

BUSINESS CASE: THE NGO HERRGÅRDS KVINNOFÖRENING

ANNA SERAVALLI
Medea-Collaborative Media Initiative
Malmö Högskola
anna.seravalli@mah.se

ANDERS EMILSON
Medea-Collaborative Media Initiative
Malmö Högskola
anders.emilson@mah.se

PER-ANDERS HILLGREN
Medea-Collaborative Media Initiative
Malmö Högskola
per-anders.hillgren@mah.se

ABSTRACT

This case explores how a non-governmental organisation (NGO) of immigrant women, Herrgårds Kvinnoförening (HKF), living on social security could become an entrepreneurial group offering services and products based on their skills and competences. In this way they could challenge the role of immigrants in Swedish society, from being a burden to become a socio-economical resource.

HKF has some peculiar characteristics that have to be taken in consideration in a successful business: they are strong as a group but weak as individuals and they have intangible qualities that cannot be externalised as proper skills. Another crucial issue for a possible business proposal is how to structure the relationships with the system of actors surrounding HKF that could support them in overcoming their weaknesses.

The case has been developed using a participatory design process. Some prototyping and trying out of possible offers have been carried out using co-design methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Herrgårds Kvinnoförening (HKF) is a NGO of immigrant women living on social security funding. Their goal is to become less dependent from the public funding by offering services and products based on their skills and competences. By turning their activities, now considered to be “leisure”, into a sustainable business HKF could become a concrete example showing how immigrant NGOs

could become a socio-economical resource for the Swedish society. However it is still unclear how far they are willing and able to go as entrepreneurs.

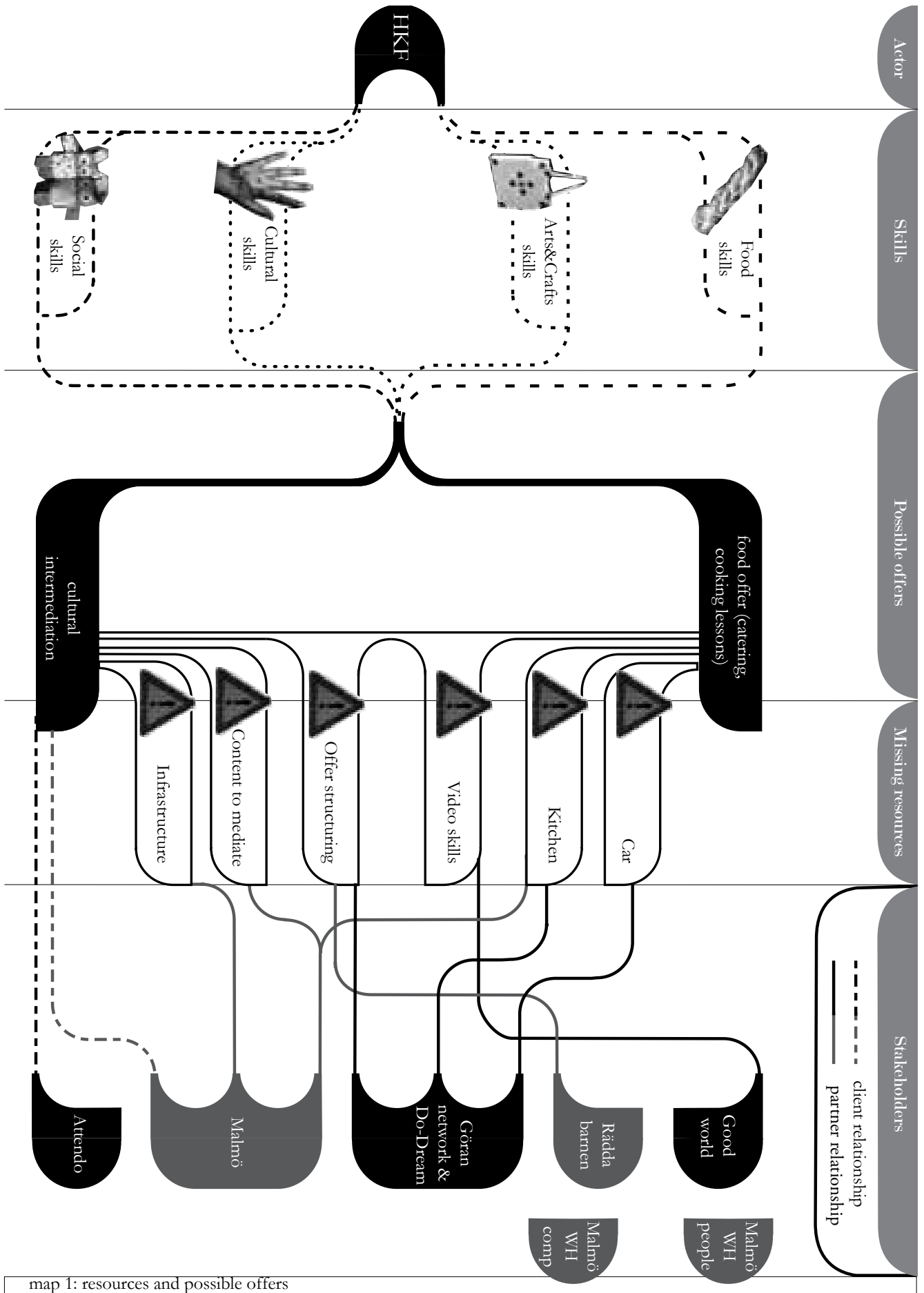
The case has been developed using a participatory design process (Björgvinsson, Ehn, Hillgren 2010) in which researchers, HKF and other stakeholders have collaborated in order to map the qualities and possible offers of HKF. This collaboration has created strong relations

and mutual trust between the actors. Moreover some prototyping and trying out of the possible offers have been carried out using co-design methodology. These performing collaborative experiments allowed to visualize their qualities and potential offers and to articulate the relationships between skills and offers (see map 1), a possible actors network (see map2) and a SWOT analysis (see below).

The challenge in this case is to find a business model that fits the internal characteristics of HKF as well as the specificity of the context they are dealing with. It will be critical for the success of the business to embed in the possible offers the peculiarities of HKF by making visible and measurable the soft qualities that characterize them. It will also be crucial to structure the relationships with the surrounding actors that could support HKF in developing a self-sufficient business.

BACKGROUND: HERRGÅRDS KVINNOFÖRENING (HKF)

Five women started the Herrgårds Women association eight years ago in Rosengård Malmö as a response to feeling excluded from the Swedish society. The association has approximately 200 women (and 200 children) as members.



map 1: resources and possible offers

The nationalities include Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Bosnian women (majority Afghan). Many have limited skills in Swedish, many are illiterates, and most lack higher education. Their activities include working with health issues (eg. sexual health) and social issues (eg. honour-related violence), food catering, small-scale clothing and textile design as well as carpet design/production. The core group of 5 women meets regularly and depending of what kind of activities are carried on other members participate.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

The HKF has some peculiar characteristics that have to be taken in consideration while developing a possible business model. They are *strong as a group but weak as individuals*. The women would never be able to become entrepreneurs as individuals, but as a group they are strong enough to take that step. The women have some *intangible qualities*, peculiar and interesting characteristics that cannot be externalised as proper skills but could still play a strategic role in the possible business. They are curious, proactive and have a strong “mum-attitude”. They are really welcoming, able to create comfortable situations and skilled in dealing with people. The association also have a strong *social role* within the immigrant community. For some of them they represent a reference point and a trustable group, but other elements of the community consider their activities and behaviours unconventional and inappropriate. At the same time the Swedish society and its key actors (public institutions, civil servants) does not recognize their potential value and they treat them as a problem and not as a possible resource.

SKILLS AND OFFERS (see map 1)

HKF members are really skilled in *preparing and serving Arabic, Afghan and Middle-East food* and they already did some trials of a catering service that beside the delivery of ethnic meals, includes the setting up of a true cultural eating experience. This could be further enriched with cooking lesson about Arabic, Afghan and Middle-East food. Some of the HKF members also have gardens where they grow the groceries they use for cooking. This ability could be used inside an educational service about gardening and nutrition.

They are also skilled in *sewing and weaving*. They could offer services around the production and maintenance of carpets as well as traditional clothing. They also did some experiments designing and producing more contemporary goods using an ethnic style (eg laptop covers). HKF is characterized by unique socio-cultural skills: they have a *strong cultural heritage* not yet mediated by the Swedish environment. They also have a genuine and spontaneous approach in presenting their culture and habits. In terms of social capabilities the members have intercultural competencies and credibility within the immigrant community. Therefore they could act as *intermediators* between the Swedish society and the immigrants community.

The cultural mediation activity could be particular interesting both for private companies working in the social-health sector (eg Attendo) and for public agencies (eg Swedish Migration Board, Work and Unemployment office). HKF is already involved in educational health programs organized by Malmö municipality, where HKF is in charge of organizing and leading meetings about different themes (e.g. sexual health) within the immigrant community.

OFFER PROTOTYPING

Several prototyping experiments about possible offers have been carried out, mainly addressed to explore how to structure a catering service and a cultural intermediation service.

In the first case HKF worked for different clients offering catering service of Arabic, Afghan, Middle-East food. An interesting aspect was the unique cultural experience embedded in how the women prepared and served the food. At one occasion they offered to the catering guests traditional henna tattoos. These experiments also highlighted some of HKFs weaknesses in structuring their offer. They does not have different menu proposals from which the client could choose according to their taste, the number of participants, or to the budget. This can create some difficulties and misunderstandings with the clients. In the second case HKF had some meetings with refugee children belonging to the same cultural background, hosted by Malmö city through the care company Attendo. During the meetings HKF cooked for the children and involved them in some cooking lessons. At one

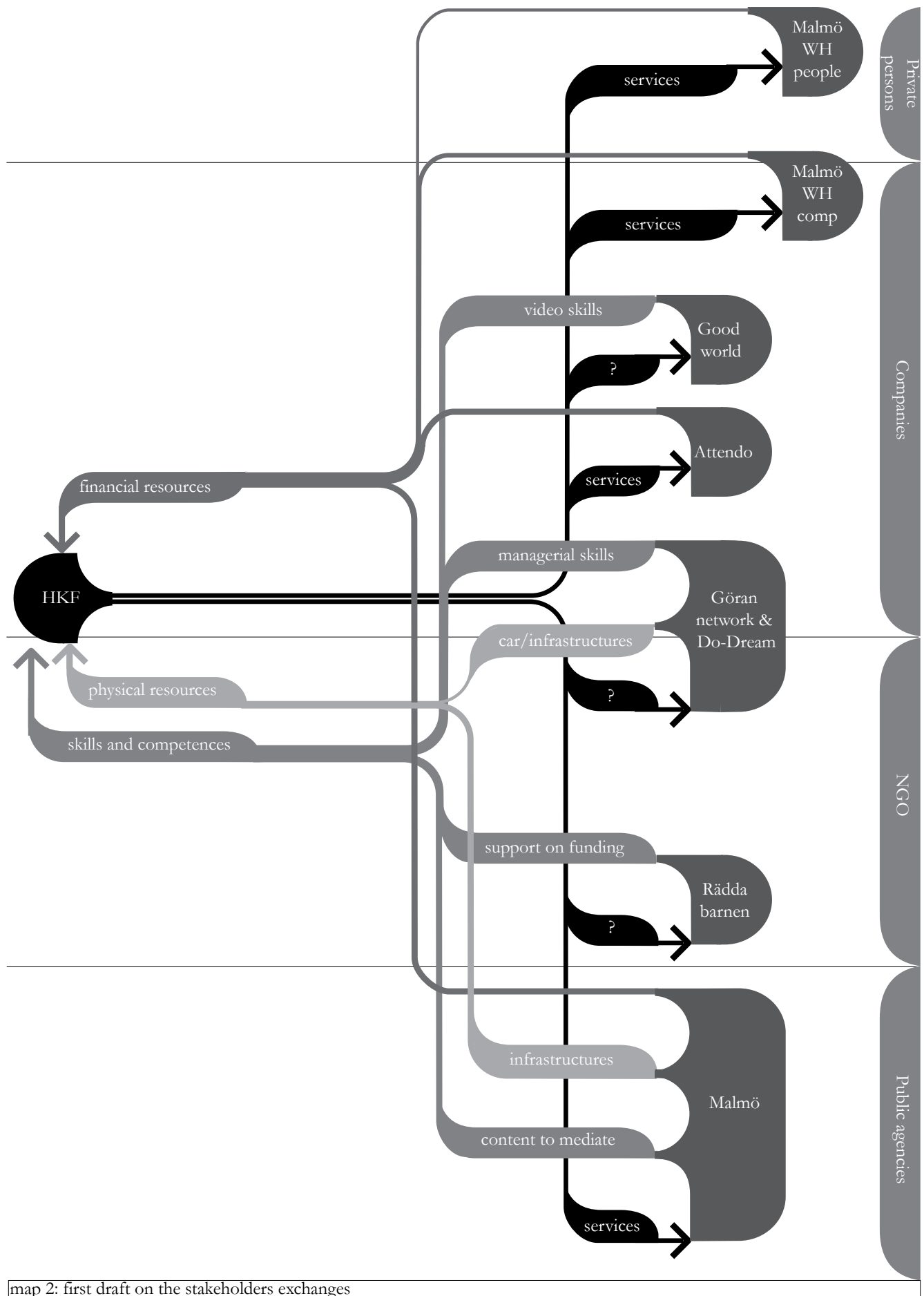
occasion the cooking lessons were held at Good World (a media company) and the kids had the opportunity to interact with media professionals.

These meetings were particularly appreciated by all the involved actors. The kids were happy to have the possibility to get in contact with somebody sharing their cultural background and, moreover, that could represent some kind of parental figure. Attendo, the company looking after the children, appreciated the role of the mediation of HKF however they pointed out that they can not pay HKF for just meeting the kids and that the offer should be more structured. They also said that they can not outsource the meal preparation to HKF since they do not have the infrastructure and experience to deliver this service.

In terms of possible business opportunities new media could play a significant role. On the catering/food offer some prototyping has been done about creating video cooking lessons. These videos could be offered as a product in themselves, or as part of a broader service of culture intermediation targeting, for example, the refugee children. Indeed most of the kids are in transit, which means that they will be moved to other parts of Sweden or abroad. Using videos as well as social media and the web could be a way to create a long lasting relationship between the kids and HKF which could provide their service as cultural mediator also on remote. The members of HKF have also a rich oral tradition and some of them suggested that the stories of the refugee kids presented by some of the older ladies could be recorded and made available on the Web.

The prototyping activities enlighten some key issues about the offers but until this moment it has not been possible to structure the value proposition in a clear way (see both map1 and map 2). On one side, there is a difficulty in framing the offers since the complexity of certain elements (socio cultural skills) and a lack in entrepreneurial and managerial skills. On the other side, the actors mainly involved since now (Attendo, Good world) could offer some kind of insights such as being a client or adding specific skills but could not support HKF in structuring their value proposition.

This tends to create a vicious circle: the offer is fuzzy because it is not possible to define it precisely until the partners are defined. But at the same time these fuzz-



map 2: first draft on the stakeholders exchanges

iness does not allow the possible stakeholders to understand how they could contribute and what kind of value they could offer and claim for.

POSSIBLE ACTORS INVOLVED

(see map 1 and 2)

There is a complex system of actors around the association that could represent business partners or clients. Some of them have been involved during the activities of the offer prototyping.

Attendo is a commercial care and social care company which is funded by the municipality for looking after the refugee children in the city of Malmö. These kids are usually between 13 and 17 years old and they have been sent on their own to Sweden. The role of the company is to look after them and at the same time give them some basic skills about how to live in Sweden. *Attendo* is both a *possible client and partner*.

Malmö is characterized by a strong presence of immigrants, they are around one third of the population. This situation has raised a number of socio-economic issues for *The city of Malmö* that traditional approaches seem unable to address in a satisfactory way. They could become both partners and clients for the women.

The *Göran Network* is a network of women entrepreneurs aimed to create support for their activities. They express their interests in enlarge their network towards group of women similar to HKF. *Göran Network* is an *important business partner*. Also *Good World/Do Dream* can become an important business partner. *Good World* is an independent film production company of which the CEO is also part of the *Göran Network*. The CEO is particularly interested in HKF and she would like to support them, also in terms of financing. Recently the CEO of *Good World* founded *Do Dream*, a website platform aimed at support grass-roots initiatives by facilitating match-making between different stakeholders. They could possibly also support media production.

Another possible business partner is the NGO *Rädda barnen* (Save the children) who met HKF during a workshop aimed at exploring how the cultural intermediation offer could be developed into services for the refugee children. *Rädda barnen* expressed their interest in supporting HKF in their activities.

There are other possible stakeholders

that have not been involved yet.

Some *Malmö western harbour companies* could become *mainly clients but also possible business partners*. This recently developed Malmö area is becoming a reference point for the knowledge economy actors (university, ICT companies, media companies, design and architecture studios). They are generally small companies connected one to the other by a thick fabric of commercial, social and cultural relationships. Some of them had been in contact with HKF and respond quite enthusiastically to the NGO intangible qualities and cultural heritage. Conceivable as **mainly clients** is *Malmö western harbour people*. This group is tightly connected to the previous one since most of them are working within the western harbour companies or are living in that area. They are a group of people with a high level of education and an over-the-average income, which could be particularly attracted by intangible qualities and cultural heritage characterizing HKF.

SWOT

Summing up the peculiarities of this case.

Strengths:

- intangible qualities of the group of woman (genuity, curiosity, mum attitude, imaginative)
- skills (related to cooking and arts and crafts)
- strong and genuine cultural heritage
- intercultural competencies
- strong as a group (every individual contributes with different skills and abilities)
- crucial role within the immigrant community

Weaknesses:

- lack of entrepreneurship skills
- lack of skills required by Swedish society (language, laws and regulations, education)
- weak as individuals (individuals are unable to carry out the activities they carry out as a group)
- no credibility within the Swedish society (they are seen as leisure group, not as a possible resource/ entrepreneurs)
- intangible qualities (how to quantify them and package as a possible offer?)
- missing of physical infrastructure (they don't have a kitchen or spaces to carry on their activities as a proper company)
- lacking of financing opportunities

Opportunities:

- credibility within their community
- capacity of being a bridge between Swedish society and their original culture/society
- possibility to offer a true cultural experience
- offering skills that Swedish society is lacking
- Attendo corporate social responsibility (need to rebuild their credibility)

Threats:

- community and family pressure/obligations (their social group could not accept that they become entrepreneurs; as women in their community they are in charge of family and house management)
- resilience (intended as the possibility that they don't have the energy and resources for working full time and carrying the responsibilities of a business)
- social security money (if they decide to establish a company after six months they will lose the right to receive the monthly financial support that Swedish state is providing them)
- Swedish laws and regulation (which are individual driven and therefore are not considering the possibility to support groups to become entrepreneurs).

SUMMING UP

To conclude, the questions around this case are: what kind of resources, infrastructure and business model are needed to create an economically self-sustained reality?

Which win-win relationships could be established to build up an economical reality that values the specific qualities of the group (eg intangible qualities, strong as group weak as individual)?

How could the "cultural intermediation" become a service whose outcomes could be measured and therefore become a valuable offer for *Attendo* and/or the City of Malmö?

REFERENCES

Björgvinsson, E., Ehn, P., Hillgren, P-A. *Participatory design and "democratizing innovation"* Proc. PDC 2010.