



EURO
CITIES



Gothenburg's entrepreneurial hub

Entrepreneurial West Hisingen

Gothenburg is challenging established truths about entrepreneurial learning to support a multicultural district with high unemployment and low aspirations. Improving children's self belief and entrepreneurs' business skills is helping to build confidence in the future.

A road divides the district of West Hisingen into two distinct areas. On one side there's a mainly native Swedish population with a strong business tradition. On the other is a rapidly growing community of immigrants. Here, low education levels and chaotic lives were stifling self esteem and employability and allowing gang culture to take hold. There was an urgent need to break the cycle of disengagement and poverty and help citizens develop the competence and confidence they need for life and employability.

The city designed an innovative initiative to achieve three things: stimulate start-ups, increase the survival rate and growth of existing businesses, and embed entrepreneurship education into schools. With the cooperation of Gothenburg's two universities, NGOs such as the Red Cross, housing company Poseidon, and local business organisations and public services, Entrepreneurial West Hisingen was born. The partners' shared goal was the creation of a new entrepreneurial identity for the district, new quality job opportunities and long term interest in entrepreneurship among young people.

Helping entrepreneurs thrive

The €1.9m project, funded primarily by the city of Gothenburg and the European Regional Development Fund, established a range of services available in different languages, such as workshops, courses and personal guidance. It also created The Greenhouse, a 'business hotel' offering new entrepreneurs office and networking spaces. This was also where established entrepreneurs could attend a special business development programme and get advice from masters students on issues like patents, agreements and public procurement.

“In terms of the project's impact, what matters for me more than overall numbers is knowing that for one individual entrepreneur who was a tenant of the incubator for two years it really mattered: he will now be able to support his extended family forever.”

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Daniela Olmunger, development manager external financing/business cooperation, City District of West Hisingen

cities in action

November 2015

where: Gothenburg, Sweden
what: economic development, social affairs
when: 2012-2014

The most unusual - and controversial - aspect of the project was its work with schools. Recognising that providing a good education in traditional subjects was not working in terms of encouraging attendance or enabling employability, the project focused on developing the entrepreneurial competencies most likely to help young people thrive beyond school.

Persuading local politicians of the wisdom of prioritising subjects like chaos management over maths was one of the many challenges the project faced. Another was finding ways to reach women within the Muslim community. This was solved, in part, by inviting Muslim men to come along and bring female members of their family. There was also initial hostility to the predominantly white project team among some community groups, although this was eased with time and familiarity.

Developing life skills

The project held 600 start-up talks and 100 new businesses were set up as a direct result. Over 4,500 people visited The Greenhouse. In total, 800 new businesses were established during the project. It is the project's influence in schools, however, that the team believes will have the greatest impact on the district's long term economic and social health.

All local schools now understand how they can support the development of entrepreneurial competencies and many children have started developing vital life skills. Ten schools created plans for systematically working with entrepreneurship and got involved in 'The Young Storytellers' project. This saw 2,000 pupils write, publish and sell their own books. Summer entrepreneur programmes run by schools have proved very popular, with students being able to launch businesses that have a positive social impact.

Continuing to learn

Many elements of the original two-year project have now become permanent, such as The Greenhouse and the development programme for innovative businesses. Others, such as the incubator, have been further developed. There is now, for example, a fast-track incubator



for newly arrived immigrants from Syria who ran successful businesses in their home country. And yet more ideas to emerge from the project are now being tested, including masters students passing on their good business ideas to prospective entrepreneurs.

A mobile app project with Chalmers University of Technology is also now underway. This will enable schools to systematically assess the level of entrepreneurial competencies of their students. The Loop Me app is being tested by children across three countries and could help change the way education is structured in Europe to build students' confidence and motivation. This aspect of the project in particular has already aroused interest in Finland, Norway, Turkey, Portugal and Spain.

The project won the EUROCITIES award for cooperation in November 2015.

“ I am so glad I got a job on the summer entrepreneur programme last year. We turned our idea for a community website into reality. This year, as a mentor, I am helping teenagers make their plans for a week of cultural events happen. I've learned more in these weeks about things that are important than in the rest of my life! ”

Christina Sjöblom Schaper, age 17, mentor

