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Shaping employability for immigrants through social entrepreneurship in Lapland

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ABSTRACT

Many immigrants are either underemployed or unemployed in Lapland, and indeed many of them are long-term unemployed. This unemployment rate among immigrants varies from region to region in Finland. As a disadvantaged group in the labour market, sometimes they are pushed into establishing a business; however, their motivation to do so is weak, due to a lack of market understanding along with other socio-cultural factors. As an alternative way of doing business and gaining access to the labour market, social enterprise could be another instrument for employment. We studied whether Social Entrepreneurship (SE) represents an exceptional mindset among the group. SE invention for this group of people is a less-studied area of research in Finland compared to many other European countries such as Sweden and Scotland. Our research examines whether SE could be a way to facilitate the integration of immigrants, particularly immigrant women, who are at risk of marginalisation, into the Finnish labour market in the near future, with Lapland as a case study. We analyse the factors that can be taken into account to enable immigrants to conduct their business under the guidance of a social enterprise in the northern part of Finland, thereby shaping their employability for the future.

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1. Introduction

The current labour market crisis seems to be a continuous challenge for immigrants to gain access to the labour market in Finland. Immigrants are a vulnerable group in the labour market, and they struggle to navigate their way into employment in the society. Many immigrants are underemployed, and indeed many of them are long-term unemployed. This unemployment rate among immigrants varies from region to region in Finland. As a disadvantaged group in the labour market, sometimes they are pushed into establishing a business (Yeasmin, 2016). However, 'a lack of understanding of the risks involved in entrepreneurship and economic fluctuations hinders the establishment of businesses among long-term unemployed people' (Yeasmin, 2016).

As an alternative way of doing business and gaining access to the labour market, social enterprise could be another instrument for employment.

An SE represents an exceptional mind-set/mindset of a group of people who are interested in establishing a social enterprise and who combine their visions with real social problems and

needs that have not been met and that are not recognized by the state's welfare system. (Yeasmin, 2016)

For immigrant women, who are generally poorly integrated into Finnish society (OECD, 2018) and are out of the labour market, a social enterprise could be an alternative for them to be integrated into the Finnish society, both socially and economically.

A social enterprise is not necessarily a profit-making business; it is a combination of social and commercial entrepreneurial activities intended to achieve self-sufficiency for its members and create opportunities for them to be employed. However, an SE is financially self-governing and the founders of an SE can benefit from personal profits (Samer, 2012). (Yeasmin, 2016)

Many employment SEs in Lapland have been established since 2012. Their origin and the creation of new SEs could be promoted if there were co-operation between them. Without having a social network relationship pattern with other social entities and organisations in the particular area, the visibility of the activities of SEs is hard to increase so as to attract and support more new members.

Not only the public but also the private sector needs to be involved, which could dispel the suspicion that SEs need to be treated under the condition of social justice. The reasoning that an SE could be favoured alongside other forms of enterprise is still in need of awareness among many societal partners.

SEs should be seen as an alternative model for immigrants and long-term unemployed, and it should be marketed as such. Co-operation demands with social partners seem high, according to this study of future opportunities for SEs. The role of social organisation can be to support the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Lapland by providing necessary resources. Though co-operation from the public sector can play a key role in developing the activities of social enterprises, direct material support or intangible support from other private or individual actors or sectors are discussed in the study, which might increase knowledge and build trust between actors that can support SEs in areas in which there is membership in groups of disadvantaged people. A social collaborative model will enable social enterprises and other actors to meet and find common economic and social interests.

Creating a model of social co-operation requires capable parties and networkers, both from social enterprises and from the private and municipal sides. A municipal actor can lead the way and bring together actors in the social economy and the traditional private business sector. A municipal actor can help jobseekers and those who have been out of work for a long time to find equal access to the labour market.

This is a less-studied area of research in Finland compared to many other European countries such as Sweden and Scotland. Our research targets whether Social Entrepreneurship (SE) could be a measure that could facilitate the integration of immigrants, particularly immigrant women, into the Finnish labour market in the near future, with Lapland as a case study. What are the factors that can be taken into account that can enable immigrants to conduct their business under an SE in the northern part of Finland?

2. Methodology

This study is based on three focus group discussion (FGD) sessions in three different cities in Lapland. A selected and invited group of people (N = 50) discussed many different

issues related to the future development of SE in Lapland, particularly those SEs with long-term unemployed, both immigrants and locals. This study is closely related to participatory research, which is technically a qualitative research and data collection method that bridges scientific research and local knowledge (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Some scholars have seen FGD as a combination of 'one-to-one' and 'group interviews' (Lacey, 1970; Mac a Ghail, 1994; Parker & Tritter, 2006; Skeggs, 1997). In such research, the authors played the role of a facilitator or moderator. The authors steered the group discussions in such a direction that they could collect their material based on their research design.

The target of the study was based on three research objectives, with each research objective having its own list of questions. This article focuses on only one research objective, which is the factors of the sustainable future of SEs in Lapland. Our target was to broaden knowledge of SEs and whether they would be one of the alternative measures for immigrants to access the labour market in Lapland in the near future. If so, then what are the factors that can enable immigrants to operate this type of SE? Based on this research design, we invited stakeholders who were willing to fully engage in such discussion, were familiar with the subject matter and could give spontaneous views on the research questions (Thomas et al., 1995). The FGDs were held in Rovaniemi (R), Kemi (K), and Kemijärvi (KJ). The duration of each FGD was 3 hours. There were four SEs/co-ops along with many individual entrepreneurs and small business owners in the discussion. Some of the entrepreneurs were interviewed by the researcher individually, separately from the focus group discussion. The four SE/Co-ops are (1) *Sie&MieKeskus*, (2) *Kemin Osaajien Osuuskunta*, (3) *Uurto Osuuskunta* and (4) *InnoOk Osuuskunta*.

The main methods of collecting data were note-taking, participant observation (Stewart et al., 2007) and context-specific workshops in which the participants worked in small groups, conversed on a topic for a few minutes and then wrote notes. The topics included the three questions that form the basis of our three hypotheses (HP).

HP I – SEs could be a sustainable option for gaining access to the labour market in the future. This could be a valid option for immigrants and other disadvantaged members of society to do and learn business.

HP II – SEs will be supported by necessary and reasonable measures under the concept of social justice and its implications for sustaining the welfare, well-being and socio-economic adaptation of a particular group of people residing in a certain society.

HP III – The composition of social entities and social organisations as a rational solution to reform social patterns. The functionalism of social structure is one of the key factors to sustaining the notion of social entrepreneurship in the future.

The analysis part of our research is based on two stages: (1) a mixed content analysis and (2) theoretical analysis. A mixed content analysis includes data coding, including respondents' lists of ideas, designing relationship diagrams between the small groups' tasks for each FGD, identifying keywords from their notes, comparing our notes and the small groups' notes, and finally subdividing codes based on each research objective. In the content analysis phase, we also discovered the pattern of direct quotations based on the themes of the research, which was a part of the ethnographic analysis.

Our theoretical analysis is a combination of a literature review that supports our empirical data and establishing a precise example for identifying a set of interrelated arguments to back up our hypotheses.

3. Theoretical framework

Theoretically, this study included a preferable future concept focusing on the labour market opportunities for immigrants in Lapland. We tried to find a positive alternative vision of the future (Masini, 1983) labour market in which SEs could be an empirical solution for the economic integration of immigrants. According to many previous studies, the unemployment rate among immigrants is high in Lapland, and there are many barriers to their gaining access to the labour market (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019). On the other hand, economic integration through establishing entrepreneurship is indeed critically discussed by researchers (Heikkilä, 2017; Yeasmin, 2016). Entrepreneurship comes with risk among immigrants unless they are competent enough to avoid negative futures, which depends on many factors. So, to understand the competing images of the future, a conceptual framework is necessary. Our HP is explored not only based on our empirical data but also through the 'six pillars' approach of Inayatullah (2002, 2008). Each FGD concentrates on four pillars of this 'six pillars' approach: (1) mapping the future labour market for immigrants, (2) anticipating the future labour market for those who are at risk of being marginalised in the future labour market, (3) timing the future labour demands, and (4) creative alternative measures for the socio-economic adaptation of the disadvantaged group in the society.

The Theory of Social Justice supports HP II. Social justice represents unbiased principles that maintain quite distinct manifestations (Sen, 1999:13). According to Jatava (1998), a measure that can be good for the greatest number of individuals in a society is a measure of social justice. According to the Theory of Utilitarianism, a common interest that creates the greatest sum of happiness among the greatest number of people is social justice (Mill, 1848; Jatava, 1998). The Marxist view of social justice gives the genuine idea of HP II. According to this view, the social justice idea was 'developed through the ages'. It is a moral sense of the society not to allow moral disclination towards a particular group of people who are minority. Society includes people who are somehow segregated from the systems of which they need to be a part, and states must work for the common good for sustaining the welfare, well-being and socio-economic adaptation of this particular group of people residing in the northern society of Finland. After John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick developed the philosophy of utilitarian morals, which concerns methods of ethics based on morality and utilitarianism. The ultimate goal of social actions or social support measures is not any individual's happiness; rather it should create positivity towards a sustainable society.

Because of the economic structure of Finland and its changing form from one age to another on the basis of the economic integration of immigrants, it is crucial to establish and maintain social entrepreneurship that can make sense of social justice. An example of social justice in our context includes the idea of freedom to the economic equality of immigrants or a disadvantaged group of people in the society, and this also involves the significance of freedom of social responsibility to the primary needs of these disadvantaged members (Laski, 1925, 1948). Another definition of social justice, this one outside

the context of our study but still relevant, is when a particular group of people in a society expects specific economic needs for their standards of living up to a level of margin of sufficiency (Walzer, 1983). Social Justice is for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged group under conditions of fair equalities of social opportunities (Rawls, 1971). The core value of SE is to reform a set of social values based on the market value (Kato, 2017).

Thirdly, HP III is constructed under the theoretical foundation of social network theory. Emile Durkheim argues that societies are interdependent on the behaviour of social institutions and all institutions operated by its members. Thus, social relations and social contact between social groups and institutions are implicit under social structure (Kadushin, 2004). Social nodes between stakeholders are generally referred to with the generic term of 'network' (Brass, 1992; Nohria & Eccles, 1992). All the stakeholders have their roles and social responsibilities that can encompass the basis of a relationship. In such a relationship, many kinds of co-operation can be developed to motivate co-operators to make their ties stronger (Kadushin, 2004). These types of social bonds between different stakeholders can support entrepreneurs by providing knowledge that may lead to entrepreneurship development. Interaction between social network contacts are required in every business, and social entrepreneurs need it more than others. They need formal and informal social network support to overcome the difficulties of the first three years, which have been named as the 'Dead Valley' (Koikkalainen & Yeasmin, 2014). Social network supports refer to sustainability in terms of operating a business for a longer period of time. Based on Granovetter's (1982) theory, there is a need of relationship development and to build stronger ties between stakeholders. 'Stronger ties' has been identified as the interaction between social entrepreneurs in a particular social enterprise, and 'weak ties' has been defined as the interaction between other formal and informal social network contacts (White & Houseman, 2002). When a socially disadvantaged group of people operates a social entrepreneurship, they obviously expect to receive community support in activating their networks to gain access to social capital, and indeed they need to gain access to other business networks to exploit all possible opportunity structures (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019) to overcome their vulnerability in the society.

4. Results and discussion

Hypothesis I: SEs could be a sustainable option for gaining access to the labour market in the future. This could be a valid option for immigrants and other disadvantaged members of the labour market to do and learn business.

The four pillars of the future concept that were taken into account in the theoretical part of the article are mapping, anticipating, timing and creative alternative measures for the future labour market for immigrants. These four pillars address whether immigrants can gain access to the labour market in the future through SE. According to many previous studies, it is also hard for immigrants to enter the labour market based on their educational background (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019; Heikkilä & Yeasmin, 2021; Yeasmin, 2018; Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019; Uusiautti & Yeasmin, 2019). Immigrants, particularly immigrant women, are at risk of labour market marginalisation. They are at a disadvantage in the whole of Finland in addition to the labour market of Lapland. The

unemployment rate among immigrants is comparatively higher than locals (OECD, 2018). There are many other barriers such as local language skills, unconstructive attitudes of employers towards immigrants, segregation in recognising previous diplomas from outside the EU, etc. Indeed, these factors have a big impact on immigrants' difficulty in accessing the labour market.

'We need to strengthen social co-operative efforts in order to encourage the members to work for the good of the society, and we need to both create and give the members opportunities to step forward and participate in the efforts to develop the society.' (FGD – KJ, 2019)

Based on the empirical materials of this study, disadvantaged immigrants who are long-term unemployed are forced to establish their own business, making them thus self-employed, a status that tends poorly in many cases. Operating a business successfully in Lapland or in Finland in general is harder because of excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy (Yeasmin, 2016), even for Finnish entrepreneurs. Many immigrants have to terminate their business soon after establishing them (Koikkalainen & Yeasmin, 2014).

According to our study, SE could be a safe business net for long-term immigrants who are motivated enough to access the labour market through trialling their business under an SE.

'There are eight of us now, eight active members in this tight-knit community that has been a joint effort from the very beginning. If there's a business idea, we can confer as a group, and if there's a chance of attracting customers and creating jobs, then we take it on board. We aim to support new businesses when they need help, as you never know what will come of one small idea!' (FGD – R, 2019)

SE is a good way to raise community spirit among disadvantaged groups, since not only is it a good model but it can also create future opportunities for immigrants and Finns to start working together, which will in turn boost motivation and inspire them to work as a team.

It's been brilliant, as without our efforts, many of our members would have suffered and might have ended up cocooned at home. It's helped members, both personally and in other ways, to stay active in the society. (FGD – R, 2019)

As a result of the study, a social enterprise can guide members in how to develop their skills through community involvement. Immigrants or long-term unemployed can learn about their value in the labour market and anticipate the future labour market by trialling their business concept and its financial profitability in the future labour market. However, instead of continuously maximising and generating financial profit, SEs can qualify disadvantaged groups for the future labour market and can offer creative alternative measures for socio-economic adaptations of their own.

Immigrants who become involved with social entrepreneurship are more swiftly integrated into the Lappish society. In addition to learning about entrepreneurship through the efforts of SEs, they also become acquainted with Finnish culture and society ... and they have the opportunity to learn how to compete in the future labour market. (FGD – R, 2019)

It's good to exchange thoughts and to see what others are doing. This process strengthens skills and knowledge. We need to reduce the accounting costs when there's an expensive third-party service involved. (FGD – R, 2019)

Members can match their skills to gain labour market success, adjust and change their plans based on proper timing and sustain their competences for future labour market needs via SE support. They can also make collective decisions, and evaluate and forecast appropriate and timely skills. They can even estimate, without taking any risk, whether their business will survive in the Finnish market, whether their business ideas have the market capacity to employ them with positive elasticity. SE can provide an informal and stress-free platform to anticipate and try alternative approaches to employment in the Finnish market. Anticipating the potential barriers of implementing their business ideas can facilitate finding a balanced view for the future labour market. They need proper knowledge to perform in different situations and need to develop courses of actions for finding alternative measures to better understand the local labour market needs. Teamwork can support in this regard by brainstorming on future markets and the demands and knowledge of market timing.

Practising business or work through SE facilitates the ability to forecast whether they can survive with their idea in the future labour market. SE is a platform for ensuring their future plan through implementing and learning, in a risk-free environment, more about whether their plan is a resilient option. Members can forecast their business trends before engaging further.

HP II – SEs will be supported by necessary and reasonable measures under the concept of social justice and its implications for sustaining the welfare, well-being and socio-economic adaptation of a particular group of people residing in a certain society.

Although social enterprises pursue a social mission, some of our participants believe that social enterprises are not distinguishable from any other modern enterprises (FGD – R, 2019); however, many believe as such that immigrants and long-term unemployed are a socially excluded group of people and they are fundamentally different from the rest as they are a deprived and marginalised group of people to a great extent. SE can be seen as a charitable entity to solve the problems of a deprived group of people and change the approach of their lifestyles.

According to Finlex no 1351/2003 section 1: “The social enterprises referred to in this Act provide employment opportunities particularly for the disabled and the long-term unemployed.

Under this Act:

- (1) the disabled are employees whose potential for gaining suitable work, retaining their job or advancing in work have diminished significantly due to an appropriately diagnosed injury, illness or disability;
- (2) the long-term unemployed are employees, who before the start of their employment relationship were unemployed jobseekers as referred to in chapter 1, section 7(1), paragraph 5 of the Public Employment Services Act (1295/2002) or in Chapter 7, section 6(1), paras.1, 2 of the Unemployment Security Act (1290/2002).”

Many immigrants and Finns are in a poor situation in the labour market. A registered trader may apply to be included in the register of SE if at least 30 per cent of their employees are disabled or disabled and long-term unemployed. Both legal aspects and

social aspects demand necessary and reasonable measures to support and sustain the well-being and socio-economic adaptation of this group of people.

This group of people face many challenges in the Finnish labour market and in society. If we analyse all the dimensions of inequality, we recognise that the integration of this group of people in Finnish Lapland requires them to be shaped in specific contexts so as to allow them equal access to the labour market. The unequal labour market conditions create social attitudes towards these groups that have a negative impact on the target group's ability to be included in the society. The social structure, its systems as well as other barriers do not permit direct support, and they influence immigrants and locals to compete equally in the labour market. There are a number of factors such as language, the recognition of skills, and the attitudes of local employers that contribute to skill-related underemployment and unemployment (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019). The ability of social justice to address this deprivation, which is related to the socio-economic status of this particular group, needs to be identified, thereby ensuring their welfare, well-being and socio-economic adaptation.

The objectives of the economic empowerment of this group of people through support such as SE is a part of social justice. Operating such an SE needs resources to meet their practical and strategic needs related to equal treatment in the society. SE needs material, human and intellectual support for further development of the SE and for the dissemination of this concept publicly.

It's challenging for SE's own resources to finance administration and development, but these are important and vital functions. There's a flawed and stigmatised perception of SE that persists, therefore there is still a need to spread the word that this isn't some kind of club or basic volunteering; the premise of "socially sustainable business" means working together to ensure socio-economic survival. (FGD – K, 2019)

A sustainable operation needs to be financially viable and therefore must be run in an efficient manner. The foundation of any business is economic viability. SEs advise how to maximise profits but, more importantly, they also aid in developing the members' skills and knowledge, encouraging societal involvement, and increasing the value of sustainable practices. (FGD – K, 2019)

It's important to take care of those who are struggling. There needs to be equal opportunity to make a living, and being stuck at home like a hermit isn't good for anyone. Sometimes there are situations that you don't want to get into because you'll likely be asked what you do for work. Everyone needs to belong to a community of some kind. (Entrepreneurs, 2019)

Such a social justice perspective can develop the notions of the social responsibilities of social actors and sectors in contributing to an approach to different support measures towards the economic resiliency of this group of people via SE. As their social position is unstable in Lapland as well as in the rest of Finland, they need a socially stable platform such as SE to reveal the opportunity structures for proper economic integration.

HP III – The composition of social entities and social organisations as rational solution to reform social patterns. The functionalism of social network structure is one of the key factors to sustaining the notion of social entrepreneurship in the future.

Based on social network theory, SE is a platform for improving social relationships for this group of people who lack support measures for further economic integration. Whether social ties and social capital are the key factors to sustain the notion of SE in the future is the main issue to be hypothesised in this phase. SE is mainly a form of entrepreneurship that can be utilised by social entities and its actors under the social network structure. Social partners impact and affect the activities of an SE, since SEs are established based on social justice. Therefore, social ties and social capital become a key factor for sustaining the notion of SE.

The responsibilities of social partners can promote well-being and equality. These responsibilities aim to create a sense of community, foster cohesion and are social in nature. Social responsibility combined with corporate social responsibility contribute to sustainable development, heightened employment and a strengthening of locality. The responsibility obliges participants to work for the good of society, but it also entitles people to become involved in constructing social stabilisation efforts. (FGD – KJ, 2019)

The functionalism of the social network structure defines a compound concept of connecting between private, public sectors and civil society organisations in relation to their impact on greater societal advancement. SEs that are established mainly to support disadvantaged groups of people in the society are in need of entrepreneurship capital and an entrepreneurial mindset, which is a subset of social capital (Audretsh & Keilbach, 2005).

Members are scared about a fragmented labour market in the future that will be a challenge for them and it means that they need to be offered advisory support from social organisations. Their access to the necessary resources for advice on continuing their work as a business developer and motivating them as an entrepreneur to compete in the future labour market are also under threat (FGD, 2019). Social capital is one of the key factors for the entrepreneurial progress of SEs. It is important to raise the networking capacity of members, and indeed understanding societal norms and values is still a fragmented concept for members (Sie&MieKeskusosuuskunta, 2019). Many possible societal partners are unaware that such SEs exist in Lapland. Further understanding the mechanisms to support those SEs are part of societal measures, and these societal measures are also a debatable issue among societal partners (FGD – R, 2019). However, one or two SEs participated in the FGD in regards to public aid for assisting and advising its members with financial management in some cities in Lapland. They are operating SEs based on grant-based support and customer/partnership-based support from the public and social sectors. The potential for co-operation still needs to be explored, since the social capital they have is not enough to support the livelihoods of all their members (Kemin Osaajien Osuuskunta, 2019). This co-operation should be a natural development but there needs to be an explicit societal understanding of social entrepreneurship development in order to overcome the challenges in the composition of the functionalism of the social network and to make possible co-operation in a new way to assemble services. However, other cities still need to learn from existing evidence.

The members of SE's spontaneous activities in developing their accomplishments have increased during the past year. A sense of inclusion and a genuine experience of being able to influence the development of activities is a key issue for members to engage in. The members themselves are very positive about their self-esteem, but to outsiders, the

activities arouse feelings and comments that may lead to a reform in social networking patterns within the near future. Outsiders' attitudes towards SE are mainly positive; however, many just see it as a normal method of doing business and they need more information about the activities of SEs to sustain the future of SE. Therefore, the need for networking with other social entities would certainly be worth pursuing. For example, social synergies could be achieved in terms of administrative simplification, joint software procurement or joint training (FGD – K, 2019).

It has always been a challenge for vulnerable people to find paid work, since there has been a wide range of free services available to people in a vulnerable position in the labour market, but the continuous opportunities to do real work for economic survival are needed in social networking patterns that are lacking in the labour market in Lapland at the moment (FGD – KJ, 2019). Most of the services of SE have been procured by city corporations, companies, individual households and other public sectors that bring sustainability, though the regional awareness of SE should be increased, as its activities and services are not well known (FGD – KJ, 2019). A social network structure to connect unstable and weak SEs with stable and strong social partners can be dissolved into a new form of social capital to bond necessary social partners for future social alliances that can sustain the notion of SE in Lapland.

The SEs need working spaces from social partners; many municipalities are kind enough to give them working spaces whereas many municipalities are still in need of learning about the functionalism measures of social partnership structures to support such SEs. Such a meeting place for the members of the SEs can add value for increasing the social participation of its members. Additionally, members can simultaneously find a place for improving and expanding their current services and activities in the area of operations towards potential social partners (Sie & MieKeskusosuuskunta, 2019). In 2017, there was a good experience when the SEs leased 80 m² of space in which experimentation began in sewing services, Chinese body care, communication services and office services. These SEs have been functioning much better but at the moment they are lacking resources to lease such a space to their members, which hinders the composition of teams to some extent (Sie&MieKeskusosuuskunta, 2019).

SE needs to reach out to its social partners and vice versa for multidimensional entrepreneurial development in securing the future labour market for disadvantaged groups of people in the society. Social learning by increasing social relations boosts the chances to get to know one another and could create joint forces to deal with a common social good in a consistent manner.

5. Conclusion

According to the project, the co-operative is a low-risk and safe way for both immigrants and the long-term unemployed to learn about doing business. SE also provides access to leadership, management, finance and strategic development. The SE makes democratic decisions and at the same time develops its activities together. Immigrants integrate well through these activities, as the co-operative is a safety net for them, enabling them to combat stress and isolation from the labour market. Being part of a team also creates enthusiasm, creativity, a positive mood, and access to the job market though many different cultural clashes can also hinder teamwork to some extent, since they basically

are from different cultural backgrounds. However, a positive team support in different mental turbulences enables them to overcome some of the challenges together.

The SE has had the opportunity to improve the skills of its member at work, increase their employability and to support transitions to education, the open labour market or entrepreneurship. Socially responsible public procurement can improve the possibility of the employability of disadvantaged people in the labour market, but the public sector may not know enough about how to exploit it. At the same time, SE indeed needs more information about the social functionalism between its social partners. However, at this moment, SEs in Lapland have to compete in the labour market when searching for jobs and procurement with other private and public entities in the society, and even wage subsidies for employees are not enough to compensate the employers for skills and productivity gaps.

The SEs need a firm approach in which the unemployed can try entrepreneurship under the condition of social justice. According to the SEs that participated in the discussion, social entrepreneurship and community spirit are on the rise, which could be a good model for disadvantaged people and for immigrants who have had the opportunity to start working together with the native Finns in a positive way in the labour market in Lapland, an area in which immigrants have been partly excluded.

The SEs feel that all SEs are different in nature, operate with different resources and systems, and it is not clear how these experiences could be shared. Broadening the knowledge of different companies has been an effective social learning policy through which they have found new experiences and information for their own progress. Although there has been little chance for business benefits, it would be one step forward to introduce this group of people to the future labour market by ensuring and increasing their social participation in co-operation with other social partners.

There is a desire for continued co-operation, as the SE actors have common goals and ideas.

According to the Sie and Mie Keskus, sustainable SE activity should continue to be oriented towards people who understand social activity and entrepreneurship. Then, the core of the membership would remain at a size that brings sustainability. There is work available, so this could somehow raise the opportunities for full-time employment by dealing under the banner of social procurement. Some of the municipalities in Lapland have added social criteria to their procurement act though many more municipalities are still considering their options. These criteria can facilitate participation in procurement bidding with other qualifying companies and bodies. The terms and conditions should include a reference to employing people who are in a weak labour market position. This would lead to a reduction in the tax resources used for employment and to the municipality buying larger and smaller assignments from the SEs (Sie&MieKeskusosuuskunta, 2018).

Being a scattered and segregated community cannot last long, whereas being connected with others can create opportunities for more co-operation, joint marketing and raising the profile of SEs. There is also a need for more research and information to make it a brand for the future rise of SEs.

The SEs are in need of social knowledge, a resource-sharing forum, and a training event for its members for building their capacity for possible social networking through existing SEs in Lapland. The forum could gather annually to share good practices and results, to learn new things and to develop a common accounting system, the benchmarking of well-established financial matters, or other governance practices.

The forum would be a common future meeting platform for members of executive board members of the SEs and other active players, and would open up access to the future labour market.

Joint training and events could help to find other common interests. The purpose of such SEs or social platforms would be to foster the economic integration of this disadvantaged group in the future labour market of Lapland. Various support measures can aid in the emergence of new SEs and can act as a development organisation seeking common development resources for entrepreneurship learning through a social platform. This could help disadvantaged people to learn entrepreneurship through SE and encourage the development of a platform for work alongside the digital platform as part of the community of tomorrow's work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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