



**LUNDS**  
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# **Making sense of power in social innovation collaborations**

A case study

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# Abstract

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A shift in the Swedish welfare state and diminishing resources has prompted new ways to address social and welfare provision issues. It is here that cross-sectoral social innovation collaborations have surfaced as an answer. Previous research shows that working with collaboration and social innovation has similar challenges and that there is a lack of studies about power and organisational issues within these fields. The aim of this study was to explore the Sopact case, an extra-preneurial actor in a cross-sectoral collaboration setting, to understand how individuals make sense of collaboration and how power affects their sensemaking of the project. 20 participants interviews were analysed and a theoretical framework of power in sensemaking processes was used. The analysis shows that Sopact as an extra-preneurial space provides room for reflective sensemaking processin for both social entrepreneurs and for municipal departments' needs owners. Intermediaries aid these processes by inducing sensebreaking and sensegiving mechanisms that question systemic power from conservative influences and algorithmic sensemaking. In general, social entrepreneurs and needs owners use different sensemaking processes. These are affected by different power influences and shaping mechanisms, a product of different backgrounds and organisational settings. Episodic power is also often affected by systemic power and conservative organisational influences, leading to less action-oriented collaborations. Lastly, a theme indicating a plausible shift from service developer and provider to facilitator within the public sector was found, a potential question for future research.

Key words: Cross-sectoral collaboration, Social innovation, Extra-preneurship, Circuits of power, Sensemaking.

# Preface

It was not long ago that I never expected that I would end up here, at the finish line. This thesis has been a long time in the making. It is the result of an idea that sparked in a casual meeting in late 2019 with the manager of Sopact. Going into it, I never expected that the outcome would be a year of meaningful experiences and most of all, encounters. Encounters with people sharing a passion for making things better.

I want to extend a massive thanks to all the Sopact participants which allowed me to explore their experiences within the project, this thesis could not have been done without you. Especially the social entrepreneurs, you all are inspiring. Thank you for doing what you do.

Thank you to the Sopact team, especially Jan Abrahamsson and Jenny Nyström. You brought me onboard and helped me view things from different perspectives. Our discussions enriched my understanding of social innovation and of the cross-sectoral collaboration field.

I want to thank my fellow programme students, who due to COVID-19 I did not get to meet as much as I would have liked. I had loads of fun learning to know everyone in the WPM class of 2019 and I will remember those days fondly. An extra thanks to Emilia Nordström, for being there when I needed words of encouragement and contributing to the imperative change my thesis took somewhere in the middle of the semester.

Thank you, Lisa Ricketts, for contributing to a more comprehensible language. Thank you, John Ricketts, for encouraging me. For googling articles when I felt defeated and, for listening to all my neverending rants. Thank you for being by my side every single day of this thesis (and for the past 10 years as well).

Lastly, I want to thank my supervisor Marcus Knutagård for believing in this topic and its importance. While not the most pressing issue within the field for a major in social work such as myself, the organising of cross-sectoral collaboration and social innovation is rapidly increasing and undoubtedly becoming a subject we need to explore and address accordingly. Thank you for your wisdom and encouragement. This thesis would not have been the same without you.

By the end of this thesis, I was battling my inner instincts of doing just enough to make this thesis passable. At the same time, I wanted to do something great. Now that the end is here, I appreciate how much I have learned through this process. And it also led me into a Radiohead rabbit hole, which I am also glad about. Hence, it is only appropriate to end this preface with some Radiohead wisdom:

**“Because we separate / Like ripples on a blank shore / (In rainbows)”**  
*Reckoner – Radiohead*

*Helsingborg, 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2021*

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# 1 Introduction

In the long-term report of Swedish economic development (SOU 2004:19) the finance department predicted future difficulties in meeting the requirements needed in health and social care as a result of resource shortage. The report concludes that the state must find alternative financing for welfare provision, while there is no silver bullet for this issue. As a response to this matter, the Swedish government launched a strategy to encourage social innovation and entrepreneurship in Sweden with the aim to hasten its establishment through financing (Näringsdepartementet 2018; Prop. 2016/17:50). Social innovation and social enterprises are being portrayed as way to solve welfare provision issues (Levander 2011; Augustinsson & Solding 2012; Gawell 2013; Rønning & Knutagård 2015; Näringsdepartementet 2018; Torfing 2019; SKR 2020; Rønning 2021). While social innovations are usually conceptualised as being initiatives that strive to meet and solve societal challenges with novel ideas or methods (Augustinsson & Solding 2012; Lenz & Shier 2021), innovation has historically been deeply intertwined with the private sector (Nählinder & Eriksson 2019; Torfing 2019). Therefore, innovation is seen as a concept in natural symbiosis with the private sector rather than with the public sector. Mazzucato (2013) on the other hand explains that the dichotomy between the public and private sector is false, furthermore, Ahrne & Papakostas (2001) argue that inertia, which is deeply connected with the public sector, can be a precondition for innovation. Although innovation may have a place in the public sector, there is a lack of research in this area and therefore, many questions that remain unanswered (Hansson et al. 2014).

Reports on the state of social innovation in Sweden shows for instance that “The organisational culture in the public sector, at national, regional and local level, is repeatedly highlighted as an obstacle to social innovation” (Gustafsson & Netz 2018, p. 19). Furthermore, collaborations between different levels and organisations to further the development of social innovation is needed, since there is a large

knowledge gap regarding social innovations per se, but also about what structures and knowledge is needed for it to thrive within public services (ibid.).

In their mappings of social innovation in Europe, SI-DRIVE has found that there are many questions that need answering in the field. An example being “how is social innovation shaped, enabled and restricted by institutional frames?” (Howaldt et al. 2014, p. 2), a question that has been identified in the Swedish context as well by Hansson et al. (2014), where they suggest that to further the social innovation ecosystem in Sweden, there is a need to invest in knowledge production because there is a lack of critical perspective on social innovation processes.

Although many new types of social innovation and entrepreneurship organisations have been born in the past years, there is still a need for further knowledge about the development of social innovation and the constellations where it is developing (ibid.). There is also a lack of research in relation to social work and service providing organisations (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey 2011; Hansson et al. 2014; Nandan, London & Bent-Goodley 2015), especially regarding the space where social innovations are organised in connection to local government (ibid.). Many actors attest and encourage cross-sectoral collaborations when working with social innovation (Hansson et al. 2014; Prop. 2016/17:50), but there are not many examples of this kind out there.

## 1.1 Sopact – A need’s driven learning process

One interesting example of cross-sectoral collaboration which is in line with the government’s strategy is Sopact, an innovation-promoting function at Lund University (Sopact n.d.). The subject of study (which henceforth will be referred to as the project) for this thesis is one of Sopact project’s called “Sopact – A need’s driven learning process”. The project’s aim is to develop processes, methods and strategies that are scalable to later have the opportunity to be implemented locally, regionally, and nationally (ibid.). The project was active between January 1st, 2019 and November 30th, 2020 and served as a second iteration of the project’s predecessor accelerator programme. The difference with this iteration of the project



lies in the change of main approach, focusing on organising a collaboration between Sopact (academia), social entrepreneurs (external businesses, students, civil sector, etc), and municipal departments (public sector). Additionally, the biggest change and traction for the new project was the shift to being “need’s driven” meaning that needs were collected from each municipal department and matched to social entrepreneurs that could help solve any of the needs, while the municipal departments would provide testbeds for these ideas.

Struggles can be found in the articles found in the Sopact project’s end report regarding financing, organisation, etc (Abrahamsson et al. 2021). These struggles are in line with other reports on similar projects (Hansson et al. 2014; Gustafsson & Netz 2018). The Sopact project’s uniqueness offers an opportunity to understand power dynamics between different sectors in innovation collaboration, also serving to fill the gap in research by addressing how power affects organising. This thesis aims to answer questions concerning disabling and enabling factors for this kind of collaboration and its organisation linked with social innovation, which can serve as a complement to the dominating research of social entrepreneurs and social innovation in this area.

The public sector is still the biggest welfare service provider in Sweden. Exploring new collaboration constellations where innovation is the main goal or a means rather than just collaboration per se is new, and for the public sector it may be unexplored territory. At the same time, the government is encouraging these kinds of collaboration as an answer to our lack of resources, meaning that they are here to stay. Collaborations are taking place throughout Sweden, creating new organisational landscapes in need for increased empirical research to help us understand such collaborations, how we make sense of new collaboration constellations and what enables and hinders working within them. The Sopact project is only one of these cases but serves as an interesting case to further understand the complexity of collaborative innovation practice where different sectors meet.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore a case of cross-sectoral collaboration and social innovation organising, to understand how systemic and episodic power affects sensemaking processes. The analysis' aim is to provide more understanding about what can hinder and enable these collaboration processes and what consequences it can lead to. The analysis will be conducted on qualitative semi-structured interviews performed with participants of the Sopact project and other documents. The aim will be operationalised in the following research questions:

**RQ1:** *How is the Sopact project organised and what has affected the organising of it?*

**RQ2:** *How do the Sopact project participants make sense of their participation and collaboration in the project?*

**RQ3:** *What power effects can be found in the Sopact case and how does power affect the project?*

**RQ4:** *What power related consequences can be found within the Sopact case?*

## 1.3 Thesis disposition

This thesis consists of seven chapters, starting with chapter one, where an introduction to the problem area, the Sopact case and the thesis research questions are presented. In chapter two, key concepts are introduced, defining three of the most mentioned concepts throughout this thesis. Chapter three provides an overview on previous research on collaboration, cross-sectoral collaboration, and social innovation within the public sector. Chapter four introduces the methodological process alongside data processing, limitations of the study and ethical considerations. Chapter five explains the theoretical framework used in the analysis, which in turn can be found in chapter six. Lastly, chapter seven concludes this study with a finding's discussion and considerations for further research in this area.

## 2 Key concepts

Concepts can have different definitions depending on who you ask. This thesis consists of concepts which in many ways are used as buzzwords which may after different uses and explanations mean different things to different people. To aid the reading of this thesis different chapters, definitions to three of the most recurring concepts will be provided in this chapter. These definitions were picked to provide a general understanding of the concepts and serve as a starting point for the remainder of the thesis, mainly previous research.

### 2.1 Social innovation

There are many definitions of what social innovation entails. Logue (2019) for example, argues that social innovation is polysemous, implying a word with multiple meanings. Consequently, the report *Social Innovation in Sweden's* literature review shows that internationally, the term social innovation is used in different ways and depends on approaches, methods and actors associated with the term (Gustafsson & Netz 2018). In Sweden, The Swedish government defines social innovation as novel ideas or solutions to meet societal challenges (Regeringskansliet 2018), a short and ambiguous definition which leaves room for various interpretation. Logue's definition on social innovation on the other hand is more defined, stating that it is the "pursuit of social value generation, capture and distribution, through a range of organisational and interorganisational activities to realise social change" (Logue 2019, p. 27). This thesis does not apply a specific definition, but there is a need for orientation of what social innovation means to get a basic understanding about the concept itself and its variations.

## 2.2 Social entrepreneurship, extre-preneurship and enterprises

Social enterprise is an old concept but relatively new in Sweden. Due to the change of the welfare state and welfare providing services in the last decades, social enterprises and social entrepreneurships have surfaced more and more (Gawell 2019). There is not one unified definition for social enterprises in Sweden, but the EU provides one which the Swedish context has subsequently been adapting to (ibid.). In this thesis, social enterprise can be defined as an organisational form which puts emphasis on social change rather than profit maximisation (Gillett, Loader, Doherty & Scott 2016).

For social innovation, there also lays an importance in which intersection it takes place. Logue (2019) presents three different locations, social entrepreneurship, social intrapreneurship and social extra-preneurship. Relevant intersections in this thesis are social entrepreneurship and social extra-preneurship. The first one entailing social innovation taking place in a new organisation such as a social enterprise. And the latter being support platforms for new and/or already established organisations (ibid. p. 17). Logue (2019) explains that the cross-sector work conducted by extra-preneur's is the least theorized of the three, making the Sopact project a relevant subject of study.

## 2.3 Collaboration

A major part of this thesis concerns collaboration, but definitions of the concept vary, both in practice and in research (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020). For example, collaboration is commonly used interchangeably with words such as coordination and cooperation (Reilly 2001; Axelsson & Bihari Axelsson 2013). This thesis will use Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi (2020) definition of collaboration, a definition compiled by four recurring key points from various popular literature on collaboration (ibid. pp. 498–499):

1. Collaboration is a goal-oriented or strategic activity

2. Collaboration is an iterative process and functions through a give-and-take logic
3. Collaboration occurs at multi-level, multi-sectoral and multi-organizational contexts
4. To achieve their goals, adoption, and enforcement of formal and informal rules for behaviour and actor's guidance is needed

## 3 Previous research

In this chapter the field of collaboration is explored to provide an overview on its complicated nature. While the focus of this thesis is more about how the organising of the collaborative practice happens at micro-levels, collaboration per se is at the heart of this thesis because it provides the framing of the empirical case. Outcomes of collaboration are being affected by different factors, why understanding more about collaboration and its outcomes is needed. Section 3.1 provides previous research on collaboration and a brief history of its development in the public sector, 3.2 provides a brief overview of cross-sector collaboration settings and lastly, 3.3 explores social innovation in the public sector.

### 3.1 Collaboration

Research on collaboration is extensive and there is some consensus about it being both difficult and troublesome to develop. Therefore, much research within collaboration focuses on obstacles in interprofessional and interorganisational collaboration to provide ways to make collaboration a more feasible endeavour (Axelsson & Bihari Axelsson 2013). Studies show that the advantages of collaboration often lie in the maximisation of scarce resources, joint action capacity and improved service delivery. But also that collaboration and its outcomes are usually hard to evaluate and that collaborative problems can sometimes outweigh its opportunities (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020).

While research may show both the upsides and downsides of collaboration, it is still mostly seen only as a positive and used to address several issues, mostly which are connected to welfare provision, which has changed due to decentralisation, privatisation, and the overall market-oriented shift. These shifts have created a professional fragmentation and organisational silos, which has prompted the need for collaboration between different professions and

organisations (Axelsson & Bihari Axelsson 2013). Another reason for the public sector to seek for collaboration is that it is expected that moving outside the organisational structure may lead to new achievements which are constrained by working solely within the organisation. Within the social work field, collaborations are used to address complex issues, sometimes called messy issues (Reilly 2001) or wicked social problems (Roberts 2000; Erikson & Larsson 2020). Selsky & Parker (2005) show that when actors from different sectors work towards the same issues they have different goals, perspectives and approaches related to the issue.

There are many critics to the lack of holistic perspective within organisations (ibid.), encouraging collaboration further, but using collaboration unquestionably can lead to worse outcomes. Huxham's (2003) study portrays a paradox where actors' ambitions to gain an advantage through collaborative practice often ends up in what he calls "collaborative inertia". Huxham emphasises the hardships surrounding collaboration, stating that "making collaboration work effectively is highly resource consuming and often painful" (ibid. p. 420). Since Huxham focuses on collaborative advantages, he tries to find what may counteract collaborative inertia, concluding for instance that collaborative advantages are not only found in action, but can also be found in the development of new relationships. Huxham's advice is that practitioners should not engage in collaboration if there is not a clear collaborative advantage at the same time as he broadens the interpretation of what it means to get a collaborative advantage. Most collaboration definitions have an action-oriented aspect in them, meaning that Huxham's way to understand collaborative advantage could be either lowering the standards for what collaboration could bring or rather, setting more realistic expectations of it.

One of the themes in Huxham's (2003) article about collaboration is power and how it appears in collaboration processes. He explains that their approach was to identify where power is enacted and how it influences the actions in collaborative constellations. Huxham (ibid.) names it "points of power" and says that they construct a "power infrastructure". Huxham's terminology is similar to Clegg's (Clegg 1989; Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006) circuits of power, but not as fleshed out. In Clegg's terminology, the points of power where power is enacted, and influences actions would be called "episodic power".

Power in collaboration processes is interesting because as Huxham (2003) explains, identifying where power is being exerted can be an enabling factor in

itself. Additionally, Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi's (2020) article states that further research is needed on disabling and enabling practice in collaborations and their relationships, and also what values shape decision-making in these settings, something that can be addressed by adding how hegemonic discourses affect sensemaking processes and how that in turn, affects episodic power, the node where decision-making occurs.

## 3.2 Cross-sectoral collaboration

Cross-sectoral collaboration is a hybrid form of organisation, often described in literature as cross-sectoral partnerships, collaborations, networks or alliances (Wohlstetter et al. 2004; Andrews & Entwistle 2010). The logic behind these organisations is that different sectors have different advantages. The public sector is considered to have the power which enables work with wicked issues, the private sector is considered to be able to maximise the use of resources, and the civil sector has the ability and closeness to service user groups which could enhance service design and provision (ibid.). These are the advantages that are strived for in cross-sectoral collaboration, which in theory, should provide collaborative advantages (ibid.).

As stated earlier, it is hard to evaluate collaboration and little research has been done within cross-sectoral collaboration (Andrews & Entwistle 2010; Barinaga 2020). Andrews & Entwistle (2010) effort to quantify performance of cross-sectoral collaboration through hard efficiency, effectiveness and equity measures shows that there are positive outcomes for public-public partnerships. They found that there were negative associations with public-private partnerships and no associations with public and non-profit sector.

Barinaga's (2020) recent study of a project in Seved, a city district in Malmö, Sweden, shows intricacies of cross-sectoral collaborations, pinpointing a lack of research focusing on relationships between actors in cross-sectoral collaborations and finds complex power dynamics and conflicting institutional logics (Greenwood et al. 2011) which add complexity to cross-sectoral collaborations (Barinaga 2020). Barinaga concludes that if there are going to be collaborations which lead to social



change, partners need to be aware of their differing approaches and most importantly, that “[partners should] be particularly watchful to support the logics and tactics of the weakest one” (ibid. p. 446). Additionally, a study conducted by Gillett et al. (2016) presents findings showing that multiple logics in cross-sectoral collaborations are key for these partnerships, but at the same time it is also the basis for tension. Thus, negotiations may be needed for successful collaborations. An example of this is presented in another study about cross-sectoral collaboration but that focuses on housing provision in Sweden (Berglund-Snodgrass et al. 2020). This article explores the political level in organising processes of these collaboration and focuses on i.e., the negotiation of different sectoral interests, deliberation, and the prioritising of knowledge (ibid.).

### 3.3 Social innovation in the public sector

In Levanders’s (2011) thesis, social enterprise and its role in Sweden is explored through discourse and narratives. The study shows that it has mainly been found within the third sector and provided an alternative way for the state to provide aid to social exclusion and unemployment. The rise of social enterprises and social innovation as a tool to solve welfare problems has been steadily rising due to the role of the public sector and its involvement in welfare provision becoming subjected to debate and withdrawing (Mazzucato 2013) as a result of recent neo-liberalisation processes and retrenchment (Brenner 2014; Gawell, 2016). Levander (2011) finds social innovation and enterprises taking a bigger role in discourse, describing a shift from the traditional universal welfare state model in Sweden. While the space for social entrepreneurship and enterprises is increasing, there is still lack of research in the area.

In his article, Torfing (2019) explains that the collaborative innovation field is quite new and that there is a lack of research of this combination. Nonetheless, the concept is on the rise and there is a growing interest in public innovation creating room for developing innovation at different policy levels, in service and in different forms of organisations, which may help the public sector to confront complex social issues (Levander 2011; Ansell & Torfing 2014). Multi-actor innovation collaborations have shown good results, but there are constraints halting

success, such as silos creating difficulties (Torfing 2019). Consequently, Torfing means that more research is needed regarding the intricacies of collaborative innovation (ibid.).

Nonetheless, there is a growing awareness in research regarding the role of collaboration in organising social innovation and entrepreneurship processes (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey 2011; Barinaga 2020; Lenz & Shier 2021). In their scoping review, Lenz & Shier (2021) found that collaboration was one of the most common elements, found in over half of the articles in regards to the social innovation process. The importance of collaboration lies in that it may lead to opportunity recognition, co-creation, legitimacy, relationship building, etc (Barinaga 2020; Lenz & Shier 2021). While research shows that there are risks in partnering with other actors, challenges shared with collaboration processes in general (Huxham 2003), this emphasises that it should not be conducted arbitrarily (Barinaga 2020; Lenz & Shier 2021).

As introduced earlier, collaboration is seen as an answer to scarce resources and a tool to solve complex social problems. The same is being said about innovation. Adding innovation onto collaboration, where previous research has shown its diverse definitions and mixed outcomes, has the possibility to create an even more complex situation, with higher risk taking and lower returns adding more variables that may impact on successful or unsuccessful outcomes. One of them is risk-taking with funding, which is something that the public sector has struggled with historically since tax-funded high-risk ventures are not seen positively by the public (Rønning 2021). This makes social innovation and cross-sectoral collaboration problematic due to both being inherently high-risk endeavours.

A way to lower risks in this collaboration constellation could be to further explore power in these processes, to see what affects them both positively and negatively. Levander (2011) says that Scandinavian research shows that governance and power structures are often invisible within social change. This makes it hard to identify where and how power is affecting potential social change, which is the aim of social innovation collaborations.

In a case study done by Rønning (Rønning & Knutagård 2015) it was concluded that certain actors within systems where innovation is conducted have decisive power over its enactment, adding an important dimension to the collaborative success. In Rønning's study, doctors were the one with the power to

decide over and therefore, it required their collaboration. Rønning & Knutagård (ibid.) state that this is a question of monopoly power and that it can be a challenge for innovations. However, if we were to understand the power structures, one could use it to one's advantage (ibid.). Furthermore, Rønning & Knutagård (ibid.) say that political craftsmanship is needed to succeed in successful implementation of new ideas in the public sector, and this depends on how well we succeed on understanding, communicating, and bargaining with other actors within the public sector. Hence, more analysis on how power structures are constructed is a must, especially since welfare service delivery is mostly done by local government, which in turn have different structures and ways of organising, creating a plethora of different governing structures and therefore also different power structures.

## 4 Theoretical framework

The organising of the cross-sectoral innovation collaboration is one of the main aims of this thesis. The combination of cross-sectoral collaboration with social enterprises and innovation is new, hence knowledge in this area is lacking. To provide insight on organising processes, theory on sensemaking and circuits of power was chosen. The aim is to provide an amp understanding on how systemic and episodic power affects sensemaking and how it leads to either enabling or disabling paths (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). This chapter introduces both circuits of power and sensemaking individually, thereon leading to Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020) theoretical framework which combines the two concepts.

### 4.1 Power in sensemaking processes

The analysis in this thesis is inspired by Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020) theoretical merging of circuits of power in sensemaking processes. The reason for this choice of theoretical framework stems from the aim to understand how cross-sectoral collaboration and social innovation is organised and how different expressions of power affect collaborations in this setting and structure. According to Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020), power brings a dimension that has been lacking in sensemaking literature, helping to illustrate “how power is implicated in actors’ interpretations of unfamiliar, unexpected and idiosyncratic events and issues” (ibid. p. 259), which can provide a plausible explanation and awareness to decision-making which can further the possibilities in cross-sectoral collaboration settings.

Circuits of power is a key component of this thesis’ analytical framework. Circuits of power assumes that power is not something one can possess, rather it is reproduced through social relations and can therefore, only be grasped relationally

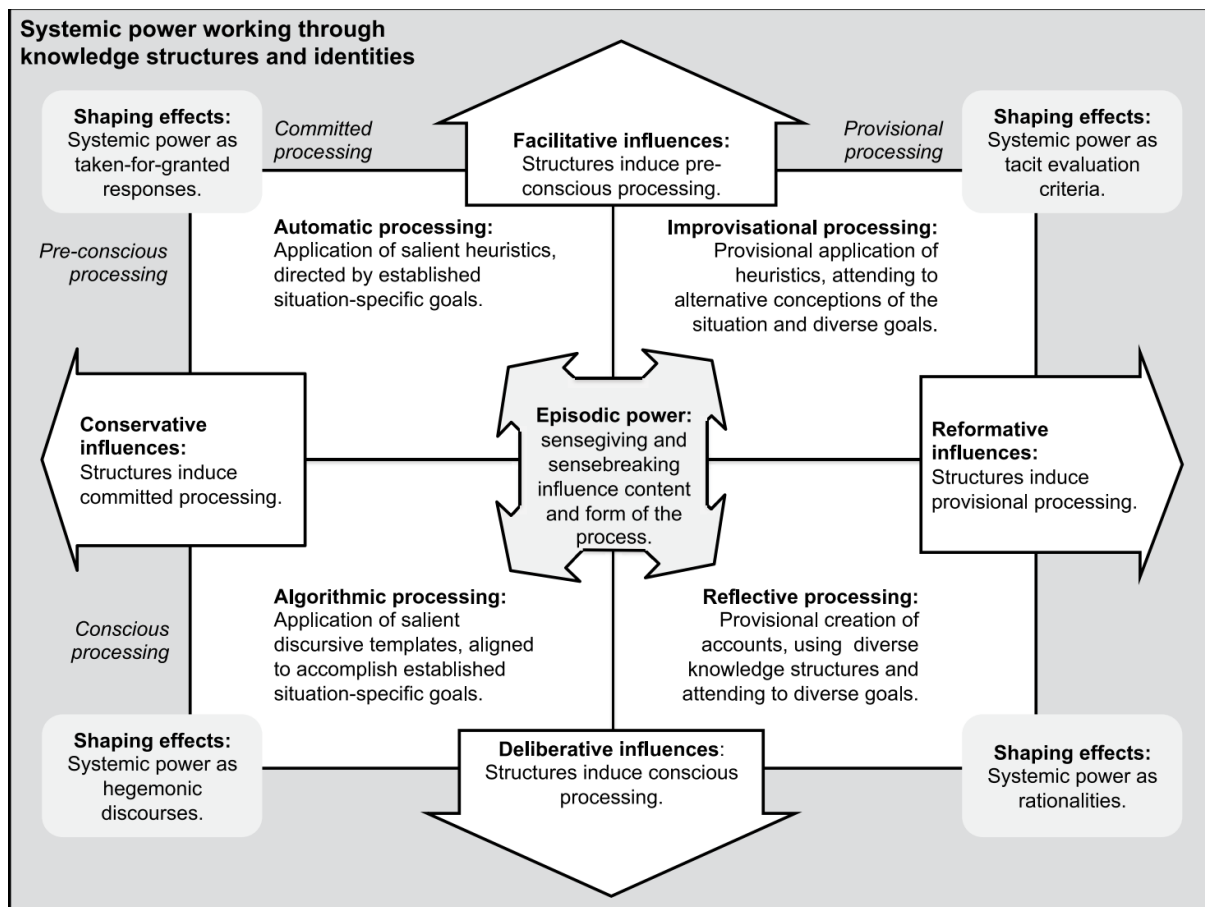
(Clegg 1989). Since social relationships are intertwined with power, they create capabilities, decisions, and change. At the same time, relationships can enable or constraint all of those, accentuating that power is “the choices we make, the actions we take, the evils we tolerate, the goods we define, the privileges we bestow, the rights we claim and the wrongs we do” (ibid. p. 3).

Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020) bring Clegg's systemic and episodic power into the framework. Systemic power being discourses which have developed over time, mostly indicating to knowledge which is taken-for-granted as truth and episodic power being what is usually considered being local struggles for autonomy and control (Clegg 1989). Episodic power is used to “configure these relations in such a way that they present stable standing conditions for them to assert their agency in securing preferred outcomes” (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006).

Sensemaking on the other hand is used to understand how people within organisations rationalize their actions in situations where there is no anticipated order (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). It is about subjects constructing and structuring what is unknown, thus, what is being constructed, why and with what effects, is central when analysing sensemaking processes (Weick 1995). Typically used for chaotic situations where organisational order is no longer applicable, sensemaking helps the portrayal of organising. Sensemaking focuses on micro actions which are performed through social interactions and later recollected upon retrospection. It is about labelling and categorisation to “stabilize the streaming of experience” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005).

Figure 1 is created by Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020, p. 248) and provides an overview of sensemaking processes together with episodic and systemic power. This figure is complex and portrays different dimensions, influences, shaping effects and processing's.

Figure 1 - Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020, p. 248) framework of power in sensemaking processes.



#### 4.1.1 Ideal-types of sensemaking processes

At the core of Figure 1, we find the ideal-types of sensemaking processes called automatic, algorithmic, improvisational, and reflective sensemaking. These ideal-types are based in two dimensions of sensemaking variations found in literature. Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020, p. 248) explain that actors vary in how they pay conscious attention to things such as the “formation and plausibility of inferences that link observations, beliefs and actions into coherent understanding and accounts”. Furthermore, actors’ attitudes vary depending on whether they have a committed or provisional attitude towards a goal or aim. This means that actors evaluate their understanding in two ways, either by seek validation of their initial understandings or seeking to challenge it. These dimensions provide the basis for the four white squares in Figure 1.

*Table 1 - Ideal-types of sensemaking processes*

<b>Automatic sensemaking</b> (committed and pre-conscious)	“Relies on heuristics that connect salient observations and claims to a categorical understanding of the situation with minimal conscious effort or attention” (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 248).
<b>Algorithmic sensemaking</b> (committed and conscious)	“Captures the more attentive formation of rationalizing accounts, carried out in a predictable manner according to pre-existing ‘algorithms’ provided by specific discourses or narrative templates” (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 248).
<b>Improvisational sensemaking</b> (pre-conscious and provisional)	“Lacks conscious attention to inferences yet involves a continued evaluation of inferences, probing actions, and attention to discrepant cues.” (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 248).
<b>Reflective sensemaking</b>	“Involves the deliberate consideration of multiple alternative accounts that relate observations, relevant existing beliefs and future or past actions, enabling rich ‘generative’ sensemaking” (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 248).

The ideal-types of sensemaking are represented in the white quadrants of Figure 1 and are closely linked with systemic power. Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020) explain that the variation of the actor’s consideration of plausibilities in their aims, goals and interests are connected to power structures, because they shape actor’s interpretations.

#### 4.1.2 Systemic power – Shaping effects

Shaping effects are presented in the corners of the quadrant (Figure 1) and represent one of the two systemic powers which affect sensemaking processes. Shaping effects portray the duality of systemic power as constraining and enabling. Systemic

power is usually embedded in knowledge structures and identities, which have an important role in shaping sensemaking processes (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). New understandings, such that may be needed for new processes and to build new structures within organisations, may be disabled by perpetuated knowledge structures and identities. But they can also enable actors, providing them with pre-determined knowledge and conclusions that help actors to cope with new situations (ibid.).

There are four shaping effects which Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020, p. 249ff) operationalize to recognise how systemic power affects sensemaking processes. These four effects are linked with each ideal-type of sensemaking (Table 1) found in Figure 1: (1) automatic processing and taken-for-granted responses, (2) algorithmic processing and hegemonic discourses, (3) improvisational processes and tacit criteria for evaluation and, (4) reflective processing and rationalities (ibid.).

Automatic processing and taken-for-granted discourses focuses on hindering efforts to create new understandings, which is done with reliance on “salient and taken-for-granted heuristics” (ibid. p. 249). Automatic processing has a greater focus on the practicality which heuristic techniques can bring, hence why imposing pre-established categories or adhering to already existing structures is likely to be the answer to any new situation.

Although very similar, algorithmic processing and hegemonic discourses portray sensemaking induced by hegemonic discourses (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). In this sense, hegemonic discourses provide a reasonable reason to act a certain way. For the shaping of this process, actors need “salient and coherent bodies of knowledge or discourses that provide them with plausible rationalizing of accounts of what is happening and why” (ibid. p. 250). Thus, looking for discourses in the analysis of key events within the Sopact project can provide a reason and explanation to why certain decisions were made and their consequences.

Improvisational processes and tacit criteria for evaluation implies unconsciousness, both in how we use sensemaking processes and how knowledge structures may affect our evaluation of situations. This aids a kind of sorting of potential alternatives rather than providing a specific taken-for-granted response. Here, there is an inherent link with knowledge acquired, which provides more



alternatives that can be used or discarded, and can therefore be something potentially empowering as well (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

Lastly, reflective processing and rationalities mean to critically reflect upon knowledge structures which usually are provided by hegemonic discourses and that in turn constrain algorithmic sensemaking. Reflective processing is enabling in nature, because it “allows [actors] to craft new understandings that transcend prior consensus” (ibid. p. 251). In this thesis, finding instances where reflective processing is being conducted can help explain where and why discourses are being questioned and what that can lead to.

#### 4.1.3 Systemic power – Influences

The second systemic power in the quadrant is represented by white arrows (Figure 1). These are called influences and portray how systemic power affect one process to the next, contributing constraint and empowerment to sensemaking forms (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

There are four structural effects conservative, reformative, facilitative, and deliberative influences (ibid.). These forms of influence are often embedded in organisational settings, they create routinised events to aid sensemaking processes when the unexpected occurs. The goal of these is to decrease the risk of conscious and consideration which could “raise questions of occupational, functional and hierarchical division of responsibilities” (ibid. p. 251).

The purpose is to avoid a dispute of taken-for-granted and routinised acts, because making sense of your situations can lead actors to question the status-quo, which is a threat to pre-established power relations (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

*Table 2 - The effects of systemic power on the form of sensemaking (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 252)*

Structural effects	Effects	Drivers
<b>Conservative influences</b>	Systemic power induces more committed forms of sensemaking	Salient coherent knowledge structures or identities Hierarchical communication practices Temporal structuring
<b>Reformative influences</b>	Systemic power induces more provisional forms of sensemaking	Plural knowledge structures and identities Dialogical communication practices
<b>Facilitative influences</b>	Systemic power induces more pre-conscious forms of sensemaking	Feelings of familiarity and predictability Temporal pressure, hurry
<b>Deliberative influences</b>	Systemic power induces more conscious forms of sensemaking	Experienced accountability Persistent attention to competing demands or tensions

#### 4.1.4 Episodic power – Sensegiving and sensebreaking processes

Episodic power is represented by the grey arrows in the middle of Figure 1, and is induced by either sensegiving or sensebreaking processes (ibid.). Episodic power is inherently relational (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006; Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020) and portrays how actors can manipulate others’ sensemaking processes through acts of sensegiving and sensebreaking.

*Table 3 - Forms of episodic power and ideal-type forms of sensemaking (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020, p. 256)*

	<b>Induce committed processing</b>	<b>Induce provisional processing</b>
<b>Induce pre-conscious processing</b>	<p><b>Suppressive sensegiving:</b> Normalise the situation to encourage the application of pre-existing heuristics to make sense.</p> <p><b>Sensebreaking:</b> Aimed at dismissing divergent responses and observations.</p>	<p><b>Inspirational sensegiving:</b> Encourage improvisation and experimentation to explore alternative tacit responses.</p> <p><b>Sensebreaking:</b> Aimed at questioning established situated responses and salient goals</p>
<b>Induce conscious processing</b>	<p><b>Authoritative sensegiving:</b> Impose a specific narrative, discourse, or articulated goal into the sensemaking process.</p> <p><b>Sensebreaking:</b> Aimed at discrediting established understandings and competing accounts.</p>	<p><b>Expansive sensegiving:</b> Induce a richer understanding of the situation to encourage critical evaluation of situated goals and relevant knowledge.</p> <p><b>Sensebreaking:</b> Aimed at questioning initial explanations and salient goals.</p>

In the framework, there are four types of sensegiving: suppressive, authoritative, inspirational, and expansive, all of which are paired with sensebreaking (ibid.) (Table 3). Sensegiving and sensebreaking appears as inherently connected, where sensebreaking provides an opposite to sensegiving processes, mostly by questioning, problematization or disruption of these. Which sensebreaking techniques are used depends on the type of sensegiving transpiring. Although episodic power may be displayed to keep status quo within organisations, it can also transpire to disrupt systemic powers at work, and provide disempowered actors a way to influence sensemaking processes (ibid.).

In this study, sensegiving and sensebreaking are used to find where episodic power is being exerted in the Sopact project. It provides a micro perspective in contrast to the meso or macro perspective which discourses within organisations

and state provide. They are connected, but episodic power is focused on the *how* power is being used, and systemic power is the *why*.

# 5 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological processes of this thesis. It starts with a short introduction of methodological considerations due to the data gathering being conducted before the aims of this thesis were decided. Thereon, the data gathering process is described. Afterward, data processing and analysis can be found. This section consists of the most important part due to the thesis topic being empirically rooted. Lastly, this chapter rounds up with ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

## 5.1 Methodological considerations

The methods for this thesis were partly chosen before the aims of this thesis were decided. As a project assistant, I conducted semi-structured interviews for the Sopact projects end report, which in turn created the opportunity for this thesis. While the data was mainly collected for the end report, a master's thesis exploring the Sopact project was in mind as well while designing the data collection method and was enunciated to each participant.

The main methodological considerations revolving this thesis are about whether the data would be suitable to explore this case, if there was a need for an additional case and/or if there was a need to do complementary interviews after deciding the aim of this thesis. The possibility to add another project and have two cases was considered, but the data collected from the Sopact project already provided rich enough data for several papers (around 500 transcribed pages) and was deemed to be enough. A single case study approach was decided upon due to the interest to understand organising and cross-sectoral collaboration within the Sopact projects constellation.

Bryman (2012) explains that case studies are a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case and are commonly used to conduct in-depth studies of limited

subjects. The aim of this study is to study the relationships and actions within the setting that the Sopact project provides, and the focus is on this intersection. Data gathering methods that usually provide intensive and detailed examination are often qualitative methods such as observations and unstructured interviewing (ibid.), making semi-structured interviewing fit the criteria of providing rich data for this in-depth exploration of the Sopact case. With this perspective, the focus was on how each participant of the Sopact project chose to organise their actions in the context of the Sopact project.

The logic behind this study and the focus on the Sopact project lies on relational ontology, meaning that nothing exists outside its relationship to other things (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). This perspective emphasises the complexity in organising activities and that they are in constant change (ibid.). The ontological perspective suits the Sopact case, mostly due to the project's aim of being a learning process with little prior knowledge on how this kind of collaboration could work. The semi-structured interviews provide a way to understand how participants relate to each other in the collaborative setting and in turn, how they categorise their actions and what affects these categorisations. Therefore, rather than understanding the individuals, the subject of study is their participation and action within the project, which fits the case study approach.

## 5.2 Data gathering

The data gathering was conducted before the precise aim of this thesis was developed. At the time, the decision for the Sopact project being either the only one or one of the subjects of study was decided, but no research questions were developed at the time. The empirical choice was predetermined to be qualitative semi-structured interviews with the aim to provide a rich dataset that would serve as the empirical point of departure for different products, one of them being this thesis.

## 5.2.1 Sampling

There are five categories within the Sopact project: social entrepreneurs, intermediaries, needs owners, knowledge partners and the steering committee (Table 4). Two social entrepreneurs left the process before the interviews took place, making them 11 in total. The needs owners group has two members that are also in the steering committee, making the number of unique members 34 in total. Social entrepreneurs consist of a diverse group of either individuals or groups who have an idea, social enterprise, or association. The needs owners group consist of developers or project leaders within municipal departments. The steering committee consists mainly of heads of municipal departments. The intermediary group consists of three Sopact employees, one of them being the head manager and the other two are project leaders and project coordinator.

*Table 4 - Sopact project participants*

<b>Participant categories</b>	<b>Project participants</b>	<b>Interviews conducted</b>	<b>Interviews analysed</b>	<b>Interviews in group/pair/individually</b>	<b>Language</b>
<b>Social entrepreneurs (SE)</b>	11 (13 at the start)	8	8	1 (group of 3) 1 (pair) 6 (individual)	3 ENG 5 SWE
<b>Intermediaries (SP)</b>	3	3	3	Individual	SWE
<b>Needs owners (NO)</b>	6	4	4	Individual	SWE
<b>Steering committee (SC)</b>	9	5	5	Individual	SWE
<b>Knowledge partners (KP)</b>	5	3	0	Individual	SWE

All participants were notified by the project owners in early March 2020 about the end report and the need for interviews. In late March and early April, emails were sent to participants in batches where they got brief information and a doodle with timeslots. First, the steering committee got their invitations, being the group with most time constraints due to the nature of their jobs as department directors and their priorities during at that time still very early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Afterwards, invitations were sent to both needs owners and knowledge partners, and lastly to social entrepreneurs and intermediaries. All social entrepreneurs, intermediaries and needs owners were interviewed. The steering committee was harder to schedule, of the directors only three participated in the interviews. The other department directors declined due to corona and time constraints. Two participants of the steering committee were also excluded from the interviews due to their roles as managers from Lund University. Knowledge partners that accepted the interview were the most involved in the project, the other two declined due to not feeling they had anything to add regarding the Sopact project. 23 interviews were conducted in total (Appendix C) and 20 were analysed in this thesis.

### 5.2.2 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide in-depth knowledge about what happened during the Sopact project, both to fulfil the production of the project end report but also to provide a basis for this thesis. Semi-structured interviews tend to be more flexible and give room to ask questions which were not predetermined (Bryman 2012). Social entrepreneur's interviews were conducted per social innovation/enterprise grouping, in practice this meant that two group interviews were conducted, one of three and one of two. The interviews were conducted during April and May 2020 through Zoom and were around 60 minutes, some longer and some shorter. The interviews were supposed to be conducted in person before COVID-19. Hence, the first interview was conducted in person and the rest online. Zoom did not present any problems for the interwees and the interviews were conducted with ease throughout. It also enabled an easy way to record the interviews through the built-in record function.

For semi-structured interviews, interview guides are constructed and usually consist of general topics or a list of questions (ibid.). This approach is flexible and can be rearranged on the go. Since there were different groups with different amounts of involvement and tasks within the project, interview guides with different questions were designed. For the department directors, questions had a more macro perspective, giving them the opportunity to answer questions which had to do with mandate or the bigger organisational picture, for example: *“Is there*

*a common strategy for the organization, i.e., the city of Helsingborg, or does each administration work in its own way?”.*

On the other hand, both social entrepreneurs and needs owners were asked questions about their mutual relationships. Social entrepreneurs were asked: “*How do you feel/think about your collaboration/working together with Helsingborg city?*” (Appendix B) while needs owners were asked: “*What do you think about working with social entrepreneurs?*”

These questions help us explore the contextual setting of the project and furthermore, we can start exploring how the workings of the collaboration in this cross-sectoral setting takes place, what the participants think about it and what enables or disables them, helping to answer the research questions of this thesis.

### 5.2.3 Other data

To aid the analysis and provide additional context to the case, other relevant documents were used. The documents used in the analysis were mostly newspaper articles and the evaluation of the accelerator programme, the predecessor to the Sopact need’s driven learning process. Other documents used in this case were also city council protocols and the project’s VINNOVA application.

The evaluation of the accelerator programme provided interesting information which was the basis for the project and was later used in the analysis to portray the organising of the project itself and could in turn be contrasted to how it became afterwards.

The newspaper articles provided interesting perspectives on the contextual setting that created room for cross-sectoral collaboration and social innovation. It also contrasts the perspectives shown in the city council protocols and problematises the setting. Furthermore, it provides actuality and relevance in contemporary politics. Documents were mostly added after the analysis and themes were identified and are solely used to show different perspectives and sources.

## 5.3 Data processing and analysis



This section covers both data processing and analysis. Transcription of the interviews was outsourced and done by two students at Lund University while interviews were being conducted, excluding one group interview which was transcribed by me. The data processing and analysis in this thesis was assisted by NVIVO, creating both structure for the files and codes. This section is divided in two parts, the first provides a recollection of pre-thesis work, which composes the main driver onto the concretisation of this thesis. The second part explains the step onto focused coding and a theoretically driven analysis.

### 5.3.1 Grounded theory and pre-thesis themes

The data processing and the search for themes emerging from the data started as soon as interviews were being conducted. Consequently, I was asked to write two articles for the Sopact projects end report which I based on the interviews to aid what to focus on in the thesis. The first article discussed the municipal departments view on social entrepreneurs and their collaborations, and the second discussed the intermediary role. To find these themes, I took a grounded theory approach which counts as the first round of coding of the interviews. Charmaz (2006) explains that grounded theory can be used as principles and practices rather than a package which tells you exactly what to do. My principle was to be as open as possible to the data and gather emerging themes which could both provide two articles and also a starting point for a more focused analysis. Grounded theory is interesting because it connects two disciplinary traditions, a logical and systematic approach and a pragmatic one connected to field research (*ibid.*). This approach fits both the rich data set's need for structure, and the aim of having an empirically driven thesis.

The first round of coding was a sentence-by-sentence coding strategy, which is inspired by Charmaz line-by-line coding strategy (*ibid.*). This approach encourages an openness to the data and its nuances while simultaneously taking data segments and finding theoretical categories (*ibid.*). This strategy led to retelling in analytical terms, more specifically descriptions of what was being said. Open coding leads to the data sparking new ideas, making the analysis empirically grounded. Up to this point, I had written the articles and left the rest of the analysis with emerging themes which I was aiming to further explore during thesis writing. The theme found up to this point was how respective groups view collaboration.

### 5.3.2 Theoretical coding

After identifying some of the themes, a more focused round of coding was conducted within these with sensemaking and circuits of power. Focused coding is more directive, selective and conceptual than for example line-by-line coding (Charmaz 2006:57-58). To not limit the analysis, I did both more open coding while doing a focused coding, going back and forth in an iterative way. Charmaz (ibid.) points out that coding is not a linear process, why most coding in this thesis was a back-and-forth dance between themes and codes. Recoding and finding links between interviews and codes, etc.

Close after beginning focused coding, the knowledge partners were excluded from the analysis. This group was the one most detached from the project and did only participate as lecturers.

After some rounds of focused and open coding, more themes were identified. Here, states of participation, the contextual setting, and the organising of the Sopact project and the “needs” were identified. At this stage, the theoretical framework changed and instead of just identifying where one could see enabling or disabling factors and sensemaking, a branching out of theory occurred, leading to a deeper analytical perspective inspired by Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020) framework.

## 5.4 Ethics

The research problem of this thesis does not address sensitive issues, rather, it explores a project where people meet and work together. Even though this in itself is not a sensitive topic, researchers need to think critically to be able to identify potential ethical dilemmas throughout the research process (Mason 2017).

The research design was carefully constructed to meet the fundamental ethical principles in social science research which are: voluntariness, integrity, confidentiality, and anonymity. My recruitment as a project assistant to conduct the interviews from the start was to address many of the issues which came from conducting the interviews internally. As a more neutral alternative that did not have in depth knowledge about the project nor knew the participants of it, I could provide

confidentiality and anonymity to the project's participants, especially regarding the social entrepreneurs, which can be considered to be the most vulnerable of the groups involved in the project.

A consent document was developed with approval from Sopact and University staff. The consent document included the interview's purpose and aims and provided information regarding the processing of recordings, anonymity, consent, and the right of its withdrawal (Appendix A).

While problematising consent documents, Israel (2015) emphasises that researchers need to make sure that every participant understands what they mean. Often, consent documents are long and hard to read, which can pose problems for interviewees. Hence, before each interview participants were asked if they had read the consent document and if they had questions. Most participants answered they had read it and that it was ok, but some asked questions about it, opening up the opportunity to clear out any questions.

Confidentiality has also been a very important subject within this study. The Sopact project has a limited number of participants, some even more publicly known than others. Even though participants will be anonymised in the study, there is a possibility that confidentiality could be breached because the number of participants in the project are so few. The focus of the study is the Sopact project itself and not the innovators, but they still face risks and in turn damage future business possibilities depending on what they choose to share in the interviews. If they share negative experiences and confidentiality is breached, some innovators may not be able to work within the public sphere. The same can be said for public officials sharing their views. Therefore, it will take a delicate treatment of the data, especially quotes, and changing key details to avoid this. Hence, a thorough explanation of this was performed before each interview took place and gave participants a chance to ask questions and withdraw consent.

## 5.5 Limitations of the study

Usually, an important aspect of writing a thesis is research design and methods being tailored to logically answer a thesis research question (Doolan & Froelicher 2009; Bryman 2011; Mason 2017). Even though I was involved in the development

of the methods for data gathering, at the time, there was no research problem to solve rather than the thought of wanting to explore the Sopact project case. This presents a few issues that may remind of secondary analysis (Doolan & Froelicher 2009), an example being that pre-existing data may not be able to answer the thesis research questions to its full potential. Nonetheless, using pre-existing data sets to research new questions happens often and being reflective of the challenges that come from having an untraditional methods design proves successful (ibid.). This study also differs from secondary data analysis since I was highly involved from the start by choosing methods for data gathering to the construction of the interview guides. The aim was always to gather a dataset rich enough to provide flexibility at the time for research question development and to explore the Sopact project.

An additional limitation, or rather a complexity, is bound to the use of grounded theory to approach data and conduct analysis. Theoretically, grounded theory was developed to understand what happens within a context from the actions within this context, leading to an empirically grounded analysis (Charmaz 2006). While this can be the aim of an analysis, it cannot be denied that the researcher's previous knowledge and other things affect the analysis regardless. Hence, analysis cannot only be empirically grounded or neutral in the sense that the researcher's own influence can be totally excluded, it can be managed by reflection and reflexivity towards why certain choices were made (Clarke & Friese 2007). The analysis in this study was iterated many times and conducted under a long period of time due to the nature of data collection, articles for the Sopact project and thereon, analysis for this thesis, something that has undoubtedly influenced the choice of themes and analysis in this thesis. Another possible influence on the analysis is my role as an employee of Sopact gathering data and writing the end report for 8 months. Even though I was employed to be the neutral part to gather data, this thesis was written a year after my employment began and 5 months after it ended. The relationships formed during my time as an employee may therefore have had an impact on the analysis.

## 6 Results and analysis

This chapter presents the results and theoretical analysis of this thesis. It begins with the setting, a contextualisation of factors that presented an opportunity for the Sopact project to be both developed and performed in the city of Helsingborg. In the following section the organising of the Sopact project is explored through sensemaking and power circuits, focusing on key aspects of what makes the project unique. Afterwards, the state of participation from the two main groups; social entrepreneurs and needs owners, is analysed. This section aims to provide insights on the differences of participation and how this affects and shapes collaboration. Consequently, the last section is highly connected to states of participation and demonstrates how different perspectives on collaboration can be found within the project. This section explores how participants make sense of collaboration and what implications can be linked to power, aiming to find which potential consequences can be identified in the project.

### 6.1 The Setting: Paths towards innovation

Retrenchment of publicly funded welfare services has affected welfare service reform (Lenz & Shier 2021) and goes hand in hand with the current discourse regarding the public sector's lack of resources (Levander 2011; Augustinsson & Solding 2012; Gawell 2013; Rønning & Knutagård 2015; Näringsdepartementet 2018; Torfing 2019; SKR 2020; Rønning 2021). Consequently, both important factors that affect the course of action and paths for further development of welfare services and their provision and can be interpreted to be systemic power. Systemic power can be a discourse, accepted knowledge and/or facts, working as shaping effects, aiding processes through the enabling or disabling of certain activities or actions and affecting sensemaking processes (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). Power being neither inherently good or bad takes shapes depending on what

is being enabled or disabled through it and can be positive and negative (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006).

In the city of Helsingborg, the local government has acknowledged and used the lack of resources discourse to encourage a culture for collaborative innovation in organisations that are usually organised in silos (Torfing 2019). This culture shift in the public sector serves to create space for action that may not have happened before, it empowers those who are in line with the power shifting towards a new circuit. It also empowers those who recognise this shift and enables the undertaking of new initiatives such as the Sopact project. In this section, events leading to an expansion on the social innovation space where the Sopact project is situated is explored.

### 6.1.1 H22: Aims, perception and reception

The City Council of Helsingborg settled that Helsingborg will aim to become one of Europe's most innovative cities, in hopes to develop and enable municipal departments, businesses, and the city's residents to realize novel ideas to meet citizen's needs (Helsingborgs Stad n.d.). H22, a city fair with the aims to be “[a] major welfare investment [...] to develop tomorrow's solutions for an increased quality of life in a smarter and more sustainable city” (H22 n.d) is in the centre of attention lately.

The account of H22 is in line with the general discourse used in Helsingborg about lack of resources, making the investment in H22 urgent action towards the contemporary issues, demanding streamlining resources by digitalisation and provision of other sustainable social solutions for complex issues. Thus, the aim of H22 is seemingly to produce a change driver in the local context (and government) to provide shaping effects that can seep down and through the public, private, and civil sector.

But, there is some resistance. An example is found in the digitalisation processes within the social work field which dominates services within municipalities (Svensson & Larsson 2017). There is an underlying idea that digitalising social work will lead to less interaction with service users and therefore, it will decrease service quality. Consequently, this resistance to digitalisation and

other factors has resulted in local government's falling behind in the overall digitalisation of society (ibid.).

Nevertheless, 250 million crowns (approximately 25 million euros) taken from share dividends from the port of Helsingborg have been invested in H22 (H22 n.d.). An investment that has led to many newspaper articles and where even the local government has not been unanimous in their stance of the event (Winberg Nordström 2019; Nilsson & Schlein 2021a, 2021b). The local government in Helsingborg is governed by the Alliance, the right block in Sweden, consisting of the Moderates, the Centre party, the Liberal party, and the Christian Democrats. The opposition consists of the Social democratic party, the Environment party, and the Left party. When voting for H22, the Liberal party abstained from voting and in the opposition, the Left party and the Environment party voted against it and the Social Democratic party voted for the initiative, giving the Alliance a majority of votes (Helsingborgs kommunfullmäktige 2019).

In a debate article in the local newspaper (Winberg Nordström 2019), the chair of the *Children and Education Committee* expressed scepticism and dissatisfaction with the decision to invest in H22. She says that while the local government is being sparse with the budgets for each municipal department, less resources are given to welfare service provision for schools, social services, and elderly care, it is not fair to invest a quarter of a billion crowns in a city fair (ibid.). Although the liberal representative is not fully against the idea of H22, she means that an investment in preventive measures to help children in criminal environments, to invest more in furthering children's education, elderly care, and healthcare for citizens with disabilities would be a more adequate investment in local social welfare (ibid). Meanwhile, H22 is portrayed as a future investment for the local welfare in general, giving each municipal department in Helsingborg an innovation budget to develop their services:

H22 in combination with the fact that we give the city's municipal departments development muscles creates good opportunities for Helsingborg to be a leader in welfare development and in smart and sustainable urban development (Helsingborgs kommunfullmäktige 2019).

The local leaders for both the Moderates and the Social Democratic party respond to Maria's debate post by saying that H22 is a long-term investment:

In the long-term it is not possible to continue with more of the same solutions as before. If we had built a municipality from scratch today, we would have built it differently. The challenges look fundamentally different today than they did 100 years ago. If we continue in the same route as before or only make minor changes, we will not find the new ways of working, innovations required to create the best possible municipality for children and young people to grow up in and the elderly to age in. Therefore, we choose to do a historic investment in innovation and at the H22 City Fair (Danielsson & Björklund 2019).

What they present in the debate article aches to a system change, a systemic change. The question is if H22 is enough to make this change. It is too early to predict what will happen in 2022, but the local paper in Helsingborg, *Helsingborgs Dagblad* (HD), has been reporting about H22 frequently. Articles show that there are problems, e.g. almost no one in Helsingborg knows what H22 is about, even though H22 markets itself as including citizens in the development of H22 (Nilsson & Schlein 2021b). An article problematises the city's marketing strategy as one of the most innovative cities in Europe, its credibility and what it potentially can lead to. Another article interviews a professor from Luleå University, whose research area is user involvement and digital innovations. In the article she talks about the innovations taking place in Helsingborg, and states that none of them are novel. At the same time, she points out that creating change within the municipal departments can be the innovation (Nilsson & Schlein 2021c), meaning that to achieve true innovative ideas there is a need for change within the municipal departments.

Another article covered how much of the budget each municipal department received to develop innovations and how much of it they used (Nilsson & Schlein 2021d). Each municipal department gets different amounts, but together they will receive 44 million crowns per year for three years' time. The municipal departments also differ in how they are using their innovation budgets, some are not using them at all. In the article, Jan Björklund, from the local opposition party The Social Democrats, says that "You should probably interpret it as being in a start-up phase. You have sat and created, you have sat in working groups and you have sat and worked out ideas. But they have not started working with them yet" (ibid.). At the same time, the innovation budget started being distributed during 2020. Thus, questions regarding action constraints arise.



### 6.1.2 The public vs private dichotomy

The city fair has put innovation in the spotlight and given the city's municipal departments an innovation budget to develop innovative welfare alternatives. As a result, H22 and the general political vision for the city of Helsingborg has been an enabler for innovation initiatives, in where Sopact is located. H22 has the potential to create a paradigm shift for service provision, facilitating department director's investment on initiatives such as the Sopact project, both financially but also with employee's time. It is too early to see if there will be a shift, and critical newspaper articles show another side to these investments. Nonetheless, these have led to some investment, which the Sopact project is an example of.

According to Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020), discourses are systemic power that can help shape sensemaking processes which in turn can both be enabling or disabling in nature. One discourse found within this context is the notion that the public sector is bureaucratic and hard to change. Inertia and the public sector are seen as mutually exclusive, at the same time making innovation an opposite to inertia (Ahrne & Papakostas 2001). This picture is based on the nature of the public sector's organisation and its role, whose main task is to deliver services, helping those in need but also enacting controlling function in society (Rønning 2021). To be able to do this, pooling resources in organisational structures is needed, since it provides the power to organise and provide services that would not be possible without it (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006). Ahrne & Papakostas argue that "the establishment of organisations is very much about creating inertia" (2001, p. 4), but that inertia may not necessarily be a constraint to innovation - but the opposite.

Furthermore, Mazzucato (2013) argues that even though it is not the government's main role to be innovative, historically it has shown potential for having an entrepreneurial role. Innovation takes risk, which is usually associated with the private sector while the public sector is associated with being tax-funded and low risks (Rønning 2021). Mazzucato (2013) on the other side argues that the notion surrounding the public sector and risk is false and proposes that the state is a "key partner of the private sector – and often a more daring one, willing to take the risks that businesses won't" (ibid. p. 17). Nonetheless, the notion that the state should be more cautious regarding investing in innovation is derived by the

discourse, even though it may be a false dichotomy. But when the state does not take the lead and risk needed, they risk becoming “a poor imitator of the private sector behaviours” (ibid.). The public sector can therefore both have enabling and disabling possibilities depending on what salient discourses are contextually used.

### 6.1.3 The directors’ dilemma

In the context of municipal departments, the department directors have this dilemma and need to manage it. Practically, this means both implementing political aims in a contested subject. Although the picture that Mazzucato (2013) and Arhne & Papakostas (2001) paint can act as an enabling factor for innovation, there is still risk and a whole bureaucratic structure full of employees that have different thoughts about what should be invested in and how the department should be run. The municipal directors are put in a conundrum, but this conundrum enables such in-between alternatives such as the Sopact project.

Within Sopact, the directors can show that they are working towards the vision while at the same time, not investing much in it. Their participation in the Sopact project is ambiguous. When asked to explain their concrete role in the project, the directors mostly answered that they attended meetings occasionally and discussed issues concerning the project and their respective departments perspective. An example of this is given by SC4:

I do not know if my role has been so significant, I think it has been important in the way that I have always expressed and got some of my employees to see the greatness in the fact that we can also let in social entrepreneurs, at least listen to if they have anything to give us. (SC4)

SC4 answer shows that their participation is ambiguous but that there is meaning. It helps legitimise the social entrepreneur’s potential role within this strict organisational structure. Additionally, it helps the political aims to seep down to other employees, which in turn makes them potential bearers within the department, enabling power relationships down the line. In Davenport & Leitch’s (2005) study it is shown that strategic ambiguity can be used to encourage diverse and new ideas that cannot be implemented in the rule bound setting that are confined within the public sector. In this case, the director’s ambiguous role in the project also seeps down to the needs owners. The ambiguousness of the municipal departments in the

project provides an opportunity to move to a more reflective sensemaking process (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020), because ambiguity induces interpretation plurality (Davenport & Leitch 2005). Hence, moving into a space where reflection and questioning rationalities has a potential to lead to creative ideas and diverse interpretations and use of the needs owners discretion.

The department director's job is complex. Their discretion is good, they are the ultimate decision-makers within the departments, while at the same time they need to work towards the city's vision and pass on the vision down to everyone under them in the hierarchical structure. The dilemma starts when there are several levels in the hierarchical structure which have their discretion and authority to make decisions. Consequently, this has an impact on the director's intentions when joining an initiative such as Sopact, which explains why there is an action-orientation lacking in the director's answers regarding their participation in the project. When it comes to budget decisions, the directors have been involved in co-financing of the Sopact project, but no part of this budget has a direct link to social entrepreneurs or their respective ideas or enterprises. When the director's make sense of the department's participation, they categorise it in the same scope as the inevitable need to develop social services and welfare provision, within the systemic power discourse coming from the lack of resources. SC4 says the following when asked why they chose to participate in the project:

Yes, it was not a difficult choice. We need to develop social services, we need that nationally as well, all over the world, I would like to believe. And in that work, we have for many years now tried to involve citizens, those for whom social services are. Because we believe that it is a way to develop in a way where we know that what we do does benefit those we are there for. We had already started with that and have, among other things, employed user developers as we call them. So, when Sopact started, then we had also started up the other work, so it was more like it fit like a glove, like, it is interesting if we get others, with different focuses and different skills to look at our questions. We can probably come up with much more exciting and operational ideas, than just sitting alone. Because it is easy to do what you are comfortable with and what you know and sometimes you need to have a different insight into what you are doing to really be able to develop. (SC4)

In the quote above the director speaks about user involvement, which can be seen as a salient discourse within the organisation (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). The director aligns their participation with their current discourse and goal, making their sensemaking into an algorithmic processing (ibid.). Later in the quote,

the director brings up how a different perspectives can bring new and needed insight into municipal departments issues, positioning the Sopact project as being a reflective sensemaking process which they want to be a part of. The categorisation being made in this sensemaking process does remove some ambiguity about the intended participation in the project and while doing this, it also provides an example of the duality which can be found in the municipal departments participation in the project. It portrays possibility constraints for collaboration but also an enabling aspect of it, providing a notion of the need to question and develop yet it does not necessarily provide room for concrete action towards it.

Brunsson (2007, p. 3) talks about organised hypocrisy, explaining that it is a way for organisations (or individuals) to respond to situations where “values, ideas or people are in conflict”. As mentioned before, Sopact is being financed by the departments, but there is a lack of budget for the social entrepreneurs. A recurring issue found across the interviews. This fact disables the possibility for testing ideas, even though the departments themselves were meant to be so called testbeds for the social entrepreneurs. This presents several problems, especially when considering that the departments have determined needs that need to be met by the social entrepreneurs. This underpins the conflicting ideas regarding working with innovation which implies risk-taking, something that makes itself known constantly throughout the project.

If the general aim for the department’s participation is not action oriented, if it is just gaining new perspectives, creating negative space and blocking potential pathways induced by ambiguity. Then, it can no longer be strategic ambiguity, rather it becomes closer to a strategic hypocrisy, where directors know that action is hard without a budget, but they still want to be a part of what is an up-and-coming wave of development. Directors may therefore use strategic hypocrisy by trying to avoid risk-taking and denying a budget, while still being a part of the development of social innovation and at the same time furthering the political aims of the city.

## 6.2 The Sopact project: Organising through a learning process

With open applications during spring and autumn in the years of 2016-2018, by the end of this period, Sopact worked together with up to 40 social entrepreneurs in an accelerator programme (Abrahamsson et al. 2021). In the evaluation of that programme it shows that there was a lack in consensus on what Sopact would provide or contribute to, something that is also shown in the quotes done by the interviewees in the evaluation (Hansson 2019). The Sopact need's driven learning process is a continuation and development of its predecessor, where the main goal is to learn how an initiative like this could be organised and run successfully for all actors. In the coming sections the development of Sopact will be explored, focusing on the changes from the accelerator programme to the need's driven learning process. This section will also provide an analysis of the intermediary's role, the creation of room for new relationships and lastly, a key component of the project will be explored further: the needs.

### 6.2.1 From accelerator programme to cross-sectoral collaboration

Initially, the process started with us knowing that we wanted to work close to the administrations, which we had not done before. And it really started a little before the project, the anchoring. (IM3)

An important part of the Sopact project comes from lessons learned from the accelerator programme. As explained by IM3, anchoring was an important activity they identified needed strengthening for the Sopact project to become relevant for municipal departments and to provide social entrepreneurs the resources they needed to realise their ideas. At the time, one of the main ambitions in the project was to connect the accelerator programmes social entrepreneurs with the departments within the city of Helsingborg, but they found a disconnect between what the departments were doing in relation to what the social entrepreneurs wanted to do. In the evaluation of the accelerator programme, department representatives stated the ideas from the social entrepreneurs did not fit the work within the municipalities (Hansson 2019).

Shaping effects from hegemonic discourses within the organisation affected the collaboration, in which pre-existing goals could not be matched with the social entrepreneurs' ideas. This conservative influence affected the project, that the need's driven learning process has this very issue at its core, focusing on municipal department needs anchoring. The public sector and in turn service delivery is closely linked with political goals (Rønning 2021). Therefore, anchoring the project became an important part of potential collaborations.

The need's driven learning process is mainly managed by three project managers, which serve to manage the project but also work as intermediaries in this cross-sectoral collaboration. The project's organising is also quite complex. The head manager explains it as being very structured in relation to the municipal departments, but at the same time, there is a need to be flexible, saying that: "we need to be ready for the change that may happen". The collaboration structure with the municipal departments has two key events: (1) meetings with the steering committee four times a year and, (2) meetings with needs owners, about every four weeks. The first event is described as strategically important and is also an enabling and disabling node where the steering committee has a say in, for example, the acceptance of social entrepreneurs and their respective ideas into the project. The steering committee is composed by both municipal department directors and University staff, but since the anchoring to the municipal departments is a key aspect of this collaboration, it means that the directors have a big part in deciding what is viable or not within their departments. SC5 describes their role in the quote below:

Yes, when you are part of a steering group, [intermediary] who is the project manager and runs it, has regular meetings where they go through where you are in the process and mostly it's about sharing information. It can also be that a positioning on something needs to be taken and then he has a dialogue with the steering group based on that. It's about using each other's experiences. And then we also have decisions that we make. It can be from schedules to finances, to different positions, choices and so on. And in that way, there are continuous meetings regularly then, and we also meet and then we work with the process. [...] (SC5)

SC5 presents their rather ambiguous participation in the process but also stating that they are there to conduct decision-making. Thus, these meetings provide a space where episodic power can be excreted through both sensegiving and sensebreaking

processes, assessing social entrepreneurs and their ideas and whether they fit into the Sopact project and the respective municipal department.

Aside from these key events with municipal actors, one of the main attractions of the project is that social entrepreneurs were recruited to solve municipal departments challenges. When accepted into the project, social entrepreneurs pledge to attend and have an active role in the process. This process consists of lectures, workshops, meetings with partners and individual supervision from intermediaries. An example of the complexity of organising Sopact is that while Sopact employees work as intermediaries within the project, they also need to manage the project in different levels. The project aims to establish new partnerships, which may redefine how the public sector works with services and service delivery. Hence, the need for networking to create opportunities for the project and for social entrepreneurs is a vital part of the job.

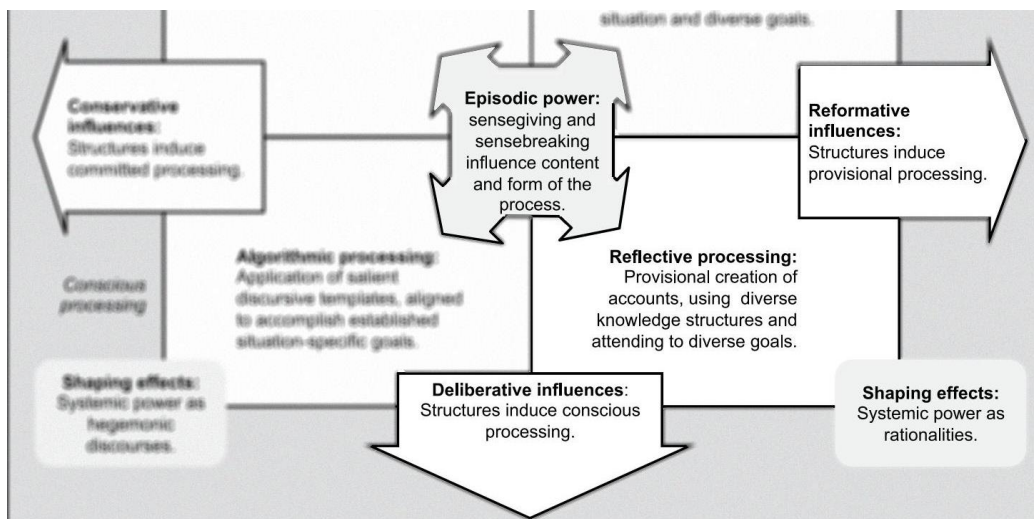
And I have taken more responsibility, overall and then that I have more contact with, or try to push the steering group with the directors and the needs owners group as it is called, where the project/developers for each administration sit. And then also more contact with Vinnova and with the School of Social Work [...] at Campus Helsingborg, and Campus Helsingborg in general. (IM2)

IM2, one of the intermediaries and the projects head manager, describes both how they network on micro, meso and macro levels for Sopact. This provides an insight into the complexity of the organising of such collaboration, where there is a constant need of expanding networks, trying to legitimise and establish the project's relevance. When IM2 works at the micro level, it is regarding one-on-one work with the social entrepreneurs, giving practical advice on how to move forward with their ideas and how to approach meetings with future stakeholders. When working on a meso level IM2 focuses on work with the municipal department, managing directors and working more strategically in furthering partnerships. This work serves to further enabling structures for the social entrepreneurs potential partnerships and combines with micro level work, providing both a broader network and concrete advice for the social entrepreneurs about managing relationships with potential business partners.

## 6.2.2 Sopact in practice: extra-preneurship and the intermediary's role

In practice, the Sopact project has provided social entrepreneurs with practical tools and knowledge. But it has also shortened the gap between social entrepreneurs and municipalities through activities and empowering them to create a product or business that can work. This combination of actions parallels what is defined as extra-preneurship, a collaborative cluster aiming to break silos which can lead to systemic change (Logue 2019). Hence, the Sopact project can be positioned in the lower right side of the sensemaking quadrant, providing space for reflective processing, reformative influences and providing enabling shaping effects that through rationalities that help shape new understandings (**Fel! Hittar inte referenskölla.**) (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

Figure 2 - Highlighting the lower right of the power in sensemaking processes (Adapted from Figure 1)



Interviews portray how different actors experience reflective processing through Sopact, an example being SE4 who was engaged in reflecting about their idea and how it can practically be implemented within x-organisation or place. Every step of the project has led to SE4 to reflection:

During Sopact, they have given us the tools, and not just the tools but they have arranged like watch-outs and meetings with people working with the questions, like people working with the municipality or working with how to set up an organisation, company, consultancy, and what is the difference between each, each one of them so, all these things are very useful and it makes you think; okay, how can I, like how, how can the idea be, be implemented or how can it become a social enterprise? (SE4)



How an idea can be implemented or how it can become a social enterprise are actions that need to be understood within the complex context of where social entrepreneurs want to conduct their idea or enterprise. The Sopact project provides this context, where sensegiving and sensebreaking can happen and where hegemonic discourses coming from organisational structures and pre-existing knowledge may not dominate, rather, they are critically reflected upon. Consequently, the role of the intermediaries appeared as an important theme throughout the interviews. Their function in the project is both to manage the project and to serve as a bridge between the social entrepreneurs and needs owners, creating a space for reflective sensemaking between different organisational logics and aid actors' relationships.

One example of the complex importance of the intermediary is portrayed by SE2, whose sole reason for joining the project was their quick connection. SE2 recounts that one of the intermediaries reached out to them and established a relationship in where SE2 felt immediate trust, which led SE2 to believe in the project, even though it meant to collaborate with an actor that SE2 had no trust for at all:

I met [intermediary] before I applied to Sopact and he was the one who contacted me, I did not know SoPact before. And he was the only person I seemed to trust from the other side, so to speak, from society. Because when I started [association] and I went to all these meetings, everyone saw me as a [...] because of my background. And [intermediary] was a person who was humane, hugged me and so on, not everyone else dared to do that. And he told me I should apply for an incubator programme. I did not know what an incubator programme was, and he did not explain that he was working there either. And so, I did as he said, I listened to him and that was why I joined Sopact, and I had no idea what it would mean. But I did it because I got such a good contact with [intermediary], I felt that I did not want to disappoint him and so I applied. (SE2)

Presumably, some sensebreaking mechanisms must have been in play for the intermediary to recruit SE2 into the Sopact project, most likely sensebreaking in inspirational sensegiving, which is meant to encourage alternatives through improvisation or experimentation (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). Sensebreaking is used to question established responses, which in this case the intermediary used to encourage SE2 to participate in the project and see what happens. SE2 explains that the intermediary treated them as a person, hugging them, this in itself can be seen as an intervention in which the intermediary provided SE2

with a response that had not been pre-established. It was something that SE2 was not accustomed to, inducing a sense of trust just by conducting oneself differently.

Furthermore, intermediaries are described as being providers of knowledge and understanding to all the actors in the project, by providing tools or knowledge that actors may need to make reflect upon their participation and actions forward. They also helped the participants manage their expectations and coping when outcomes did not go as expected. An example of this can be found in the interview with SE3, where they explain that even though they had greater expectations of a potential collaboration with the city – they still found meaning in the established relationship with one of the intermediaries:

I would probably have expected to see little more results, I would probably have expected that we would actually have a collaboration with the city of Helsingborg, precisely because we have been in contact with so many municipal departments. But it feels like we ended up between the chairs on different projects (...) so I feel it has been a big frustration with me, that it has not led to something. I think it has been positive, I have found quite close contact with [intermediary] who is one of the leaders of Sopact and I think our exchanges have made a lot of sense (...). (SE3)

SE3 portrays the challenge of participating in a project like this and how it was possible for them to manage it by the help of the intermediary. In this sense, reflective sensemaking can be used to cope when outcomes are not the desired ones. Through expansive sensegiving, intermediaries can use interventions where social entrepreneurs can deliberate, subsequently leading to alternative action (ibid.). Additionally, not only social entrepreneurs were aided by the space for reflection given by the project and intermediaries, needs owners also experienced an increase in knowledge which was aided by the intermediaries. NO4 explains that when they first joined the project, even the language used was hard to understand, so they had a hard time grasping what the project was and their role in it. But things became clearer with the help from the intermediary:

I cannot say exactly in time, but when it came to [intermediary], he met with us needs owners. So, I got the opportunity to discuss with him [...] I needed to hear it many times and since we also gathered all the needs owners regularly ourselves and then sometimes together with the innovators. When we gathered ourselves, I also heard that the others had similar thoughts as me, and that helped to clear [things] up for me. So, I thought that was very good. (NO4)

The role of the intermediary is key for the Sopact projects aim to be an extra-preneurship context, where intermediaries provide the needed sensegiving and sensebreaking mechanisms that can influence relationships between actors and most importantly, action.

### 6.2.3 Exploring the needs in ‘A Needs Driven Learning Process’

One of the projects’ distinguishing characteristics aside from the cross- sectoral collaboration is the focus on needs. Each municipal department defined challenges and translated them into short two sentence needs to guide the social entrepreneurs (Table 5). Thus, the needs are the answer to the lack of anchoring identified during the accelerator programme.

*Table 5 - Municipal department needs*

<b>Municipal Department</b>	<b>Identified needs</b>
<b>Labour market department</b>	Enable business, residents, and associations to organize around needs and opportunities that can contribute to the development of our districts.
<b>School and Leisure Department</b>	[Location] must be a place for co-creation and democratic processes that capture, enable, and support the involvement of residents.
<b>Social Service Department</b>	New approaches and approaches to facilitate and stimulate a meaningful everyday life / employment for people with substance abuse, addiction, and psychiatric problems.
<b>Health and Social Care Department</b>	Initiatives and services that prevent involuntary loneliness and that contribute to Helsingborg's residents experiencing quality of life throughout life - regardless of conditions.

The needs provided for the project come from the narrative “The Inclusive City” which is in line with other general aims and official documents within the city of Helsingborg. The narrative “The inclusive city” is based on the Quality of Life Programme<sup>1</sup>, Vision 2035<sup>2</sup> and H22<sup>3</sup>, all of which correspond with political aims, acting as hegemonic discourses within every municipal department.

<sup>1</sup> <https://helsingborg.se/bo-bygga-och-miljo/helsingborgs-arbete-med-miljo-och-hallbarhet/helsingborgs-livskvalitetsprogram/aktualiserat-livskvalitetsprogram-pa-remiss-till-den-31-maj-2021/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://helsingborg.se/kommun-och-politik/helsingborg-2035/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://h22.se/>

The needs are complex to analyse because what prompted their existence may have both enabling and disabling characteristics which lead to enabling and disabling paths. E.g., the social services need provides opportunities for enterprises targeting the specific need of employment to a certain group but disables all other relevant ideas that could match other parts of their organisation. Interviewees sensemaking of the needs is also that it is mostly disabling, an issue that is brought up mostly by needs owners. Consequently, consequences of this can also be found in social entrepreneurs' interviews. Generally, interviewees do not speak much about the process behind identification and formulation of needs. In a follow-up interview, SP2 explains that before recruiting social entrepreneurs, around two meetings with needs owners were had. Consequently, needs owners were provided questions to help them develop needs that could be easily used in the project. Thus, it is likely that needs owners all had different processes to develop these, and Sopact did not have insight in their internal processes.

Altogether, there is a risk that needs development needed more time and a shared process where needs could be developed. The needs were meant to be a guideline which is disabling. Hence, a more reflective sensemaking process when constructing needs would have benefitted the project. Instead, they were constructed within each department where the algorithmic processing's and conservative organising influences had dominance and leading to more disabling consequences. NO1's quote depicts what influenced their needs development:

We had received this assignment from the City Council. We had several different needs as well. But it was not something that we had very much support on. I mean, we have support on the basis that the need is real and exists on several different levels. (...) Then we have many other problems as well that maybe you need to look at, these might also have been included. Because it could have been easier for the contractors to answer that. So, I have a thought that maybe we should have a broader needs base, then you get to see what kind of applications you get in. (NO1)

In the quote above, NO1 portrays the complexity surrounding the needs. The needs that NO1 had to work with came from the city council, in that sense, it is a need that came from the top. Of course, that need is recognised as a valid need within the department, but was it the need that they needed help with the most? And did the need become problematic for a potential collaboration? Here, the needs themselves pose as points for potential episode power enactment. If the needs are a clear

statement of the needs owners preferred outcome, that anything that is outside that definition will be disabled. In this sense, it also makes it easier for the needs owners to become disablers rather than enablers for innovation. In this context, needs can be interpreted to be the imposing of systemic shaping and influences, because it shapes the project to the structural needs of the municipal department's organisation. The needs themselves then act as shaping effects which in turn can both preclude social innovation ideas that may not fit the definition of two sentences, but more interesting, these sentences can also reshape ideas that at first were deemed to fit the mould. Of course, developing ideas together with the needs owners is part of the project aim. Hence, some change and expectation of change were expected, alas challenges were present for some social entrepreneurs with ideas that ended up being in-between needs.

There was also a case where a needs owner only accepted a part of an entrepreneur's idea, SE7 explains that even though their idea was received positively, they were not positive about the whole idea. SE7 explains their idea as an evidence based seven step method where a matching between different groups occurs, in here, the municipality was mainly interested in the matching part of their idea. In this sense, maybe the simplicity brought by the two-sentence department need is what makes a complex evidence based seven step method too reformative, when maybe the matching part of it is enough to solve their need without the need of changing too much and keeping the status-quo in a rather conservative organisation.

The narrowness in some of the needs is not the only perspective. Two other needs owners say that their needs were so broad that it created difficulties, e.g., NO3 says that "if we had been more specific and limited, we might also have been able to go further. It has been a challenge", portraying an opposing view to the scope of the needs. This view could be seen as a result of a scope which is spilling over to a reflective process, which could enable different outcome from the more restrictive needs developed, but there is also a risk for this to become disabling if the process gets caught at the reflective stage. In NO3's case, it seems that there was a lack of decision-making and action due to the needs' width. For NO4, the width of the need they aimed to solve was so broad that the *how* to solve it, became too ambiguous:

I: What was it that made it so fuzzy do you think?

IP: It was, it's really a process, it's not like that it is this goal we should achieve, and it is during that time and it is that money and it is the people who are involved in the work group, because that's how I'm used to working. This is more like; it was such a big grip; how to counteract involuntary loneliness? Only there you must first funnel it down a lot because it was a huge concept. I thought; oh, will it be a digital solution or what will it be? like that, but it is not the product itself here that is, but it is the way there. And it took a while before that, it became clear to me, so it has been very exciting. (NO4)

It is here that the intermediary role becomes relevant, aiding with sensegiving and sensebreaking processes to free participants of constraints that stem from pre-existing knowledge, structures, and hegemonic discourses (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

### 6.3 Municipal departments: participation conditions and perspectives on collaboration

This section will explore municipal department conditions of participation as well as perspectives on collaboration. The focus lies mostly on needs owners because they are the operative municipal actors in the project. Here, the analysis is focused in exploring how sensemaking processes are shaped by discourses and how that in turn affects both views on the collaboration processes in the project. All the departments have different strategies, approaches, aims and outcome expectations of the project, and in turn, they differ from social entrepreneur's perspectives and participation conditions. This section explores how these differences lay the foundation of the Sopact project and in what way they may affect a potential collaboration.

#### 6.3.1 Strategies, approaches, aims and expectations

The development and organising of a concept such as Sopact comes with a lot of complexity. By placing themselves within academia but moving between different sectors, the work includes meeting different organisational structures and different organisational logics which may or may not clash (Greenwood et al. 2011). For some time, service provision has been fragmented and is provided through

organisational silos (Torfing 2019), with fragmentation both within and between organisations (e.g. social service and the school and leisure department both belong to the municipality, but have different organisations and are located separately).

In the Sopact project, being needs owners is an assignment or task, falling under each of the needs owners respective jobs within their municipal departments. Each of the needs owners role within their departments is strategic in nature, meaning that they work with the development of organisation and/or services both generally and/or in projects. When interviewing needs owners, most of them express slightly different views on participation because they are affected by their respective organisation. Wording and reasons have some variation, but sensemaking processes are mostly located in the left part of the quadrant, where we find automatic and algorithmic processing (Figure 1, p. 17) (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). An example is NO1, who uses mainly suppressive and authoritative sensegiving while making sense of their participation:

It is probably always positive to bring new perspectives and we see it positively that you work with both the business community and our users in bringing in new ways of thinking. What we see as positive is partly that you are involved in the target group in question, but also others who may have a different specific competence in being able to think new and that is just that; when you involve several different parties in a development process that you can sometimes reach a greater height of innovation. (NO1)

NO1 explains that it is positive to involve different actors in service development. While this may seem as being reflective sensemaking, there is a more prominent association to discourses than critical thinking in this quote. The discourse within the organisation is that they must collaborate and take in new perspectives to further services and its delivery, hence, making this a statement shaped by salient discursive templates in algorithmic processing (ibid.). NO1 uses the organisations' goal to explain their participation and does not venture deeper. What is most interesting in the quote is the classification to prior knowledge, making a connection to a pre-existing structure within the organisation in saying “what we see as positive is partly that you are involved in the target group in question [...]” (NO1). A classification can be depicted from the quote, which could be an embedded knowledge hierarchy within their organisation, in which attaining certain attributes more or less beneficial categorisation can be attached to the individual. By creating

this hierarchy, imbalances may be retained, making it easier to exert episodic power to achieve one-sided goals (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

In general, the department's aim, and expected outcomes of collaboration seems to be tied with knowledge rather than action. Action requires buying a product or service from the social entrepreneur, and/or jointly working with a service delivery. In NO1's answer there is a lack of agency and room for this kind of action. A plausible explanation for this view is that it changed as the project developed from being action-oriented to being more knowledge obtaining. At the time for our interview, NO1 omits one of the most important aspects of collaboration, which is joint action towards a goal (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020). Implying that conservative influences within the organisational structure are obstructing a more action-oriented approach, hence why NO1 uses sensegiving to influence the form of the process by constructing a narrative where their participation does not necessarily need to imply or lead to action, and sole participation is their end goal.

Another explanation can be that the projects ambiguity has proved to provide the opposite to creative ideas and such (Davenport & Leitch 2005), instead leading needs owners to adhere to hegemonic discourses and salient organisational goals to structure their participation in the project, in turn suppressing themselves unconsciously (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). When interviewing NO2's, they emphasise a different reason to their participation but the sensemaking process is the same as NO1:

We have a focus in our municipal department, and we also have a strategy linked to this very thing with district development, which means that we must be enablers. And by that we mean that it is not only the sum of the efforts we make that counts, but we can with our funds or our contacts or our arenas enable other actors to, so to speak, make efforts, run projects, meet needs that the resident has in their everyday life it is ours, then it is our approach, that is how we want to work.  
(NO2)

NO2 uses authoritative sensegiving and connects their organisational narrative and organisational goals to explain their participation in the Sopact project. They also emphasise resources as important when going into this and in general when they explain their role. Hence, in their answer, there is more potential for an action-oriented collaboration, which differs from NO1s. As a result, structural effects from



NO1 and NO2 differ and provide different influences where NO1 leans towards a more conservative influence where a routine response or action is good enough. On the other hand NO2 leans more towards a deliberative influence which makes actors more conscious of why they are doing certain things to be able to provide justifications for it, often a product of organisational settings with competing logics and demands (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

Another example can be found in NO4's interview. NO4 explains that in their municipal department there is more structure when working with innovation, demonstrating the variation of organising between municipal departments working with innovation. In their organisational hierarchy NO4 is third, meaning that there are two managers above them. In practice, NO4 has only the mandate to pick which ideas are good and may fit the municipal department needs, but afterwards, NO4 needs to present it to their manager, and the manager has another manager, and lastly, their departments committees make the ultimate decision on all innovation projects. While participating in the Sopact project, NO4 noticed that it varied within the departments and it got them to think more about it:

I have worked a lot with the social service department and there are completely different ways to work. And I noticed that when we talked, that they had a certain pot of money set aside, you had to fill in a document with an idea that you then raised in the management group. We do not have that at all, but it was like; Okay, which path should I take? Then one has to search a little. So [municipal departments] have built up different ways. I think it would have been good if it had been the same. (NO4)

The sensemaking process (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020) of NO3 is reflective, where they critically think about the differences between departments and what possibilities there are for them to get funding. Here, the lack of organisational structure opens possibilities for enabling sensemaking where NO4 is encouraged to create a new understanding to solve the issues presented to them. In NO4 sensemaking process there is much more consciousness of the situation presented because there are no pre-existing paths to take. Their sensemaking processes are also aided by the new context in which they were put, where they got the chance to gain increased knowledge about alternative ways of working in different departments. Even though NO4 ends the quote by hoping they could share the same ways of working, there is still a reflectiveness induced by participating in

the Sopact project because of the differences in the structures and organisation in the municipal departments.

### 6.3.2 Collaboration perspectives: a new role for the public sector

The interviews for this thesis were conducted in May 2020, at the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic. The public sector had to adapt quickly, affecting projects like Sopact in the sense that collaborations were put on hold, shifting focus to new needs for both local and state governments. When constructing the interview guide, we felt that it was important to address not only what the process had been like until then but also how the projects participants felt about the process at that specific time.

COVID-19 seen through the lens of systemic power is complex. When COVID-19 hit us, it disrupted work as we knew it. Automatic sensemaking responses are usually predictable accounts of what you should do in certain circumstances according to algorithms from specific discourses or narratives (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). When COVID-19 hit us, there were no longer any predictable accounts to adhere to. In this sense, COVID-19 prompted a more reflective sensemaking approach to solve the challenges that arose. From here, two influences could arise, deliberative influences or reformative influences. The first one where structures induce conscious processing and the other provisional processing.

Yes, but I think that right now we are in a very still, I should not say inactive, but very quiet period in that we have no activities, we have a few, but it is very very calm. Before Corona and Covid and so on, it was fully booked at [place] with activities and groups and associations and various actors. And there we have had contact with three of the innovators, where it has been a little more concrete to look at. So, it can be said that out of that need, to look at what happens in a place when residents and associations get involved, it is difficult now, because there is no one there. (NO3)

NO3 describes that there have been talks about collaborating with three different social entrepreneurs but that the pandemic has put a stop to that. Even though the pandemic induced reflective processing which could lead to new things, NO3 pinpoints that the loss of gatherings in a physical room is hindering for a successful collaboration with social entrepreneurs. In this sense, the pandemic has become

disabling to the project and this specific department need. Additionally, episodic power is in play here. When NO3 explains that before there was full of people in there while now it is empty, suppressing sensegiving is being done. NO3 is normalising the situation, explaining why a collaboration cannot take place, because it does not fit with pre-existing heuristics. NO3 does not come with alternative ways to keep on going with collaboration in a time of COVID-19, which disempowers rather than empowers this collaboration form.

I see in front of me that, of those we have contact with, that I want to continue to keep in touch [with them] and I want to continue to find entrances where we can do things, out of our needs. We are curious about what those who come with eyes from outside as well, and come there and see; what do they see? What do they see as a need? What opportunities do they see? So, there are collaborations. And collaborations are perhaps one thing, buying services is another. (NO3)

NO3 sees that there is still a chance for collaborations in the future, but the pandemic has affected NO3 decision-making, disabling projects, because it now makes sense to not meet due to the consequences it could bring to keep meeting and keeping business as usual. This also highlights the lack of reflection of alternative ways of collaboration at a testbed, revealing a vulnerability to both these kinds of collaborations and the need that needs solving from the department's perspective. Although NO3 sees potential collaborations in the future, it all depends on whether things go back to how they used to be, which we have seen is not the case since the pandemic is still active a year later. An interesting part of the quote above is the last sentence, where NO3 says "collaborations are perhaps one thing, buying services is another". This is a recurring theme in the interviews, showcasing current collaborative limits. There is an inherent organisational constraint in play, where buying a service from a social entrepreneur is unconventional and becomes unattainable within the organisational structure. NO3 builds on the quote saying:

Hiring to work with a concept or something like that, there are opportunities for that too. But I do not feel that we are very close to it with any of those we have. We are much closer to smaller assignments and to offer space, a context, a network and everything, to be able to start up their idea and get to test it as in, in reality. There we are close. (NO3)

What NO3 is conveying is that there is still a long way for them to buy a whole concept from a social entrepreneur, rather, they portray what they can provide to a

social entrepreneur in a collaboration. Providing space, network, context, etc, creates an enabling context for social entrepreneurs and their ideas. But here, we can also see that NO3 is using suppressive sensegiving (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). They are using pre-existing heuristics to make sense of how the collaboration may work rather than being open to something different. They are also using sensebreaking through the dismissive approach to what they believe they cannot offer right now.

The sensemaking processes carried here are algorithmic because there is rationalisation occurring (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020), but it is predictable, and there is a close link to hegemonic discourses shaping these statements. Working with social entrepreneurs is new for the departments, so when trying to make sense of their collaboration, needs owners process it through the reigning discourses within their organisations while still trying to accomplish something with the collaboration. Hence, serving as a facilitator surfaces as a viable answer.

Municipal departments are also well acquainted with the concept of collaborating with different actors and organisations to meet shared goals (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020), hence there is a risk for collaboration with social entrepreneurs to fall into this pre-existing category and for actors to adhere to pre-existing knowledge surrounding collaboration and actors they have pre-categorised. While working with social entrepreneurs involves the same aspects as collaborating with other actors, it is more complex and there is a need for new structures for it to work. Hence why using pre-existing measures which are either enabling or disabling may not be the same in this constellation, rather what is enabling in other types of collaboration processes may only be disabling working with social entrepreneurs. Here, sensemaking processes provide path dependency through the taken-for-granted responses, which point towards conservative influences rather than reformative ones (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

During the interviews collaborations were being categorised in pre-existing categories, but there are also examples of a more reflective sensemaking approach where this collaboration is being seen without the boundaries needs owners bring with them. This implies that the project itself could be a departure for redefining collaborations of these kind in the future:

I think it's important, this need to talk about social innovators, how we define and talk about it, what it can mean for us, and we may have talked a little casually about and called things that before. But I think we have learned, it has turned out that we, I think we still have a long way to go to how we can really work closely with social innovators, see the benefit of it in our business, in some way. Because I think there are a lot of areas we should work even more, but that as well as that many social innovators have found it difficult to get into the municipality and where to turn like this, so it is, has been, I think it is just as difficult from the other direction to really see when, where and how it would fit. (NO3)

The quote above portrays that different sensemaking processes are happening at the same time. There is a certain struggle between suppressive sensegiving and expansive sensegiving and between shaping effects as reflective processing is happening at the same time as algorithmic processing. Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020) explain that discursive structures that impede algorithmic sensemaking can enable and empower resources for reflective sensemaking. With an increased learning for key actors within the public sector, there is potential for a reconfiguration of knowledge which could lead to structural enabling change for collaborations with social entrepreneurs. Hence, why the intermediary's role is important. But it may still be a long way to go. While NO3 says that they have learnt much, another perspective shows that there is room for more learning in the municipal departments:

[...] I probably thought that the administrations would be more used to this way of working, which has turned out to be totally wrong. They have never worked this way. So, I must say that the collaboration has worked very well. But it has also been one, as big a journey for the developer, the project manager in the municipal department as it is for the recruited social entrepreneur. (IM3)

While social entrepreneurs learned about what it entails to develop a business and how the public sector works, the municipal department needs owners learned as much as they could just by participating in the project. IM3 means that this created a divide, because they did not expect that needs owners required the same knowledge to bring a fruitful collaboration. But if they did have lessons directed towards the municipal departments, it would have brought more opportunities for reflective processing, creating more space for other sensemaking practices that could be a potential catalyst for reformative action. But what happens when sensemaking as a result of participation in the project leads to conclusions that only

reinforces the notion of municipal departments not being the right place for social entrepreneurs? NO3 is not the only needs owner who portrayed these kinds of ideas. What particularly sets NO3 apart from others is that they see that there is more to learn on how to collaborate with social entrepreneurs within their current organisational structure. NO2 on the other hand, has been thinking a lot about apparent struggles which have surfaced throughout the life of the project and expresses the following:

[...] I think in a best-case scenario, we have an outcome where we have strengthened a number of innovators to actually be active in society. Maybe not necessarily with us as clients because I have, and this is also something I have fed back to the Sopact team, that I actually see the municipal departments here as a supportive party that should be able to convey and describe a need, but I think the arena for innovators to work towards is the whole society at large. [...] So, for me the best case is not whether we should exclusively benefit or establish a collaboration with a specific innovator, but rather that we are involved and contribute to the innovators getting the tools they need to have a functioning service in the market. (NO2)

In the quote above we can identify that NO2 has been reflecting about their role in relation to social entrepreneurs and in turn, the aim of the project. What sets NO2 apart from the rest of the needs owners is that NO2's reflection leads to a conclusion that does not entail a collaboration between the municipal department and a social entrepreneur, rather, NO2 sees their own role as a facilitator for the social entrepreneur. There is an inherent complexity in the sensemaking process being presented here. While NO2 is using sensebreaking consciously, by questioning their role in the project, their role as an municipal actor and the aim of the project itself, we can still see that some narratives are being imposed, which is more in line with authoritative sensegiving (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). Another way to understand this could be that the sensebreaking here is disguising as inspirational but is rather authoritative sensebreaking, which aims to discredit the established understanding of the project – the cross-collaboration in development and delivery of a socially innovative service. The role shift to a facilitator in terms of knowledge and contacts would discard the entrepreneurial role of the state, a role which the state is much better at according to Mazzucato (2013). But here, NO2 says that they are not necessarily a future employer or collaborator, rather they just want to facilitate:

I think that traditionally, the municipality often gets this role of being some form of purchaser and the other party then becomes a contractor and it is a classic LOU reasoning, that you procure a service because you have a need. But in this process, somewhere you polish on both needs and service along the way and based on my own experiences of this process, I think it can be a frustration for the innovators to rely on a few dedicated parties who will find themselves somewhere. [...] I think more that we are here as a knowledge partner, a support, but the innovator should feel free to take his job out, in the market and with the partners that you think are best. [...] We [municipal department] should not hamper that process by trying to find the right [collaboration form], I think it is important that the innovator both gets a mindset and gets contacts to be able to take their product further or their service further. (NO2)

NO2's sensemaking involves classifying themselves as knowledge bearers rather than opening up pathways for structural change within their organisations. NO2 explains in the quote above that inertia is the main reason for why they think that social entrepreneurs should be out there in society and seeking other, bigger and better opportunities for their ideas or businesses. NO2 further emphasises that the bureaucratic nature is a hindrance for innovation, furthering the false dichotomy of the public sector and the private sector as Mazzucato (2013) puts it. Hence, it becomes clear that there is a shaping mechanism in play here, a discourse and false dichotomy, which has induced a disabling factor for NO2 and shaped their sensemaking processes, which in turn affects social entrepreneurs. The shaping effects can be used as a pretext to exert negative episodic power, where potential collaborations are already deemed to fail due to the constraints that NO2 has identified. On the other hand, if NO2 is affected by systemic power unknowingly and NO2 has internalised the dichotomy of public versus public sector and that inertia is a hindrance to innovation, then there is a need for systemic change which links back to the importance of political aims and investment. Regardless of which, systemic power shapes NO2's sensemaking of their participation in the Sopact project, what their role as a representative from the local government is and therefore also what kind of collaboration they construct with social entrepreneurs and other partners.

## 6.4 Social entrepreneurs: participation conditions and perspectives on collaboration

In this section social entrepreneurs perspectives will be explored and provides the other side of the coin regarding participation in the project. While needs owners perspectives are more linked with power in sensemaking processes, social entrepreneurs are affected by it. Thus, social entrepreneurs perspective differ from needs owners. Hence, the analysis focuses on social entrepreneurs participation conditions and their perspectives on collaboration, two matters which are inherently linked.

### 6.4.1 Conditions and expectations: fighting an uphill battle

In the interviews with social entrepreneurs, it becomes clear that doing what they do is hard, but they all have a passion for it. The social entrepreneurs within the Sopact process are a diverse group. Age, nationality, gender, education, and work experience varies, making them a group with vastly different reasons for participating within the Sopact project. All of these influence each social entrepreneur, giving them a range of driving forces to keep on working and developing their innovations. Even when their driving force differs, they find a bond in their joint desire to make things better for others.

All these characteristics may affect participating conditions and expectations in the Sopact project, but one characteristic that they all share and that we can see has an impact in the outcome expectations of the Sopact project is that they cannot participate in the project without having a main occupation which produces an income. All social entrepreneurs that are participating in the project have a main occupation besides Sopact, which is logical since Sopact does not provide them an income. The social entrepreneurs must therefore have another way to provide for themselves, making it an unwritten condition for their participation in the project.

Depending on where the social entrepreneurs were in their entrepreneurial journey, their expectations, and thoughts about participation in the project varied. Sensemaking processes for social entrepreneurs are also more reflective in nature



(Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020), something that can be attributed to their participation in the Sopact project.

Some of the social entrepreneurs had already developed ideas. SE1, consisting of three social entrepreneurs that previously participated in the Sopact accelerator programme, gained knowledge about tools, the Swedish public sector and had already established contacts within the municipality, making them one of the more advanced entrepreneurs in the project. During our interview they explain that even though they had all that knowledge, they still felt they lacked knowledge about how to establish a company in Sweden, which was their main reason to continue onto A need's driven learning process:

[...] You feel that the time we give to a process is also, this was going to be a very lengthy process. So, I think in the end it was a conversation I remember we had so many times that, we do not know if we can give so much time. But I think at least from what I see, the fact that there were administrations involved this time and this was more a full collaborative process with the city and with other actors that it just made sense for us to be there and to be a part of this. But we did have reservations in the beginning [laugh]. SE1

In the quote above the group of social entrepreneurs' reason around the pro's and con's of joining the follow-up to the accelerator. But the most important aspect of their answer is that they have high expectations regarding collaboration with municipal departments. Having already conducted a pilot of their idea, they expected a faster path to a partnership or a potential procurement of their service from a municipal department. Later in the interview, SE1 said that the project did not meet these expectations in this regard, that they expected more coaching and results in establishing a collaboration. The collaborative process with their matched department was slow and at the time of our interview, they still did not know if there was going to be any collaboration at all. Another example of this is given by SE3, they explain that they were expecting more action regarding collaboration with the needs owners and municipal departments. Saying that they started to get a feeling that their idea was not good enough, they felt their idea fell through the cracks:

Both high and low, I would say. I would probably have expected to see a little more result, I would probably have expected that we would actually have a collaboration with the city of Helsingborg [...] I guess I just generally feel that I have spent a lot of time on this and maybe time that has been invested there, yes, I feel like I did not really get what I wanted to get out of it and... I was not looking to get an

education in how cities worked, I was looking to get a collaboration and it feels like I got an education and not a collaboration. (SE3)

Like SE1, SE3 was ahead and had other needs from their participation in the Sopact project. SE3 expectations were to be able to conduct business right away and therefore, had other expectations regarding the form of collaboration. When SE3 makes sense of why this happened and why they did not get a collaboration with the city, they state that it is not the Sopact teams' fault, rather they present the dichotomy between the private and public sector as the reason for this not working out as they expected. This instance of algorithmic processing and discursive effects (ibid.) is used by the social entrepreneur to make sense of their situation, they rationalise the lack of collaboration with public sector inertia (Ahrne & Papakostas 2001). Most interesting is that sensegiving is done by the entrepreneurs themselves. This emphasises the power of hegemonic discourses and how algorithmic responses can be achieved through the use of suppressive sensegiving (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020). Meaning that the individual supplies a plausible explanation to the lack of collaboration themselves. SE3 has a background in the private sector, so it is natural that they would compare their experience in the Sopact project with what they know, and it may be that the discourse on the private sector being faster and less bureaucratic is strong.

Collaboration has many definitions and many of them have joint action towards a goal as one prerequisite for collaboration (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020), which could be a plausible explanation for social entrepreneurs' expectations for concrete action. Another reason can be linked to the entrepreneurs' hope of fully investing in their enterprises. The entrepreneurs who had a more defined idea or enterprise had more pent-up frustration in themselves, a frustration which they attributed to the amount of work they had to do while not getting enough back from their hard work towards a potential partnership with the municipal department. An example of this is in the interview with SE8:

Yes, it has made me a little angry at times. And it has nothing to do with Sopact, it is experiences they also do; how does this work and what should we do...? And I have had a very open dialogue with [intermediary] so that it is not Sopact's fault at all, but this is the way we must go, this is where the obstacles are and that is why nothing happens. So, this wound is exactly what needs to be worked on and there I can feel that; am I the right person to do it? I'm not sure. I thought I was perhaps more when I started. And it can be a relief to say that; 'No, but I do this, and I can offer it, but I cannot go in and fight with

the administrations at that level.’ [...] And there comes the perseverance. And I do not have it. [...] But running there for meetings and it just alternates around and it's so little money so it's completely ridiculous, I have to say. It makes me angry. How much we work, both we and Sopact, for a small penny if you think about what the departments have. (SE8)

The quote above was chosen because it represents several issues that came up across the interviews. It portrays that there is an innate disabling nature in the collaboration with the departments. Sopact is providing enabling factors and pathways to collaboration but that problems lie elsewhere. It also portrays the frustration that social entrepreneurs hold because they lack of funding. And lastly, it shows patience and perseverance as a key attribute to be able to keep fighting as a social entrepreneur. This quote is part of an answer to the question “what is the most important thing you take with you from your participation in the Sopact project?”. SE8 says that the question is rather complex and that there are two different questions here, dividing the question in twofold, one where SE8 reflects upon their own achievements within the project and the other part being their own conclusions surrounding the project, which is not that good. There is rich generative sensemaking here by SE8 because they take a lot into consideration when answering the question. SE8 is using reflective sensemaking to organise how things have gone, and even though they see the good, they also present the downsides to the overpowering shaping effects that can be found within the department’s organisation, creating negative consequences for social entrepreneurs and potential partnerships.

#### 6.4.2 Collaboration perspectives: building beneficial relationships

While understanding the underlying factors that affect how participants expectations of the project and cross-sectoral collaboration is important, it lacks the dimension of how collaboration took place in practice. Social entrepreneurs’ perspective on the collaboration with municipal departments within the Sopact project differs from the needs owners perspectives, and as mentioned earlier, most entrepreneurs also had an idea that the collaborations would be action-oriented.

When social entrepreneurs were asked to describe their collaborations with the departments, they often said that the collaboration was more like building a relationship and networking. To SE1, a collaboration entails a transaction:

**I:** So, what are the advantages or benefits of your collaboration would you say?

**SE1:** What do you guys think? We really cannot talk about collaboration now. There is no collaboration until today because we do not have a contract, we do not have anything. So...

**I:** How would you describe what you guys are doing?

**SE1:** Networking.

**I:** Networking?

**SE1:** Yeah, now we are still in the networking phase.

**I:** Ok.

**IP3:** Because there is no serious talk, we never talk about prices, we never talk about money. [NO] mentioned contract two times, one of the times, but yeah...

When sensemaking collaboration SE3 equals collaboration with a serious conversation and a contract for a transaction of service. In SE3's case, they want to sell their services to the department, to fill the departments need with their target group. In the quote, there seems to have been a more casual approach in the interactions between the entrepreneurs and department, putting them in a position where collaboration has not yet taken place.

Mostly the difference is that the entrepreneurs that had a more concrete idea had a higher threshold for what they would consider a collaboration. Still, the entrepreneurs who did not have a concrete idea never said themselves that there was collaboration. Hence, the threshold for social entrepreneur's idea of collaboration seems more connected to action in general. Collaboration perspective may differ, some collaboration literature infers that joint action is key in collaboration (Osei-Kojo, Bawole & Sakyi 2020), on the other hand Huxham states that beneficial relationships are at least a collaborative advantage (Huxham 2003). The problem in the Sopact case is that there might have had an underlying action-orientation which instead got hampered by conservative influences, systemic power shaping effects through authoritative sensegiving and sensebreaking mechanisms. This means that social entrepreneurs find themselves in the reflective part of the quadrant (Figure 1, p. 17) and use sensebreaking mechanisms that question explanations and salient goals used by needs owners (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

This creates a dilemma, because sometimes we find needs owners in the same square as the social entrepreneurs but needs owners are mostly located in the lower left part of the quadrant, in the algorithmic processing square (Figure 1). This becomes problematic when social entrepreneurs find themselves thinking that they could be colleagues with the needs owners, but this picture may not always match reality. During our interview, SE7 says that they found out that the needs owners who they worked with talked about them [social entrepreneurs] as someone they needed to teach, portraying themselves as mentors. SE7 describes a difference in how they see each other and collaborations, saying:

[...] So, I got to read about the departments view of ourselves and it was a little different than one could think. It was positive it is not that. But I'm a part of it and I think we're a team, like we do it together and you see each other's strengths and so on while they see us as uncut diamonds, that they help us. (SE7)

This quote portrays that these competing perspectives could affect trust between actors, which is important when collaborating (Huxham 2003). Huxham (ibid.) finds that trust is not always there, rather suspicion is more often found. Hence why building trust is very important to collaboration and why it should be treated as an important feature. In the interviews, trust is a subject that some have talked about more than others, but it has not been addressed as being an important feature. Although some entrepreneurs have mentioned that they feel they have a good relationship and that they felt they could reach out to needs owners, this was not something that needs owners themselves touched upon, portraying yet another difference between these groups. Two examples of trust being mentioned can be found in SE4 and SE2.

So, for example I'm working with [municipal department] and we have a good relation, I think from day one we kind of clicked and since then I think, every time we have a meeting, it seems that we are on the same boat, we agree and it's easy to work with them, because there's a trust, I think, which is very important in a collaboration. And there's a good relation, so, I would say both a good relation and trust. It's what characterizes this collaboration. (SE4)

At the time for our interview, the actual collaboration was on pause due to corona restrictions affecting the entrepreneur a lot more, since their idea seems to involve physical presence. The collaboration between SE4 and the respective department had therefore stagnated at the stage of showing interest for it. But one interesting

aspect of the quote above is the emphasis on trust. There is trust, therefore SE4 considers a potential collaboration likely to succeed. SE2 on the other hand has a rocky relationship with the municipal departments which has impacted trust. In our interview, they explain that they felt that almost every meeting with the department went bad due to their background, saying that the biggest obstacle for collaboration with their respective department is trust:

It is probably trust, that [collaboration] takes a long time. But I also understand that, not according to law but according to the rules or unwritten rules that they have... [background] ... And I do not have it yet. That's probably why I think it's the way it is. But I do not know.  
(SE2)

SE2 and SE4 are opposites in their views on collaboration, showing that the project itself cannot erase other aspects that each individual takes with them. Circumstances such as background, levels of education and even age could be a factor that leads to either enabling or disabling paths towards successful collaborations. The factors can either be linked to systemic power through discourses, but it can also be linked to needs owners episodic power and what they think is right or not, or rather what they construct as being desirable or eligible for enabling pathways forward. This shows us that the paths both towards the needs owners and through the needs owners are narrow.

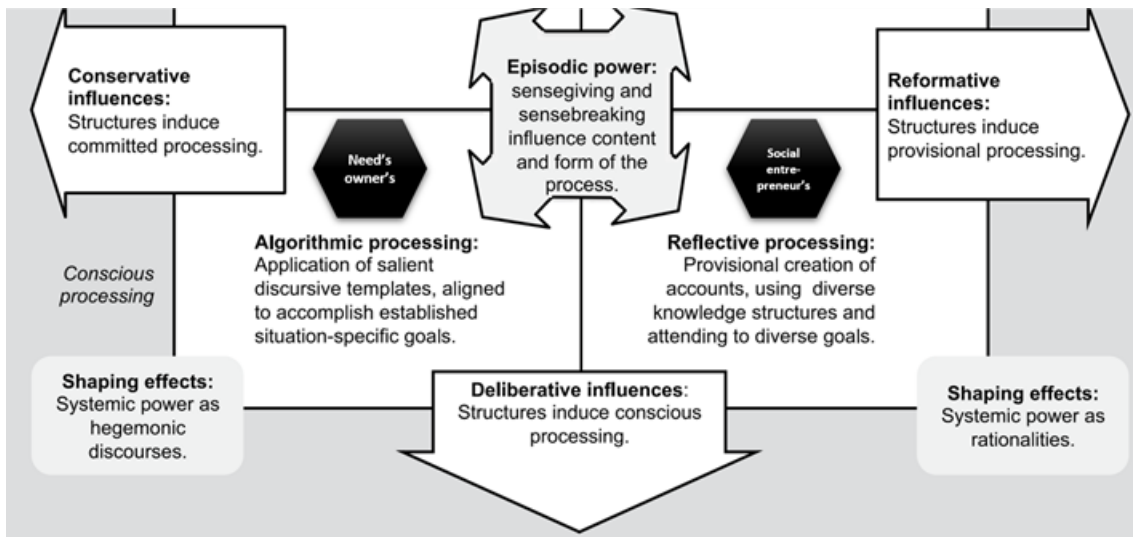
## 7 Conclusion

In this qualitative case study, 23 interviews were conducted with Sopact project participants and 20 of them were analysed with a theoretical framework of power in sensemaking processes. The aim was to explore how different power mechanisms shape sensemaking in this unique case of cross-sectoral collaboration revolving around the development of social innovation collaborations. The analysis focused on the contextual setting of the Sopact project, the organisation of the project and, the municipal departments and entrepreneurs' conditions and perspectives on collaboration. Thus, this thesis answers four questions: (RQ1) How is the Sopact project organised and what has affected the organising of it? (RQ2) How do the Sopact project participants make sense of their participation and collaboration in the project? (RQ3) What power effects can be found in the Sopact case and how does power affect the project? and, (RQ4) What power related consequences can be found within the Sopact case?

When it comes to organising, ambiguity and no former paths to rely on have potential to both enable and disable collaboration (Davenport & Leitch 2005). This study helps to portray why disabling or enabling organising may occur and what affects the enabling and disabling paths. The answers to all the research questions are intertwined because they are all affected by sensemaking processes. Figure 3, which is an adaptation of Figure 1 by Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen (2020), positions needs owners and social entrepreneurs in their respective squares. Social entrepreneurs are usually found in the right square because the Sopact project provides room for reflective processing, where systemic power such as hegemonic discourses can be questioned through episodic power influences from intermediaries and the entrepreneurs themselves. Needs owners on the other hand are usually located in the left square, where they are affected by organisational discourses and are more conservative towards change. They differ from Sopact and the social entrepreneurs, because needs owners have conservative influences

stemming from organisational structures and the established goals they need to adhere to.

Figure 3 - Needs owners and social entrepreneurs in sensemaking processes squares (Adapted from Figure 1)



The needs owners positioning in the left square poses many implications for the project. One of them is that hegemonic discourses and conservative organisational structures (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020) influence needs owners in a restrictive manner, thus restricting collaborations with social entrepreneurs. Though needs owners restrictions may be negative for this kind of collaboration, intermediaries help counteract this. Sopact is an extra-preneurship space that aids social innovation processes in cross-sectoral collaborations. But Sopact itself is not providing organising and change, rather it is the intermediary role.

In the interviews it becomes evident that the intermediary role is key to the project's survival and to reach change, because the intermediary role does not only bridge the gap between sectors, rather it provides room for reflective processing which serves to contend hegemonic discourses which hinder collaboration and accordingly, change. The shift from the project's predecessor to focus more on collaborations between social entrepreneurs and municipal departments made the role of the intermediary come forward as essential to keep the project going. Consequently, intermediaries do not only manage the project, they also induce sensemaking and sensebreaking processes which contests the needs owners algorithmic processing (Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

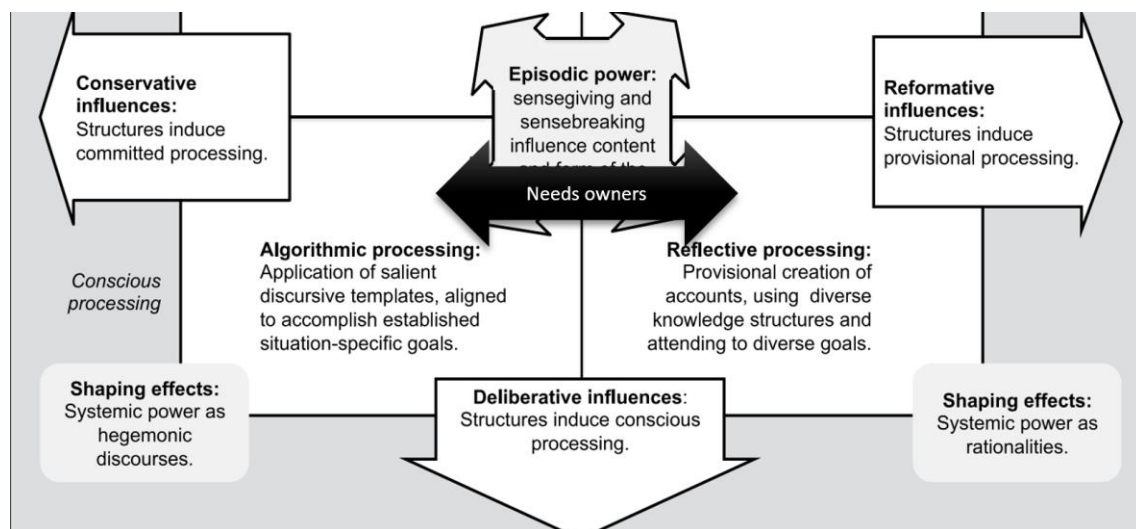
The differences in how departments and entrepreneurs view collaboration are likely related to the conditions for participation which are reflected in their different



positions in the quadrant (Figure 3). Although needs owners mostly engage in sensemaking processes adhering to the left quadrant, there are also instances in which needs owners cross over to the right quadrant. An opportunity to cross between sensemaking processes is what the Sopact project provides for the needs owners. Even though needs owners mostly engage in algorithmic processing when they make decisions, they still demonstrate that the project has given them new reflections about what collaborations could take place and how to make it happen in the future.

An example is found in the needs development, which highlights that there is both a movement between logics along with discourses and power mechanisms that create a complexity when moving between sensemaking processes. Consequently, the reflective space in which Sopact is located and the needs owners capacity to leap between algorithmic sensemaking and hegemonic discourses and reflective sensemaking opens for reflective and questioning opportunities that they would normally not be provided within their organisational setting and structure. This enables possible paths for change (Figure 4). This finding demonstrates the need for extra-preneurship spaces and intermediaries when working with these types of collaboration. Here, the Sopact project becomes a relevant example for other cases where cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation is happening but where change is not being reached. It provides a concrete example of not only the practical work intermediaries do when organising the project, but rather their inference in providing space for the development of paths that can lead to change.

Figure 4 - Needs owners and social entrepreneurs in sensemaking processes squares. (Adapted from Figure 1)



The consequences found in this study relate to the differences in how systemic power shapes sensemaking processes, making collaboration hard to both conceive and for the different parts to understand each other. This is yet another reason why the Sopact project and intermediary role is important, and more interactions of reflective nature could be encouraged to highlight the shaping mechanisms that needs owners are restrained by. A more active approach to decipher these constraints could therefore be beneficial for cross-sectoral collaborations, to jointly find enabling pathways for successful collaborations.

Additionally, there is an implicit role change from providers to facilitators, that was identified in some of the interviews with needs owners. While this specific theme needs further research to provide more description, one interpretation of this phenomenon could be a result of the leaps between the sides of the quadrant (Figure 4). Due to the restraining and conservative nature of their organisations while having to accommodate to the established goals (in this case the established goal being to find new ways to provide services), the facilitator role can be seen as a coping strategy which fits into the organisational mould at the same time as help to develop ideas is provided. Previous research shows that the role of the welfare state is changing, presumably, the local government being impacted as well. Hence why hypothetically, this could be seen as a natural progression for local governments.

While this study has been able to apply Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen's (2020) framework of power in sensemaking processes to the Sopact case, most of the analysis used the lower part of the quadrant (Figure 1). An important addition to this framework is the mechanism that allows actors to move between sensemaking processes. This identification provides an additional level to the framework and the analysis, why adding a level of episodic power which can act as a relocator means that actors are not constrained in each quadrant. This is in line with the logic behind sensemaking and power mechanisms and relational ontology of this study (Clegg 1989; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005; Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006; Langley & Tsoukas 2010; Schildt, Mentere & Cornelissen 2020).

For further research, a more in-depth study with a perspective grounded in the theoretical framework rather than a single case study would benefit to uncover the nuances in sensemaking processes within cross-sectoral collaborations and social innovation. Interview questions would have benefitted from targeting situations where power in sensemaking processes is conducted and also further

exploring organisational shaping mechanisms and hegemic discourses. Although the rich dataset provided enough to explore the case, future research could further explore how sensemaking processes and power play a role in social innovation collaborations where the scope is larger than one case.

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# 8 Appendices

## 8.1 Appendix A

### Consent document in English

#### **Information for interviewees in reports and research studies linked to “Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess”**

We would like to interview you within the framework of Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess, conducted by Sopact at Socialhögskolan, Lund University with funding from Vinnova, the City of Helsingborg and Lund University. Lund University is the head of research and ultimately responsible for the project.

#### **Short information about Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess**

For 24 months, starting January 1, 2019, Sopact runs a project aimed at promoting social entrepreneurship and strengthening social innovation support. The project is a joint learning process around four test environments that are established based on identified societal challenges at four administration offices in the City of Helsingborg. The test environments are based on real needs and to the project we have matched social innovators, i.e. intrapreneurs, researchers and students to give them an opportunity to iterate their societal improvement ideas. The aim of the project is to develop scalable processes, methods and strategies that can be applied and hopefully implemented locally, regionally and nationally. An important part of the learning process is the ongoing documentation that is carried out in the form of notes, observations, agendas, presentations and more, in order to create a further understanding and new knowledge. This is part of developing results and insights to disseminate through physical meeting places and digital channels, with the aim of contributing to a strengthened innovation system as well as more social innovations coming into use in society.

#### **Your participation**

We want to interview you because you have been involved in Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess. Starting in April, we will conduct interviews with participating innovators, the needs owner group, the steering committee, and some of our knowledge partners. The interviews aim is to deepen the knowledge surrounding the Sopact process to strengthen the social innovation system. Your participation as a research person in reports and studies is important for us to share your specific experiences and perceptions.

#### **What does it mean for you to participate in the study?**

The interview conducted in conversation form is estimated to take about one hour and will primarily be conducted at Campus Helsingborg. Online interviews are conducted through Zoom if necessary. We base the interviews and studies on ethically correct

principals that research developed by the Swedish Research Council. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to withdraw your participation or refrain from answering certain questions at any time, without giving any reason. If you have no objections, we will record the interview and then print it verbatim. No unauthorized person will take part of the recorded interview or printout and find out what you have said. In the articles and reports that are published, any quotes and accounts of your interview will be anonymized. Your name, specific position or other information that can be linked to you as a person will not be stated unless you have clearly stated this yourself. If you wish, we can send the printout of the interview to you so you can read through and possibly adjust it.

#### **Information on the results of the study**

The study's results will be presented in a popular scientific article or report by Sopact, a master's thesis and other scientific articles. The results will also be presented and discussed in various forums and conferences. How this should be done is determined during the process.

#### **Handling of collected data**

No unauthorized person will receive your answers. Audio files, printings and consent forms are then stored in the archives safe deposit box at the university. Digitized data is stored in an encoded space at the University's disposal. Only the project's employees have access to this data. After ten years, the data is deleted.

Lund university is responsible for personal data collected and processed in accordance with the EU Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, Article 6 e). According to GDPR, you have the right to access the data handled in the study free of charge and, if necessary, to correct any errors. If you have questions about the EU's data protection regulation, you can contact Lund University 's data protection representative via the email address [dataskyddsbud@lu.se](mailto:dataskyddsbud@lu.se) or via telephone exchange 046-222 00 00.

#### **Questions and more information?**

If you have any questions, please contact me at [amanda.ricketts@soch.lu.se](mailto:amanda.ricketts@soch.lu.se)  
Jenny Nyström at [jenny.nystrom@soch.lu.se](mailto:jenny.nystrom@soch.lu.se)  
or other employees at Sopact or researchers connected to the project.

**Primarily responsible for the study** Marcus Knutagård, Deputy Head of the School of Social Work School of Social Work, Lund University. Address: Box 23, 221 00 Lund Tel + 46 73-062 66 82 E-mail: [marcus.knutagard@soch.lu.se](mailto:marcus.knutagard@soch.lu.se)

#### **Other participants in the project**

Magnus Adenskog, samverkansansvarig Campus Helsingborg and affiliated researcher of School of Social Work

Jan Abrahamsson, verksamhetsledare Sopact Jenny Nyström, projektkoordinator Sopact Amanda Ricketts, projektassistent Sopact

#### **Consent to participate in reports and studies linked to Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess**

I have been given oral and written information about the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain the written information.

**I agree to** participate in reports and studies linked to Sopact – En behovsdriven lärprocess

**I agree** that information about me as well as the recording and transcript of the interview with me will be processed in the manner described in the research presentation.

.....

Date

.....

Signature

## 8.2 Appendix B

### Social entrepreneurs interview guide in English

1. Tell me about yourself and your company/idea/project.
  - a. Did you have a company/idea/project before Sopact?
  - b. Where were you in the developing process at that stage?
2. What is your driving force?
  - a. What does your path look like here? Please describe.
3. What characteristics do you think are needed to be a social entrepreneur?
4. Why did you apply to Sopact?
  - a. What is your experience with the Sopact-process until now?
  - b. Is there a big difference to when you worked with your idea/project/company before joining Sopact?
  - c. Would you have worked with your company/idea/project without you participating in Sopact?
  - d. Have there been any upsides (positive aspects) to your participation in the Sopact-process?
  - e. Have there been any downsides (negative aspects) to your participation in the Sopact-process?
  - f. What is the most important thing you will take with you from your participation in the Sopact-process?
5. What do you think about the physical environment's role in your work with new ideas?
  - a. If you think back over your time within the Sopact-process, what kind of physical locations have you attended to?
6. Now, if we go back the whole way to the start of the Sopact-process, could you describe what your thoughts were on a possible best case/worst case scenario outcome regarding your project?
  - a. What do you think about the process and where you are now?

- b. What do you think about the future of your idea/company/project?
7. How do you feel/think about your collaboration/working together with Helsingborg city?
    - a. Describe the collaboration between you and the representant of Helsingborg city.
    - b. How has the communication between you been like? Please describe.
    - c. What were the advantages/benefits of your collaboration?
    - d. What were the downsides or challenges with your collaboration?
  8. How do you feel your idea has been received by Helsingborg city?
    - a. How do you think it has been received in relation to other ideas coming from employees within the municipality?
  9. Sopact is working in the fields of the public, private as well as the civil society sector. Would you say there are any differences between those sectors? And if so; which are these?
  10. What is the most important thing you as an innovator have learned under the Sopact-process?
  11. Do you feel the process has contributed with knowledge regarding social entrepreneurship and social innovation? [Öppen fråga, utveckla svar – ställ följdfrågor]
    - a. If yes: how has the Sopact-process contributed to this knowledge?
    - b. If it has not: what would you have wished more of?
  12. Do you think that the process has contributed with knowledge about the public sector? [Öppen fråga, utveckla svar – ställ följdfrågor]
    - a. If yes: how has the Sopact-process contributed to this knowledge?
    - b. If it has not: what would you have wished more of?
  13. Is there anything during or within the Sopact-process that has made a special impression on you? [Öppen fråga, utveckla svar – ställ följdfrågor]
  14. Has your idea been affected in some way by the Sopact-process and the way of working with public administrations such as SOF/VOF/AMF/SFF?

15. Will you keep working with your idea/company/project even after the Sopact-process has ended?
16. Will you keep working with Helsingborg city even after the Sopact-process has ended?
17. During the Sopact-process, you have worked with many different tools. What do you think about these?
18. There have been several participants, you included, among the group of innovators and needs owners. What do you think about this process and more specifically the relationship between working by yourselves or in a group?
  - a. How did you experience the meetings with potential collaborators when also other innovators were present?
  - b. Pros and cons with these meetings?
19. How do you perceive the local/regional innovation system? How does this relate to Sopact and yourself?
20. Is there anything that you still find hard to understand or not quite clear and that you think needs to be more focused upon?
21. COVID-19 has required many big changes and challenges for our society, locally, nationally and globally. Has this meant any changes for you and your idea/company/project?
  - a. In the long term, do you believe this can affect your idea/company/project? If so, how?
  - b. Do you see any connections between this current development and social innovations at large?
22. *Last question:* If you take a helicopter perspective, what role do you think social entrepreneurs fill in society in general and/or in the public sector more specifically?
  - a. Why is it (social entrepreneurship) important to invest in?
23. Is there anything we haven't asked you about that you would like to add?

## 8.3 Appendix C

### Interviewees

Social entrepreneur or enterprise (SE)	Intermediaries (IM)	Need owners (NO)	Steering committee (SC)
SE1	IM1	NO1	SC1
SE2	IM2	NO2	SC2
SE3	IM3	NO3	SC3
SE4		NO4	SC4
SE5			SC5
SE6			
SE7			
SE8			