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Sharing City Umeå – Contributing to sustainable growth and inclusivity through the sharing economy

Philip Näslund, Olle Bergman and Kes McCormick



Background

Over the past 50 years Umeå has displayed constant growth, making it the fastest-growing region in northern Sweden. It is therefore crucial that Umeå grows with regards to environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects. Sharing City Umeå, which is a test-bed for the sharing economy, is focusing on innovative solutions for shared mobility, green spaces, resource efficiency, sustainable consumption and supporting the local sharing ecosystem and entrepreneurs. One key question for Umeå is to understand the different roles in the sharing economy for the municipality, companies, NGOs and citizens to support, enable and deliver sharing services in the city. It is important to understand how different sharing solutions are contributing to the Global Sustainable Development Goals and the local sustainability goals in Umeå. The test-bed solutions that are successful will be implemented both in new city districts and in existing infrastructure and processes.

Solution

Umeå Municipality is planning for a growing city and emphasizes the importance of growing in a sustainable way. The Umeå development plan relies on sustainable principles. This means Umeå aims to grow vertically in the central areas of the city. That will make people rely less on cars, and instead they can walk or ride a bike between work and home.

It is important to be inclusive and build trust among all involved stakeholders and citizens, irrespective of whether you have been living in Umeå for a long time, a fresh student or a newly arrived citizen. Sharing City Umeå is promoting new solutions to support the development and as such the sharing economy has come to play an important role in the urban development of Umeå.

- *"An issue that occupies us is how we can stimulate the right type of behaviors from our citizens in the urban planning process", says Philip Näslund, project manager in Sharing City Umeå. "We apply nudging principles where it should be easy to do the right thing. For us, it is about understanding what role the municipality should have and how we can create the best conditions for a sustainable city."*

Tomtebo Strand is an example of one of the new districts in Umeå. Today, the area is undeveloped, but in a few years an expected 10,000 people will have their home and workplace there. Hubs for sharing services are planned in the district. In a modern city, garages and parking can be replaced by service hubs for car pools, bikes, deliveries, waste management and other things that make it easier to live sustainably.

- *"In the municipality, we must first learn what drives certain behaviors for citizens. What are the real needs and how can we implement sustainable solutions that solves it?"*

Philip Näslund studied environmental science at Linköping University. Prior to joining Umeå, he worked in the county council for many years and there he was primarily engaged with environmental management.

- *"In my job, it is important to be in the forefront. I like to test things and try new ones so it suits me well to have a job where you have to be curious. Umeå work according to circular principles as regards to environmental issues, and for the social and cultural bit we focus on raising confidence among the citizens of the city. There are newly arrived citizens, and there will be more students - we want to include them in the community."*

An interesting player in the collaboration is the cooperative business incubator Coompanion. As experts in cooperative entrepreneurship, they support social groups to get started with their projects. Everyone is welcome and it can be university students one day and newly arrived citizens the next.

As in many other cities, integration is high on the agenda as well as gender equality aspects. Philip Näslund emphasizes that it is important here to take into account the social dimension of the sharing economy. Around these issues, the test-bed collaborates with the integration department, Viva integration, in Umeå Municipality. Among other things, they run a project on sharing services and integration.

- *"We did an analysis of how it looks when a person arrives in Umeå. What resources do you need, and what knowledge can you contribute with? It can be about accessing everything from mobility services, tools and sports equipment to social networks. At the same time, you bring your own knowledge and skills, with which you can build a sharing business."*

In 2019, the test-bed Sharing City Umeå organized a conference with the title Cooperative Cities - the Nordic region's first conference on the theme "the city as a jointly owned sharing platform". The purpose was to "explore jointly owned, cooperative digital platforms with a

focus on sustainability in all dimensions". Among the speakers were representatives of Swedish cities and various types of cooperative platforms.

- *"Through the conference we created a new meeting place and knowledge of the digital infrastructure that is crucial for promoting sustainable lifestyles. We hope this will be a recurring event and meeting place in up-coming years"*, says Philip Näslund.

In the work with the sharing economy, there is only one way for the actors to find their role in relation to the environment and other stakeholders: to get involved.

- *"We operate in different sectors and we have different roles - we at the municipality facilitate services, and others run them. Umeå Municipality gets many benefits from acting as a test-bed for the sharing economy within the program Sharing Cities Sweden. We get the chance to develop new knowledge about the municipality's different roles and how we can best promote a circular and sharing city where everyone is involved and contributes to sustainable development. In this way, one can say that the first challenge is to put into words on what one does."*

Lessons

1. Define the goals

What is it you really want to achieve? Try to sort out what the city wants and what it can help to achieve, using its current structures. Make sure you get the local politicians onboard.

2. Agree on an action plan

Do not delay the process of designing and implementing a concrete action plan.

3. Engage in concrete projects

In Umeå, we have been involved in for example an electric bicycle pool, which has been a great success. Make connections to all possible actors such as power companies, parking companies, waste companies and not least the private and knowledge-based sector.

Resources

For more information on Sharing City Umeå visit:

<https://www.sharingcities.se/umeatestbed>

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