

VÄGEN UT! SHOWED THE WAY IN

Social enterprising
and empowerment



Some conclusions from the research report "Exit processes and empowerment. A study of social cooperatives in the Vägen ut!" project by Göteborg University, Department of Social Work.

PREFACE

The Swedish Vägen ut! (exit) cooperatives have shown that it is possible to successfully return to society. Four new cooperatives have been set up, employing over 20 people. Another three cooperatives are up and running.

Research from the Swedish Prison and Probation Service research committee (September, 2005), show that some of the most important prerequisites for breaking away from a life of crime are freedom from drugs and a supportive, non-criminal network. These prerequisites are provided by the Vägen ut! cooperatives.

But the work within the Equal Partnership Vägen ut! – From prison to social cooperative, which has been running for three years has taught us even more about a successful way out. This is what we would like to share with you in this publication.

It's about what happens when people are given the opportunity to influence their own lives together with others. We also want to demonstrate the importance of good role models and people from the authorities contributing with their knowledge.

This publication is based on the conclusions that three researchers at Göteborg University; Ulla-Carin Hedin, Urban Herlitz and Jari Kuosmanen present in their study "Exit processes and empowerment. A study of social cooperatives in the project Vägen ut!"

We would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to the Swedish Prison and Probation Service Research Committee for their funding, which made it possible to carry out this extensive research project.

People are more alike than different, our dreams, our desires and our needs are not all that different, regardless of background and experiences. It is a matter of giving people a chance, an opening into society. This is our story.

Take inspiration from us and see the possibilities!

Göteborg, Sweden, March 2006

Pernilla Svebo Lindgren, Coordinator

The Equal Partnership Vägen ut! – From prison to social cooperative

"JOY AND FRIENDSHIP,
STRENGTH AND COURAGE!"

Catharina, entrepreneur from Karin's Daughters



Margita and Christina, entrepreneurs from Karin's Daughters

KARIN'S DAUGHTERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

"Here, you meet others with the same background as yourself. You get a role model. If they can do it, so can I!"



"When I was interviewed for a placement at Karin's Daughters, Magda and Tina introduced themselves as former drug addicts. You could have knocked me down with a feather. Something happened inside of at that point. We were suddenly on the same level."

"It is an enormous difference compared to meeting an official. It doesn't matter how good they are. The professionalism makes it cold. They never open up, you never meet the person. They remain up there while I'm down here."

"It may be something in me, but you have been feeling so low, crossed so many lines. Upbringing and childhood provide the framework and you have stepped over so many of those boundaries. Dropped everything! Your whole existence. You can never understand that sort of thing if you haven't abused drugs yourself. That's an experience you can't learn from a book. If you haven't ever let go of everything, you can never really understand."

"Here, we are equals. We have been through so much – foster homes, rehab centres, prison... after that you don't trust anyone anymore. But here, you can talk to people with the same background as yourself. There is so much you can't put into words when you have been an addict, but they know. The others can tell what I am going through and can be there for me just when I really need it. In a way that is needed right there and then."

"And we are important too. The staff can also be upset, and they show it then, without putting on a front. This is an authority free zone and a place free from men. We can do without all that. It is nice with just women around. Men always want to be in control, put us down. We are going through a change – it's dangerous, as they can easily lose that control."

"Will I make it? Of course I will! I've made up my mind. I want nothing to do with drugs. I've got role models here, both among the staff and the other girls, to prove to me that I can do it. That's what you need throughout life, role models. I can talk to them whenever I want to. Even when I leave, I will still always be able to have contact with them."

MC, 39 years old – one of Karin's Daughters since Summer 2004.

FROM PRISON TO SOCIAL COOPERATIVE

The way out of substance abuse and crime is hard. Numerous reports, studies and media stories have highlighted the impossible situation most discharged prisoners end up in after serving their sentence, a life without accommodation or work where the door back to a life of crime and substance abuse lies wide open.

Some NGO organisations in Göteborg, Sweden, took this problem to heart. They decided to create new ways out of addiction and crime. The purpose was to give the participants a job and the means to support themselves in social cooperatives.

Thus, **The Vägen ut! (exit) – From prison to social cooperative** project was born, initiated by the user entities *Bryggan* (The Bridge), *KRIS* (CRIS, Criminals Return to Society), *Vävstugan* (the Weaving lodge) and *The Ateljé Trädet studio*, *Foundation Half Way House* in Göteborg; organisations and enterprises where the people involved have had personal experience of both crime and substance abuse, as well as of prisons and other institutions. On the basis of the activities of these four organisations, a partnership was developed between the public sector and two organisations within the social economy, *Göteborgs FöreningsCenter – Gothenburg NGO Agency* and *Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation*.

VÄGEN UT!

was set up in August 2002 as a development partnership within the EU initiative Equal and continued until June, 2005.

During 2003 and 2004, four social cooperatives were set up: *Villa Solberg*, *Karin's Daughters*, *Café Solberg* and the studio *Ateljé Trädet*. These four social cooperatives were the driving force of the whole partnership. Several associations, organisations and public authorities supported their work.

The aim was to combat discrimination and labour market exclusion through social cooperatives, but also to change the attitude towards people with a history of substance abuse and criminality, and to make the public sector more efficient by getting the *Swedish Prison and Probation Service*, *the Swedish Social Insurance Agency*, *the Swedish Employment Service* and *the municipality of Göteborg* to cooperate better with each other and with the user organisations, and to be supportive rather than overprotective.

Vägen ut! was run from an empowerment perspective where the most important elements were participation and personal responsibility.

FOUR COOPERATIVES

VILLA SOLBERG was officially opened in September 2003. It is what is generally known as a half way house, with five to seven places for men in an old detached house situated outside of Göteborg. It is run by entrepreneurs and apprentices, all of who are men.

First and foremost, Villa Solberg accommodates men who have recently left prison. However people are actually sent there by the social services too. The residents are required by the entrepreneurs to completely abstain from drugs and alcohol during their stay at Villa Solberg. The residents are also required to participate in AA or NA meetings (Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous), and they must want to leave behind life as an addict and criminal behind them. All residents are also expected to adapt to the cooperative community and participate in the daily work, in the green house or the workshop, for example, that is if they don't have jobs outside Villa Solberg.

Most of those who come to Villa Solberg are between 30 and 50 years old. They stay between three to six months before they move on to accommodation of their own.

KARIN'S DAUGHTERS is run by six women and is a weaving- and craft cooperative in Göteborg for women who have broken away from crime and substance abuse. The first woman arrived for work training in the autumn of 2003 and one year later all 5 places were filled.

Most of those who come to Karin's Daughters are in their 30s, having had drug and alcohol problems and been unemployed for several years. They are placed by the social services, often for six months at a time and work according to individual programmes of fixed group activities and meetings. Two of the entrepreneurs act as key contacts for the women and supervise them in their daily work with weaving, silver smithery and other handicrafts.

THE STUDIO ATELJÉ TRÄDET has been running a craft shop with silk-screen painting in Göteborg for several years. Nowadays the cooperative rents some office space in Göteborg with a view over the harbour. They produce various painted silk textiles and in 2004 they started to organise classes in silkscreen painting.

Four entrepreneurs started Ateljé Trädet but several apprentices and voluntary co-workers participate in the cooperative's activities. The studio does not offer work training or the accommodation of residents. It is exclusively dedicated to the production of art handicraft that is sold on the open market. The cooperative is run by women only.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE?

A social enterprise is a business

- with the purpose of integrating those who are excluded from the labour market into society and working life
- that primarily reinvests its profits in its own business or similar enterprises
- that enables the co-workers to participate through ownership, agreements or other well documented procedures
- that is an organisation that operates independently from the public sector

CAFÉ SOLBERG is a little café in Gårda, central Göteborg. The café opened its doors in October 2004, and a catering business is also being operated alongside the normal café business.

One entrepreneur and two apprentices work at Café Solberg. The café is open weekdays between 9.00 and 15.00 with customers mainly coming from nearby schools and businesses.

WHAT IS AN EXIT PROCESS?

How and why does somebody leave a life of addiction and crime? This question has interested many researchers over the last few years.

Various researchers have identified the different steps a person takes to leave behind a destructive life style. Some have indicated real turning points. Others have spoken about slow exit processes.

What both approaches have in common is the focus on the need to create a new identity and a new social structure to cope with the exit.

One of the objectives of Vägen ut! has been to create new positive structures for everyone involved. Structures that provide the participants with the possibility of reconsidering their old identity, and making a new life for themselves without drugs or crime.

VÄGEN UT! AND THE FUTURE

The actual Vägen ut! partnership ceased to exist in June 2005, but Villa Solberg, Karin's Daughters and Café Solberg today (March 2006) employ over 20 people. The Vägen ut! cooperatives have set up a consortium for the joint administration of quality development, procurement, finance and personnel administration.

Ateljé Trädet also lives on in new facilities on the expansive north shore of the Göta river. They have chosen not to join the Consortium Vägen ut! cooperatives but continue to cooperate closely.

Three new cooperatives have been set up: Young Surfers – a screen printers for young people, Anlita – a Business Employment Cooperative (BEC), Villa Karin – a halfway house for women. Café Solberg has moved to new facilities and there are plans to open a hotel in the form of social franchising in cooperation with an Italian cooperative hotel chain, Le Mat.

Vägen ut! will continue to use social franchising as a dissemination method for social enterprising by spreading the Half Way House concept around the country in collaboration with CRIS Sweden (Criminals Return to Society) and local cooperative development centres.

WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

The terms power and powerlessness are important for the understanding of exclusion. Someone who is unemployed, an addict and maybe a criminal is powerless in more ways than one; powerless in the relationship with public officials, employers and other people who are established in society, but also in the relationship with himself/herself. Here, we are talking about the sense of powerlessness that manifests itself in low self-esteem and inferiority complexes.

To conquer this powerlessness many speak today of empowerment – the promotion of self-actualisation. It is simply a question of strengthening oneself in relation to, but not to the cost of, other people and institutions.

The practices in Vägen ut! are characterised by empowerment. The basic idea is that everybody who participates in the social cooperatives will grow as humans and thereby become more self-confident. At the same time, the organisation of the social enterprises itself will contribute to a changed perception of people with a history of substance abuse and crime. As an example, the officials from the public sector must meet the entrepreneurs as equals, not as applicants for assistance.

"I HAVE GROWN AS A PERSON"

Why were you involved in the setting up of the half way house Villa Solberg?

"I was involved with CRIS Sweden (Criminals Return Into Society), and had a history as a criminal and addict myself. I knew all about how hard it is to get into the job market and to get a place to live when you've been in



prison – and I noticed that it hadn't exactly become any easier lately. That's why I helped to set up Villa Solberg."

What can Villa Solberg do that others can't?

"Our own experiences of both drugs and criminality are extremely important. I think that we have an understanding and a language that you can't learn from a book. We give the guys a platform to stand on from which they can find their own way in life."

How well have you succeeded?

"We have not done any precise studies, but most of the guys who concluded their stay here at Solberg have done well. I know that they're free from drugs and I know that they're not in prison."

What have you learnt yourself during this journey?

"I've grown as a person and I've become better at working with people. I also completed my drug therapist training during the start up of Villa Solberg."

What are you most proud of today?

"That we got Villa Solberg going so quickly and that it works. Apart from that, the cooperation with the public sector is very good, especially if you consider the background that we entrepreneurs have. It's been very positive."

Tommy Johansson

Manager, Villa Solberg

It was in Vägen ut! that I first got to use the abilities I had previously developed in the world of drugs.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM VÄGEN UT!

Three researchers from the Department of Social Work at Göteborg University, have monitored the practices in Vägen ut! Below are some of their conclusions:

REHABILITATION THAT WORKS

Working in social cooperatives means constructive rehabilitation from substance abuse and crime. For someone who has just experienced a turning point, the daily work in a strong and closely knit working group provides both security and structure. It also seems to be important not to be the only one in the group with a certain type of addiction, but to have others to identify oneself with.

In the initial phase the support is paramount; a person who has just stopped abusing substances normally has very little working capacity that the members of the cooperative can count on. Inner resources and capabilities do on the other hand develop after a period of rehabilitation, and for many of the entrepreneurs, apprentices and users, the work in the cooperatives has meant new personal challenges: for example, to accommodate the will of other participants and take on a lot of personal responsibility.

NEW QUALIFIED SKILLS

Firstly, new skills are acquired from the production alone – to run an enterprise. Learning the craft, whether it being silkscreen printing, weaving mats or doing the sandwiches at a café, learning to administer the business – doing the book keeping, planning a budget, submitting the tax declarations.

Secondly, the entrepreneurial skill – to make your way in society, learn to speak to officials, build up the courage to speak to politicians, negotiate the provision of facilities and funds for the activities. New experiences that which can be used in other settings.

Thirdly, the social work that they perform, based on solidarity and empathy; to get the participants to give a urine sample or to motivate them to go to AA meetings. These are quite often the same duties as those of the social worker, but from a common ground perspective. This leads to the need arises to gain new knowledge and skills through courses and training in behavioural science and social rehabilitation.

BRAVE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

To ensure that successful cooperatives continue to exist, committed and persevering social entrepreneurs are needed. Many of the real enthusiasts have, from the outset, done far more work than planned. In sacrificing their spare time they have enabled the success and continuation of the project.

Many drug addicts and criminals are creative and possess abilities that society is not normally able to make use of. For many of them it was the first time outside the world of drug addicts that somebody listened to their ideas and provided a space for their energy to be channelled into.

BRAVE PUBLIC SERVANTS AS PIONEERS AND DEFENDERS

The start up and management of a venture of this kind has necessitated a large network organisation and a mobilisation of mainly government and municipal resources. It has been a question of expert knowledge and legitimacy but also of financial resources.

Brave public servants within the public sector have acted as advocates and ambassadors for the project internally within their own organisations and in doing so, they have played a part in the success. These enthusiastic public officials have been very important, both in legitimising the project and in finding public funding.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is the endeavour to represent the interests of the users against powerful groups or social structures in society. An important requirement is that the users are active themselves. Without their participation no empowerment is created, and instead we have the more traditional patriarchal relationship between an all-knowing expert and a passively receiving client.

EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICE

Marginalised groups lack the power, the networks and the knowledge about how to safeguard their own rights.

In Vägen ut! the participants had to learn how to represent not only themselves but also more importantly, their enterprise and the project, often together with others in contact with the media, union representatives and politicians, for example. Sometimes the professional advocates for the social cooperatives participated in these external activities – they were well established, well educated individuals with a lot of experience in this field.

MODERN LEADERSHIP

The success of Vägen ut! can also be attributed to the style of leadership. It is a leadership that has succeeded in making use of the entrepreneurs' own resources. It acts within a well-defined structure, at the same time giving people a large amount of responsibility as well as conveying a sense of trust. This kind of leadership does not take over but provides space and does not dictate the terms, but is supportive and gives recognition, but still setting boundaries.

THE AUTHORITIES AND THE POWER

To begin with, the officials tried to take the initiative, take the driving seat and assume the responsibility. However, they relearned and put themselves on a more equal footing, they dared to let go when they saw that the entrepreneurs assumed responsibility. Instead of becoming an authority-run project, it became an authority-supported project. The project was regarded as being professionally managed and the project managers were seen as skilled and enterprising. The more consolidated the project became, the more the entrepreneurs could cope with on their own and the need for support from the public authorities lessened.

Social cooperatives demand public officials to treat them more as equals and not just regard them as clients in need of help, but as partners to work together with.

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE PROMOTES EQUALITY

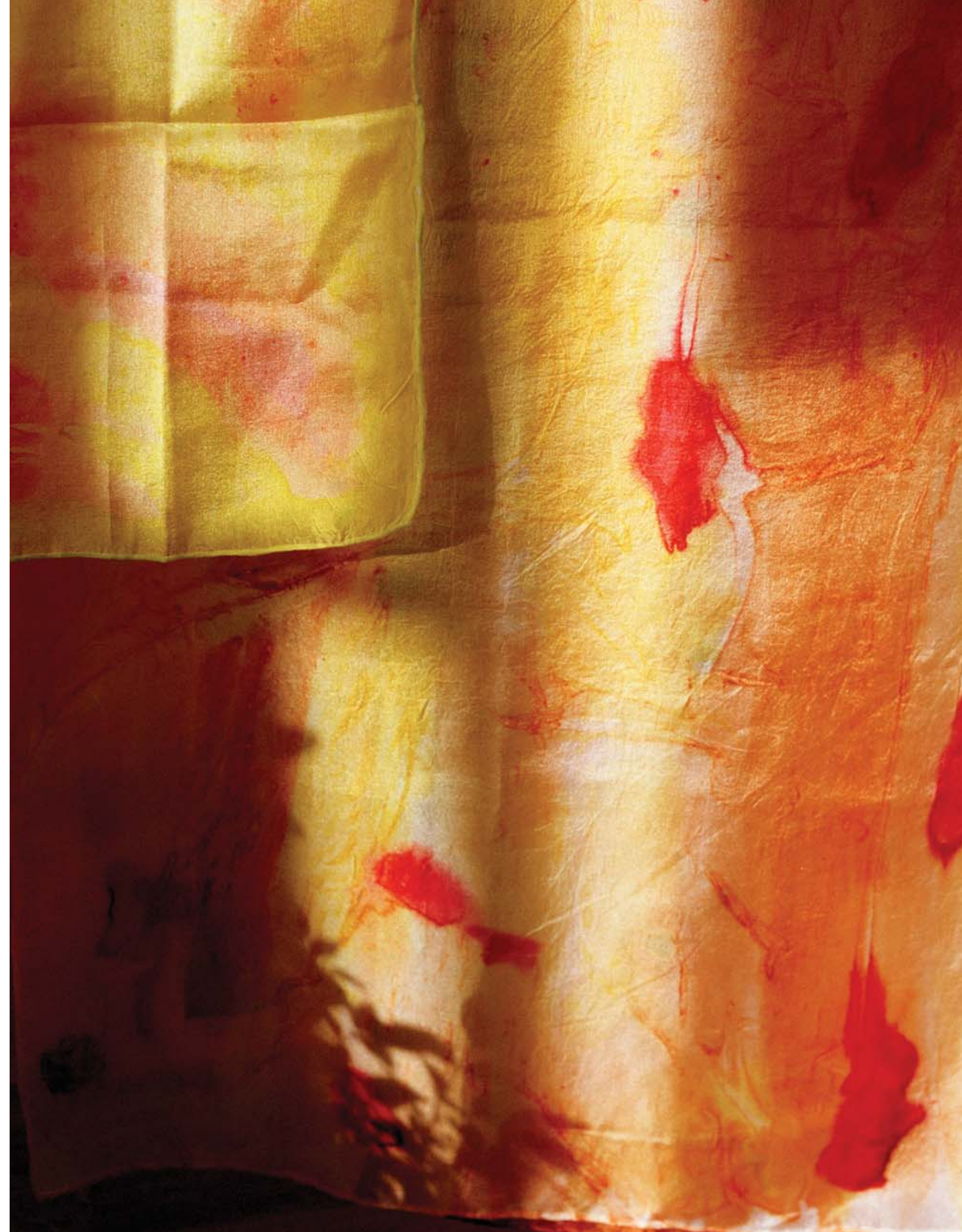
To counteract stereotypical gender structures of domination and subordination, something which is especially noticeable within substance abuse settings, most of the cooperatives within Vägen ut! were deliberately gender separated. The male-only social cooperatives were more goal-orientated and got their activities going quicker, while the female cooperatives were more focused on process. However, as time went on and the distance between them and to the social service institutions widened or rather, as the relationship between institution and user levelled out more, the lesser the gender-based differences between the enterprises became, and the relationships within Vägen ut! became more equal too.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISING AND EMPOWERMENT

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS CONSTITUTE A BASE FOR COMMON GROUND AND SOLIDARITY

Vägen ut! has been in contact with similar programmes in Italy, Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom throughout the whole project. Most of the entrepreneurs and some public advocates have taken part in study trips to social cooperatives in other countries. Many entrepreneurs and apprentices have also welcomed guests from other countries on study visits and who are participating in workshops in Göteborg.

The transnational cooperation has provided inspiring and interesting insights into cooperative practices abroad, for example the Italian prisoner's cooperative in Rome. Contacts have been developed with entrepreneurs in other countries, and the partnership has got to know friendly and enthusiastic people and learnt about living conditions and the affairs in other parts of Europe.



GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND LOCAL NETWORKS

For the social cooperatives to succeed they need to be surrounded by support structures of knowledge and resources, the social enterprise must have access to local and regional networks. The expertise in the Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation and GFC – Gothenburg NGO Agency have been of great importance to Vägen ut!

At national level it has been a question of backing the social enterprises in different ways. Various types of resources are needed in order to develop this support, resources that have to be freed from the government, the market and civil society.

Read more about the findings of the research in the report *Exitprocesser and empowerment – a study of social cooperatives in Vägen ut!* (Department of Social Work, Göteborg University, 2005) by Ulla-Carin Hedin, Urban Herlitz and Jari Kuosmanen.

The report can be read electronically or ordered on the web site of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service at www.kvv.se

THE QUESTIONS PUT BY THE RESEARCHERS:

1. Which factors affect the exit process from crime and substance abuse?
Are there any gender specific factors influencing the exit process?
2. How does participation in self-help practices and social cooperatives influence the integration of the participants into society? Which strategies need to be developed individually and in the group?
3. How are the social cooperatives being developed socially and financially?
And how do the social cooperatives affect the other activities in the organisation?
4. How is the cooperation between the various authorities and organisations within the partnership being developed? Which new working methods and models of cooperation are being developed within the partnership?

FACTS ABOUT VÄGEN UT!

PARTICIPANTS:

Bryggan Self-help Association in Göteborg • CRIS, Criminals Return Into Society in Göteborg • Vävstugan, the Association Skyddsvärnet in Göteborg • The Ateljé Trädet studio, Foundation Half Way House • Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation • Gothenburg NGO Agency • Employment Service Office Svingeln in Göteborg and County Labour Board in Västra Götaland • The Swedish Prison and Probation Service in Göteborg/Central • The Prison and Probation Service in Göteborg/Hisingen and suburbs • The Social Insurance Agency in the region of Västra Götaland • Resource Unit for Voluntary Social Work, the City of Göteborg, Lundby • City Administrative Office, the City of Göteborg.

FUNDING:

The Equalpartnership Vägen ut! – From prison to social cooperative was set up in August 2002 with funds that came from the Swedish ESF council.

The project has been part of the Equal programme in Objective 3. It is part of theme 1 within the Equal programme and its purpose is to “To ease access to the labour market for those who are having problems entering and returning to a labour market which must be open for all”.

Vägen ut! was, just like all the other projects within the Equal programme, organised as a partnership with 12 partners from both NGO's and the public sector. The EU made a contribution of 8 million SEK and the other partners of 12 million SEK in the form of working hours, wage subsidies and sick pay from the County Labour Board and the Social Insurance Agency.

ORGANISATION:

The organisation of Vägen ut! has been rather complicated due to the number of partners taking part in the project.

The researchers at the Department of Social Work, Göteborg University, have identified three levels in the project: a management level, a collaboration level and a national and transnational level.

The *management level*, consisted of the steering group of the project and the executive committee. The four cooperatives, Gothenburg NGO Agency, Kooperativ Konsult – Gothenburg cooperative support organisation and the municipality of Göteborg were part of the steering group.

When the steering group met once a month between 10 and 15 people participated. Some six months later, this organisation felt to be too unwieldy, so the steering group then elected an executive committee to lead the project.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISING AND EMPOWERMENT

At *collaboration level*, all the 12 development partnerships were supporting the project – both NGO's and governmental bodies The NGO's include several of the initiators, such as the Bryggan Association and CRIS. The government bodies include the municipality of Göteborg, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the County Labour Board and the Social Insurance Agency. At collaboration level, the partnership met four times a year for project information and to discuss important policy issues.

At *national level*, a project has been developed within the national thematic group; Social enterprising – a way towards work. Apart from Vägen ut!, another five Equal partnerships in Sweden, take part in this project, together with FKU/Coompanion (the Swedish Association of Cooperative Development Agencies), NUTEK (the Swedish Business Development Agency) and the Swedish ESF council The group is working on a national action plan for social enterprising where changes in the law, regulations and their applications are proposed to improve the conditions for the development for the social enterprises. Go to: www.socialaforetag.nu

At *transnational level*, the organisations with which Vägen ut! cooperated in the Le Mat Partnership – Decent work through social economy, including cooperatives in Italy, Greece, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Tina Eriksson, Manager Karin's Daughters – On the way!



WORK AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES INSTEAD OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CRIME

Social cooperatives are a good way out of crime and substance abuse. This is demonstrated by three researchers in the Department of Social Work at Göteborg University, Sweden, after evaluating the three year old partnership **Vägen ut! – From prison to social cooperative.**

We have included some of their most important findings in this publication, where you can also read more about the partnership itself and about the ideas **Vägen ut!** was based on.

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