



PARI
PATHS FOR RURAL
INNOVATION

Project ID: 101169803

MANDATORY TRANSNATIONAL WORKSHOP REPORT 3

Deliverable #3.3



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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the study visit to Linköping and Söderköping in the Östergötland region, Sweden, held on 4–5 September 2025. The visit focused on public procurement, financing in the context of social economy, and practical examples of social and ecological innovation clusters. The event brought together regional actors, municipal officials, cooperative enterprises, and social economy stakeholders to exchange practices and explore sustainable development approaches in rural settings.

During the visit the term of “**micro clusters**” was introduced, as well as the “**Cluster ladder**”. In Östergötland as well as in the project we are beginning our processes, exploring, from our partnerships different local, regional, and national perspectives, what clusters can be, what factors lead to success, and what pitfalls to avoid.

Three questions guided us in our exploration:

- What is the countryside?
- How can a cluster be defined?
- What makes clusters succeed?

Sweden: Facts and Figures

Sweden – facts and figures

- Capital: Stockholm
- Distance: 1,600 km from north to south
- Area: 450,000 km² (96,000 km coastline), 2/3 of the surface is covered by forest
- Population: 10,5 million
- Density: average 24 inhabitants per km², regional differences from 3 to 375 inhabitants per km²
- Foreign-born inhabitants: 20%
- Life expectancy:
Men 81 years, women 85 years

- Religion: a secular nation
- Government: Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary democracy
- Education: Ten years compulsory schooling
- Three years upper secondary school, optional
- Working hours: 40 hours, minimum paid vacation 5 weeks
- Labour force participation:
Men 75% and women 71%

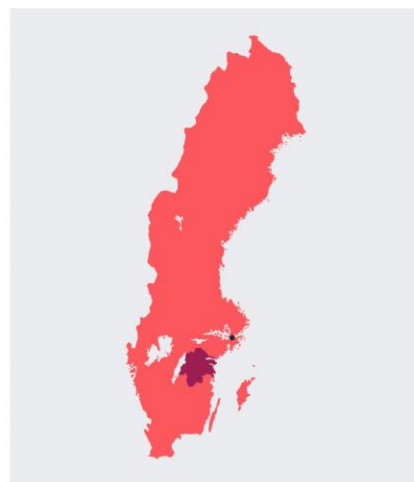


Figure 1 - Sweden: Facts and Figures

Östergötland Region: Facts and Figures

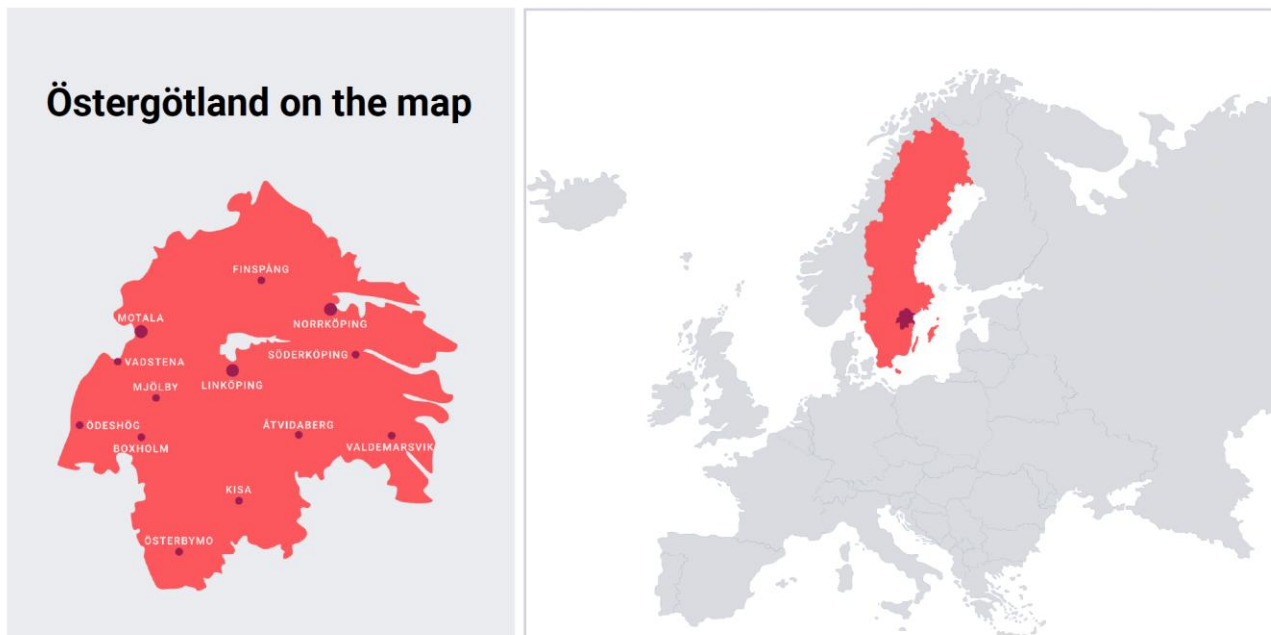


Figure 2 – Östergötland: Facts and Figures

Östergötland is one of Sweden's most populous regions with approximately 470,000 inhabitants (as of 2023), and is known for its strong public sector, university presence, and vibrant industrial base. The region's economy is diverse, with strengths in advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and sustainable food production. Its capital, Linköping, is home to both a leading technical university and several innovation clusters.

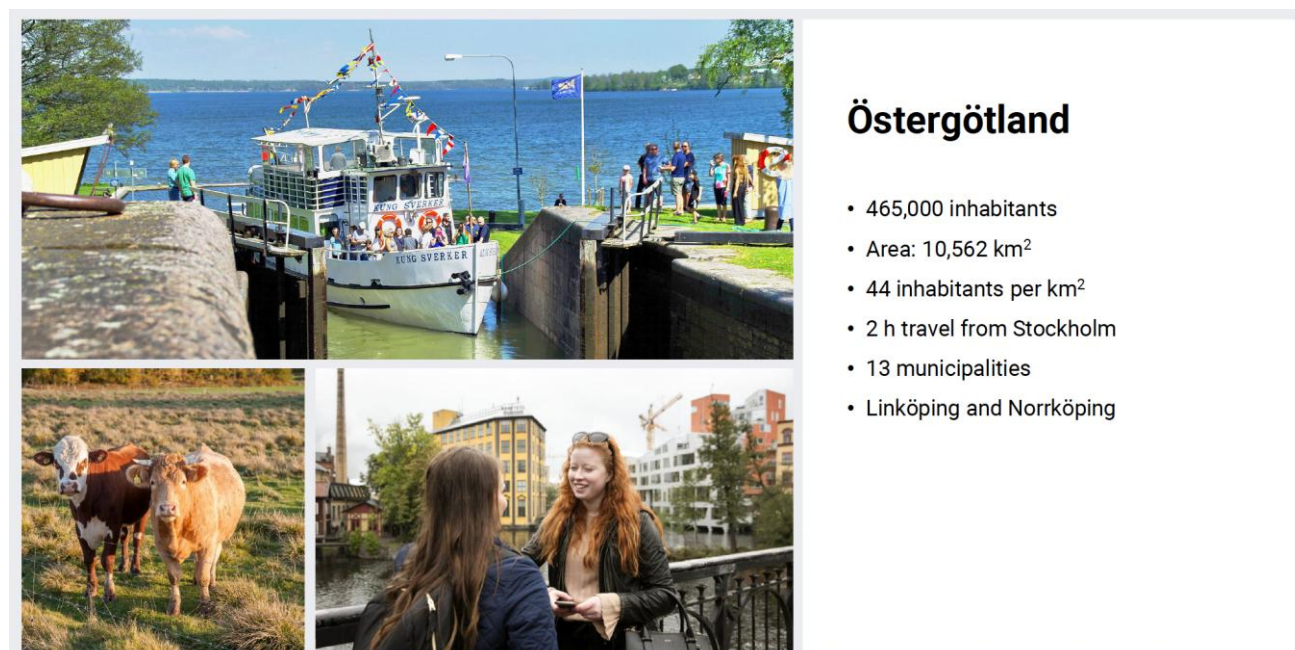


Figure 3 - Östergötland: Data Sheet

What are rural areas? On the importance of geography

Place Typology – Understanding the Geography of Östergötland

Östergötland is home to **472,446 inhabitants** across **13 municipalities**, ranging from a small municipality of just 3,600 inhabitants to a large one with over 160,000. The region offers a striking variety of landscapes, from dense urban areas and highly productive farmland to deep forests and a vast archipelago.

Why Place Typology Matters

The concept of *place typology* goes beyond administrative borders, recognizing that “**what is rural depends on the question.**” Instead of relying only on municipal boundaries, it uses a **grid-based method** (1,000 m squares) that factors in:

- Population density
- Commuting patterns
- Land use (housing, industry, agriculture, forests)
- Economic activity (variety of businesses)
- Accessibility and distance to cities

This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of rural and urban dynamics.

Roots of the Method

The model is inspired by the Finnish statistics institute **SYKE** and developed further by the research institute **Nordregio**. Region Östergötland has adapted this method to create a regional-level perspective for Swedish conditions.

Seven Typologies of Place

The analysis divides Östergötland into seven place categories:

1. Inner urban area
2. Outer urban area
3. Peri-urban area
4. Local center in rural area
5. Rural area close to urban
6. Rural heartland
7. Sparsely populated rural area

Typology for urban areas

To get an even better understanding of the geography Region Östergötland also have a typology also for urban areas, or dense areas. This typology goes beyond number of inhabitants and shows instead the functionality, what range of functions reside there.

The urban areas and municipal “capitals” play a significant role for surrounding rural areas, for access to services, health care, public transport, childcare, schools and job opportunities.

Nodes of Functionality

Beyond population size, places are also assessed by their functions—what services, opportunities, and roles they provide. Examples include:

- **Cross-regional nodes** (universities, university hospitals)
- **Regional nodes** (large municipal capitals)
- **Part regional nodes** (smaller municipal capitals)
- **Nodes for larger rural areas** (with workplaces, education, services)
- **Nodes with limited or no services** (from a grocery store to housing only)

Understanding Urban Functionality

The framework considers the **range of services available in urban areas** and what they mean for surrounding rural communities:

- Commercial services and shops
- Public healthcare (from pharmacy to hospital)
- Education (from childcare to university)
- Public transport access
- Balance between workplaces and population

Place typology and typology for urban areas help policymakers, planners, and communities see Östergötland not just as a collection of municipalities, but as a mosaic of places with unique roles, challenges, and opportunities. By focusing on both geography and functionality, the region can better design strategies for sustainable development and vibrant rural-urban connections.

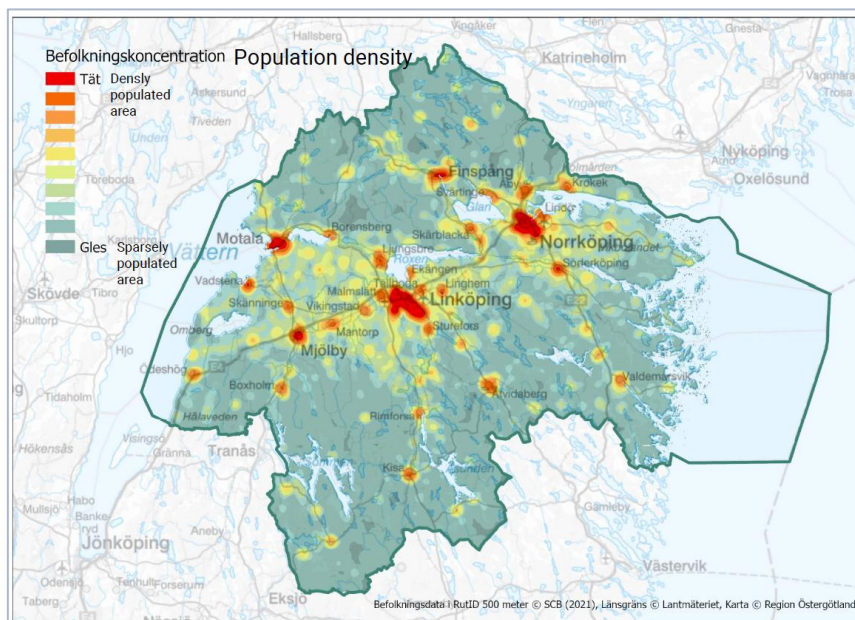


Figure 4 - Population Density in Östergötland

What is the countryside?

Östergötland is a multifaceted region where the countryside takes on different expressions. To understand where and how clusters emerge, we need to understand the differences between various types of rural areas.

Region Östergötland's place typology divides the county into several geographical categories, including:

- Dense areas in the countryside – small centers with some business density.
- Rural areas – areas with more dispersed settlement but strong local anchoring.
- Sparse rural areas – areas with low population density, often in forest or archipelago landscapes.

Understanding the variation of rural areas is crucial when analyzing clusters – it affects everything from collaboration opportunities to access to workforce and visitors.

How to define clusters?

In the overview on existing projects developed in the PARI Project, the following frame for the concept of Clusters for Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEI) is provided:

“Unlike conventional industrial clusters, which are primarily driven by the pursuit of economic efficiency, market competition, and profit maximization, CSEIs are fundamentally rooted in the principles of the social and solidarity economy (SSE). This means they emphasize cooperation over competition, democratic governance, and the reinvestment of surpluses for social or environmental objectives rather than private gain. The defining characteristic of a CSEI is its deliberate integration of social and ecological dimensions into its operational model and strategic objectives. For instance, a CSEI might focus on developing circular economy solutions for local waste management, simultaneously creating employment opportunities for marginalized groups. Or, it could involve a network of organic farmers, local food processors, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives working together to build a resilient, sustainable food system that also enhances social cohesion and provides healthy, affordable food to the community.”

The theoretical underpinning of CSEIs draws from an evolved understanding of cluster theory, where the emphasis shifts from purely economic agglomeration to a more holistic view that includes social capital, trust, and shared values as critical drivers of innovation and resilience.”

Thus, a cluster is more than just a group of companies. It is an interplay. In its simplest form, it is a network of actors – often small businesses – that complement each other and benefit from cooperation rather than competition. Crucially, in the case of CSEIs, actors from the social economy—cooperatives, associations, foundations, and work-integrating social enterprises—are central players alongside private businesses and public sector actors. In Sweden this is very visible: across clusters, public services, civil society, and the social economy, collaboration is consistently described as something that grows from relationships first—with formal tools used when useful, not as a precondition. The high-trust context helps these informal networks function smoothly, matching the observation that Swedes often “skip” extra formality when cooperation already works.

We can understand clusters based on:

- Geographical proximity – they are close to each other, often in the same locality or municipality.
- Product/service – e.g., local food producers, nature tourism, or crafts.
- Target group – clusters targeting the same type of customer, e.g., cycling tourists.
- Value-based foundation – where sustainability, local development, shared place identity, and the principles of the social economy are at the core.

The Cluster Ladder. Different Scales of Cooperation



Figure 5 - The Cluster Ladder

Microclusters:

- A farm shop, a microbrewery, and an artist creating a joint summer brochure.
- Collaboration between three companies in Kinda offering hiking packages (stay, eat, experience).
- A village association running a local food market and small events.

Cluster at the municipal or intermunicipal level:

- Collaboration between Vadstena, Motala, and Ödeshög on pilgrimage routes.
- Destination Göta Canal – a cross-municipal tourism cluster along the waterway.
- A cluster of farm shops and cafés in Ydre coordinating opening hours and marketing.

National cluster:

- Swedish Lapland Visitors Board – a nationally profiled tourism cluster.
- Innovatum Science Park in Trollhättan – collaboration between technology and tourism actors.
- Smaka på Skåne – a food cluster that has profiled the region as a gastronomic destination.

Multinational cluster

- Nordic Innovation House – Nordic cluster in Silicon Valley.
- CleanTech Öresund – energy and environment cluster between Skåne and Denmark.
- Interreg project ARCTISEN – around culturally sustainable tourism in the Arctic, where Swedish actors are also involved.

However, clusters may also deviate from and/or transcend, for example, administrative, geographical, and the boundaries indicated in the figure above.

What makes clusters succeed?¹

Regardless of scale or theme, there are certain common denominators for clusters that succeed in growing and renewing themselves:

- Trust first – when people know each other and dare to collaborate, magical things happen.
- A clear direction – successful clusters have a common vision, e.g., “become a leading sustainable destination.”
- Room to test – innovation power arises where ideas can be tested without needing to work perfectly right away.
- Support, but not control – the public sector can do a lot as an enabler, but should not take over.
- Local anchoring – the most vital clusters grow from the unique conditions and stories of the place.

How does this Swedish approach relate the findings of PARI project based on the findings in the preliminary overview?

Linking to PARI – Paths for Rural Innovation

This place-based approach resonates strongly with the goals of the PARI project. By moving beyond administrative borders and working with a fine-grained, grid-based analysis, place typology allows us to see the micro-level dynamics of rural areas more clearly.

In doing so, it makes visible the micro-clusters of businesses, associations, and actors that shape local development but often remain hidden within broader statistical categories. These clusters represent not only economic potential but also the social and cultural fabric of rural communities.

Through PARI, we see the opportunity to use place typology as a tool for identifying, analyzing, and ultimately supporting rural clusters in their specific contexts. By dividing geography in this way, we can recognize and strengthen the diverse forms of rural innovation across Östergötland, ensuring that each place, whether large or small, has the chance to thrive.

¹ Adapted from general insights in cluster research (Porter 1998; Sölvell et al. 2003; Asheim & Coenen 2005; Barca 2009; Putnam 2000)

The key data of the mission to Östergötland

Places:	Söderköping and Linköping
Dates:	4th – 5th of September 2025
Participants (project partners):	1. Elisa Mancinelli, REVES Aisbl (Belgium) 2. Margareta Wandel, Region Östergötland (Sweden) 3. Malin Gumaelius, Region Östergötland (Sweden) 4. Pia Tingvall, Coompanion Östergötland (Sweden) 5. Camilla Carlsson, Coompanion Östergötland (Sweden) 6. Pablo Lansac, ANEL (Spain) 7. Iñaki Ugalde, ANEL (Spain) 8. Javier Zubicoa, Government of Navarra (Spain) 9. Raúl Pilar, ANEL and Gure Sustraiak (Spain) 10. Josu Reparaz, Federation of Ikastola's of Navarre (Spain) 11. Haran Burguete, Federation of Ikastola's of Navarre (Spain) 12. Nicolle Santos, Câmara Municipal de Torres Vedras (Portugal) 13. Helena Vazão, SmartFarm Colab (Portugal) 14. Vítor Simões, Valor Partilhado (Portugal)
Invited experts:	1. Ann-Louise Kroon, Chairman of Cooperate Coffice Söderköping 2. Jonas Lagander, Coompanion Östergötland 3. Lotta Nilsson, CEO Tygsparven and part of NGO Möjligheternas Söderköping 4. Therése Eklöf, Head of business development The Municipality of Söderköping 5. Johnny Forsell, CEO Jotex 6. Helena Haglund, CEO Björke Väveri 7. Per Nyhlin, CEO Medisox 8. Midas Verhejden, CEO Hållbar & Kök, Söderköping 9. Louise Magnusson, Region Östergötland Head of the department Unit for business development 10. Niklas Tideklev, Region Östergötland 11. Gordon Hahn, CEO Coompanion Sweden 12. Nils-Erik Elf Svensson, Café Drivbänk
Approach:	Study visits and learning missions are not mere excursions, but living bridges—pathways where ideas, knowledge, and cooperation travel freely between people and places. They are immersive journeys that invite dialogue, spark imagination, and allow new seeds of thought to be planted across different soils. When policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders step outside their familiar landscapes, they return with fresh eyes—able to see the hidden possibilities of social and ecological innovation, to understand not only what succeeds, but also why it does, and how its essence might be reshaped to meet their own local challenges. Within this spirit, the PARI project offers a guiding framework. At its heart lie Clusters for Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEIs): flexible, place-based constellations that draw strength from the uniqueness of each region rather than imposing uniform solutions. Study visits and missions organized under PARI give these clusters breath and life. The study visit unfolds as a journey into Sweden's culture of trust and collaboration. At every encounter, participants meet people who show how creativity, sustainability, and cooperation are not just ideals, but everyday practices. They experience how businesses, social economy and civil society join forces. How new ways of financing spark opportunities, and how communities weave together tradition and innovation to build resilience.

	Rather than rules and formality, it is the energy of networks, clusters, and partnerships that stands out, people working together, testing ideas, and creating value that stays local. In the end, the visit offers more than insights: it is an invitation to imagine how trust, shared purpose, and long-term commitment can shape the future of regions everywhere. Participants witness the living proof of transformation. They see how CSEIs take root in local assets and relationships, how they adapt to cultural and institutional terrains, and how, in their unfolding, they bring integrated benefits to both people and planet. These journeys are not just about learning but are also about envisioning new worlds together.
Narrative:	The study visit unfolded like a tapestry of encounters and discoveries. From the vibrant clusters of Söderköping to the pulse of Linköping, the participants stepped into spaces where imagination and cooperation shape daily life. In co-working cafés and community hubs, stories of resilience and creativity were shared, concerning barter systems and local currencies, entrepreneurs weaving textiles and festivals that breathe history into the present. Conversations spilled over into lunches crafted from local fields and kitchens that live by the rhythm of the seasons. Each meeting was more than a presentation; it was invitation to see how social and ecological innovation takes root in the ordinary (e.g. school meals, cooperative farming, small businesses, or municipal and regional visions). Between it all, there were moments of walking together, pausing, tasting, listening. A rhythm of exchange where ideas cross borders, perspectives shift, and the seeds of new possibilities quietly sown. The journey not only showcased projects, but it also revealed how communities, when working hand in hand, can nourish both people and planet.

1. The Östergötland ecosystem

1.1 Building on Innovation and Trust

Coompanion Östergötland

Coompanion is the home of cooperative entrepreneurship in Sweden, a place where ideas turn into meaningful ventures that create real value for people and communities.

At its heart, Coompanion believes in the power of collaboration. Instead of building businesses on competition, it helps people build them on trust, equality, and shared ownership. Whether it is about starting a social enterprise, a local cooperative, or a bold new initiative, Coompanion offers empowering guidance, tools and networks.

What makes Coompanion unique is its vision: businesses should not only generate profit, but also strengthen communities, foster sustainability, and make society more inclusive. It's about entrepreneurship with a purpose, where success is measured not just by numbers, but by the positive impact created together.

Coompanion is more than an advisor; it's a movement. A movement proving that when people cooperate, they can build resilient businesses, create new opportunities, and shape a future that works for everyone.

www.coompanion.se



Svensk Barter (the Swedish Barter)

Swedish Barter, or Svensk Barter, is not only an inspiring way to rethink value, but it is also a fully functioning business system. While the idea builds on connection, cooperation, and creativity, the exchange itself is still monetary in nature, just in an alternative form.

Here is how it works in practice:

- **The Barter Currency (Barterkrona)**

All transactions are recorded in a digital account system using the unit barterkronor. This functions like an internal currency, where 1 barterkrona = 1 Swedish krona in value.

- **How companies trade**

Instead of paying in SEK, businesses trade goods and services through the system, where credits and debits are tracked automatically. A restaurant, for example, might earn *barterkronor* by hosting a company dinner, and then spend those credits on accounting services or marketing support.

- **Legal and tax compliant:**

Every transaction is treated like a normal business deal. Invoices are issued in SEK, with *barterkronor* as the means of payment. VAT is always added and reported as in any other business transaction, which ensures full compliance with Swedish tax regulations.

- **Liquidity and growth benefits:**

Companies can save cash while still accessing what they need, which improves liquidity. They also reach new customers within the barter network—buyers who might not have chosen them otherwise.

- **Flexibility:**

You don't need a direct swap between two parties. You can earn *barterkronor* from one transaction and use them later with a completely different member of the network.

What makes Swedish Barter unique:

- Redefining value: Money is not the only way to trade; skills, resources, and creativity matter just as much.
- Empowerment and fairness: Every business, regardless of size, has something to offer and gain.
- Community and cooperation: Beyond trade, it builds long-term trust and relationships.
- Sustainability: By circulating value locally and reducing waste, it promotes smarter, greener growth.
- Creativity: New business opportunities emerge when exchange is broadened beyond cash.

<https://coompanion.se/svenskbarter/>



SVENSK BARTER

Barter Exchange

- a trading system that help businesses to ...

- Find new customers
- Increase turnover
- Strengthen solidity
- Engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR)

SVENSK BARTER



1.2 The Söderköping cluster. A Hub for Sustainability

Söderköping is a dynamic hub where cooperation drives opportunity and innovation. Besides being a charming town, Söderköping provides support to people, businesses, and other organizations to co-create solutions, strengthen community ties, and shape a sustainable future together.

A Local Currency: Value that Stays in the Community

What makes Möjligheternas Söderköping truly unique is its very own local currency, which has become an engine for collaboration and trust.

This currency keeps value circulating within the community, empowering local businesses, encouraging exchange, and reminding everyone that prosperity grows stronger when shared.



Cooperation as a Way of Life

In Söderköping, tradition and innovation meet, sustainability and growth walk hand in hand, and cooperation unlocks endless opportunities.

With its own currency and a culture of collaboration, Söderköping is more than a town—it is a movement, a model, and living proof of what happens when people build the future together.

<https://mojligheternassoderkopring.se/>



Östgötadagarna – The Rural Days of Östergötland

Östgötadagarna is a major celebration of rural life, business, culture, and nature across Östergötland. It provides a sustainable and strong arena for cooperation, development, and visibility for companies, associations, and local actors in the countryside.

The event showcases rural businesses and highlights Östergötland as an inspiring place to live, work, and experience.



Key facts:

- Takes place twice a year:
 - Spring: May 17–18, 2025
 - Autumn: September 6–7, 2025
- Draws over 100,000 visitors each year.
- Features 230–240 companies, plus clusters of businesses and associations, altogether 260–280 participants.

Awards & Recognition:

Three prestigious awards are presented at a ceremony in Linköping Castle, each with a prize of 15,000 SEK:

- The Pastry Award – for rural bakeries using local ingredients in artisanal ways.
- The Craftsman Award – for outstanding rural craftsmanship.
- The Rural Scholarship – for individuals, companies, or associations driving local rural development.

Experiences & Highlights:

Visitors can take road trips to meet artisans and entrepreneurs at places such as [Hagdahls Smide](#), [Kornettgården](#), [Boställets Wood-Fired Bakery](#), [Ölsbo Farm Brewery](#) and [Stafsäter Farm Ice Cream](#).

Marketing & Reach:

The event is widely promoted through:

- Printed & digital maps, posters, flags, and large roadside signs.
- Media coverage in newspapers, radio, and TV.
- A strong online presence via website, Instagram, Facebook, and event reporters.

Cooperation & Clusters:

A strong focus is on cluster development, where groups of businesses collaborate to create joint visitor routes and marketing efforts, enhancing the visitor experience and strengthening the rural economy.

Financing:

- Region Östergötland contributes 900,000 SEK (staff and marketing).
- Participating businesses/actors contribute 300,000 SEK through registration fees (500 SEK for non-profits, 800 SEK for commercial actors).

As a project, we also see great potential to further develop Östgötadagarna's unifying power. Today, it primarily invites residents to visit, shop, and experience rural life during two dedicated days each year. But the event could also serve as a springboard for more systematic cooperation—bringing together public, private, and civil society actors in ways that extend beyond the festival itself. By building on the spirit of collaboration, Östgötadagarna can evolve into a continuous driver of regional development, innovation, and sustainable partnerships all year round.

<https://www.ostgotadagarna.se/sv/>

Cooperate Coffice

Cooperate Partner in Söderköping is a hub for collaboration and trust-building in the region. Here, small businesses and non-profits come together not only to share spaces and services but also to create a culture of mutual support and learning. By working side by side, entrepreneurs,



associations, and social innovators find opportunities to exchange knowledge, pool resources, and co-create solutions that strengthen both their own initiatives and the wider community.

What makes Cooperate Partner unique is its role as a trusted meeting place. It nurtures long-term relationships between actors who might otherwise remain disconnected, bridging sectors and industries through daily interaction and collective activities. This trust-building function lowers barriers to cooperation, making it easier to test new ideas, take risks together, and develop sustainable enterprises.

In this way, Cooperate Partner serves as a local hub for innovation and resilience, anchoring a network where collaboration is not just encouraged but actively facilitated. The result is a thriving local ecosystem where businesses, associations, and citizens grow stronger together, contributing to Söderköping's identity as a community built on cooperation, trust, and shared value.

www.cooperateoffice.se/

Söderköping Municipality

Söderköping positions itself as the most attractive place to live in Östergötland, combining a lively countryside, a unique archipelago, and strong ambitions for growth.

At the heart of Söderköping is a dynamic small-business community, supported by strong partnerships that nurture local growth. Networks such as the Business Council of Söderköping, Nyföretagarcentrum, Leader Kustlandet, East Sweden Business Region, and Coompanion Östergötland help entrepreneurs, innovators, and businesses thrive.



Söderköping is also a community for all ages, ensuring quality of life from preschool to elderly care. Food plays a central role in this vision. The municipality serves around 3,000 lunches daily, from toddlers to centenarians, guided by values of sustainability, nutrition, and education.

Their food strategy emphasizes:

- Local and Swedish ingredients whenever possible.
- At least 30% organic choices, seasonal produce, and sustainable fish.
- More plant-based options and meals prepared from scratch.
- Including game meat when available.

Education around food is deeply integrated:

- Preschools use the Vegetable of the Month program, where children grow, cook, and learn to appreciate nutritious foods.
- Schools connect meals to learning, raising awareness about how food impacts both health and the environment.
- Elderly care provides joyful meals with variety, strong nutrition, and attention to special dietary needs.

Söderköping's holistic approach to growth, where business, sustainability, and community well-being go hand in hand, has even brought recognition, as they have reached the finals in national competitions.

1.3 Insights into the Söderköping experiences

The FIX Area in Söderköping. From Industry to Innovation

Söderköping's textile history ranges from the simple garments and crafts of the Middle Ages to a large modern textile industry with the well-known brand Fix. Archaeological finds, such as the unique Söderköping shirt from the 13th century, show early textile production in the city. In modern times, from the mid-20th century to 1990, Fix Trikåfabriker was one of Söderköping's largest employers and a prominent player in children's clothing production, known for its high quality and large exports.

The **FIX area** in Söderköping thus carries a rich industrial history. Once home to manufacturing and workshops that shaped the town's economic life, it was a place where craftsmanship, production, and hard work laid the foundation for local prosperity. The area's name itself has long been associated with activity, resilience, and the spirit of "getting things done."

Today, the FIX area has transformed into something new, **a living hub for cooperation and clusters**. While its past was defined by traditional industry, its present and future are shaped by **collaboration, creativity, and sustainable business development**.

Entrepreneurs, small businesses, and organizations now gather here, forming **clusters that strengthen each other through shared knowledge, networks, and resources**. The FIX area has become a meeting point where different industries and ideas intersect—where innovation grows from cooperation rather than competition.

This mix of history and forward-thinking energy gives the FIX area a unique identity: a place where heritage meets renewal and where Söderköping's entrepreneurial spirit continues to thrive in modern form.

The study visit began at [Jofotex](#), where owner Johnny Forsell presented the business. A brief stop was then made at Söderköpings Återvinning, a second-hand store.



Figure 6 - Original Photos taken during the PARI Visits

The next visit took place at [Björke Väveri](#), where owner Helena Höglund provided information about the company, while partner and colleague Maja Magnusson Wiklund managed the register.

The program continued at [Medisox](#), where CEO Per Nyhlin, also known as "Pelle," introduced the company.

The visit concluded with a tour of [Tygsparven](#), guided by CEO Lotta Nilsson, who also organized the study visit.



Figure 7 - Original Photos taken during the PARI Visits

Hållbar & Kök.

Where Sustainability Meets Community

In the heart of Söderköping, [Hållbar & Kök](#) is a meeting point for sustainability, collaboration, and creativity. At the center of it all is Midas Verhejden, the passionate owner whose enthusiasm for cooperation and local partnerships shapes everything about the restaurant. For him, ‘food’ is about building connections between local producers, conscious customers, and a community that values quality and responsibility.

Hållbar & Kök proudly embraces locally produced and sustainable ingredients, carefully chosen to reflect the seasons and support nearby farmers and artisans. Each dish tells a story of place and people: the growers, the makers, and the collaborative spirit that makes Söderköping unique.

Midas’s vision goes beyond running a restaurant. He sees Hållbar & Kök as a hub for collaboration, where local producers, small businesses, and creative minds come together to shape a more sustainable and resilient future. His energy and openness inspire others to join in, proving that when people cooperate, everyone wins.

Hållbar & Kök is not just a kitchen but instead it is a movement in Söderköping, led by Midas’s passion for sustainability, local pride and the power of working together.



Figure 8 - A Conversation with Midas at Hållbar & Kök
 (Original Photo taken during the PARI Visit)

2. Public Authorities as Enabling Stakeholders

2.1 Region Östergötland. Context and Vision

Region Östergötland serves as a driving force for sustainable development and quality of life, with responsibilities in three key areas:

- Health care
- Regional development
- Public transport

The region's vision is to build a future where well-being, competitiveness, and sustainability go hand in hand. Region Östergötland leads and coordinates several strategic areas, including:

- The Regional Development Strategy
- The Regional Transport Plan
- The Regional Growth and Innovation Strategy
- The Regional Competence Strategy
- The Collaborative Cultural Model

The **Regional Development Strategy** rests on three pillars:

1. Well-being for inhabitants, improving quality of life through healthcare, education, and opportunities.
2. A competitive economy and high employment, fostering innovation, skills, and entrepreneurship.
3. Sustainable use of resources, balancing growth with environmental responsibility.

2.2 Overview on Public Procurement, Reserved Contracts and IOP as Financing Solutions linked to Social Economy in Sweden

Social Economy in Sweden: History, Role and Future

The presentation by Gordon Hahn (Coompanion Sweden) provides insights into the social economy in Sweden, its historical roots, current scope, and future opportunities, especially in relation to public procurement, reserved contracts, and innovative partnership models (IOP).

Historical Background

- The social economy in Sweden is closely tied to the country's broader social and economic development.
- 19th century: Workers' and agricultural cooperatives, as well as mutual benefit societies, emerged to fight poverty and poor conditions.



Figure 9 - Mr Gordon Hahn, Operations Manager at [Coompanion Sweden](#)

- Early 20th century: Consumer cooperatives flourished, making affordable goods accessible to working-class families.
- Post-WWII: Sweden adopted the welfare state model, with government taking a strong role in social services.
- Over time, the social economy expanded into sectors like childcare (1980s), digital infrastructure (2000s), renewable energy (2010s), and resilience/preparedness (today and beyond).

Social Economy Today

- Exists all over Sweden, supported by Coompanion's 25 Cooperative Development Agencies (CDAs), funded with €2.6M annually in government support.
- 1,100 members and 120 employees in Coompanion.
- Helps start about 500 new social economy enterprises every year.
- Around 5,300 social enterprises in Sweden employ 40,000 people.
- Sweden's 100 largest cooperatives have a turnover of 606 billion SEK (10% of GDP).

Social economy entities include economic associations (cooperatives), non-profits, foundations, and mutuals—organized around democratic values, societal purposes, and independence from the public sector.

Public Procurement and Social Economy

Public procurement represents a key opportunity for social enterprises. Sweden's system is governed by several acts (LOU, LUF, LUK, LOUFS), ensuring transparency, equal treatment, non-discrimination, and proportionality.

Opportunities for social economy actors include:

- Social considerations as award criteria.
- Special contract conditions (e.g., requiring inclusive employment).
- Divided contracts to increase accessibility for smaller actors.
- Reserved contracts (\$19.25 and \$4.18) for enterprises with democratic ownership or value-based purposes.

Examples include municipalities procuring cleaning services, gardening, and laundry while requiring employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

IOP as an Alternative Market for Social Services

The Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap (IOP), or Civil Society–Public Partnership, represents an innovative approach to financing and delivering social services. Unlike traditional public procurement, which is designed for commercial markets and competitive bidding, IOP creates a framework in which public authorities can directly support and co-finance services provided by actors in the social economy.

This model acknowledges that many services essential for social well-being—such as integration initiatives, youth work, cultural activities, and community development—are not easily delivered on a commercial basis. Instead, they are best provided by non-profit organizations, associations, and cooperatives, often in close collaboration with municipalities or regions.

By establishing an IOP, public actors can channel resources into these areas outside of conventional procurement mechanisms, thus creating a parallel market for social value rather than commercial profit. Financing is based on shared objectives, negotiated agreements, and long-term collaboration rather than short-term contracts.

In practice, IOPs make it possible for municipalities and regions to pay for socially vital services that would otherwise fall outside the scope of the market. This strengthens the role of civil society, fosters co-creation between sectors, and ensures that crucial services remain accessible, sustainable, and adapted to local needs.

IOP is not just a governance tool—it is a financing mechanism that enables society to invest in social value alongside economic value, ensuring that critical services provided by the social economy are both recognized and supported.

- IOP (Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap / Civil-Public Partnership) is not a legal definition but a flexible model for addressing complex societal challenges where no market solutions exist.
- Built on shared goals, mutual contributions, non-commercial nature, and autonomy.
- Used to improve labour market access, encourage entrepreneurship, and stimulate social innovation.

Future Needs and Support

- Better access to markets for social economy enterprises.
- Improved financial ecosystems, including Mikrofonden and Ekobanken, and public guarantees.
- Stronger education, recognition, and statistics to increase visibility.
- Alignment with EU initiatives to embed social economy in industrial and innovation

2.3 PARI in a Regional Context. Östergötland's Social Economy and Innovation Strategy

This presentation highlights how Region Östergötland integrates the social economy into its broader business and innovation strategy, emphasizing collaboration, inclusion, and sustainable growth. The PARI project is a piece in the regional jigsaw to gain insight on cluster related to social innovation!

Governance in Sweden

- 21 County Administrative Boards – supervisory authorities.
- 21 Regions – including Östergötland, responsible for healthcare, regional development, and public transport.
- 290 Municipalities (13 in Östergötland) – handling education, childcare, elderly care, social services, infrastructure, and planning.

Social Economy in Östergötland

- Accounts for ~2,000 companies, employing 4.8% of full-time workers (2017).
- Defined as activities with societal purposes, democratic values, and independence from the public sector.
- Member of REVES since 2010 (European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy).
- Policy milestones:
 - Public Health Commission (2014) highlighted WISEs (Work Integration Social Enterprises).
 - 2017 Agreement between the Region and NGOs recognized the social economy as a strategic partner in regional development.
 - Funded collaborations with the European Social Fund and national action plans raised visibility of social entrepreneurship.
 - 2025 Social Innovation Hub initiated under the Growth & Competence program.

Business & Innovation Strategy for Östergötland

- Built around action plans and roadmaps for each strategic area.
- Social innovation is a priority:
 - Create a common approach for supporting social innovations.
 - Integrate social innovation into the regional support system.
 - Establish a node for social innovation within the East Sweden Business Region (ESBR) platform.
 - Help socially innovative companies access public procurement opportunities.

East Sweden Business Region (ESBR) connects ≈45 publicly funded actors in growth and innovation, including municipalities, science parks, clusters, incubators, universities, the County Administrative Board, Nyföretagarcentrum, Almi, and Coompanion

PARI – Regional Action Plan

The PARI project supports Region Östergötland in exploring new ways of collaboration, particularly where regional strategies may overlook certain local actors.

Key policy areas of interest due to cooperation with social economy actors:

- Business development & innovation
- Healthcare & hospital industry
- Social innovation & inclusion
- Community planning & rural development
- Public health, equality & gender perspectives

Through the collaboration and the development of clusters the region of Östergötland together with actors in the various social sectors want to focus on:

- Inclusive labor markets
- Inclusive living environments
- Tackling poverty, integration, and public health issues
- Climate and environmental sustainability
- Strengthening cultural and social capital
- Promoting democracy

PARI positions the social economy as a strategic partner in Östergötland's future, combining business development with social innovation. By embedding inclusion, sustainability, and cooperation into its innovation strategy, the region is building a stronger, more resilient society.



Figure 10 - The ESBR visual

3. Concluding remarks

One aspect that clearly stands out in the Swedish context is the prevalence of informal organizing, in clusters, networks, and cross-sector cooperation. Sweden has a long tradition of collaboration, partnership, and co-creation that tends to emerge from the bottom up, often with encouragement and support from municipalities or regional authorities.

In this context, whether as a private individual, entrepreneur, association member, or public official, one does not always perceive a strong need to formalize collaboration if it is functioning effectively on an informal basis. As a result, much of the traditional formality such as annual meetings, board meetings, and similar procedures can be avoided in favor of action.

A central explanation for this may be found in the concept of trust. In Sweden, levels of trust are comparatively high. Both interpersonal trust and trust in the state, public authorities, and institutions. Though naturally varying depending on factors such as residence, educational level, and social vulnerability. Data from the OECD (2023)² supports this observation, suggesting that high trust may be one reason why informal organizing plays such a prominent role in Sweden.

Further evidence for this interpretation is provided by a study from Lund University³, which reinforces the theory that trust functions as an enabling factor for informal collaboration. This paper analyses how the European Social Fund (ESF) in Sweden is implemented with forms of collaborative governance: top-down, bottom-up regional initiatives, and horizontal local collaboration.

A multi-case, practice-based study of 14 Swedish regional clusters⁴ shows that day-to-day collaboration depends heavily on orchestrating and narrating practices that mobilize members through bottom-up, relationship-driven coordination rather than strict formal structures.

Reviews of Swedish civil-society research⁵ (incl. "Partner sökes") track a long tradition of municipality–association cooperation, much of it practice-driven and locally negotiated rather than rigidly formalized.

Research on horizontal local governance⁶ during and after the 2015 refugee response shows extensive civil-society engagement and cross-sector partnering emerging rapidly and informally to meet needs.

Across clusters, public services, and civil society, Swedish actors repeatedly describe collaboration as something that grows from relationships first—with formal tools used when useful, not as a precondition. The high-trust context helps these informal networks function smoothly, matching your observation that Swedes often "skip" extra formality when cooperation already works.

Connecting Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone to the Swedish context: Putnam's Core Idea: Social Capital

- Robert Putnam defines social capital as the networks, norms, and trust that enable people to act together more effectively for common goals.

² https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_a8004759-en/sweden_11ca1946-en.html

³ <https://lup.lub.lu.se/record/7c395238-6530-4832-b943-355d748872d5>

⁴ Anna Yström & Hedvig Aspenberg, 2017. "**Open For Innovation? Practices Supporting Collaboration in Swedish Regional Clusters.**" *International Journal of Innovation Management (ijim)*, World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., vol. 21(05), pages 1-28, June

⁵ <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2%3A360402/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2021.643134/full>

- He distinguishes between:
 - Bonding social capital – strong ties within a homogeneous group (family, close friends).
 - Bridging social capital – weaker ties that connect across different groups (associations, networks, community life).

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam argued that the United States had seen a decline in social capital since the 1960s. Participation in associations, clubs, and local civic life declined, leaving Americans more socially isolated and less engaged in collective action.

Applying Putnam to Sweden

- Sweden (and the Nordic countries) has traditionally had high levels of social capital—both bonding and bridging.
- Evidence from the World Values Survey (WVS) and OECD trust surveys (as mentioned above) shows Swedes report very high generalized trust (“most people can be trusted”), which is an indicator of strong bridging capital.
- Sweden has a long tradition of popular movements (folk movements) such as the cooperative movement, the temperance movement, labor unions, and sports clubs, all of which fostered civic engagement and trust.
- Unlike the U.S., Sweden has not seen a dramatic erosion of civic participation. Instead, much activity has shifted toward looser, more informal networks (clusters, partnerships, cross-sector collaborations).

What This Means for Informal Organizing in Sweden

- Putnam’s framework helps explain why Sweden can rely more on informal forms of cooperation.
- Where *Bowling Alone* highlights decline in the U.S., Sweden shows a different path: formal associations coexist with informal networks.
- High trust allows actors—citizens, businesses, civil society, and public authorities—to collaborate without always needing contracts, heavy formalities, or rigid hierarchies.
- Municipalities and regions reinforce this by supporting co-creation and partnership even when not formally institutionalized.

How does that play with the context for the other partners?

Swedish society is commonly characterized by modesty, compromise, and consensus-based decision-making, often described through the concept of “lagom.” However, findings from the World Values Survey (2023) demonstrate that Sweden occupies an exceptional position, marked in yellow on the map, both in relation to the global context and in comparison with the partner countries situated in the green area. This divergence carries important policy implications. Significant variation in values and societal contexts within project PARI can serve as a strategic strength, enabling a broader range of perspectives and innovative approaches. At the same time, such differences require deliberate coordination and targeted strategies to ensure that common objectives are achieved and shared actions remain feasible.

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023

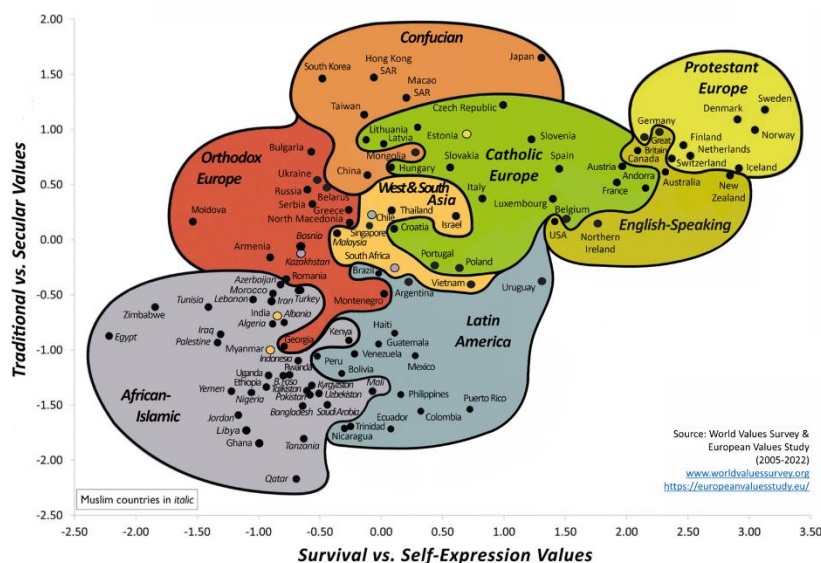
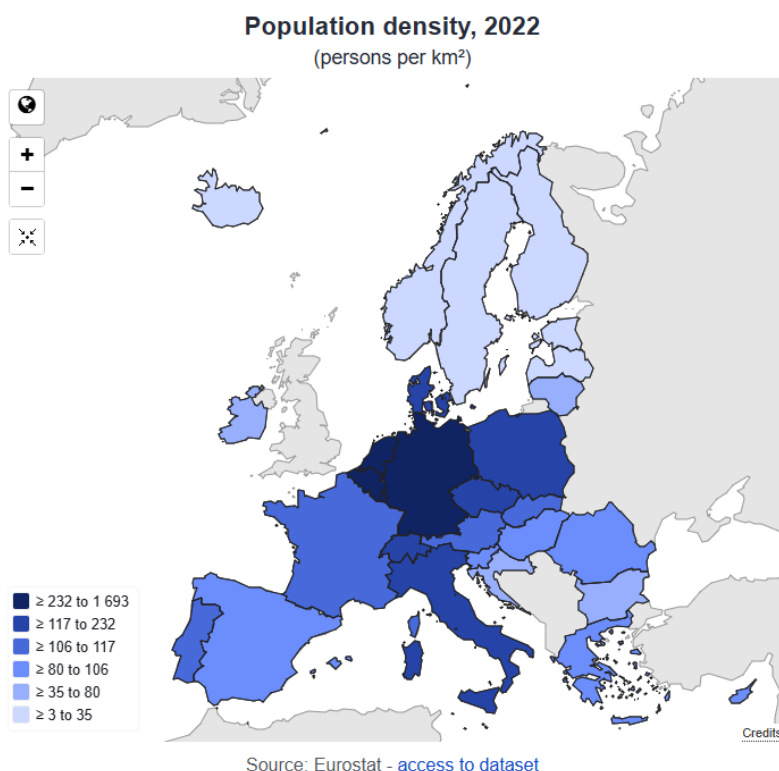


Figure 11 - The Inglehart–Welzel cultural map of the world

Another contributing factor to Sweden's distinctiveness in this context may be the sparsity of its rural areas. Sweden has a comparatively small population spread over a large territory. This may contribute to clusters and collaborations often remaining informal, as the scale is limited and the need for formal organization may not arise. Sweden's population density is very low compared with the rest of Europe, as shown in the map below:

Figure 12 - EU Population Density (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2024>)

3.1 Policy Implications

The analysis of the experiences observed in Östergötland has been conducted in alignment with the concepts and criteria established in the project “Preliminary overview on existing projects”. The findings highlight a set of policy implications that are essential for advancing collaborative and sustainable innovation within CSEIs. These implications emphasize the need for supportive policy environments, adaptable place-based strategies, effective multi-sectoral coordination, sustained financial mechanisms, and comprehensive evaluation frameworks capable of capturing multidimensional impacts.

- **Enabling Frameworks.** Policymakers are urged to cultivate policy environments that actively support and incentivize collaborative innovation. The French PTCE framework serves as a compelling model, demonstrating how national legislation can effectively establish supportive institutional environments for CSEIs. The EU’s Social Economy Action Plan provides a broader, overarching framework for championing social economy initiatives across the continent.
- **Place-Based Approaches.** The diverse array of CSEIs examined, ranging from tourism-driven models in Białystok to intricate food systems in Charleroi, underscores the critical necessity for policies that are flexible enough to accommodate varied local approaches while steadfastly maintaining coherent overarching objectives.
- **Multi-Sectoral Coordination.** The success of CSEIs is intrinsically linked to their capacity to bridge disparate sectors and navigate multiple governance levels. This necessitates the creation of policy frameworks that actively facilitate, rather than impede, such crucial cross-sectoral collaboration. [14]
- **Long-Term Support.** The European funding analysis highlights the indispensable role of sustained financial support. Beyond initial project funding, there is a clear need for funding mechanisms that are adaptable and can accommodate the inherently long-term development cycles characteristic of CSEIs.
- **Evaluation Frameworks.** Traditional economic indicators often fail to capture the holistic value generated by CSEIs. This research mandates the development of innovative assessment methods that can comprehensively evaluate the multi-dimensional impacts (social, ecological and economic) simultaneously.

Annex

The programme

Mission to Östergötland

4th - 5th of September 2025



A PARI ADVENTURE

We will explore clusters for social and ecological innovation through collaboration, procurement, and local engagement

At the heart of the PARI project is the development of Clusters for Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEIs).

These multi-sectoral initiatives integrate social, environmental, and economic resources to foster sustainable local development. Söderköping represents a unique example of such efforts, where the municipality, local enterprises, and civil society cooperate to build a vibrant, sustainable rural community.

Day 1 – September 4: Visit to Söderköping

Cooperate Office

A collaborative platform for SMEs and NGOs with a focus on shared business development, community support, and sustainable financing strategies.

<https://www.cooperateoffice.se/>



Coompanion & Swedish Barter

Coompanion promotes cooperation, sustainability, and social innovation. Barter - an innovative financing model enabling SMEs to trade services and products in a circular economic system.



Söderköping of Opportunities

- Promotes local procurement, especially in school meals
- Focus on cutting food waste
- Transforming elderly care through voluntary and collaborative models
- A local currency supporting the regional economy

<https://xn--soderkopingtillsammans-39be.se/>



Östgötadagarna

A rural entrepreneurship festival supporting micro-clusters and fostering collaboration between municipalities and local producers.

<https://www.ostgotadagarna.se/sv/>



Fixområdet – The Textile Cluster

A group of five companies in Söderköping focusing on textile reuse, sustainability, and innovation. The "FIX area" in Söderköping is an area where several textile-related companies operate, including shops and factories. It is named after the former textile factory FIX trikkfabriker, which manufactured children's clothing in Söderköping until 1990. <https://www.soderkoping.se/turism/uppleva/textila-soderkoping/>



Governance and Institutional Support Söderköping Municipality

The municipality plays a key role in facilitating collaboration, enabling procurement innovation, and recognizing the social economy's value for local development.

Region Östergötland

Supports clusters through policy development, financing strategies, and fostering a place-based approach to rural development.



Hållbar & Kök

A sustainable restaurant using local and seasonal produce, part of the Three Oaks cooperative farming and the Swedish Barter system.

<https://www.hallbarkok.se/>



Day 2 – September 4: Visit to Linköping

Theoretical overview on public procurement

An introduction to public procurement, reserved contracts, and IOP (idea-driven public partnership) as financing mechanisms linked to the social economy in Sweden.

PARI project – A regional puzzle piece

Presentation of the PARI project's contribution to social innovation clusters, and its significance within regional development strategies.

Drivbänk – A social enterprise

A labour market initiative run at Vreta Kluster. Offers training and employment opportunities in restaurant and kitchen work. Promotes local and sustainable food production.

<https://vretakluster.se/projekt/drivbank/>

