



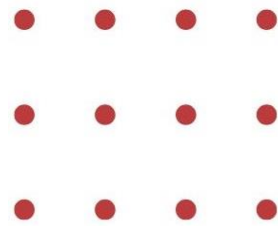
Co-funded by Programme for Employment
and Social Innovation (EaSI)
of the European Union



REPORT

"LESSONS LEARNED - IDENTIFYING AND SCALING UP SOCIAL INNOVATIONS"

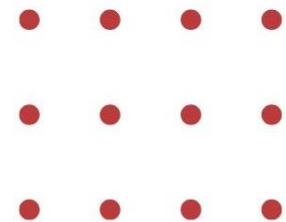
Social Innovations Plus - Competence Centres (SI PLUS)



Final deliverable of the "Social Innovations Plus - Competence Centres (SI PLUS)" project

4.1 Report "Lessons Learned - Identifying and Scaling up Social Innovations"

Project	Social Innovations Plus - Competence Centres (SI PLUS)
Procedure/Funding Programme	Competence centres for social innovation (European Social Fund and European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation)
Reference number	VP/2020/010/0100
Activity Report 4.1.	Activity 4: Pilot actions
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INTRODUCTION

This report aims to present the lessons learned from the pilot scaling up of social innovations in the process of establishing a Competence Centre for Social Innovations in Bulgaria, within the framework of the “Social Innovation Plus - Competence Centres (SI PLUS)” project. The main objective is to scale up successful social innovation projects in the country.

In selecting the social innovation projects to be developed, two key considerations were taken into account. First, the projects should contribute to overcoming territorial imbalances and second, they should promote social cohesion and inclusion.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL INNOVATION AND MAIN AREAS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION INTERVENTIONS

The concept of social innovation is primarily associated with the establishment of new social relations that change the balance of power and ownership, followed by the development and market entry of radically new products/services/practices/models/initiatives that respond to societal needs not covered by public policies and instruments.



“Social innovation” means an activity that (...)

A. relates to the development and implementation of new

... products, services, practices and models

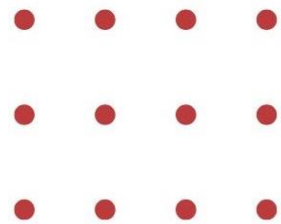
B. meets social needs

C. creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations

D. thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act’

(European Union, 2021a).





As part of the „Social Innovation Plus – Competence Centres (SI PLUS)” project and based on the L&R institute, and Arbeit Plus proposal for definition operationalization we used the working definition in order to launch pilot activities on creating an environment for developing and scaling up of innovations with societal impact:

DIMENSIONS	CHARACTERISTICS
Defining the initial challenges and social needs	Challenges that mainly affect disadvantaged groups of individual citizens and/or local communities
	Problems/challenges affecting broader groups of society
	Inequalities/inequal distributions between groups
	New challenges/problems (new needs, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine)
	Existing challenges/problems for which solutions are not yet available or are still inadequate
Goals / Intentionality	Solving social challenges to sustainably improve social coexistence and strengthen social cohesion
	Empowerment of civil society actors / individual target groups, stimulation of capacities for social action
	Solutions to sustainably reduce social inequalities and unequally distributed material resources and opportunities.
	Restructuring of social power relations in favor of those who have so far had fewer opportunities to exert influence
Impact level / target groups	Tsunami of societal challenges: solutions for challenges of specific groups (vulnerable groups, local groups, etc.) or for overall societal challenge that affect multiple areas of life.
	Cooperation and collaboration: Creation of new forms of cooperation – cooperative missions
	Resource use and distribution: solutions for better and more sustainable use and fairer distribution of existing social and environmental resources and capacities.
	Empowerment: solutions for stimulating/strengthening the scope for action and the opportunities for participation.
	Scope and focus: impact limited to local framework or extending beyond it, supraregional significance through mainstreaming

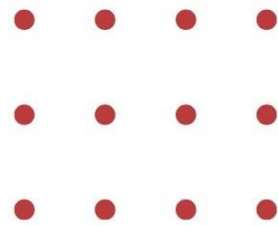
Approach and methods	Participatory approach: Active involvement of the project's target group Stages of participation (project development, innovation, implementation, testing)
	Development of solutions involving or cross-linking all relevant stakeholders
	Multidisciplinary: inclusion and use of diverse perspectives, resources, experiences and competencies
	Openness: Consideration of local and cultural conditions and use of these as resources for the joint development of solutions.
Novelty	New processes, products, methods, etc. (differentiation/cross-linking with technical innovation)
	Reconfiguring social practices to better meet social or societal needs: Forging new relationships or establishing new forms of cooperation/communication.
	New use of existing resources or exploitation of existing resources through new strategies, processes, services
	Solutions/methods/processes that are not new per se , but function better than existing solutions in the respective context and represent an improvement for the target group
	Successful projects that have not yet managed to receive (sufficient) recognition or funding

The societal challenges that provoke the emergence of social innovation are constantly changing with the changing environment and due to the ever-increasing costs required to meet social needs. While there are certain general trends, societal expectations and social issues differ depending on local contexts.

Social innovations as a concept have one key quality - to solve current social problems through innovative approaches that benefit the affected community.

According to a survey conducted by the Sofia Development Association among representatives of different municipalities in Bulgaria, the most important problems to be solved in our society are in the following areas:

- ⇒ **Overcoming poverty;**
- ⇒ **Access to the labor market;**
- ⇒ **Quality and accessible education;**
- ⇒ **Quality and accessible healthcare;**
- ⇒ **Quality of life for the elderly;**
- ⇒ **Social inclusion;**
- ⇒ **Climate issues and the right to clean air;**
- ⇒ **Entrepreneurship for access to culture;**
- ⇒ **Young people's dependence on the internet and social media;**
- ⇒ **Urban regeneration and creating community spaces.**



A first step is to identify social innovations and the need for them using the criteria described above, and then assess their potential for scaling up (developing and increasing their impact).

WHY IS SCALING UP SOCIAL INNOVATION IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO SCALING UP?

Scaling up = increasing the impact of social innovation, which does not necessarily mean scaling up social enterprises/companies/NGOs.

Development and growth are more about entirely business oriented organizations, whereas social enterprises and entrepreneurs are delivering social impact activity, thus scaling up will be about increasing the social impact to solve important societal challenges.

Scaling up is part of the process of developing social innovation and optimizing the activities of the organization that created and implemented it.

The aim of scaling up social innovations is to increase the social impact of innovations so that they can benefit a greater number of people and have a greater impact on society as a whole.

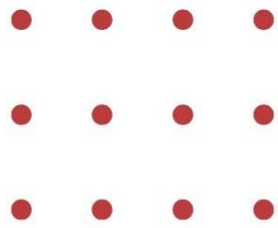
According to the French Council for the Social and Solidarity Economy, social impact: "consists of the repercussions of an organization's activities (evolution, disruption, change, decay), both on its external stakeholders (users or customers), whether direct or indirect, and on society as a whole."

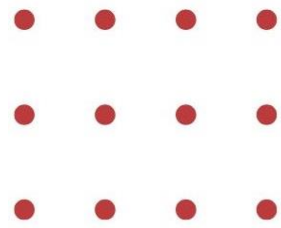
Scaling up is a "process" rather than a "state".

Scale up – creating conditions to increase the impact of innovation and to create new activities, services/products/practices/initiatives.

Scale out - geographic and/or demographic expansion, reaching a larger audience/target group of new services/products/activities/initiatives/practices.

Scale deep – expanding and optimizing the use of the innovation - collaborating with other organizations; transferring know-how, merging assets between organizations.





THE PROCESS OF SCALING UP SOCIAL INNOVATION: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PILOT ACTIVITY

Step one: creating an environment for identifying and sharing social innovation ideas and projects.

Creating networks and partnerships that bring together innovators, experts, policy makers administrators, and other stakeholders who can support and promote social innovation. This would help create a supportive environment that provides access to resources, expertise and possibly funding.

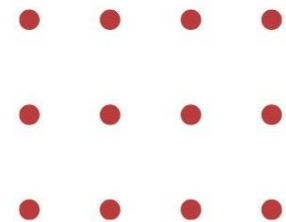
Such a supportive network is created by the Academy for Visionaries. "The Academy for Visionaries is an initiative open to the individual young urban person with smart solutions to benefit the community. The initiative is completely free of charge, and any young person, aged 15 to 29, living in the city is eligible to participate. The Academy is organized annually by Sofia Municipality, and is supported by the Sofia Development Association through mentoring and resource sharing.

Step two: creating a supportive environment for the development of social innovation.

In 2022, the Sofia Development Association's team chose to support, through mentoring and resource sharing, the "Imprint" idea of a group of young people whose main goal is to address the following social challenges confronting negative stereotypes by representing a diverse ethnic community through culture.

Their idea of social innovation was to present the organisation of a festival called "Imprint" together with local communities in order to increase social impact - providing access to outdoor culture (scaling up) in unprestigious and abandoned urban spaces (scaling up).





THE CHALLENGES OF SCALING UP THE PROJECT:	APPROACH	SOLUTIONS FOUND
⇒ Locate and renovate an urban space so that it provides a safe and accessible environment	Engagement with local authorities and institutions from the very start of the project's implementation.	Identifying the outdoor stage in St. Trinity district in need of renovation. Involvement of the district administration as a partner to ease the bureaucratic permissions process and make the environment safer.
⇒ Creating an interest and engagement in local communities	Organizing creative design workshops with artists, policy makers and citizens.	Forming volunteer groups to renovate and brighten up the stage and run the festival.
⇒ Financing renovation, if needed	Analysis of available resources and merging of resources.	Purchase of materials needed for the renovation
⇒ Ensuring sustainability	Formalizing the partnership to support and fill the stage with content	Inclusion of the project in the Sofia Urban Regeneration Programme.

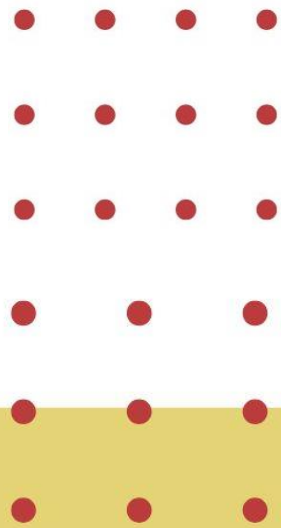
Step three: Analysis of results.

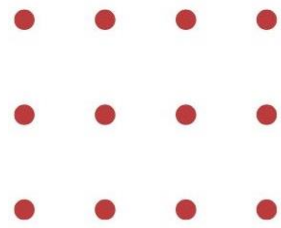
The result:

- ⇒ **Completely renovated stage;**
- ⇒ **An engaged and empowered local community;**
- ⇒ **A festival with an audience of over 100 people in a part of town that had not seen a presentation of cultural content in several years;**
- ⇒ **Creating a model for replication in other abandoned parts of the city.**

Lessons learned:

- ⇒ **A supportive environment is key to scaling up innovatio;**
- ⇒ **Sharing and merging of resources can be more important and more sustainable than one-time funding;**
- ⇒ **Involving policy makers and local communities in the implementation of a social innovation from the beginning guarantees success.**



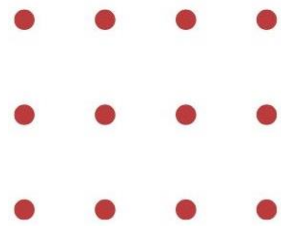


Another example of scaling up social innovation is the Bureau for Information and Services for Third Country Nationals. The Bureau is a joint initiative led by Sofia Municipality to create a service centre that provides up-to-date information and services to refugees and migrants, third-country nationals, NGOs, employers and stakeholders. The space is provided by Sofia Municipality and Sofia Development Association, full-time social workers are provided by the Bulgarian Red Cross, and over 15 NGOs and international organizations provide services on a rotational basis in seven languages. The Bureau has its own programme of outreach and capacity development activities.

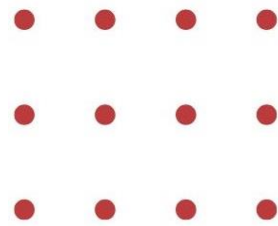
The societal challenge: a policy of "zero integration" (as per the report on Bulgaria by the Asylum Information Database 2021).

It is in this exact situation that Sofia - through the Sofia Development Association and other partners - opened its Bureau for Information and Services for Third Country Nationals in September 2021, making integration assistance visible, coordinating efforts, strengthening the local ecosystem and developing a relationship of mutual trust and shared vision. It was created at a time just before the dramatic increase in the number of refugees coming to Bulgaria.





THE CHALLENGES OF SCALING UP THE PROJECT:	APPROACH	SOLUTIONS FOUND
⇒ Expanding activities and services despite a hostile environment	Creating a collaborative mission instead of a simple pilot project	A broad coalition of organizations with common goals that aims to achieve synergies at the community, local and national levels.
⇒ Shortage of resources	Sharing and merging resources	Monthly joint planning of activities and service delivery by over 15 organisations.
⇒ Creating a supportive environment for integration and market access	Recognition of the work of those working on the ground and building institutional bridges	Establishing an award for employers hiring third-country nationals. Organising regular discussions involving third-country nationals, employers, NGOs, public institutions.
⇒ Lack of trust in institutions	Participative evaluation of the activity	Establishing a model of inclusive performance evaluation and recommendations for improving services and activities.
⇒ Counteracting stereotypes	Storytelling and internships	Organizing student internships at the Bureau and publishing the stories of their work to help third-country nationals.
⇒ Ensuring sustainability	Partnership	Partnership agreement with Sofia Municipality for long-term use of the site of the Bureau.



Results:

The Bureau for Information and Services for Third Country Nationals is a good example of the application of the "test before invest" principle. A small-scale operation that succeeded in achieving various objectives:

- ⇒ Easier access to TCN services by bringing together multiple service providers, expanding the range of languages and combining a variety of services.
- ⇒ Strengthening the ecosystem through collaborative programming and decision making, and shifting the balance of power through shared ownership, achieving significant media reach.
- ⇒ Taking steps towards creating a 'one-stop shop' for refugees and migrants by putting the challenge of integration on the local political and public agenda, increasing the capacity of local administration to engage with integration policies and practices, developing resources and reporting on experiences.

The office was an important stepping stone towards organising the management of the Ukrainian refugee influx after March 2022, so its creation also proved very timely. The Ukrainian crisis, in turn, further motivated all involved with the Bureau to learn by doing and seek opportunities to adapt and expand.

Lessons learned:

- ⇒ Monitoring the results of the Bureau's work and regular public reporting.

It is important to create and use the snowball effect when the pilot activities and their results are significant enough to convince decision-makers to scale up.

- ⇒ Linking the scaling up of the Bureau's activities not only to geographic or sectoral coverage (of sectors important for integration), but also to the capacity of the city and the state to achieve their integration commitments and goals.
- ⇒ Identifying municipalities that face similar challenges in integrating significant numbers of refugees and migrants. Contacting them directly or through the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.

