BASTA SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
A CASE STUDY ON COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD)

In Italian or Spanish, Basta means ‘enough’ but in Sweden, it is the name of an adventurous, ground-breaking social enterprise. This enterprise is client-run and so both in theory and in practice, power and influence over its different activities rests with the people who were formerly socially excluded due to heavy drug abuse.

THE BACKGROUND

The idea of creating a social enterprise specifically for people who wanted to end long-term drug abuse began when Basta’s founder, Alec Carlberg, visited social cooperatives in Italy. In 1994 Alec, a former politician, took the first step together with four people who had previous experiences of drug abuse, when they moved into premises covering 54 hectares of land in Nykvarn, 40 km southwest of Stockholm.

Just as there were five people involved in the launch of Basta, five municipalities gave a loan to Basta, which enabled the non profit organisation to buy the premises in Nykvarn. These five municipalities then became the first customers of Basta’s rehabilitation services. During Basta’s start-up phase, there was a two year period of consultation when the views of people from the target group were gathered and analysed and this helped in building this special community.

Now, nearly twenty years later, almost all posts on the board and in the management of Basta are held by people who themselves have gone through rehabilitation at Basta. More than 90% of the people who live and work at Basta come from such a background and the organisation is the result of the work of many, many hundreds of local Swedish people who, through the years, have sought an alternative road away from drugs.

BUILDING BASTA’S APPROACH

Basta’s view is that it is not enough to simply offer work in order to start a rehabilitation process for someone who has been socially excluded for decades. Rehabilitation at Basta starts from the notion that everyone who comes to the company has a need to start a personal “empowerment journey”. Work at Basta is a therapeutic tool used to stimulate a development process, which leads to a growing self-esteem. Professional skills are gained as part of the process, but they are secondary to the main objective of developing self-confidence and recapturing communication skills.

Basta is a real community, as it offers people a home and a context and the rehabilitation is built around the work and the company that are run together. No traditional therapy is available and the only support comes from friends and colleagues. Basta is a supportive structure in which people can empower themselves. Basta believes that nobody can
empower another person, only the person himself or herself can do that. Empowerment means that you can control your life, make decisions about your life and have the power to choose what happens to you. But to have that power you also must take responsibility for your choices. These ideas are the key to how Basta engages with people and the first requirement when people want to come to this community is that they make their own choice or decision to come and so they cannot simply be referred to Basta by an external agency working the field of social services. But to make it fair for these people, it is important to explain everything about the premises and the pre-conditions of coming to this community so they are informed about the choice they are going to make.

**PROMOTING EMPOWERMENT, WHILST MAKING A PROFIT**

Basta offers services that include horse breeding, dog ‘daycare’, carpentry, construction, graffiti removal, cleaning, large-scale catering, property and facilities maintenance, rehabilitation services, accounting and administration and it also runs European projects.

Quality production ensures the company’s survival. This means that everyone at Basta knows that his or her work is genuinely needed for the success of the company. Nothing is done just to pass the time. Through a strongly decentralised organisation, many people are given the opportunity to take on responsibilities and leadership, which results in human growth and increased self-esteem. In this way, the production fulfills two combined purposes: a personal empowerment journey and crucial business profitability. The people that come to Basta have a lot of skills and these can be maximised, so much so that this company that trades on the open market and has a yearly turnover of around €5 million. Any profits are reinvested in the company and this enables more people to come and work at Basta.

After the first year of rehabilitation, people can choose to stay and build a career within the company or to try and find a sustainable life and job somewhere else. At Basta the average time workers remain in the company is somewhere between three and four years. This means that the vast majority of the people who live at Basta are not supported by the public authorities: they live off their own work and the income the company gains through the sales of the goods and services that it produces. Basta is a self-sufficient social enterprise – 40% of the income is derived from offering rehabilitation services to the municipalities and criminal justice departments and 60% comes from selling its services.

**PRODUCING RESULTS**

**THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

ESF activities have shown that entrepreneurial ability does not depend on educational qualifications, social status or race. Even the most deprived urban and rural communities can become ‘business incubators’ - but this means designing long-term integrated itineraries which build individual and collective empowerment and link broader social issues to economic activity. ESF projects stress the importance of starting with small activities that spring directly from local people’s concerns and using these to create positive examples and role models which are the seed for entrepreneurship.

The activities and approaches of Basta demonstrate how such social enterprises can make a profit whilst still supporting people who have problems with drugs and alcohol. Through experiencing real work and with the support of peers in the company, people move away from drugs and into work. The approach of involving and employing these people in social
enterprises has proved to be very cost effective. For example, an external evaluation\(^1\) of Basta calculated the social gains of this social enterprise per year. The gain is one million SEK or €115,219 per year if an individual stays at Basta for one year instead of being an active drug abuser out in society. Of course, this includes his or her contribution to the value of the goods and/or services produced in Basta.

**The Group Level**

The different work places in Basta are collectives were people cooperate to improve the services for the customers and raise the related income. Working together in a group builds the self-esteem of the individuals, as they realise that they are playing an increasingly significant role in this overall group effort. However, if any problems occur during the work, more experienced members are always willing and available to offer their help.

**The Organisational Level**

Through its excellent company results, Basta has shown that socially excluded groups have a value and are not simply a burden, which is the way they are usually seen by society at large. Basta is structured in the same way as most companies, which means that it is not a democratic system in which everyone has a vote. However, the structure is clear and it supports the empowerment process for the individual because it is easy to understand and individuals know how they can navigate through it.

**Changing Policies and Practices**

Basta has made considerable efforts to raise awareness of its activities and, based on almost 20 years of experience it has made a number of serious efforts to change policies or practices in Sweden and abroad.

**Introducing New Forms of Education in Sweden**

Basta created a new educational approach for long-term unemployed adults called YES – Yrkes-och Entreprenörsutbildning or vocational and entrepreneurial education. This approach offered a one-year course that led to a secondary school certificate recognised by both employers and trade unions. Students worked in small groups of up to eight. They learnt social and entrepreneurial skills in the mornings and trade skills, taught by specialist tutors from local schools, in the afternoons. Half the time was spent on the Basta premises and half on work placements. Skills offered included the Basta activities of carpentry, bricklaying, dog and horse breeding, computer training, plumbing and restaurant operation. “Most of our users have no educational qualifications whatsoever to their name, and this is naturally a barrier to getting a job,” says Kristina Blixt who adds that “One innovation we made was to take the compulsory Swedish, English and mathematics out of the syllabus. This made the course much more relevant to what the users actually needed. If they learnt maths, it was through the practical work they did.”

The YES school had an impact on both the school and higher education systems. The school was originally meant to be only for adults but soon neighbouring schools asked if young people with difficulties in the ordinary school system could also apply to YES. This was agreed, and it was a success, as from a pedagogical point of view, both teachers and pupils appreciated this wide-ranging mixture of ages and experiences. Whilst the school in Basta lasted for ten years it has recently been closed, as its approach has inspired many other similar projects and developments in adult and secondary education and Basta can now invest in other pioneering developments.

Basta’s educational activities have also fed into the higher education system. Together with the University of Lund, Basta developed a five-week course for students in the School of Social Work. During the course the students, many of whom will later become social workers, study together with people who have had their own experiences of being a user, or client, of the social services system. The course enables theory and practice to come together and as a result, the participants develop new ideas for social mobilisation and new ways of respecting and addressing the needs of clients of social services.

**SPREADING THE MESSAGE ACROSS EUROPE**

At European level, Basta has run several European projects via Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, PROGRESS and the European Social Fund. These different European projects have enabled Basta to learn from other social organisations and social enterprises around Europe. Together they have exchanged best practices and found new answers to challenges that are shared across Europe.

Basta was also a very active member of the [ESF Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/education/leonardo-da-vinci/transfer_en.htm). At the beginning of this network’s activity, it hosted a study visit during which all of the other members could see firsthand how this social enterprise operated. Basta then played a key role in the development and testing of the various tools produced by the network and in the drafting of the Handbook designed to help ESF Managing Authorities, Intermediary Bodies and Project Promoters to use empowerment approaches to attain their objectives.

In autumn 2013, Basta will start a new [Transfer of Innovation](http://www.diagramafoundation.org.uk/?q=who-we-are) project. These projects that are financed through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme aim “to improve the quality and attractiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the participating countries by transferring existing innovations to new legal, systemic, sector, linguistic, socio-cultural and geographic environments through working with transnational partners.” This Transfer of Innovation project will take the European exchanges one step further. It will enable Basta to go from theory to practice. The name, of the project is EASE, which is short for Empowerment Approaches and Social Enterprise, and this is the foundation of the Basta model. During the two-year project period, Diagrama UK[^3] and Elia[^4] in France will apply the model and test how it functions in their local contexts. In the nineties Basta was inspired by San Patrignano in Italy and now it is Basta’s turn to inspire Elia and Diagrama UK and this community-led local development approach should assist more people to find new positive pathways for their lives.

**MUTUALLY-REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS**

In the partnerships Basta had during European Social Fund projects, there was close collaboration with the Nykvarn Municipality, the Södertälje Municipality, the University of Lund and Fryshuset (an organisation working with young people). In the very first project, in 2002, one of the partners was one of Sweden's biggest insurance companies, Folksam. “Folksam joined the partnership because drug-related crime is a considerable cost for insurance companies, so it has a very simple interest in finding better routes to rehabilitation,” explains Kristina Blixt

All of these partners have contributed to the success of Basta’s projects and through their cooperation a common platform has been created and a commitment to working together has been established. In the case of Fryshuset, it is now involved as a partner in the Transfer of Innovation project and the Municipality of Södertälje currently has a very large Social Fund

[^3]: [http://www.diagramafoundation.org.uk/?q=who-we-are](http://www.diagramafoundation.org.uk/?q=who-we-are)
[^4]: [http://elia06.org/accueil.html](http://elia06.org/accueil.html)
project called K2, like the name of the mountain, in which Basta is the partner in charge of the transnational work.

As part of EQUAL Community Initiative, it was compulsory to have transnational partners, which turned out to be a blessing for Basta. The organisations it worked with are still connected to Basta's European network. For example Diagrama from Spain has opened a facility in the UK and it is Diagrama UK that will import the Basta model as part of the new Transfer of Innovation project. So the wheels keep on turning and all the local and transnational partners continue to provide new ideas on, and insights into, how work with the target groups might be extended and as to how Bastas’ activities might best be broadened.

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