



Social Enterprise Partnership GB Ltd

SEP Bulletin July 2004

Introduction

Thank you all for the positive feedback on the previous SEP Bulletin and for those of you who contributed with project updates. In this edition we are presenting articles and news summaries from The SEP Central Management team – the study visit to Sweden, SEL on their recently launched website - shopsocialenterprise.com, the SEP Training project, the Quality and Impact team and information on the launch of the Scottish procurement guide by Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone.

Please send us your suggestions for articles for the quarterly bulletin - as well as events related to your projects for our new 'coming attractions' section.

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Content

1. A report on the Transnational Study Visit to Sweden
2. Project highlights:
 - SEL - shopsocialenterprise.com
 - SEP Training Project Update
 - Q&I Project Update
 - Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone - launch of the Scottish procurement guide

1. Transnational Study Visit to Sweden



Ikea, Abba, Volvo... and now a forerunner in Social Co-operatives: things we all know about Sweden



In the previous Bulletin we were pleased to announce that at an international level, SEP is taking part in information exchanges, joint product development, and social enterprise exchange visits within the framework of the SQUARES and Le Mat transnational networks.

Elizabeth Lopez and Heather Squires from the SEP Central Management Team both participated in the Swedish Study Visit to Gothenburg in late May. In this quarterly edition of the SEP bulletin - Elizabeth Lopez recounts her study visit experience.

When I received the invitation to participate in a transnational study visit to Sweden, I jumped at the chance – this was an opportunity to see what Swedish ‘Kooperatives’ were doing at ground level and with other leading practitioners from European partnerships - explore common themes and issues.



Exchange of ideas: The European partners at work

The study visit was an insightful and enlightening experience. The Kooperativ Konsult – otherwise known as the Gothenburg Co-op Development Agency (GCDA), promotes co-operative development through counseling, training and development programmes. The GCDA gave us an insight into a number of innovative social co-operatives that are currently operating in and around the city of Gothenburg.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the local authorities and the co-operatives. The co-operatives provide a service to the local community by providing rehabilitating workplaces for individuals that are and have been excluded from the labour market and the local authorities supports the organisations by providing them with premises and trained mentors. However, importantly these co-operatives are independent legal firms, built on the principal of one member - one vote.

Eva Laurelii, the Swedish Transnational Co-coordinator, (also responsible for the development of social co-operatives for groups with physical and mental disabilities) – had organised a packed itinerary and had convinced an incredible range of people to open their 'doors' to us.

The schedule included visits to a garden centre, a community centre for people with mental health problems, a half way house for male prisoners and a handicraft co-operative – making silk products and holding silk painting courses.



Swedish Social Co-operatives in action

Our study visit began at Grimbo Bilvard – a co-operative that offers car care and recycling services. The co-operative was established in 1998 and now has seven members. The aim of the organisation is to be 'a good workplace' and offers a rehabilitating environment for individuals that come from mental health and drug abuse backgrounds.



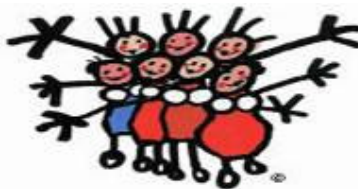
Ana Stupani hard at work

We were introduced to Ana Stupani, the first female mechanic at the Grimbo Bilvard and during our visit she was still waiting to be officially named as a member. We were all struck by her enthusiasm, commitment and work ethic. She confessed to being a "hard working perfectionist". This became evident when she went onto explain that she had bought, using her own money, a car polish that she was going to use on a customer's car. Ana's energy and drive has had a positive effect on her colleagues and the determination to make the project work is contagious.

The main challenge for the organisation is access to finance, and even though the majority of their business is through word of mouth they have cleverly secured sponsorship from the local ice hockey team. The agreement is simple – Grimbo Bilvard washes the player's cars and in turn the business gets free advertising on the billboards at every home game.

The social co-operative is doing well, and there are plans to expand the workshop - so that they can cater to more clients and provide additional services. The members salaries are paid through the Social Security Benefits system and all 'profits' are either reinvested back into the business, spent on providing training or on social activities for the workers.

At the other end of the spectrum we visited Karin's Daughters – an organisation created by women for women. There are 8 members, and a few have come from their sister organisation the established Vävstugan (Weaving cottage) operation (under the aegis of the Skyddsvärnet association) as former clients. The co-operatives female clients come from various backgrounds, but mostly they are former alcoholics, drug addicts and ex offenders, and/or prisoners on probation or in work release.



Karin Daughters logo: designed by a member

Karins Daughters run a drug-free, day-by-day - small-scale operation with individual rehabilitation plans. Magdalena Herrnsdorf, a member at the co-operative, informed us that an integral part of their 'service' is providing training opportunities in the production and marketing of handi crafts such as jewellery making, pottery, woodwork and art. She also stressed that the co-operative is a network that provides social support for women who want to stay drug-free and to help this rehabilitation process - each participant is assigned their own sponsor. The aim of the organisation is to assist their clients to create a new platform within the labour market offering both new skills and social opportunities.



In Action 3 they are proposing to establish a half way house for their clients. Under the new scheme, their clients will be able to spend time with their families and receive support on a full time basis.

Magdalena, says that their aims are simple: to promote the business and to keep the members and their clients motivated and happy. They have a good relationship with their local authority and are hoping to negotiate a trade deal with them. She also went onto add and stress that

Karins Daughters: the workshop

they are a serious organisation and are making some profit – which they are able to re-invest back into the business.

Their story, like the many other social co-operatives we had visited during our trip, had faced many challenges; financial and motivational. However, their enthusiasm and social and entrepreneurial spirit is at the heart of making their business a success and essentially providing a service to their 'clients'.

The number of social co-operatives in Sweden is growing – today there are more than 100 organisations thriving in the towns and cities of the country. Since Sweden became a member of the EU and national reforms have developed and changed – more funding has been available to the social sector. However, these businesses are gaining more responsibility and are beginning to see themselves as part of the economic market – rather than having to solely depend on their local authorities.

Trends for the future.... We were informed by Gothenburg Co-op Development Agency, that the State owned company – Samhall Ltd, will be losing its status as a monopoly this autumn. Thus opening the flood gates of opportunity for the social market, potentially there could be more funding for the social co-operatives. The continuing dialogue between the Government and the co-ops – is providing the organisations a multitude of options for expansion within the labour market. As they are only now beginning to be perceived more as an essential tool and a business entity – rather than simply as an additional support structure.

There are still many challenges facing the social co-operatives in Sweden, the issue of proving that employing someone with a mental health disability, an ex offender or a former drug addict, is financially viable not a liability, is still at the heart of their cause and this is where social accounting and benchmarking the success of their work is essential. However, as Magdalena Herrnsdorf, at Karins Daughters, insisted on informing us: “It’s all about the empowerment of the workers – we must never forget that”.



Our Swedish hosts: from the left, Eva Laurelli and Pernilla Svebo Lindgren

If you are interested in taking part in a transnational study visit – please contact Elizabeth Lopez at SEP for information on further visits taking place later in the year.

2. Project Highlights:

Social Enterprise London

shopsocialenterprise.com

www.shopsocialenterprise.com is an innovative, new website that sells goods and services on-line, giving the UK’s social enterprises a competitive advantage and bringing them in-line with contemporary sales techniques. Selling everything from fair trade chocolate to complementary therapies and re-conditioned computers, shopsocialenterprise.com is highlighting the diverse nature of social enterprise in the UK and bringing it to the attention of ethical consumers and the general public.

Developed through a partnership between Social Enterprise London, the Development Trusts Association London Office, Social Firms South East, and Tower Hamlets CDA, the project was funded by Equal and the Social Enterprise Partnership GB. The site works like a social enterprise department store. Visitors to the site log on and use the enhanced search facility to either browse what’s on offer, or look for a specific product. Launched in March 2003, the site builds on traditional social enterprise ‘directory’ websites, by taking things one stage further and arranging purchase with the social enterprise ‘shopkeepers’.

Project manager Robin Harris, of Social Enterprise London, says “The website is a great way for social enterprises to attract customers who might otherwise not realize what is on offer. Some social enterprises don’t have a web presence but through shopsocialenterprise.com they can kill two birds with one stone – marketing their business as well selling on-line”

Shopsocialenterprise.com is a user-led internet tool. This means that the shopkeeper has the ability to control exactly what products they feature on the site using their unique log-in and password.

“The idea was to create a tool that social enterprises could use according to their needs, while creating a way to show the range and sophistication of social enterprise products and services to local government procurement and commissioning officers” says Harris. “Not all social enterprises sell consumer goods that can be easily dispatched by post. Where instant sales are not the priority, the website can simply be used to advertise a social enterprises’ services and provide a direct line of communication between consumer and producer”

Shopkeepers also become part of unique on-line community of social enterprises with whom they can share information and foster new partnerships. A dedicated notice board and email alert facility means that any useful information can be posted and immediately sent out to fellow social enterprises. It is hoped that this on-line community will help to increase the buying power of social enterprises through co-operative purchasing or by highlighting any special offers or advantages.

In the first three months since its launch, the shopsocialenterprise.com has attracted over 3500 visits, with 10% of these making use of on-line sales facility. The site currently features 113 products offered by 32 social enterprise shopkeepers from around London and the UK.

The project is an example of how partnership working can lead to innovation, a core theme for the Equal programme and embraced by the Social Enterprise Partnership. We are looking at ways to adapt the website and open it up to more users and buyers, while sharing lessons learned in this project with other regional partners through SEP. www.shopsocialenterprise.com is open to all social enterprises in the UK.

To find out how to join and get your social enterprise onto the website please phone Robin Harris on 020 7704 5630 or email Robin.Harris@sel.org.uk

SEP Training Project... reaches out.

The past three months have been busy busy busy - with the central SEP Training Project reaching out to learn what people working in social enterprise feel is important to their professional development and learning. A sample of our work:

National Occupational Standards. With piloting well underway, the national occupational standards for people providing advice or managing social enterprise are beginning to take shape. Now in their 2nd draft, the standards are posted on the SEP web site (www.sepgb.co.uk) and are available for download along with **feedback forms** for your comments. Please take a few minutes to review and give us your thoughts. The national occupational standards are a tool for quality so your perspective on what makes good practice in the sector is vital. The final formal version of the standards will be available in the autumn.

Consultation on Professional Development. With the national occupational standards nearing completion, the Training project has been busy getting a handle on what kinds of training and professional development is most desired by people working in social enterprise. With focus groups, telephone and in person interviews, and now survey inserts in a range of sector media, the project has collected feedback from people from a range of backgrounds and perspectives. These results will fuel the type of infrastructure support offered and developed in the future.

Consultation Day on Qualifications and Assessment. National occupational standards sit within a broad qualifications and assessment framework, and to understand exactly how this should look we invited a range of training and social enterprise experts to a day of consultation and debate. Held on the 29th June, at the DTI offices at 1 Victoria Street, the SEP Training project reviewed a range of options for ensuring the right qualifications and assessment structures are set up for people working in social enterprise.

For further information on this or other activities of the SEP Training project please contact Heather Squires, project manager, at the SEP central office – heather.squires@sepgb.co.uk

Quality & Impact Project Update

In general, the Q & I project has seen a greater extend of awareness of how the “improving” methods and various impact indicators can be used within a social accounting context.

In a 31 March meeting, John Pearce of SAN noted “I find myself telling people about LM3, SROI, and Balance Scorecard...all the various approaches – and that they can be helpful in doing their social accounts!” The project sees this as indicative of movement in the right direction, and considers this level of buy-in essential to be further use of the new tools and approaches.

The Q & I project is progressing well, and has made a number of key advances towards producing its major outputs – the toolkit and the web-based diagnostic resource. It is envisaged that the draft outline, proving and improving of the tool kit, will be made available to selected organisations in the broader social enterprise sector for consultation to ensure that its contents best meet the needs of the sector.

The following points summarize the activity and accomplishments in the various pilot areas over the last two months.

Co-op KPIs

- Co-operatives UK launched its KSCPIs at Co-op congress in May
- Two of the piloting organisations, the head to of the National Centre for Business Sustainability (NCBS) and Lisa presented a short seminar on the indicator at Co-op congress. Feedback from the pilots indicates that while initially the organizations had anticipated that collecting information would be a great deal of work, many of the indicators were relatively easy to measure.

Social Return of Investment (SROI)

- The SROI team has helped to establish a European SROI network (ESROIN). This group met in Edinburgh on 4 and 5 June to discuss aspects of the methodology for the SROI calculation, issues arising in piloting the tool, potential new pilots and applications of SROI, and the resources needed to bring the tool to a wider audience throughout the social economy and other sectors.
- The SROI team has published a report on its pilots: Social Return on Investment, Valuing What Matters, This is freely-downloadable on the nef website.

Social Audit Network

- The Social Audit Network activities continue. SAN has received Community Fund money for a dedicated SAN worker. SAN is in the process of recruiting a person for the post.
- Work throughout the UK on the new social accounting model continues, and SAN members will be called together to evaluate the draft of the manual in July.

DTA Healthcheck

- DTA made the Healthcheck model available to SEP members in May
- DTA plans to roll this out throughout the membership, and has planned two sessions on proving and improving for its annual conference in September.

Balanced Scorecard

- Work on the Balanced Scorecard as originally developed by Social Firms UK continues.
- Successful workshop on “social return” for BSC pilots involved SAN members and social firms adding value to the BSC work and the SROI work.

North East “Valuing the Difference” Social Accounting Pilot

- The Valuing the Difference” project continues In July VTD will hold an informal evening feedback session to collect frank information on the barriers faced by the piloting organisations, the success they have had, and the support they feel they need in completing the social accounting process.

Email lisa.sanfilippo@neweconomics.org with your contact details or suggestions for articles in the newsletter - as well as events related to quality-building or impact measurement for our 'coming attractions' section.

Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ)

The Launch of the Scottish Procurement Guide

A new guide to help social economy organisations across Scotland to bid for millions of pounds worth of business opportunities from the public sector, is being launched in Inverness.

Written by Kevin Robbie, Manager of Forth Sector, which is one of the leading social enterprises in Scotland, 'Tendering for Public Sector Contracts' is a step-by-step guide to public

procurement and one of a series of measures aimed at leveling the playing field for the social economy in gaining access to public sector contracts.

Commissioned by the Scottish Executive and part-funded by the EQUAL *Strengthening the Social Economy* Development Partnership the guide was launched on Wednesday 23 June at an event jointly hosted by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Communities Scotland and Social Firms Scotland.

"More organisations are looking at contracts or service level agreements as a method of achieving sustainability" says Robbie "yet the area of public procurement is often seen as complex. The guide aims to provide a simplified step-by-step outline of the process. Its focus is on helping organisations to prepare for and deliver contracts more effectively rather than addressing any barriers that exist within the public procurement processes."

A series of case studies from organisations in Scotland that have secured contracts should help to raise awareness of this approach to funding and financing social enterprise. The guide also includes checklists of the key questions that an organisation should answer at each stage of the process. "One of the main differences from the DTI Procurement Toolkit published in October 2003 is that we have identified the potential for the development of an internal market within the social economy as a stage in helping organisations to gain experience of tendering and delivering, often small scale, contracts before moving on to enter the public procurement market" says Robbie.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the development agency for the North of Scotland, welcomed the publication of the Guide. Nicholas Gubbins, Head of Community Regeneration at HIE said "this guide provides a starting point for those social enterprises who see an opportunity to develop or maintain their role through tendering for the delivery of public services. This is now a very big market and its time the social economy got into it." Pauline Hinchion, Chief Executive of Feat Enterprises, whose social firm The Green Team is one of the case studies featured, also sees the guide as a valuable resource for the social enterprise sector, "the guide is easy to follow and has plenty of tips and useful case studies from organisations with a wealth of experience in the field. It is something that all social enterprises will find beneficial. It's a must have guide to the procurement process."

Buyethic.com will also be launched at the same event. Buyethic.com is an online procurement prospectus that outlines the goods and services the social economy can supply. "Buyethic.com will be used by both public sector purchasing staff and forward-thinking social economy organisations to identify potential suppliers", says Kath Critchley, Chief Executive of Social Firms Scotland who is project managing the development work in the Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone. "Buyethic is an important addition for the sector in advertising itself to the public sector, we see it complementing the range of activities that we are developing as part of the Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone" continues Critchley.

Buyethic.com can be viewed at www.buyethic.com and the procurement guide can be downloaded from www.socialeconomyscotland.info

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