

Study Visit Of The WG I Training And Recruitment 13 – 15 May 2004 To Göteborg Sweden

On the occasion of a WG I meeting regarding training and recruitment in Göteborg eight German project workers of the development partnership Strategies For The Future (Strategien für die Zukunft) had the opportunity to visit different co-operatives in Göteborg and the surrounding area.

1. Silk painting at the Ateljé Trädet

The participants, who had already arrived on Friday morning in Göteborg, visited a small organisation, which is separated from the city by the docklands. The founders hope that the Ateljé Trädet will be very popular in future as soon as residential areas, industrial estates and a bridge will have been built in this area.

The members of the Ateljé Trädet have been manufacturing various products made from silk material. Apart from scarfs they manufacture silk covers for books, boxes and gift cards. Large-format tapestries with different technics are designed as well, that can be bought or borrowed for decoration purposes. Furthermore, the members of the Ateljé Trädet offer silk painting courses against a charge.

Currently five women with different disabilities have been working for two days a week. However, the co-operative looks for further members in order to offer a wider range of goods. They do not get any payment but they still live on pension or other social security benefit. The revenues, through sale of their products or from courses, are spent on new material, food and occasional vacation-trips. The Göteborg council pays the rent for the shop, which is situated at the new promenade. Two project managers, social workers from Vägen Ut (Way Out), support the members of the co-operative. They cannot become co-operative members and therefore they are not entitled to vote. In a detailed conversation, that was advanced by the especially good English skills of the Swedish, the Swedish hosts appeared very interested in the work of German social firms. At the end of their visit the guests had the opportunity to paint silk scarfs for themselves.

On the 13 und 15 May WG-meetings took place, so that the Friday was available for further study-visits.

2. Car service Grimbo

First, we visited the co-operative Grimbo, where car service and repair-works are offered. The members of this co-operative are above all people with mental illnesses or serious social problems. With the support of a Co-operative Consult member they do different car service jobs, such as cleaning the upholstery, changing tyres, engine wash and cleaning and polishing cars. We learnt about the co-operative's work over a cup of coffee. A young woman reported lively and vividly about her problems and how she has been learning to cope with them during her work in the co-operative. She has been working there for nine months. In the beginning she had enormous problems with being on time. At the same time it was very difficult for her to stop work in the evenings and go home. So, she was always late at work, but she left work far too late. In the co-operative she has now the opportunity to handle this problem.

She told us, it was all about her being extremely performance-orientated and thorough, that she behaved that way. First, she did not see the point in working for the co-operative and live on social benefit instead of getting wages. However, later she understood that she had the chance to learn a lot of things that are useful in life. Additionally, she enjoys this work. She started working in the co-operative because she did not want to do typical women's work.

The co-operative members have their meals together. They take turns to cook daily. However, she does very rarely the kitchen work because she prefers working in the garage.

There she likes taking the responsibility for jobs that require thoroughness. So, it is her who works with a small brush at the car polish in order to remove little faults and scratches. At the same time, she tries to tackle her tendency towards thoroughness and perfectionism, which is so distinctive that she is absolutely exhausted in the evenings. She has been a co-operative member for a while and is very proud of it because now she can take part in the meetings and the decision process.

Some members only work a few hours a week. The working times are discussed with the team leader individually. Above all it is important that the member is able to keep this agreement.

Another member of Grimbo told us, that the hospital had sent him to the co-operative. He works regularly three days a week at Grimbo and one day at Multikult.

The team leader is responsible for the whole management of the members' work schedules. It is essential that the schedules are balanced in order to work efficiently without pushing the members too hard. When receiving orders, it is very important to estimate how much work can be carried out during a certain time, which means that sometimes orders have to be refused or postponed when the co-operative is short of staff.

Usually, people who are interested in working with cars are referred to the co-operative by social workers from the psychiatric hospital, the social security office or the job centre. In general, they still get financial aid by the public sector or pension. The profit made by the co-operative is used for paying the rent or other expenses of the co-operative as well as buying food. A surplus can be used for vacation-trips of the group. Last year for example the co-operative was skiing.

We, the German visitors, were delighted about the warm welcome in the co-operative. The report of the members helped us a lot to understand their work.

3. Garden center Multikult

Afterwards, we visited the co-operative Multikult, situated a little outside the town Göteborg. It is a small firm with several greenhouses and small fields.

Until a few years ago, Multikult sold its products to the employees and patients of a psychiatric hospital nearby. Since this hospital closed down, the co-operative has been working at new business ideas in order to get customers.

The co-operative pursues the following business concept:

The members grow tomatoes and cucumbers in several greenhouses, which can be harvested by the customers themselves. A special importance is attached to different kind of tomatoes and cucumbers in order to meet the customers' different requirements and taste. In addition to that, „unspoilt“ flowers and herbs are grown, that have not been cultivated. The co-operative also sells pickled vegetables, fruits and dried herbs. Multikult is a certified organically producing firm, advertising with the Swedish biological seal.

Multikult is also supported by a member of Co-operative Consult. Just like the employees of the other co-operatives, the members of Multikult live on pension or financial aid by the public sector and the profit is used for operating costs or group activities.

Afterwards we had a delicious meal in Gyllenkroken, a day-care centre for mentally disordered people.

4. Day-care centre for dogs Beateberg Hunddagis

The day-care centre for dogs is in a beautiful, well decorated and spacious building, situated at a distance from the residential area of the center of Göteborg.

This co-operative is run by seven members with disabilities or learning difficulties and supported by two social workers. Currently, the members are looking after 11 dogs from 6am to 6pm. There is a high demand of day-care centres for dogs in Sweden because most people are in work, however, they do not want to go without a dog. Due to the popularity, the co-operative can choose their dogs and charge the usual fee.

Despite of this, the monthly fee of this centre is with about € 135.00 below the fee of the others. The reason for that is, that the opening times are a little shorter compared to other centres. The co-operative members do not only care for the dogs and the building. They also run the household and the administration. Two members are responsible for the book-keeping. Amongst other things, their jobs are cleaning, cooking, shopping, decorating and washing.

The dogs are kept in ways appropriate to their species. The timetable includes walking, playing, cuddling and time to rest. Once a week, the members and the dog owners come together for coffee and self-baked bread and cake.

Beateberg Hunddagis was founded in 1996, after today's members had had a one-years training in running a co-operative. They were in their early 20s and school-leavers. At that time, teachers and parents had the idea to create an alternative to the sheltered workshops by founding this co-operative. They put a huge commitment into the development of the concept. Suitable rooms had to be found and they had to apply for financial aid at the council of Göteborg. The today's members showed a great enthusiasm about learning everything necessary in order to run the co-operative.

Today, the disabled members act as employers for the social workers. They chair the meetings by themselves, keep the minutes and handle almost the entire book-keeping.

According to the law, the council of Göteborg is obliged to offer jobs to disabled people. Therefore, the co-operative sells work places to the council. With this money the personnel costs of the social workers can be financed. The profit gained from different services is used for operating costs such as telephone, electricity and food. The members live on pension or financial aid by the public sector. Surplus is used for the members' leisure activities, e.g. trips and journeys. The co-operative would like to expand their range of services by taking more dogs into their care for example. However, the council is not willing to buy more work places from the co-operative, because it wants to make full use of the already existing nationwide sheltered workshops for disabled people. Currently, the co-operative hopes for a draft legislation which could change the allocation of resources. This would mean new opportunities for the co-operative.

The visitors were particularly impressed by the relaxed atmosphere at the day-care centre. This atmosphere has a positive effect on the dogs' behaviour. They appear satisfied, easy-going and well treated. We had the impression that the employees really enjoy the good quality of their work.

The high point of the study visits was a boats-tour through the Fjord of Göteborg. All of the visitors and co-operative members and the members of the Cooperativ Consult enjoyed the delicious fish buffet and the beautiful countryside.