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## National mapping : Defining and reaching a shared understanding of the Competence Centre purpose in Bulgaria

**Deliverable 1.1: Report on research and analysis of existing approaches and experiences in Bulgaria and the EU.**

**Deliverable 1.2: Report on Identification and needs assessment of local users, stakeholders, potential partners**

# The research methodology

**The first phase of research: 1<sup>st</sup> of September to the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2021** dedicated to desk research on the existing approaches and experiences in the field of social innovations in Bulgaria and the EU:

- ▶ EU reports
- ▶ Academic papers on (evolution of) the definition of the term “social innovation”
- ▶ Bulgarian databases and statistical information: **(1)** Register of the social enterprises, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; **(2)** Register of the specialized enterprises and cooperatives of the people with disabilities, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; **(3)** National database of (self-declared) social enterprises, National Statistical Institute.

**The second phase from the 30<sup>th</sup> of September to the November 2021** included verification of desk research findings through interviews (onsite/online) with key stakeholders, including with representatives of European institutions and organizations.

In addition, two (2) focus groups were organised with a variety of social innovators and stakeholders from NGOs, businesses, local and national authorities:

**The third phase from the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 to the February 2022** included additional desk research, participation in two international workshops related to the mapping of social innovations and scaling of social innovations two additional interviews, and a questionnaire circulated among all municipalities in Bulgaria, in partnership with the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.

# Key findings on existing competence centres or similar bodies and relevant European practices

- ▶ no previously established National Competence Centers for Social Innovation (NCCSI) in the EU
- ▶ several national organisations and institutions across Europe, established in the last 20 years have similar characteristics and partly overlap the functions of the future NCCSIs
- ▶ 3 of these organisations/institutions were researched through desk research and interviews with their representatives – Social Innovation Portugal, [Avisé](#) (France) and [Shipyard Foundation](#) (Poland).

# Key findings on existing competence centres or similar bodies and relevant European practices

- ▶ Across the three researched organisations/institutions there is no common/unified definition of what “social innovation” is ;
- ▶ The three organisations researched have very different organisational structures. In this context, it is very important to be clarified that out of the 3 organisations only Social Innovation Portugal has a single focus on “social innovations” but the other two organisations have a much broader field of activity
- ▶ All three organisations have a special team or unit, which support local projects and initiatives – directly or through other support structures at the local level

# Key findings on existing competence centres or similar bodies and relevant European practices

3 core activities in common:

- ▶ **Grant-making**, mostly with EU funding but also with additional local and/ or business funding.
- ▶ **Capacity building**, mostly for social entrepreneurs and social innovations, but also for intermediary and support organisations, including local and regional support organisations.
- ▶ **Networking** between key stakeholders in the social innovation ecosystem, both at the national and regional/local level. Including through the creation of databases and maps of social innovation actors and initiatives, as well as through organising of national and regional forums and match-making.

# Key findings on existing competence centres or similar bodies and relevant European practices

- ▶ All the 3 organisations receive EU funding plus national and regional/funding. Concerning EU funding, Avise is an Intermediate Body for ESF and Social Innovation Portugal is also an “*Intermediary Body with delegation of authority agreements for the four Operational Programmes*”. In Avise case, because of its governance, there are no donations but an annual membership fee for entities that are part of the governance and it also develops programs and activities with private stakeholders.
- ▶ Social Innovation Portugal is a governmental initiative, so it is completely dependent on the public authorities. However, both Avise and Shipyard Foundation are independent bodies, with their independent management and way of operating.

# Key findings on existing competence centres or similar bodies and relevant European practices

## Main successes could be summarised in 3 points:

- ▶ Mobilization of EU funds (ESF) specifically for support of social innovations.
- ▶ The identification and access to the local social innovation initiatives and their effective support in cooperation with local actors (local authorities, local institutions, local businesses and others).
- ▶ The raised visibility of social innovation projects and initiatives, as part of the support for their sustainability and scaling-up

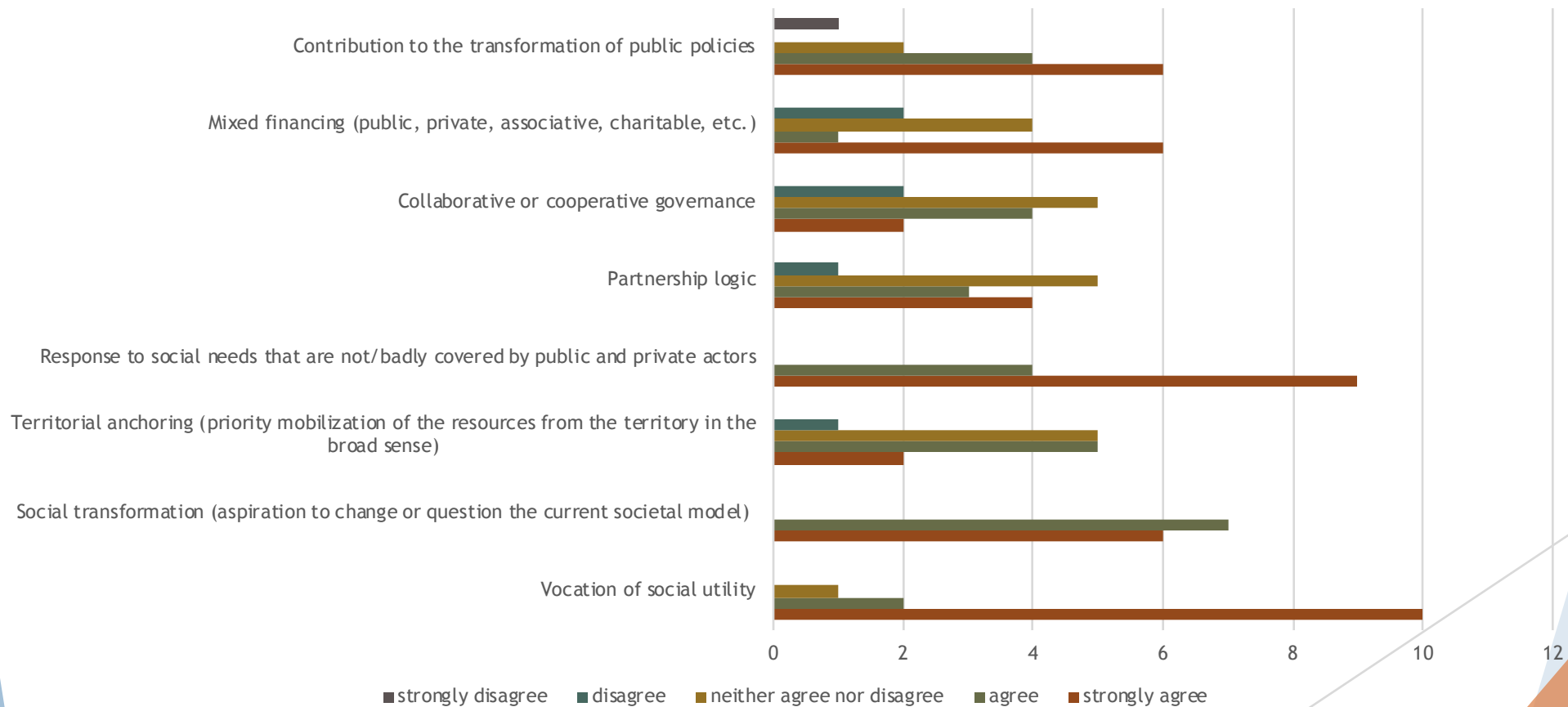
# Key findings on existing approaches and initiatives of social innovation, methods and projects in Bulgaria

- ▶ “Social innovation” is a trendy term and a lot of organisations, especially in the NGO field, like to use it because it sounds attractive for the donors. However, it is a term without a well-defined meaning in Bulgaria.
- ▶ Institutions, including the ESF Managing Authorities, are suspicious about the term “social innovation” because of its ambiguity and prefer to narrow it down to a clear set of pre-defined social problems to be addressed.
- ▶ The business and the NGOs, especially those which work on broader social problems, are more flexible in their understanding and would prefer a broader definition of what “social innovation” is.



# Key findings on existing approaches and initiatives of social innovation, methods and projects in Bulgaria

Elements inseparable from the notion of social enterprise and social innovation



# Conclusions on the mapping of existing approaches, initiatives, methods and projects in Bulgaria

- ▶ There is **no common understanding and clear definition of “social innovations” in Bulgaria**. Among the NGO sector and institutions, there is a common misunderstanding about the differences and specifics of the terms “social economy”, “social entrepreneurship”, “social innovation”. The “green innovations” are not considered as part of the “social innovations” among most of the stakeholders.
- ▶ The concept for “social innovation” is more recognizable among the NGO sector. The businesses are still uncertain or ignorant about the concept. The institutions are trying to follow the EU trends though there is **no a clear political agenda in that respect**.
- ▶ **Social innovations require the collaborative efforts** of public bodies, civil society, academia and businesses, which is both an opportunity and a threat, since leadership is needed but also shared ownership.
- ▶ The research coincided with a process of administrative restructuring which affects to an extent the future policy and management of social innovations at the national level.
- ▶ There is **no aggregated data** about the number and specifics of the “social innovations” and “social innovators” in Bulgaria.
- ▶ **There are convincing examples of successful social innovations in Bulgaria. They share the following characteristics: local roots and support, diversified sources of income, digital tools and strong communication, among others.**
- ▶ The existing experience is **uneven in terms of geographical coverage and type of settlement**.
- ▶ Although Bulgarian national and regional contexts differ, international partnerships and European transfer of experiences are needed to speed up the process of social innovation mainstreaming, and catching up with the most advanced European regions.

# What are the pressing social needs in Bulgaria according to the national and EU official reports?

**10 pressing social issues, which can be identified through analysis of EU official reports, as follows (social entrepreneurs point of view):**

- ▶ People at risk of poverty or social exclusion or affected by (multidimensional) poverty.
- ▶ Obesity rate.
- ▶ Quality of education.
- ▶ High risk of death of avoidable diseases (e.g. tuberculosis, HIV, and hepatitis).
- ▶ Access to healthcare for groups of people with unmet health needs.
- ▶ Increasing access to affordable energy.
- ▶ Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET).
- ▶ Citizenship gaps related to education, employment, and risk of poverty.
- ▶ Increasing quality of life in cities and communities by reducing air pollution.
- ▶ Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates

# What are the pressing social needs in Bulgaria according to the national and EU official reports?

The representatives of municipalities (policy-makers point of view) that took part in the survey, identified the following challenges that could be addressed through social innovations (ranked by priority):

- ▶ Poverty;
- ▶ Access to the labour market;
- ▶ Quality and accessible education;
- ▶ Health care;
- ▶ Quality of life of the elderly;
- ▶ Social inclusion;
- ▶ Climate change;
- ▶ Demographic issues;
- ▶ Civic rights and liberties;
- ▶ International and cross-border cooperation.

Additional issues that are not mentioned above but are volunteered by local authorities, are:

- ▶ Labour migration to Bulgaria;
- ▶ Entrepreneurship for access to culture;
- ▶ Young people internet and social media dependency;
- ▶ Urban regeneration;
- ▶ Early behavior and literacy interventions for pre-school children.

# Who are the main groups of stakeholders in the field of “social innovation” in Bulgaria?

- ▶ Social entrepreneurs – both NGOs and for-profit companies, which main aim is to achieve positive social impact;
- ▶ Policymakers at a national and local level;
- ▶ Academia and research institutions;
- ▶ Banks and other bodies providing financing, including investment funds, business angels and social investors;
- ▶ Incubators and accelerators;
- ▶ Development agencies;
- ▶ A wider range of civil society organizations, which are involved in the identification of social issues, but also in the scaling of the social innovations once they become self-sustainable and viable;
- ▶ Private companies.

# What are the needs of the Bulgarian social innovation stakeholders and how a potential Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations could respond

The desk research, interviews and focus groups showed that one important distinction should be made first: between the “newcomers”/very early-stage social innovators, and the more mature/more experienced social innovators.

Both groups share common interests and needs in:

- ▶ Networking and exchange of information peer-to-peer, including a database of colleagues and potential partners;
- ▶ Access to information for opportunities in the field of funding, trainings, international partnership.

# What are the needs of the Bulgarian social innovation stakeholders and how a potential Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations could respond?

## The early-stage social innovators are mostly interested in:

- ▶ Access to basic knowledge and information, and especially so-called “Starter Pack”, i.e. how to start their innovative activities in cooperation and according to the rules of authorities, funders, partners, clients, etc.;
- ▶ Access to external expertise through trainers and consultants, including on specific topics like accounting, legal issues, marketing and others;
- ▶ Public recognition and visibility, both as moral support and as an opportunity for market penetration.

## The experienced social innovators are more interested in:

- ▶ Access to specific information and expertise, as for example, expertise in social impact measurement;
- ▶ Dialogue with policy-makers, as an instrument for scaling and expanding;
- ▶ Access and knowledge on how to attract and retain quality personnel;
- ▶ External evaluation of their activities.

# What are the needs of the Bulgarian social innovation stakeholders and how a potential Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations could respond?

Bulgarian local governments define three main needs that would help them foster social innovations locally :

- ▶ To establish instruments, including financial ones, to support the development and application in practice of social innovations;
- ▶ To foster collaboration between NGOs, private companies, academia and other actors to initiate and promote social innovations;
- ▶ To establish internal culture to develop and integrate social innovations in institutional policies, practices and services.



# Potential functions and activities of the future Bulgarian National Competence Centre for Social Innovations:

- ▶ Creation of database open for social innovators from different fields of activities and different parts of Bulgaria, as well as for potential partners, as an instrument for facilitating cooperation and common actions.
- ▶ Access to specialised, and verified, expertise – especially in the field of legal issues and accounting/finance.
- ▶ Capacity-building activities, including training and consultancy.
- ▶ Research activities and sharing of information based on data and data analysis.
- ▶ Communication campaigns and communication activities for social awareness and recognition of the social innovations and social innovators.
- ▶ Facilitation of international contacts and international transfer of knowledge and expertise
- ▶ Certification of social innovations / social innovators – although this suggestion was not fully supported by all of the respondents.