

## **Learning from and with Social Entrepreneurs: lessons from an Amsterdam pilot project**

Social entrepreneurs and government (at different levels) have the same goal: solving societal problems. They need each other, in particular when dealing with problems related to (labour market) participation. But in practice, cooperation is a difficult process. The government does not know how to deal with the hybrid business models of social enterprises. In the Dutch context this is an especially urgent problem, as there is neither a special legal form for social enterprises, nor a central government policy on this issue. In a 2015 sector overview, social enterprises named cooperation with government the main problem in their business strategies.

To deal with this problem, the Entrepreneurial Lab Social Entrepreneurship at Amsterdam UAS established what we call a 'learning network' with eight social enterprises in Amsterdam New-West, a sub-municipality with around 145,000 inhabitants. Together, we worked on the main research question: *In what ways can social enterprises, in relation with government, make impact on the solving of societal problems in the impact area of (labour market) participation?*

In this paper we focus on practical lessons from the collaboration process in this pilot project. After recruiting and setting up the learning network, we organised three meetings and gave 'homework' in which aspects of this question were highlighted. A preliminary analysis of (possible) strategies was made and discussed in the last session. Subsequently, results were finetuned and have been (and will be) presented in different forms, suited to specific stakeholders ranging from local government officials to entrepreneurs themselves to the educational and research community.

Among other things, we highlight the importance of dealing with the question 'what's in it for us' at every stage of a project involving small businesses; and its consequences for methodological issues and practical planning.

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### **Link to conference themes:**

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