

Best Practice

Coordination of support organisations in a national network – Social Entrepreneurship Sweden

The support in brief

Social Entrepreneurship Sweden is a national initiative with nine organisations from different parts of the country, who work together to promote a broader ecosystem and a stronger support structure for social innovation and social entrepreneurship. The focus of the project is to coordinate what already exists in Sweden. This includes coordinating all bodies applying for funding, instead of competing. The collaboration is an opportunity to concretise work towards a society where companies, organisations and public bodies together create solutions to our societal challenges.

The initiative will run from 2021-2023 and is a collaboration between the Social Entrepreneurship Forum (SE Forum), Ashoka Nordic, Coompanion Västerbotten, Reach for Change, Impact Invest, Inkludera, Mikrofonden, Linköping University, Sopact, and is partly funded by Sweden's innovation agency Vinnova and the Postcode Foundation.

The focus during the first two years is on mapping, coordinating and developing support structures, financing solutions, policy proposals, and the development of a long-term strategic partnership with the hope that this can continue from 2023 onwards.

Why the initiative started

Sweden has a strong commitment to Agenda 2030 and to solving sustainability challenges, but the truth is that we are still a long way from achieving the global goals. Sweden is also lagging behind of many of our European friends in terms of the development of social entrepreneurship and social innovation, which shows in the lack of legislation and tax breaks for social enterprises as well as an underdeveloped financial market to support the start-up of new social enterprises. Few politicians understand the importance of social entrepreneurship.

Social Entrepreneurship Sweden thus works with internal coordination between entities that provide support to social entrepreneurs¹, and partly with external coordination for shared lobbying of decision-makers. In this way, Social Entrepreneurship Sweden strengthens the processes that already exist by providing backup.

Who are the target groups for support activities?

Social entrepreneurs are the main target group, and the objective is for them to be able to do what they are good at doing. Another target group is other types of innovation promoters in both the public and private sectors. The goal is to provide help to social entrepreneurs.

Support offered for social innovation

Social Entrepreneurship Sweden will involve existing innovation promoters, as well as private and public actors who want to support social entrepreneurs, to clarify and organise a support structure that promotes socially beneficial innovation and entrepreneurship at all stages. They also want to engage a broad alliance of actors to create a network where they can learn from each other, find common solutions to societal challenges, and together strengthen social entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

Examples of support

Social Entrepreneurship Sweden has launched a digital platform that gathers knowledge, inspiration, lessons learned and tips for everyone interested in learning more about, and being involved in, strengthening sustainable development in Sweden. They are very happy to have succeeded with the platform after only a few months instead of it being the end product. There is currently no definitive plan for what it will look like in a few years, but the intention is that it will grow organically over time. *Who else can they link to? Should they create a back-end version where different types of actors can make contacts?*

The ongoing work that will be presented later is taking place within four work packages: Communication, Policy Design, Cross-Sectoral Collaboration and Long-Term Organisation.

What results have you achieved with your support activities?

Social Entrepreneurship Sweden can already see a clear commitment to coordination. Already when they announced the news about creating the initiative, many people emailed and wrote on LinkedIn that they appreciate how someone is finally going to coordinate the sector and the support structures.

As the project progresses, they will get clearer results, clearer models for cross-sectoral collaboration and policies for, among other things, funding. Their hope is also to build a structure for an organisation to live on after the ending of the project.

What are the key success factors in your work?

Starting from a coordination and collaboration model is something completely new in Sweden, where a lot of work has been done in knowledge silos for many years. All organisations have done their own work, sought the same money and developed their own projects without much collaboration. These organisations have not been able to cooperate, nor have they been encouraged to do so. Coming together and letting go of the prestige and competition is something completely new. Social Entrepreneurship Sweden has here found a model that strengthens everyone – individually and in

partnership. No one can drive all change in Sweden for a stronger ecosystem on their own.

During the first half of the year, Social Entrepreneurship Sweden has been able to do things outside the project. They teamed up around side projects such as [the Nordic Changemaker Map](#), as well as [projects around financing and young community entrepreneurs in the north.](#)

The collaboration allows them to create a broader strategic discussion where they look at who else are in the ecosystem, to build something that more people can, and above all, want to be a part of. The questions they are looking at include what actors want to get out of such a network, and what needs to be strengthened, as well as who can benefit from it. They have a longer-term perspective than the project period ending in March 2023. What Social Entrepreneurship Sweden is doing now should be the beginning of how the ecosystem in Sweden will look like.

Best Practice

Financing and financial coaching for social enterprises – Mikrofonden Sverige

The support in brief

Mikrofonden Sverige is a consortium of regional funds that supports social enterprises in finding the right financing through financial coaching as well as with venture capital.

<https://mikrofonden.se/>

Why the initiative started

Mikrofonden Sverige has been operating for 11 years. They are familiar with different financing solutions and what is required for a social enterprise to be able to receive funding. It can be very difficult for social enterprises to keep track of the different types of funding routes and capital that exist, and Mikrofonden Sverige therefore offers coaching/advice. In 2021, 80 social enterprises contacted Mikrofonden Sverige and received guidance based on their maturity. 15 social enterprises were recommended to apply to Mikrofonden Sverige, of which 13 were approved.

Many of those who are not told to seek funding from Mikrofonden are those who are likely to default on payments. Instead, they are sometimes informed about grants they can apply for from relevant funds, and booked in for consultations with Coompanion to help develop their business and generate increased revenue. This enables them to demonstrate better financial performance and apply for funding in the future.

Other entities who contact Mikrofonden Sverige and who are referred further include social impact companies looking for larger investments (share capital), and are referred to, for example, Impact Invest Scandinavia, or other suitable actors in Europe, such as [Fase's fund ESIF](#).

Another need that Mikrofonden responds to is the challenge faced by work integration social enterprises (WISEs) regarding the time

that elapses between the payment of wages and the receipt of a wage subsidy from the Swedish Public Employment Service, when work integration social enterprises may go a few hundred thousand into the red for short periods. Most companies solve this by the board supplying private funds or homes as guarantees for bank loans. Mikrofonden can, instead, guarantee overdrafts so that the board does not have to do this.

Who benefits from the support?

Mikrofonden Sverige's target group are social economy organisations. These range from foundations to limited liability companies with limited profit distribution (svb) and hybrids in between. It includes those who contribute positively to global objectives and have an ability to repay. Depending on the industry, Mikrofonden Sverige primarily works with entities that are active in work integration, social construction and rural development. These target groups are often excluded by investors.

One reason these target groups are excluded is that they must do more administration if financial institutions are to comply with money laundering regulations. Association-run social enterprises that are not limited companies have no requirement to report to the Swedish Companies Registration Office, so Mikrofonden Sverige needs to spend a lot of time on extensive administration to assess whether an entity can be granted a financing solution. These administrative processes

may entail Mikrofonden Sverige requesting documentation such as meeting minutes, clarifying who the principal is and calling the Enforcement Authority to check all board members.

In a for-profit bank, this customer group is not an option, as it requires extra processing for a low level of lending and the income from interest would not cover the administrative costs.

Support to social innovation

In addition to financial coaching and financing that encourages user/target group engagement, Mikrofonden Sverige also works with:

- **Knowledge and skills development in social innovation** through training for, among others, Coompanion's staff so that they gain increased competence in various financing solutions
- **Cross-sectoral meeting places, processes and networks** through the organisation of two conferences: [The Great Social Enterprise Day](#) and [the Local Economy Days](#). Furthermore, Mikrofonden Sverige usually organises seminars together with Coompanion and is present at other events and meetings.
- **Advice to support social innovation** by actively driving the development of impact measurement, and then providing advice in accordance with the agreed guidelines in Sweden. Firstly, Mikrofonden Sverige, together with Skoopi and Effektfull, is part of an ESF (European Social Fund) project where they will develop a model for how Skoopi and work integration social enterprises will report socially beneficial results. Secondly, Mikrofonden Sverige aims to enable social enterprises to account for how their work is linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Thirdly, Mikrofonden Sverige is part of the Swedish Institute for Standards' efforts to develop a standard for impact measurement. And last but not least, Mikrofonden Sverige is a member of the Swedish National Advisory Board for Impact Investing.
- **Encouraging collaboration between the private and public sectors, and the civil society.** Mikrofonden Sverige encourages collaboration by creating solutions that enable community organisations to receive public funds, such as project grants and

wage grants, through solutions for liquidity. Mikrofonden Sverige also cooperates with the public and private sectors as investors and customers of social enterprises.

Examples of support

A concrete example of how Mikrofonden Sverige works with financing that encourages the involvement of the users/target group is the credit guarantee¹ they gave to [Egnahemsfabriken Tjörn](#) in 2019.

Egnahemsfabriken Tjörn is a member-run economic association that gives housebuilders the opportunity to carry out construction projects in a context where there is community, help and knowledge. They build socially; together, for and with each other.

Using the credit guarantee, the association was able to start its construction factory and already the following year, 2020, they built 18 small houses (Attefallshus – houses up to 30m²). The target group that participated was young adults and unaccompanied (i.e. with no legal guardian) young immigrants. Furthermore, Egnahemsfabriken Tjörn was able to employ 30 people, half of whom were girls and half were unaccompanied young immigrants (who could be both girls and boys, but the majority of unaccompanied young immigrants in Sweden are boys). In addition to the creation of new homes, this also provided work training.

What is the most innovative thing about your support?

Internationally, most micro-funding companies work with microloans for people who are poor, but Mikrofonden Sverige works more structurally through, for example, support for work integration social enterprises and provides organised self-empowerment, where users create common solutions to their problems. This is this kind of initiative that Mikrofonden Sverige enables – it is a hybrid between being a social impact investor and a micro-financer actor.

What conditions do you operate under?

Mikrofonden Sverige is set in a policy landscape of financial operations in Sweden, which is currently adapted for system-critical entities. This means that Mikrofonden Sverige must pay a fee of 15,000 SEK to the Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority each year and report on any money laundering and other

matters. The regulations that exist for financial actors impose a regulatory burden that would actually require a full-time employee to work with compliance, but for Mikrofonden, which only has a part-time CEO, a lot of support comes pro-bono instead, from the banks that are members of the micro-funding consortium.

The funding that Mikrofonden Sverige receives looks a little different within the consortium. In general, project funding is actively sought from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, and Vinnova. Mikrofonden Väst and Mikrofonden Uppsala have capital from the public sector (Gothenburg Municipality, Västra Götaland Region and Uppsala Municipality) which also provides operational support. The fund's equity consists of the 15 members' contribution of SEK 10,000 each (which they will get back if they exit). The members are seven regional micro-funds: Coompanion nationally and in Kronoberg, Ekobanken, JAK-banken, Hela Sverige Ska Leva, Skoopi, Bygdegårdarnas riksförbund, the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union, and Fremia. Each regional fund also has its own member organisations, which are often savings banks, Almi, Länsförsäkringar and others. Members can sit on the board and enter as an investing member, or issue loans to Mikrofonden.

Other support that is important for Mikrofonden is collaboration, such as that of the Social Entrepreneurship Sweden project. A unified voice is needed for social entrepreneurship in Sweden, which is why nine organisations that promote the sector have joined forces to develop joint policy proposals and investigate the start-up of a trade association.

What results have you achieved with your support activities?

Mikrofonden Sverige has now made 125 impact investments through microfinancing and is thus one of the largest in Europe. Furthermore, Mikrofonden has provided guidance on other funding to even more entities than the 125 who received funding. Unfortunately, we don't have the capacity to call everyone to follow up.

Do you intend to scale up your business? If yes, how?

Mikrofonden Sverige's ambition is to grow. Today they have 30 million SEK in the consortium and the goal is to have doubled the fund to 60 million SEK within two to three years. In the long term, the goal is to reach a total of 100 million SEK. This goal corresponds to an estimate of investment in about 80 companies per year that correspond to Mikrofonden Sverige's target group. The idea is to be able to offer a new start-up loan to companies, of up to 250,000 SEK with a five-year repayment term.

In order to achieve this ambition, operational support is needed. Furthermore, Mikrofonden Sverige hopes that the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi) will once again be able to provide compensation for transaction costs.

Finally, Mikrofonden Sverige believes that it would be positive to have follow-up research on their work to strengthen them even more as a support structure in the ecosystem. For example, this follow-up research could look at the societal benefits achieved per krona from different types of investments – implementing a SROI at Mikrofonden in comparison to other financiers.

What are the key success factors in your organisation?

The most central success factor for Mikrofonden Sverige is that the organisation itself consists of actors from the entire ecosystem, such as business advisors, banks and social enterprise associations. This means that the board has all the skills needed to understand the different types of organisations submitting applications. Furthermore, this means that Mikrofonden receives applications from all member organisations' members and customers.

What would help you better support social innovation?

Mikrofonden Sverige would like to see the following two measures taken to strengthen support in the social innovation ecosystem in Sweden:

1. The traditional support structure should not be discriminatory. Today, only for-profit limited liability companies can benefit from

certain promotional efforts, for example from Almi Invest and Saminvest. This needs to change.

2. There should be organisations that are geared towards social enterprises and based on the fact that social enterprises have different circumstances. This organisation could, for example, be Mikrofonden, which could then act as an intermediary for EaSi in Sweden. Today, Sweden has no intermediary for the venture capital that the EU had set aside for social enterprises via the EaSI. Otherwise, the state should provide funds.

Best Practice

Supporting Social Innovation on regional level – Örebro Partnership for Social Innovation

The support in brief

The Partnership for Social Innovation (PSI) is a regional forum for dialogue and exchange of experience on societal challenges and social innovation. It builds on a network of organizations from social economy, the university and public sector in Örebro County. PSI has existed since 2015 and brings together approximately 40 organizations. The aim is to strengthen the conditions for social innovation in the County in order to deal with societal challenges and contribute to a sustainable development. PSI offers competence building, knowledge sharing, funding of social innovation initiatives, project support and provide advice for the development of social innovation.

[The Partnership for Social Innovation \(regionorebrolan.se\)](http://regionorebrolan.se)

Why the initiative started

There was a perceived need in the County for increased dialogue on societal challenges between different sectors, and also to strengthen civil society's role in the dialogue. There was a wish for a meeting arena where the public sector and civil society together could create new social innovations. Other needs were to show who the different actors in the sphere were, their different strengths and capacities, and an ambition to create a greater, shared intelligence through cooperation on societal challenges. An aim was also to strengthen the capacity for regional development, through co-creation.

Who benefits from the support?

Citizens, the region, civil society, public and private sector.

Support to social innovation

PSI is a network of several organizations. When a need for development support is brought up, the first step is the PSI working committee. The nature of the support needed determines which organization within PSI is best suitable for contributing, whether it is about starting a new social enterprise or about specific efforts to meet a concrete societal challenge.

PSI provides support for social innovation in the following areas:

Webinars on societal challenges

The webinars on societal challenges are a meeting place for the public sector, business, the university, social economy and civil society to focus on and identify current societal challenges based on the different actor's respective knowledge and perspectives. Topics have been, for example: An inclusive labour market for young people who neither work nor study, how to strengthen trust in the welfare system and how to act together to deal with societal challenges.

The webinars make it possible to build networks, create alliances, develop collaborative projects and take advantage of ideas that are useful to citizens and society at large. The webinars are filmed and published on the PSI webpage (Swedish only).

Advice and support

PSI guides those who are looking for advice and support in developing social innovation to turn to some of the participating organizations, such as Coompanion and Stiftelsen Activa, who are organizations within PSI whose main task is to provide advice and support in the development of social innovation.

Project support and coordination

Those with an idea of a project can contact PSI to get tips on suitable advisors in the innovation support system, develop ideas and formulate project applications together with PSI, get information on current national, European and international calls

Partners within PSI who run projects can get support from the partnership on project applications and project coordination, and to find partners to collaborate on joint applications. PSI also functions as a regional reference group in projects and in European and international proposals.

Funding

In Örebro County, there are special annual development funds (500 000 SEK) for social innovations to apply for. The formal decisions are made by Region Örebro County, but the decisions are prepared by PSI.

How is the work supported by national/regional/local policies?

PSI has contributed to strengthening formulations on social innovation in their Regional Development Strategy for example. There is also a four-year action plan for civil society and the social economy with formulations that support social innovation.

The national strategy on social innovation has been a support – but is perceived as too vague in the present formulations. PSI representatives talk about the national strategy in Scotland as a good example – a strategy that is running for ten years, with a substantial budget.

Is the support supported by funding, research or other measures?

PSI has been successful in coordinating the network without specific funding for many years. Recent decisions from Region Örebro County has strengthened PSI in organizing certain activities, such as the webinars on societal challenges.

When it comes to working with the academia, Örebro University is in the partnership, and in some international projects PSI collaborates with universities abroad.

What results/outcomes can be seen from the support?

Some of the results of PSI are:

- An increased recognition of the importance of creating opportunities for social entrepreneurs in the County.
- A coordination page for social entrepreneurs is set up, where social entrepreneurs and their services are made visible, in order to open up cooperation with public and private sector
- The partnership has been able to strengthen formulations on social innovation in policies and strategies (Regional development strategy, innovation strategy for the region)
- The partnership is mentioned in the same policies as a platform to catalyze social innovation.
- PSI has established a funding structure to support the development of solutions for societal challenges
- PSI is recognized as an interesting support structure for social innovation in Sweden, internationally, and by the EC.
- PSI is established as a forum to coordinate cooperation on societal challenges in the County.
- PSI is used as a Swedish stakeholder group in several European projects funded by different programmes, for example the RaiSE-project (funded by Interreg Europe) and CHERRIES (funded by Horizon).

Has the work been scaled?

PSI started 2015 as continuation of a previous network. It has a long development history but is replicable to other regions and counties.

What is innovative in the support, and what are the success factors, according to the organizer?

The most innovative aspect is the coordination between different actors and that PSI has become an essential link that connects development work at local / municipal, regional and European level.

Success factors for PSI have been to use,

strengthen and build on policy support and key organisations in the county. The creation of the partnership – a long term, established cross sectoral cooperation.

What needs are identified, for improved support to social innovation?

A revision of the national strategy for social entrepreneurship and social innovation is needed, to secure policy support. A strategy that is long term and includes funding.

To strengthen the innovation support system, that does not sufficiently support social innovation. There is also a need for more coherence in the support system, to know who does what, who are experts on social innovation, and how to work together to strengthen SI.

There is also a need to strengthen the work with social innovation in municipalities – where there is a lack of coordination.

Best Practice

Collaboration and knowledge exchange for strengthened social innovation through cross-sectoral meeting places – Forum for Social Innovation Sweden

The support in brief

Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (FFSIS) is a national knowledge and collaboration platform for social innovation in Sweden. FFSIS was founded at Malmö University in 2010 and has been developed in close cooperation with the City of Malmö. FFSIS has two main purposes. The first one is to be a knowledge platform that actively follows what is happening in the field, both in Sweden and internationally, and ensure that knowledge and experiences are developed, shared and utilised. The second purpose is to be a collaboration platform. They bring people together and arrange and facilitate meeting arenas across organisational boundaries around urgent societal challenges, where social innovation is part of the solution.

In collaboration with academia, business, public and idea-driven organisations, FFSIS works to promote the development of knowledge and build the capacity needed to strengthen social innovation as a societal force in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Why the initiative started

In order to meet the societal challenges Sweden is facing, there is a great need to develop and create new innovative and creative models and methods for knowledge exchange and collaboration between the private and public sectors, as well as civil society and academia. All sectors have common needs and have expressed willingness to find new forms of collaboration that create innovation, added value and growth.

Who benefits from the support?

The target groups for FFSIS's support activities are professionals who work with various societal challenges in academia, civil society, business, the public sector, and hybrid organisations.

Support offered for social innovation

During the past two years, FFSIS has targeted five priority thematic areas: innovation and collaboration for future work, children's rights, digital inclusion, equal health, and safety in the public space. Within each area, FFSIS carries out external monitoring to identify societal challenges in areas that have not previously been highlighted from a social innovation perspective, as well as relevant actors working on these challenges. Here, FFSIS aims to target a variety of actors in terms of which sector of society they belong to, which industry they operate in and a mix of well-established and newer actors. These thematic areas thus serve as frameworks for the two tasks; to act as both a knowledge and collaboration platform.

Within each area, FFSIS arranges different meeting arenas:

- knowledge-sharing webinars that are free and open to all
- coalitions that gather around 20 actors on specific societal challenges, in which the actors can exchange knowledge and thereby gain perspective on their own operations and, above all, find new potential partners for future projects and activities
- network meetings that focus on broadening networks and collaborations.

The meetings take place both digitally and physically, which allows for the participation of different target groups.

The thematic work focuses on needs and issues, which allows for exchanges between knowledge silos, and makes social innovation available to new target groups who have previously worked with societal benefits but not from a social innovation perspective.

In addition to the meeting places that FFSIS arranges to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration within the thematic areas, the organisation also gathers knowledge about the field as a whole. This is an important premise for being able to invite actors to more focused meeting places.

FFSIS provides lectures on social innovation for interested parties, collaborates with Göran Bredinger on the award of the [Göran Bredinger scholarship](#) (a scholarship of 50,000 SEK to a social entrepreneur at an early stage), and is a member of [the Swedish National Advisory Board for Impact Investing](#), [Impactful](#) and the [Euclid Network](#). In addition to being a member of the Euclid Network (EN), FFSIS is a partner of EN in the implementation of [the European Social Enterprise Monitor \(ESEM\)](#). ESEM aims to gather the data that decision-makers need – nationally and internationally – to create better conditions for social entrepreneurs to successfully run their operations in Sweden and the EU.

One of the conclusions in FFSIS's report from 2020–2021 is that social innovations and social enterprises contribute to the development of the system innovation that Sweden's welfare society demands, but could play an even more significant role in urgent societal challenges such as equal health, children's rights, digital inclusion, safe public environments, and

future work where social innovation is an important part of the solution.

Finally, FFSIS forwards social entrepreneurs looking for advice to bodies that can provide them with direct support.

One example: Coalitions

FFSIS, like everyone else, experienced a changed landscape in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic broke out. The knowledge-sharing seminars were transformed into webinars, but this reduced contacts between the participants, and there was a need for meeting places where actors working with different societal challenges could meet for a more in-depth knowledge exchange and to find potential partners. This led FFSIS to develop the 'Coalition Method'.

A coalition is a group of actors who meet on four occasions to join forces around a current societal challenge. The Coalition Method contains a clear meeting arrangement for each occasion that aims to promote an open and inclusive climate. A strong focus is placed on building relationships between the participants.

One of the actors, the Youth 2030 Movement, which participated in the first coalition in the autumn of 2020, then became a partner of FFSIS and Umeå University, which together created 'The Coalition for Young People's Community Engagement in Rural Areas' in the autumn of 2021. This social challenge was chosen because many young adults in rural areas feel that they are not needed where they live and feel forgotten by the municipality and the state. According to doctoral student Maja Adolfsson, who was one of the organisers, many young people describe a lack of activities and meeting places where they live and say they lack confidence in the future. This coalition brought together researchers and representatives from various civil society organisations, municipalities, regions and youth projects focusing on rural areas. A reunion with the coalition is scheduled for the end of March 2022, to follow up on the results and provide continued inspiration for joint negotiations. Applications for this occasion have flooded in.

FFSIS will continue to organise coalitions, as well as evaluate and develop them. At present, the results indicate that the coalitions enable

the participants to meet relevant actors they otherwise would not have time to contact or be familiar with. The participants gain new knowledge about how others act on the societal challenge and thereby also gain a new perspective on their own activities. Furthermore, the coalitions create peer pressure that encourages the participants to address societal challenges with action. Finally, the coalitions are an attractive target group for other actors who want to get input on their work with societal challenges – they build capacity for collaboration with potential to address societal challenges.

What is the most innovative thing about your support?

The unique thing about FFSIS's support is that the meeting places and methods span various sectors and often cross the boundaries between different industries.

Furthermore, FFSIS's position as a promoter of social innovation and as a societal driver for the implementation of Agenda 2030 is unique – through this goal, FFSIS becomes a 'neutral' actor without a 'hidden' agenda.

What conditions do you operate under?

FFSIS at Malmö University is recognised as a national unifying knowledge and collaboration platform for social innovation with its headquarters in Malmö. This recognition has come from previous and current governments, Vinnova and a large number of actors from all sectors.

The Swedish government launched a national strategy for social innovation and social entrepreneurship in 2018–2020, which still applies today. One of the priorities highlighted in the strategy is the need to 'develop and share knowledge and to create meeting places'. This objective is also connected to the other four objectives. FFSIS has an important mission in implementing the strategy.

Financiers, such as Sweden's innovation agency Vinnova, have, because of the strategy, supported projects to develop social innovation, including FFSIS. In 2020, with funding from Vinnova, FFSIS continued its establishment at several higher education institutions across the country, which are building regional knowledge and collaboration platforms; in Luleå, Umeå, Örebro, Jönköping

and Syd, with FFSIS in Malmö as the national office and headquarters for the establishment.

What factors are important for you to become an even stronger player?

The forthcoming Social Fund programme, ESF+, has its own social innovation programme area to enable innovative solutions in social inclusion, the labour market and education, and the perspective will also be included in the implementation of the programme as a whole.

What results have you achieved with your support activities?

It is evident that FFSIS's work has contributed to Sweden's strategy for social entrepreneurship and social innovation, especially to the goal of developing and sharing knowledge and creating meeting places, by strengthening the conditions for social innovation as a societal force and cementing links to interesting international environments.

Do you intend to scale up your business? If yes, how?

Yes, the ambition of Forum for Social Innovation Sweden is to establish itself at more higher education institutions in Sweden.

What are the key success factors in your work?

Long-term basic funding from Malmö University and the City of Malmö and, furthermore, FFSIS's many skilled employees.

What would help you become an even better support for social innovation?

A continuation of the national strategy for social innovation and social entrepreneurship with renewed funding. Furthermore, it would be beneficial if social innovation was an explicit objective for actors promoting innovation and social sustainability.

Best Practice

Universities connecting to strengthen social innovation

– Forum for Social Innovation Sweden

In 2018, the Forum for Social Innovation Sweden scaled up its work through the establishment of a national knowledge platform for social innovation with regional nodes, connecting the Universities of Malmö, Jönköping, Örebro, Luleå and Umeå. The platform is established to create knowledge on and meeting places for social innovation across the country. The platform aim is also to strengthen the focus of social innovation in research, to contribute to social innovation practice through research-based knowledge and to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation in addressing societal challenges.

Website: Socialinnovation.se

Need of the support provided

The research field on social innovation is rapidly growing in Sweden and internationally. Much of the knowledge on social innovation has evolved in the practical field, rather than through academic research. Research engagement in cross-sectoral cooperation for social innovation exists but is not as extensive as in technological innovation. With that background, there was a need to strengthen researchers and universities in the field of social innovation and to strengthen the role of academia in cross-sectoral social innovation. There was also an aim for the Forum for Social Innovation Sweden to scale up and go national, strengthening the social innovation field with the academy as a base.

Since 2008, Swedish universities have had the possibility to establish innovation offices through a government proposition. The role of the innovation offices is to promote the innovation, tech transfer and the societal impact of research, including social innovation.

Who benefits from the support?

Universities, researchers, the social innovation field (incl. innovators, innovator promoters, public sector etc)

The support provided for social innovation

Some of the support provided from the academic cooperation are described below, together with some of the results:

A formalised network of academic nodes contributing to social innovation

both in their region and nationally. A formalisation of cross sectoral cooperation based in academia, with the aim of tackling societal challenges and contributing to the goals of Agenda 2030 more efficiently.

More meeting arenas for social innovation. Examples are:

- **Social Innovation Summit**
The network has contributed to the yearly conference Social Innovation Summit, connecting practitioners, researchers, public and private sectors, increasing knowledge and cooperation on social innovation. About 5200 participants have taken part in 70 different meeting places such as seminars and workshops during the last two years.
- **Expanded national and international networking** for participating universities. An increase in partnerships and collaboration (55 in Sweden and 12 international)
- **Increased cross sectoral cooperation** for social innovation in the regions the universities belong to.
- **Research in co-creation – films and articles**
The FFSIS academic nodes network have produced a series of examples of how research in cross sectoral cooperation contributes to a positive societal development.

- **A meeting arena for researchers for social innovation** has been established in northern nodes, that will be established nationally in 2022.
- **Examples from the northern universities – Social innovation in the North**
The Universities of Luleå and Umeå, in cooperation with municipalities and the NGO Coompanion, have arranged an annual regional conference on Social Innovation since 2017. The conference has attracted 150-200 participants each year from all sectors of society and has shared research, good practice from and created opportunities for collaboration in the northern Counties in Sweden. LTU and Umeå University has arranged research gatherings at the conference Social Innovation in the North and also arrange meetings at the Universities for researchers with an interest in the field.

What would you say are the most innovative aspects of your support?

The focus of connecting research to social innovation, connecting academia to practical development measures.

Is your work supported by national/ regional/local policies?

The platform was started in order to meet needs described, which were also formulated in and strengthened by the formulations in the national strategy for social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

Upscaling

The initiative is in itself a form of upscaling, taking FFSIS further to other Universities, also strengthening FFSIS, involving four new universities. Other universities have expressed their interest in joining the collaboration. The upscaling of FFSIS continues, and can also be done in other countries.

Key succesfactors

- The national steering groups consist of pro vice-chancellors from each university, providing ownership and sustainability for the platform, avoiding being sidelined
- Connecting the work to research and education at the respective universities
- Strengthening the regional, cross sectoral

work on societal challenges through a more active role of the universities

- Joining forces to create greater impact

Funding

The first phase of the work was funded by the Swedish Innovation Agency, Vinnova, and co-funded by the universities. Further funding applications are expected.

Needs for a better support to social innovation

- An updated national strategy on social innovation
- Connected funding for both research and cooperation
- Long-term funding

Best Practice

Supporting social innovation through the business innovation system – The Joint Way

The Joint Way is a web-based toolbox - designed to help increase Sweden's innovation/business promoters' abilities to identify, attract and support social innovations. The Joint Way was developed as a project, financed by Sweden's national innovation agency VINNOVA during 2018-2020. The toolbox was designed in collaboration between business incubators, consultants and academia, with Ideon Innovation as project lead. The toolbox is freely available at: www.thejointway.se

Need of the support provided

Research shows that the traditional business/innovation promoting system in Sweden does not sufficiently support social innovators and social entrepreneurs. They often fail to identify, attract and support these and their ideas. There is a lack of competence as well as supportive methods and approaches that fit their needs. The project was started in order to increase innovation/business promoters abilities in this area.

Who benefits from the support?

The innovation/business promotion system and social innovators.

The support provided for social innovation

The support consists of the web-based toolbox. The toolbox provides descriptions and examples of good practice for supporting social innovators/entrepreneurs in relation to the:

- **Inflow of social innovators/entrepreneurs**
How to reach out to social innovators, to make them feel at home and welcome in the services of business/innovation promoting system in the first phase. There are also methods on how to assess the potential of social innovations, with the help of adapted criteria and forms.
- **Incubation**
How to support the social innovators through the incubation process, with methods for supporting social innovators

to formulate their business plans, methods to show the values of social innovations, guides to funding for social innovators, how to clarify innovators connection to the sustainability goals etc.

- **Outflow**
How to support the social innovators as they exit the services of the innovation promoters, good practice on how to create networks, opportunities for support from other organisations.
- **Strategy and management**
Tools that can be used to manage the services of the business promoters towards supporting social innovation, through including a focus on social innovation in their strategies, goals, follow up and the communication from the organization.
- **Training material**
Films and examples of exercises that the innovation promoters can use in order to raise awareness and competence of the staff, to better support social innovators.

The most innovative aspects of the support

The innovative contribution is to provide a comprehensive toolbox that makes available a wide range of tools for supporting social innovators/entrepreneurs, without charge. The toolbox has been developed through innovative co-creation, with engagement from innovation/business promoters, research and consultants.

Support by national/regional/local policies

The toolbox is in line with Sweden's national strategy for social entrepreneurship and innovation, that advocates improved support to social innovators/entrepreneurs.

Is it strengthened by funding, research or other supportive measures?

The project included an innovation researcher, and was research based. It was funded by Sweden's national innovation agency VINNOVA.

Results of the support

There is a web-based toolbox that provides methods and knowledge on how to support social innovation, freely available to innovation/business promoters. The project has strengthened the opportunities for Sweden's innovation promoters to identify, attract and support social innovators/entrepreneurs.

The project's overall goal has been to provide knowledge, raise awareness, as well as develop, test and disseminate practical tools to support social innovators/entrepreneurs. For the participating organisations, these goals have been reached.

Upscaling

The toolbox is presently nationally available in Swedish. The plan is to also make it internationally available in English, see <https://en.thejointway.se/>.

Central success factors

That the toolbox was research based and co-created with innovation/business promoters, consultants and academia. It was designed based on the supportive practices of the innovation/business promoting system, in order to fit their needs and routines.

What would improve the support for social innovations?

That the toolbox was actively managed and developed, as an integrated part of an organization with long term funding.

Best Practice

Umeå's innovation platform for sustainable cities – Social Progress Innovation Sweden

The innovation platform Social Progress Innovation Sweden (SPIS) is a multidisciplinary arena, connecting people, knowledge and tools in order to co create ideas to solve complex societal challenges. The purpose is to co create to strengthen the innovation capacity and ability to solve complex sustainability challenges in the municipality. The innovation platform is managed by Umeå municipality and the research institute RISE. SPIS focuses on social sustainability, with the goal of finding new ways to solve old problems, in order to meet the challenges of the future. The innovation platform provides support to cooperation over organizational borders, mobilization of resources and knowledge, methods to solve complex problems and support in the use of creative and activating methods.

Need of the support provided

The background of the project is a recognized need to solve complex societal challenges in new ways. In this work, Umeå builds on the experiences from previous and ongoing innovation initiatives. Many of these projects have focused on cross sectoral cooperation and innovative ways of solving complex societal challenges in the areas of for example climate neutrality, urban planning and integration. A challenge in this work for the municipality is to connect innovation processes with the traditional line operation in the municipality. The culture and tradition of leadership and planning in public administration is considered to have a need to be updated and redirected in order to create a modern, socially sustainable municipality that invites, listens to and co creates with citizens and various actors in the city.

There are also an increasing number of voices in society, citizens, private sector, who want to be invited and listened to. They want to discuss problems and ideas in new ways, and sometimes also challenge the traditional ways to reach the public administration.

There is also a described need for municipalities to work more explorative, in cooperation and to be challenge driven. Working with innovation in public sector is

about adaptability and the ability to include different perspectives, "to understand societal challenges from the outside rather than from the inside" . Municipalities need to include those that the organization exists for in development work, and this involves crossing more boundaries of the organization, between competence fields and perspectives.

Who benefits from the support?

Umeå's municipal management administration firstly, then all actors in the municipality – citizens, civil society, academy, public and private sector.

The support provided:

Umeå's innovation platform rests on the thesis that development of a social sustainable city is only possible if all the citizens participate. This can be achieved if the municipality and other public organisations, citizens, the civil society and the private sector talk and collaborate with each other. The main focus of the innovation platform is therefore to establish a strong and sustainable cross-sectoral organisation that can coordinate ongoing innovation processes, and work as a hotbed for new initiatives. Support includes providing methods and tools for promoting social innovation, cross sectoral opportunities for cooperation, arranging/providing cross-

sectoral meeting arenas and networks, advisory services to support social innovators and guidance to funding. Specific support forms are:

- **Innovationlabs**

A format where different sectors, organisations and administrations meet and co create over a period of time to discuss challenges and suggest solutions to challenges in the municipality.

- **Umecom**

Umecom is community where citizens, companies, associations, researchers meet to explore solutions to challenges in society. It can involve co creating to make Umeå a greener, more equal, inclusive, circular and creative. It can concern a business idea, a call to action, a campaign or initiative. SPIS attempts to open up the organization in the municipality, to provide opportunities for citizens to be involved in the development in the municipality, in a simple way. The attempt is to bring people together, brainstorm and co create ideas.

The most innovative aspects of the support

The innovation of SPIS is to try to challenge the traditional organisation of the municipality, to try to open up and find new more cross sectoral ways to work, and increase the dialogue and co creation with the citizens. We want to try to develop local democracy. Not new to the world, but for us in Umeå.

Supported by national/regional/local policies?

At both local and regional level there is support in policy documents for work with social innovation. For example, Västerbottens regional development strategy (2020-2030) and the forthcoming regional innovation strategy highlight the need to work with initiatives to meet the major challenges of the environment and climate as well as social issues that strongly characterize sustainable development.

Local policy documents that shed lights on this include Umeå municipalitys strategic plan and the soon to be adopted programs for (1) Social sustainability and (2) Digital transformation.

Is it strengthened by funding, research or other supportive measures?

SPIS is cofunded by the Swedish Innovation Agency for three years.

Results of the support

- The work is asked for internally in the municipality. SPIS has also been contacted by several other Swedish municipalities who are interested in their work, to share their experiences.
- Discussions from meeting arenas end up in board meetings and influence decisions, for example on digital meeting places for elderly, digital centers for youth.
- Prototypes have been developed for developing the elderly care, on how to live well as a senior in Umeå. A prototype for modern generational housing has been taken to discussions of detail planning with the housing companies.
- New networks
- New forms for cooperation in the municipality
- In 2021 SPIS carried out three innovation labs, six prototypes and one digital Umecom event with four citizen workshops. In 2022 the ambition is accomplish at least six innovation lab, several prototypes, six Umecom events and a major citizen-driven festival during the spring.
- In order to intensify the work started by SPIS internally in the municipality, an innovation team will be formed in 2022. This is to further strengthen the internal capacity and ability to innovate and to bring courage to dare test new ways of working, evaluate, redo and hopefully implement and scale up in more of the municipalitys activities.

What are the central success factors of your work?

To have funding for an arena where it is possible to try, explore, fail and to try again. The support of managers, staff with the right competence and a supportive environment. The external funding means we can explore in an innovative way. Managers taking questions to a higher level. To focus on what the municipality is doing – but doing it in a new way.

What would make it possible to provide an even better support for social innovations?

To have clearer national policies and communication on the importance of social innovation, that would encourage and provide even stronger support from managers in public sector. Public sector managers need to prioritise - have space in calendars and budget and increased competence to support in the development of social innovation.

Best Practice

Funding of social innovation – Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency

Vinnova is Sweden's innovation agency. Through funding, Vinnova supports organisations from different parts of society to innovate in selected focus areas. The aim is to improve Sweden's opportunities to change to a sustainable society, make Sweden competitive and as described on Vinnovas webpage, "our world a different place".

In the last years, Vinnova has had a number of funding initiatives/calls aiming to strengthen social entrepreneurs, the ecosystem of social innovation/entrepreneurship and has funded a large number of socially innovative initiatives. In the coming years, a strong focus lies on strengthening civil society and make sure this sector is part of cross sectoral cooperation for innovation. Another focus lies on integrating social innovation more into all innovation funding offered by Vinnova.

Need of the support provided

Being a government agency under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, Vinnovas work on Social Innovation is based on the Government's strategy for social entrepreneurship and social innovation. A governmental mission was given to Vinnova (2018-2020) to strengthen the social enterprises to take a stronger role in solving societal challenges, and to strengthen public sector's work with social enterprises. The national strategy and Vinnovas reports from the mission, describes that social innovation is needed in order to meet the complex challenges facing society and to meet the global goals connected to Agenda 2030. In order to develop new solutions, new ideas, methods and cooperations, social entrepreneurship and social innovation can strengthen the capacity for innovation by including all sectors in society, and create opportunities that traditional research and innovation programs might not fulfill. On the yearly conference – Swedish Innovation Days, Vinnova representatives highlight the need to "innovate how we innovate", in order to meet the global goals.

Who benefits from the support?

Civil society organisation, social entrepreneurs and their target groups. All sectors, through the cross sectoral cooperation. Support provided:

Funding of social innovation

Vinnova has supported social innovation through different calls. A number of funding initiatives have been open, aiming to strengthen social entrepreneurs, the ecosystem of social innovation/entrepreneurship and a large number of socially innovative project initiatives.

Design of funding to encourage social innovation

Vinnova designs most of it's funding that is meant to strengthen cross sectoral, socially innovative, initiatives. Vinnova aims to integrate social innovation into all their funding initiatives.

Specific funding for social innovation in civil society. Specific funding initiatives for civil society, to make it possible for civil society to be part of cross sectoral cooperation in innovation initiatives. See for example: [The transformation of civil society and Civijsamhällets lösningar för klimatomställning.](#)

One part of this support is communication measures such as a podcast on social innovation, that highlights the role of civil society in innovation and aims to show how relevant civil society is when innovating for a sustainable society. [Podden Innovation: Civilsamhället – en innovativ kraft att räkna med.](#)

Funding the ecosystem for social entrepreneurship and social innovation

Vinnova has funded initiatives to include social innovation support in the traditional business/innovation promoting system, to strengthen civil society actors role in the social innovation ecosystem and also tools to make it possible to measure effects of social innovation initiatives.

I.e. [Samhälls-entreprenörskap Sverige](#) and [Swedish Changemaker Map](#).

Working with a mission-oriented approach

Vinnova has adopted a mission oriented approach in their work, to achieve changes at the system level. This is a way to steer funding towards thinking and cooperating in new ways, where different actors work together towards common objectives. Using a mission oriented approach is a way to ensure cross sectoral cooperation and involving those concerned, creating collaborative processes with a common goal. Through this approach, social dimensions and social innovation is integrated in the funding initiatives.

[The road to sustainable change - missions as a way of working](#) and [Metoder och nätverk för innovation i civilsamhället](#)

What would you say are the most innovative aspects of your support?

Steering funding towards solving societal challenges and working with change on a systemic level. Ensuring cross sectoral cooperation and social innovation through designing funding initiatives. Strengthening civil society's capacities to be involved in solutions for a sustainable society.

Results of the support

Some of the results from Vinnovas' initiatives to support social innovation are:

- Increased competence among social enterprises and public sector on possibilities to cooperate to solve societal challenges
- New models for and examples of cross sectoral cooperation
- Increased competence and methods in the traditional business/innovation promoting system to support social entrepreneurship and social innovation
- A number of social innovations have been funded and are continuing their work after the funding from Vinnova
- Increased knowledge and methods and organizations supporting impact assessment of social innovation. More support available to measure impact of social innovation, in public, private sector and civil society.
- The eco system for social innovation has been supported
- A number of meeting places – conferences, seminars and workshops on social entrepreneurship and social innovation.
- The knowledge and practice on public procurement of social entrepreneurship has increased
- Clarification of the legal limits on procurement - has made it easier for public sector to cooperate with and procure social enterprises.

What would help you provide an even better support for social innovations? Describe needs for improved support for social innovations, for your organization and also on a national level.

Vinnova has an ongoing, long term work to support the innovation capacity in civil society. This work aims to create sustainable opportunities for co creating, providing opportunities to experiment and upscaling of innovative solutions. This needs to be supported /matched by new ways of cooperation and shared ambitions from other sectors and organisations.

Other challenges for the social innovation ecosystem are for example:

- Funding
- Measuring effects
- Knowledge, research and meeting places
- Strengthening the support system for social innovation

Best Practice

Sweden's Municipalities and Regions' (SKR)'s Development Network Social Enterprises

The support in brief

Based on the Swedish Municipalities and Regions' (SKR's) handbook "A new path to innovative welfare solutions - a handbook on collaboration with social enterprises", SKR is now running an ESF-funded development network with twelve committed municipalities for two years. The goal is to create models for sustainable collaboration structures and more business between municipalities and social enterprises - contributing to a successful societal development and a broadened labour market.

[Film from start-up meeting for The development network for social enterprises](#)

Need of the support provided

Municipalities and regions see the power that social enterprises and civil society can contribute. They also recognize the interest of these actors in contributing to solving societal challenges. But it is often unclear what a social enterprise is, whether actors in civil society count as social enterprises, and what opportunities there are for municipalities and regions to collaborate and create businesses with social enterprises. Thus, skills development is needed to dare to tread this untrodden ground. Through The Development Network Social Enterprises, the twelve participating municipalities work together, exchange experiences and become more courageous — it's a forum where they can get wise together.

As a good project should, this network has bought two years for the municipalities to create models for sustainable collaboration structures and more business between municipalities and social enterprises. It has enabled a development that had to be done.

What are the target groups for your support activities?

SKR invited all municipalities in Sweden to apply for a place in The Development Network Social Enterprises. However, it was a short response time. Furthermore, SKR had a requirement that both the municipal director and the chairman of the municipal board should sign an expression of interest. The criteria ensured a structural commitment instead of relying solely on the driving force of enthusiasts. The outcome was a cross-section of Sweden's municipalities, and the twelve participating municipalities are:

- Helsingborg
- Hudiksvall
- Härjedalen
- Karlstad
- Laxå
- Malmö
- Mölndal
- Sölvesborg
- Söderhamn
- Tierp
- Uddevalla
- Umeå

When SKR wrote the project, they had the requirement that the administrations that work with business issues, procurement and the labour market should participate. However, they had no requirements as to who the local project coordinator would be as they wanted the municipalities to decide this for themselves. The way it has developed is that the project teams in the municipalities are often larger than what was assumed in the planning stage and extend over several administrations. Municipal companies also participate in many municipalities, and a

sustainability or civil society coordinator is usually engaged. In the case of extensive project teams, they have subsequently organized themselves into smaller working groups.

The support offered for social innovation and/or social entrepreneurship

The network's support to the municipalities is time to implement this development in how they will collaborate with and enter into business with social enterprises. But more specifically, SKR offers locally adapted process support. This was initially intended to be given locally for one day per year and for all twelve municipalities during four joint meetings per year. With Covid-19, the support was converted to digital, which resulted in the project staff being able to do more. They hold breakfast meetings with all project teams and project meetings with the twelve project leaders. In addition, they can provide support at steering group meetings, committee meetings, local skills development days and inspiration days organized by the municipal project teams for their local politicians. The local support was utterly different than planned, which turned out for the better. SKR has now also been able to have individual sessions with the project teams and furthermore offers the scheduled full days per municipality.

The first physical network meeting was held in May 2022. At that time, representatives from all project teams came to the work-integrating social company Basta in Nykvarn. There, the network had a more extended study visit, exchanges of experience and a training opportunity on effect measurement.

Examples of support

Among the participants in the network, a couple of municipalities stand out, which had come a little further before the project started. Tierp, for example, had a head start through a newly written guideline for civil society cooperation. Through their participation, they now have a large project team with both managers and officials, making it quick to raise issues and make decisions. They have achieved their internal collaboration but also had time for external collaboration. The team has mapped actors and meets them every two weeks, where they discuss needs and upcoming procurements. The other

municipalities in the region are now following this example and writing regional projects with Tierp as a mentor - a success story.

The city of Mölndal had a clear political mission and solid political support, facilitating the journey towards a local policy for the city's collaboration with social enterprises. However, Mölndal had, at first, difficulty seeing how cooperation and business with social enterprises was in line with their mission in terms of the municipal business support initiatives. After a long exploratory conversation where all the ambiguities were raised, it was a big turnaround. Now, this initiative is seen as the future, and the local social enterprises have workshops with the municipality to explore what they need to do together to promote social entrepreneurship in the municipality. And officials and politicians in the municipality go on study visits to the social enterprises to gain increased insight and knowledge of what they can contribute.

Many municipalities were already good at procurement before the project. There are many different success stories to highlight here. For example, the Umeå municipality surveyed all administrations' future needs and asked, "what could we find for business?". In Umeå, SKR has supported skills development for the municipality's politicians during four voluntary meetings of two hours.

Härjedalen municipality has no local social enterprises, so participation in the network has become a chance for them to start working with this. The municipality has started a company training which they will carry out with Coompanion to produce the first social companies. This training will be developed in collaboration with the target group.

In summary, SKR's ambition is to be present at all times, meet local needs and contribute to creating sustainable structures that survive after the project.

What is the most innovative thing about your support?

SKR's Development Network Social Enterprises try to organize the municipalities for innovation - organize the municipalities so they can receive the power of innovation from someone else.

What are the prerequisites for you to be able to run your business?

There are three important conditions for the development of this network. First, the project is funded by the ESF. Secondly, it could not have been implemented without Anders Bro, Ronney Olsson, and Åsa Bengtsson - essential employees at SKR who form the core of the process support. Thirdly, the project depended on the municipalities' willingness and ambition to progress in the area.

Do you have the ambition to scale up your business? If so, how?

Previously, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth had a government assignment to support the development of social enterprises, and the regions played a major role here. This assignment has now ended, so SKR sees that it would be good to have a project in the future that builds the competence for collaboration and business with social companies at both municipal and regional levels.

What would help you run an even better support business for social innovation / social entrepreneurship?

SKR identify some challenges in working with social innovation and entrepreneurship, especially the ambiguity around the area - what is a social enterprise? It's easy to get caught up in that discussion. However, in many parts of Europe, e.g., a social enterprise is a separate form of organization. Such clarity would markedly simplify the work and accelerate the development in Sweden.

Another challenge is the Swedish Public Employment Service's reform, which SKR has chosen to work alongside instead of being stopped by it. There are efforts that the Swedish Public Employment Service could make to direct job seekers to work-integrating social enterprises. However, now during the reform, this is not done to the desired extent.

Best Practice

Coompanion Sweden

The support in brief

Coompanion Sweden is a national umbrella organisation, with Coompanion offices in all 21 regions of Sweden, promoting cooperative entrepreneurship - entrepreneurship that takes place on equal terms, where ownership and governance are democratic, and sustainability (from both a social, economic and environmental perspective) is safeguarded. Together they have around 1000 members in organisations, cooperatives, social enterprises, study associations and public actors.

Need of the support provided

In a world that often talks about tech, quick solutions and return on investment, Coompanion upholds the values that the cooperative stands for and that influence how companies and businesses are run. Furthermore, Coompanion works for democracy, equality and social benefit and to counteract the polarisation that is taking place in society in so many areas and issues.

In society, there are few business support actors working on business development for existing enterprises. Nyföretagarcentrum (The Centre for New Business) works almost exclusively with start-ups. When it comes to business development linked to social entrepreneurship, it is more complex, involves longer processes, and the business model is not always easy to see, requiring more extensive resources. Within this setting, Coompanion contributes with the necessary resources and knowledge of the social entrepreneurs' complex business. Sometimes entrepreneurs come back after 30 years when new needs have arisen in the business and for advice and support. Together with the entrepreneurs, Coompanion helps them move forward. The clients are partners - an "extended family".

Finally, the fact that Coompanion is present throughout Sweden means they can be involved in projects that meet local needs such as rural development, sustainability and social innovation. They also help to organise entrepreneurship schools, hackathons, workshops and dialogue forums. In addition, Coompanion's governmental mandate

enables the organisation to support many different types of collaborative processes and to promote cooperative values in various contexts.

Need of the support provided

Coompanion helps people with business idea development and business development. They support people in developing new and existing businesses or entering into partnerships with others. This often leads to either a new or evolved economic association or cooperative that creates a solution to a societal challenge.

Coompanion's mission is to help people who are passionate about an idea. The help often consists of finding the forms for the ideas and making them possible. Coompanion's expertise lies in the legal field. They have knowledge of group processes and a long experience advising value-driven entrepreneurs. It is a great advantage that the organisation itself is genuinely rooted in its values and understands how to develop ideas that create benefits for society.

Furthermore, Coompanion often has experience being a process leader for groups, associations and companies that want to realise their ideas together. They tailor and offer training according to needs, e.g. board work, group dynamics, conflict management, business development or leadership in a democratic organisation.

Last but not least, Coompanion works with local and regional development, for example, by participating in development groups and by running projects that create and improve the conditions for cooperative entrepreneurship.

Who are the target groups for your activities?

Coompanion's mission focuses on the socially valuable and cooperative, so the target group is anyone who wants to start a business together. The organisational form is often economic associations, but sometimes sole proprietorships, partnerships, non-profit associations and foundations. An individual entrepreneur with a social entrepreneurial idea cannot solve it alone but needs to team up with others. Coompanion has a vital role to play here. The organisation has an extensive network of contacts in the regional networks and understands how to do business with the public sector and interact with the rest of the business community. Therefore, the target group is those with a mission-driven idea that want to work with or collaborate with others.

Examples of support

There is a wide range of support provided by Coompanion. It can be helping someone find funding, write a partnership agreement or develop their business idea in a more sustainable direction. All advice focuses on sustainability, whether economic, environmental or social.

Through Coompanion's business promotion work, socially beneficial entities and social enterprises come to life. These can be businesses that create jobs for people far from the labour market. For example, people who have newly arrived and want to start a new life in Sweden or people who find it more challenging to enter the labour market. The cooperative business model gives these people a chance to create their own workplace - a workplace and a business in which they are co-owners. An example is a publicly employed integration coordinator who turned to Coompanion. In his job, he met many foreign-born women with low educational backgrounds. He tried to encourage them to start businesses. Still, he ended up creating a company himself, with the help of Coompanion, where he could employ these women. The profits are reinvested in the business so that even more can be hired.

Many organisations that have received support from Coompanion now stand on their own two feet, such as Hela Sverige ska Leva, Mikrofonden and Skoopi.

What is the most innovative aspect of Coompanion's support?

The cooperation is a few hundred years old, so from that perspective, Coompanion is not working on anything new. But the innovation lies in linking tools and cooperative solutions to today's challenges. Their toolbox - sharing, reinvesting profits to build long-term economically sustainable businesses and social inclusion - can be essential to managing the transformation towards a more sustainable society.

One example of this work is that Coompanion will run a project on circular sustainability and see what new business models and processes they can bring about. The project will run in parallel in several regions.

Another example of how Coompanion is making its support and tools available based on today's challenges is that Coompanion Västerbotten has launched Impact Academy 2030. The academy is an online training on social entrepreneurship that is now being disseminated and is open to everyone in Sweden, regardless of where you live.

What are the prerequisites for you to be able to carry out your activities?

Coompanion's advice and information are free of charge thanks to their mandate from the Swedish government, which through Tillväxtverket (the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth) co-finances part of the activities with municipalities, regions and other actors. In addition, Coompanion's regional actors are involved in collaborative projects to apply for funding from, for example, the EU or various funds.

Another paramount leg is membership income. Coompanion is a membership organisation, and it works to create benefits for its members. Benefits include providing training, advice and support to member organisations, offering opportunities to participate in development projects and strengthening the cooperative sector. Another area that Coompanion works in is what is known as employee buy-out. Employee buy-outs allow employees to take over a business when the owner wants to sell or retire, resulting in businesses not having to close down. In this way, the skills and capital of the organisation are also retained locally.

What factors are important for you to become an even stronger player?

Coompanion wants to strengthen its relationship with academia and create a more significant knowledge base. They would like to interact even more with researchers looking at cooperation in general or who would be interested in follow-up research on the projects that Coompanion implements in several regions regionally. Coompanion hopes this can be an exciting source of research topics that can generate new insights.

Other factors that are important for Coompanion are the ones of funding and network. Regarding their financing, the trend today is that public funding is decreasing. Here they would like to see a reverse trend so that they would receive increased funding instead. Regarding the network, they have managed to create a broad regional collaboration, and their communication work has been one of the key factors for success. Through clear communication, they have become a well-known actor with whom others happily collaborate. Coompanion wants to continue these collaborations to make more of a difference to entrepreneurs and society.

Do you have the ambition to scale up your business?

Coompanion's ambition is to become stronger nationally - to become top-of-mind outside the cooperative world. They will continue their advocacy work and plan to have individual meetings at the ministerial level. Another crucial area is understanding the needs of the new generation of entrepreneurs and collaborators. One activity will explore how those born in the 90s and the 00s relate to cooperation.

What are the key success factors in your work?

The strength of Coompanion is that it has over 120 people, the majority of whom are certified business advisors and business developers - all with a deep knowledge of their region, the needs of entrepreneurs, and the benefits of cooperative entrepreneurship. Furthermore, all staff members have a strong focus on collaboration. They are curious and relationship-building with a user-driven approach.

What would help you run an even better social innovation support service?

The government's 2018 social enterprise strategy was a step in the right direction. Still, as it was not followed up by continued funding, many teams that worked on the strategy have been scaled back. With many people no longer working in the agencies that were tasked with implementing the strategy, the result is that there is now a lack of knowledge and expertise in the field.

In addition to continued funding, there would need to be someone at the Department of Enterprise who has social innovation and social entrepreneurship on their plate. Support actors cannot be shuffled between different people and different departments. It would solve a lot if there were a minister with social entrepreneurship as their responsibility.