

## **Food and social inclusion**

*In this report we compare two initiatives from the city of Groningen that both work with food as a tool to reach an increased social inclusion. What do they have in common? How do they differ? And what can they learn from each other? The initiatives have been compared on organizational model, goals, partners involved, business model and lessons learned.*

### **Two examples from the city of Groningen**

#### **Fruitcafe de Helpende Hand**

Fruitcafe de Helpende Hand is a neighborhood fruit & vegetable shop with coffee and catering facilities. It was established in 2017 for social and integration purposes.

You can read more about this initiative in a former ORC-report:

<https://northsearegion.eu/reframe/news/fruitcafé-de-helpende-hand-as-a-neighborhood-social-enterprise/>



#### **Toentje**

Toentje is an initiative of committed citizens who are growing vegetables for poor people who are dependent on food from the Foodbank. By growing vegetables Toentje can provide fresh food for these people. More than 50 volunteers work in Toentje. The two project managers have paid jobs for 20 hours a week.

You can read more about this initiative in a former ORC-Report:

<https://northsearegion.eu/reframe/online-resource-centre/business-innovation-through-smart-specialisation/toentje-producing-food-for-the-food-bank/>

### **Organizational model**

Both initiatives are so called social enterprises. Toentje is registered as non-profit association and Fruitcafe is a cooperative. Toentje is a place where people who are not fit for a regular job, can get a positive working experience and structure in everyday life. Fruitcafe offers jobs to help unemployed to get working experience and daily routines as well. However, both initiatives are steppingstones to other jobs on the labor market. Toentje has a board with a chairman, secretary and treasurer. And the operational activities are run by a project leader and a business leader.

Fruitcafe is a cooperative, founded by the Gebiedscoöperatie Westerkwartier and the agricultural school Terra. Besides these 'founding fathers' there is a close cooperation with Alfa-college, Noorderpoort, Hanzehogeschool and the municipality of Groningen.

## **Goals**

Toentje and Fruitcafe bring many different people in contact with each other and offer an accessible, sustainable and safe work and learning place. In this way they strengthen the social cohesion and the involvement of local residents. Their goal is to increase the quality of life in their neighborhood.

Both initiatives are active in various policy areas of the municipality, such as sustainability, food, health, combating poverty and loneliness, prospects for work and participation. This is also why the municipality supports both initiatives financially, by networking and by knowledge.

## **Partners involved**

Fruitcafe and Toentje have both several partners involved. The municipality and educational institutions are important partners to both initiatives. Toentje organizes lessons and cooking workshops for pupils. Fruitcafe is a place where interns can gain practical experience and offers cases for graduation studies.

The municipality is the only (financial) partner of Toentje. Fruitcafe gets funding also from their members. The municipality is not a member, but since Fruitcafe is active in various policy areas of the municipality, they provide the first three years a financial contribution.

Both initiatives have social partners in their neighborhood. For Toentje these are the Foodbank and Resto van Harte.

## **Business model**

Both initiatives want to be less dependent of the contribution of the municipality and, therefore, are organizing new activities to realize income. Toentje gives advice to initiatives that want to start similar projects. And they develop products that they can sell. Groning (honey) and hops for the production of beer, are examples.

In addition to the regular sale of vegetables and fruit, Fruitcafe organizes workshops, children's parties and sell processed products, for instance soup, which they make with residents of the neighborhood.

Both initiatives generate income with the sale of products and by providing certain (social) services, where the municipality or other grand providers are willing to pay for.

## **Lessons learned and points for improvement**

For Fruitcafe it turned out that it's hard to activate people, that are in a welfare situation, for voluntary work that might result in a payed job. The situation they are in seems to be too comfortable for some of them to be active in taking the next step to a payed job. This is a

discussion Fruitcafe have with their partners. Although it seems to be difficult for many people, two persons did find a paid job as a result of their experience at the Fruitcafe.

Another point of improvement is how Fruitcafe can get more regional fruit and vegetables in the shop. It is proven to be hard to organize this because the shop is not a large buyer, they only buy small quantities.

In the meantime, it appears that working in Toentje's vegetable garden works well for their target groups. Various organizations, i.e. the Municipal Health Service, picked-up these good results. The municipality of Groningen is at the moment the only financier. Financing from poverty policy does not actually cover all objectives, from prevention point of view it seems logical that health insurance companies participate as well. This is currently being discussed.

Concluding, it is likely that food initiatives can enhance the social inclusion in neighborhoods. Food initiatives connect the residents, bring organizations from the neighborhood together, provide healthy food and enhance the livability in the neighborhood.

### **Do you want to learn more?**

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