A better life is possible

On empowerment and social mobilisation

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Foreword

The EU programme Equal funded innovative activities within the European Social Fund (ESF) between 2001–2008 in all of Europe. The activities aims to contribute to a more inclusive worklife by reducing exclusion and discrimination. One way to achieve this is to find new keys to open doors to employment for individuals who are detached from the labour market. Equal has resulted in several positive developments both in innovative accomplishments and potential change. These results have been integrated into future activities of the ESF in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe.

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Nutek), shall contribute to a sustainable economic growth throughout the country through the creation of more new enterprises, more growing enterprises and more strong regions. Nutek supports business development and entrepreneurship through various projects and programmes, in traditional business areas as well as in new areas with new groups of entrepreneurs.

The Equal project, "Social enterprises – a way into the labour market", has been undertaken by Nutek through a broad partnership with social enterprises, co-operative development centres, interest-groups and regional development partnerships. The aim of the project is to change structures through the spreading of knowledge and experiences, and to make it easier for those who want to start and run social enterprises.

The social enterprise Basta, that builds its organisation on empowerment in combination with the business development of the enterprise, is a good example of how new enterprises with new groups of entrepreneurs can emerge. Basta has shown how a structural change can begin when individuals take control of their lives. Following ten years of operation, Basta has gained genuine experience in the dynamics of empowerment, long before the EU realised the value of including it as an important component of the Equal program.

This document unfolds and reflects about the concept of empowerment, taking us one step further, and contributing to the concept's potential impact even in other areas. Basta's experiences and knowledge can be generalised and to a large extent applied to other individuals with difficulties in entering the regular labour market.

It is in everyone's interest that this knowledge and these experiences reach many in aim to create more enterprises and a broadened labour market that is open and available to all.

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Everything is not what it seems

A number of years ago, the Board of Social Welfare in Stockholm visited Luce sul Mare, a staff-run co-operative for disabled situated outside of Rimini, Italy. The co-operative is large. Main parts of the programme include the provision of living accommodations and daily activities for mentally disabled. Often in Italy, social organisations have worse physical environments than Swedish institutions. This applies to everything ranging from number of square metres, technical aids and the standard of the premises and furnishings. The Swedish visitors noted this immediately and someone questioned whether "we Swedes" actually could learn from this visit. Everywhere, the impression of the Italian's low standard was confirmed, and that our own standard was comparably much higher. This could have been our lasting impression if not one of the Swedish politicians had once been a nursing assistant. She started asking questions about the contents of the care and the types of activities offered to the mentally disabled, what influence they had over daily matters and how much time the staff could spend with each patient per day and week. The inquisitive Swede quickly concluded that the patients at Luce sul Mare received almost a third more time and attention from staff than patients in Stockholm.

This incident is a reminder of how easy it is to be seduced by high material standards and thereby risk undermining the value of time and human relations within health care. This text however is not about health care, rather about empowerment – where human relations are decisive – and far less about technical or organisational solutions. Empowerment has many sides and elements that can be generalised and are universally applicable. This makes it fully possible even for people who are active within other areas than those concerned with the daily life of mentally disabled to ponder the essence of empowerment using the visit to Luce sul Mare as a starting point.

Although there are great differences in the life conditions of an unemployed immigrant, a physically or mentally disabled or a drug addict, they all share a desire to improve their life situation by becoming less dependant on the people and authorities that to a high degree dictate their daily lives. In this document, reflections and examples will be presented to highlight empowerment and social mobilisation. The examples are primarily experiences from the 15 years of operation at Basta worker's co-operative – from the first four years where the co-operative was being developed to the present situation where some 100 ex-drug addicts run the two organisations, Basta Arbetskooperativ in Nykvarn and Basta Väst in Borås.

Generalisations and conclusions based on Basta are my own. The interpretations are also my own and based on personal experiences and values. But this has not prevented many wise friends at Basta to share viewpoints that have improved the text and hopefully made it more stringent. Likewise, Annika Mansnérus and Ann Jönsson, from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs have taken time and contributed with their knowledge and patience, as well as Peter Brusén at the National Board of Health and Welfare.

Naturally, there is no claim that the thoughts and opinions stated here are "correct" or the only interpretations of empowerment or social mobilisation. Rather, view the contents as a contribution to a discussion on client-power and client-influence, which has grown to be a topic of interest on both sides of the broad political spectrum.

In the autumn of 2004, the School of Social Work at Lund University introduced a course in social mobilisation and empowerment for students of social work. The course takes place in co-operation with Basta within the framework of an EU project. As of autumn 2005, the course will be open for students coming from organisations with strong client-influence, such as client, disability and immigrant organisations. Many of these new students have no previous university experience. The expectations are that that the mix of experiences will cross-fertilize and nourish both students and organisation representatives. The co-operation can in the long-term also lead to a greater scientific interest in empowerment and social mobilisation.

Empowerment has become a concept within professional social work, but here, empowerment and social mobilisation focuses on another viewpoint, namely of people in vulnerable positions who try to find their own ways and power structures in order to create better lives for themselves.

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Summer 2005, Grottammare (AP), Italy

The author

The author is a graduate in Political Science and has worked within patient and client organisations for the past twenty-five years. He has also been politically involved and elected member of the Stockholm County Council and Stockholm City Council. He is founder of the Basta worker's co-operative that has been in operation since 1994 and has grown to the current status as one of the most well-known social enterprises in Sweden. Today, Alec Carlberg is Chairman of the Board at Basta and at Rainbow-Sweden, an umbrella organisation for 15 client organisations for addicts and ex-addicts who run own rehabilitation centres.

Empowerment – a fashionable word or something universal?

"The concept of empowerment should be constantly redefined and reconstructed, not just by so-called professionals but also through the actions and words of people wanting greater control over the services they receive. The authenticity of empowerment should derive from being rooted in the circumstances of those who use services, not those who deliver them."[1]

The term empowerment became commonly used in the USA and in the UK in the late 1980's. It was mainly social workers and work groups within the social sector that started to use the word empowerment to define work methods and processes that led to increased power by their clients. The Dictionary of Social Work suggests that the term empowerment derives from "becoming powerful."[2]

In the last few years, the term empowerment has increasingly penetrated the EU. The community initiative Equal, with two rounds being carried out 2002–2007, emphasizes that empowerment is fundamental for any projects that are to be financed through Equal funds. The social fund's terminology focuses on empowerment as a way of involving specific target groups with a "bottom-up" perspective.

Sweden, a country that often follows Anglo-Saxon trends, has incorporated the word empowerment into its language use. Empowerment is closely related to client- or user influence. In the past ten years, client-influence, client-councils, client-audits and client-associations have been increasingly emphasised in social policy documents.[3] Therefore the emphasis on empowerment fits in well in current political trends. The term has been incorporated across the political spectrum. Simplified, it can be stated that the conservative parties were the first to use "empowerment". They speak of it as a way for individuals to increase their influence and take personal responsibility at the expense of public exercise of power. Parts of the left-wing however, emphasise that empowerment can be a covert way of attacking a strong public sector that is an indispensable part of the Swedish model of the welfare state. On the other hand, there is a tradition of empowerment within the left-wing in form of owner co-operatives, such as housing and consumer co-operatives, that are well in-line with empowerment and social mobilisation.

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[1] The quote is from the English Sociologist Robert Adam's book, Social Work and Empowerment (2003, page 3).

[2] Reference to Thomas and Pierson 1995, Adams, Social Work and Empowerment (2003, page 8).

[3] In this document, the terms *client-influence, client councils, client-audits and client-associations are synonymous with user-influence, user-councils, user-audits and user-associations*.

Empowerment – a fashionable word?

The ambiguity of the term empowerment and its increasing status as an in-word or trend has caused a growing degree of scepticism, not least by social scientists who take a cautious approach to the use of the term without reflection or being precise about its meaning. The primary critique is that the term can be used in a positive, symbolic and salutary way, without any practical significance. For instance, suppose that empowerment is a condition for applying for project funds. Empowerment then becomes a mantra rather than a project idea with a well thought-out "bottom up" perspective. Secondly, the term risks being taken-over and diluted by professionals and others in dominating positions and thereby incorporated into existing power structures. Such a development does not change the situation for those in need of tools to increase the power over their own lives.

Another sign that empowerment is not only accepted but also a trend, is apparent by the interest of various management consultants in the phenomenon. In management culture, empowerment is often transformed into a method for making companies and organisations more effective. In such cases, *employee involvement, management clarity, common and attainable goals, high performance levels and loyalty to management* are promoted and described as empowerment. This however, is different from the concept of genuine empowerment, described in this document, which is founded on persistence and inquisitiveness. The Effective empowerment organisations go through continuous crises but are able to handle the crises, endure doubtfulness and try to answer member's and colleague's objections and questions.

Similar to social scientists, client- and user organisations are growing suspicious towards the use of terms related to empowerment, such as client-influence, client-audits and client-councils. The concern is especially strong in cases where the initiatives derive from the top of the social apparatus. An example is the client-council set up by The National Board of Institutional Care (SiS) to follow and have views on the compulsory care of substance abusers. The majority of the members in the SiS client-council are not clients or ex-clients of compulsory care. The majority are representatives of temperance organisations, relative support groups and socio-political organisations.[4]

It may well be that the SiS client-council does an extraordinary and important work, but this example illustrates how the term "client" loses its meaning by becoming something generically positive and legitimised rather than a critical examination of a controversial organisation, based on the special knowledge that only a person who

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[4] SiS is responsible for the compulsory care of heavy substance abusers. Adult substance abusers are sentenced according to the law concerning the care of addicts (LVM). Compulsory care may not exceed six months. In Sweden, compulsory care accommodates approximately 300 adults. SiS is also responsible for compulsory care of youth in need, in accordance to the law concerning care of youth (LVU).

has personally experienced compulsory care can have. The term empowerment runs the same risk of losing its meaning.

Empowerment is often spoken of as something specifically valuable for helpless and marginalized people. It is believed to be a way of regaining self-respect. Our thought go to the homeless, beggars, drug abusers, prostitutes and physically disabled who live their daily lives on the streets with no social support. This reasoning further leads to the social services responsibilities towards marginalized people, where empowerment risks becoming a question of "those" living "out there" in misery, in context of society's safety net, rather that an occurrence that affects all who want to take or re-take control of their lives. It may just as well concern a disabled person who is otherwise highly competent who is dependant on social services in their daily lives, who want to have control and the ability to influence the services being received.

Empowerment – something universal?

The need of having control of and the ability to influence what happens to oneself is universal. Nobody wants to be at the mercy of other's arbitrariness in matters that are important to one. This simple truth is the foundation of the empowerment concept. The issue of empowerment is closely linked to the individual's having or lacking self-esteem and thereby the ability to dare and to influence daily life. With this insight, the question of empowerment becomes a basic question for all people, and not only narrowed to the relation between the most vulnerable people and society's help and support efforts.

During a discussion amongst future social workers at the School of Social Work in Lund, the students began talking about the meaning of empowerment and how they in their future roles as social workers can support client's empowerment processes. The discussion started out in a conventional manner. The students highlighted humanistic standpoints and the importance of setting reasonable demands while at the same time being respectful in their treatment of the client. It was first during an experiment where five of the participating students were asked to put themselves in the position of being unemployed a number of years after graduation and never having had the chance of working within the field in which they were educated, that the discussion took a turn. Everyone agreed that the self-esteem would be at its lowest. Apathy, bitterness and resignation would lurk around the corner, which are the same feelings that their future clients have. The students agreed that they would as soon as possible want to regain footage and not be dependant on unemployment benefits or social allowances. Due to a fairly good self-esteem – at least in comparison to most social services clients – they quickly began to discuss alternative strategies for supporting themselves and winning back self-esteem. The discussion was relieving and enlightening. Everyone realised that no matter what background or status in society, everyone has the need to find ways for strengthening or regaining lost self-esteem.

These students decided to develop a staff co-operative. In the scenario, they used the empowerment process as a way out of an imagined, humiliating and destructive future. Throughout the discussion it became clear that empathy,[5] based on insight and recognition, is invaluable for being able to support empowerment processes of others.

Empowerment and social mobilisation

This document brings forth examples and discussions to create an understanding of how empowerment manifests itself in specific circumstances. *Empowerment* is an individual process – both physically and mentally. Through various stages it strengthens the individual's self-esteem and gives the person greater chances at taking responsibility and controlling decisions and events that are conclusive to the individual's life situation. In a collective process, the term *social mobilisation* is used to describe what happens when several individuals form a group and work together both towards individual and personal empowerment, and as a collective power, with the strength and ability to negotiate with and influence political and administrative power structures.

Empowerment processes and social mobilisation do not follow any given models or patterns and thereby initially take separate ways and expressions. The ways and expressions taken depend on who is involved and what needs, talents, interests and wishes they have. Anger and a desire to revenge the powerlessness that they and others in similar situations have experienced can be driving forces for initiating projects that enable increased empowerment and create organisations for it. A highly educated immigrant that is never able to enter the labour market due to his or her "strange" name may feel a similar powerlessness as a physically disabled who experiences that a functioning transportation service for disabled is acknowledged as a favour that one is constantly to be thankful for. The similar feeling of powerlessness is felt by the drug addict in meeting with a care system that "knows" which type of treatment to apply, even if the addict feels it is not what he or she needs.

A comprehensive view rather than a "drainpipe" perspective

Within public agencies there is widespread "drainpipe thinking". This is where agencies only look to their own areas of responsibility, have little or no contact with each other and thereby do not grasp the overall picture. An example of "drainpipe thinking" is when a drug addict gets caught between social and health services. The health services claim that the care of addicts is the responsibility of social services

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[5] Empathy is a word often used without reflection; The following is an example of use with reflection, "Empathy is the ability to see through someone else's eyes, hear with someone else's ears and feel with someone else's heart" (Alfred Adler) Quote from the book by Peter Brusén, "Livet en gång till" (Read: Life one more time) (page 119, 2003).

and social services counters by claiming that the addict has mental problems that are the responsibility of the health services. The agency that loses the battle is stuck with the addict, as well as the responsibility and costs for rehabilitation. The real loser is of course the addict with mental and social needs who is sometimes left to mend for him- or herself. Critique towards the drainpipe mentality of public agencies often comes from third sector organisations where members are at times drainpipe victims.

A similar, narrow, sector perspective can also be found in the organisations. There is a tendency amongst client organisations, disability federations, relative support organisations and other interest groups to only see to the interests and problems of their own members. While it may seem natural to concentrate on the issues of one's own group, the universal knowledge and experiences that other groups have already appropriated is missed. This means the wheel has to be re-invented again and again.

In Italy, where there is a long tradition of social co-operatives, many have realised the value of having a mix of members with different backgrounds, needs, conditions and assets in the work co-operatives. For instance various ethnical backgrounds or different types or disabilitites.[6] It is rational from a production viewpoint, since a work task that a visually impaired may have difficulties in performing, may be performed by a physically disabled or vice versa. Amongst vulnerable groups there is a tendency to see their own vulnerability as unique and extremely difficult. In a daily work between people with social, psychological and physical disabilities, a unique, creative and reflective environment can arise. Empowerment processes grow more easily in such an environment. One of the conditions of empowerment is the understanding and consequences of the own situation in relation to an environment full of nuances. *"My situation may not always be the worst."*

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[6]   For more information on Italian social co-operatives, please see Eva Laurelii's document, "Sociala arbetskooperativ funktionshindrades möjligheter till arbete genom sociala arbetskooperativ. Strukturella förutsättningar i Sverige, Storbritannien och Italien. (Read:"Social worker's co-operative – opportunities for disabled to work through social worker's co-operatives. Structural conditions in Sweden, United Kingdom and Italy.") National Institute for Working Life 2002.

Empowerment – a new
word for an old phenomenon

As previously mentioned, British and American social workers began using the term empowerment in the late 1980's to describe work methods and attitudes that would involve and strengthen their clients. However, the roots of empowerment date back much further in history. The English sociologist Robert Adams traces empowerment in England back to the 1700's where social movements were based on what Adams calls, "mutual self-help movements". In modern time there are strong links between empowerment and the protest movements of the 1960's. The modern empowerment thinking has been influenced by the struggle against oppression of minorities. In an attempt to establish independence and to raise its status in relation to the white ruling majority, the black American Civil Rights Movement built-up parallel social, cultural, political and economic structures. An important ingredient of the movement was to change the self-image, and to stop seeing oneself as a helpless victim by increasing the self-esteem through the own group.

Becoming one's own spokesperson

In Sweden in the 1960's, the "R-associations" were formed, where the majority of members were prisoners, drug addicts or mental patients.[7] The aim of the R-associations was to organise and become a united force that public agencies listened to in order to rectify issues of dissatisfaction within the health services system. Empowerment was apparent by way of formulating and presenting one's own views. The individual and no other is the expert in his or her own experiences, no matter whether the individual is a client or a patient. Some federations,

but not all, saw a possibility in strengthening empowerment by organising and running rehabilitation activities on their own, adapted to the needs of the own group. The will to speak for oneself either personally or through the interest group is characteristic of both individual empowerment and collective social mobilisation. It is clearly distinguishable from charity, but is also a guarantee for the individual to be represented by someone with legitimacy. Empowerment and social mobilisation are linked to terms such as *democratization, critical reflection, raising awareness, client-*

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[7] The R-associations comprise; the Swedish Association for Social and Mental Health (RSMH), the National Association for Aid to People Addictive to Drugs and Pharmaceuticals (RFHL), Alkoholproblematikers Riksorganisation. (Read: National Alcohol Problems Association) (ALRO) and the National Association for Humanizing Correctional Treatment (KRUM) which has been discontinued.

influence, self-organising, help to self-help, and a free and liberating atmosphere. There will be more on the linkage between these terms and empowerment further on in the exemplification of empowerment in practice.

Freire and Maslow – two empowerment theorists

The Brasilian educator Paolo Freire's most famous book in Sweden, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[8] is about how human liberation can be achieved through the acquisition of practical and theoretical knowledge. The pedagogy leads to insight, which in turn leads to a raised level of consciousness of the oppression that one experiences and not least, how to come out of it. Freire does not use the word empowerment but his way of thinking and expressing himself is based on what we today would call an empowerment perspective. His thoughts and conclusions are based on experiences of literacy teaching in the Brazilian countryside. Freire's experiences as an educator amongst the illiterate poor convinced him that the liberation of vulnerable people must be their own work. He rejects what he with disdain calls "helpism" as a way to liberation:

> *"Helpism deprives people of a fundamental human necessity – responsibility." Freire adds, "Responsibility cannot be achieved solely intellectually, but solely through experience. Helpism does not offer responsibility, or any opportunity to make decisions, it only offers gestures and attitudes that encourage passivity."[9]*

This quote has three points. First, empowerment must be captured personally and can not be given to or taken from anyone else. Secondly, the way to empowerment is through actively testing your way and collecting and cultivating experiences. Finally, it points out that empowerment is closely related to responsibility.

Another researcher – more readily accessible than Freire, but not entirely un-debated – who has contributed to the understanding and conditions of empowerment processes, is the American psychologist Abraham Maslow. His theory of the Hierarchy of Needs suggests that as humans meet basic needs such as eating, drinking, sleeping and thereby having a basic sense of security, they seek to satisfy successively higher self-realization needs.[10] Each step in the hierarchy entails the beginning of a process that leads to greater self-esteem based on psychology and experiences, in other words empowerment.

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[8]   Published 1972 in Swedish.

[9]   The quote is taken from Paolo Freire's book, "Utbildning för befrielse, (Read: Education for Critical Consiousness) in Swedish (page 58, 1977).

[10] The Hierarchy of Needs is published in the book "The farther Reaches of Human Nature", (1971).

It is easy to agree with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Everyone understands that a person, who feels insecure, has no money and worries about each new day, are occupied by these thoughts and drained of energy. There is no will or energy to take necessary actions for improving the life situation in the long-term. To usurp power over oneself requires a basic sense of security, and not least, time. Despite the fact that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is sensible, and moreover easy to agree with, society's support functions show time and again an attitude that is quite the contrary. A homeless drug addict seeking help in finding housing at social services may hear that it is not possible for an addict to receive housing support unless he/she stops using drugs. During certain periods, people affected by the use of drugs have even been refused overnight shelter.

Living on an entrance staircase, constantly being hassled to leave is a degrading and strenuous existence that is practically impossible to endure unless numbed by drugs. Rather than starting out with the human basic needs – such as having a place to live – one skips a number of Maslow's needs, possibly in the belief that by refusing a safe night's sleep, the addict will pull himself together and cease using drugs. In all honesty, it must be noted that during the last few years in Sweden, increasing numbers have begun questioning whether it is humane or effective to refuse social services as a way of correcting an undesirable social behaviour.

Empowerment is libertarian

Constraint or threats of sanctions is incompatible with empowerment. It may seem obvious, but in Sweden there is a tradition of occasional use of compulsory actions, or threats thereof, within social services and psychiatric care. Compulsory actions are regulated through laws concerning the care of addicts (LVM), care of youth (LVU) and of psychiatric compulsory institutional care (LPT). Today, most likely no one would come up with the idea of applying treatment based on empowerment within compulsory care, since it can not take place under constraint.

Such attempts would only be possible in a future where the concept of empowerment has been gravely distorted in an Orwellian spirit and thereby lost its libertarian and democratic dimension. Compulsory care regulated by law in this context does not constitute a real threat to the development of reinforced empowerment thinking, but the indirect consequences of compulsory actions may. Socially and economically vulnerable groups know that they are in a weak position. "The system" has the preferential right of interpretation if there is a conflict of interest between the person seeking help and the person who has the power to grant or refuse the applicant's request for help. The question of compulsion and voluntariness within social services and psychiatric care is a political and philosophical question that waken strong feelings. It is mentioned here as a reminder that both empowerment and social mobilisation – when vulnerable groups organize – can lead to both latent and open conflict between individuals and organisations, and public agencies.

Capable of making decisions – a necessary good

Empowerment assumes personal choice and a decision on how one wants to live. This in turn means that people must be confided with the power of making own choices and decisions.[11] Acceptance of free will is not a problem as long as the other part makes decisions that the surroundings, you and I, find reasonable and sensible. Problems arise when some people choose to live a life that we others find unacceptable for a number of reasons. The free will is not unlimited. Class, social and cultural backgrounds, gender, ethnicity and level of competence to name a few are factors that limit and discriminate the choices of free will. But there is no alternative to the belief in the possibility of free will. It would be a staggering blow to the idea that people – also in vulnerable situations – are able to change their lives for the better. There is a tendency to declare people who make choices that "we others" do not accept or strongly dislike as incapacitated. A common example is the sight of a person under the influence of drugs who is more or less asleep with a vacant expression on the face. Is this person capable of making decisions? The truth is that each day, even this person – despite the addiction and life of misery – has taken a number of decisions. One such decision concerns money for more drugs. Shall the money be acquired through stealing, prostitution, begging or by deceiving the parents?

Obviously, a person is capable of making decisions, but the surrounding environment probably disapproves of the decisions made by an addict. If the addict in our example is not given the credit of being able to make decisions, how can we believe that this person will ever come to realise and take the decision to quit drugs and seek another way of life?

As mentioned, empowerment cannot be forced upon someone. It implies that people both have the ability to reach decisions on their own and that they have the desire to improve their life situation, a wish for a different and better life. An example is the substance abuser who knows or believes he or she can cease using alcohol or drugs but does not want to at this certain moment. A better life cannot be decided by anyone else. It is a subjective judgement that must be made by the person who wishes change.

The true essence of empowerment is about one's own decisions and thoughts about a desired change. Empowerment is personal and individual in character, but this does not mean that outsiders cannot play a decisive part in getting an individual to take a step towards an empowerment process.

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[11] For a more comprehensive discussion on compulsory care in relation to being capable of making decisions see Torbjörn Tännsjö "Tvång i vården (Read: Coercive care), (1995).

Being supportive in empowerment processes

During a visit to the Italian Centre of Solidarity (CEIS), a voluntary organisation founded on religion, a group of Swedish social workers experienced a culture shock. The centre, located in an old school building in the middle of Rome, receives nearly 1000 youth with severe drug problems, per day. The centre is run by the youth. They prepare daily lunches, clean and maintain the premises while also going to scheduled group meetings where they discuss how to kick their heroin addiction. In Sweden, CEIS would be called a day-centre, or be part of a non-institutional program. What shocked the Swedes was the size of the centre. A thousand heroin addicts in one place! But it didn't take long before yet another and even bigger shock prevailed. In a subsequent discussion with one of the staff, it was asked how many employees work at the centre. The answer was that 12 people were currently employed there. Twelve staff members for 1000 heroin addicts, the thought was dizzying. On top of this, it came up that "Most likely we are currently over-staffed by two". The Swedes laughed at what they thought was a joke. But, Ottavio Romano – who is an ex-heroin addict – quickly explained what he meant. Kicking the drug habit cannot be done by anyone else. If there are too many employees at the centre they have a tendency to let their professionalism take over and decide things that only the addict can decide if he or she is serious about wanting to live a life without drugs. The twelve CEIS employees are available and step in with their experiences and professionalism in situations where there is a breach of rules or a conflict that the youth feel they cannot solve. In such cases they request the competencies and knowledge of the staff.

Ottavio Romano's reflection bears one of empowerment's latent contradictions. The contradiction is not irresolvable but requires second thought. The question is; how can I, who does not have the problem – that is, I am not disabled or psychologically ill, I am not an addict and I have not been unemployed for a longer period, and I can communicate in fluent Swedish – contribute to getting another person onto the track of empowerment?

Supporting liberation but avoiding dependence

Peter Brusén is a successful civil servant, responsible for disability issues at the National Board of Health and Welfare, whose life changed in a matter of seconds in a surfing accident in Hawaii. From having been a physically trained, curious and adventure-loving tourist he suffered a spinal injury and became bound to a wheelchair.

In the book, "Livet en gång till *(Read: Life, one more time)*, Peter Brusén describes the important role that his wife played in keeping him from decaying into hopelessness and giving up his desire to return to life, in the following way;

> *"I was weak and unfathomably sad. I didn't have the energy to take initiative or to be strong. I didn't know anything about the reality that lay ahead and the present reality just felt empty. Gradually however, patterns started to appear, patterns that indicated possibilities. With relentless energy and life optimism, Lotta (note: Peter Brusén's wife) forced me to see beyond my limitations. She helped me to not abandon my old ways of living and my self-regard. She showed me how I could be my own saviour". The quote shows Lotta's important role as an empowerment reinforcer."*[12]

Harm or damage caused by institutional care, or the closely related learned helplessness, are two common obstacles that block the road to empowerment. This is where the role of the supporter or perhaps more importantly the lack thereof is put to the test. The most important task of the supporter is often to infuse courage, to conjure up a vision that it is possible to create a life that is better than the current. In Peter Brusén's rehabilitation, his wife Lotta played the role of the person who infused courage and a desire to face the trauma that threatened to make Peter unable to act and feel dejected.

The more serious the disability, whether it be mental, physical or social, the more likely it is that both "victim" and "helper" enter a destructive role play where the good helper in reality becomes the opposite and in fact, contributes to keeping the "victim" in a state of exaggerated and unnecessary dependence.

How professionalism with good intentions can threaten growing empowerment

The following happened a few years ago at a drug treatment centre. The employees were highly educated treatment staff. Both group and individual therapy sessions were held regularly. Despite a solid therapeutic program for each patient, they had plenty of spare time. Clients complained that they found it tedious and difficult to get time to pass by. The staff grew tired of the constant complaining and suggested that they could use some of their spare time to go fishing, since the treatment centre was situated on an island and there were plenty of fish in the sea.

Some of the clients followed the advice of the staff and set out to fish, first with fishing rods and then with fishing-nets. The catches were good. Then a client came up with the idea of building a simple smokehouse to smoke-cure some of the catch.

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[12] (page 46, 2003)

More and more clients became engaged in the fishing and in the smoke-house. The next idea was to sell the fish on the market square in the nearby town. It was suggested that the profit would go to a trip for everyone, both staff and clients, to the Canary Islands. The clients grew more and more enthusiastic and soon everyone was part of the big fishing project. The staff however grew wary when some of the clients discontinued going to therapy since it got in the way of the evolving "fishing business". The project was ultimately called to a halt by the staff that in turn prohibited all fishing. The treatment centre was shut down many years ago, although probably not because of this incident. But the story is interesting. In this case, the clients' initiatives, enthusiasm, and budding empowerment processes threatened the structure and professionalism of the care system. What happened at this treatment centre leads to the question of how structures and environments can be designed so that they encourage and support the growth of empowerment within the framework of professional care structures.

Starting points for creating structures where empowerment can grow

Below is an attempt to capture the essence of empowerment and some of its prerequisites:

- Empowerment is change in stages that in the long-term strengthens the individual's self esteem and gives the individual the possibility to take decisions that lead to a better life than how the person currently perceives it to be. Taking control over one's own life takes time since it builds on insight and self-understanding and not pedagogic subordination.

- Certain material conditions are required for the development of empowerment. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was previously mentioned. Developing empowerment demands that the individual has a reasonably secure living situation that allows space for reflection and careful consideration.

- Empowerment is about mental processes that are often gained through practical experiences. It is a matter of "aha" experiences and new insights resulting from the individual's own testing that are then accepted as a reality.

- Empowerment is more easily achieved if material and mental processes can co-operate and integrate in a natural manner. Such an interaction can take place through an organisation, in a company, in a friendship or in an institution. The challenge is in creating structures that are adapted to the individual's and group's specific change needs.

The last point – about structures that allow empowerment processes – leads to reflections on and an analysis of the circumstances that firstly, bring people into difficult situations and secondly, how they later attain the tools to get out of them. Such an analysis increases the possibility of understanding how supporting structures should be organised to facilitate the development of empowerment amongst people in similar situations. A group of people with similar functional disabilities can serve as an example. What experiences and what needs must be considered for increasing the self-esteem of a person who is visually impaired? Is the visually impaired unemployed? Are relevant aids available? Does the person in question need to improve his or her education? Does the impairment make the person shy or insecure? Has the person received sufficient rehabilitation in everyday skills such as Braille or getting about with a walking stick? Does the local environment form an obstacle of isolation? Does the person want to become involved politically but realises that it would take too much strength and energy, and that it is not worth it? Further questions related to the daily life of this person who is visually impaired leads to an overall, realistic picture that serves as a starting point.

Similar analyses can be made for all groups that are in some way vulnerable, excluded or marginalized. In all cases, specific patterns of explanations for the real and perceived situation will become apparent. A further point for performing an independent analysis is that it minimises the risk of overtaking "obvious truths" and valuations in a routine manner. To demonstrate possible specific components of an analysis we will use the example of a group of heavy drug addicts who by their own will have begun the journey away from drugs and crime to change their lives in the long-term.

Elements Of A Target Group Analysis – example: Drug Abuse

How does society view drug abuse? What political measures does society take in relation to drug abuse? What are the consequences of these measures? What are the consequences of the heavy abuse on the individual? These and similar questions constitute starting points for developing structures that answer to the drug abuser's wish for a change in behaviour and thereby also a changed self-image.

Drug abuse in the perspective of society

The drug abuser is a despised person, who is often a criminal. His or her way of life causes pain and insecurity and costs society a fortune. Care consumption is large and expensive, crime and appending prison terms also cost a fortune. Courts and police authorities are constantly troubled by the addict as are insurance companies.

Society's answer to the ravages of the drug addict has been to develop a strategy that makes it difficult and strenuous to maintain heavy drug abuse. Severe terms of imprisonment for drug-related crime. The police on street level chase and hassle the addict. Health services are evasive and at times even insulting towards a patient with addiction problems. It is difficult if not impossible to find employment or a permanent home address. If the individual does not express a desire to cease abuse by entering a treatment program, he or she is unfairly treated by the care system. Sweden has a large selection of care efforts to offer, even after comprehensive reductions, especially during the 1990's. The conducted politics have on occasion been described as "it shall be difficult to use drugs, but easy to get care".

The care of drug addicts, both non-institutional and institutional 24-hour care, is highly professionalized and personnel-intensive, which implies that daily costs are high. Many municipalities have therefore shortened the terms at treatment centres, or concentrated on institutional care on home ground. There is strong political confidence in the ability of the health and social services to rehabilitate drug addicts, either through regular health or social care or through compulsory care. The care system assumes two roles; that of professional care staff and that of the drug abusing client. If the course of treatment is successful – that is the treatment is completed as planned and no drugs have been used during that time – the previous client is defined as an ex-addict and ex-client. In the majority of cases, heavy drug addicts have repeated experiences of staying at treatment centres.

All in all, society's efforts have often contributed to marginalizing rather that integrating the addict. In an evolving vicious cycle, the addict avoids contact with agencies. The addict becomes increasingly isolated and directed towards the sub-culture of street drugs. Irrespective of the "objectivity" of the above description, this is how drug abusers often perceive their situation as active addicts. Society must take a "bottom-up" perspective in its analysis when developing and practicing structures and strategies for empowerment.

Drug abuse in the perspective of the individual

Abuse leads the individual into a sub-culture where most parts of the day are occupied by drugs and crime. Gradually, the circle of acquaintances almost only consists of equal peers. Daily contact with other parts of society is minimised. The sub-culture has its own norms, attitudes, language, and physical ways of presenting itself. The isolation and the insecurity towards other parts of society create contempt for what is "normal". When the individual is not under the influence of drugs, he or she is scared to spend time with others who do not use drugs. It is difficult to know how to behave without seeming strange. Drug abuse leads to self-disdain and poor self-esteem.

The life led by drug addicts leads to physical and sometime psychological, ill-health and often also to housing problems and unemployment. The drug addict is aware of the misery and during periods of clarity there is a strong will to change the situation. These moments are more frequent when there is sufficient access to drugs and when there is no reason to worry about tomorrow's supply – a drug addict's version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The basic need/security is drugs. The same phenomenon exists amongst smokers who want to quit the habit: I'll quite when I've finished this pack of cigarettes. Similarly an overweight person considers dieting after he or she has just eaten and feels full.

Many drug addicts have repeated experiences of staying at treatment centres. Failure increases the self-disdain, but one thing is clear, and that is that a successful treatment is determined by the individuals own choice to stop using drugs. It will not work if the decision is someone else's, the parent's, the children's or the social worker's. In the best of cases there is also some realisation that it will take time to kick the habit.

The description of how heavy addicts live and feel is simplified and generalized. It is only meant to serve as a base for further discussion on how to build empowerment structures for the specified target group of heavy drug abusers.

Some summarizing points to start from

In our example of the Basta work co-operative for drug addicts, there are a number of starting points for allowing empowerment processes based on an analysis on societal and individual levels.

Society level

- Drug abuse and crime are unacceptable in society

- The drug addict is despised and marginalized

- The drug addict becomes a client when seeking professional care for the addiction

- The drug addict will not be offered an unlimited number of treatments

Individual level

- You exist in a circle of drugs and crime

- You have become shy and anti-social towards the non-addict surroundings

- You are in poor health

- You probably lack a permanent address

- You are unemployed

- You understand or are beginning to understand that your addiction requires a long-term rehabilitation

- You are aware that no one can stop the addiction for you. It is your decision only

The challenge is creating an organisation that takes the specific experiences of those wanting to quite the addiction into consideration. It cannot be stressed enough that the Basta experiences presented here is only *one* example of *one* specific empowerment structure.

Empowerment and social mobilisation – example: Basta

Fifteen years ago, when plans for developing a co-operative enterprise for drug addicts were taking form, the term empowerment was unknown in Sweden. With the growth of Basta into an empowerment enterprise, it can be interpreted that empowerment is not a specific model that can be generalised and transferred straight off. The establishment of Basta was rather based on the insight that certain basic human needs and feelings must be met and stimulated even for people with drug problems that want to quit. Undesirable social behaviour can hardly be punished away.

Entrepreneurship and elements of empowerment in the build-up of the company are not treated here since it is not within the framework of this text. But naturally, the more elements of empowerment that are built in and tested from the start, the greater the possibility that the company will strengthen its empowerment profile in the future.

Empowerment organisations build on ideas and visions. The Basta vision is "a better life" for the person who is socially marginalized due to addiction. The strength of a good vision is that it inspires people. It can get people to exceed themselves when they catch a glimpse of a desirable and coveted future. The abstract term "a better life" must therefore be given concrete ingredients that agree with the own expectations. Being free of drugs, an improved health, own housing, a job, a social life and re-established contacts with children and parents are some of the things often included in the personal vision at Basta. The meaning of the visions – whether applied to the overall organisation or to the individual – cannot be underestimated. If there is a lack of formulated visions that can be taken in as a whole or in parts, then empowerment will become a catchphrase or be transformed into a rigid social technique that excludes the most important part of empowerment, the human growth. The organisation – whether it is a co-operative or another form of organisation – is only tools and frameworks in which empowerment processes are given space.

Power and powerlessness

The feeling of power and powerlessness is a state that most of us are familiar with. This is also true at Basta. Both power and powerlessness must be illustrated. The hidden exercise of power and the learned powerlessness are two enemies of empowerment. The hidden exercise of power because it inhibits healthy questioning of power and power structures, and the learned powerlessness because the individual becomes

weak or may not dare to question power. The back side of hidden power and powerlessness is that it frees the person without power from taking responsibility, which is fundamental for self-esteem. "Why should I care when I can't do anything about it?"

Much of what is offered an addict undergoing professional treatment is therapy, work, and social training. It has been described as trying to get the drug addict to live a regular lifestyle. It is certainly a good idea to let a person who has lived with drugs and in a state of homelessness and chaos, and who has not bothered about or lost the ability to manage daily activities such as keeping track of time, hygiene, eating, keeping the home and paying bills to practice these. But this goal is much too low and lacks excitement and new challenges. Generally speaking, almost all rehabilitation programs – probably not only rehabilitation from drug abuse – have set ambitions and expectations of what the client, patient, unemployed or disabled want or is capable of doing too low for reaching a changed life situation.

The road to a raised self-esteem is a process comprising several stages, with advancements and setbacks. People who have been excluded and marginalized during a long period have time and again disappointed themselves and have also repeatedly failed their surroundings. This leads to a disbelief in long-term abstract goals that perhaps span over several years. The anarchistic slogan "everything now" is a reality that one must learn to manage in the daily work of empowerment structures. One way is to break down the big visions to attainable partial goals. In the Basta example, partial goals may be to stay drug-free for a number of months, visit the dentist, check the liver status, start sleeping at nights, work eight-hour days or to take the first tentative effort in many years at contacting parents and children. Empowerment and self-esteem grows in stages within the framework of the chosen organisational structure. But the structure must not be fixed or unchangeable. The structure should be developed in line with personal developments in a way that is noticeable to all and that everyone feels a part of since they have the ability to influence it. The pioneering spirit is as the term implies something new, but nothing can remain new during a longer period of time. The most important element of a pioneering spirit is that what is new and developed by "us" results in a feeling of being united and proud. The pioneering spirit can be maintained through continuous development of the activities. Building new or developing existing activities creates space for new power positions and responsibilities in an organisation that can be filled by new individuals, when the current posts and already engaged by others, in way of their earlier personal empowerment development.

Social mobilisation has been describe as a collective form of empowerment, in other words when people unite and create an organisation that gives them and others in similar situations space for empowerment development. The power over the organisations must be held inside the organisation and by a majority of people who have experiences and insight resulting from a state of vulnerability. Empowerment

organisations are not professional in the sense that filled posts of responsibility are based on academic merits. It does not mean that empowerment organisations act in an amateur way or scorn theoretical education and knowledge, on the contrary. It means that those experiences which later become knowledge required for a successful organisation are the most important tool for individual empowerment, and this tool cannot be surrendered. This is linked to Freire's theories on how knowledge is acquired by vulnerable groups, or the expression "learning by doing". During its first years, Basta struggled to develop a business-like, profitable production. It took time, naturally a much longer time than if the company had only comprised professionals rather than a number of drug addicts with the desire to kick the habit. There were several proposals, from credit institutions amongst others, that a professional managing director should be employed to get the production off its feet. The suggestion was rejected, a decision which later proved to be entirely correct since it meant that power – and tools for empowerment – were retained as a company asset.

The company Basta today – some basic facts

Today, after more than 10 years, Basta has become a client-owned company.[13] The organisation encompasses 13 independent work units and a centre for education. The company offers work within keeping of animals, business administration, cleaning and maintenance, removal of graffiti, carpentry, and construction and runs a centre offering one-year vocational education programmes. During the past six years, Basta has also taken part in projects financed by the European Social Fund.

Basta's economic strength is built on two key components. Approximately half of the revenue is based on the sales of drug rehabilitation, where Basta competes with traditional treatment centres. The other half is based on sales of goods and services. The revenues have continuously increased. Today, the company's different units have a combined annual turnover of 2.6 million euros.

The continuous economic growth is necessary since Basta has created a system that allows everyone who wants, to stay with Basta for as long as they like, as long as they contribute to the company's economy and development. Seen from an empowerment perspective, and with insight that a long-term addiction requires a long-term rehabilitation, a system has been developed where public social services and correctional services purchase one-year rehabilitation placements. Thereafter, the public liability ceases, meanwhile a person who so wishes can continue to work and live at Basta. Today, approximately 50 per cent of those living at Basta have chosen to continue following the first year paid for by public means. It is evident why this system demands a constant increase of sales of goods and services, not including the sales of rehabilitation.

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[13] More information about Basta is available on www.basta.se.

Basta's survival in an empowerment perspective

So what consequences does the need for continuous economic growth have on empowerment? Let's begin with the most evident and brutal fact: If Basta does not survive economically, it will go bankrupt. A bankruptcy has several consequences. For one, everyone would become unemployed, implying personal suffering, and furthermore they would become homeless and lose their social affinity. These are real consequences that can be communicated to everyone at the co-operative. This makes the company's production for real: what you produce contributes to everyone's survival. If you do not do your utmost then everyone's security in form of work, housing and on-going empowerment processes – that is, the road away from addiction – is threatened. At Basta there is no room for passing time by pottering about. The message is: "We take you seriously. You are needed, so take responsibility". It is a matter of the individual's responsibility to the co-op. To be needed, to be seen, to be taken seriously and to be given responsibility are the cornerstones of empowerment processes. Not exclusively in the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

"Maslow at Basta" – Basta's answer to the drug addict's physical needs

If one links Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the previously described schematic analysis of an addict from the perspectives of society and the individual, what must be included in the actual empowerment process? Highly decisive is an environment without drugs. Therefore Basta shall be drug-free. This includes alcohol since alcohol is a drug that many have grown to like a lot. Furthermore, it is often via alcohol, through a loss of judgement, that many relapse and start using drugs again. The knowledge that long-term addiction demands long-term rehabilitation must also be included in the structure. Uncertainty regarding the amount of time the individual has to change their lives is cause for anxiety, which in turn threatens the beginnings of an empowerment process. At Basta the individual decides how long he or she needs the drug-free security. The question of housing and work is solved for those who decide to live and work at Basta. Provision is secured for the person who does his or her part. Health and dental care is available. In conclusion; the basic needs according to Maslow's theory are taken care of in the Basta concept. This implies a drug-free environment, work, housing, health and the security of being allowed to stay at Basta until the person feels confident in being without drugs. This is decisive from an empowerment perspective but it is definitely not enough for starting the journey towards empowerment.

"Freire at Basta" – Basta's answer to the drug addict's mental needs

The language, behaviour and way of presenting oneself are decisive both for the own self-image and for how others view and understand the individual. A lot needs to be changed. The addict's daily life in the own sub-culture has already been described. The question here is about the mental journey, from the sub-culture to what can be called a normal everyday life without drugs.

Kenta, one of Basta's pioneers once said; "Tell me ten times that what I did was good! I won't hear it! But tell me once that what I did was bad. I will hear it and dwell upon it again and again." This is one of the most common consequences of drug addiction, namely poor self-esteem. The mental empowerment journey is about building up self-esteem, which is not to be confused with exaggerated cockiness. Basta has chosen work as a tool and method for developing empowerment. At a workplace, there are numerous re-occurring daily episodes that bring out a personal attitude. In a joint production of a product or service, daily discussions arise concerning leadership, professional competence, co-operation, enthusiasm, work ethics, interests, further education, conduct toward colleagues and customers and much more. At a workplace, one must learn to manage anger and joy, and to give and take praise and critique in a way that colleagues can understand and handle. One can not relate to these types of feelings as before, by quite simply fleeing, taking to violence, shouting, threatening or giving up. Working at Basta is not primarily a way to acquire vocational education. The work is primarily a way of learning to communicate, to be with and socialise with others in a normal manner. Should one develop professional skills then this is a positive consequence, but only a side-effect in relation to the most important function of the work; learning to spend time and communicate with other people.

Being taken seriously is one of the consequences of empowerment. To be taken seriously, one must do things seriously. As previously made clear, the production at Basta is necessary for the company survival and for maintaining one's empowerment structure. This means that the production at Basta is for real, which is ultimately judged by the company's customers. Here, another dimension of empowerment comes in. Customers demand quality. Active drug addicts are often not interested in quality aspects in life. This applies to how to dress, what one eats, how one lives, how one expresses oneself and the treatment of others. In a work process, the egoistic, consumistic mentality gradually changes to a quality consciousness of the different aspects in life. One needs to dress properly when doing business with potential customers. This means that the demand for good conduct and dress is not a moral or subjective demand from management, rather a demand rooted in the fact that Basta is a company that needs to survive on the market.

In order for work to be used as a method in empowerment certain criteria must be filled. Work must be for real, which in Basta's case is judged by the customers. Work must also be done through teams where there are communication processes. Furthermore, work must be developmental in the sense that there is always room to learn more. And, not least, there must be room for continuous growth and for taking and receiving more responsibility.

Åsa came to Basta eight years ago, directly from imprisonment. She began working with horse-breeding at Basta Bashkir. After three months, the previous manager for the establishment resigned and Åsa was asked if she would like to become the new manager. Her first task would be to compile the budget for the coming year. Åsa thought it was a joke, and that perhaps management was pulling her leg. Was she to prepare a budget? It was Impossible. Åsa was promised support in the budget work, and she prepared the budget.

Since she had prepared the budget, she felt responsible and was driven to stay at Basta the coming year to see if the budget was met. Her initial plans were to stay at Basta for three months. Today, eight years later, she is a part-owner of the company and Basta s rehabilitation manager. The example of Åsa illustrates three things. First, most people with an injured self-esteem can always do more than they think. Second, if management believes in the ability of co-workers – hidden or visible – then the organisation of company will receive a good return on invested confidence. Third, the colleagues and co-workers that have taken "the long way" set good examples for others that are just beginning their journey towards better self-esteem and strengthened empowerment. Åsa shows others at Basta that change is possible. It may take time, but those who are patient can expect responsibility, power and a new self-image. If she can, then so can I.

From client to horse breeder

Many companies, organisations and authorities waste hidden capacities that co-workers never let out due to fear of managers, given structures and fear of competitiveness which would mean a loss of power. Therefore it is important to clarify both who has power and how the power has been obtained and managed.

Nicolò Machiavelli, perhaps the most famous power theorist ever, wrote in 1 513 in his work, The Prince: *"One's first impression of a prince's skills is acquired by looking at those who he places in his immediate surroundings, if they are competent and faithful one can regard him as wise, because he has seen the knowledge and kept their faith."* By changing the word "prince's" to "organisation" and the second "he" to "management", we have a modern and fearless management philosophy.[14]

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[14] Fursten, (Read: The Prince), Nok pocket (page 115, 2004).

An empowerment organisation should by definition be a crisis organisation. In such an organisation, people try out and test limits, both their own and those of the organisation as a whole. How much resistance can I handle and how much can the organisation handle? In returning to Freire, it is about having the possibility to test and find skills that are permanent and trustworthy, so that one dares trust them and feel they are sensible. This means that it must be permitted to question rules and old habits, even by someone who has only been in the organisation for a short time. In turn, this sets demands on management and others in positions of responsibility to explain in a convincing way how things are done in the organisation. Rules and codes that cannot be explained in an empowerment organisation shall be abolished. Such rules only lead to a management that demands obedience rather that understanding and acceptance on rational grounds.

Empowerment is about leaving or reducing one's self-image as vulnerable or helpless. This is the case no matter whether it concerns physical, mental, linguistic or social isolation. For a drug addict, part of the vulnerability and thereby also the liberation is leaving the role of client behind. A known addict is a client of the social services from time to time. The person who is undergoing treatment is the client and the person providing the treatment is the care-giver. A person who leaves the treatment – no matter whether is was successful or not – does not leave the role of client. Another identity, other than that of being an ex-client must be developed.

Namu, who has been at Basta for eight years, described her personal empowerment experience in the following way. After the first year at Basta she wanted to test her ability to meet a life without drugs. She decided to do it the hard way by going to a pub with a girlfriend. They sat down and ordered food and drink. Soon, two men approached and asked if they could join them. Sure, okay. Then the usual question "what do you work with?" came up. Namu felt panicked. What should she say? "Well, I've been in treatment for drug addiction one year?" She thought: "No, but perhaps I should say I'm studying which is somewhat vague, but it usually works." The friend was a real estate agent and the two men were lawyers. Namu didn't have a choice. She had to tell them what she worked with. All of the sudden the panic left her while she described her new career. "I am a horse breeder!" Namu didn't lie or withhold the truth. For one year she had been working at Basta with horse breeding. She was no longer a "drug addict" or "an ex-addict" or a "client". She was a horse breeder. After that she continued to describe the special Russian Bashkir breed that she worked with. An empowerment process was well under way and had started to show results.

Social mobilisation creates politics of change

A successful empowerment organisation is not only a place where individuals struggle for new attributes and increase their self-esteem. It is also an organisation that can contribute to reducing the surrounding environment's prejudiced notions of a specific group. In the Basta case, politicians and others in power are without a doubt affected by the fact that approximately 100 former addicts are running a successful, commercial enterprise. This affect will in the long-term manifest itself in the development of new regulations and laws within industry, social and health politics.

Over the years, about 6 000 people have visited Basta. The many study visits affect the empowerment and social mobilisation at Basta. The empowerment is strengthened in individuals when they notice that others are interested in and express their admiration in the work and in the high-quality production. The Swedish Parliament's Committee on Civil Law conducted a study visit at Basta. At the end of the day, the Chairman of the committee thanked for the visit and commented on how liberating is was to visit the workplaces at Basta where co-workers would greet you and take you by the hand with a firm grip, look into your eyes and proudly present their own work. She concluded that there should be more organisations like Basta. The Chairman's comment mirrors both the visit's meaning on empowerment and the influence it may have in a general political perspective.

Securing the quality of empowerment and social mobilisation

Documentation is the foundation of quality assurance. A continuous documentation over time is required to establish whether the organisation is doing the right things that is, the organisation's stated tasks, in a good and cost-efficient manner. This also applies to empowerment processes and social mobilisation, both which can and should be quality-secured.

The individual empowerment processes main source for quality assurance is the individual who is in the process of changing his or her life. A functioning empowerment structure develops and provides tools that the individual can use for evaluating and finding out if the conditions governing his or her life are changing in the desired direction. Interviews, surveys, structured and documented conversations are examples of tools that can be used to secure the quality of empowerment processes. Unlike public sector documentation however, this documentation only contains information from the perspective of the individual going through the empowerment process. Of course, this does not mean that everything from the individual's perspective must be positive. It is quite the contrary. As previously mentioned, empowerment processes are characterised by both progress and setbacks during the course of the journey. In the continuous work of securing quality, the management provides feedback on the individual's views and understanding of the own development. This in turn implies that the individual is continuously seen and acknowledged by management. This type of quality assurance, where the management is involved, can be compared with staff development talks conducted by companies with a thought-out staff policy. Being seen and acknowledged has been described as one of the cornerstones of empowerment. If management realises this, the documentation will touch the soul of the organisation, namely the empowerment processes. The documentation will not be forced upon because others such as those who grant allowances and subsidies, sponsors, donators, or customers require it rather it becomes a part of the continuous, daily process of strengthening empowerment.

Instead of an act, a file or journals which are common in the public sector, relevant facts and accounts can be gathered over time in a "portfolio". Personal evaluations of progresses and setbacks that are social, mental and physical in character – driver's education, completed courses or training, new professional accomplishments and so on can be gathered in the portfolio. The portfolio belongs to the individual, as opposed to the documentation of clients, job applicants and patients in the public sector.

If an empowerment organisation has external customers or contributors, a compilation of the individuals' portfolio contents (without reference to individual names) can provide an overall picture of how well the organisation is living up to the set goals that are important for the particular customer or contributor. This type of accumulated knowledge is a form of social auditing that often contains softer facts of social and personal character, than the hard economic facts available in organisation's annual reports.

Another quality instrument that focuses on the hard facts in form of euros and cents is the *socio-economic balance sheet* (a cost – benefit analysis). The socio-economic balance sheet is useful for so-called *vertical mainstreaming*, where organisations influence political and administrative power structures. The socio-economic balance sheet puts a price on the organisation's contribution in a social context, either in form of increased revenue or reduced costs for other public institutions. A concrete presentation with euros and cents showing the organisation's socio-economic profit provides a strong political argument for encouraging certain types of organisations.[15]

Peer reviews by one or several external organisations, often within related fields, is another way of securing the quality and developing empowerment organisations. Views and critique are delivered through the fresh eyes of an outsider. This type of quality assurance could be called horizontal mainstreaming, where similar organisations help each other to develop and improve their efforts.

Scientific evaluations of both the individual empowerment process and the collective social mobilisation process are also powerful tools for quality assurance on different levels of organisations. A scientific report or evaluation is highly credible and also proves the organisation's readiness and openness to outsiders.

As mentioned, there are different ways and systems to secure the quality of empowerment processes per se and the organisation and the empowerment structure as a whole. Despite this, evaluations and quality assurance is often the Achilles heel in many organisations for different reasons. Many prefer concentrating on the main task of the organisation, the core business, while evaluation and sometimes also economic matters are seen as a necessary evil. We are talking about a narrow organisational culture that can in the long-run break the organisation. Many empowerment organisations lack persons internally who are accustomed to documenting, writing reports and handling the economic administration effectively. Other organisations have a large turnover of people over time. This can imply that even if the system of documentation is running, it risks faltering if the responsible person leaves. Many

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[15] A socio-economic balance sheet was prepared for Basta in 2002 by the economist Ingvar Nilsson. "Svempa från missbrukare till företagare, (Read: Sven – from addict to entrepreneur). Two additional balance sheets were produced in 2005 and 2006 within the framework of the Nationella Temagruppen Socialt företagande (Read: National group for social entrepreneurship), financed by the European Social Fund, The Swedish ESF Council and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Nutek).

empowerment organisations would therefore gain by discussing and setting up a quality assurance system together with an external resource that takes into consideration the characteristic flaws of the organisation, such as the inexperience in documentation, participant's flightiness and poor understanding of the importance of the documentation.

Summarizing generalisations

Empowerment is a greatly debated concept. In this document, the term empowerment has been described as a way for people who are in some way socially vulnerable, marginalised and excluded to improve their life situation. It is a matter of different variations of help to self-help.

The term empowerment is also used by professional social workers, less as a method and more as an attitude to describe how they in their professional roles can contribute to strengthening the position of their clients. This aspect of empowerment has barely been touched here.

Capturing empowerment and thereby improving ones life situation is a matter of both mental and physical changes. Through their theories, Maslow and Freire have contributed to a greater understanding of the pre-requisites for personal empowerment processes to be started. Empowerment is about dialectic processes where progress and set-backs relieve each other. Well-functioning processes lead over time to increased personal insights and thereby greater space for the individual to take own, and for him or her positive, decisions. "A better life," that has first been defined by the individual alone, is the core of empowerment. The desire for empowerment must therefore be drafted by the individual and can never be forced upon someone, since increased empowerment is won through a personal desire to change the own life situation.

Power and powerlessness are strongly related to empowerment processes. The question that must be asked is who has power, who is powerless and why? Why does an individual experience powerlessness in certain situations? Is there a desire and ability to change the existing power structures? Power analyses on individual and societal levels are the starting point, both for initiating an empowerment process but also for initiating a social mobilisation, that is, a collective organisation for creating a collective position of power.

The collective social mobilisation, creating a collective empowerment organisation, fills two functions. When designed in the right way, it can be a "laboratory for empowerment testing", where trial and error experiments on an individual level can continuously be executed. The result of the tests will lead the empowerment process forward. Secondly, the organisation instils courage in members in relation to the world around them.

Organisations who want to give space for empowerment processes should build on certain prerequisites. The organisation's work tasks shall be perceived by members

as useful and needed, and that they fulfil a societal need. This is contrary to "pottering about" to kill time. There is always space for raising the task goals. Low expectations however provide no challenges to develop. Power and hierarchies shall be clear and possible to discuss and question. The organisation shall develop and deepen its activities continuously, in the same way as empowerment processes involve individual and personal development. It will result in a collective self-esteem and will create new work tasks that can be performed by people who are striving forward in their empowerment process. Rigid organisations result in rigid and conservative power structures and passive disengaged members.

Supporting someone else's ongoing empowerment process may involve helping out to create and maintain the vision that a better life is possible. As an adviser, one can see and clarify setbacks and progress. The relation between these two however may not be one of "helper" and "victim". The responsibility of the empowerment process must be and remain clear. In the organisation's work – the social mobilisation – another type of professional or organisational need arises where external competences may facilitate the success of an organisation. The decisive element is that power is held by a majority who have gone through empowerment processes of the type that the organisation is created for.

In order for documentation of empowerment processes and social mobilisations to become an integrated part of a continuous quality assurance effort, certain criteria must be filled. The documentation must be understood as something that will facilitate daily work and not as something solely done for outside parties, such as contributors or customers. Empowerment organisations often lack members who are accustomed to – as opposed to professional occupation organisations – working on reports and writing documents. This must be considered when the organisation develops routines for quality assurance.

Empowerment – end quote

In the book, Livet en gång till: En ryggmärgsskadad möter svensk handikappolitik (Read: Life one more time: A person with spinal injuries meets the politics for disabled in Sweden) Peter Brusén describes what is was like to return to the place where he became injured in the spine and what it was like to go out diving again:

> "On Maui I was dragged up, very injured and dying. In Tobago, I was carried back and went diving for one day with tanks, to a depth of 8 meters and again met all the fish of the salty sea, the amazing sea urchins, corals, turtles and sea snakes. For the first time since the fateful accident I was doing something that I had never done before and I had managed the first long journey. Life hadn't ended – it had just taken a short break so that I could catch up."[16]

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[16] Brusén, Livet en gång till (Read: Life one more time) (page 209).

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Would you like to find out more about starting a social enterprise?

Cooperative Development Centres, Kooperativa Utvecklingscentrum LKU, are found in every county in Sweden and have a government mandate, via Nutek, to support the development of business and entrepreneurship in the social economy, including social enterprises and cooperatives. To find the Kooperativa Utvecklingscentrum office nearest you, visit their website at www.kooperativutveckling.coop

Would you like to get in touch with the cooperatives that produced socioeconomic reports?

Vägen ut! kooperativen: www.vagenut.coop

Basta Arbetskooperativ: www.basta.se

Would you like to know more about the European Social Fund, ESF, and the Equal programme?

The Swedish ESF Council is a state agency that administers European Social Fund schemes in Sweden and informs the public. ESF supports projects that contribute to higher employment, gender equality, sustainable development and economic and social cohesion. You are invited to visit the Swedish ESF Council online at www.esf.se

Social Enterprise – expanding the labour market is a project within Equal, a Community initiative whose objectives are to:

- Facilitate start-up and operation of social enterprises aimed at creating jobs for people who are excluded from the labour market
- Identify barriers and suggest amendments to laws and regulations and how they are applied
- Spread information about existing social enterprises and their economic and human impacts

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Nutek is the Swedish National Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. Nutek's mission is to contribute to the creation of new enterprises, help existing enterprises grow and strengthen regional growth – and thus promote sustainable economic growth throughout the country.

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A better life is possible

This document was first released in Swedish by the Swedish ESF Council within the Equal program.

EQUAL is a EU-programme aimed at opening doors to working life for groups who are excluded or risk being excluded from the labour market.

The concept of empowerment holds a unique position in the Equal programme. It concerns the strengthening of vulnerable groups and individuals so that they can take greater responsibility in controlling their lives. The social, economic and political systems shall be opened for those who are excluded today. Groups and individuals shall be able to act – within society in general – but also specifically within the labour market and working life.

Alec Carlberg, founder of the work co-operative Basta, describes the conditions required to achieve this. The document is mainly based on experiences and knowledge accumulated at Basta, but can to a large extent be applied to target groups other than drug addicts. The document unfolds and theorizes about the concept of empowerment, taking us one step further, and contributing to the concept's potential impact even in other areas.

Nutek promotes sustainable economic growth throughout Sweden by contributing to the creation of new enterprises, helping existing enterprises to grow and by strengthening regional growth.