



Territorial Social Innovation in the Nordic Countries and Scotland



Innovative Food Procurement for the Elderly in Ramsjö

The public service for the provision of meals for the elderly was outsourced to the local entrepreneur in Ramsjö village; previously, this was a municipal responsibility. The new solution increased satisfaction on the part of the elderly and enhanced social interaction, which has a positive effect on well-being. Positive effects on local development have also been achieved through the creation of jobs and increased revenues for the local food store.

Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

Ramsjö, a village in Ljusdal Municipality, Gävleborg County, Sweden, is one of the four pilot cases implemented in the framework of the project Innovation Procurement X. The project was financed by Vinnova and driven by Inköp Gävleborg—a municipal procurement association—from 2012 until 2015.

The overall aim of the project was to explore and test how innovative public procurement could be used as a tool and a driving force in finding new methods and models for meeting societal challenges. The point of departure was a focus on the end users' needs in contrast to a conventional public procurement process that is guided by the lowest price offer.

Based on the previous research, the meal situation in relation to care for the elderly and for elderly people living at home was chosen as a focal area of the project. Malnutrition and loneliness have been identified as key factors affecting the quality of life among the elderly population in Sweden. The project focused on finding innovative solutions that would improve the meal situation so that the elderly would eat more during the day, feel better and experience a higher quality of life.

The municipalities involved in the pilot came up with their own solutions for an improved meal situation for the elderly, and these were tested and implemented during the project with guidance and support from Inköp Gävleborg as the project leader. Among the important conditions was that the developed solutions should not be more expensive for the client than the existing one; they should create added value for the end users; and they should provide opportunities for new players to enter the market.

Ljusdal is a rural municipality with a scattered settlement structure, which implies long travel distances between the center of Ljusdal and the nearby villages when providing social services. The focus of the pilot project in the municipality was on rural residents and the elderly living at home and receiving assistance from the municipality with regard to food and meal provision. Geographically, the pilot project was implemented in Ramsjö village. The pilot project was implemented from March 1, 2014 to February 28, 2015.

Implementation

The new public meal service was developed in Ramsjö village in cooperation with the social care staff, municipal authorities and the local entrepreneur Ramsjö Camping Havermans for the cooking of public service meals in Ramsjö. The meals are thereafter distributed through the home care service (Hemtjänst). Thus, all public service meals eaten in Ramsjö (both school meals and those for the elderly) are being cooked locally and distributed to the end users daily. Previously, the public service meals were cooked at the central kitchen in Ljusdal municipality and delivered to the elderly in Ramsjö village, which is 60 km away, once a week

The new solution entails public service meals being cooked at the school and at Camping Havermans. The elderly have the possibility to choose between a school lunch box and another option.

The elderly may also choose to eat their lunch directly at Camping Havermans, which has positive implications on their well-being through increased social interaction. Eating together is encouraged within the pilot project, as the importance of and willingness to increase social interaction with the local community was among the factors highlighted by the elderly during the interviews in the village.

All public purchases of food in the village are made through the local village shop Tempo.

Resources

Building the knowledge and capacity of the municipal actors and social care providers regarding innovative public procurement were among the key resources for the implementation of the solution facilitated by Inköp Gävleborg.

Vinnova funding has been used for financing the Innovation Procurement X project, which added knowledge into the pilot. Additional training of the kitchen staff (menu planning, dietary and nutrition information, hygiene training) and several other training courses have also been arranged for the social care staff working with the elderly.

The implementation of the pilot project was financed through the municipal budget. The municipality has also contributed by cofinancing one full-time kitchen staff position.

The Network / Cooperation

The main cooperation partners in the pilot project are the social care staff, municipal authorities and the local entrepreneur. The municipality purchases services from the local entrepreneur Camping Havermans and food products from the local shop Tempo. Support in the form of guidance and advice is provided by the project leader from Inköp Gävleborg.

Enablers and Barriers

Among the enablers of the solution have been the availability of guidance and support in the form of knowledge, capacity-building and empowerment provided by the project leader. The pilot project provided the possibility of collecting extensive data on the actual needs of the inhabitants prior to the development of the solution, and a thorough analysis regarding the meal situation, social aspects and the health and quality of life of the elderly. This approach facilitated the development of a solution that responds to the actual needs of the end users.

The willingness to innovate and daring to try out new solutions by the social care staff, municipal authorities and the local entrepreneur has also been a key to success.

The most effective solutions taking into account the different needs of the end users are often of a holistic and cross-cutting nature, and therefore involve different budgets. One of the challenges identified in the pilot project was the difficulty of combining and supplementing different municipal budgets within the municipal authorities, as each division of the municipal authorities has a separate budget.

Social Innovation Effects

Outcomes, Impact and 'Scaling'

The elderly are more satisfied with the meals today when it comes to taste, quality, freshness and increased variety. An increased contact with the staff due to the increased frequency of meal deliveries and an understanding of the individual needs of the elderly, e.g., regarding the size of the portions and food preferences, has enabled more people to feel safe and relaxed. More people are also more willing to be involved in the experience of eating meals together. This contributes to a higher perceived quality of life by the elderly. Local food production also makes it possible to respond more easily to the individual needs of the elderly.

The new model for the procurement of food services in Ramsjö village has also contributed positively to rural development. Public purchasing of food in the village is being made through the local village shop, Tempo, which increases the possibilities for its survival by providing increased revenues. It also contributes to the attractiveness of living in the rural area in general, as the presence of the store is highly important for the village. Other positive impacts on the economy of Ramsjö village include creating new jobs in the village by the private entrepreneur who signed the tender contact for the provision of the meal service. Two new half-time positions were created during the pilot phase of the project.

The 'Ramsjö model' has attracted considerable attention from national and regional actors in Sweden. The Ramsjö solution for meals for the elderly was shown on the television channel SVT, for instance.

The solution that was developed as a pilot activity is still ongoing after the end of the project, and is driven by the municipality. The municipality is carrying out a feasibility study and a pilot project from March 2016 looking into whether the operating of all public services in the Ramsjö district could be outsourced to local actors, and whether it is a good management model for rural development. This solution is expected to increase the perceived quality of life by the local users of the public services, as well as create new jobs in rural areas.

More villages in the municipality are now interested in being part of the project and developing services that can be applied to their specific local context and needs. So far, the pilot initiative has been economically viable. The local politicians have also been positive about the results.

Lessons Learned

The case of Ramsjö demonstrated the importance of a holistic view of rural development. Care for the elderly and provision of public services are linked to other rural development issues and challenges. Therefore, addressing these issues requires a more holistic approach based on identifying needs and a thorough knowledge of the local context.

Well-functioning cooperation among different local public and private actors has been highlighted as an important precondition for a successful implementation of the solution.

Innovative public procurement is an effective tool to facilitate and encourage the emergence of innovative solutions for the provision of public and social services. Innovative public procurement may enhance the possibilities of developing solutions that truly respond to the end users' needs, are more cost-benefit-efficient, and facilitate the involvement of an increased number of actors in services provision, including the private and third sectors.

This process, however, requires knowledge-building among the local and regional actors. Testing and implementing the innovative ideas and solutions requires courage and commitment from the politicians, as the associated risks are higher in comparison to 'business as usual' solutions.

A more holistic approach to budgeting within the municipal administration would facilitate cooperation between different actors in the municipality and therefore foster the emergence of innovative solutions within the service delivery.

References

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