

Two social co-operatives in Gothenburg and their developing environment.

Multikult

Multikult is a co-operative that has an ecological cultivation of vegetables, herbs and flowers. We have three green houses. One is for ten kinds of tomatoes; the other is for six kinds of cucumbers. We offer people to pick their own tomatoes and cucumbers. The third green house is the nursery for herbs, flowers and for other plants. The shop is connected to the green houses. Outside is a garden where our customers can walk around, relax and enjoy the flowers and herbs. In the shop we also sell own homemade marmalades, chutneys, dried tomatoes and flower arrangements. The co-operative started 1989 and has nine members.

Grimbo Bilvård (Carcare)

Grimbo Bilvård is a co-operative that offers car care, reconditioning of cars, tire services, washing of cars and easier reparations. We also help our neighbours in the industrial estate where the co-operative is situated with recycling garbage and stripping down dryer machines etc. We also sell manpower to the surrounding firms. The co-operative started 1998 and has now seven members.

Aim and method

The aim of our co-operatives is to be “the good workplace” and a rehabilitating environment for people that are excluded from the ordinary market. The membership address to people with psychological and social disabilities.

The co-operative method emphasises participation, responsibility, democracy and solidarity. The co-operatives are independent legal firms, built on the principal of one member - one vote. Members define their workplace as an ordinary job and a possibility to achieve a skill. There is pride and self respect through the ownership and management of the enterprises. It gains empowerment.

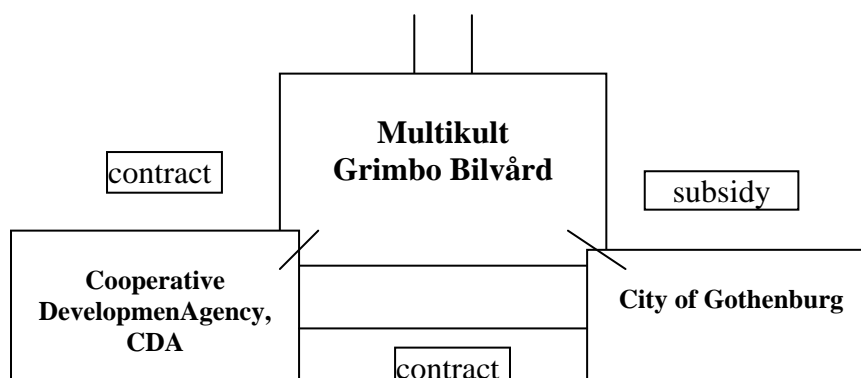
Developing environment

Since two years the co-operatives have been involved in a project for development, to create a more sustainable business and to increase the number of members. Today no members have salary from the firms, but the intention is to increase the turn over so the members can go from subsidy from the social insurance system to a salary.

The Local Authority finances the premises as a subsidy from the municipality directly to the co-operative.

City of Gothenburg has contracted The Co-operative Development Agency to employ three co-operative instructors and to give them the support they need to empower and back up the members, the democratic procedures and the co-operative management.

Customers



There is a reciprocal relationship between the authorities and the co-operatives. The co-operatives give a service to the local authorities providing rehabilitating workplaces for people that are excluded from the working market and the local authorities supports the co-operatives with premises and instructors.

Two of the instructors have skills in the trade of gardening respective cars. The third instructor works as a resource for both of the co-operatives management.

Development strategies

It is a challenge to develop business ideas that can enhance the turn over in the co-operatives. The aim is to provide a good workplace, but also to be able to employ the members and to have a sustainable business.

During the last two years, the turnover of Grimbo Bilvård has increased and we have made a lot of investments in new machinery and tools. The strategy now is to higher the skill and also to recruit new members to be able to answer to the increased demands from the market.

Networking with other co-operatives in the region, the support from the CDA and membership in the national interest organisation SKOOPI, reinforces the identity as a co-operative and gives possibilities to education, learning from others experiences etc.

Multikult has received money from the European Social Fund for an architectural consultation for building a café and a new kitchen. A new business idea is to specialise in growing heirloom – old plants and also to grow more flowers. In Sweden there is an increasing interest in gardening. The café and the enlarged garden with interesting flowers will hopefully attract more customers to the co-operative.

A good co-operation between the social entrepreneurs in the co-operatives, the CDA and the local authorities will probably increase the independence and sustainability of the enterprises.

It takes time, confidence and patience.