

Social Innovation in Sweden

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Social innovation and social entrepreneurship in Sweden are relatively new as concepts, but historically there has been grassroots-initiatives active in this sector in Sweden for many years. But a recent surge in interest is increasing common knowledge of social innovation, throughout all sectors.

There are many definitions of social innovation today, but the most common describes it as existing on three levels:

- Grassroots initiatives that are meeting social needs which are not met by the public sector nor the present market, in new and innovative ways.
- Social innovation where the boundaries between different sectors of society become blurred and where the innovation addresses the entire community.
- System-changing social innovations that seek to change values, cultures, strategies and policies.

Many social innovations are developed by social entrepreneurs – which can be described as someone who solves the problems society is facing in new ways, often by combining entrepreneurial logic.

In Sweden social innovation is seen, not only as a way of solving great challenges and injustices, but also as a means to create new business opportunities and growth. Specifically within the areas of health, medical care, education and green industries.

In addition, areas such as environment, energy, an aging population, youth employment, inclusion and urban development are seeing an increasing amount of social innovations in Sweden.

Sweden, and all the Nordic countries, are built upon a foundation of a strong state and with limited need for philanthropy; this stands in stark contrast to countries such as the UK and the US. In the Nordics the tradition of dividing society into three main sectors – government, public and private – and dividing areas of responsibilities of society amongst them – is becoming out-dated as more and more are realising the need for cross-sector collaboration and social innovation.

The Nordic countries can be seen as somewhat of pioneers when it comes to social innovations, with their welfare state system and [Folkhemmet](#) – a vision that the entire society ought to be like a small family, where everybody contributes, but today this is in great need of renewal.

An initiative to promote social entrepreneurship in Sweden was launched in 2008 by The Knowledge Foundation. In 2010 Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (Mötesplats Social Innovation) was launched as a permanent national platform for

social innovation, sharing knowledge and facilitating cross-sector collaborations to promote social innovation in Sweden.

Sweden is still in need of national and regional policies and strategies to promote social innovation in a more systematic way in order to make it become an area of growth. New kinds of partnerships and cross-sector collaboration are needed, as well as new methods of financing social innovation. Some municipalities have developed social investment funds, but more is needed as well as advice and guidance on social innovation and social enterprise from government institutions that promote the development of business, trade and enterprise on a national level.

Research on social innovation in the region today is limited, something which needs to be developed. Malmö University in the south and Mid Sweden University have been focusing on social innovation the past couple of years and the latter has developed a doctoral course in social entrepreneurship.

To name a few examples of Swedish social entrepreneurs we might mention [Dr. Karl-Henrik Robért](#) of The Natural Step, [Björn Söderberg](#) of Fair Enterprise & Watabaran, [Peepoople](#), [Solvatten](#), [Mitt Liv](#) and [Telge Tillväxt](#).

For more on Swedish social entrepreneurs and social innovation take a look at www.socialinnovation.se/en