

Building bridges in rural Röstånga



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Röstånga development company (RUAB) is a community-owned social enterprise responsible for several local initiatives that are at the heart of Röstånga a village in rural southern Sweden.



Röstånga is a small village, of 850 inhabitants, located on the slopes of the ridge of Söderåsen in the National park – an area famed for its natural landscape and popular for trekking and other outdoor activities. Because of its setting, there are good opportunities for tourism and other businesses. Nevertheless, the village was recently experiencing specific problems linked with a loss of vital services due to de-population (empty houses, vacant shops etc). In common with other rural areas, a growing vacuum had been created by the withdrawal of vital public sector services (schools, youth clubs, care services etc) and of the private sector with little prospects of investment due to limited revenue expectations and the low values of properties.

Grass root members

To overcome this, the people of Röstånga recognised that they needed to reorganise themselves and re-consider both their role in the community and their capacity to run certain services. As a result, the RUAB development company was founded by its largely grass root membership. It is a social enterprise run by its locally-based members as a co-operative and non profit-making business (i.e. any revenues are reinvested into the company).

With over 400 shareholders, RUAB is responsible for the creation of several important businesses/ services for the community. One example, is the Old Train Station Restaurant. The former station building, which had been empty for many years, was bought by the community in 2012. After raising more than €45 000 of local private capital, it was renovated and sub-let to a local family who have been running it as a successful restaurant since April 2013. After its first season, the rental income has brought a revenue of €12 000 for the development company and the restaurant business has meant three new full-time jobs in the community.

Success stories

Another success story is Röstånga's Museum of Modern Art. This once run down building, adjacent to the village mill-pond, was bought and renovated in 2010. It now houses one of the country's smallest museums of modern art which, when necessary, also acts as an exhibition hall.

Another plus is a new community bus (owned by the RUAB) – whose benefits are twofold: Firstly, its use allows energy savings by avoiding the need for individual cars for transport to sports and cultural events; and secondly, there's a social aspect as the bus brings people together – acting as a 'meeting place on wheels'.

Finally, two other services are being developed in 2014 – a local home-care service and a service for the elderly organising social and other events in the local municipality. The idea is to employ local people to take care of the elderly people, thus also helping to bridge any age/ social barriers in the community.

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