

Cycling innovations - Best Practice by EIT Climate-KIC

City of Malmö: The Bicycle Kitchen

Over the last ten years, the western harbour area in Malmö has undergone a massive redevelopment. Almost all off the industrial buildings located in the area have been demolished and been replaced by new apartments and office buildings. An exception is the “slipway” which is where the Bicycle Kitchen is located



Foto (lower): The building “The slipway”, today hosting the makerspace STPLN and bicycle kitchen. The building used to be where the construction of ships took place. Foto (upper): Varvshistoriska föreningen.

The municipality owned some of the buildings, including the “slipway” which, before the establishment of the Bicycle Kitchen, was used as a dumping ground for unused items from the municipality (e.g. old fridges from pre-schools, building materials, etc). A civil servant working the City of Malmö was interested to use the space, to support the social and cultural life in Malmö. The idea was to use the space – as well as the waste as far as possible and offer it to third parties who could make use of it. To this end, the municipality contacted different people involved in the Malmö cultural scene: artists, club arrangers etc, and offered them the chance to use the building and the rubbish. This resulted in the building being used as a creative space for an artistic collective.

Context

Malmö was an industrial city, with much of the industry located in the dockland areas. With the downturn of industry over the past decades, many of the old industrial buildings in the western harbour area stood empty.

The shift towards a knowledge-driven city is well underway in Malmö. The City has positioned itself as a cultural / creative hub, a fashionable city to live in, and a mixing-pot of cultural and social spheres.

The Bicycle Kitchen is very much a grassroots initiative that has been developed with this backdrop. That the Bicycle Kitchen is located in the Western Harbour strengthens the connection to the redevelopment of the city itself.

The City of Malmö is by no means a driving force in the initiative, but more an enabler – encouraging the development, and creating space for those who wanted to drive this forward.

Driving forces

Bertil Björk, together with some friends, came up with the idea of the bicycle kitchen since they themselves wanted a place where they could potter around and work on their bicycles. This group became the engine and the driving force of the initiative. The timing also worked in their favour since the municipality could offer free space at “the slipway”.

It is mostly volunteers who have been responsible for running the Bicycle Kitchen, and the engagement in the topic is a key driving force here. The volunteers have changed over time, but Bertil Björk is still active in the management of the Kitchen.

The Bicycle Kitchen is housed in the basement of the “slipway”. It was a grassroots initiative, started by a group of guys with a love for bicycles, but also a strong social drive and engagement in the development of the city. They saw a need for a place where people could work on their bicycles, borrow tools and exchange knowledge about bicycle repairs. The model is that people can come with their bicycles and fix them by themselves with the tools available for free use. They can receive support from volunteers who know how to fix bicycles, but the volunteers will not fix the bicycles for the bicycle owners.

The bicycle kitchen has not received any direct grants from the municipality, but the rent is free which can be seen as an indirect grant. At the outset, the Bicycle Kitchen was run on an entirely voluntary basis. They received donated tools and bicycle gadgets from different agents, such as bicycle repair shops.

External sources of funding were sought and received to support some salary costs as well as to buy tools. The Bicycle Kitchen received three years of funding from The National heritage fund, as well as some private funding, (e.g. from an IT-millionaire from Malmö). Income is also received by selling mobile bicycle kitchens to schools. The Bicycle Kitchen is still however very much dependent on volunteers.

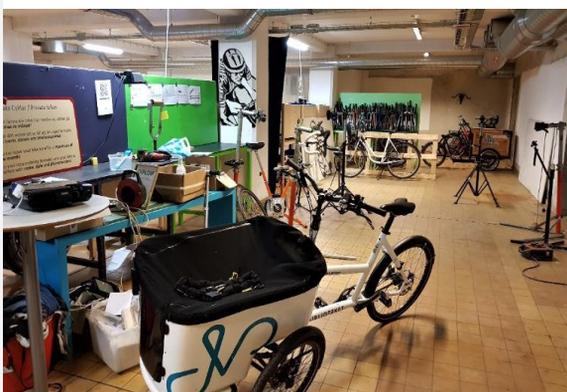


Foto: The Bicycle Kitchen workshop in the basement of “The Slipway”.

The kitchen opened in 2011 and there has been a big interest since the start, even though there has been no official promotion. During low season, an average of 40 visitors a night visit the kitchen, and during peak season in the summer it increases to an average of 60 visitors. The visitors are from all different age groups and comes from all areas of the city.

The Bicycle Kitchen is not only open for “do it yourselves repairs”, but also teaches classes and workshops in bicycle repair. In the summer the organisation visits different areas of the city with a “Mobile Bicycle Kitchen” and help kids with bicycle repairs.

The newest project that the Bicycle Kitchens has implemented is a “bicycle library” in which individuals can borrow a cargo bicycle or an electric bicycle for two weeks. The idea is that people will get the chance to try out and evaluate the use of a new type of bicycle in their every day practices.

The bicycle library has been successful in getting people to choose cycling over car driving, and some of the participants in the bicycle library have sold or stopped using their car as a result of their test. The pedelecs tests have been especially successful in attracting users that are upper middle-aged or older and who used to cycle but for different reasons can't use a normal bicycle anymore. Through using pedelecs, they express their ability to regain their freedom of mobility and improve their quality of life. The cargo bicycle users are typically families with two or more children, who have transport needs that are hard to be met with a normal bicycle.



Success factors

The Bicycle Kitchen has managed to work due to the engagement of volunteers, who have kept the kitchen open. When the bicycle kitchen was initiated, the redevelopment of the Western Harbour was only beginning, and the area was not liveable or attractive. This allowed the municipality to support different initiatives by giving free access to space. Today, the area is developed, and the real-estate value is very high. It is uncertain whether the municipality could or would have wanted to give away a rent-free space today.

Barriers

One barrier has been the high cost of tools, since the Bicycle Kitchen hasn't received steady funding. Initially there was a financial grant from the municipality specifically for purchase of tools. Five years into the project times were tough and it was uncertain if it would survive, then an additional grant was received from the municipality. Besides from that the municipality has made it clear that they appreciate the project but expects it to fund itself and depend on volunteers.

During the start-up phase, bicycle shops and bicycle repairers in the surrounding areas were sceptical of the Bicycle Kitchen and the unfair competition that the free rent created. Those working in the Kitchen, made a tour of the bicycle shops and discussed with the shopkeepers about their worries, explaining their activities and the role of the Bicycle Kitchen. Since the Bicycle Kitchen doesn't do reparations in exchange of money, nor sell any equipment, the scepticism has decreased. As a result, the shops don't feel now that they have lost customers, but rather gained a new collaboration with the Bicycle Kitchen and its users.

Malmö is often seen as a city with a lot of grassroots initiatives, and with a do-it-yourself mentality. Many of the city's residents are involved and interested in the development of the city.

External funding has also been important to the success of the Bicycle Kitchen, particularly longer-term funding from the heritage fund for Scania which made it possible for the Bicycle Kitchen to get started with its activities and made it possible to buy further tools than those donated. Additionally, funding from an external financier made a requirement that they prove that they increase the use of bicycles in the city. Results from this – concrete numbers about their success – allows them to show what impact they have, and this helps them receive other funding.

There have been no official PR campaigns for the Bicycle Kitchen, but word-of-mouth advertising has been very successful. This is believed to be because the Kitchen offers a useful space that is well-organised, and people are happy to tell their friends and family about it.

Foto: The Bicycle Kitchen workshop in the basement of "The Slipway".





Scaling potential

About 15 to 20 other Swedish cities has copied the idea of the Bicycle Kitchen. Every one of these places has a slightly different format, which might indicate a possibility to adapt the kitchen to local characteristics. Bicycle kitchens have been set up by either municipalities, organisations or individuals.

Barriers (cont.)

In recent years, new types of bicycles have become more common, for example cargo bicycles and pedelecs (electrically-assisted pedal bicycles), but the knowledge of the volunteers is limited for these “trickier” bicycles. Thus, there is a gap between the existing knowledge of the volunteers and the requirements on bicycle repairs.

There is also the need to attract engaged people to set up and run the kitchen. In some cases, the kitchens have failed because of the dependence on volunteers and their engagement. This has also been the case in Malmö where there have been periods where the kitchen was managed by less-engaged volunteers causing the kitchen to close for a shorter time before finding new engaged people.

The Bicycle Kitchen in Malmö has not done any promotion but still managed to attract people from all neighbourhoods of the city. New visitors keep coming, and old ones return. The volunteers have seen an increased interest in regular cycling and making bicycles safer by repairing them.

The bicycle library is also a concept that can be easily scaled, but requires some funding.

Find out more?

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