



S.E.E.D

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND
ECOSYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT**

ADVICE PER ECOSYSTEM

Social Entrepreneurship and Ecosystems Development



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Introduction

This document brings together insights and recommendations from three regions: Haarlem (Netherlands), Savonlinna & Kuopio (Finland), and Salerno & Baronissi (Italy). These findings were developed through Learning Tours, during which project partners explored the local ecosystems for social entrepreneurship and identified opportunities for strengthening them.

The process involved dialogue with key stakeholders, including municipalities, educational institutions, social enterprises, and community organizations. Based on these exchanges, partners formulated recommendations aimed at improving collaboration, market access, skills development, political support, and financing for social enterprises. These recommendations were then analyzed and refined by the partners from each respective country, ensuring that they reflect local contexts while contributing to shared European learning

The Netherlands - Haarlem

Advice for Strengthening the Regional Ecosystem for Social Entrepreneurship in Haarlem.

1. Engaged community and networking

Strong aspects in Haarlem:

- Haarlem has a strong collaborative environment with initiatives like Stadsgarage, which provides essential services such as coaching, training, and impact boosting for social entrepreneurs.
- The municipality actively supports networking and community engagement through various programs and events.

Aspects of concern:

- The Regional Ecosystem for Social Entrepreneurship in Haarlem could become too dependent of the willingness of the municipality for support of this ecosystem.
- It is a question of how dependent this ecosystem is of people in key positions. What happens if these key persons change their job or move out of the regions?
- It is not very clear how citizens of the city and neighbouring municipalities are involved and supportive of this ecosystem.

Recommendations:

- Strengthening networks: the municipality of Haarlem should further strengthen existing networks for social entrepreneurs by organizing regular meetings and workshops. This can be done through Stadsgarage, which already plays a significant role in providing services such as coaching, training, and impact boosting.
- Communication and visibility: it is crucial to increase the visibility of social entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by organizing events where social entrepreneurs can share their stories and impact. The municipality, together with the social entrepreneurs can play an active role by promoting and supporting these events.
- Collaboration with educational Institutions: Nova College (VET) and InHolland (University of Applied Sciences) can collaborate with local social entrepreneurs by offering internships and projects that directly involve students in social entrepreneurship. This needs the willingness of social entrepreneurs to invest time in students and cooperation with education institutions.

2. Enhanced market opportunities and access to markets

Strong aspects in Haarlem:

- Haarlem has a well-established platform, www.kennemerinkoop.nl, which helps in connecting social entrepreneurs with potential customers.
- The municipality is actively involved in ecosystem building, providing business opportunities and communicating at local, provincial, and national levels.

Aspects of concern:

- The market for services and products of social entrepreneurs is more difficult for them than for entrepreneurs who only go for the lowest price. Because social entrepreneurs take care of the social/environmental goal(s) together with making money. This means that procurement by (local) authorities is not so simple. Another aspect is that B2B markets are not very well developed. There are more opportunities possible in that domain.

Recommendations:

- Platform for social entrepreneurs: the existing platform www.kennemerinkoop.nl should be further developed and promoted to ensure that customers can easily find social entrepreneurs. This platform can be expanded with success stories and impact reports to gain consumer trust.
- Ecosystem building: the municipality should actively build an ecosystem where social entrepreneurs have easy access to markets. This can be achieved through collaborations with large companies and government agencies to influence procurement policies in favor of social entrepreneurs.
- Storytelling: social entrepreneurs should be encouraged to tell their stories clearly and convincingly so that consumers and businesses understand and appreciate their impact on society.

3. Learning and skills development

Strong aspects in Haarlem:

- Educational institutions like Nova College and InHolland offer programs and electives focused on entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship.
- InHolland has a 5-month program supporting students to start their own businesses during their studies, providing workshops on various aspects of entrepreneurship.

Aspects of concern:

- Because of the intrinsic difficulties of starting a social enterprise and the high chances of failure of start-ups easy access to support, coaching and training is important.

Recommendations:

- Coaching and training: Stadsgarage should further expand and make their coaching and training programs more accessible to both starting and established social entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by offering phased programs specifically tailored to the needs of entrepreneurs in different stages of their business.
- Integration into education: Nova College and InHolland should structurally integrate social entrepreneurship into their curriculum. This can be achieved by offering specific modules and electives focused on social entrepreneurship, as well as organizing guest lectures and workshops by successful social entrepreneurs.
- Pilot business models: educational institutions should encourage students to develop a pilot business model during their studies. This can be supported by mentoring and access to resources such as financing and networks.

4. Political acknowledgement and an active role of the municipalities

Strong aspects in Haarlem:

- The municipality of Haarlem has a favorable political climate with a strong focus on social equality and sustainability, which is reflected in the coalition agreement and the Environmental Vision Haarlem 2045.
- The current political coalition consists of PvdA, GroenLinks, and D66, which focus on themes such as housing, mobility, sustainability, social inclusion, and municipal finances.
- For over five years, the Municipality of Haarlem has been actively committed to impact entrepreneurs in the city and have sufficient autonomy to do so. The municipality has established an Action Program Impact Entrepreneurship 2020-2024 and has made a budget available for this.

Aspects of concern:

- There could be a change happening with the local 2026 elections, leading to less support for the ecosystem of social enterprises in Haarlem.
- The role of neighbouring municipalities in supporting the ecosystem of social enterprises is not very clear, or absent.

Recommendations:

- Political support: the municipality of Haarlem should further explore opportunities within the extended Action Program Impact Entrepreneurship to stimulate social entrepreneurship even more. This can be achieved by including specific objectives for social entrepreneurship in the coalition agreement and other policy documents.
- Collaboration with stakeholders: the collaboration between the municipality and educational institutions should be further developed on social entrepreneurship, for example by developing joint initiatives and periodically evaluating the needs on this specific labour market.
- Communication and transparency: the municipality should stimulate the social entrepreneurs to communicate clearly and transparently how their impact is helping achieving the long term goals of the Environmental Vision Haarlem 2045. This could be a part of storytelling, but impact measurement and convincing by doing “good jobs” is also important.

5. Access to finance

Strong aspects in Haarlem:

- The municipality has established a Social Impact Fund to generate social impact in addition to financial returns.
- There is high confidence in future funding, with EU legislation steering towards social and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Aspects of concern:

- The attitude of traditional banking and financing institutions could be a hindrance for social enterprises to start and scale up their activities.
- There is still no specific legal status for social enterprises in the Netherlands. The “BvM” is being discussed about by political parties. Examples in other European countries show that such a special legal status makes it easier for clients and funding to engage with social enterprises.

Recommendations:

- Social Impact Fund: The municipality should support the development of a Social Impact Fund aimed at generating both social impact and financial returns. This can be achieved through collaboration with financial institutions and investment funds.
- Guarantees and Social Impact Bonds: The municipality should investigate possibilities to improve access to long-term financing, for example, through guarantees or social impact bonds (SIB). This can help ensure the financial sustainability of social entrepreneurs.
- Financing advice: the municipality should offer financing advice to social entrepreneurs to help them find suitable financing options. This can be achieved by organizing workshops and individual advice sessions.

Finland – Kuopio and Savonlinna

Advice for Strengthening the Regional Ecosystem for Social Entrepreneurship in Kuopio and Savonlinna.

1. Engaged community and networking

Strong aspects in Savonlinna and Kuopio:

- The region shows strong commitment among professionals working in social welfare and education sectors. Stakeholders like Kolmonen, YYO, SAVO, and Samiedu demonstrate involvement with third-sector associations and social values.
- Kolmonen provides a home and support for over 160 associations, offering a backbone for community engagement in Savonlinna.
- Elävä Säätiö and Savas Foundation actively support vulnerable groups through inclusive employment and rehabilitation.
- Events organized by associations such as Kolmonen (e.g., Autumn Fires, Christmas charity work) bring citizens together.

Aspects of concern:

- There is a lack of a coordinated ecosystem; networking is fragmented and depends heavily on a few key people.
- No clear leadership or organization is taking responsibility for developing and sustaining the ecosystem.
- Culture of self-reliance and reluctance to seek support inhibits cooperation.

Recommendations:

- Convene regular multi-stakeholder meetings to enhance collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- Define ecosystem leadership: VET providers like Samiedu and SAVO could take an initiating role.
- Develop an online platform to support youth and new associations in engaging with social entrepreneurship.
- Encourage storytelling and visibility of successful local initiatives.

2. Enhanced market opportunities and access to markets

Strong aspects in Savonlinna and Kuopio:

- PeeÄssä Cooperative provides an example of consumer-driven cooperative values with a strong regional presence and inclusive practices.
- Savas Foundation and Elävä Säätiö demonstrate how service delivery and job creation can go hand-in-hand with a social mission.
- Some services are procured from third-sector organizations by regional welfare provider Eloisa.

Aspects of concern:

- Market access for SEs is still limited and fragmented.
- Associations are often unaware of their potential as social enterprises.
- Procurement practices by municipalities and welfare regions do not yet systematically support SEs.

Recommendations:

- Create a regional directory of social enterprises to enhance visibility and market access.
- Facilitate B2B and public procurement opportunities tailored to SEs.
- Train local officials and procurement teams in sustainable and impact-driven purchasing.
- Support social enterprises with business development and diversification strategies.

3. Learning and skills development

Strong aspects in Savonlinna and Kuopio:

- Samiedu and SAVO integrate entrepreneurship and responsibility into their curricula.
- Entrepreneurial education models (e.g., TUVVA and innovation camps) encourage students to take initiative and develop business ideas.
- Teachers in both institutions demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and social values.

Aspects of concern:

- Distinction between traditional entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship is not always clear in education.
- Lack of structured cooperation between VETs and social enterprises in curriculum design and internships.

Recommendations:

- Explicitly integrate social entrepreneurship modules and examples in entrepreneurship education.
- Establish mentorship programs between SEs and students.
- Promote pilot business models addressing social challenges as part of the educational process.
- Provide teacher training on social economy and ecosystem thinking.

4. Political acknowledgement and an active role of the municipalities

Strong aspects in Savonlinna and Kuopio:

- Eloisa (regional welfare area) is a key actor contracting services from third-sector organizations.
- Some politicians (e.g., Anna-Kristiina Mikkonen) show clear support for SEs in the region.

Aspects of concern:

- The role of municipalities in supporting SEs is unclear or passive.
- SEs and associations are often unaware of how to engage with local government structures.
- There is no common vision or strategy for ecosystem development at municipal level.

Recommendations:

- Municipalities should create a clear contact point or helpdesk for SEs.
- Include support for social entrepreneurship in local strategies and budgets.
- Foster dialogue between municipalities, welfare regions, VETs, and SEs.
- Recognize SEs as partners in achieving long-term goals like community resilience and sustainability.

5. Access to finance

Strong aspects in Savonlinna and Kuopio:

- Some SEs and associations successfully combine funding sources (EU grants, public support, sales income).
- Tools such as the Finnish Social Enterprise Mark and impact measurement frameworks (e.g., by YYO) exist to strengthen investor trust.

Aspects of concern:

- SEs face challenges in accessing funding, especially after initial start-up support.
- Traditional finance institutions are often skeptical of social value-focused business models.

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness of EASI and other EU funding instruments among SEs.
- Develop regional financing advice services and peer learning workshops.
- Encourage foundations, municipalities and cooperatives to co-invest in impact-driven initiatives.
- Promote the Social Enterprise Mark and provide support for applying for it.

Italy – Comune di Baronissi and Salerno

Advice for Strengthening the Regional Ecosystem for Social Entrepreneurship in Comune di Baronissi and Salerno.

1. Engaged community and networking

Strong aspects:

- The Salerno–Baronissi area shows a strong social and civic engagement tradition, supported by a rich network of cooperatives, associations, and social enterprises.
- Several local hubs and associations actively promote networking and collaboration among social entrepreneurs.

Aspects of concern:

- Despite the vibrant social landscape, collaboration among municipalities, universities, and social economy actors remains fragmented. There is a lack of permanent local coordination structures, and the visibility of social entrepreneurship in local planning is still limited.

Recommendations:

- To strengthen networks, it would be advisable creating a stable space where public authorities, academia, and social enterprises can meet regularly, coordinate activities, and develop joint initiatives.
- To improve communication and visibility, organising local events, thematic fairs, and simple storytelling campaigns would help bring to light the positive impact that social enterprises generate in the area. These activities can also strengthen community involvement and stimulate broader civic participation.
- Closer cooperation with schools and universities could be fostered by developing programmes that allow students to collaborate directly with social enterprises (through internships, living labs, and applied research projects) encouraging learning-by-doing and supporting innovation on the ground.

2. Enhanced market opportunities and access to markets

Strong aspects:

- Campania's regional innovation ecosystem and EU-funded programmes provide potential support for social entrepreneurship. Salerno hosts a growing number of enterprises working in welfare, culture, and circular economy sectors, and the University supports several entrepreneurial initiatives.

Aspects of concern:

- Market access for social enterprises remains limited. Public procurement procedures are often too complex, and B2B opportunities with larger firms are underdeveloped.
- There is a lack of a digital marketplace or database that connects social enterprises with consumers and public buyers.

Recommendations:

- Develop a regional online platform or digital map of social enterprises in Salerno–Baronissi, integrated with the national RUNTS registry
- Encourage municipalities to adopt socially responsible procurement practices with social clauses and impact-based evaluation
- Facilitate partnerships with local industries and cultural institutions to create new markets for socially innovative solutions.

3. Learning and skills development

Strong aspects:

- The University of Salerno integrates entrepreneurship education and supports start-up incubation through its Contamination Lab and similar initiatives.
- There is strong potential to link higher education and vocational training to the needs of the social economy.

Aspects of concern:

- Probably due to cultural factors, there is still some resistance toward those who engage in entrepreneurial activities in the social field, as if the idea of 'doing business' and 'doing social good' were somehow incompatible.
- Access to tailored training for social entrepreneurs is limited, especially outside university settings.
- Many young people lack awareness of social entrepreneurship as a viable career path.
- National curricula do not include specific modules on social entrepreneurship. As a result, these topics are introduced voluntarily by individual teachers or addressed through extracurricular projects and activities, which depend largely on the initiative of each school.

Recommendations:

- Expand incubation and mentoring opportunities building on the University of Salerno's existing initiatives to provide accessible and tailored support for social entrepreneurs at different stages.
- Introduce dedicated modules on social entrepreneurship and impact measurement within university and vocational courses, helping address cultural barriers and increase awareness of this career path.
- Encourage students to develop small-scale social business prototypes through challenge-based learning and university spin-off activities, strengthening the link between education and the social economy.

4. Political acknowledgement and an active role of the municipalities

Strong aspects:

- Local authorities in Salerno and Baronissi increasingly recognize the importance of social innovation in local development strategies.
- The University of Salerno and local administrations collaborate in several EU-funded projects focused on sustainability, inclusion, and innovation.

Aspects of concern:

- Policy support remains fragmented, and social entrepreneurship is not yet systematically embedded in municipal or regional development plans. There is a risk of dependence on specific political mandates and personal commitment from key officials.

Recommendations:

- It would be useful to integrate clear objectives on social entrepreneurship within local and regional strategic documents, ensuring consistency with Campania's Smart Specialisation Strategy and other development plans.
- Strengthening cooperation between municipalities, the University of Salerno, and third-sector networks through a stable coordination mechanism would help provide continuity and reduce fragmentation.
- Municipalities could more actively communicate how social enterprises contribute to sustainability and inclusion goals, improving public understanding and reinforcing political and community support.

5. Access to finance

Strong aspects:

- Campania benefits from multiple EU programmes supporting innovation and inclusion.
- Local ethical banks and cooperative credit institutions show growing interest in social finance, and regional development funds can be partially mobilized for impact-oriented initiatives.

Aspects of concern:

- Many social enterprises rely significantly, and in some cases predominantly, on public or project-based funding, a condition that can limit their financial stability and their ability to plan for the long term.
- Social enterprises often face barriers to financing due to a lack of collateral, financial literacy, and tailored investment instruments.
- Existing regional funds are not always accessible or adapted to the specific needs of social enterprises.

Recommendations:

- Expand impact finance: Build on the growing interest of ethical banks and cooperative credit institutions by developing more accessible financial tools for social enterprises, such as microcredit or impact-oriented loans.
- Reduce dependence on grants: help social enterprises diversify their income sources by encouraging the use of blended finance and collaborations with private investors.
- Strengthen financial skills: offer practical training and guidance to improve financial literacy and investment readiness, especially for organisations with limited experience in managing capital.
- Make regional funds easier to access: adjust regional development instruments so they better match the needs of social enterprises, simplifying procedures and lowering barriers linked to collateral or early-stage status.