

RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

AN EXPERIENTIAL REPORT CREATED BY PRACTITIONERS,
FOR PRACTITIONERS, IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



Photo: Wolfgang Mader

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of social enterprise has attracted much attention. In 2011, the social business initiative of the European Union identified social enterprises as important players in the development of new solutions to societal problems¹. Increasingly, many EU member states are prioritising the development and implementation of social enterprise policies; in Ireland, for example, the Department of Rural and Community Development has recently convened a high-level Working Group of key national and regional stakeholders, with a view to producing research outputs which will support the development of an Irish Social Enterprise policy and implementation roadmap in 2018.

Despite this however, one of the key challenges facing social enterprises is that supports tend to be available only in their start-up phases, with few, if any, supports available to foster further development and expansion; social enterprises often lack resources and opportunity to train staff members to acquire new knowledge and

skills, all of which are essential to develop sustainable businesses. Because social enterprises straddle the boundaries between social and commercial imperatives, stakeholders from local or regional government, and from the business community, are often absent from these ventures, due largely to a lack of knowledge and understanding about the business model, and about how best to support, drive and balance the development of organisations where social objectives are equally as important as commercial objectives.

Social enterprises are a social innovation in themselves, which challenge traditional boundaries between social initiatives and commercial ventures. As with all new ideas throughout history, the challenge now is to inform, raise awareness and support the development of the sector; to develop societies and communities which are sustainable and beneficial to the many; and to co-create the types of communities we are proud to live in.



The RurlInno Consortium at the Kick-Off meeting in February 2016 in Berlin

¹ European Commission (2011): *Social Business Initiative: Creating a favourable climate for social enterprises, key stakeholders in the social economy and innovation*, European Commission, Brussels.

WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR?

This document is the output of a collaboration between four social enterprises that have successfully navigated the challenges involved in establishing social businesses in rural regions. Their locations, in four different European countries, have enabled them to acquire a diversity of knowledge and experience in the formation

and development of social enterprises in differing institutional and cultural contexts. They are all driven by a desire to make their regions better places. By necessity, they have all acquired a deep understanding of how to overcome the barriers and hurdles inherent in the sustainable management of social businesses.

The four social enterprises involved in producing this document are:

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT CLG, IRELAND

OTELO eGEN, AUSTRIA

THE NIDZICA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION “NIDA”, POLAND

STEVIA HELLAS COOP, GREECE

What these organisations have in common is that they all operate in rural regions, and are located in sparsely populated areas which suffer from a lack of accessibility, but conversely, provide a wealth of free ‘space’ for developing new ideas to address local challenges.

All are keen to share their knowledge and experiences with other social enterprises and with decision-makers, in the hope that these experiences can support and inform others as they work towards developing sustainable, socially innovative businesses.

Today, rural regions across Europe face a range of similar problems: out-migration of young and well-skilled people; lack of local opportunities for skilled employment; limited possibilities for higher education; dispersed pockets of rural poverty; the exclusion of particular social groups; and sparse provision of public and private services such as public transport and community shops and services. However, at the same

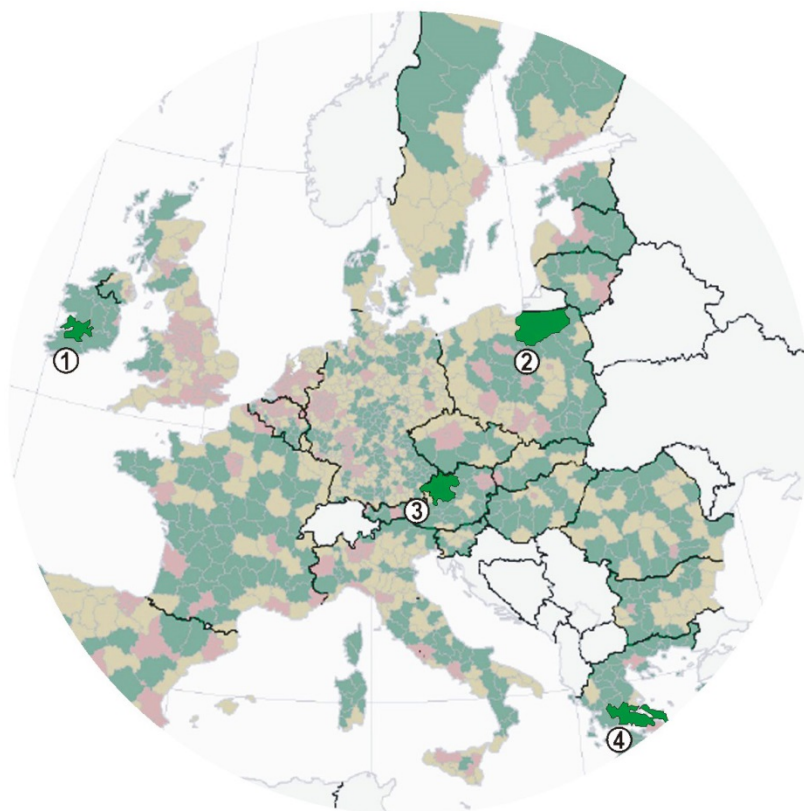
time, these challenges are an important source of motivation for social entrepreneurial activities. Rural regions not only provide opportunities for fostering social innovation and change, but often act as a backdrop for engaged local people, as well as offering available venues that provide physical and metaphorical space for trying out novel solutions, without the immediate pressures of commercial viability.

This document is directed at social enterprises operating predominantly in rural regions. The hope is that the experiences which the contributors have acquired in dealing with typical challenges will be able to provide valuable suggestions for social enterprises that are facing similar challenges elsewhere. It aims to be motivational in dealing with challenges, even with those that may seem insurmountable at the beginning.

Who dares wins!



WHO WE ARE



Ballyhoura Development CLG, Mid West Ireland (1), NIDA Development Foundation, Voivodeship Warmian Masurian/Poland (2), OTELO eGen, Upper Austria (3), Stevia Hellas, Central Greece (4)

Source: EU (2013): Rural Development in the European Union; Urban-rural typology: Predominantly rural (green), Intermediate region (yellow), Predominantly urban (red)

1. BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT CLG

Established in 1989, Ballyhoura Development CLG (BD) is a Local Development Company that works with communities to develop local solutions to local issues, with a focus on promoting local economic development and addressing inequality and social exclusion. Operating across the Ballyhoura area of East Limerick and North Cork, BD is a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, with charitable status. It is governed by a multi-sectoral partnership structure, comprised of representatives of the community and voluntary sector, social partners, and public and elected representatives.

The Ballyhoura area has a population of approx. 87,000, which is widely dispersed across 54 local communities, categorised predominantly as rural. Historically, the area has been heavily dependent on agriculture, which has resulted in the underdevelopment of the industrial, commercial and professional service sectors.

BD's mission is to work in partnership to develop, empower and include communities to inspire and



BALLYHOURA
DEVELOPMENT CLG

embrace new opportunities; to drive sustainable social, environmental and economic change; and to reduce inequalities, thereby making the Ballyhoura area an attractive location in which to live, do business and visit.

In order to deliver its services, BD operates an integrated delivery model, across six diverse, cross-cutting work areas (1. Lifelong learning; 2. Children, Families & Well-being; 3. Community Development; 4. Culture, Tourism & Heritage; 5. Enterprise & Employment; 6. Environmental Sustainability), which aim to support the development of the Ballyhoura area to be "an area with empowered, inclusive communities, and a diversified economy".

For more information: www.ballyhouradevelopment.com

2. NIDA FOUNDATION

Nidzica Development Foundation (NIDA) is a non-governmental organisation, which was founded in 1994. NIDA operates in the Nidzica region, located in the Voivodeship Warmia and Mazury, in the predominantly rural North East of Poland.

The organisation's main fields of activity include: supporting social economy initiatives (Social Economy Support Center); the promotion and support of English language teaching in rural schools in Poland; consultancy and training; and the provision of micro-loans and guarantees for small companies and for the self-employed. The development of the rural area is also supported through a 'theme village' concept: supports for the reintroduction of traditional skills associated with a particular village serve to activate production and services based on traditional handicrafts, knowledge and regional

customs, thereby creating new tourism and employment opportunities. Moreover, the theme village concept supports the (re)integration of people with limited job prospects into the labour market.

In 2009, NIDA has received the main prize in the national competition "Pro Publico Bono". One year before, NIDA has been awarded the second prize in the European Enterprise Awards, in the category "Enterprise Promotion and Social Inclusion Supports", for the Pottery Village project.

For more information: <http://www.nida.pl/en/>



3. OTELO eGEN

The Otelo cooperative eGen ("eingetragene Genossenschaft" = registered cooperative) emerged from a network of Open Technology Labs, known as Otelos.

The Otelo idea is to create inspirational environments that attract talented and open-minded people to live in rural communities. To do that, it creates "open spaces" and "open technology labs", based on voluntary work, in small towns and villages that offer a place for experimentation, as well as for the development and exchange of ideas. Otelo creates "white spaces" in environments that often lack public, easily accessible spaces. The Otelo eGen enables the realisation of new working models (self-employment with a maximum of autonomy), as well as the development of participatory projects.

Otelo eGen is part of the Otelo network for innovation culture, and supports technical and social innovations on a regional level, by generating interest in the network

and by linking civil society with intermediary organisations. Currently, 29 locations in Austria, Germany and Italy are affiliated to the network.

Otelo eGen's fields of activity are dynamic and diverse. One focus lies in the development of regional innovation networks, e.g. through inclusive regional cooperatives; another in educational programmes on MINT-topics e.g. in the projects "Children Experience Technology" or "Digital Playground". Research on robotics deal with technology assessment. Finally, Otelo eGen offers consultancy on communication and design solutions for enterprises working towards sustainability, and for whole regions, on topics like Agenda 21, LEADER or village and urban development.

For more information: www.otelogen.at



4. STEVIA HELLAS

Stevia Hellas Coop was established in the city of Lamia in 2012, in the predominantly rural prefecture of Phthiotis. This region in Central Greece is economically dominated by agriculture, traditionally by tobacco cultivation.

The downturn of the tobacco industry in 2007/2008 necessitated the development of alternative economic development strategies, and prompted the switchover to the production of stevia. The stevia plant grows in similar conditions to tobacco, and yields a low calorie, diabetic-friendly sugar substitute. Soon after the EU approval of stevia in 2011, the social cooperative Stevia Hellas was founded, and currently includes 87 members. In cooperation with universities and research institutes appropriate cultivation and processing methods were developed. Stevia Hellas offers not only education and

support to farmers in growing and harvesting stevia, but also purchases the leaves, and markets the final stevia sugar.

The actions of the social cooperative increase the value added across the whole value chain for the small farmers, help to preserve jobs in a region with a youth unemployment rate of 60%, and also improve the economic resilience of the Phthiotis region. Today, Stevia Hellas is among the few stevia producers in Europe.

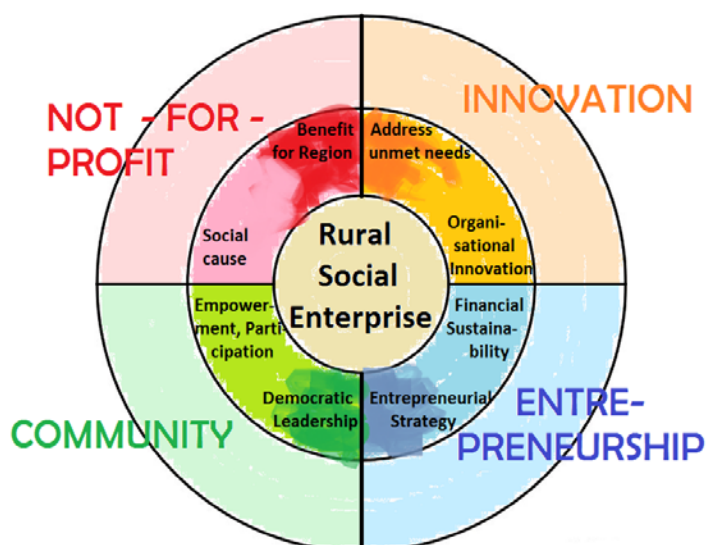
For more information: www.stevianet.gr/en/



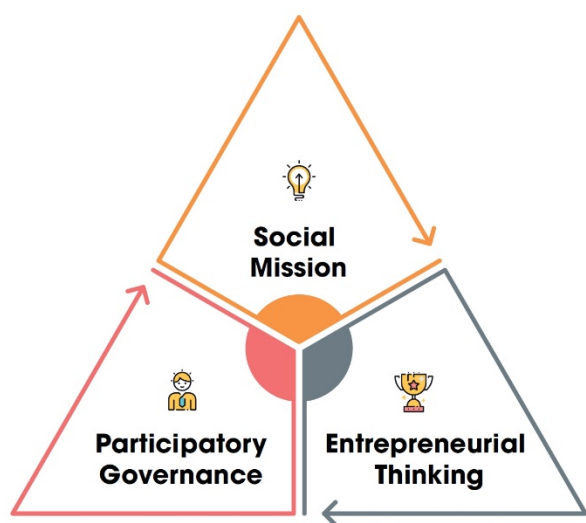
WHAT IS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE?

ALL-ROUNDERS CONNECTING VARIOUS FIELDS

Rural social enterprises straddle the community, commercial and statutory sectors to fulfil multiple objectives and aspirations simultaneously. While creating benefit for, and with, local people, they aim to satisfy both entrepreneurial and non-profit goals simultaneously, thereby creating something completely new and innovative in their region.



JUGGLING SOCIAL, BUSINESS AND PARTICIPATORY GOALS



There are multiple definitions of social enterprise in circulation, however this document is aligned to the EU Commission definition of social enterprise, developed in 2011 within the framework of the Social Business Initiative (SBI)², and further refined by the Social Enterprise Research Network EMES³.

This definition encompasses three dimensions: an entrepreneurial, a social and a governance dimension.

Defourny and Nyssens⁴ describe the entrepreneurial dimension for social enterprises as follows: “A continuous activity producing goods and selling services”; “a significant level of economic risks”; and “a minimum amount of paid work”.

The social dimension includes an “explicit aim to benefit the community”; “an initiative launched by civil society”; and “a limited profit distribution”.

Participatory governance refers to “a high degree of autonomy”; “a decision-making not based on capital ownership”; and “a participatory nature, which involves various parties affected by the activity”.

² European Commission (2016): *Social Enterprises and their Eco-Systems: Developments in Europe*, European Commission, Brussels.

³ EMES is a research network that is dedicated to the investigation of social enterprises. The acronym stands for the French term “Emergence des Entreprises Sociales en Europe”.

⁴ Defourny, Jacques and Nyssens, Marthe (2012): *The EMES Approach of Social Enterprise in a Comparative Perspective*, EMES European Research Network, Liege.

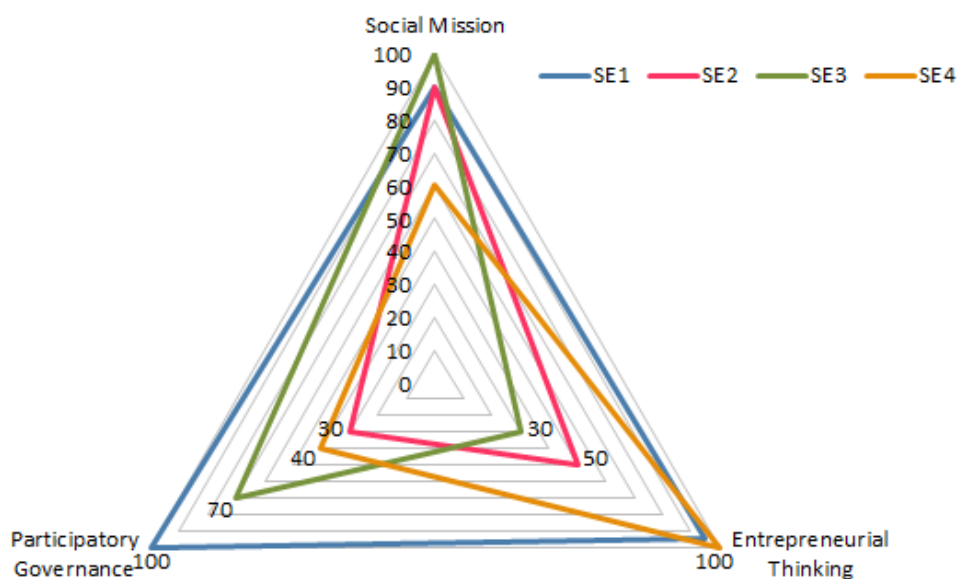
JUGGLING SOCIAL, BUSINESS AND PARTICIPATORY GOALS

Whenever a Social Enterprise aims to address social objectives through its economic activities, it thereby combines the three dimensions in different ways. Thus, the focus varies from organisation to organisation, depending on that organisation's engagement in each of those areas; this is visible in the diagramme below, with each of the four triangles representing the social enterprises involved in this document (SE1 to SE4). A balanced combination of the three provides an ideal, solid framework for a social enterprise.

This document embraces a broad range of social enterprises, with the contributors representing different types

of organisations in terms of legal status (limited company with charitable status, cooperative, foundation), and their differing focus on the three dimensions. Social enterprises always function as hybrids, balancing elements of the three dimensions, which is a tight balancing act.

A clear understanding of social enterprise is not only important from a scientific and academic perspective, but also to provide clarity to organisations on their purpose and objectives. This is essential, for example, where an organisation needs to decide on an appropriate legal status.



SIX PILLARS OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Together, the four social enterprises involved worked to identify the hurdles and barriers which are typically encountered in establishing a new social enterprise. These were then categorised into six pillars which the contributors deemed to be cross-cutting and of likely relevance to all rural social enterprises, irrespective of regional and institutional contexts:

1. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
2. PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE
3. EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE
4. FOSTERING INNOVATION
5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK
6. IMPACT MEASUREMENT

The document is intended to act as an inspirational report. It aims to provoke thinking and conversation amongst communities, fledgling social enterprises and their stakeholders, and others who may be considering how best to develop a rural social enterprise.



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

IN ORDER TO OPERATE SUSTAINABLY, SOCIAL ENTERPRISES REQUIRE STABLE FINANCIAL INCOME. RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISES FACE A DIVERSE SET OF CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO ACHIEVING THE REQUISITE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY. On one hand, generating income from sales of products or services may be difficult because customers may not be able to pay for 'social' services, and the potential paying client base is often limited in sparsely populated regions; on the other hand, the strong reliance on generating income from public funds carries risks such as high financial vulnerability and overdependence on public funding streams, since they tend to allow little freedom to innovate, and are usually time-bound. Public funding streams are often target- and output-driven, and rarely cover full overhead costs: this means that building up capital reserves in order to expand and diversify the remit and/or services of

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can social enterprises balance social impact and economic viability?

How can social enterprises diversify their income sources?

How can social enterprises collaborate more effectively, on different levels, to optimise resources?

the social enterprise, or to bridge funding streams, is a common challenge. Building a financial reserve may also conflict with the charity status of social enterprises.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: STRATEGIC DIVERSIFICATION

For many years, Ballyhoura Development was reliant mainly on two EU and nationally funded programmes to operate: the national Social Inclusion Programme and the Rural Development Programme (LEADER). Over the last decade, as the Irish policy and strategic context has changed in response to the challenges of the economic crash of 2008, so too has the range of programmes which Ballyhoura Development delivers. Having been reliant almost exclusively on these two programmes for funding

income in 2008, these programmes now constitute less than fifty percent of the company's income, and the range of community development programmes offered by the organisation has expanded exponentially across all sectors. The result is that the organisation now administers and delivers thirty different programmes, covering a range of employment, enterprise and community development supports, all funded by separate national and/or EU funding streams.



Photo: Ballyhoura Development

As the company does not generate profit from the provision of services, as stipulated by funder guidelines, this means that the company is constantly striving to source additional means to support local communities, and underpins the ongoing need to seek out new, complementary programmes to sustain operations. Going forward, BD envisages continuing to broaden its range of service offerings, and consequently its income streams, so that the company may grow and diversify, and consequently, lower the financial risk.

OTELO: COOPERATIVE FINANCE MODEL

Otelo eGen was founded fundamentally on the basis that ideas and projects from the contributors should be implemented in a cooperative company form. Otelo eGen offers a corporate framework designed for a variety of services and projects, offering both classic social business offerings such as the programme “Children experience Technology”, and also advising companies in the field of sustainable corporate development. The cooperative model allows for a high degree of financial stability, due to the wide range of services offered by its members. The formerly independent members, who are now employees and co-owners of the cooperative, can exploit and develop their poten-

tial through the common corporate framework. Otelo eGen offers a variety of services in the areas of consulting (regional development, e.g. the further development of the Otelo innovation culture network), educational programmes (digitisation and technology mediation), advertising agency services (graphic recording, design and communication) and research, especially in the field of funding social innovation in rural areas. Projects are, in principle, developed and submitted with cooperation partners. Thus far, no external capital has been necessary for any investment. Financial stability arises, above all, through the mix of offerings and the associated different payment flows.

STEVIA HELLAS: ECONOMIC VIABILITY THROUGH CRISIS

Stevia Hellas is a social enterprise, established in 2012, with the legal status of a cooperative. According to Greek agricultural cooperative law, operating as an economic entity requires that members of the cooperative finance from the business. In order to be able to gain a social impact on its members, their families and the surrounding communities, it is important to be economically viable and profitable. Stevia Hellas has not received any external funding yet.

The Coop’s income sources depend on diverse stevia products, and on services provided to its members. The Coop also strives to optimise production by pooling resources in a systematic and practical way. Stevia Hellas aims to work as efficiently as possible: it protects and saves natural and economic resources by fostering cooperative working practices, by developing collective offerings, and by sharing common machinery and space.

However, it can be difficult to harmonise the individual needs of the cooperative members. For example, the Coop recently faced a challenge concerning the purchase of a harvesting machinery. On the one hand, buying this machinery would raise the productivity and thus be beneficial for all cultivators; on the other, it would be a huge and risky investment. The General Assembly eventually decided to self-finance this purchase and to try to find additional funding.

Funding options are subsidies from national agricultural schemes which could cover up to 60 percent of the investment, using loans from a bank as private equity funds, and collecting money on a crowd funding platform. Stevia Hellas is currently waiting for the results of a crowd funding campaign launched via the Katana Reward Crowdfunding Platform.

NIDA: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF PROJECT FINANCE

The NIDA Foundation operates a Pottery Village, a settlement with traditional workshops, markets and gardens which serves as a gathering, educational and tourism venue. In addition to the existing attractions in the Pottery Village, NIDA had plans to establish a “Brickland” – a playground with bricks like Lego – that would serve to educate children in creative learning in a playful way. To realise the project, NIDA applied for public funds. However, the project failed to receive funding and the Foundation started to look for alternative ways of financing the planned “Brickland”.

NIDA contacted a company that produces equipment for wooden playgrounds, and from that, a partnership project was born. The partner company provided the components for “Brickland”; NIDA, together with volunteers, constructed and painted the components of the playground. The process was recorded through

videos and photographs. This visual material served the partner company as an instruction tool, as well as for marketing purposes. Instead of being reliant on public funds, the project was realised through a strategic partnership. This proves the value of considering ‘outside the box’ options, when the immediate and obvious avenues are not fruitful.

“Brickland”, with its colourful houses, has turned out to be the new attraction of the Pottery Village.



Photo: NIDA Foundation

The new “brickland”, located in the NIDA pottery village



PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

THE EMES NETWORK DEFINES PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE AS ONE OF THREE KEY DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES. HOWEVER, THE STRUCTURE REQUIRED TO INTEGRATE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND OPINIONS IN OPERATIONAL DECISION MAKING IS NEITHER EASY NOR ABSOLUTE. Successful democratic governance requires a balance between bottom-up and top-down consultation and decision-making, since democratic governance which merely pays lip service to the concept eventually yields to frustration and demotivation amongst staff and stakeholders. Other challenges associated with democratic governance include slowness of the decision making processes, and the potential for loss of innovative thinking and action, since classical economic theory considers a charismatic business leader to be the catalyst for new and innovative ideas, as well as being the power-broker who can

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What is the right organisational model to enable participatory governance?

How can social enterprises implement joint decision making without losing innovative capacity and impetus?

How can staff of social enterprises be empowered to feel responsible for the enterprise?

How can rural social enterprises ensure they are addressing the needs of rural communities?

make them happen. There is also a danger that this impetus can be diluted or lost, if decisions require protracted negotiation and consensus making.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The Board, organisational and staff structure of Ballyhoura Development has evolved in response to the changing operating environment, local needs and statutory regulatory and governance guidelines. The governance structure consists of a Board of Directors, six subcommittees and five advisory councils, together with working groups, networks and initiative/project steering groups, as required.

The Board of Ballyhoura Development is a partnership of local government, social partners, community and voluntary organisations, and statutory agencies. Communities and service users directly elect up to nine representatives to the Board, which ensures that service users are represented up to, and at, Board level.

The presence of statutory, local government and community-based Board members allows for a representative voice, and ensures that input from service users is considered at Board level, and consequently informs programme implementation decisions.

The Board devises the overall organisational strategy, based on identifying local needs through stakeholder consultations, and responding accordingly. Responsibility for managing implementation and meeting the company objectives is delegated to an executive management team, headed by the CEO, and implemented through teams working across focused development programmes, projects and initiatives.

NIDA: TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

In 1990, a local activist and school teacher became the first Mayor in the town of Nidzica, located in the Warmia and Mazury region in North East Poland. At the time of post-socialist transformation, this region was affected by high unemployment, and action was required to address this issue. At that time, many funding streams were available to support disadvantaged areas.

In 1994, the Mayor, together with local business and community leaders, established the NIDA Foundation – one of the first social enterprises in Poland. The Mayor subsequently left local government and became the President of NIDA with the objective of providing more opportunities to improve the social and economic situation of the region.

NIDA attracted much funding to the city, which helped to create new companies, to develop the business sector, and to support educational and social economy initiatives. Cooperation and consultation with local communities and business experts provided NIDA with information about which services were in demand. The

strong relationships between the President, the local administration and the local community were key to this. The President's knowledge of, and experience, in engaging with the municipal administrative structures has been a fundamental positive influence in developing local projects.

STEVIA HELLAS: PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Stevia Hellas Coop is a cooperative, with members - like investors - that share common interests: this facilitates the realisation of participatory leadership. Its main decision-making body is the general assembly, which decides upon a range of strategic issues concerning the cooperative. The general assembly follows the democratic principle of 'one member one vote'. Not all power lies within the general assembly however; before a vote, members of the board – often supported by the management team – can make proposals to the assembly, and afterwards the board and the management develop solutions to implement the joint decisions.

It is the responsibility of the members to grow and manage the cooperative, and also, for their personal economic benefit, they need to ensure the coop

performs well, so that their returns will grow. For this reason, it is essential to nurture and maintain a certain level of innovation capacity, which is often a balancing act, because of the joint decision making structure between the general assembly and the board. A strong leader, or a group of determined persons, such as a board, is required to keep the cooperative moving forward. Of course, innovation is something that may emanate from one person alone, but in most cases, it is the process of linking ideas and thoughts, and discussion with other members which yields innovative and new ideas. To this end, there often take place expanded meetings held by the board, the management team and perhaps by the members of the supervisory board, in order to facilitate more effective decision making.

OTELO: SELF-ORGANISATION AS THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT

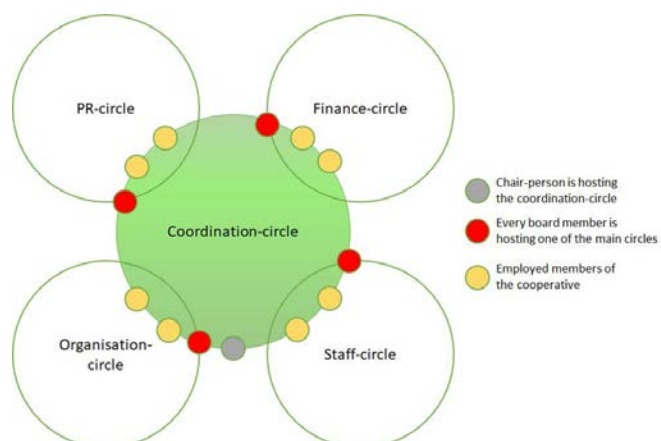
The Otelo eGen cooperative was born out of the members' need for cooperative and meaningful work, and for establishing a new form of corporate management based on sociocracy. In the sociocratic model, working groups are fundamentally based on self-organisation, and moreover, decisions are made by consent. This model establishes a culture in which all members are privy to as much information as possible before every opinion-forming process, in order to formulate information-based decisions. A decision is only made when all members express their opinions and raise no serious objections. It was a big challenge to establish this decision-making model within a cooperative structure, however, the structure now enables a fast and stable decision-making for quick and flexible responses on new requirements. Furthermore, the feeling of co-responsibility in decisions is promoted and all potential inputs receive equal consideration.

In accordance with the sociocratic governance approach, OTELO has implemented four principles:

- 1) Consent: Decisions take into account objections instead of voting out minority opinions
- 2) Organising in circles: Instead of having a hierarchical governance structure leadership lays in the hands of all members. Overall decisions are made in the coordination circle. Additionally, members are involved in one of four specialised circles dealing with personnel

development, organisation development, public relations, and finances.

- 3) Double linking: Every specialised circle is linked with the coordination circle with two persons: one person selected by the coordination circle, another person selected by the specialised circle. This way, at least two persons guarantee the information flow between the circles.
- 4) Sociocratic elections: Members are appointed for chair and host positions following a process of making recommendations in the members group, discussing the recommendations and putting up the jointly selected person for consent decision.





EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE

EMPOWERING PEOPLE IS ESSENTIAL FOR BOTH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISES. ON ONE HAND, EMPOWERED PEOPLE ARE VITAL IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY AND ARTICULATE COMMUNITY NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS; ON THE OTHER HAND, ACHIEVING A LASTING IMPACT FROM SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED TO EMBRACE AND TAILOR LOCAL SOLUTIONS, SO THAT THE INITIAL IMPETUS CAN BE FURTHER DEVELOPED, INDEPENDENTLY OF ANY SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE. Notwithstanding this, the process of empowering people is an ambitious challenge that does not follow a prescribed path or methodology. By their nature, social entrepreneurs tend to be ambitious people, with a clear vision and agenda; this can be a potentially negative influence if others who are involved feel that decisions have been already made, and that participation is only paying lip service to the process. In these circumstances, top-down implementation is likely to result in passivity, rather than in motivation and engagement. The process of empowering people

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can social enterprises enable local communities to articulate their needs?

How can social enterprises attract interest in innovative solutions and motivate people to take responsibility for their implementation, while avoiding top-down guidance?

What appropriate self-help measures are available to local communities?

can also be challenging in instances where innovative ideas meet resistance in local communities. The implementation of innovative solutions presupposes openness to challenging and changing existing perspectives and habits - this often requires a lot of consultation, negotiation and groundwork.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Ballyhoura Development believes that empowerment of individuals and groups is fundamental to both personal and collective development and progression. This approach is firmly embedded in community development principles, which is underpinned by five principles which form the basic building blocks of empowerment:

- 1) Facilitating and supporting local communities – to increase the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities;
- 2) Participation – supporting representatives from all sectors to take part in decision making;
- 3) Inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination – recognising that some individuals and communities may need additional support to overcome barriers they face, and co-designing appropriate supports to address these needs;
- 4) Self-determination – supporting individuals to make their own choices and empowering them to do so;
- 5) Partnership – recognising that many stakeholders have a contribution to make to community development, and to the development of community-led solutions to local challenges.

Over the course of its 30 years' experience, Ballyhoura Development has developed, with local stakeholders, a methodology which provides communities with an enabling framework for collective empowerment - Community Socio-Economic Action Planning. The Community Socio-Economic Action Planning process provides a means of empowering communities to reflect on the fabric of their local living environments, and subsequently, to devise a collective vision for their community, which encompasses economic, social, environmental and community sustainability considerations. The process is a participative, whole-of-community planning process, undertaken over 5 or 6 sessions, whereby communities are facilitated to identify, reflect on, and prioritise community challenges and needs, and to define an action-focused timeframe for addressing these challenges, in close collaboration with statutory stakeholders, normally over a five year timeframe. This process tends to provide a mechanism for community cohesion, and on completion, the Action Plan provides communities with a strategic focus for their local development.

NIDA: EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS THROUGH LABOUR MARKET SUPPORTS

Since its establishment, NIDA has empowered and provided supports to people living in rural parts of the Warmia and Mazury region, by supporting their progression towards new or better employment. The Foundation provides training, technical advice, grants to support self-employment, as well as supports for the development of cultural and tourism activities. NIDA also works to influence and positively impact the development of regional plans and cross-sectoral cooperations, which support progression of unemployed people towards employment and self-employment.

One of the programmes which NIDA delivers is the 'Social Economy Support Center'. The center supports people from disadvantaged groups to enter or re-enter the labour market. This initiative provides training supports,

consulting services, and grants for establishing social cooperatives and other forms of social enterprises; participating organisations receive, through the Social Economy Support Centre, much needed support during the first year of their development, in the form of start-up capital grants.

One of the success stories of this programme is the social cooperative "Nie jesteś sam" ("You are not alone"), which was established in 2011 at the local support center for disabled people. The social cooperative provides work for disabled people in a canteen, where they cook and serve food for the residents of the town of Nidzica. Nie jesteś sam has enabled disabled people to live more independently, to work and be part of the community.

STEVIA HELLAS: KEEPING MEMBERS ACTIVE AND INFORMED

Historically, the cooperative movement in Greece has faced challenges, but in recent times, changing market forces have generated an upsurge of interest in forming and joining cooperatives. Market and consumer demands for quality products (from the field to the shelf) as well as the small share of land that every farmer is entitled to cultivate are the main factors that drive the formation of cooperatives in the rural economy.

The success and viability of Stevia Hellas as a cooperative is dependent, to a large extent, on members of the coop

being aware of their roles, rights, responsibilities, and obligations within the cooperative structure. This is particularly important because all farmers/members have an equal vote in decisions which affect the coop. Stevia Hellas keeps its members involved through regular general meetings that are used to inform and discuss relevant topics. Additionally, trainings about agricultural issues are offered, thus upskilling and enabling members to operate according to best practices in the sector.

OTELO: INNOVATION CULTURE AS A BASIS FOR EMPOWERMENT

In the Otelo landscape of Upper Austria, the concept of empowerment has been supported by a culture of openness and a fundamental willingness by local administrations to facilitate and create suitable spatial and organisational conditions for the creation of new ideas.



Photo: Ralph Richter

"Greenhouse approach" of empowerment:

Greenhouse: New forms of work, collaboration and cooperative management

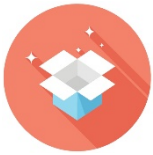
Plants: Viable Processes and Business Models

Breeding Ground: Regional enabling networks

Humus: Otelo as open space to foster love of experimentation

Through Otelo, a "Network for Innovation Culture" has been established. The network receives support from local councils, which provide open spaces for experimental development of new approaches. The network forms the bedrock that facilitates a culture of personal and collective empowerment; this, together with other enabling networks, provides an breeding ground for the further development of ideas into viable processes and business models. This is possible because of the strong focus on empowerment within the Otelo concept. To nurture this, it is essential that the open spaces can be organised and used participatively: freedom to develop something which is truly 'new' thus becomes a citizen's right.

To compliment this, Otelo has established the Otelo cooperative, a model which provides a framework to integrate new forms of work on a regional basis, and which acts as a "greenhouse" for innovative ideas. By facilitating the space to do this, citizens are empowered to 'think big' and to make their visions a reality.



FOSTERING INNOVATION

RURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISES ARE REGARDED AS ACTORS THAT DEVELOP INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS AND FACILITATE SOCIAL INNOVATION. THEIR JOINT, INTERRELATED, FOCUS ON BOTH SOCIAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL GOALS PROVIDES A SOLID FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING SOCIAL NEEDS, AND FOR ADDRESSING THEM THROUGH SOLUTIONS DESIGNED TO SOLVE PROBLEMS MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN BY EXISTING MEANS. Rural regions can be a fertile ground for innovative solutions because they often provide time and space for project and idea development. However, social enterprises are in danger of not being able to fully showcase their innovative potential, for a number of reasons. Lack of financial stability leads social enterprises to focus predominantly on project implementation and income generation, which is often at the expense of developing and testing new ideas. Rural social enterprises which are initially established through public funds often align their products and services to meet the criteria of the funding streams, which

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can social enterprises continue to design, develop, pilot and implement innovative initiatives, in tandem with everyday tasks?

How can the innovative potential of staff members, customers and other stakeholders be fostered and valued?

How do social enterprises source funding opportunities for innovative products and services?

How can social enterprises ensure that innovative solutions meet social needs?

leaves little room for variation and new service/product development; the logic and prescriptive nature of funding streams often leaves little scope for innovations.

OTELO: FROM ADMINISTRATION TO CREATION

OTELO eGen was founded on the assumption that a cooperative of socially responsible, self-employed people, is a fertile ground for innovative ventures. The economic approach of the cooperative is equally important for promoting individual potential, since it allows for joint development and implementation of new models, while at the same time, the collective ethos facilitates financial stability. Because of this, projects can be realised which have very different financing bases.

Through the model of self-employment, new employees or Otelo associations can introduce and discuss ideas or projects within the cooperative. The cooperative provides a secure organisational framework for testing new ideas and for their professional implementation. Thus, in addition to the generation of a stable income, the potential of the business idea can be better utilised.

In Otelo's experience, small, manageable structures like the Otelo model enable faster decision making during change processes, which is a motivator for innovative thinking. Because of the rapid socio-economic and political changes that rural communities have undergone,

regional innovation culture is experiencing a renaissance, increasingly decoupling from top-down directives, which allows for the creation of local innovation networks.

The vision of the Otelo Cooperative is to build a regional innovation network that provides as many resources as possible to facilitate new ideas as well as to promote processes that foster the cultural basis for innovation. We have learned that it is important to distinguish between the following levels in communication:

1st Innovationshumus: Rooms and events are needed that give people the opportunity to discuss, experiment and deepen new ideas. Examples of this are the Otelo Open Technology Laboratories.

2nd Innovation Greenhouses: If the humus is good, plants grow better and similarly, support structures (such as technology centres or cooperation initiatives) can be more effective. Otelo eGen sees itself as a new model for a greenhouse, where new ideas can be developed cooperatively in an open innovation process.

STEVIA HELLAS: COLLABORATIONS WITH RESEARCH INSTITUTES

Producing stevia, a low calorie, diabetic-friendly, sugar substitute, was a new idea necessitated by the economic imperative to respond to the downturn in the tobacco production industry in the Lamia region of Greece. The eventual birth of the Stevia Hellas Coop was the result of an innovative, collaborative pilot project between universities and farmers, to explore the potential viability of stevia production from an agricultural and economic perspective. The idea of producing and trading the finalised stevia product was made possible by a subsequent pilot collaboration between farmers and local entrepreneurs. All of the stakeholders involved at various stages of this journey displayed openness to

innovative thinking, and followed through, despite the risks and the possibility that the investment of time and resources may not have paid off.

Since the foundation of the coop, the members and other stakeholders continue to develop and maintain partnerships with institutes, universities and other enterprises, thus continuing the culture of openness to innovation. The current challenge for Stevia Hellas is to solve the problem of how to produce plants faster and more economically by experimenting with new seeds and new methods of field planting: innovation continues.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: CREATIVE WAYS TO GROW INNOVATION

Ballyhoura Development's work is embedded in a partnership approach, with all stakeholders. BD believes that collaboration is key to the development of sustainable social enterprises and to fostering a broader socially innovative landscape. Not only does this create opportunities for identifying and realising collaborative responses to local needs, but it provides much-needed opportunities for learning, idea generation and networking, as well as providing a potential platform for collaborations between the community, public and private sectors, to pilot initiatives.

BD has established that strong, transparent governance structures are one of the key building blocks which

underpin successful social enterprises, thereby enabling the organisation to plan for and assign resources to innovative thinking and implementation. In its work in supporting other local rural social enterprises, BD has identified governance structures as an area in which communities require capacity building, training and knowledge, and has designed a "Community Governance Training Initiative" which provides a structured, multi-faceted suite of training to fledgling and established rural enterprises and social enterprises, to support them in this goal. Good governance is in turn vital for the sustainability and development of pilot initiatives.

NIDA: ENABLING SOCIAL INNOVATION BY INVOLVING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The Pottery Village was one of the first theme villages in Poland. It was founded in 2007 arising out of a cooperation between NIDA, different NGOs, local businesses, the regional labor office and unemployed people from the region. The project was driven by a desire to support the development of the Nidzica region, by considering how to do something new and different, as a means of attracting visitors to the region. From this, the concept of the Pottery Village was born, as a way to renew interest in regional craft traditions and to create job opportunities in the local area.

A key element to the success of the Pottery Village was the involvement of all partners and stakeholders in the whole process, from creating the concept to implementing the project. Additionally, the Pottery Village has since developed partnerships with local private enterprises that provide voluntary hours as part of their corporate social responsibility strategies.

Funding support from the European Commission's programme EQUAL helped to bring the project to fruition. Local residents who gained employment in the Pottery Village were inhabitants of the municipality. They often had to learn new skills and professions such as tailoring, pottery and forging. In this way, skills which were almost lost were redeveloped and given a new lease of life, while also providing local jobs.

The Pottery Village is located in a settlement with less than one hundred inhabitants. Now every year it is visited by thousands of people. It provides local employment opportunities and thus retains residents in the area. For the last two years, NIDA has provided guided tours, study visits and consultations to other groups, to share the experience and to foster new partnerships for the development of further theme villages.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES ARE INNOVATIVE VENTURES THAT PRODUCE SOCIAL ADDED VALUE. THEY REQUIRE A LEGAL STATUS AND TAX FRAMEWORKS THAT ENABLE BOTH ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCING A SOCIAL BENEFIT FOR SOCIETY. However, enabling legal frameworks tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Often, social enterprises only have a choice between registering as a mainstream enterprise or as a charitable organisation. Both options bear risks and add complexity to social entrepreneurial actions. Registering as an ordinary business often limits access to public funds and does not incentivise the social impact element of the organisation. Registering as a charitable organisation, in contrast, may facilitate access to public funds and may provide tax reliefs. However, the charitable status can hinder social enterprises from building up capital reserves,

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Which legal status best supports the objective of combining entrepreneurial activities, social goals and participatory governance?

How does the status of a limited company fit with the goal of producing social added value?

How can social enterprises pursue entrepreneurial goals whilst holding charitable status?

which is essential in order to achieve financial sustainability, and to expand the business and its offerings. Moreover, it often involves burdensome financial reporting.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: CONFIDENCE IN THE CHARITY SECTOR

Ballyhoura Development is a limited company, with charitable status structure. This structure protects individual board members, financially and legally, while also enabling a participative strategy. The structure is recognised as a charity company, and is registered with the newly established Irish Charities Regulatory Authority, under The Charities Act.

The Charities Act was adopted in 2014 and its purpose was to reform the law relating to charities in order to ensure greater accountability, to protect against abuse of charitable status and fraud, and to enhance public trust and confidence in charities and increase transparency in

the sector. The adoption of The Charities Act followed a period where several high profile charities in Ireland were scrutinised, and exposed for not operating as so called advertised charities, which had a detrimental effect on this sector as a whole.

The development of a regulated and governed charity sector in Ireland has provided confidence and reassurance to the public, and to the charity itself in relation to its revenue generation. The establishment of this new regulated body and the alignment of charities to meet the criteria is a slow process but a huge milestone for the community and voluntary sector.

OTELO: COOPERATIVES AS INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR HYBRID SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

In Austria, the status of social enterprises is not clearly regulated. Although entrepreneurial thinking is required and encouraged, the scope of action is limited by non-profit governance standards. With Otelo eGen – a “self-employment cooperative” – and the associated voluntary association network, Otelo can balance these different levels well. In the long term, however, partial profitability would be an advantage, so that an enterprise can operate in a market economy and at the same time promote public service goals. It would also simplify support structures and prevent the formation of compli-

cated networks of companies. Currently, project ideas that are eligible or have a sustainable financing concept are implemented within the Otelo eGen enterprise. The initiators can become members of the cooperative and apply for support for the implementation of a project or offer, within the cooperative. The condition is that own salary and project costs are obtained, or that they are covered by promotion. With this model, Otelo eGen has already employed 16 people and currently engages with more than 200 customers.

NIDA: TAX EXEMPTIONS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

With its legal status of a foundation, NIDA stands out in a field in which many social enterprises are registered as enterprises with charity status or as social cooperatives. The choice for this legal status dates back to 1993, when the town of Nidzica has been selected by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to participate in the programme “Local Initiatives for employment and social and economic development”. A local committee composed of people representing different public and private institutions decided to establish an organisation to implement development projects. They considered an organisation with the status of a foundation to be more suitable for contributing public and private capital than this would have been possible in other forms of organisations such as in associations. This was the birth of the NIDA Foundation.

One of the benefits of being recognised as a foundation is the exemption from tax on all income devoted to the public benefit objectives listed in the law. Moreover, the foundation status allows for applying for public funding schemes. This would not be possible as a limited company which is regarded to follow economic goals. In contrast to associations, the foundation enables economic activities on condition that income is allocated for statutory purposes. This gives NIDA the opportunity to obtain funds, for example, for own contributions to ongoing projects. As a foundation NIDA has to prepare and publish annual reports, including narrative and financial components.

STEVIA HELLAS: NEW COOP MODEL

In the agriculture sector of rural Greece, forming cooperatives or small groups of professional farmers is the most common and established way of progressing agricultural production. Within this model, all members have the same rights and obligations. Agricultural cooperatives offer the possibility of economies of scale which is a strong incentive to produce in a more profitable way. Stevia Hellas is obliged to be registered in the National Cooperative Register by law.

Stevia Hellas Coop is comprised of its members, the members of the board, and the management team. Having a management team to oversee the day-to-day

management of the cooperative, outside of its members, is not a common structure in Greece. Usually coops relied on the board for everyday tasks and for the products as well. Nowadays, using a management team ensures an appropriate focus on operational tasks and, most important, focuses on the marketing, the communication of the product and the product availability as well. All those involved in the coop have responsibilities regarding the cultivation, production and marketing of the products. This model also encourages cross learning, cross-transfer of skills, and saving resources.



Photos: NIDA Foundation, Ballyhoura Development



MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT

TRADITIONAL ENTERPRISES DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMERCIAL ACHIEVEMENTS TO STAKEHOLDERS AND SHAREHOLDERS, IN ORDER TO PROVE THEIR SUCCESS. Performance indicators, such as sales figures and profit margins, are established measures of demonstrating the success and viability of commercial businesses. While financial viability is equally important for social enterprises, measuring and demonstrating social impact is more challenging to demonstrate. Rural social enterprises contribute to the welfare of communities, which may be evident in a change of attitudes and increased wellbeing. Such achievements are not always observable and tend to be difficult to measure. Secondly, unlike commercial indicators, social parameters are qualitative rather than quantitative. While the first focuses on outcomes, the latter is related to impact. In a world where outcome measurement tends to be based on figures and target numbers,

GUIDING QUESTIONS

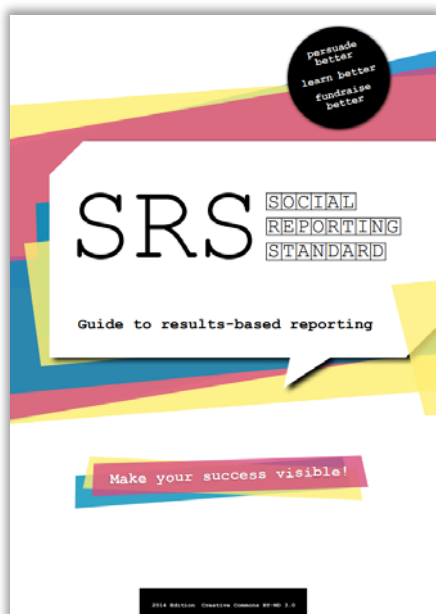
How important is it for a social enterprise to measure and report its social impact?

Which measurement standards and indicators are effective to measure social impact?

How do social enterprises ensure that the actual outcomes correspond with the intended impacts?

it can be challenging to convince stakeholders by means of qualitative indicators. Moreover, the existence of different social impact standards makes the assessment and comparison of achievements difficult.

OTELO: WHAT WORKS WELL SPROUTS - USING THE SOCIAL REPORTING STANDARD (SRS) TOOL



SRS Guideline published by the Social Reporting Initiative e.V. (Source: www.social-reporting-standard.de/en/)

In 2015, Otelos eGen carried out an impact measurement according to the Social Reporting Standard (SRS), in consultation with the network of sixteen Otelos associations. The SRS was developed primarily as an annual reporting model for measuring social impact and, from Otelos's point of view, is also suitable for measuring the impact of existing networks and structures. At the same time, the SRS also provided a good opportunity to reflect and adapt the goals and direction of the network.

The Otelos charter functions internally as a specific statute. It was adopted on the basis of the impact analysis, and new ideas were also revealed in the course of the qualitative analysis, which led again to new services and projects being developed, for example in the field of digitisation in rural areas. The indicators for the impact analysis were defined together by the network partners and the service users. Especially in rural areas, indicators such as participation in shaping the region, access to resources and educational opportunities, inter-generational encounters and strategies to increase regional resilience were particularly important.

NIDA: MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL IMPACT UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Every year NIDA presents in an annual report all of its activities. This report is published on the NIDA website and contains the number of participants, budgets of the project, and numbers of grants allocated.

The organization is still looking for tools that will allow the better capturing of social impact and qualitative outcomes. Most of the stakeholders require quantitative and not qualitative project outcomes. One of NIDA's objectives is to change the mentality of the people towards civic involvement and engagement. This, however, is hard to measure. Capturing social change appears to be only possible through observation.

As the biggest NGO in the municipality, NIDA has an impact on the community by providing employment opportunities and supporting start-ups and business development. Still, it is difficult to capture the impact of NIDA in figures as there are other complex factors influencing employment and economic trends. Another reason for the low implementation of social impact measurement is that funding schemes do not provide support necessary for capturing the social impact.

STEVIA HELLAS: QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS PREVAIL

Stevia Hellas coop regards self-assessment and external independent reviews as essential for the evaluation and development of the coop, so that it can measure and report on its social and economic impact to the shareholders. Ongoing review and monitoring also flag up changes and corrections which could be implemented to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the enterprise.

As previously mentioned, qualitative indicators are difficult to obtain. In Stevia Hellas' case, the impact on the coop members/farmers are measured by the in-

crease in production numbers every year, or by the involvement and the participation of members in coop meetings, as well as the level of interest in becoming a new member. Stevia Hellas is also regularly invited by other cooperatives and local authorities to present its work and to give advice to other farmers, as a model of best practice. However, while Stevia Hellas has a clear impact on the wellbeing of family farmers in the region and as a role model for other cooperatives it still does not measure this impact in a systematic way.

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT: QUALITATIVE MEANS FOR MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT

Measuring impact is essential for social enterprises, since such impact cannot be measured solely on profit metrics, as with traditional enterprise. Assessing the success and positive social impact of social enterprises is challenging, as evidenced by the fact that there are no common national standards in Ireland for measuring social impact, however this is currently under discussion.

Despite the absence of a common measurement standard in Ireland, BD relies on a number of qualitative tools to measure and assess social impact. These include:

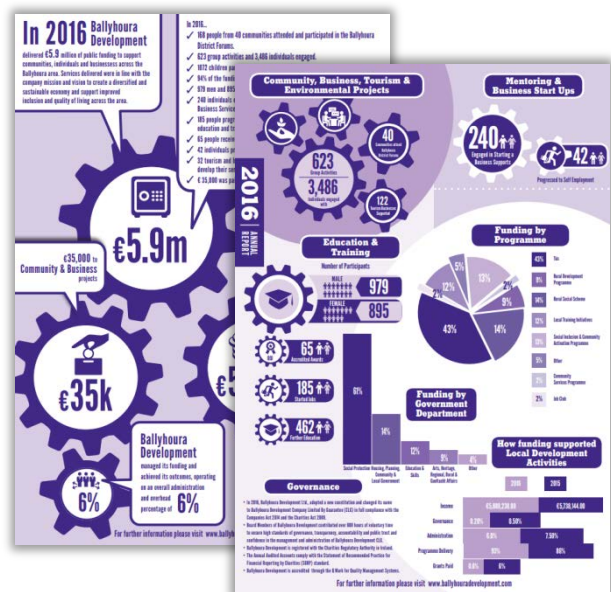
Baseline studies on attitudes and behaviour, targeted to the relevant client group, and followed up with the client group at regular intervals;

Testimonials from clients and stakeholders involved;

Impact statements, using quantitative data to underpin qualitative results;

Client satisfaction surveys;

Client service consultation surveys and Case Studies.



Ballyhoura Development CLG: Annual Report 2016



THE RurInno PROJECT

The EU Horizon2020 research and training project “Social Innovation in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: How Social Entrepreneurs Foster Innovative Solutions to Social Problems” (RurInno) creates an empirical knowledge base that is used to tap the potential of social enterprises in marginalised rural Europe. Four acknowledged social enterprises (Ballyhoura Development in Ireland, NIDA in Poland, OTELO in Austria and Stevia Hellas in Greece) and two high-profile research institutes (the Leibniz Institute For Research on Society and Space (IRS) in Germany and the Institute for Innovation Management (IFI) in Austria) work together in the project. RurInno strives to address three obstacles: It aims to place the social entrepre-

neurial approach on the agenda of policymakers and authorities. It develops a tailored training programme for social entrepreneurs to help them develop and implement social innovation in structurally weak rural Europe. It is also building a knowledge base to support formulating recommendations on how to foster social innovation to meet social needs and social challenges in marginalised rural Europe. For this purpose, RurInno researchers investigate in long-term research secondments the innovative activities and institutional ecosystems of the four involved social enterprises. The RurInno programme ran from February 2016 until March 2018.

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Photo: RURLNNO consortium

The Rurlnno Consortium at a project meeting in January 2017 in Nidzica, Poland

The RURINNO project online: rural-innovation.net



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