

MESMER+

Mapping European Social Economy: Employment, Social Dialogue and the European Pillar of Social Rights

Project nr. 101052222

Policy lab – Sweden

30 August 2023

From 12.45 to 15.30

Venue: Sensus Möte, Klara Södra Kyrkogata 1, Stockholm

Event Summary

We sent invitation to prioritized organizations and 25 participants. Unfortunately, only 8 persons accepted and showed up. Still, we had participation from the most important actors in the field of social dialogue and industrial relations. Both employer organizations (4 persons) and trade unions (3 persons) were present.

We started the policy lab by an introduction to the field research made by Gordon Hahn for the Mesmer+ project. The introduction described the aim and purpose of the project as well as definition of social dialogue and industrial relations. Furthermore, the introduction to the policy lab described the findings in the field research, with special focus on what the social dialogue is in Sweden, how that may be translated from other perspectives as well as a definition of the social economy.

The content was focusing on the concept of social economy inclusion in the social dialogue as well as industrial relations. The social economy, which have a different relationship between capital and labor compared to traditional enterprises, are often overlooked in social dialogue and industrial policies.

Additional information from the field research given to the participants at the policy lab was then the findings from the field research regarding the state of play for the social economy inclusion in the social dialogue. This includes stating that the formal role of the social economy is limited in the social dialogue and industrial relations in Sweden. Attempts are though made with informal networks to create influence over legislative social and labor market issues. Democratic forms of governance and the logic of economic sustainability/owner influence create other conditions that do not emerge in Sweden. Fremia, Arbetsgivaralliansen etc. - advocates social economy conditions in the contract movement? LO/TCO/Saco - share the same democratic value base? Which side of the table? There is a need for a general increase in knowledge about the social economy's special form, possibilities and conditions. The social dialogue in Sweden is structured based on two sides (employers and employees) but also includes the social economy/civil society. Before we started the policy lab, we also presented experiences from other countries, such as Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the UK.

Then we divided the policy lab into two different discussions; (1) What role does the social economy have in relations on the Swedish labor market? Opportunities and barriers to its participation. Input to the field research. And (2) Does the position of the social economy need to be strengthened regarding the design of the Swedish labor market? If so, how?

It is important to find ways of highlighting the democracy perspective at work differently from traditional social dialogue institutions and trade union representation. There is a need for social partners (employer organizations and trade unions) to understand and support alternative models of entrepreneurship. The issue of involving employees, consumers or producers in social economy structures needs to be given attention as well as potential confusion between employee/stakeholder and employer roles. There are notable benefits that need to be highlighted such as increased employee engagement and positive effects on employees'/stakeholder mental health.

The policy lab focused on what role does the social economy play in relation to other stakeholders on the Swedish labor market, in the social dialogue and industrial relations? Opportunities and barriers for the social economy participation. Furthermore, the policy lab explored the issue of if the position of the social economy needs to be strengthened regarding the design of the Swedish labor market, and in that case, how?

In Sweden, the issue of social economy inclusion in the social dialogue is difficult due to the Swedish system around labor and social issues. There are discussions of a wider civil dialogue, including other issues than social dialogue, but this is also on a very vague level.

Regardless of the unique Swedish construction of social dialogue and industrial relations, we also need to emphasize the large public sector that stands for a vital part of employers as well as work regulation and labor market. The social economy in Sweden also lacks large welfare actors, that exist in other EU countries because of a large welfare state system.

There is a need and willingness from the sector, as well as the employer organizations representing the social economy, to broaden the perspective in industrial relations so that the conditions for the social economy may be more visual. We need to develop definitions that may be developed jointly.

Inclusive labor market (which is the main aim of the partnership between employee and employer organizations) need to include the social economy who in many areas represent venerable persons.

In Sweden, labor market initiatives are mainly proposed and implemented by the state (labor market department and the Swedish employee agency), so also for social issues. The employer and employee organizations are responsible for the labor and employer conditions, wages and social issues related to the workplaces.

Anyhow the social economy conditions are forced into a system, pre-decided on another logic and conditions. It does not really fit.

The Swedish model need to be protected. What's healthy should be preserved. Most part of the Swedish model is healthy, but the social economy deserves a more visible form in the industrial relations as well as in the social dialogue.

Policy recommendations:

The employer organizations need to collaborate closer in this manner and demand to be included as representatives for the social economy, both regarding industrial relations as well as social dialogue to the government. Furthermore, representatives from the social economy need to give mandate to the employer organizations. The employer organizations need to construct a system based on member need for their political voice, rather than expertise's in fields outside the reality. Fremia might be able to coordinate such an initiative together with other independent social economy employer organizations.

From a trade union perspective, all these issues are very important, the foundation is wages, but social dialogue issues are of outermost importance. There is a need to connect the dialogue to local and regional level, as well as social economy actor perspective.

From an EU level, the social economy inclusion in the social dialogue in Sweden are vague. Therefore, the government have the task to secure representation and to make the social economy more visible. Often the social economy is left out from social dialogue and regulation in Sweden. There are a lack of knowledge and will to support or include the social economy in regulative structures from the Swedish state.

The social economy sector needs to secure that we may participate by one voice and make sure we are visible.

To conclude, there is a need and will to make the role of the social economy increasingly visible as well as to ensure representation of the social economy in the social dialogue and the industrial relations.