



Case Study Briefing

Exploring how a civil society public partnership matters for social impact

A case of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children reception and integration in Sweden



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1. Overview

Innovative civil society public partnership for the reception and integration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Gothenburg, Sweden

The case study analyses the abilities of Gothenburg municipality to address the challenge of newcomer immigrant children without parents reception and integration through an innovative form of collaborative partnership between municipality and nine voluntary organisations (idéburna offentliga partnerskap, IOP). This unique partnership– the largest and economically heaviest cross-sector collaboration (IOP) in Sweden – is explored against its ambitions to establish new patterns of more equal and long-term relations with civil society, in contrast to traditional contracts and grants, and its abilities and added value in addressing new challenges of social investment in unaccompanied immigrant children.

This unique IOP partnership, being the largest and economically heaviest cross-sector collaboration (IOP) in Sweden, is explored against its ambitions to establish new patterns of more equal and long-term relations with civil society, in contrast to traditional contracts and grants, and its abilities and added value in addressing new challenges of social investment in unaccompanied immigrant children.

2. Key policy implications

How a civil society public partnership matters for social impact

Collaboration with civil society allows increasing public policy capacity, relevance, quality and acceptance thereby benefitting public agencies, civil society and targeted groups. This form of collaboration overcomes important relation and power balancing challenges as it allows civil society a more equal role in local policy and service design, in contrast to a pure service agent, without undermining civil society specificity and critical voice. Arguably the new relations are a major factor for policy/service success.

A few major policy implications of IOP in Gothenburg:

- Services provided by IOP partnership are difficult to achieve by other dominant collaboration models;
- The positive mid to long-term economic effects of children wellbeing and integration are outweighed by involved public and civil society costs;
- Knowledge exchange and innovative resource pooling allows developing more adequate, need based and effective services.
- The political support truly matters for the implementation and social impact of IOP

3. Context

The beneficiaries and their need

The major beneficiaries of this ongoing IOP collaboration are newly arrived unaccompanied immigrant minors under 18 (20) that the Swedish Migration Agency allocates to Gothenburg municipality to take care of during their asylum seeking process and first time in Sweden. Parties have initially set as their goal to provide qualitative accommodation and other specified integration services for at least 100 youngsters and in 2016 the number was increased to “at least 150” but remains open to adjustments. The number of targeted youngsters is constantly shifting and currently decreasing due to restrictions in the government immigration policies.

Who is involved?

The partners of this unique in its composition local IOP partnership are currently the municipal Social Resource Department (SRD) and nine civil society organizations with social purpose (“idéburna”). IOP partnership is a form of collaboration distinct from contracts and traditional grants to civil society and is based on principles of more transparent and equal collaboration detailed in each agreement but with the basis in national collaboration compacts of 2008 and 2010. The partnership was signed in April 2015 for the period up to 2020-04-30 but prolonged one year latter to 2021-04-30.

Scope and scale

This IOP partnership is an experimental in Sweden local public policy instrument to increase municipal capacities and abilities to implement municipal obligations towards the national government in newcomer minors’ reception and integration. Swedish municipalities are the institution primarily responsible for the wellbeing of children including the arriving unaccompanied children seeking asylum and this local responsibility is unique in Nordic countries. The Gothenburg partnership is also an (indirect) effect of government policy for civil society aiming at increased civil society involvement and collaboration with public sector in service design and delivery. This partnership is an ambitious experiment aiming at more flexible, qualitative, comprehensive policy alongside municipality own services and traditional commissioning of services forms in newcomer minors reception and integration.

In terms of budget the studied Gothenburg partnership was in 2016 economically heaviest IOP partnership in Sweden with 250 mln SEK only in public resources allocated by the government via The Migration Agency. Besides this all partners contribute with additional personnel, volunteer and other resources.

Why is this a Social Investment?

The Gotenburg IOP is a case of social investment to disadvantaged migrant groups by providing targeted children access to a greater variety of complementary services – such as psychosocial counseling, access to Swedish social networks through friend families, access to civil society organizations through tailored leisure time activities and labor market experiences through knowledge exchange and on-job practice opportunities. The partnership advantage has been seen in its ability to provide a chain of need-based services complementary to housing and care, that often are the only services asylum seeking children receive through municipal or contracted service providers.

4. Sources of evidence

The evaluation analysis and study findings are based on the existent partnership documentation such as general and individual partnership agreements of 2015 and 2016 and minutes from Partnership Board. In addition, the researcher has conducted 34 interviews and conversations with partner representatives at partnership major structures – the Partnership Board, Collaboration Group and Directors and personnel at special housings for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and youngsters (HVB) – who are involved in partnership decision making or delivery of services. The researcher has also participated as an observer in several partnership board meetings.

It has been a challenge to reach sufficient numbers of immigrant children for their perspectives on the partnership services. Access to youngsters at their housings was closed and attempts were made to interview youngsters that volunteered to the reference group organized by one partner. Finally 5 interviews were conducted with youngsters that agreed to partake in the study. In addition larger numbers of youngsters were reached for their assessment of individual partnership services by written questionnaires.

Major research findings, especially social impact so far and challenges that needed to be overcome by the partnership were presented and discussed at a seminar with partnership representatives on 15 September 2016 in Gothenburg.

5. Main findings

Innovative organisational elements

IOP are innovative in regards to their function and design. There are no other partnership/collaboration forms in Sweden that respect and highlight the uniqueness of civil society organizations. Thanks to the partnership collaboration and innovative ways to pool and share the available public resources and knowledge all IOP partners could receive support for developing individual complementary services targeted at the partnership children and their housing personnel. A fixed sum of public money for housing services per child was allocated to the partnership pool to co-finance complementary services to reach partnership goals. This model allowed developing and coordinating a service while its delivery depended on individual partner contributions and access to volunteers. Thus all services complementary to housing bring the partnership an added value, unlikely to be achieved in collaboration with private for-profit actors.

Services developed through partnership

The partnership offered newcomer children residing in its housings a variety of services to complement the care and integration attempts of their housing personnel. To increase children wellbeing, chances to meaningful free time and integration – the needs identified by the partner organization – children we offered free psychological counseling, friend family matchmaking, summer on-job practice opportunities and possibilities to establish links with the Swedish civil society, learn more about Sweden and their city, practice language and develop new skills through a variety summer leisure time services. Thus integration was approached from a holistic perspective. All services, albeit to varying extend, contributed positively to the children wellbeing and integration. Overall access to more than one of services resulted in a cumulative effect. One of the most appreciated and frequently used services among by partnership youngsters was friend family matchmaking and psychological counseling.

Friend family

A majority of partnership 130-150 children (fluctuating number) have been matched with Swedish families in 2016 with the aim to establish a longer-term private relation. The interest among children has been great (ca 99%) and almost all matched children have appreciated the friend family relations. For some the relationship implied having a “supplementary family” and ability to receive attentiveness and support in their daily life especially after not seeing their own families for 1-1,5 year. Children especially appreciated possibilities to train Swedish, play sports, take part in family activities, (a picnic, go fishing, play games, family gardening) or just sit and talk. Some youngster has been offered an own gardening plot. Yet another received friend family help with taking lessons for a driver’s licence. The service had an additional impact also for the friend families who felt satisfaction with being able to give youngsters some meaningful activities and relations.

6. Impact & Implications

Partnership Impact for services

The study concludes that the unique partnership impact and the collective value for the targeted unaccompanied minors lies in what the partners can offer and achieve together rather than by individual services. The partnership arrangement not only enabled initiating new personified services, the coordination and responsibilities for which were placed at different organisations, but it also enabled smoother collaboration around their planning and implementation and especially their timing, tailoring and complementarity, disregarding all challenges of newly evolving partnership.

Several major factors may be highlighted for partnership success in its policies and their impact so far. Firstly, a *shared understanding and commitment* to the new social challenge and secondly, understanding that such a complex challenge requires collaboration across organisations and sectors where public sector actors admit their dependency on civil society and where civil society organisations see each other as collaborators rather than competitors.

Thirdly, IOP was designed in a way as to allow the civil society organizations *a greater influence* in both partnership management tools – such as principles for pooling and sharing the allocated public resources – and in designing the particular partnership policy contents and services. As a result, the partnership agreement serves as an example of a more balanced collaboration form enabling civil society organizations greater influence than in traditional contracts and greater responsibility sharing with the municipality than in traditional grants. These new relations and trust-based steering towards partnership goal legitimises the partnership in the eyes of civil society and as an effect allows developing a unique holistic approach towards qualitative services as a sustainable social investment in newcomer children.

Partnership Impact for beneficiaries

While the youngsters did not use all of the partnership services, they have used some or a few and thus often gaining more value and cumulative impact for their wellbeing, meaningful and structured free-time and integration. Several of the partnership services contributed to youngsters' wellbeing and empowerment by providing psychosocial support structure and meaning to their leisure time. Majority of partnership youngsters have gained access to social networks and some chose to gained labour market experience through summer on-job practice. In short, the unique offer of complementary services have both individually and especially cumulatively achieved a positive impact in increasing newcomer children wellbeing and for those that are allowed to stay chances to integration.

Political context matters

Even if partnership results are undeniably positive several important factors hindered more positive effects. Constant fluctuation of youngsters in and out of partnership housings and services often for reasons out of partnership control, youngsters' traumatic war and asylum experiences only worsened by the legal changes in asylum laws, procedures and increasingly harsh political climate. Thus the political context and climate truly mattered for the implementation and social impact of collective partnership action.

Economic impact

The Gothenburg IOP partnership is unique in its scale and focus although by 2017 there are ca 56 local and regional IOP partnerships on social and welfare services in Sweden. There has been a discussion in several other municipalities about applying similar model for newcomer reception but the recent changes in government newcomer policy sets new challenges for IOPs in this policy area.

As this partnership has just been initiated in May 2015 and it has taken time to define and develop the services to address children needs the study was not yet able to grasp all the positive impact and assess its economic effects. It is clear though that the services in their entirety have positive effects that are difficult to achieve by other collaboration models and organisational arrangements, such as commissioning services. The positive mid to long-term economic effects of children wellbeing and integration are outweighed by involved public and civil society costs. However the changing political context and legal amendments produced some negative consequences for the targeted children and to counteract this much higher costs from service delivering actors were required drawing focus from mid-to and long-term to emergency measures.

Lessons from Gothenburg IOP

As these partnerships are mainly driven by the political will rather than clear legal frameworks the importance of local and national political culture and driving actors cannot be stressed enough. National governments need to be more supportive in specifying favourable legal frameworks for IOP collaborations. Here knowledge exchange regarding framing similar collaborations in the EU are needed to educate political decision makers.

7. Further information


To access the full report, please go to: (www.innosi.eu)

For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>

To view the Community Reporting video with a personal experience of the case study please follow the link below

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