



Partnership for Social Innovation



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The Partnership for Social Innovation is a regional collaboration forum where social economy and civil society organisations can meet, share knowledge and enable the emergence of ideas that can progress into social innovations.

The purpose of the Partnership for Social Innovation is to create and strengthen opportunities for social innovations in Örebro County in order to meet societal challenges and contribute to

sustainable development.

The objective of the Partnership for Social Innovation is to provide a forum for dialogue and experience-sharing on societal challenges and social innovations, to promote collaboration and offer project support for the development of social innovations and to contribute to the dissemination and communication of information and knowledge about social innovations.



A starting point in the social economy

Since the late 1990s, there has been a special commitment to social economy in Örebro County. An organisation called Local Development and Social Economy (L&SEK) was established a few years after the Swedish EU membership to bring together actors from both the public sector and the social economy. The organisation was active for a long time but after about 15 years the question of a fresh start was raised and how social economy could be better incorporated into the regional innovation support system.

During 2013, a major investigation was therefore launched. Since the concept of social innovation had started to become widespread, it was decided that the fresh start should be guided by these ideas. The starting point for the investigation was that social innovations could contribute to managing many of the social, economic and environmental challenges faced by the county.

Feasibility study

A first step was a feasibility study

that provided an overview of the research literature where concepts such as innovation, social innovation and innovation systems were explained. The feasibility study also included a review of current initiatives on social innovations at the EU level, national level and regional level in Sweden. In conclusion, the feasibility study also provided an overview of the scope and distribution of the social economy and civil society in the county.

Regional dialogues and workshops

In light of the feasibility study, several regional dialogues and workshops were held with participants from the public sector, civil society and the social economy. The purpose was to discuss the conditions for how a new regional collaboration structure could look from an organisational, financial and operational point of view.

In parallel, special workshops were held with researchers from several scientific disciplines at Örebro University with the ambition of developing an R&D programme on social innovations.



- In the preparatory work, we found, among other things, that the existing regional innovation support system was not focused on supporting the development of social innovations nor did it capture the idea development in civil society and the social economy. We saw a great need to supplement the system with a forum that could have a special focus on civil society and the social economy in the development of society, says Anders Bro, development at Region Örebro County.

Research circles

A research circle is a method for knowledge acquisition and development where researchers and a specific target group get together during a series of meetings to - based on literature and practical experience - increase the theoretical knowledge and practical understanding of a certain phenomenon.

With special funding, several research circles on social innovations were conducted while working on the feasibility study.

Researchers from Örebro University became involved and met with representatives mainly from civil society and social economy in different locations around the county. Literature and study guides led the discussions and the development work. Questions that were discussed were: what are social innovations, are there examples of social innovations in our vicinity and do you yourself have suggestions for a new solution to a societal challenge?

The official start

The preparatory work resulted in a proposal for a new network which was submitted to interested partners in the county for comments. After the consultative round, the Partnership for Social Innovation was established in Örebro County in 2015 with the aim of creating and strengthening opportunities for social innovations. Social innovation is defined as a new way of meeting societal challenges and improving people's living conditions.

In connection with the establishment of the Partnership, the organisation L&SEK was dissolved. Up until 2022, Region Örebro County had an overall responsibility for managing and coordinating the Partnership. The forms of the network and direction regarding content have evolved and changed over time.



A network of organisations

The Partnership for Social Innovation is not a formal organisation. It is a network of organisations where the respective partners participate to the extent they find possible. No membership fee is paid. The decision to participate is made by the Board of Directors or the equivalent in the respective organisations. Each partner is responsible for designating a contact person and for setting up the necessary procedures for information and dialogue, to and from the Partnership.

One of the basic ideas behind the network was to bring together several actors from the public sector and civil society as well as the social economy in order to jointly discuss the development of new solutions to societal challenges. The broad structure is important in itself.

The Partnership consists of approximately 40 partners. Roughly, half come from civil society and the social economy. These include advisory organisations, educational associations, folk high schools, member organisations and social enterprises. The public actors of the Partnership include

Region Örebro County, several of the county's municipalities and the county's four coordination agencies. Örebro University is also involved in the Partnership. The Partnership has a broad mix of partners in the county, all things considered.

“ - The Partnership is unique in Sweden. There is no equivalent collaboration structure in the country which brings together both civil society and social economy with the public sector in this way. The University's involvement is a strong plus. The Partnership has definitely contributed to strengthening the assumptions for our issues and the involvement of Region Örebro County provides strong legitimacy to the Partnership, says Anders Johansson, Head of Operations at Coompanion Mälardalen.

-The Partnership has become a good and natural forum in the county for sharing experiences on how civil society and social economy can contribute to the management of our societal challenges, says Nils Varg, Head of the Competence Supply Unit, Karlskoga Municipality.

- One of the biggest challenges for us in civil society and the social economy is to find the right contacts in the public sector. Through the Partnership, we meet municipalities and the regional organisation and can easily contact relevant people. The Partnership will be “one way into” the public sector for us, says Sofia Tungfelt, Head of Operations for Möckeln Associations.

Assembly meetings

An important part of the Partnership's organisation is assembly meetings that take place approximately twice a year. It is an internal meeting place for sharing experiences and learning about social innovations for the partners to the Partnership. Here the joint initiatives and activities of the Partnership are discussed on the basis of the business plan, as well as current calls for proposals, ongoing projects and development work in the participating organisations. The assembly meetings follow a jointly set agenda.

Working committee

A smaller working group, the working committee, coordinates the Partnership. The committee meets every three weeks to handle ongoing strategic and operational issues and to plan and organise the activities of the Partnership, including its assembly meetings. The meetings of the working committee follow an agenda that has been jointly set in advance. The committee is open to all partners but often consists of 7-8 organisations. Convening and leading the working committee has for a long time been the responsibility

of Region Örebro County but from 2023, a new method of working is being tested.

- We want civil society and social economy to be involved in key positions and be given greater responsibility. Even though civil society and the social economy are always in the majority in the working committee, Region Örebro County has now allocated resources in order to allow two organisations from civil society and the social economy to have the practical coordination responsibility for the Partnership's activities, says Anders Bro.

Business plan and list of activities

Each partner has its own policy documents and guiding principles. To unite all the partners in the Partnership, a joint business plan has been developed. It is multi-annual and is adopted by the assembly meeting.

The business plan captures various local and regional societal challenges where social innovations are needed. The business plan also describes the forms of the Partnership, its objective and purpose,

and identifies its strategic fields of activity.

In addition to continuous information and communication, the plan sets out three strategic fields of activity:

1. Experience-sharing, problem identification and greater competence
2. Project support and project coordination
3. Guidance and method support

An annual list of activities sets out specific activities within each field of activity.

Experience-sharing, problem identification and greater competence

The Partnership's first strategic field of activity is experience-sharing, problem identification and greater competence. The activities are aimed at the partners in the Partnership but also at organisations and actors outside the Partnership. Two types of activities are carried out. One is the assembly meeting,

which is an internal activity for the partners of the Partnership.

The second is Community Talk (Swe: Samhällssamtalet), which is an open arena with talks based on different themes established through the annual list of activities. The Community Talks are related in different ways to social innovations and may, for example, be about how an inclusive labour market can evolve, what social entrepreneurship means or what a digital exclusion can lead to. Every year, two Community Talks are held.

- We invite a wide range of people to our Community Talks. It is a way to reach people and organisations that are not part of the Partnership, says Mona Hedfeldt, Development Manager at Region Örebro County.

The Community Talks provide an opportunity for different people and organisations, that in various ways have gained a deeper knowledge of the current theme, to share their knowledge. Sometimes it is one of the partners of the Partnership that introduces the talk, sometimes the speaker is



“external”. The Community Talks can be the beginning of a process and the starting point for new, joint applications within the field the Community Talk has centred on.

- I made a presentation on the theme of homelessness and digital inclusion at a webinar within the Partnership. There was a lot of interest in this. A researcher with similar interests also participated in the same webinar and we subsequently wrote a joint application on how we can in-

crease participation in society via digitalisation. The application was granted and we received SEK 1.6 million for a joint project, says Fredrik Karlsson, Head of Operations, Örebro City Mission.

The Community Talks are funded by Region Örebro County. One of the partners of the Partnership – Coompanion – has been given a special assignment by Region Örebro County to plan and organise the Community Talks in dialogue with the working committee.

Examples of themes for the Community Talks

- What is social innovation?
- How do we build increased trust in the welfare system?
- Acting together to meet social challenges
- An inclusive labour market for young people who neither work nor study
- Social enterprises, collaboration and societal challenges
- From exclusion to inclusion through collaboration and education
- Skateboard and cultivation – could that be social innovations?
- How do we join forces to ensure that more young people get secondary school qualifications?

Project support and project coordination

Since many partners in the Partnership are running or are interested in participating in projects, the second strategic field of activity concerns projects. There are two kinds of activities.

One is to provide project support. This may involve providing information about current and future national and international calls for proposals, conveying requests for project participation from other countries or generally providing support in how to formulate applications. Often there are great opportunities for several partners within the Partnership to collaborate on joint applications, which is why the second activity is to promote project collaboration between the partners of the Partnership. The practical responsibility for these two activities has for the most part been given to the working committee.

The Partnership is a network and cannot formally be neither the project owner nor a project participant. Therefore, any of the partners assume these roles in their own name but represent

the Partnership. Several of the partners are small and lack administrative resources and often one of the larger organisations with more project experience will do it. Regardless of which of the partners are involved in a project, the entire Partnership can act as a reference group (stakeholder group) for the project. This ensures a good dissemination of knowledge and creates opportunities for a broad commitment.

“Regardless of how many partners are included in an application, the Partnership can be used for support and coordination for project applications and project ideas. Since the Partnership has such a broad representation, you will often find the partners that are relevant for a call for proposals within the Partnership. So you don’t have to spend time looking for project partners”, says Lotta Karlsson-Andersson, CEO of the Activa Foundation.

The project support and project coordination activities also play an important role in the internationalisation of the Partnership. The Partnership participates in international projects on an



ongoing basis. One of the partners is a project participant and uses the Partnership as a reference group (stakeholder group). In the vast majority of cases, this also means that several partners can participate in the transregional and international exchanges of experience that take place in the projects.

- We have attended several physical meetings abroad for projects that the Partnership is involved in. It has been extremely informative and has given us a very different understanding than just reading about good

examples. To also get the chance to establish links with organisations and people in other countries is particularly important”, declares Åse Sundqvist, Head of Operations at Verdandi in Örebro.

Sundqvist, Head of Operations at Verdandi in Örebro.

To further strengthen the practical project coordination within the Partnership, a new method of working will be tested during 2023. Region Örebro County has been able to allocate financial resources that cover the costs of a certain number of working hours

at organisations in civil society and social economy in connection with the writing of applications. Until now, one group has been active in formulating a joint Partnership application to the Swedish ESF Council.

A second group, together with colleagues from other countries, is involved in an application for the EU Framework Research Programme on the theme of social economy.



- The Partnership provides opportunities for meetings and co-creation between different actors within civil society and the public sector. Region Örebro County has an important unbiased role in looking after various interests. It is also valuable and appreciated that they, like now, can provide financial assistance by using planning funds," says Helena Lundell, Head of Operations, Fountain House Örebro.

Guidance and method support

The Partnership's third strategic area is guidance and method support for the development of social innovations. Within the Partnership there is an advisory group, the core of which consists of two organisations: Coompanion and the Activa Foundation. Coompanion is an advisory organisation and within Activa there is a great deal of project experience.

The advisory group is aimed at civil society and social economy organisations, regardless of whether or not they are partners in the partnership, that have an idea about how to deal with a societal challenge. Region Örebro County also has a form of support for social innovation which is aimed at social economy and civil society organisations. One of the political committees funds this form of support, the Cultural Affairs Committee, which has also established its guidelines.

Organisations can submit an application with a description of the project they want to run. A processing group consisting of

the Partnership's advisory group together with an official from Region Örebro County will read the applications. A meeting with the organisation that is applying is often included in the process. The advisory group then prepares a draft decision and the decision is made by the Area Manager for Culture and Civil Society upon delegation from the Cultural Affairs Committee.

"It is not the case that an application is either approved or rejected. Sometimes an application may need to be supplemented and it also happens that the advisors can help the applicants find other sources of funding and ways forward, even if we are not able to grant funds," says Mona Hedfeldt.

Over the years, several organisations in civil society and social economy have received funding to develop their ideas.

- Our project created opportunities for us to work on an application to the Swedish Inheritance Fund for a large project in the county to boost skateboarding. The Inheritance Fund approved

In order to be eligible for financial assistance, certain essential requirements must be met. Some of them are that the project should:

1. be deemed to be of benefit of society
2. be innovative and aim to provide long-term and sustainable effects
3. be new locally but may have role models in other places
4. have secure support from potential partners

our application and we received a total of SEK 2.9 million. Not a bad pay-off for the regional financial assistance of SEK 50,000”, says Daniel Schön, Örebro Skateboard.

The projects that receive financial assistance are invited to a Community Talk within the Partnership to share their results. This contributes to learning and to the dissemination of experiences of social innovation from a practical perspective. It also contributes to more organisations becoming aware of this form of financial assistance and the opportunities it provides.

Examples of projects that have received financial assistance from the regional call for proposals

Social Innovations :

1. Strengthen the mental health of young people and develop attractive rural areas where young people can participate in finding solutions to challenges.
2. Develop a social enterprise for people with disabilities who want to counteract discrimination and stigmatisation of disabilities.
3. Increase recycling, sharing economy and the building of a toy library.
4. Increase participation and the joy of discovery in various leisure activities with a norm-critical approach for boys growing up in financially vulnerable households.

5. Increase opportunities for women born abroad to enter the labour market through guidance on cultivation, processing of local ingredients, as well as ingredients that would otherwise have been discarded
6. Strengthen the mobilisation and organisation within skateboard activities where there are no established structures and traditions of organisation. A balance between the tradition of spontaneous sports in public spaces, creativity and organisation.
7. Meet the basic needs of financially vulnerable families, create meeting places and combat child poverty.
8. Boost mental health in sport through promotion and prevention as well as preparedness in case of signs of mental illness.

Some lessons and recommendations

Since the start of the Partnership, the organisation and operations have changed and several lessons can be learned. The first lesson is the importance of thinking and

acting long-term. The Partnership consists of many organisations from different sectors of society, each with its own core values.

Meanwhile, social innovations are a field distinguished by rapid theoretical and practical development. Developing relevant working methods and procedures for organising with such a content-oriented approach takes time and requires “responsiveness” to the partners’ wishes and needs but also to changes in the emerging field of knowledge. At the same time it is important to remember that a network organisation sometimes requires a “restart” between partners.

In the Partnership, each partner designates a person to be responsible for the ongoing dialogue between the organisation and the Partnership. When that person changes jobs, it is not uncommon for them to forget to hand over the assignment to another colleague.

The second lesson is that you have to be allowed to make mistakes. Some initiatives within the Partnership have been successful, others have not. One activity that did not work and did not turn out the way we expected was the initi-

al R&D programme. It did indeed result in a common text proposing R&D initiatives in different scientific disciplines but the programme was not implemented.

Two activities that have been particularly successful are the current Community Talks and the procedures for counselling and funding. Although the activities need to be further developed in order to reach out even broader and deeper in the county, we are reaching an increasing number of organisations.

A third lesson is that the Partnership is nothing without its partners. The partners must feel involved and interested in the activity. However, this does not mean that all partners must be equally active all the time.

Involvement can vary over time and depend on which activities are carried out and which theme is in focus. Partners can have different levels of involvement.

That the public sector must dare to let go of control is a fourth lesson. It is basically about trust, to dare to try and to trust each

other. It is particularly important that civil society and the social economy participate on their own terms and based on their own opportunities.

If civil society and the social economy lack such opportunities, the public sector must, to the greatest extent possible, contribute to the creation of these opportunities.

Region Örebro County has allocated financial resources for civil society and social economy with the consequence that the practical coordination of the Partnership has now been taken over by civil society and social economy. It is not a question of Region Örebro divesting itself of responsibility but about daring to try new working methods and finding effective forms for the ongoing activities to be able to grow.

The fifth lesson is that you have to dare to test different solutions and until now untried activities. For example, the Partnership for Social Innovation used a caravan for a year to meet citizens in different locations in the county and to discuss societal challenges.



The caravan was populated with representatives of the various partners of the Partnership. It was an unusual and resource-intensive activity but it was fun and attracted a lot of attention. We picked up ideas from citizens about how societal challenges can be met.

The sixth lesson is that the Partnership basically does not require any special funding by the partners, except for working hours. Special funding from the Region Örebro County has, however, been important in order to be able to carry out certain initiatives.

The seventh is that although the Partnership is not a formal organisation, having a common direction is still important. A busi-

ness plan or other form of policy document is a solution.

Contact details and information

If you would like more information or have questions about the network and activities of the Partnership, please contact Lotta Karlsson-Anderson, CEO of the Activa Foundation, or Sofia Tungfelt, Head of Operations for Möckeln Associations, who are jointly responsible for the practical coordination of the Partnership.

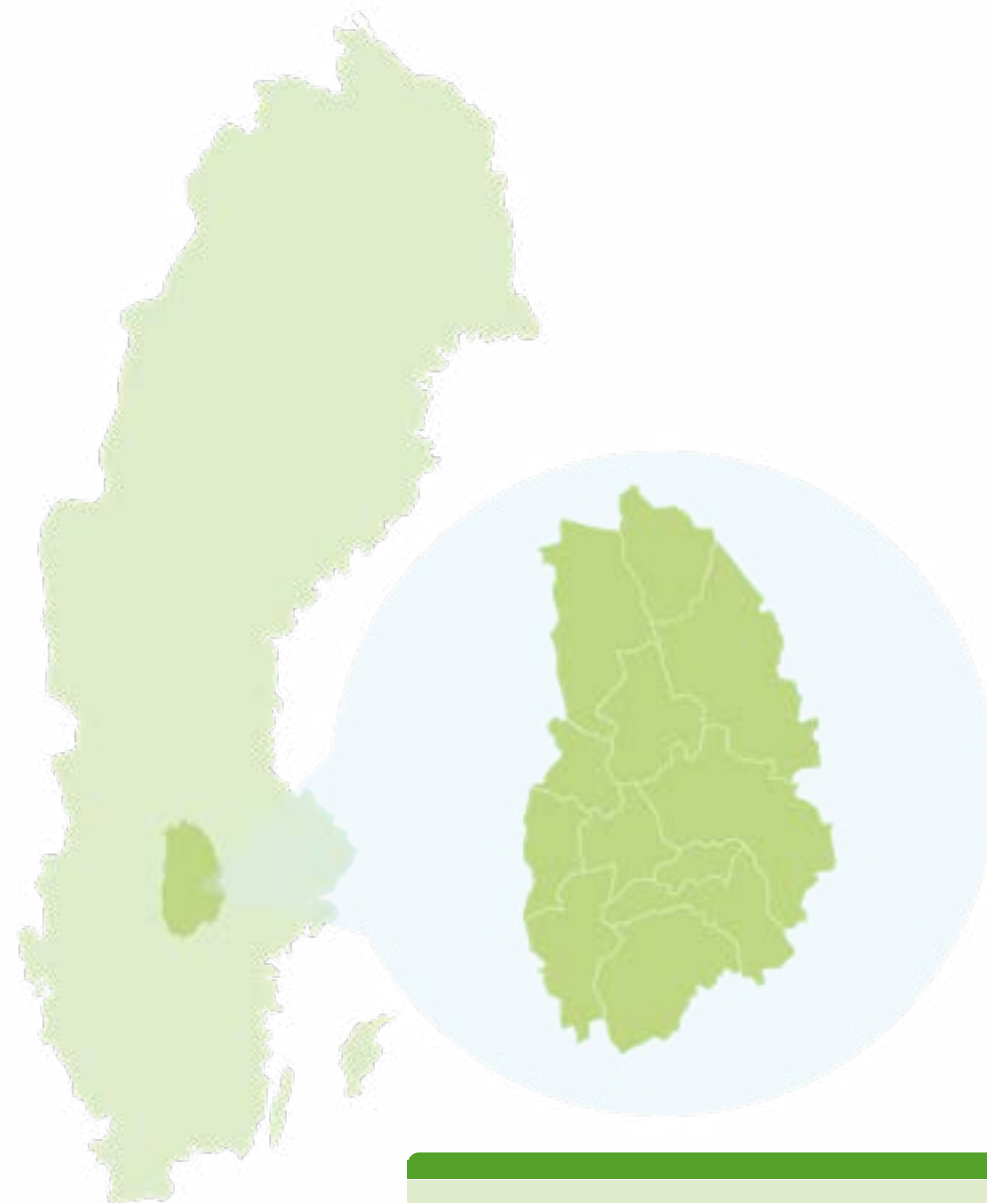
You can also contact Anders Bro or Mona Hedfeldt, who both work as Development Managers in Region Örebro County.

▶ **Lotta Karlsson-Andersson**
Activa Foundation, lotta.karlsson-andersson@s-activa.se

▶ **Sofia Tungfelt**
Möckelnföreningarna, sofia.tungfelt@mockelnforeningarna.net

▶ **Anders Bro**
Region Örebro County, anders.bro@regionorebrolan.se

▶ **Mona Hedfeldt**
Region Örebro County, mona.hedfeldt@regionorebrolan.se



The Partnership for Social Innovation is a county-wide network that is located throughout Örebro County.

Is there anything you want to change? Do you have an idea that might be useful to many people?

The Partnership for Social Innovation (PSI) is a network to combat social problems and societal exclusion. Together we develop ideas and initiatives and spread knowledge that is beneficial to society and residents.

PSI a forum for organisations in civil society, social economy and public actors that encounter exclusion issues and that together with others want to make a difference in all areas of society. We collaborate and build alliances to solve social problems and other societal challenges.

The Partnership has its roots in mobilisation of associations, social enterprises and other actors within civil society and the social economy in Örebro County. PSI currently consists of approx. 40 parties, primarily civil society organisations together with representatives of the public sector. For example Verdandi, Coompanion, Activa Foundation, Fountain House, the Swedish Adult Education Association, Bilda Study Association, Örebro Municipality, the county's four coordination agencies and Örebro University.

Region Örebro län

Area of Culture and Civil Society

Telephone number: 019-602 10 00

Visiting address: Eklundavägen 1, Örebro

Postal address: Box 1613, 701 16 Örebro

E-mail: regionalutveckling@regionorebrolan.se

utveckling.regionorebrolan.se/sv/kultur-och-civilsamhalle/natverk-och-samverkan/partnerskapet-for-sociala-innovationer