



NATIONAL PROFILES OF
WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES:
FINLAND

Pekka PÄTTINIEMI
Niina IMMONEN

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The "ELEXIES" Project

This project is specifically concerned with the different types of social enterprise for integration, also known as work integration social enterprise (WISE) in 12 EU countries. Its aim is to identify and describe their main characteristics as social enterprises, the type of work integration they provide, their numbers, and how they have developed and are supported. The ultimate goal of the project is to build a database accessible on internet.

The study is conducted using the EMES Network definition of social enterprise as a common reference point and guideline for determining the social enterprises to be included in the study. The EMES definition distinguishes, on the one hand, between criteria that are more economic and, on the other hand, indicators that are predominantly social.¹

Four factors have been applied to corroborate the economic and entrepreneurial nature of the initiatives.

a) A continuous activity producing goods and/or selling services

Social enterprises, unlike the traditional non-profit organisations, are normally not engaged in advisory activities as a major goal or in the redistribution of financial flows (as, for example, grant-giving foundations). Instead they are directly involved in the production of goods and the provision of services to people on a continuous basis. The provision of services represents, therefore, the reason, or one of the main reasons, for the existence of social enterprises.

b) A high degree of autonomy

Social enterprises are voluntarily created by a group of people and are governed by them in the framework of an autonomous project. Although they may depend on public subsidies, public authorities or other organisations (federations, private firms, etc.) do not manage them, directly or indirectly. They also have the right of participation and to terminate the project.

c) A significant level of economic risk

Those who establish a social enterprise assume totally or partly the risk of the initiative. Unlike most public institutions, their financial viability depends on the efforts of their members and workers to secure adequate resources.

d) A minimum amount of paid work

As in the case of most traditional non-profit associations, social enterprises may also combine monetary and non-monetary resources, voluntary and paid workers. However, the activity carried out in social enterprises requires a minimum level of paid workers.

¹ See C. Borzaga & J. Defourny (2001), *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*, London, Routledge, pp.16-18.

To encapsulate the social dimensions of the initiative, five indicators have been selected:

i) An initiative launched by a group of citizens

Social enterprises are the result of collective dynamics involving people belonging to a community or to a group that shares a certain need or aim. They must maintain this dimension in one form or another.

ii) A decision-making power not based on capital ownership

This generally means the principle of "one member, one vote" or at least a voting power not distributed according to capital shares on the governing body which has the ultimate decision-making rights. The owners of the capital are obviously important, but the decision-making rights are shared with the other stakeholders.

iii) A participatory nature, which involves the persons affected by the activity

Representation and participation of customers, stakeholder orientation and a democratic management style are important characteristics of social enterprises. In many cases, one of the aims of social enterprises is to further democracy at local level through economic activity.

iv) Limited profit distribution

Social enterprises not only include organisations that are characterised by a total non-distribution constraint, but also organisations like co-operatives in some countries, which may distribute profits only to a limited extent, thus avoiding a profit-maximising behaviour.

v) An explicit aim to benefit the community

- One of the principal aims of social enterprises is to serve the community or a specific group of people. To the same end, a feature of social enterprises is their desire to promote a sense of responsibility at local level.
- The database of work integration social enterprise has been produced for each country. Due to different circumstances in each country (especially legislative frameworks) there have been slightly varied approaches to mapping the sector. Researchers have generally made a great effort to ensure that the most interesting and progressive initiatives are represented. There are certain types of social enterprise which have their own legislative framework, and which are *exclusively* concerned with work integration. The second type, concerns those social enterprise which are exclusively engaged in work integration, but though they are recognisable as a distinctive type, they do not enjoy a complete and specific legal recognition, and thus generally operate under a range of different legal forms also used by organisations out of the field of work integration. Other types of social enterprise do not have their own specific legislation, and only a proportion of that type will be engaged with work integration. Researchers have made particularly strong efforts to ensure that the first two categories are included, but lack of data has meant that some of the latter category may be missing.

National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Finland

Pekka PÄTTINIEMI and Niina IMMONEN

Mikkeli Institute for Rural Research and Training Co-op Studies – University of Helsinki

Introduction

In Finland discussion on social enterprises has developed during the last few years, causing political interest to arise. A group of over hundred MPs (out of a total of 200 in Parliament) made a proposal for a new law on social enterprises. A study was then conducted on the situation of social enterprises and on the legislation governing them; the study was carried out by a working group of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The working group restricted its work to organisations dealing with the physically or mentally disabled and to the problems that these groups faced when enterprising. The study concluded that there was no need for specific legislation. These conclusions have raised some resistance, especially amongst people dealing with the long-term unemployed and immigrants. The discussion is still underway.

One can identify five kinds of work integration social enterprises in Finland: (1) the well-established movement of sheltered workshops; (2) enterprises owned by associations for the disabled; (3) workshops for young unemployed people; (4) labour co-operatives established by the unemployed; and (5) social co-operatives for the disabled. In this paper we concentrate on the last two categories, which are more clearly private and meeting the EMES criteria of social enterprise. However, the first three categories are also briefly described in this introductory section.

Sheltered workshops

The original aim of sheltered workshops was the rehabilitation of mentally, physically or socially impaired people through work and their reintegration into the "ordinary" labour market. Sheltered workshops are mainly owned and run by municipalities or municipality-owned foundations and, to a lesser extent, by associations. Regardless of their aim to reintegrate the target group into the "ordinary" labour market, the workshops have been and are still, in many cases, permanent / lifelong workplaces for the impaired workers.

Although sheltered workshops sell their products and services on the market, until the late 1990s they were substantially well-secured from losses in business and could rely on support from the public sector. It was then decided that an important financial support for rehabilitation could not be granted to a person for more than a restricted number of years.

This led to new developments of sheltered workshops: they had to improve the rehabilitation process results and find new financial opportunities from business

sources. Many sheltered workshops developed into "multipurpose service centres", uniting under one roof many services which were previously separate: rehabilitation, training, work experience services.... Another group of sheltered workshops have been evolving more clearly into enterprises of the WISE type; they were inspired by the necessity to improve both the efficiency of the production of goods and their business organisation. This development has had two consequences, namely (1) the privatisation of the workshops and (2) a will to increase the productivity of the impaired workers. It is estimated that there are about 10 such new enterprises, which developed from sheltered workshops.

Sheltered workshops have a support organisation, the Vates-foundation, established by 24 major national associations for the disabled. It organises various kinds of support services for the sheltered workshops.

Enterprises owned by associations for the disabled

Some associations for disabled people have organised work opportunities for their members by establishing enterprises owned by national or regional associations. These enterprises may organise recreational services for their members and partly employ persons with disabilities to carry out these tasks; they may also produce aiding devices or computer software for their member group, or market the goods and services produced by the members of the association. An example of the latter is SOKEVA, an enterprise owned by the Finnish Federation for the Visually Impaired. SOKEVA is a marketing and product development enterprise for handicrafts (brushes, baskets and bamboo furniture) made by visually impaired people working at home, in small workshops or in the SOKEVA factory. SOKEVA is a major employer of the visually impaired; in 1999, it employed 480 visually impaired persons.

Public policies have favoured this industry by introducing a special VAT reduction for the products made by the visually impaired. Most of the impaired workers work only for the small amount which is allowed for pensioners without losing their pension.

Workshops for young unemployed people

There are over 300 social workshops for young unemployed people. These workshops are mainly owned by the municipalities. They organise a wide range of activities, from drama to recycling. The aim of these workshops is to give a profession to young unemployed people with a low level of education and/or to develop their vocational skills.

Some of the 350 local associations for the unemployed also organise workshops for their members to keep up their vocational skills.

Labour Co-operatives

1. Brief historical description

The first labour co-operatives emerged during the economic recession and heavy unemployment period (unemployment in Finland reached its peak - over 20 % - in the early 1990s). The mainly State-run employment agencies could not cope with their tasks in the new circumstances. Before the recession Finland was in practice a country with full employment; consequently, there were no well-established methods to organise short-term employment. The unemployed had to develop alternative and self-governed solutions to find jobs. The first labour co-operative was established in late 1993 in Kirkkonummi, near Helsinki, with the help of the Institute for Co-operative Studies of the University of Helsinki and according to the experiences of the Kirkkonummi Association for the Unemployed. The association was one of the over 300 Local Associations for the Unemployed which had emerged over the country in the previous years. The co-operative received widespread and positive publicity and became an example for the other labour co-operatives that soon emerged all over the country.

2. Key features

2.1. Legal form(s) and structure of ownership

Labour co-operatives have taken the co-operative legal form. In the 1990s that meant, in Finland, that every member of the co-operative had one vote. Since labour co-operatives are enterprises active mainly in the service sector, they usually do not need a high capital input. The price for membership share varies normally from 50 to 100 €. Some labour co-operative also have, as supporting members, local associations, trade union branches, parishes and so forth.

2.2. Pursued goals

The main goal of labour co-operatives is to help the members to reintegrate the labour market.

2.3. Type of jobs provided

Jobs offered to the members are mainly temporary or/and part-time jobs. The main sectors are construction work and various secretarial services for enterprises. Sometimes the jobs can be described as a qualifying or test period for a certain job in a client enterprise.

2.4. Weight of training

Normally, training is not particularly important, but in some cases the goal to help members to find employment includes training and/or other supporting services. The most common training subject is computer skills.

2.5. Type of employed workers

Unemployed and long-term unemployed aged over 35 years.

2.6. Type of resources

The resources come almost solely from the market. During the establishment period a labour co-operative may receive some financial support (maximum 10,000 €) from the Ministry of Labour.

2.7. Links with public policies

Labour co-operatives are recognised in public policies. As just mentioned, labour co-operatives may receive financial support during their establishment period.

Recently there has been a discussion on the need for special legislation for social enterprises. The discussion mostly concerns enterprises active with disabled people, the way to organise the pensions system so that working in a social enterprise does not affect the right to receive a pension if work is not possible for the person, the possibility to implement special treatment - for example on VAT - for social enterprises, as a reward for the social benefits they produce, etc. Presently it seems that the possible future legislation will concern the enterprises active with disabled people rather than the enterprises active with the long-term unemployed. The legislation is not connected with the legal form of the enterprises. The discussion has not tackled the important empowerment aspect of social enterprises.

2.8. Basic data

In 1999 there were about 200 labour co-operatives and they were employing about 1,500 persons. According to figures published by the Ministry of Labour in 1998, labour co-operatives had offered by then job opportunities to about 19,000 persons since 1994; this figure includes those who have moved to regular jobs in other enterprises after a work experience through jobs offered by the co-operative.

There is no reliable information on turnover.

3. The relation to the EMES socio-economic criteria

3.1. A continuous activity producing goods and/or selling services

The main activity of labour co-operatives is to sell services, namely work. After the short establishment period, the service production is also the only source of income.

3.2. A high degree of autonomy

Labour co-operatives are independent enterprises, governed by their members according the Co-operative Society Law. Some labour co-operatives may have

subsidised workers under the so-called "combined support" of the Ministry of Labour, but these persons are entirely managed by the co-operative.

3.3. A significant level of economic risk

Practically the only income for labour co-operatives comes from the services (work) they sell to other enterprises, the public sector or households.

3.4. A minimum amount of paid work

The activity of labour co-operatives is based on paid work. Voluntary unpaid work is needed and used only in the management board and sometimes in marketing the services.

3.5. An explicit aim to benefit to the community

Many labour co-operatives have explicitly mentioned as one of their aims to benefit the development of the local community. The main aim is to integrate members into the labour market.

3.6. An initiative launched by a group of citizens

The initiatives emerged in three main ways:

- 1) on the initiative of the Local Associations for the Unemployed;
- 2) as a result of "Co-operative entrepreneurship training courses for the unemployed", financed by the Ministry of Labour and run mainly by the Regional Co-operative Advice Centres;
- 3) through model learning and local activity.

3.7. A decision-making power not based on capital ownership

Decision-making is based on the "one member, one vote" principle. The management board consists usually of ordinary co-operative members and is always elected by the members.

3.8. A participatory nature involving the persons affected by the activity

In most co-operatives services are provided only for members, and those who are members of the co-operative are included in the decision-making process.

3.9. A limited profit distribution

Although profits are seldom distributed, a moderate interest to the share capital can be paid to the members.

4. The supporting umbrella structures

At the national level, the main supporting organisations are the Institute for Co-operative Studies of the University of Helsinki, Fincoop Pellervo (an association of agricultural co-operatives and co-operative banks) and the association for co-operative development workers Osuustoiminnan kehittäjät Coop Finland.

At the local and regional levels, support can be obtained from the local co-operative support organisations or, in major towns, from co-operative development agencies. Some universities, like Kuopio University and the University of Lapland, also offer regional services to labour co-operatives.

A national association for labour co-operatives has also existed for some years, but it recently went through moral and financial crises, and it is now engaged in a merging process with the association of co-operative developers Coop Finland.

5. The innovative features

The innovative feature in labour co-operatives is connected with the creative use of a traditional self-help method (the co-operative) in a new situation and in the new circumstances of information society. The co-operative formula is used creatively in a field of activity that was traditionally considered the responsibility of the public sector.

The experience has shown that some labour co-operatives have been transitional enterprises from social minded self-help organisations to more conventional enterprises; some others have lost their *raison d'être*, because the members have become employed by other companies and the original purpose of reintegration has been met; and some others yet have become local partnership organisations where the local stakeholders have also taken their responsibility of employing the local unemployed.

Co-operative social firms for disabled people

1. Brief historical description

Co-operative social firms for disabled people have their roots in the critics towards the patronising attitudes and working methods of traditional associations for disabled people and towards the traditional sheltered workshops, where it was felt that disabled persons were more objects of the work than subjects. The main ideas behind these WISEs are self-help and support among equals.

The first attempts to establish enterprises of this type date back to the late 1980s; the first initiatives took the legal form of associations. Later, in the mid-1990s, inspired by the newly established labour co-operatives, co-operative firms were founded. Amongst the first one was a co-operative of deaf people working in a way similar to labour co-operatives; another was a co-operative established by persons recovering from mental illness.

2. Key features

2.1. Legal form and structure of ownership

In this WISE category, there is a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship among disabled people. Social firms ran by a society or a foundation are left out, because they do not support the democratic participation of the disabled people. Many enterprises of this category adopt a legal form in which the "one owner, one vote" rule applies and all the disabled people are also owners. This kind of structure is possible in a co-operative society.

2.2. Pursued goals

The main goal here is to initiate an empowerment process in which individual needs and individual growth are central. The goal is to grow both in profession and in entrepreneurship. These goals are supported by training and individual guidance. It is considered important to achieve meaningful employment for disabled people, be it through work in a social firm or through a return to the labour market after the period of work in the social firm.

2.3. Type of jobs provided

This kind of social firm provides real working places for disabled people. These work relations are regulated by normal labour contracts and normal salary is being paid. In some cases it is possible to combine different kinds of income sources, for example money for training with a salary.

2.4. Weight of training

Training plays an important role in this category of WISEs, but the weight of training varies from case to case and is difficult to assess accurately, due to the lack of comparative systems or legal definition for this kind of social firm. It is important to note that social firms of this kind cannot work without proper vocational training for employees and entrepreneurial skills of managers and members.

2.5. Type of employed workers

This WISE category is meant for disabled people (for example the visually disabled, the mentally ill).

2.6. Type of resources

The main aim is to get the turnover from normal market economy. It is also possible to combine support from a backing organisation, the government or the municipality, charity organisations and private investors. Different kinds of project funding support are also common.

2.7. Links with public policies

Today there is no legal recognition for social firms in Finland. The aid granted for the establishing period does not apply to this group of WISEs, because this aid is connected with unemployment. It would be important to increase public knowledge about the possibilities of social firms. This category of WISEs in particular is not getting enough publicity.

2.8. Basic data

The exact number of enterprises in this category of WISE is unclear. We estimate that there are about 10 to 20 social enterprises of this kind in Finland.

3. The relation to the EMES socio-economic criteria

3.1. A continuous activity producing goods and/or selling services

Producing goods and services is of crucial importance in this category of WISE. Co-operative as a legal form demands business activities. The idea is to act like a normal enterprise and to sell services for normal market prices. The additional function is to train and to increase the knowledge of the disabled.

3.2. A high degree of autonomy

Co-operative structure brings along democratic decision-making. Because all the disabled people are also members of the co-operative, they have control over their own business. If there is some kind of backing organisation involved, it usually has only one vote, like any other member. That means that enterprises in this category have a high degree of autonomy.

3.3. A significant level of economic risk

The basic principle is that enterprises in this category of WISEs are "normal" enterprises with normal economic risks. In many cases the situation is not so simple, because these social firms are usually being established with help. This help can also take the form of financial support or non-material support (for example in training or individual guidance). Because of these support structures it is possible that the level of economic risk be somehow reduced.

3.4. A minimum amount of paid work

All the members of the co-operative social firm get paid for the work they do. The financing of the support structure is not clear and it varies. Some volunteer work is possible, as well as different kinds of mixed funding from Finnish national sources and from the European Social Fund.

3.5. An explicit aim to benefit to the community

From the disabled people's point of view the main aim is the integration back into society through meaningful work. For the community this aim is also important, because it helps to reduce the financial support paid for the disabled people. With the help of this category of WISEs, a passive disabled citizen can become an active working citizen. Moreover, the co-operative, as a locally-owned business, creates positive regional development and local financial input.

3.6. An initiative launched by a group of people

These enterprises are usually created in co-operation with associations, social workers, various public authorities and disabled people themselves.

3.7. A decision-making power not based on capital ownership

In the co-operative society, the decision-making power is based on the "one member, one vote" principle. Decision-making power is thus not based on capital ownership.

3.8. A participatory nature involving the persons affected by the activity

Since disabled people are the members of the co-operative, they are involved in all activities. Participation in decision-making is very important.

3.9. A limited profit distribution

Co-operatives in Finland can distribute moderately their profit to their members if this is provided for by the co-operative's statutes. This also applies to enterprises in this category of WISEs.

4. The supporting umbrella structures

These social firms have had project structures to support them. In the projects there have been large networks involving different kinds of actors. Supporting groups can often be found among the organisations for the disabled.

5. The innovative features

In these enterprises, which represent the need for the "last step" in the rehabilitation process, disabled people can have:

- work that matches their real abilities and working skills;
- control over their own lives and work;
- the possibility to work and get paid (actual salary), which changes the traditional "patient" relationships;
- co-operation with others, democracy;
- equal decision-making possibilities in work and in the management of the enterprise;
- education and support to improve their working skills and entrepreneurship;
- the possibility to move on towards a "normal" working life.

This kind of social firm really constitutes a new kind of economic actor in society.

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