

*Citizen-driven initiatives for sustainability must be part of the city in practice - not just in brochures!*

Since 2011, *the Bike Kitchen*, has been a do-it-yourself workshop in Gothenburg open to anyone who wants to learn to repair a bike. *The Bike Kitchen* saves abandoned bicycles from being sold as scrap, promotes upcycling and repairs, and creates an open social meeting place. *Solidarity Fridge*, shares space with *the Bike Kitchen* and since 2016 has brought together volunteers who rescue surplus food from grocery stores and restaurants and redistribute it. The *Solidarity Fridge* improves awareness of food waste, reduces the environmental impact of the city, and provides food to people who need it.



Ian Fiddies at the Bike Kitchen. Photo: María José Zapata Campos

For these past few years, the Bike Kitchen and Solidarity Fridge have been found in Kommersen, an old flea market building in central Gothenburg. Both the Bike Kitchen and Solidarity Fridge are sustained by the work of their volunteers and the resources they themselves collect (old bikes and surplus food). As we have previously argued, these citizen-driven initiatives create urban commons with their everyday practices. The provision of affordable space is the only external support that these initiatives require.

However, Kommersen will soon be demolished to make room for a new high-end urban development 'Masthuggskajen', a central riverside area in Gothenburg. The Bike Kitchen and Solidarity Fridge are being left without space for their operations, as they cannot pay market rent.

Recently, both the Bike Kitchen and Solidarity Fridge have been used in the City of Gothenburg's marketing brochures for its sustainability strategies - for example, when *Masthuggskajen* in November 2020 received the Green Buildings Award for its sustainability program. Now these citizen-driven initiatives are being forgotten by the City because they do not fit in the new high-end development and its financial business model. The City of

Gothenburg is scaling down these grassroots innovations for sustainability, when they could scale them up.



The Solidarity Fridge. Photo: Bruno Chies

A central location is important for these and many other citizen-driven initiatives promoting a genuine sharing economy from below. The municipal government seems to have forgotten that a city is more than shops and services. Neighbourhoods and their residents also need common spaces, non-commercial areas and room to socialize and be creative.

The City of Gothenburg has, until recently, been at the forefront of waste prevention in Sweden, a role model for other municipalities and for national authorities. However, recent budget-cuts, and a lack of political will has imperilled social innovations that were built upon the collaboration between the civil society and the City.



Kommersen. Photo: Bike Kitchen, Gothenburg

It is time for Gothenburg, and many other cities, to make up their minds. Do they want to be at the forefront of sustainability struggles, not only on paper but also in practice? Let us create more successful examples of how citizen-driven initiatives and cooperative ventures

can have a place in central parts of the city, and contribute to an inclusive citizenship and urban sustainability. A more inclusive and sustainable city requires access to a commons space without commercial requirements. The creative power of civil society can take care of everything else.

Bruno Chies, Solidarity Fridge

Carl Thorshag, Cykelköket Göteborg

Robin Biddulph, Associate Professor of Human Geography, GU School of Business, Economics and Law

Patrik Zapata, Professor of Public Administration, School of Public Administration, GU

María José Zapata Campos, Associate Professor of Business Administration, GU School of Business, Economics and Law