

GREEN & BLUE FUTURES

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

JULY 2015



**SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
UK**





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work of the G&BF programme, we have a number of key policy recommendations aimed at informing European Strategy & Policy, national bodies, and government.

Introduction

The Green & Blue Futures Partners believe that;

- European policymakers should seek to bring together parallel streams of work looking at environmental / sustainability and social enterprise more clearly – there is learning to be shared both ways, and potential duplication to be avoided. Bringing networks together or creating a joint programme of work would be a start.
- Those responsible for social value or social enterprise support as policymakers or influencers should reinforce the importance and significance of the environment in all their work – as a key and fundamental part of being a triple bottom line organisation. This could be enshrined in practice, in guidance and in programmes.
- Local policymakers with devolved powers should seek to create a green and blue social enterprise zone, with associated benefits and reliefs, to unleash the potential of its environmental assets as a force for employment and social mobility.
- European and national social enterprise bodies should potentially establish environmentally-focused or ‘green and blue’ networks from amongst their memberships to foster and join up more of this activity.
- Policymakers and influencers should investigate community ownership options for environmental assets – partners should work with the likes of Shared Assets to take such work forward.

Recommendation 1 – On EU funding programmes

A key barrier for Social Enterprises to not only establish themselves, but also to survive, is the distinct lack of start-up finance available for fledgling Social Enterprises.

The G&BF partners therefore suggest that future funding programmes should be given specific measures which will support Social Enterprises, and also have specific references to how Social Enterprise models would have a positive impact on the management of ‘Green and Blue’ spaces and subsequently the socio/economic development of such land and water space.

There have been previous commendable efforts to assist Social Enterprises through initiatives such as the Social Business Initiative (SBI), and if a second phase of this was launched with more Finance that would be a very positive step forward.

The current ESF programme is another key funding stream that offer excellent opportunities for Social Enterprises. ESF will support organisations around the EU to put in place projects aimed at training people and helping them get work. Initiatives supporting entrepreneurs with start-up funding and companies who need to cope with restructuring or a lack of qualified workers will also be funded.

The GBF partnership firmly believe that funding should be linked to:

- encouraging better environmental behaviour amongst recreational users of waterways, water buffers, agricultural, and recreational land
- Support for the use of new technology in managing land and waterway infrastructure to improve efficiency and reduce costs

The G&BF partners also recommend that:

- European policymakers bring together parallel streams of work looking at environmental / sustainability and social enterprise more clearly. There is learning to be shared both ways, and potential duplication to be avoided. Bringing networks together or creating a joint programme of work would be a start.
- EU territorial policies have specific reference to measures which highlight the importance of Social Enterprises and the Social Economy for socio/economic development.
- More funding is made available for small business start-ups using social enterprise models such as those highlighted as good practice in the Green & Blue Futures project.



Recommendation 2 – On a European Network of Social Enterprises

The Social Enterprise concept is still in its relative infancy. Many of the project partners experienced different levels of support their respective countries and this was sometimes a barrier to progress.

It was agreed that a National Social Enterprise contact point for each member state should be established if it wasn't already. Similarly, these national organisations should be engaging with umbrella organisations such as Social Economy Europe who are the representative organisation for the EU. We believe that Social Economy Europe can be a key body in raising the profile and potential behind Social Enterprises throughout the EU

By Through Social Enterprises affiliating themselves with representatives of the Social Economy sector they are more likely to be included in stakeholder consultations relating to the design of regional funding initiatives at EU level.

It is also suggested that there should be one specific owner of the Social Enterprise concept at a European level. Presently, there seems to be a certain amount of confusion as to which body in Europe acts as the ‘sponsor’ of Social Enterprises.

It would be a real benefit if one specific DG was the leading light. Through research in pulling together this Framework we found references to DG Internal Markets and Services, and the European Economic and Social Committee amongst others. If there was one body in particular tasked with the lead (and adequately resourced of course) it will be much simpler to raise the profile of the potential of Social Enterprises with a common message

Recommendation 3 – On initiatives for Research & Design

The G&BF partners suggest that continued financial and advisory support is provided for innovative approaches that encourage research and development across sectors and disciplines

This should be a “quadruple helix” approach and should include specific support for market valorisation of new innovative practices.

The partnership is aware that the European Economic and Social Committee are currently undertaking a project to specifically look at the role of Social Enterprises in the EU.

It would be welcome news if the EESC were given further resources to investigate their initial findings further, and continue to promote the benefits of Social Enterprises further.

Recommendation 4 – On EU2020 Flagship for Resource Efficiency

The flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe under the Europe 2020 strategy supports the shift towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth.

The initiative for a resource-efficient Europe provides a long-term framework for actions in many policy areas, supporting policy agendas for climate change, energy, transport, industry, raw materials, agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity and regional development. This is to increase certainty for investment and innovation and to ensure that all relevant policies factor in resource efficiency in a balanced manner.

The G&BF partners recognise that social enterprises and a thriving social economy can deliver a considerable contribution to achieve the goals of this Flagship. This is why they promote:

- Support and funding to encourage better environmental behaviour amongst recreational users of green and blue infrastructure.
- The development of more energy-efficient and less polluting / ecologically-damaging vessels for recreational users of green and blue infrastructure.
- Greater recognition of & and support for, the ecological value of inland waterways and the green infrastructure as a driver of economic growth
- Greater recognition of & and support for, the environmental resource of inland waterways and the green infrastructure as a driver of economic growth and for promoting people's health and well-being through access to the outdoors and learning

We therefore believe that those responsible for social value or social enterprise support as policymakers or influencers should reinforce the importance and significance of this Flagship Initiative in in all their work – as a key and fundamental part of being a triple bottom line organisation (combining social, environmental and financial goals). This could be enshrined in practice, in guidance and in programmes.

Policymakers and influencers could also investigate community ownership options for environmental assets – partners should work with the likes of Shared Assets to take such work forward.

Recommendation 5 – On EU2020 Flagship – An agenda for new skills & jobs

The G&BF partners welcome the flagship initiative, An agenda for education and new skills & jobs. They call upon the European institutions to recognize the contribution that Social Enterprises and the Social Economy can make to implement this agenda through integrated approaches for the management of Inland Waterways, green spaces and adjacent Regions.

Partners would welcome measures that encourage the public and private sector to recognize the value / synergies that can be delivered on this initiative through use of social economy structures and ‘not for profit’ social enterprises. This contribution should be facilitated through support for funding schemes that facilitate the bringing together of the different ‘actors’ involved in. In particular;

- Support for exchanges & placements through the Lifelong Learning programmes.
- Support for schemes that pro-actively promote or facilitate ‘reticent’ communities to participate in activities that deliver a healthier lifestyle, civic pride, reduction in anti-social behaviour, and routes to employment.
- Support for waterway and other environmental or community engagement - based social enterprises to deliver employment & training programmes, particularly those targeted at disadvantaged groups - the long-term unemployed, young people and ex-offenders.
- Support for volunteering schemes, particularly those that bring the generations together.
- Support for volunteering schemes, particularly those that bring people from different ethnic groups together.

In that perspective, it is important to:

- Recognize the needs of the private sector work together with Social Enterprises in R&D, education and consultation.
- Recognize that the private sector needs to work together with Social Enterprises in order to jointly deliver employment, training, cost savings and social skills development offered by Social Enterprises.

Local policymakers with devolved powers should also seek to create a green and blue social enterprise zone, with associated benefits and reliefs, to unleash the potential of its environmental assets as a force for employment and social

mobility. G&BF partners believe that the idea of a social enterprise zone would fit well under the Green Infrastructure Initiative⁹.

European and national social enterprise bodies should potentially establish environmentally-focused or ‘green and blue’ networks from amongst their memberships to foster and join up more of this activity.

Recommendation 6 – Operating Guidelines for working with public and private sector

With reference to the above recommendation, we would like to see further co-operation between Social Enterprises, the public sector and the private sector. We believe that Social Enterprises would greatly benefit from being able to access Government contracts with a specific focus on the management of Green & Blue Infrastructure.

There are presently few examples where we can show true cross sectoral working, but the project partners have demonstrated through this scheme that there is potential. With reference to the Flagship Initiative of the Innovation Union, we see a lot of synergy between this and the work that the Green and Blue Futures project delivers.

The Innovation Union outlines how innovative approaches, in our case the management of Green and Blue Infrastructure, can significantly improve;

- Products
- Marketing
- Processes
- Organisation

There is much evidence from the project that can help improve processes and stimulate growth. For example, new public – private partnerships have been working very well.

Recommendation 7 – Measuring outcomes rather than costs

We believe that too many contracts are awarded based on costs, with little consideration towards other positive social and environmental outcomes that can be generated.

We need to explore ways in making policies that will result in financial returns being gained for works but that have additionally, for example, significant training or personal development opportunities attached to them.

⁹ See more on: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/>