

URBAN II Evaluation

Project Case Study: Passgenau Workshop
(Dortmund)



1.0 Goals

The Nordmarkt square in the Nordstadt area of Dortmund had become a regular meeting point for groups of people abusing alcohol and drugs, most of whom were long-term unemployed and many also had social or psychological problems. This issue was also preventing other residents from using the square in safety and acting as a key environmental detractor for the neighbourhood as a whole.

The idea for the project stemmed from discussions at the Monitoring Committee of Dortmund's URBAN programme about the best ways of helping these people and dealing with this ongoing problem. Rather than simply trying to move people on, a 'solution' that had been tried numerous times before and which only displaced the problem to other parts of the city, an idea was developed to try and provide more practical assistance to the people congregating in the square, providing a more lasting solution to the problem by improving their economic prospects for the long term.

The idea was that an unused building near the square could be converted into a workshop where participants could work, in exchange for a small amount of money at a level that would not affect their benefit payments. In the course of this work they would learn new skills, initially for two or three hours at time, with the intention that this would gradually build up over time as people developed an interest and become accustomed to the routines of the activity.

In this regard the project resembled an intermediate labour market, with people offered a gradual route back into work, by building confidence and giving their daily lives more of a structure. It was also less formal than other employment or training activity targeted at the unemployed and benefited from a more gradual and 'gentle' introduction to the world of work. Unlike other training schemes, participants also received payment which again helped them realise the benefits of returning to work.

The workshop facility also includes a social space where people can mix before and after work, helping people to develop contacts and improve their social skills (outside of those developed whilst taking drugs or drinking alcohol). The project's main goals are listed as;

- Providing order in participants' lives
- Encouraging the acceptance of personal responsibility
- Strengthening social skills

- Reinforcing self-esteem and self confidence
- Encouraging reintegration into society
- Achievement of an ordinary working life on the long terms

Support to beneficiaries is also provided by social workers, who draw up individual assistance plans for each participant that again ensures a rounded support mechanism that deals with social as well as the economic problems of beneficiaries. In addition to developing 'soft' skills such as punctuality, reliability and determination, qualified instructors supervise and train the participants in specific areas of business, with the following trades represented in the workshop's activities;

- Woodworking, carpentry and furniture making
- Warehousing, logistics and recycling
- Cleaning, renovations, clearances and care-taking
- Gardening and lawns
- Boat rentals

The above trades were all recognised as having skills shortages in the local neighbourhood economy meaning the participants were more likely to access real jobs at the end of their involvement in the project and equally were more likely to have skills demanded by future local employers.

The project has been able to link with other URBAN projects, for example providing workers to assist with environmental improvements and running the boating lake in Fredenbaumpark meaning the level of cross referral between this project and other URBAN intervention was high with all sides benefiting from the demand and supply of skilled labour.

2.0 Implementation

The project started in November 2002, and received a total of €240,000 from the Dortmund URBAN II programme.

It was incorporated into a set of measures aimed at the 'integration of disadvantaged groups'. The project was run by the Diakonie, a welfare association that is part of the Evangelical Church¹, in partnership with Dortmund city council, the government agency responsible for unemployment benefit recipients and managing supported employment programmes² as well as a range of local actors (such as the local partnership for social employment initiatives³).

URBAN funding was mainly used to pay for professional revenue support for the project, paying the salary of a business advisor to develop the commercial side of the business in areas such as customer acquisition, contract management, customer database and accounting. The projects set up during this period have since been transferred to permanent employees and the project sought to develop products and services that were of a commercial standard and comparable to those available on the private market. For example, the project has now taken over the running of a wooden-toy shop that had recently closed but is now trading well through the project.

The capital side of the project (the workshop building) was provided by the city authorities who provided the use of the building - although project beneficiaries also helped to convert the building as part of their training.

The involvement of the benefits agency was also a key part of the projects implementation because they still kept paying the beneficiaries benefits even though they were receiving a (small) payment. Losing benefit entitlement was often seen as a barrier for people to enter employment and training activity as they were often better off not participating in support once their benefits were withdrawn.

This multi agency response to the problem was seen as one of the key aspects to the successful implementation of the project. The project was developed in the context of the URBAN programme and stems from the partnership working and networks that were set up to administer URBAN.

3.0 Results and Impact

According to consultations, the project achieved much more than was originally hoped for. The workshop has been very popular and is now over-subscribed, with a substantial waiting list for places to get onto the scheme. Some people with alcohol and drug problems still congregate in the Nordmarkt square, but in much smaller numbers than

¹ Das Diakonische Werk Dortmund und Lünen GmbH

² ARGE Job Center Dortmund

³ Interessengemeinschaft sozialgewerblicher Beschäftigungsinitiativen

before. These smaller numbers mean the authorities are much more able to cope with and address the problem and don't require as many resources to tackle what was considered a key issue for the neighbourhood.

A significant impact of the project is that the work is carrying on (post URBAN) and the workshop now appears to be a sustainable business requiring little revenue funding from the public sector. Without URBAN funding, it is conceivable that project could have take place in a more limited form, for example as a work experience or placement project run by the local employment agency as opposed to an ongoing training facility with its own premises and staff.

The project does not keep records of how many people access job opportunities as a consequence of the support, partly because of the nature of the client group that are often transient and difficult to 'monitor'.

4.0 Identified Good Practice

This project represents an innovative way of tackling a number of linked problems, namely improving the economic prospects and well-being of long-term unemployed people, addressing anti-social behaviour that was affecting the lives of other residents, and improving the provision of local services in the URBAN intervention area. The work of people taking part in this project also contributed to a number of different thematic priorities, such as improvements to the public realm and the local environment.

The project is of wider interest because it not only recognises the societal benefits of assisting people to get back into work, but also the value of work in improving people's lives and their longer-term prospects, by developing skills but also bringing structure and purpose to peoples lives which had little of this previously.

However, the workshop did not seek merely to 'keep people occupied' and enable personal development to take place, but strove to develop products and services that were of a commercial standard and comparable to those available on the private market. This is also helping to improve the provision of valuable local services in an area that has been under-served in recent years.

The collaborative efforts of a range of local partners active in the area of employment promotion area also meant that a relatively small amount of URBAN funding could make a significant difference. URBAN funding allowed the project team to ensure its longer-term viability by concentrating on development of its commercial aspects.