politically and professionally. At the same time the large group of people with reduced ability to work and which therefore finds itself excluded from the labour market – around half a million people – poses problems for the welfare system and impacts upon the social economy in a way which makes it well worth trying new solutions.

8.2.4 Towards empowerment-oriented social work

The experiences of this investigation show that empowerment-oriented social work can be profitable when dealing, for example, with users who have complex problems. Here, we will discuss what should be thought about and what should be taken into consideration when abandoning the more traditional, paternalistic methods of social work in favour of a more user-centred, empowerment-oriented operation, where the focus is on the individual's resources, rather than the individual's problems.

Firstly, empowerment-oriented social work requires active behaviour and reflection on issues which affect power relationships and the various potential power resources, *physical and mental strength, knowledge and skills, the power of the group, and formal and informal institutional resources*. In other words, it is not just a case of having the

client at the centre, but of a dynamic and democratic process where the potential for growth is created, and not just in terms of the initial understanding, but beyond. Preconceived thoughts and ideas about the other party can often present a significant obstacle in this type of relationship. Through meetings and dialogue-based communication, these views can be modulated. This is not to say that the differences of opinion disappear completely, but they can be based more on objective grounds. Once this threshold has been reached, for example the institutional power and obstacles become clear, one can start to discuss their function and legitimacy. Through this process, any thresholds can be moved and constructive system changes can be created.

Secondly, since the formal powers of the institutional in the form of rules, provisions and procedures sometimes constitute a major obstacle to this process, it is important, over and above the normal exercise of authority, to create free zones where other types of activities can be developed. This is achieved partly through cross-border work between various authorities and partly through close relationships and communication on a more equal basis between the users. This could be a project with a set timeframe, or an ongoing operation with special circumstances and permission to try new methods.

Thirdly, it can be noted that significant support, such as in the form of financial assistance and various types of expert

knowledge, is often needed during a phase of the empowerment process, and in certain cases for longer. In terms of empowerment-oriented social work, however, no assistance should be given automatically and without user participation, but in consultation with the users and as support for them to be able to obtain more potential power resources, with the aim that going forward they should be able to lead a more independent life.

Fourthly, it has also become apparent that although financial support is an important material foundation, the relationships form an irreplaceable social and psychological foundation in this work. In the various meetings, one often forms images and impressions of others, and particularly of oneself. In such situations, key issues include where and how one is positioned, how one is listened to and how one is greeted. This places particular requirements on those who are familiar with meetings and communications to make room for those who do not yet have the same routines or abilities. In other words, in empowerment-oriented social work it is not just the goal which is important, but above all how constructive and democratic the route taken was.

Fifthly, empowerment-oriented social work requires some kind of advocacy. When one's own potential power resources are insufficient for powerful systems, it is important to get help from someone else. Advocacy can be practised by the actual users, officials or professional advocates. The important thing here is once again that this is based on a

dialogue between the representative and the user, who is the actual sponsor. We have discussed above five key basic requirements for empowerment-oriented social work. It is probably not entirely easy to realise this in many authority contexts, where the scale of the task often necessitates bulk processing of the clients. This includes, for example, adapting the individual to the system, the clientising process. The inverted journey – the empowerment process – requires, on the other hand, more individualised, personal and democratic behaviour on the part of the authority and the official. We understand that, particularly when there are complex problems which affect several authorities' areas of operation, there is a high risk that individuals are clientised and made passive, dealing with their case automatically. With this very group, empowerment-oriented social work can break the negative cycle. The outlook is promising, although more research and development work are needed in order to develop this model further. One of the key issues relates to how empowerment processes can be developed in contexts where there are strong opposing forces, such as large, powerful institutions. Another issue which has been brought to the fore in this and other similar projects is why power constellations arise even among users, even if the underlying ideology of the operations affirms empowerment; the question is also how to combat these tendencies. A third question relates to the rehabilitating relationships, the qualities of these relationships and how they can be promoted within social work.

Chapter 9. The research project's aims, questions and implementation

9.1 Background

In autumn 2001, in connection with the first application to the ESF Council for funding for an experimental piece of work with social cooperatives for former criminals and substance abusers, the staff of Gothenburg's NGO Agency also contacted the Institution for Social Work, to see if they had a researcher with time for, and an interest in, monitoring the development work and evaluating the results. This contact was made on the basis of earlier research collaboration. Ulla-Carin Hedin was invited to join the ongoing discussion with Gothenburg's NGO Agency, and it was in this context, in winter 2002, that the possibility of starting up a social cooperative was discussed. She contacted two colleagues and a research group with the appropriate skills was formed.

It became clear over the course of the discussions that there were several research questions which would be interesting to investigate, for example, what each individual's "exit process" from crime and substance abuse entailed, and what effect working in a social cooperative has on speeding up the exit process and facilitating social integration for these people. However, there were also research issues at a group and organisational level, including how group processes in the social cooperatives are developed and managed, how to collaborate with others, and what the role of the founding

organisations (the NGOs) was in the project. Collaboration with advocates for public sector organisations, and trying to influence and change their way of working, was another unusual feature of the project's objectives. Consequently, there were interesting issues to be investigated and evaluated at individual, group and organisational levels.

In April 2002, a plan was drawn up for the research project, which was enclosed with the main funding applications to the ESF Council and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. When the main funding was granted, some money was also set aside for a research and evaluation project, with the ESF Council and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service contributing equal parts to the research grant. The research work was to go on for just over three years, from autumn 2002 to autumn 2005.

9.2 Aims and questions

In the project plan from April 2002, there were four aims for the research work:

- *to study which individual and gender-specific factors influence the exit process from crime (and substance abuse) and the significance of the work in the process of achieving change*
- *to investigate the possibilities for former criminals to take power over their own lives and achieve social integration by working in a social cooperative*
- *to study the development of the social cooperatives, how they influence their founding organisations (the NGOs) and analyse the advantages and difficulties inherent in this organisational model*

- *to investigate how collaborating in the development partnership influences the participating authorities and organisations, and whether new ways of working can be developed from the collaboration*

Four questions provided the direction of the research work:

1. *Which factors affect the process of "breaking away" from crime and substance misuse? Can working in social cooperatives facilitate the development of a new social identity? Are there gender-specific factors which influence the exit process? Which relationships and resources do women and men need in order to build up a new social existence?*
2. *How does participating in social cooperatives and self-help work influence the participants' integration into society? What forms of stigmatisation and oppression might participants come up against? What strategies, both for the individual participant and for the participants as a group, contribute to increasing their control and power over their situations?*
3. *How are the social cooperatives developed, both socially and economically? How do the social cooperatives influence the other activities of the organisations? What type of transformation process is initiated within the NGOs?*
4. *How is the collaboration between the different authorities and organisations developed within the partnership? What new ways of working and models for collaboration are developed within the*

partnership? How can these be transferred to other human care organisations and other areas of work?

In reality, the research work was started during the preparatory discussions in winter 2002. It became clear at an early stage that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods would be preferable, but that due to the nature of the research questions, a qualitative approach would predominate. It was necessary to use triangulation – the use of several different methods (Kvale 1997).

The ESF Council were positive about the project from the start, but they emphasised the evaluative nature of the assignment. However, as researchers we did not want to limit ourselves to a simple evaluation, since the development of the cooperatives and the project as a whole was interesting to monitor and investigate on a deeper level.

9.3 Gathering of material and methods

9.3.1 Selection

The *Vägen ut!* project has a fairly complicated structure. There are many participants in the steering group, including development partners, public sector organisations and NGOs, and then there are the four social cooperatives which form the central part of the project (cf. outline in chapter 1). Within the project, there has also been an extensive amount of activity in terms of meetings, where certain events and elements of the process have been selected for study. Added to this is the transnational part of the

work, and the collaboration with other “Equal” projects in the work for change at a national level (cf. chap 7). There are several groups of actors, whose collaboration has been important for the project:

- The project’s *steering group and working party*, which consists of the leading professional advocates, project leaders from the four cooperatives, and some public sector representatives within the development partnership.

- *Cooperators (members of the cooperatives), apprentices and users in the social cooperatives*. At the beginning the group consisted of 13 people who began the cooperator training course in autumn 2002. Since then new apprentices and users who live or work in one of the cooperatives have joined. A total of 60 people have participated in the work of the cooperatives for a period of time.

- *Actors in the original self-help organisations* which initiated the project in 2001-2002, who later had different roles in relation to the social cooperatives and the project work (cf. chap 6).

- *Contacts within the different public sector organisations which were part of the development partnership* and who in some way supported the project. This group of around 15 people has been an important support and resource group for the development of the project (cf. chap 6).

- *Actors who represented partners in the national and transnational networks* which *Vägen ut!* has participated in (cf. chap 7).

Since the project is so big with so many partners at a local, national and transnational level, we have had to select a level for study. We have chosen to focus on the local level, with the social cooperatives, the project steering group, and the development partnership in focus. The questions about the project are also aimed at local level. As a result, we have limited ourselves strictly in relation to the national and transnational levels.

9.3.2 Gathering of material

Three primary methods were used to gather material.

I. Visits, conversations and interviews with different actors.

We have visited the originating self-help associations (*Bryggan*, CRIS, *Half Way House* and *Vävstugan*), where we spoke to key actors about the development of the project and the current situation (cf. chap 1). Visits to the social cooperatives (*Villa Solberg*, *Karins Döttrar*, the *Trädet* workshop and *Café Solberg*) have also been carried out on a regular basis.

These cooperatives have grown over the period of the project. The aim of these visits has been to gain knowledge about the current situation in the associations and to be able to follow the development of the work. Through these visits, we

have been able to see how the process has sometimes moved in leaps and bounds, and at other times remained on a frustrating plateau.

The visits were sometimes initiated spontaneously by the researchers, who talked with key actors and members when they happened to appear on site. Their level of knowledge on the *Vägen ut!* project has been varied, but they have often vented their feelings about it. In other situations, the researcher has gathered some key actors and discussed certain subjects with them, or interviewed some actors who were responsible for keeping a diary in the association.¹

For the researchers, this material has provided notes to trigger the memory in relation to certain events or phases in the establishment of the cooperatives. It has been used at a later time, to complement the interview material when writing the report.

II. Qualitative, themed interviews with different categories of actors in the project.

Interviews have taken place with help from a set of questions on different themes. Three different sets of questions have been used: one for the steering group and contacts in the development partnership, another for cooperators and apprentices, and a third for users, who have lived in or done work training in the cooperatives. The aim of the interviews was to monitor the development of the project, clarify various special tasks and capacities which the actors have, and

to investigate both individual development and the group process. In total, 35 people have been interviewed using qualitative interviews – 23 people from the group of cooperators, apprentices and users, and 12 people from the professional group (the management group or the development partnership). The majority of the actors in the social cooperatives have only been interviewed on one occasion. However some of the professionals in the steering group have been interviewed on several occasions during the period of the project, including both of the project’s coordinators. Four categories of actors have been interviewed:

1. *Members of the steering group and working party* who have managed the project from the perspective of Gothenburg’s NGO Agency as an organisational centre, and have been responsible for its development – for example, the project’s chairperson, coordinator, coordinator for transnational work, and the finance officer, who has had an important role in holding the project together and at the same time helped the cooperatives with financial issues. These people were interviewed for the first time in the spring of 2003, and follow-up interviews have taken place during the second and third years of the project. The interviews have been based on a theme provided by the set of questions, but have also included longer reports concerning the development of the project, specific events in the cooperatives, and difficul-

¹ The keeping of a diary as a research method has not functioned particularly well – see below.

ties encountered in the areas of funding and collaboration. These interviews can be described as focused interviews with certain narrative elements (Hydén & Hydén 1997). These interviews have provided a great deal of information on the ambitions of the project, and together with other interview material, they have given a good picture of the development and results of the project, as well as the obstacles and difficulties encountered by key actors.

2. *Contacts from the public sector organisations* which participate in the project as development partners and who represent their various organisations in the steering group and the partnership. Around ten people from this group were interviewed in spring 2003 regarding their role and their responsibilities in the project, as well as their view on the project work and the development of the social cooperatives in a general sense. These interviews took an average of one and a half hours to complete, and usually took place at the interviewee's place of work. The later interviews have contained more concrete material, and have worked well as a source of information, together with other materials. Most of the material from these interviews is given in chapter 6 of the report.

3. *Cooperators (members of the cooperatives) and apprentices from the four social cooperatives* have been interviewed, aided by a themed set of questions. Around 15 people from this group were interviewed in autumn/winter 2003/4. The themes discussed included

how the person came to the cooperative; how the establishment of the cooperative began and was carried out; the current situation in the cooperative and how the group functions together; how ideas of empowerment are put into practice and how gender equality functions; and how the interviewee sees their future in the cooperative. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. Then the material was compiled by theme and analysed (cf. Kvale 1997). The interviews have given concrete insights and extremely valuable information on the work and the sense of community in the social cooperatives. *Users* from two of the social cooperatives have also been interviewed. These were men who live or have lived at *Villa Solberg*, and women who have been placed at *Karins Döttrar* for employment training. These interviews were with a small group of seven to eight people, who were interviewed on the subjects of how they found out about and came to the cooperative; the nature of their work and whether they enjoyed it; and what forms of support and help they received from their contacts in the cooperative. These interviews have usually taken place on the premises of the social cooperative, and have taken about an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. Later they were analysed according to the themes, and form the basis for certain parts of chapters 3 and 5 of the report. These interviews give a good picture of daily life in each cooperative, the users' social situations, and which forms of support and help are offered within the cooperative.

III. **Participation in and observation of various types of meetings and working groups** within the project. The aim here has been to get an insight into the development of the project, how it has been constructed, and what it actually involves. Through this participation, the researchers have gotten to know all the key actors and acquainted themselves with the procedures involved in the project. Consequently, we have, throughout the length of the project, participated in the steering group meetings and development partnership meetings, as well as some work committee meetings and national meetings in relation to evaluation and communications. However, we have not been able to participate in all the working groups and collaboration groups which exist as part of the project.

The researchers have presented their results and observations at seminars and conferences within the framework of the project. Every six months, the research results have also been presented at larger seminars in the development partnership. The researchers have also become acquainted with all the dispatches and letters which have been sent out as part of the project. Notes and minutes from meetings, and written communications have been analysed for the writing of a chapter of the final report. The documentation from the project has been extensive, and has provided plenty of material for the final report.

9.4 Data processing and analysis

The analysis of the material gathered has taken place in three stages:

All the interviews have been recorded and transcribed in their entirety, or summarised according to the themes in the set of questions. The work of arranging the material in themes at this stage has been a first analysis. Certain patterns have become visible in the material and established categories, which we have then been able to develop and look into in more depth. Relationships between the different categories have become visible later on (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1967). The results of visits and interviews, as well as the various main categories of information, have been discussed regularly in the research group, and more subtle connotations and relationships have become visible. A third round of analysis has taken place in connection with drafting the chapters of the report, partly in the drafting of the text, and partly in discussions of the text in the research group. On the basis of these discussions, changes and additions have been made.

Over the course of the project, the study of relevant literature and discussions in the research group have also brought in perspectives which have influenced the analysis. From the beginning, the individual and group levels have dominated the work, and the main sources used have been sociopsychological theories on exit processes and on gender roles and gender differences. The perspective has gradually been moved towards questions of power, democracy and empow-

erment. At a relatively late stage of the project, more structural issues came into the discussion, relating to employment market policy, different sectors in society, and economic profitability. We have primarily used an *abductive method*, where the analysis has been influenced both by the research results and by different theoretical perspectives (Peirce 1990).

9.5 Dilemmas in the study

One problem with selection of levels and the focus of the study has already been mentioned. At the beginning of the project, the project's structure seemed extremely complex and inaccessible to us. Thus, we chose to stick tightly to our sets of questions, and monitor the work in the founding organisations, the steering group and among the cooperators. Visits to the organisations and to the budding cooperatives, as well as interviews and conversations with key actors, became the primary methods. At the beginning, there was also a great deal of participatory observation at meetings, in order to try to understand the greater structure, and ascertain which parts of it were the most significant to study. At this point, the activities of the four social cooperatives stood out as the core activities which should be reviewed carefully. The methods for this could have been long-term participatory observation in the work (cf. Meeuwisse 2001) and/or qualitative interviews. For reasons of time, we chose to conduct shorter observations, supplemented by quite a lot of qualitative interviews with different categories of actors.

Another dilemma has been to do with the *"action research" nature of the study*. The *Vägen ut!* project deals with a process of transformation in terms of rehabilitation of former criminals and substance abusers, who establish an institutional career in several steps. There is also the aim of creating a different outlook within prison and probation services, social services and other public sector organisations. The key actors wanted help from the researchers, who were to be part of the different stages in the transformation process and legitimise this process for decision-makers and the media. The role of the researchers was not only to be the gathering, analysis and documentation of material in the usual way. They were also to be actors in the process, and produce useable knowledge for the process. For us as researchers, this different research role was not clear from the beginning, and we had not discussed it explicitly with the steering group for the project. Later this became clearer and led to discussions in the research group. There are several problems connected with this type of research (cf. Sandberg 1981). Partly, there is a problem with the time required and the researcher's ability to complete their tasks. An obvious risk in this type of project is that the action comes first, and demands the resources of all involved, in order to achieve the best results possible. There is no time or energy left for the more detailed, complex and long drawn-out research work, which falls further and further behind. When the action is completed,

the key actors move on to other tasks and the research project has overrun all its deadlines.

There is also a risk of too much involvement in the action, and that the balance between proximity and distance may be disturbed over the course of the research. Qualitative research demands deliberate movement between proximity in some phases, and distance in other phases (cf. Repstad 1999). The gathering of material via participatory observation and interviews demands close collaboration with actors in the process being investigated. However, in order to distinguish patterns and review material from different angles, and understand what is hidden and be able to describe it, greater distance is required. In the phase of writing up the report, peace and quiet is required for reading and contemplation. Discussions with research colleagues studying different subjects and projects also bring new perspective to the analysis. During these later phases, too strong an involvement with the actors can cause certain perspectives to disappear, and the resulting report may lack theoretical substance. Discussion of problems and criticism of certain aspects can lessen, and the result is a highly modified and politically correct product (cf. Sandberg 1981). There can also be a risk that the credibility of the research results and conclusions may be compromised. The researchers are seen as the defenders of the project, and their role as independent researchers is weakened. They are placed in a position of legitimising and supporting the

work of the client. There is no value in conducting independent research into a project or transformation process when the researcher's power to be critical is limited. The research project becomes a legitimising and fairly harmless activity, which no-one can really use – neither the client, nor the user, nor other organisations.

In this piece of research, we have tried to prevent this "action research" approach, and treat the *Vägen ut!* project as a normal research object. In order to reach a better understanding of the project and become closer to the actors and interviewees, we have devoted plenty of time to qualitative interviews, visits, and participation in meetings during the period of gathering information. Nonetheless, in order to make good quality analysis possible, we have also devoted a significant amount of time to discussions in the research group during the analysis phase and the write-up phase. It has also been an advantage that there are three people in the research group, and between ourselves we have been able to develop different roles in relation to the project's key actors. Thus, we have been able to vary our involvement with the project according to each person's commitment and perception of their role as researcher.

A third dilemma in the research work has been that of *ethical issues*. We have tried to make sure that everyone who has been requested to participate in an interview has chosen to cooperate of their own free will. If anyone has shown any hesitation, we have recommended



immediately that they think it over. We have also informed them that they break off an interview or refuse to answer a question if they feel under any pressure. The central principle of informed consent and voluntary participation has thus been carefully followed.

Another ethical issue is of course that of secrecy and confidentiality. The majority of actors in the project know each other well and sometimes spend time together out of work as well as during working hours. We have attempted to change certain details and names in the material which is quoted in the report. We have also attempted to shorten quotes or only use parts of them, so that the quotes are not too revealing of the interviewee in question. However, it may still be possible to recognise certain quotes, and this may cause discomfort within the group.

Thirdly, there is the ethical issue of the interpretations and comments which we have made in response to things which interviewees have told us. It may be that some comments or interpretations which we have made are thought by the interviewees to be wrong or out of place. We alone are responsible for our comments, reflections and interpretations. Nevertheless, this also brings up the problem of what conclusions different groups of readers draw from the text. Therefore, we must be careful with making statements and interpretations, so that the interviewees concerned are not harmed by what we write.

A fourth ethical issue relates to the reporting of results and discussions with the target group and the actors regarding the results of the study and ongoing reflections. The reporting of results began at a relatively early stage of the project, for example at the seminar at Skandia in April 2003. Since then, we have recounted material at development partnership meetings in 2004 and at dissemination meetings in 2005. The fourth dilemma concerns the *validity and reliability of the study and whether it is possible to draw general, universal conclusions*. These are typical methodological questions, which are often discussed in great detail in the scientific community.

For other people outside the academy, such concerns may seem like splitting hairs, but in simple terms, the validity of the report depends on its credibility. Has the study investigated the questions which were set? Have we arrived at results which seem trustworthy and dependable? The validity can be scrutinised by looking at which methods have been used and what results have been attained. Comparisons with similar studies in related subjects are also useful. The reliability depends on which measuring methods have been used, and how carefully measurements have been made. Would similar results be attained if the study was repeated with the same methods but with different researchers? The reliability factor has its origins in quantitative research, and is difficult to apply to qualitative studies such as this one. There

is also the question of whether it is possible to draw general conclusions and apply these to people other than the individuals and groups who were part of the study.

We are aware that discussing the reliability of the study here, in the way that is usually done in a quantitative context, would be complicated, when we have not really made any measurements according to statistical methods. The objects of our investigation have primarily been qualities, nuances and processes. In other words, the study was about complicated relationships which cannot be simplified and measured. On the other hand, it is possible to review the methods and how they were used. Have the questions from the original project plan been answered? Have the best methods been used or could the study have been carried out in a different way? Have our choices of what to focus on and what to limit worked well? Has the study been reported in a transparent way, so that everyone can see how the theoretical tools have been used? Did the analysis and reflections function well in relation to the reality which we described? And so on. All of these questions relate to the validity and credibility of the study. As methods of validation, we have included other similar studies, for example the study carried out on the Basta Work Cooperative, as well as our discussions in the research group.

The question of whether it is possible to draw general conclusions is also extraordinarily difficult to answer. The *Vägen ut!* project is in many respects a unique undertaking. Over three years together, an extensive change-inducing process has been built up. How this development process has taken shape for individual actors, cooperators, users or advocates is specific to each person and as such impossible to recount. Nonetheless, there are of course certain features which the *Vägen ut!* project has in common with other projects or transformation processes. Probably the only form of general application which is possible is analytical generalisation, where certain terms and phenomena can be discussed and applied.



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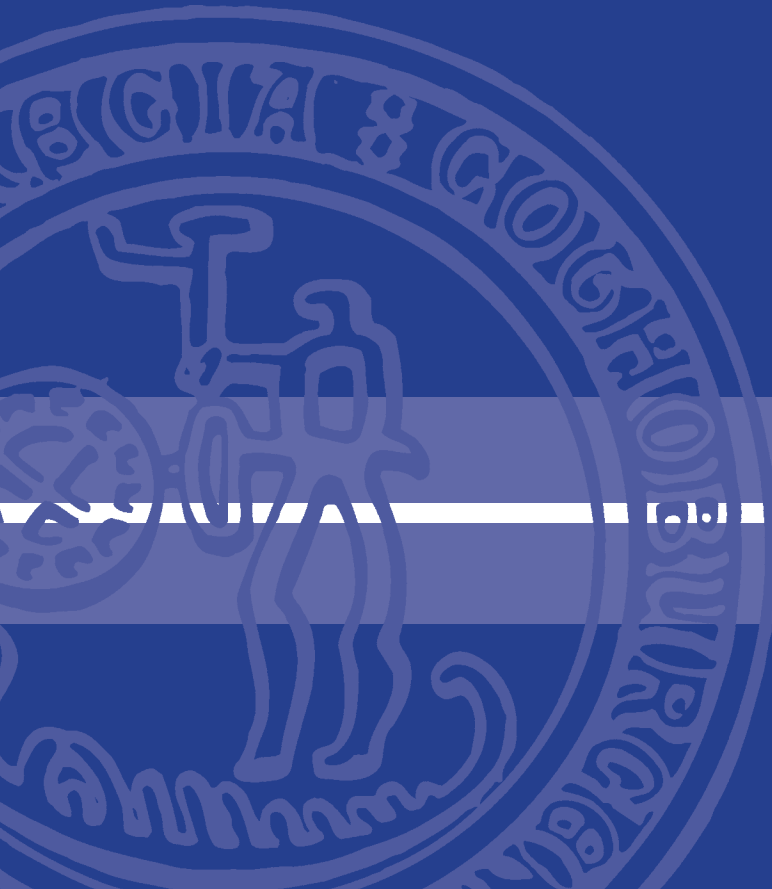
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The work of the *Vägen ut – Från fängelse till socialt arbetskooperativ* (“EXIT! – From prison to social cooperative”) Equal partnership was carried out over the course of three years, and shows that important conditions for breaking away from a career of crime include freedom from drugs, work/employment and new relationships within a working community. Other important conditions include emphasising empowerment and opportunities to manage and determine for oneself the terms of the project work. The project was monitored by three researchers from Göteborg University who, in a newly published report, *“Exit processes and empowerment – a study of social cooperatives in the Vägen ut! project”*, describe and analyse the process of building up the project from a number of different perspectives.