

**Scrapstore Organizations in the UK:
a summary of email interviews**

Elisabeth Mueller Nylander

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nylaelis@gmail.com

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine an organization that I find interesting, namely a scrapstore. The following questions are further explored:

- How is the scrapstore structured or organized?
- What difficulties has the organization experienced?
- What successes has the organization experienced?
- Has the way the scrapstore is organized changed over time? Why or why not?

What follows is a summary of several email interviews conducted during the spring of 2010. The paper was in response to an assignment for the Social Entrepreneurship program from Glokala Folkhögskolan in Malmö, Sweden¹.

Method and Validity

While looking for more information on scrapstores on the Internet, I discovered a link to a list of scrapstore organizations in the UK.² Because of its voluntary nature, the list itself is not comprehensive but provided access to plenty of contacts for the initial overview that I wanted to perform. In the interest of time and convenience, I chose to conduct the interview by email.

There were 110 unique email addresses available on the website. Of these about ten appeared to go to the same domain or organization. Twenty-two came back as undeliverable due to server error or an incorrect address. According to my calculations, 75 emails were delivered. I received sixteen answers. One email was from a municipality employee to inform me that the scrapstore had closed. One of the project leaders did not answer my questions but encouraged me to consult the homepage of the scrapstore and contact them with any additional questions. Even if I plan to do this, those results will not be included in this report. Another respondent sent along a feasibility study from 2007. This document was very helpful but will not be summarized here either. In all, there were thirteen responses to the email questionnaire.

After reading through the answers several times, I summarized the responses according to each question. Even though the survey was not done anonymously, I have not singled out individual scrapstores but rather I have provided a break down of responses without identification of the respondents.

For the purposes of an initial study of how scrapstores in the UK work, I found the results helpful and informative. However, the low response rate means that the findings of these interviews should only be seen as a general indication of the situation of scrapstores in the UK and not a comprehensive report. There are a number of ways a more scientific result could be achieved including on-site interviews, guaranteed anonymity and increased response rates from a more comprehensive list of respondents.

Job Description of Survey Participants

The survey participants were asked to state the name of their organization and what position they held there. The names of the scrapstores will not be provided here but rather what follows is a table over the job description of the thirteen interview participants.

¹ An course description in English can be downloaded as a pdf file at http://webzone.ts.mah.se/projects/gl_she09_10/Folder/index.aspx?file=230&function=text
² <http://www.mkplayassociation.co.uk/scrapstore/NEWSCRAPSTOREDIRECTORY2.htm>

Job Title	No. of Respondents
Managing Director	2
Manager	2
Chair (man/person)	2
Coordinator	2
Administrator	1
Secretary	1
Worker and Artist	1
No response	2

Table 1: Job Titles and Number of Respondents

In summary, the majority of respondents had positions of administration and/or management. Although this lends a level of credibility to knowledge of how the organizations work, I fear that the table above does not represent the organizational diversity that seems to exist among the scrapstores, which we will begin to examine now.

Scrapstore Structure and Organization

All the scrapstores interviewed said they were dependent on volunteers. However, this ranged from being run wholly by volunteers to some sort of volunteer/paid position hybrid. The largest number of volunteers per organization mentioned was thirty, but most of the scrapstores had less than ten.

About a third of the scrapstores operated as registered charities and were run by management committees or a board of trustees. The number of hired employees tended to be one or two individuals working part-time. In general the scrapstore was seen as a calling or leisure activity. As one participant put it: "This is our hobby and passion, not a business."

Many of the interviews mentioned some sort of membership scheme to provide income streams for the organization. There was also mention of donations to help offset costs. At least two of the interviews noted the help provided by the local council for rent and utilities.

Difficulties

The scrapstores face several challenges, including managing volunteers and space, but the main problem seems to be financial. Originally some of the scrapstores had problems persuading companies to donate their waste, and the general feeling was that businesses are not encouraged to re-use their "waste". Recruiting a functioning management committee was also seen as difficult as was finding specialist advice on policies and procedures, training and legal issues. Many of the scrapstores depend on volunteer efforts so naturally the recruitment and management of volunteers was a concern.

Proper facilities were another essential element of the organization that proved difficult. Over half of those interviewed mentioned lack of space to store and display materials. In addition, at least two of the buildings used had problems with damp, resulting in spoiled materials.

Funding was the one problem that every respondent mentioned. Often this was expressed in terms of lack of government support or the uncertainty of grants. As one respondent explained, "Demand for our services is growing however funding is shrinking." At the same time, a decline in

retail sales was also noted. This was seen as the result of an increasingly competitive market sector due to a growth in internet sales, pound shops and single operator businesses.

In general, the problem of finding sustainable income streams originates with a basic misunderstanding about what it takes to run a scrapstore. As one respondent explained, “people either get it or they don't.” The following example beautifully illustrates how difficult it is to establish the right marketing strategy for a social business of this nature:

...we soon realized that we needed approximately £4,000 per year to keep running, and so we had to charge people or spend all our time completing grant application forms.

Successes

The success of a scrapstore cannot be measured in merely financial terms. The bottom line for many of the respondents was not how much money they could make, but how much service they could provide. The number of scrapstore members was often used to measure success, and on average the organizations boasted around 300 members. Another success was the amount of money saved by members who had gained access to recycled materials. According to one respondent:

Our strength lies in our commitment to do this for the love of it, not for financial gain or to complete quotas or targets set by larger organizations

Community involvement was also named as a significant achievement. Examples of this sort of contribution included: volunteer opportunities, providing free play for disadvantaged families and the reuse of about 7 thousand liters of unwanted paint otherwise destined for the landfill. Many were pleased to report successful partnerships with the local governments. Yet there were those who saw the very survival of their scrapstore as a success or a “minor miracle” since many scrapstores funded by local authorities have closed down. Other forms of outreach included working with local charities and trusts and running workshops at fairs.

Even if the success of a scrapstore was often measured by community or environmental gains, financial progress was important nonetheless. This could take the form of raising capital to buy a building, receiving grants for smaller projects, or quite simply turning over a profit.

Organizational Changes

Only two of the respondents said that their organization had remained unaltered. Most of the scrapstores changed as new ideas came up. There were also many attempts to improve services, e.g. development of a delivery service or the packaging and bar-coding of all materials to enable warehouse overview. Several mentioned the need to rationalize, downsize or streamline venues and management. One respondent explained that the scrapstore originally had a sliding scale of membership depending on how many children were cared for and once membership was paid all materials were free. This had worked well initially but then a few customers had become “greedy” and some of the schools complained about paying very high fees for little stuff. The system had been changed now so that everyone paid the same amount in membership but all materials were charged for, and this had worked much better.

The most common change was that from the vague vision of a handful of people to a definable organizational form. For example, what started life as a co-operative could evolve into a charity or vice versa. One person might manage to recruit a whole team of dedicated volunteers, and this group in turn might dissolve into two or three persistent individuals. Not all of the organizations managed to change in a predictable manner as the following quotes reveal:

...the scrapstore has closed down and re-opened several times over the years because of a lack of organization and staff..

...some of the people left to get 'proper' jobs...

...a couple of years ago, one person did absolutely everything, then he managed to recruit volunteers and is now hardly involved at all because he has a full-time job elsewhere...

There were also a few respondents who mentioned plans for organizational changes in the future, such as the ambition to become a social enterprise or attempts to network with other scrapstores nationally and internationally.

Summary

This paper examines scrapstores in the UK based on email interviews conducted during the spring of 2010. The findings should only be seen as a general indication of the situation of scrapstores in the UK and not a comprehensive report due to the limited number of responses (thirteen answers of 110 queries). The majority of respondents had positions of administration and/or management. In general, the scrapstore was seen as a calling or leisure activity, and all of the scrapstores were dependent on volunteers to some extent. About a third of the scrapstores operated as registered charities and were run by management committees or a board of trustees. Many of the interviews mentioned some sort of membership scheme or donations to help offset costs.

The scrapstores face several challenges, including managing volunteers and space, but the main problem seems to be financial. Often this was expressed in terms of lack of government support or the uncertainty of grants. The success of a scrapstore cannot be measured in merely financial terms. The bottom line for many of the respondents was not how much money they could make, but how much service they could provide. Community involvement and successful partnerships with the local governments were also named as significant achievements.

Only two of the respondents said that their organization had remained unaltered. Most of the scrapstores changed as new ideas came up, and there were attempts to improve services, e.g. development of a delivery service or the packaging and bar-coding of all materials to enable warehouse overview. Several respondents mentioned the need to rationalize, downsize or streamline venues and management. The most common change was that from the vague vision of a handful of people to a definable organizational form. There were also a few respondents who mentioned plans for organizational changes in the future, including the possibility of becoming a social enterprise and linking with other scrapstores nationally and internationally.

Sammanfattning (summary in Swedish)

Uppsatsen utgör en undersökning av *scrapstores*³ i Storbritannien baserat på e-post intervjuer under vår 2010. Resultatet bör ses som en översiktlig indikation av den situation *scrapstores* i Storbritannien befinner sig i eftersom antal svar var begränsat (tretton svar utav 110 enkäter). Huvuddelen av respondenter arbetade med administration eller management. Generellt ansågs *scrapstore* organisationen som ett kall eller ett fritids intresse, och alla *scrapstores* var beroende av någon form av volontär insats. Ungefär en tredje del av *scrapstores* fungerar som välgörenhets organisationer med en styrelse eller ledningsgrupp. Många av intervjuerna nämnde någon form av medlemskap eller donationer som ett sätt att hantera kostnader.

Scrapstores möter flera utmaningar, till exempel hantering av volontärer och lokal, men huvud problemet verkar vara finansiellt. Detta uttrycks ofta i termer av brist på statligt stöd eller anslag. Framgång för en *scrapstore* kan inte enbart mätas i finansiella termer. Kärnpunkten för många av respondenterna var inte hur mycket pengar de kunde tjäna utan hur mycket tjänster de kunde erbjuda. Att vara delaktig i samhället och lyckas samarbeta med den lokala regeringen, nämndes också som en viktig framgång.

Bara två av respondenterna sa att deras organisation var oförändrad. De flesta *scrapstores* förändrades allt eftersom nya idéer kom fram. Det fanns försök att förbättra tjänster, tex utveckling av en leverans tjänst eller paketering och streckkoder till allt material för att underlätta en översikt av lager. Flera av respondenterna nämnde behovet av att rationalisera, eller att dra in på lokaler och administration. Den vanligaste förändringen var från en vag vision tillhörande några personer till en organisationsform som gick att definiera. Några av respondenterna nämnde framtida planer för förändringar i organisation, såsom att blir ett social företag eller att nätverka med andra *scrapstores* på ett nationellt och internationellt plan.

3 *Scrapstores* är sociala företag där återvunnen material görs tillgängligt för konstnärlig sysselsättning. Läs gärna mer på <http://www.wix.com/kulretur/scrapstore>

Appendix 1: copy of interview email

date: Mon, Mar 22, 2010 at 1:37 PM
subject: short interview for future scrapstore in Sweden

Dear Sir or Madam,

Sweden needs a scrapstore! As part of my efforts to open a scrapstore of my own, I am studying Social Entrepreneurship at Glokala Folkhögskola in Malmö, Sweden (please see attachment). For one of my assignments I have chosen to conduct email interviews about the organization of scrapstores in the UK. Your organization has come to my attention thanks to this list of UK scrapstores (<http://www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk/Uk%20Directory%20of%20Scrapstore%20Feb%203.htm>). My hope is that you will take a few minutes to answer the questions below. I will use your response to present a short summary of how scrapstores in the UK operate. If you wish to help me, please respond by Friday next week, i.e. April 3rd.

Feel free to contact me with any questions you might have. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Elisabeth Mueller Nylander

Email Interview Questions

What is the name of your scrapstore and what is your position there?

How is your scrapstore structured or organized?

What difficulties has your organization experienced?

What successes has your organization experienced?

Has the way your scrapstore is organized changed over time? Why or why not?

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Elisabeth Mueller Nylander
tel +46 (0) 730 32 97 99
nylaelis@gmail.com

Appendix 2: copy of assignment (in Swedish)

Uppgift 6: Exempel på organisering.

Deadline: 18 januari 2010.

Undersök ett projekt eller en verksamhet som du finner intressant. Hur har man organiserat sig? Framgångar, svårigheter? Vad är syftet med formen för organisering? Förändras sättet att organisera verksamheten/projektet över tid?

Att intervjua en eller flera personer från det projekt/verksamhet som du väljer att titta på är ett bra sätt att få underlag.

Välj gärna ett exempel som ligger nära de idéer på projekt som du själv har, ofta är det värdefullt att ta del av erfarenheter från de som gör något liknande.

Du kan genomföra uppgiften själv eller i samarbete med någon annan i kursen.

Form för inlämningen är öppen, dvs det går bra använda video, ljud, text eller en annan form du vill pröva.

Omfattning:

Video, ljudinspelning, bildspel, en blogg eller andra former: Du får själv göra en bedömning men en riktlinje för video- och ljudinspelningar kan vara att hålla sig inom 15 minuter.

I text: 3 upp till 5 sidor.

Inlämning:

Lägg till ett nytt inlägg, klicka på "Nytt inlägg" under fliken "Exempel organisering".

Benämnlägg med en titel, t ex det projekt/verksamhet du har undersökt. Skriv något i fältet för inlägget. Ladda upp din inlämning som en bifogad fil.

Lämnar du in på annat sätt än genom text vill vi att du kort beskriver hur man tar del av din presentation.

Kontakta August eller Fredrik om du har någon fråga om hur du kan gå tillväga för att lämna in!

Inlämningforumet är öppet för alla deltagare, men stängt för andra besökare.