

# GIRA – Green Initiatives in Rural Areas

## English Summary

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### GIRA-Sweden Newsletter number 1

*The Erasmus+ project GIRA started in September. Due to Covid-19, the first transnational meeting has not taken place yet. At a digital meeting in the middle of December, the steering group (the six partner countries) will decide how the project will be taken forward with the activities and the transnational meetings in the coming years.*

*In this first issue, we present the work in Gävleborg and the participants from the Swedish side.*

#### **The work in Gävleborg**

Europahuset Gävleborg, together with representatives from the local partners in Trönöbygden, Österfärnebo, Kursgården Gläntan and as well as Hela Sverige X-ings Wind Power project, forms the project group GIRA-Sweden.

The project group had a first meeting in October, where the project was presented. In addition to the transnational exchange of experience and the acquisition of knowledge between all participating countries, the idea is that participating Gävleborg organizations will also try to make different contributions to environmental and climate issues. These can be very small initiatives of a practical nature to larger initiatives in collaboration with other organizations and public bodies.

#### **Kursgården Gläntan**

- We are a course venue for different associations. We run the place mostly non-profit and mainly accept groups for courses. Our project idea is to develop the plant environmentally through better recycling thinking and try to get better energy solutions.

- The challenge is partly to bring about a generational change with new non-profit forces, while at the same time we must create financial surpluses to invest in sustainability.

- We already have ideas about making the facility a place where visitors gain an understanding of environmental and climate issues by showing practical solutions for sustainable energy

alternatives, composting etc. In addition, we want to develop various educations about a sustainable society and offer these to popular movements, municipalities and others.

- In meeting people from different parts of Europe to get new ideas on how we can run our business in a climate-better way, simply learn from others. It is about practical solutions but perhaps also how to engage local communities around its issues.

#### **Hela Sverige (Rural Sweden)**

##### **X-ing Gävleborg**

- Hela Sverige X-ing Gävleborg is a non-profit association that operates in the entire county of Gävleborg. Our members today are 228 associations, spread throughout the county, which work with various local development issues.

- X-ing Gävleborg is now running the project "I med och motvind". The project's goal is to offer a neutral party that can promote fact-based information about each wind farm's unique conditions, create meeting places and dialogue between all parties at the county's wind power establishments. The project is funded by the Swedish Energy Agency and runs from September 2020 to December 2022.

- The project works to ensure that sustainable wind power is built.

- We see the transnational meetings, in GIRA, as an exchange of information and inspiration. Possible opportunities to find future collaboration partners.

#### **Österfärnebo Utvecklingsgrupp**

##### **(Local Development group)**

- Österfärnebo Utvecklingsgrupp has many projects today. For example: a "Second Hand" store and a "Market Day" - an outdoor weekly market with locally grown products and furthermore a car sharing program. We have completed a first local economic analysis (LEA) which aimed to identify how money flows in and out of our society. We are forming a rural company (a cooperatively owned investment group). A LEADER project is underway today, with three parallel goals. Objective 1 examines the feasibility of a cooperative school (grades 7-9). Goal 2 is improved public transport within the region. Goal 3 is an improved information

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platform that would include a website design and other digital communication methods.

- One of the major challenges is the loss of municipal services. At the beginning of the 2000s, the Health Center was closed, so now we only have limited access to the nearest full-service center 25 minutes away. Recently, the municipality closed grades 7-9 in our local school, which creates a problem for children and their families. Being able to demonstrate the economic benefits for the municipality of investing in rural areas such as ours, rather than selling them, would make a difference. Another challenge we have that has not been fully realized is a broader societal investment. What we do in the development group is in a kind of bubble. We have brought in new and energetic people too late which is a positive indication that people realize the issues and want to get involved, but we can be even more effective with deeper efforts.
- Feasible it is practical to build on our existing communication platform project and shape it into something that can engage more activism in our society with a well-communicated sustainability strategy. In this way, our impact can have more breadth and longevity.
- Although there are concrete examples of what we can do, we hope that the GIRA program will highlight some creative and effective ways to strengthen society. It would be useful to see successful examples of effective community building. They can also be very useful for managing our newly formed community investment companies. Due to the friction between the local countryside and the municipality, it would also be wonderful to see how other communities have found arguments for rural development aimed at skeptical politicians.

### **Trönöbygdens ekonomiska förening** (Economic association)

- Trönöbygden has the following going on:
  - a) The association owns a couple of properties and right now we are handling a major renovation of the ICA store's premises to increase service in the area.
  - b) We have made a local economic analysis (LEA) and, as a result, are developing a local development plan (LUP). The work with the LUP has taken a long time, partly due to the fact that we have been

waiting for a new municipal master plan, partly due to the Corona virus.

- c) There is a housing shortage in the area, and we are investigating in what form new construction of apartments should best take place.
  - d) We have written an article in our local newspaper to capture interested participants for a local project group.
- A major challenge is other issues that arise in the area and need to be dealt with more urgently. Then long-term work ends up on the sidelines and thus the meetings we would need to have within the project. And of course, the corona virus contributes greatly to the fact that we cannot meet as we should.
  - We have not come so far in the project that we have decided what we want to contribute. But we think of three areas that could be conceivable:
    - a) Energy solutions for the property that houses the ICA store (existing / ongoing)
    - b) Climate-smart construction of apartment buildings (not yet started)
    - c) Local development plan (LUP) with active work on conversion to a sustainable local community. The "regular" LUP started, but not the part with adjustment.
  - We expect an increased interest in environmental and climate initiatives locally with us when we receive support from a project, where it is also seen that there is an international interest. We also expect to get ideas and increased knowledge from other countries' work and that we can hopefully contribute immediately.

