"Innovate Integration"

The Impact of Malmö's Social Innovations on Sustainable Development Goals through Immigrant Labor Inclusion

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Abstract

Integrating immigrants into the labor market is a challenge for the city of Malmö, impacting its performance to achieve Sustainable Development Goals related to Decent Jobs and Reduced Inequalities. This thesis explores the role of 3 social innovations in addressing this challenge, guided by the Multi-Level Perspective. The research explores unique approaches these enterprises apply to create employment opportunities and foster social inclusion, thus contributing to the achievement of relevant SDG goals. The findings indicate considerable impact of these niche innovations on relevant SDG targets, as well as their common challenges such as inconsistent funding, cultural lock-ins, and regulatory complexities. The research offers recommendations to support and improve the role of these initiatives in integration of immigrants into Malmö's labor market. It concludes by highlighting the necessity of strategic support and policy adjustments to optimize the impact of social innovations, providing insights for other cities grappling with similar integration challenges.

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Social Innovations

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Integration Inequalities

Economic Integration

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My best friends, whose love remains steadfast across the miles that separate us.

All the immigrants,

Who compressed their humble lives into small suitcases, too small to contain all loved ones

Who traversed roads, climbed mountains, swam seas and overcame stigmas

Yet never gave up on their dreams of a better, normal life

And to Tehran, the city that still claims my soul,

The place I will forever call home…

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1 Introduction

1.1 Migration, integration, and connections to sustainability

Migration plays a crucial role in sustainable development, driving progress while also presenting challenges. Migrants contribute to social change, improve job markets, and foster cultural interactions, benefiting both the communities they come from and the ones they settle in (Bastia et al., 2020; Franco Gavonel et al., 2021). However, challenges like reduced job access and social barriers can stem from improper integration, which can contribute to segregation. This can exacerbate unemployment, underemployment, and vulnerability, particularly among the immigrants living in poorer regions (Bastia et al., 2020). Innovative global initiatives have been pivotal for integrating immigrants into the workforce, as seen through Amsterdam's holistic coaching approach, Germany's efforts to foster unified integration strategies through establishing a connecting platform between federal and state governance, and a program in Luxembourg that focuses on local governance for job market inclusion (OECD, 2020). Models suggested by these initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of personalized support, cross-regional cooperation, and participatory governance in promoting immigrant employment (OECD, 2020). This highlights the importance of inclusive and rights-based strategies to fully harness the advantages of migration to strengthen sustainability and integration beyond merely economic adjustments (Bastia et al., 2020; Franco Gavonel et al., 2021).

Integration is the inclusion of migrants into the host society's various sectors, aiming for mutual benefits and social harmony (IOM, 2019). Ager and Strang (2008) describe it as more than just moving to a new place, but to full and fair inclusion of newcomers in all areas of life in their new community, which involves interactions between migrants and the local population. Assimilation on the other hand is a contested concept that reflects the varied experiences of migrants and their host communities. In this process, migrants may lose some of their ethnic characteristics to match the prevailing cultures and norms leading to better mental health and educational achievements, which could also expose them to riskier behaviors (Ager & Strang, 2008; Greenman & Xie, 2008). In addition, Ager and Strang (2008) highlight fundamental areas of integration that encompass societal benefits such as job opportunities, accommodation, learning, and well-being, noting principles like entitlements and nationality, along with mechanisms that foster interpersonal bonds within and among societies.

1.2 Social innovations as drivers of sustainable development

Social innovations are essential for the long-term resilience of societies, as they introduce fresh concepts, goods, services, and frameworks that not only cater to social needs but also cultivate new social connections and partnerships, enhancing the ability of society to take action (Eichler & Schwarz, 2019). Social innovations, which propose novel ideas for societal advancement, reshape behaviors to address societal obstacles and are especially effective in assisting immigrants in entering the job market. A few examples include social innovations that focus on immigrant entrepreneurship, leveraging social capital, and offering essential support mechanisms that can boost urban economies and social cohesion, create job opportunities, and foster community integration (Babu et al., 2020; Eichler & Schwarz, 2019; Gupta et al., 2020; Hoppe & De Vries, 2018). While social innovations provide valuable solutions, their complexities and potential drawbacks must be acknowledged. Effective implementation often requires extensive cross-sectoral collaboration and presents challenges in accurately measuring social impact. Ethical concerns may arise from business models that fail to deliver tangible quality improvements, and financial sustainability remains a significant issue as socially oriented policies may struggle to adapt over time. Moreover, although social capital can encourage risk-taking, it may also impede innovation by limiting the influx of new ideas within organizations (Osburg & Schmidpeter, 2013).

Nevertheless, in light of concerns about individualism and reduced public resources, new economic models focused on social cooperation are suggested to tackle these issues (Avelino et al., 2019). These models are increasingly echoed in policy dialogues across the European Union, underlining social innovations as crucial to address societal challenges with their diverse, interconnected, and wicked nature (Avelino et al., 2019). Social innovations are also valuable tools for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in fostering sustainable job growth, improving productivity, and establishing equitable partnerships that encourage inclusivity. They ensure that economic progress benefits all segments of society, especially marginalized groups (Eichler & Schwarz, 2019; Ruszkai et al., 2021). Numerous innovations centered around communities are specifically designed to tackle local hurdles, thus amplifying their efficiency and endurance (Ruszkai et al., 2021).

Social innovations play a critical role in the realm of immigrant integration in the job market, by establishing inclusive work environments, offering tailored trainings, fostering connections and mentorship, and encouraging immigrant entrepreneurship. These initiatives can optimize the skills of immigrants, enhance employment prospects, and facilitate systemic integration enhancements (Baltagi et al., 2018; Eroğlu, 2018; Kerr et al., 2015).

1.3 Migration and labor market integration dynamics in the European Union

The EU's migrant population is substantial and growing, with 8% born outside the EU and 10% of young people having at least one non-EU born parent (EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.Pdf, n.d.). This population faces considerable economic challenges, with 26% living in relative poverty compared to 16% of the native-born population—a disparity more pronounced in longstanding European destinations like Sweden (OECD & European Commission, 2023). Despite ranking among the top ten countries globally for migrant integration policies (Solano et al., 2020), Sweden continues to struggle with challenges in implementing "SDGs 8" and "SDG 10" given the rising socio-economic inequalities among migrants (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021).

Although Sweden saw a slight decrease in migrant poverty over the last decade, significant gaps persist, exacerbated by educational disparities and employment conditions, with working migrants twice as likely as native-born to be below the poverty line, as shown in Figure 1. This underscores the need for comprehensive policies to improve migrants' economic integration and social inclusion, including unstable employment issues (OECD & European Commission, 2023).
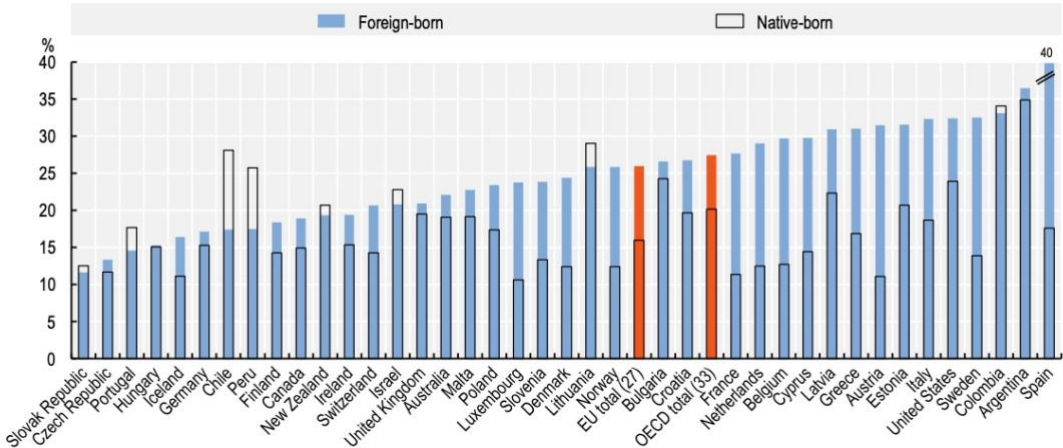
Figure 1: Relative poverty rates of foreign-born versus native-born population of 16-year-olds and above, across OECD countries in 2020 (OECD & European Commission, 2023)

1.4 Malmö's social innovations as important integration hubs

The city of Malmö faces multiple challenges in integrating immigrants into its labor market. High proportion of migrants in the city's population is one of the key challenges, as 40% of Malmö's residents come from foreign background (Malmö stad, 2024). This is as well highlighted in the Malmö city policies, which focus on integration and participation through work and self-support, drawing on

the results of 2016 investigations on the reception of asylum seekers and new arrivals (Malmö stad, 2022).

Integrating immigrant workers into the job market in Malmö's multicultural urban environment, serves a dual purpose and is deemed essential for community well-being. Through cultivating social connections among diverse groups, this approach not only builds social capital—encompassing bonds, bridges, and links that foster a sense of belonging and enhance mental health—but also facilitates access to job opportunities (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kerr et al., 2015). This, in turn, boosts the city's vibrancy and resilience. Furthermore, these efforts can tackle significant employment barriers, such as the recognition of international qualifications and acquiring local work experience, while fostering inclusive workplaces and providing targeted training programs. This comprehensive approach is key to empowering immigrants and enriching the community fabric of Malmö (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kerr et al., 2015). This research explores the impact of such initiatives on economic integration and their contribution to sustainable development, providing strategies to achieve objectives outlined in "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kerr et al., 2015).

Within this study, I examine three specific social innovations in Malmö that actively involve immigrants and facilitate their transition into the Swedish job market, and support the achievement of relevant SDGs in Malmö. These initiatives are "Yalla Trappan", "Botildenborg" and "Mitt Liv", which share a common dedication to inclusiveness and community involvement (*Mitt Liv - Om oss & vår vision*, n.d.; *Om Botildenborg*, n.d.; *Om Yalla Trappan*, n.d.). Each of these enterprises employs distinctive methods to promote social inclusion, economic engagement, and learning opportunities within their communities, especially for marginalized populations (*Om Botildenborg*, n.d.; *Om Yalla Trappan*, n.d.).

1.5 Research Questions

My study explores how the three selected social innovations in Malmö, facilitate job market integration for immigrants, and in turn highlights their unique role in promoting inclusivity and equality. I am particularly interested in how these interventions align with the "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" targets as well as the challenges involved in assessing this alignment. This includes analysis of the specific methods that have been successful for helping immigrants find decent work and for promoting economic growth, thus contributing to reduced inequalities. By closely examining the common obstacles that these initiatives encounter in Malmö's complex socio-economic and policy landscape, my research seeks to uncover valuable insights that can improve implementation of these SDGs in

Malmö and provide some recommendations on how to navigate current challenges. Therefore, my research questions are:

1) In what way do social innovations that create job opportunities for immigrants, align with the "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" targets?

2) What are the main challenges faced by these initiatives in Malmö's existing immigrant integration setting?

1.6 Thesis Outline

In the first chapter, I introduce how migration and integration connect to the SDGs in the context of social sustainability, why social innovations are important, what general challenges of immigrants in face in EU and Sweden, followed by an overall picture in Malmö and my case studies leading to the research questions. Following this, in the Chapter 2 I will unpack the relevant SDG targets, followed by a detailed description of integration policies and challenges in Sweden and Malmö, an introduction to the main players involved in the integration of migrants in Malmö and the 3 case studies. Chapter 3 delves into the theoretical basis of social advancements utilizing the multi-level perspective framework, offering a solid structure for evaluating their effectiveness. Chapter 4 outlines the mixed-methods approach that has been utilized in the thesis, incorporating data-gathering techniques designed to study performance of these social innovations. In chapter 5, I present the results from the case studies, major findings, and subsequently discuss research questions along with limitations in chapter 6. Subsequently in chapter 7 and 8, I conclude the research by offering some recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and reach of social innovations in Malmö, particularly those aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10. This study not only adds to academic knowledge the role of social innovations in promoting SDGs, but also provides practical recommendations for stakeholders seeking to utilize social innovation for the betterment of society.

2 Contextual Background

2.1 Migration, integration, and global equity through the SDGs

The significance of migration and integrative strategies is evident in the SDGs, which evolved from the Millennium Development Goals. This global blueprint expands the focus to a comprehensive sustainability framework that prioritizes reduced disparities and promotes collective progress (Allen et al., 2018; Khalique et al., 2021; Zinkernagel et al., 2018). The SDGs emphasize social sustainability by promoting fair access to education, employment, and governance (Cojocaru et al., 2022). Inequity hinders sustainable progress and can worsen environmental challenges, while equality promotes resilience and inclusive policies (Cojocaru et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020).

"SDG 8" on decent work and economic growth aims for sustainable and inclusive economic advancement, while "SDG 10" on reduced inequalities strives to reduce disparities within and among countries (United Nations, n.d.). With the 2030 midpoint approaching, deviations from the SDGs, specifically regarding inequalities are alarming (Global Sustainable Development Report 2023.Pdf, n.d.; Malekpour et al., 2023).

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of all targets and indicators of "SDG 8" and "SDG 10", serving as a detailed reference for understanding the specific objectives and metrics that guide global efforts toward inclusive economic progress and equity, with relevant targets highlighted (United Nations, n.d.; Team & Roser, 2023). Several targets within these goals hold particular significance due to their focus on job creation, entrepreneurship, inclusion, and reducing inequalities. However, the following specific targets which align most with objectives central to this study are herewith introduced.

Target 8.3 aims to promote job creation and entrepreneurship by fostering creativity and innovation, supporting policies that facilitate the growth and formalization of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises through easier access to financial services. This approach increases employment opportunities and bolsters entrepreneurial activity within the formal sector (United Nations, n.d.; Mallett, 2018). Target 8.5 focuses on achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, regardless of gender, age, or disability by 2030, while advocating for equal remuneration for work of comparable value (United Nations, n.d.). Target 8.6 aims to reduce the number of youths not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET), using the youth NEET rate to measure the proportion of 15-24-year-olds not participating in these areas (Carlsen, 2021).

Table 1. "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" targets and indicators. Own illustration based on (United Nations, n.d.).

Targets	Indicators	Targets	Indicators
8.1 Sustainable Economic Growth	8.1.1 GDP percapita growth rate	10.1 Reduce income inequalities	10.1.1 Income growth inequalties
8.2 Diversify, Innovate and Upgrade for Economic Productivity	8.2.1 GDP percapita growth rate per employed person	10.2 Promote Universal social, economic and political inclusion	10.2.1 People living below 50 per cent of median income
8.3 Promote Policies to Support job creation and growing enterprises	8.3.1 Informal employment	10.3 Ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination	10.3.1 Eliminating discriminatory practices
8.4 Improve resource efficiency in consumption and production	8.4.1 Material foot print

8.4.2 Domestic material consumption | 10.4 Adopt fiscal and social policies that promote equality | 10.4.1 Policies for greater equality

10.4.2 Redistributive impact of fiscal policy |
| 8.5 Full employment and decent work with equal pay | 8.5.1 Hourly earnings

8.5.2 Unemployment rate | 10.5 improved regulation of global financial markets and institutions | 10.5.1 Regulating financial markets |
| 8.6 Promote youth employment, education and training | 8.6.1 youth employment, education and training | 10.6 Enhanced representation for developing countries in financial institutions | 10.6.1 Voting rights for developing countries |
| 8.7 End modern slavery, traficking and child labor | 8.7.1 Child Labor | 10.7 Responsible and well-managed migration policies | 10.7.1 Migration recruitment costs
10.7.2 Well-planned migration policies
10.7.3 Death or disappearance during migration
10.7.4 Refugee population |
| 8.8 Protect labor rights and promote safe working environments | 8.8.1 Occupational Injuries

8.8.2 Complince of labor rights | 10.a Special and differential treatment for developing countries | 10.a.1 Differentioal tarrifs for least developed countries |
| 8.9 Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism | 8.9 Tourism contribution to GDP | 10.b Encourage development assistance and investment in least developed countries | 10.b.1 Development assistance and investment |
| 8.10 Universal access to banking, insurance and financial services | 8.10.1 Access to financial services
8.10.2 Population with financial account | 10.c Reduce transaction costs for migrant remittances | 10.c.1 Remittance costs |
| 8.a Increase aid for trade support | 8.a.1 Aide for trade | | |
| 8. b Develop a global youth employment strategy | 8.b.1 Youth employment strategy | | |

Target 10.2 seeks universal social, economic, and political inclusion by 2030, with the goal of equalizing opportunities and reducing outcome disparities (United Nations, n.d.). Target 10.3 emphasizes reducing inequalities by advocating for non-discriminatory laws and policies to secure equal opportunities (Martin, n.d.). Collectively, these targets underscore the importance of fair and inclusive policies for building sustainable and equitable societies.

2.2 Sweden's integration journey: achievements and obstacles

Sweden ranks among the top ten countries globally for migrant integration policies according to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (Solano et al., 2020). Yet, it faces significant challenges to fully address issues like socio-economic inequalities, labor market integration and housing shortages that affect migrants (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021). Increasing disparities among recent or non-European immigrants are evident in the 64.9% employment rate for Sweden's immigrants, which is lower than the OECD average of 69.2%, and significantly below the 79% rate for native Swedes (The Lancet Regional Health – Europe, 2023). Figure 2 pictures this difference as compared to other OECD countries.

	Foreign-born			Native-born		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Austria	51.4	70.4	77.8	45.5	74.6	86.9
Belgium	37.4	60.9	77.3	32.7	65.1	85.5
Canada	44.2	64.7	79.7	45.4	70.7	82.4
Chile	73.7	81.7	85.1	61.2	74.1	82.2
Czech Republic	61.3	82.8	82.2	23.9	79.6	85.0
Denmark	57.5	79.7	89.3	53.9	80.1	88.4
Estonia	50.6	70.0	75.1	39.5	76.7	89.1
Finland	46.5	69.4	81.4	39.9	74.4	87.8
France	48.4	60.5	74.6	35.2	68.7	85.6
Germany	54.7	75.5	78.0	47.8	80.7	90.2
Greece	50.6	54.9	61.6	37.7	55.0	75.8
Hungary	67.6	78.5	87.0	38.6	77.0	90.1
Iceland	73.0	76.1	80.7	64.3	81.5	90.6
Ireland	33.6	70.9	85.2	36.2	68.6	86.3
Israel	65.8	76.7	85.0	41.9	69.2	87.4
Italy	54.9	62.5	66.5	40.2	63.9	80.5
Latvia	39.5	62.9	77.7	31.4	70.7	86.5
Lithuania	34.8	62.5	80.5	24.9	69.6	89.7
Luxembourg	56.7	63.5	84.1	33.4	68.7	84.7
Mexico	70.1	64.1	71.2	65.6	71.6	79.7
Netherlands	53.5	69.3	78.2	68.9	83.2	90.2
New Zealand	66.4	79.5	86.3	71.9	83.0	89.3
Norway	51.5	72.5	81.9	54.9	79.7	90.0
Poland	-	76.0	88.6	24.7	70.7	89.9
Portugal	71.4	77.3	91.0	59.5	68.6	85.9
Slovak Republic	-	75.6	84.7	13.7	74.9	85.5
Slovenia	41.3	72.9	81.7	29.3	69.7	88.9
Spain	52.4	62.0	70.2	48.1	58.2	81.2
Sweden	41.8	72.5	80.7	40.7	81.8	90.9
Switzerland	63.6	74.7	83.3	54.8	80.7	91.4
Türkiye	-	-	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	67.3	77.6	85.0	55.4	77.6	87.0
United States	58.9	67.4	77.9	29.0	65.4	81.6
EU27	52.1	67.8	76.3	41.9	71.4	86.2
OECD average	54.7	70.5	79.9	45.1	72.9	86.4

Figure 2: Employment rates for individuals aged 25-64, categorized by birthplace and educational attainment in OECD nations, 2021. (OECD, 2022)

Furthermore, 19.4% of immigrants face unemployment, over double the OECD average of 9.1%, compared to 6.8% among native Swedes (The Lancet Regional Health – Europe, 2023). This unemployment gap highlights the ongoing challenge in ensuring equitable and sustainable economic growth for all, amid difficulties in localizing these SDGs and fostering necessary cross-sectoral and governmental cooperation (Gustafsson & Ivner, 2018).

2.2.1 History of immigration and integration in Sweden and Malmö

Sweden's transformation into a migrant destination is tied to global migration trends, driven by international conflicts, economic opportunities, and EU policy changes. Post-World War II economic growth shifted Sweden from a labor exporter to a host country (Scuzzarello, 2008). The 1990s and 2000s immigration waves followed by conflicts in Yugoslavia and Iraq, and the Arab Spring in the early 2010s further increased asylum seekers (Dahlberg et al., 2012). Later in 2015, refugee crisis led to a surge in asylum applications, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, which challenges Sweden's housing, education, and integration systems (Lindgren et al., 2022). EU enlargement also increased migration from Eastern Europe, leading to changes in Sweden's labor market and demographics (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2014). Recent immigration has been driven by family reunification and demand for skilled labor (Dunlavy et al., 2019; Johansson, 2014). The foreign-born population grew from 11% in 2000 to 21% in 2023, as shown in Figure 3.
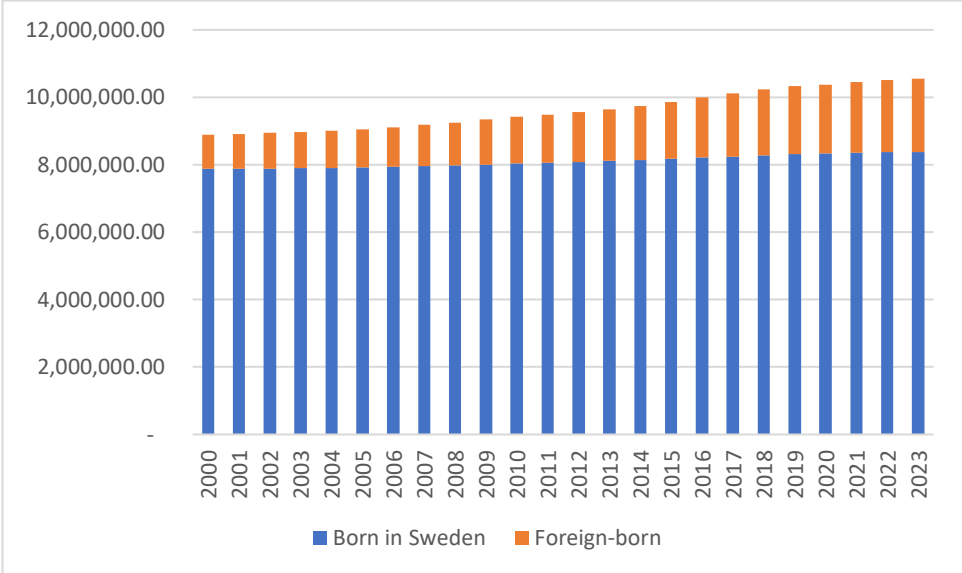
Figure 3: Growth of the Foreign-Born Population in Sweden, compared to native population, 2000-2023. Own graph based on population data from Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2024)

Malmö, in southern Sweden, reflects similar migration trends. After World War II, the city shifted from exporting labor to welcoming a diverse array of immigrants. In the 1994 and early 2000s the city

witnessed significant influxes due to conflicts like the Yugoslav Wars and Iraq War (Scuzzarello, 2010). By 2022, Malmö's population had reached 357,377, which turned it into Sweden's fastest-growing major city, with a 1.6% increase from the previous year. Malmö is notably diverse, with people from 186 nations, and about a third of residents born abroad (Malmö stad, 2024). This group often faces harsher living conditions, with unemployment rates double the national average (Đorđević, 2018). Despite efforts to promote sustainable development, the city still struggles with inequality due to high unemployment, socio-economic disparities, and integration challenges (Leander, 2021). Employment data from 2020-2022 show a 16% employment rate gap between Swedish-born and foreign-born residents, as depicted in Figure 4.
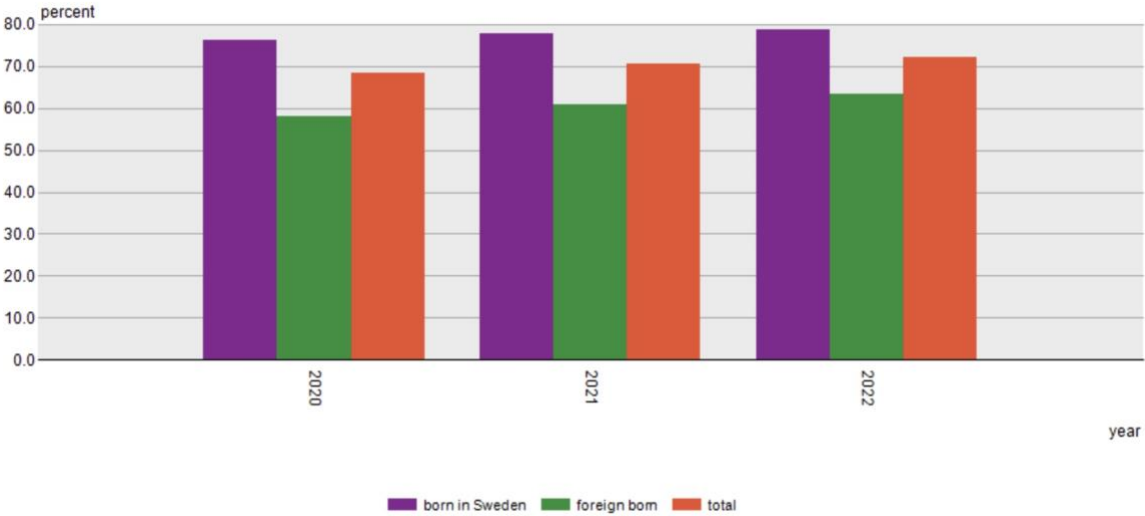
Figure 4: Employment rate of workers aged 16-64 born in Sweden vs. outside Sweden, between 2020-2022 (SCB, 2023)

2.2.2 Adapting integration policies for labor market inclusion

Sweden's demographic changes due to a significant influx of refugees have reshaped the immigrant population and increased integration needs (Bevelander, 2009). In the 1980s, the country transitioned from multicultural policies to an integration agenda prioritizing Swedish language and culture, with local authorities managing refugee integration until 2010 (Righard & Öberg, 2018; Scuzzarello, 2008). Afterward, the Swedish employment service took over refugee reception, introducing the "Establishment Program" in 2010 to improve labor market integration (*Etableringsprogrammet*, n.d.; Righard & Öberg, 2018). Since the 1970s, integration policies have increasingly aligned with standard labor market measures, signaling a minimal approach that emphasizes employment over other integration strategies and assumes migrants will adapt to assimilationist labor market policies (Wiesbrock, 2011).

In Malmö, these integration policies have manifested through narratives that emphasize labor market participation and economic asset perspectives, where immigrants are seen both as integral to the host community through increased interaction and as entrepreneurial assets benefiting from international networks (Scuzzarello, 2015). Malmö's strategies, that aim to utilize the skills of newly arrived adults and improving employment for women to bolster economic integration are influenced by "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" (Frödin et al., 2021; Malmö stad, 2020).

2.3 Malmö: A case study of localized social innovation for integration in action

2.3.3 The transformative role of social innovations

In workforce integration, social innovations are crucial for addressing immigration challenges and opportunities (Bastia et al., 2020; Franco Gavonel et al., 2021). Rising political interest in social innovations and investments is becoming a strategic tool for social issues and unity in the evolving Swedish welfare system (Brandsen et al., 2016). Integration in Malmö requires mutual adaptation between the host community and newcomers (Alwall et al., 2012). To integrate its diverse population, Malmö emphasizes voluntary participation and employment-focused programs, harnessing the power of diversity (Wiesbrock, 2011).

Malmö's social innovation landscape for immigrant workforce integration is shaped by dynamic interactions among social entrepreneurs, local governments, research institutions, and NGOs, each playing a crucial role in developing and implementing social initiatives (Gawell, 2014). These innovations aim to create conditions for mutual integration through collaboration with the business community and the Employment Agency, and promote swift labor market inclusion (Malmö Stad, 2024). The city's framework brings together local governments, NGOs, and the business sector to offer language instruction, civic orientation, and employment opportunities crucial for integrating immigrants into Swedish society (Malmö Stad, 2024). Additionally, some initiatives focus on preserving immigrant languages and cultures, assisting with public welfare navigation, and enhancing labor market competitiveness (Frödin et al., 2021).

2.3.4 Three social innovations in Malmö with focus on immigrants' job integration

Malmö demonstrates a range of pioneering social initiatives that prioritize empowerment and diversity. The three selected case studies that specifically focus on immigrants' labor market integration are presented comprehensively below:

1) **Yalla Trappan:** Initiated by a European Social Fund program focused on women's empowerment, Yalla Trappan evolved into a labor-integrating social enterprise that aims to aid women who face employment barriers, with emphasis on a cooperative model for overlooked groups (Brandsen et al., 2016). This work integration social enterprise in Rosengård, Malmö, originated from a non-profit sector project (Merker-Siesjö, 2014). The enterprise is celebrated for its progressive and integrative approach and many of the women engaged by Yalla Trappan, have been furthest from the labor market and have been in Sweden for decades without employment (100 sociala innovationer, 2017). The initiative is expanding slowly through networks and labor market projects, offering services like catering and sewing (*Om Yalla Trappan*, n.d.).

2) **Botildenborg:** Centered around a farm and community gathering space, Botildenborg is an example of sustainable practices and innovative social initiatives in Malmö. Established by Lena Friblick, this enterprise together with Xenofilia and Stiftelsen Botildenborg, is dedicated to promote social, environmental, and economic sustainability through agriculture and food production (*Om Botildenborg*, n.d.). Botildenborg has received prestigious awards such as Skåne's Gastronomy Prize for its commitment to diversity, and initiatives like Växtplats Botildenborg, done in partnership with the city of Malmö, provide essential training opportunities in food and farming. This program increases participants' knowledge and well-being and helps them to successfully reintegrate into the workforce. It uniquely combines social, environmental, and economic sustainability efforts through agriculture and food production (*Om Botildenborg*, n.d.).

3) **Mitt Liv**: Equivalent to "My Life" in Swedish, this enterprise was established in Gothenburg back in 2008. This organization is dedicated to create a society and job market that values diversity and inclusivity with a focus on equal opportunities in the Swedish workforce (*100 sociala innovationer*, 2017; *Mitt Liv - Om oss & vår vision*, n.d.). At the heart of Mitt Liv's activities is Mitt Livs Chans, a mentoring initiative designed for individuals with a foreign background who look for opportunities in employment, professional growth, connections, and networks in Sweden. The mentoring program is provided at no cost to the participants and is funded through collaborations with various partners. Mitt Liv operates as a company with a unique model that limits profit distribution, ensuring that any earnings are reinvested into the organization. This reinvestment is aimed to promote sustainable growth and to make lasting

changes related to equality and diversity in the Swedish job market. Mitt Liv has been recognized as a successful social entrepreneur in Sweden and is now active in Malmö and many other cities in Sweden (*100 sociala innovationer*, 2017). This enterprise collaborates with various companies, providing mentors and facilitating the integration of highly skilled immigrants into suitable job positions. This initiative not only helps the immigrants but also enriches Swedish companies with diverse competencies (Mitt Liv, 2022).

3 Theory

I use the Multi-level Perspective (MLP) as a framework for my research to break down the complex, intertwined, and multidimensional facets of immigrant integration through social innovations (Geels, 2011, 2019; Loorbach et al., 2017)

3.1 Multi-level Perspective

MLP framework aims to demystify the complexities of socio-technical transitions by offering a structured analysis of landscapes, regimes, and niches. This approach emphasizes the dynamic interplay across different system levels, providing a holistic understanding of socio-economic challenges like immigrant integration into the labor market (Geels, 2011; Markard & Truffer, 2008). Its multifaceted approach helps inform strategic action in addressing the nuanced aspects of societal transitions (Schot & Geels, 2008).

The MLP clarifies trends in societal technological transitions (El Bilali, 2019) and integrates insights from science, technology studies, evolutionary economics, and institutional analysis (Coenen et al., 2012; Falcone, 2014). It describes transitions as interactions across three levels: macro-level landscapes, meso-level regimes, and micro-level niches (A. Smith et al., 2010). This framework explores how niche innovations diffuse across sectors (Geels, 2019) and reveals pathways that support the scaling up of niche projects (Cairns et al., 2023; Kanda et al., 2020; Warbroek et al., 2018).

In this thesis, the MLP is used to study immigrant labor market integration by highlighting systemic barriers and the roles of social innovations in driving change (Geels, 2019). It emphasizes the emergence of niche innovations, analyzing their potential to transform labor market regimes and socio-technical landscapes (Loorbach et al., 2017). This framework helps evaluate the potential and challenges of social innovations, guiding targeted interventions and collaboration among stakeholders. As shown in Figure 5, by highlighting interactions between emerging niches and existing regimes, the MLP offers a way to assess the impact and expansion of social innovations for labor market integration (Geels, 2019; Loorbach et al., 2017).
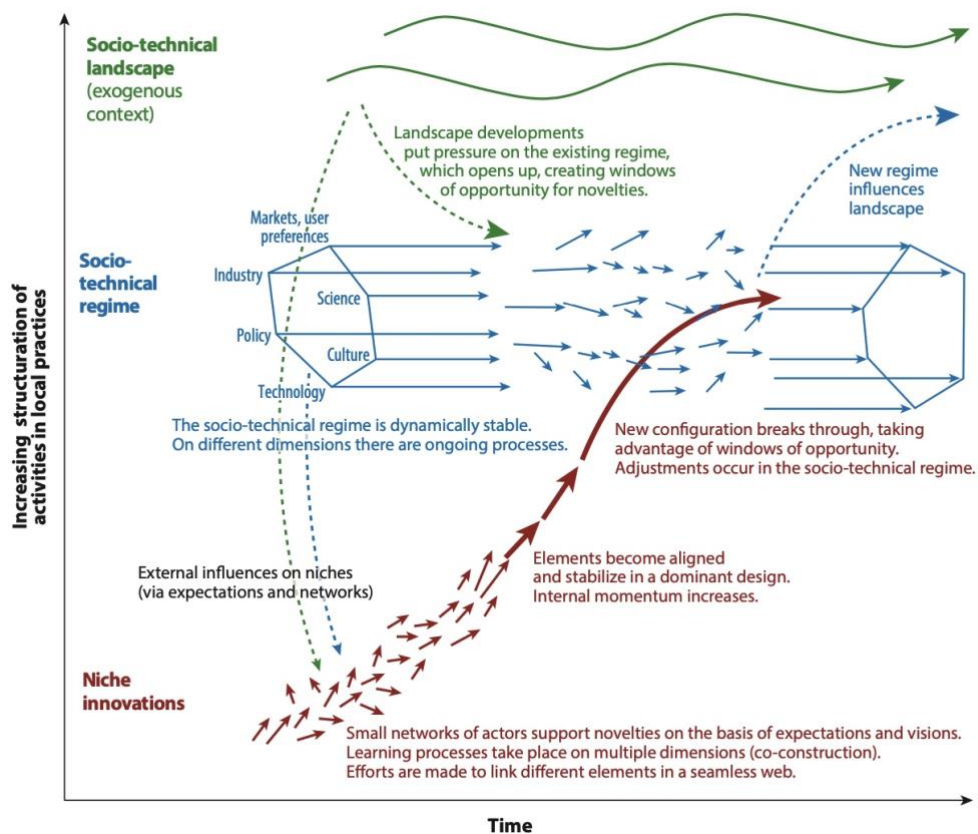
Figure 5: The fluctuation of transitions, showing how shifts develop through numerous stages and various pathways (Loorbach et al., 2017).

3.1.1 Definition of Niche, Regime and Landscape

In the MLP, "niches" provide a protected environment for radical innovations that challenge entrenched socio-technical systems (Geels, 2011; Kemp et al., 1998). These innovations typically emerge in specialized spaces like research labs or small enterprises, allowing new technologies and business models to develop without immediate pressure from prevailing market norms. Innovative niches must navigate regimes resistant to change, aligning with existing technological and behavioral norms even as they try to transform them (Geels, 2011). Economic or social shifts can open opportunities for niche innovations to penetrate regimes and drive systemic changes (Geels, 2002). Niches consist of dynamic networks that help scale solutions to transform labor markets, potentially achieving wider adoption (Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018; Kemp et al., 1998; Schot & Geels, 2008).

The "regime" level encompasses the entrenched structures, practices, and norms that dictate how socio-technical systems, like labor markets, operate. It involves a network of actors, institutions, and governance structures that adapt incrementally, reinforcing stability and making radical change

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challenging (Geels, 2002, 2011). This level also includes social and cultural norms that guide labor market behavior, often acting as barriers to new policies and practices for immigrant integration.

The "landscape" level represents the societal backdrop where gradual, transformative changes unfold. It includes macroeconomic trends, cultural patterns, and significant political shifts, shaping socio-technical regimes externally (Geels, 2002, 2011). It also comprises political ideologies, demographic changes, and environmental shifts that influence how societies evolve.

In this research, I use the MLP framework to study how niche innovations for immigrant labor market integration interact with entrenched regimes and adapt to the external landscape. It helps identify systemic barriers and opportunities at each level, revealing how these innovations can drive or impede change and how policies can foster effective integration practices.

4 Research Methods

4.1 Data collection and literature review

The literature review for this research was constructed through an extensive examination of peer-reviewed journals, grey literature, and various online resources. Utilizing a combination of traditional and digital scholarly databases such as LUB Search and Google Scholar the research capitalized on a dynamic, iterative search process. This method involved repeated rounds of searching, using targeted keywords such as "Social Innovations," "Immigrant Integration," "Sustainable Development Goals," "Integration Inequalities," "Economic Integration," and "Malmö" to refine and deepen the understanding relevant to the study's focus areas.

The iterative nature of the literature review process, adapted from strategies such as triangulation of data, which strengthen the credibility and depth of the study (Vivek et al., 2023), allowed for the continuous updating and incorporation of emergent literature throughout the research phase. This approach ensured that the review was not only comprehensive but also responsive to the evolving dynamics within the fields of social innovation and immigrant integration (Sanjari et al., 2014)

Specifically, the review process began with a preliminary exploration aimed at establishing a foundational understanding of the current discourse around social innovations and their role in facilitating immigrant integration into the workforce. Emphasis was placed on identifying how these innovations address or perpetuate integration inequalities and contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals within urban settings like Malmö. Continual engagement with the literature was maintained parallel to the primary data collection via interviews. This ongoing interaction with the literature ensured that emerging themes and insights from empirical data were consistently cross-referenced with established knowledge, providing a robust framework for analysis and discussion.

Additionally, to gain specific insights into the local context of Malmö, which has a significant immigrant population, and to better understand the localized implementation of global sustainability goals, the research expanded to include specific case studies and expert opinions from key stakeholders within the region. This provided a nuanced understanding of the practical challenges and successes, enhancing the research's applicability to real-world scenarios. It must be added that since some of the documents were in Swedish, I used Google Translate to translate them into English.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are crucial for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of human actions and societal occurrences, and allows for flexibility in conversations and posing follow-up questions when needed. This method leaves room for mixing unstructured and theoretical inquiries to collect detailed, nuanced information, and thorough examination of intricate experiences and concepts, with gradual transition from overarching stories to precise investigations. Its repetitive method enhances comprehension and assists in enhancing or refining theories (Galetta, 2020). I selected the 3 case studies, as they stand out as pioneering social innovations in Malmö which actively engage immigrants (some of them with focus on women) and support their integration into the local job market (*100 sociala innovationer*, 2017). To understand the ecosystem of social innovations and partnerships, I consulted Malmö Stad and Mötesplats Social Innovation (MSI), a national platform at the University of Malmö focused on knowledge-sharing and collaboration in social innovation.

All initial contacts with participants were made via email. The interviews were conducted in-person or using Zoom, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewee and all the interviews were then audio-recorded with their consent, and transcribed to facilitate data analysis. The transcription process allowed me to gain understanding of the information collected, review and categorize key details, and identify frequently occurring themes. Table 2 shows an overview of the interviews. For anonymity, I have assigned short names to each interview (CS 1, CS 2, CS 3 for the social innovations and A 1, A 2 for the Actors) and I will refer to them with these short names throughout the analysis. The interview questions are provided in the Appendix.

Table 2. List of Interviewees (Own Illustration)

Organization	Type	Target Group	Position of interviewee	Assigned short name
Yalla Trappan	Social Innovation Case Study	Marginalized Immigrant Women	Project Manager	CS 1
Botildenborg	Social Innovation Case Study	Culturally diverse populations far from labor market	Project Coordinator, Växtplats Ukraina	CS 2
Mitt Liv	Social Innovation Case Study	Individuals with a foreign background	Head of Diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) Strategy and Research	CS 3
Malmö Stad	Public Sector	Malmö citizens	Analyst, City Office, Urban Planning and Establishment Unit Development Secretary, Strategic Labor Market Issues	A 1
MSI	Academia	Researchers, social innovators, policy makers	Project Manager	A 2

4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis involves categorizing data into key themes, identifying patterns, and refining mechanisms (Putri et al., 2023). As the first step, I categorized the literature by hand in an Excel file, based on my initial research outline including SDGs, social innovations and social sustainability, Immigration and integration, Immigrant integration in the labor market in EU, Sweden and Malmö, followed by a breadth of articles that helped set up my theoretical base on MLP. For RQ 1, the design of my interview questions was informed by connection to the relevant SDGs which helped me assess in what way Malmö's social innovations align with SDG 8 and SDG 10. To analyze data for RQ 2, the design of the questions in 3 different categories helped me identify challenges in the city's immigrant integration ecosystem. The Niche-level questions focused on unique solutions of social innovations for immigrant employment, while regime-level questions explored the adaptability of local structures to support the SDGs. Questions on landscape pressures investigated broader societal trends impacting social innovation. Then I looked for keywords in each section, which led me to further understand the underlying categories.

5 Results

5.1 Alignment of the selected social innovations in Malmö with "SDG 8" and "SDG 10"

In this section, drawing on the documents and interviews, I explore the extent to which the three case studies align with "SDG 8" and "SDG 10", utilizing insights gained from literature reviews, document analyses, interviews, and applying the MLP. My analysis is additionally enriched with documents and expert perspectives from Malmö Stad, representing the public sector, and MSI, which embodies the academic research viewpoint, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the local integration and impact of these initiatives.

5.1.1 Alignment with "SDG 8" targets

Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises (Target 8.3)

As small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the three case studies in Malmö each offer distinctive strategies that align with promoting job creation and entrepreneurship among immigrant populations. Yalla Trappanäs focus is on enhancing job opportunities through business activities tailored specifically for immigrant women, which integrates them into the workforce by leveraging skills like catering, sewing, and other services. This approach not only supports "*Female Empowerment*" but also aims to increase the financial independence of women (CS 1).

Similarly, Botildenborg's initiatives such as "Växtplats Rosengård,", prepare participants for the labor market through a blend of theoretical and practical training, demonstrating a robust model of workplace preparation (Botildenborg, 2023). In this project, jobseekers in kitchen and farming areas get trained by professional staff, and are then matched with and internship, and more than half of those who complete the whole program, get an employment. The strategic location of Botildenborg functions as a *"perfect meeting point for all sorts of nationalities"*, particularly through culinary experiences that empower people and create a safe space for them to learn and practice (CS 2). The founder of Botildenborg advocated the culinary skills of immigrant women through the "Tastes of Rosengård " TV series, which, alongside the "Kryddor från Rosengård" cookbook, became a hit by showcasing diverse spices and cooking techniques. This led to cooking classes, spice walks, and festivals, leveraging food as a tool to promote entrepreneurship and cultural exchange among immigrant women (*Om Botildenborg*, n.d.).

Mitt Liv contributes to this target through its mentoring program that equips underemployed individuals—either born outside of Sweden or born in Sweden to parents from outside Sweden—with

necessary skills, significantly improving their employment prospects (Mitt Liv, 2022). During the interview, it was noted that companies that collaborate with Mitt Liv were "*seeing the opportunity to be able to actually work with individuals that they could potentially hire*" (CS 3).

Full employment and decent work with equal pay (Target 8.5)

Each of the three enterprises address this target in a unique way. Yalla Trappan emphasizes empowerment and self-reliance for immigrant women by "*trying to adopt and making it a workplace that makes changes for their needs, instead of the women trying to meet the needs from our side*" and to facilitate mentorship opportunities between employees (Yalla Trappan, 2023). Botildenborg's focus on securing employment for participants through internships further aligns with this target by enabling full and productive employment. They achieve this by recognizing and nurturing individual skills, provision of comprehensive job training, and facilitation of employment opportunities, which enhances participants' employment prospects and societal integration.

This holistic approach ensures that participants not only gain employment but also find meaningful work that respects their cultural backgrounds and personal aspirations. As raised by one of the interviewees, "*Almost 90% of participants in the Ukrainian project have been able to join the labor market*" (CS 2). Similarly, Mitt Liv addresses underemployment among highly skilled immigrants to ensure that they find work that matches their qualifications. According to Mitt Liv, "*approximately 50% or more of the mentees are actually securing work during or within about six months after the program*" (CS 3).

Promote youth employment, education and training (Target 8.6)

Botildenborg's "Växtplats Ukraina" program which empowers youth through vocational training in gardening and culinary arts, is relevant to this target. The program focuses on enhancing job prospects and personal development, prepares youth for the workplace and matches them with employers through internships. Part of the program includes education about the Swedish labor market which involves practical learning through study visits to various workplaces and institutions. These comprehensive training efforts significantly aid young people's employment prospects and societal integration (CS 2). Mitt Liv focuses on youth education and employment by promoting university education and providing mentoring that bridges students with professionals, to aid in successful career and workforce integration (CS 3).

5.1.2 Alignment with "SDG 10" targets

Promote universal social, economic and political inclusion (Target 10.2)

Yalla Trappan's approach in relevance to this target focuses on using existing skills within culturally relevant sectors, offering job opportunities that do not require formal education or advanced language skills. This approach effectively reduces employment barriers, fostering inclusion and enhancing financial independence (CS 1). Although Yalla Trappan does not formally measure its impact on SDGs, its operations inherently support these goals by prioritizing employment creation and social inclusion for its target group (CS 1).

Botildenborg on the other hand approaches this target through innovative practices. Utilizing social gastronomy, Botildenborg creates meaningful employment for those distant from the labor market, integrating food and cultivation as core tools for economic and social integration (Botildenborg, 2024). The organization fosters community involvement and enhances community integration through sustainable urban agriculture (Botildenborg, 2024). This strategy not only promotes economic opportunities but also nurtures community ties and inclusion, especially for marginalized groups such as immigrants and refugees, thus aligning with this target (CS 2).

Mitt Liv's contribution happens through their mentoring program which supports around 1,000 foreign-educated individuals annually to secure relevant jobs or internships, thereby promoting economic and social integration (Mitt Liv, 2022). Beyond mentoring, Mitt Liv's diversity and inclusion consulting enhances workplace inclusivity and economic participation (Mitt Liv, 2022). Additionally, their efforts align with national and local policies, amplifying their impact on reducing inequalities and supporting governmental inclusion goals (CS 3).

Ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination (Target 10.3)

Yalla Trappan actively aligns with this target by implementing employment strategies that ensure equal opportunities and reduce inequalities. As pointed out in the interview, Yalla Trappan aims at "*giving all employees 100% full-time and permanent contracts*", providing job security and financial stability, which are crucial for societal sustainability. Furthermore, as pointed out before, Yalla Trappan adapts to the needs of its employees rather than requiring them to conform to rigid pre-existing standards. This approach not only utilizes the inherent skills of the immigrant women but also fosters a welcoming and equitable work environment, thus embodying the essence of equal opportunity as outlined in SDG Target 10.3 (CS 1). Through these practices, Yalla Trappan significantly aids in reducing systemic inequalities within the labor market.

Botildenborg contributes to this target by promoting inclusivity and engaging immigrants and refugees in urban agriculture and sustainable farming projects, providing not only essential job skills but also facilitating their social integration and mental health support (CS 2). The interview revealed that Botildenborg also actively participates in local policy discussions, advocating for integration strategies that are responsive to the unique challenges faced by immigrants, thus influencing more inclusive community policies (CS 2).

The contribution of Mitt Liv to this target happens through promoting equal opportunities for immigrants in the Swedish labor market in Malmö. Their efforts are underscored by a strong engagement with local policies and initiatives in Malmö (CS 3). This integration is facilitated through Mitt Liv's well-structured mentoring programs, which ensures that immigrants receive necessary support tailored to their specific needs, significantly improving their employment prospects and societal inclusion (Mitt Liv, 2022).

5.1.3 Insights from other actors

The interview with Malmö Stad reveals their approach to integrating SDGs 8 and 10 into urban governance. Although the city does not explicitly launch SDG-focused projects, its initiatives inherently align with these goals, ensuring adaptation to practical community needs. This strategic approach strengthens local economic and social structures while aligning with global sustainability targets (A 1). The city's 2024-2026 budget plan underscores its commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth through a new business program that aims to foster entrepreneurship and the growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, supporting SDG Target 8.3. Simultaneously, urban planning addresses physical and social segregation, creating a socio-economically mixed city with accessible living conditions for all residents. This urban development strategy promotes economic inclusion and social integration, directly aligning with SDG Target 10.2 (Malmö Stad, 2024).

Malmö's commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration and comprehensive urban development to counteract segregation and enhance social cohesion is also pointed out in some reports. Examples include Initiatives like improving job accessibility for immigrants and fostering diverse community interactions which contribute to SDG Targets 8.5 and 10.3, and highlight Malmö's dedication to an inclusive society through policy dialogue and stakeholder engagement (Malmö Stad, 2024). This comprehensive approach embeds SDG principles into urban planning, ensuring international compliance while addressing the localized needs of Malmö's diverse population. The integration of social innovations into city development plans is recognized for its significant impact on economic growth and social inclusion (A 1).

MSI also provided critical insights into Malmö's approach to implementing SDG targets. The interview emphasized the importance of policy and political involvement in enhancing the impact of social innovations aligned with these goals. Integrating SDGs into local government frameworks, particularly through budgeting processes, demonstrates a commitment to embedding global objectives within municipal operations while fostering economic and social inclusion strategically (A 2).

The interview also underscored the need for continuous adaptation and responsiveness to evolving narratives around social innovation and integration. This dynamic approach aligns with the city's comprehensive strategy to support an ecosystem where social innovations can contribute significantly to global sustainability targets (A 2).

In a nutshell, the alignment of social innovations in Malmö with "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" targets confirms their contribution to local and global sustainability goals. Table 3 illustrates the placement of these contributions in the MLP framework, at niche, regime and landscape levels.

Table 3. Impact of 3 social innovations in alignment with the targets of "SDG 8" and "SDG 10", based on MLP framework (Own illustration).

		SDG 8			SDG 10	
	Targets	**8.3 Promote Policies to Support job creation and growing enterprises**	**8.5 Full employment and decent work with equal pay**	**8.6 Promote youth employment, education and training**	**10.2 Promote Universal social, economic and political inclusion**	**10.3 Ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination**
Yalla Trappan		Enhanced job opportunities through leveraging skills	Adapting workplace to the needs of target groups		Reduced employment barriers	Providing 100% full time and permanent contracts to employees
Yalla Trappan		Supporting "Female Empowerment"			Using exising skills	Establishing an inclusive workplace model (adapting to employee needs)
Yalla Trappan		Increasing womens financial independence			Prioritizing employment creation and inclusion for women	
Botildenborg	Impact	Mixed theoretical and practical job training	Comprehensive job training, and facilitating employment opportunities	Vocational training, cv building, networking for youth through "Växtplats Ukraina" program	Fostering community involvement	Promoting inclusivity through offering essential job skills and mental health support
Botildenborg	Impact	Matching trainees with jobs	Almost 90% success for participants joining labor market			Advocating for integration strategies in local political discussions
Botildenborg	Impact	Connecting communities thorough culinary experiences				
Mitt Liv		Mentoring programs for skill improvement	Matching existing skills with jobs	Promoting university education	Mentoring around 1000 foreign-educated individuals	Strong engagement with local policies and initiatives in Malmö
Mitt Liv		Networking and connecting to employers	50% of mentees able to secure jobs after program	Providing mentoring that bridges students with professionals	Enhancing workplace inclusivity	Offering and promoting equal opportunities to immigrants

Niche
Regime
Landscape

5.2 Challenges faced by social innovations in Malmö

This section will address the second research question on challenges faced by these social innovations in Malmö, by applying MLP framework and identifying the barriers at Regime, Niche and landscape levels.

5.2.1 Niche level challenges

Constant need for being innovative and operational at the same time

Funding agencies often prioritize innovative projects, which places long-running programs at a disadvantage, regardless of their proven success. This can lead to a mismatch between the need for stable, ongoing support for effective solutions and the funding agencies' emphasis on innovation. The interview with Yalla Trappan highlights the paradox of needing to appear continuously innovative to secure funding, even when the existing methods are still effective (CS 1). This scenario underscores a broader issue where regulatory and funding frameworks may not always align with practical, on-the-ground needs, forcing organizations to adapt or modify successful programs to fit the criteria of innovation that funders demand. This was also mentioned by Botildenborg, that there is a need to constantly find new ways to work, in order to find more opportunities and funds.

In this regard, Malmö Stad also touched on the difficulties faced by social enterprises, particularly in sustaining funding and operational momentum in a challenging regulatory and economic environment. They noted the critical role of social enterprises in advancing immigrant integration but also highlighted the precarious nature of relying on inconsistent funding streams and complex partnership dynamics. As Malmö Stad explained, maintaining these initiatives is challenging due to uncertainty of future funding which could threaten the whole concept (A 1). This encapsulates the vulnerability of niche innovations in the face of fluctuating support and resources.

Visibility and communications

Communication and marketing strategy of social innovations is affected by limited resources. In the case of Yalla Trappan, the organization prioritizes direct employment creation over marketing activities, reflecting a strategic choice to maximize social impact directly through job opportunities rather than broader publicity. This approach limits their visibility in the public sphere, relying mainly on organic reach and word-of-mouth among community members and stakeholders. This situation underscores the tension between expanding outreach and sustaining operational priorities within resource-constrained social enterprises, which will also impact their competition in the market.

Knowledge-sharing platforms

As pointed out by Botildenborg, experience-sharing spaces are random, rather than established. There are few communities of practice among similar niches, where they could share their experiences and learn from each other's lessons.

5.2.2 Regime level constraints

Limited funding

The issue of constrained financial resources significantly impacts the ability of social innovations to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of their initiatives in relation to the SDG targets. For instance, Yalla Trappan points out that "*we're not measuring anything for these goals because we don't have the funding, we don't have the resources of doing so because we're small organizations and we really need to reinvest into new employments all the time*" (CS 1). This focus on employment generation rather than expanding measurement and evaluation capabilities limits their ability to demonstrate social impact. Similarly, Botildenborg highlights financial challenges worsened by policy decisions, noting that funding from the EU and the specific conditions tied to financial support are crucial for their operation. The dependence on external funding and the stipulations attached to it, constrain financial planning and sustainability within the broader policy and economic frameworks (CS 2).

Another significant challenge involves the underfunding of social sustainability initiatives compared to environmental and economic sustainability. Mitt Liv notes that social sustainability, "*which is the newest into the sustainability area*," often lacks sufficient funding and is regarded more as a Human Resources issue rather than a strategic one (CS 3). This challenge reflects macroeconomic trends, where funding and budget allocations align with societal and governmental priorities. The resource allocation issues highlight the gap between the needs and the available supports, positioning social innovation as essential for devising effective solutions in resource-constrained environments (A 2). Furthermore, MSI highlights that existing funding and policy frameworks lack the agility to meet the rapidly changing needs of social initiatives. "*The current mechanism is not agile and fast... we just need another kind of process to meet those challenges*" (A 2). This lack of flexibility within the economic and political environment presents a critical barrier to sustaining and scaling social innovations.

Labor market demands and competition challenges

The labor market itself, influenced by the existing regime, poses some challenges. Mitt liv highlights the issue of overqualification among immigrants, where highly qualified individuals are unable to secure jobs that match their skills due to structural barriers in the job market. According to the

interview, "*Providing opportunities for people with higher education to get into the positions which they are qualified for, also opens up pipeline for the rest of competencies to come into their right areas*" (CS 3). This reflects a regime challenge where the labor market's existing structure does not accommodate the diverse competencies of immigrants, thereby necessitating systemic changes to enhance inclusivity and equity.

As a business supporting marginalized immigrant women, Yalla Trappan's special operational model significantly impacts their ability to compete on service prices. Since this enterprise focuses on employing women furthest from the labor market, they often require more time to perform tasks, which in turn raises their service prices. While they strive for social sustainability and offer stable employment with full-time, permanent contracts, these ethical practices increase operational costs. As they mention during the interview "*We really need the public to buy our services. We really need to compete with the other business branches, and sometimes it's hard to compete because the women we work with who are providing the services often needs a little more time to do the services*" (CS 1).

Regulatory and operational barriers

The requirement to seek funding from various sources to develop businesses and projects makes it difficult for some social initiatives to expand their reach or secure larger contracts. This is because many opportunities demand a national presence or compliance with specific international regulations. For instance, as Yalla Trappan is based solely in Malmö, it cannot meet these criteria, limiting its ability to collaborate on a larger scale, particularly with major corporations operating at the national or international level. This also complicates securing government contracts that follow standardized national regulations, like those of the Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket). Yalla Trappan states, "*The legal requirements and the standards are sometimes really high and complicated to fulfill*" (CS 1).

Malmö Stad looks at adaptation of public and private entities to effectively support sustainable transitions, from a different perspective. They discuss the challenges a city faces in supporting and expanding successful social initiatives, particularly those led by NGOs. The main challenges involve funding and legal procurement procedures. Securing continuous, long-term funding is crucial for the sustainability of successful projects, but strict regulations and fairness principles prevent the city from indefinitely funding a single organization without considering others. One solution is using Idea-Based Public Partnerships (IOP), which aim to support good initiatives over the long term. However, even IOPs face limitations to the duration of funding without reevaluation, and they must open up opportunities to other groups to maintain fairness and legal compliance (A 1). Thus, the city must navigate a complex landscape of financial, legal, and ethical considerations to sustainably support

effective social innovations. This reflects the regime's struggle with inflexible structures that do not easily accommodate innovative solutions for immigrant integration.

Economic and financial constraints of immigrants

Another significant regime challenge is financial vulnerability of certain immigrant groups, notably the Ukrainian women who, due to their precarious legal and social status, arrive in Sweden with minimal support. This vulnerability is increased by limited rights, such as the inability to access full healthcare services or educational opportunities, which restrict their integration into Swedish society. As raised by Botildenborg during the interview, "*They don't have rights to health care so they only have right to emergency care*" (CS 2). The adaptation of broader policies is rather slow.

Inadequate cross-Sectoral collaboration

The regime level needs more effective collaboration across different sectors, including public, private, and civil society. MSI describes the current state of collaboration as insufficient, stating, "*It's not a direct career path to collaborate across sectors*" (A 2). This highlights a broader regime challenge where existing cultural meanings and market dynamics within the socio-institutional structure do not encourage or facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation, thereby limiting the potential for systemic transitions.

5.2.3 Landscape barriers

Political and legislative environment

Government policies and European Union directives significantly impact the operations of these enterprises. Directives related to diversity, inclusion, and employment opportunities for immigrants shape how social enterprises can function and reach their goals. The emphasis on project-based government initiatives often results in short-term impacts rather than sustained changes, creating a landscape-level challenge where "*a lot of the knowledge and competence ends up kind of like just running through the sand in some ways*" (CS 3). This underscores the difficulty of achieving long-term systemic changes in immigrant labor market practices.

Mitt Liv specifically points to policy fluctuations, often manifested in short-term initiatives rather than long-term solutions, reflecting a fragmented regime that lacks stability for lasting impacts. She notes, "*One of the things that we find challenging is that the way that the state and government often kind of look at this is very much project-based*" (CS 3). This inconsistency presents challenges to sustainable transitions that require enduring commitments.

Malmö Stad on the other hand highlights the tightening of immigration policies as a significant pressure affecting the city's ability to integrate immigrants effectively. A reduction in refugee quotas has influenced Malmö's demographic landscape and labor market. They explain, "*the recent government are trying to reduce the possibilities to immigrate to Sweden*" (A 1). This landscape-level influence demonstrates how broader political decisions shape societal structure and limit opportunities for social innovation.

Slow pace of Landscape changes and public sector rigidity

MSI discusses cultural patterns and significant political shifts, and how these impact the speed at which public sectors can adapt to societal needs. This misalignment is crucial as it affects the operational context for social innovations. They emphasize, "*the public sector is not [adaptive]. They cannot be that fast in what they're doing*" (A 2). This statement underscores the difficulty of achieving rapid changes within the rigid structures of public governance, which directly impacts the integration initiatives for immigrants like those observed in Malmö.

MSI also touches on the inadequacies in the legislative and regulatory frameworks that affect social enterprises. They out the absence of specific legislation for social enterprises in Sweden, which affects their recognition and operational capacity within the regime. "*There should be more reviews of statistics... of the number of immigrants that are unemployed or those who are in more need*" (A 2), advocating for regulatory adjustments that better reflect the realities of marginalized groups and enhance support for social innovation.

National policies for funding civil society organizations

As pointed out by Yalla Trappan, there is a significant disparity in funding allocation between the civil society organizations and the governmental sector in Sweden, where only about 2 to 3% of available funding is directed towards civil society initiatives. This is in contracts to neighboring Denmark, where 12 to 14% of funding is allocated to such organizations. The interviewee points out this as a negative trend, emphasizing that the proportion of funding dedicated to civil society in Sweden is decreasing, not increasing, which they view as a step in the wrong direction (CS 1).

Immigration policies and government support

The interview with Botildenborg highlights the complexities of immigration policies that affect the integration of specific immigrant groups. For instance, Ukrainian refugees have specific legal entitlements that differ markedly from those of other refugee groups, affecting their ability to integrate and receive support. These policies are often slow to adapt to the changing needs of immigrant populations, thereby affecting initiatives aimed at their integration: "*The government is now saying that by the end of the year they should have more rights and they will have special treatment compared to other refugees*" (CS 2). This also shows a discriminatory approach, as the policies were not similarly adapted to for example Syrian refugees, but became rather more restrictive (CS 2).

Integration and employment policies

Changes in local government policies directly impact the ability of initiatives like Botildenborg to assist immigrants. Recent changes in policy have led to reductions in the availability of work placements, crucial for providing practical work experience to immigrants. Such policy shifts can suddenly alter the operational capacity of social enterprises working towards immigrant integration. "*The politicians at Malmö Stad changed, so they can only place people for work experience within Malmö stad's projects... we then, from one day to another, lost two of our staff*" (CS 2).

Cultural disconnect and employment barriers

Broader societal and cultural barriers affect the mission of these enterprises. Botildenborg for example reflects on the societal challenges and prejudices that immigrants face by potential employers, which are entrenched in the broader cultural and policy regimes of Sweden. They mention, "*I've noticed if they have zero experience from Sweden, they're like, oh, who is this person? No, we don't trust that what they're saying on the CV is true*" and discusses the skepticism employers have towards immigrants' resumes, which points to deeper societal and cultural norms affecting immigrant integration (CS 2). This is especially affecting women and people of color. As pointed out in the interview "*The longest recruitment waiting time is for women that are born outside of Sweden. And the most people that are most likely to employ women not born in Sweden are women not born in Sweden*" (CS 2).

Mitt Liv also refers to deep-seated cultural norms and societal values around employment and integration as a barrier which their company is trying to solve through equipping immigrants with the competencies needed to adapt to Swedish workplace culture and by educating mentors on diversity and inclusion. However, the slow pace of change in societal values regarding immigration and the

integration of foreign-born workers pose ongoing challenges. They refer to the "*unconscious biases*" and the exclusive norms that may inadvertently occur within organizations (CS 3).

MSI notes the impact of demographic changes, such as the influx of immigrants, on local social structures and labor markets. According to them a bottom-up approach is needed to better understand and meet the needs of these changing demographics. "*What we need to do more of, I think, is to be on the ground and to understand our target groups better from their point of view, not only from data*" (A 2). This approach is suggested as a solution to the landscape's slow response to demographic shifts, aiming to make social innovations more responsive and effective.

Figure 6 below illustrates interactions between the 3 Niche, regime and landscape barriers in Malmö (Own illustration).
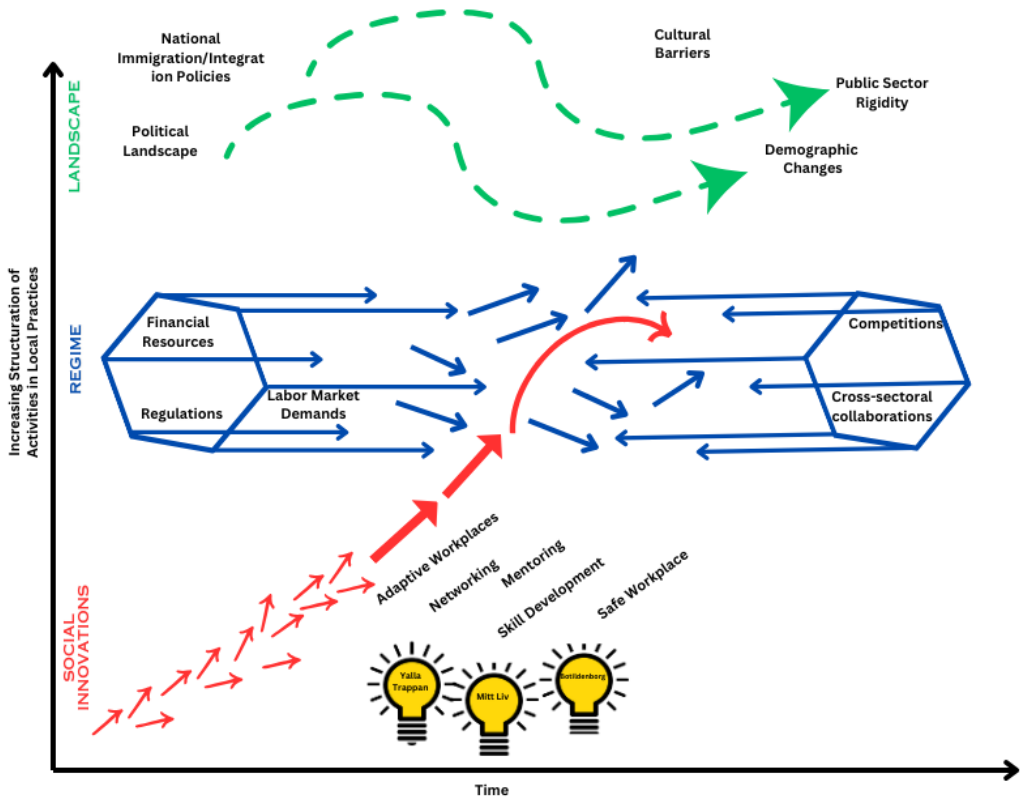
Figure 6: Interaction of Malmö's Work Integration Social Innovations with Regime and Landscape barriers (Own illustration, adapted from Loorbach et al., 2017).

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6 Discussion

6.1 Assessing the influence of Malmö's social innovations on "SDGs 8" and "SDG 10"

Having explored how the selected social innovations in Malmö align with "SDG 8" and "SDG 10", the first part of the discussion section will provide further reflections on how this alignment could be interpreted by applying MLP framework. Initially, it is important to acknowledge that monitoring and reporting on SDGs have many complexities, and interpreting all of them into measurable indicators is proven to be challenging (Fonseca et al., 2020). In fact, one of the main criticism of SDG monitoring largely centers on the substantial costs and resource requirements for data collection and reporting, alongside doubts about the relevance and adequacy of the collected data (Zinkernagel et al., 2018). This is more pronounced for small to medium-sized enterprises, as they might not specifically adopt SDGs as their main goals or report on them due to limited resources and high compliance costs (Pavlović & Denčić-Mihajlov, 2020). Therefore, the findings and categorization of the impacts are based on the interviews and reviewed documents. Findings regarding RQ1 which explores 'In what way do social innovations that create job opportunities for immigrants, align with the "SDG 8" and "SDG 10" targets?' suggest a considerable impact. Indeed all 3 innovations contribute to SDG Target 8.3, both at niche and regime-levels. For instance, Yalla Trappan and Botildenborg's tailored business models exemplify how niche environments support radical innovations that challenge socio-institutional systems (Geels, 2011; Kemp et al., 1998) while Mitt Liv's partnership with companies challenges both niche and regime structures as it affects the companies' collaboration strategies with immigrant job seekers. Similarly with regards to Target 8.5, initiatives such as internship programs by Botildenborg and Mitt Liv, or the mentorship programs by Yalla Trappan, could be interpreted as niche level impacts through innovative practices (Geels, 2011; El Bilali, 2019). Interventions regarding target 8.6 on youth unemployment are addressed by both Botildenborg and Mitt liv through their internship and vocational training programs which include networking and connecting, thus impacting the regime-level where partnerships are necessary to adjust policies and opportunities for this target group (Geels, 2019; Markard & Truffer, 2008).

Geels (2011) argues that niche environments can challenge existing norms through adaptability and inclusivity. The type of impacts on Target 10.2 by all 3 case studies could be categorized as niche-level interventions, reflected in their employment models, creation of safe and inclusive work environments and reduction of employment barriers. On the other hand, in line with target 10.3 the case studies impact both niche and regime levels, through providing their employees with fair contracts and offering job skills, and at the same time challenging the regime level by strong engagement in local

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policy-making as well as advocating for better integration strategies in local discussions (Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018).

6.2 Challenges at every level: examining the complexities of social innovation in Malmö through MLP

In the second part of the discussion, I will explore how social innovations in Malmö grapple with multiple challenges at niche, regime and landscape levels.

Social innovations in Malmö struggle to balance funding priorities with maintaining operational effectiveness. Funding agencies emphasize innovation, compelling organizations to adapt their programs continually to fit the criteria of innovation-focused grants. Kemp et al. (1998) emphasize that niche environments provide protection for emerging practices, but the need to appear innovative can hinder sustainability. Furthermore, Malmö's shift to a knowledge-based economy complicates job opportunities for certain immigrant groups, creating additional barriers to economic integration for the main target group which are immigrants (Malmö stad, 2024).

At the regime level, funding constraints limit the capacity of social innovations to measure their impact and expand programs, as limited resources prevent them from demonstrating progress against SDG targets. The reliance of these enterprises on external funds makes them vulnerable to shifts in financial regulations and external conditions. Moreover, social sustainability often receives less priority in funding decisions compared to other areas, resulting in underinvestment in programs supporting SDGs. Geels (2011) argues that regime structures tend to resist systemic changes, and a lack of agility in funding frameworks reinforces this rigidity. Additionally, policy frameworks such as the "Tidö Agreement" have tightened labor immigration regulations, which could hinder certain groups, especially those with fewer skills, from finding employment (Sveriges regering, 2023). The decentralized Swedish model, while progressive in policies, demands stronger anti-discrimination measures and better alignment of labor market strategies to address systemic challenges (Lemaître, 2007; Wiesbrock, 2011).

At the landscape level, government policies and European Union directives often prioritize short-term project-based funding, hindering sustained systemic change (Geels, 2011). Proposed changes to labor immigration policies under the "Tidö Agreement" could further complicate integration for certain groups and exacerbate existing disparities (Sveriges regering, 2023). Smith et al. (2010) note that landscape-level barriers include shifts in economic and political climates that externally impact socio-

technical regimes. Despite efforts to integrate SDGs into strategic planning, unemployment and socio-economic segregation remain persistent issues in Malmö, which requires structural adjustments to align national strategies with global SDG goals (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021).

6.3 Limitations and positionality

Finally, I have to acknowledge that my research has limitations. Researchers can have a bias if they are closely affiliated with the population they study or are members themselves, which might limit their curiosity to only explore what they think they don't know rather than uncovering unknown areas (Chenail, 2014). As an immigrant woman myself, I had to resist the tendency to lean toward the data I could affiliate with. To overcome this, I tried to remain objective and unbiased regarding the current environment of segregation in Sweden and Malmö by looking for both positive and negative trends in the data at hand, and tried to take a result-based approach and come up with practical recommendations, rather than only criticizing the current state. Secondly, given the fact that all SDGs are interconnected and impact each other, while I narrowed my research down to only 2 most relevant SDGs, it should be noted that other SDGs such as gender equality or sustainable cities and communities could be very relevant to this research, but were not prioritized given my research topic (United Nations, n.d.). The number of interviews I carried out were also limited to case studies and a few actors, but certainly more interviews with a broader range of stakeholders, specifically the immigrants benefiting from these social innovations could have added to the depth of research.

There are also some criticism toward the MLP framework for its limited engagement with agency and power dynamics, which neglects the complex socio-political roles of diverse actors in sustainability transitions (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009; A. Smith et al., 2005). Critics argue that its vague conceptualization of the landscape level oversimplifies reality and ignores the intricate interplay between different levels and the broader systemic context (Holtz et al., 2008). Furthermore, the framework overemphasizes grassroots innovation and lacks comprehensive analysis of policy environments affecting immigrant integration (Weber & Rohracher, 2012). Despite these limitations, the framework remains valuable for analyzing sustainability transitions by highlighting interactions across levels and acknowledging the complexities of power and agency (Geels, 2002; Hansen & Coenen, 2015).

7 Recommendations

In Malmö, enhancing social innovations aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10 requires a multi-faceted approach to tackle complex challenges. The first step would be to strengthen partnerships across diverse stakeholder groups. **Enhanced collaboration** between social innovation organizations among themselves, local government bodies, academia, private companies, and NGOs will foster comprehensive data reporting and help address resource constraints through a robust, cross-sectoral network.

The development of **tailored monitoring frameworks** is crucial to overcome the complexities and compliance costs faced by small and medium-sized enterprises. These frameworks can include sector-specific indicators that reflect unique activities and business models, and streamline data collection and reducing resource burdens. Such clarity will allow these enterprises to produce more measurable results, thereby demonstrating their impact more effectively. Developing a standardized reporting framework that integrates qualitative and quantitative metrics will offer a cohesive measurement system. **Capacity-building** efforts should train staff on effective data collection and reporting techniques, ensuring accuracy in impact documentation.

Strategic policy engagement is also vital. Social innovations must actively participate in local policy discussions to amplify their influence at the regime level, advocating for inclusivity and fair labor practices. Collaboration with policymakers will create inclusive strategies that ensure comprehensive reforms in line with SDGs 8 and 10.

Promoting **replication and scaling of successful practices**, such as tailored mentorship and business models, will help niche organizations challenge rigid institutional systems. **Knowledge-sharing platforms** and funding support are essential for this growth. Financial incentives or grants, specifically tailored for social innovations, can bolster SMEs as they maintain innovative business models and fair labor practices amid resource challenges.

Scaling up work and language integration models requires **documenting** best practices and adapting them for broader use across Malmö. Establishing **mentorship networks** between successful and emerging social enterprises can help with seamless implementation and training, while ensuring culturally sensitive materials will encourage active participation from various backgrounds. On the same note, a **centralized platform** that consolidates information about social enterprises focused on immigrant integration will facilitate networking and resource sharing. The provision of open-access

data to organizations, researchers, and policymakers will strengthen cross-sector collaboration and align efforts.

Finally, **Visibility** is another key pillar. Partnerships between social enterprises, government agencies, and private companies can host joint events and campaigns that showcase the transformative power of social innovations. The engagement of local media to share success stories can increase public support and visibility.

By weaving together these strategies, Malmö can unlock the full potential of social innovations, paving the way for systemic change and sustainable growth aligned with the SDGs.

8 Conclusion

This thesis explored the landscape of social innovations in Malmö, particularly examining how three key initiatives—Yalla Trappan, Botildenborg, and Mitt Liv—align with Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10. By analyzing these organizations through the MLP framework, the research examined how social innovations drive inclusivity and fair labor practices while confronting challenges at the niche, regime, and landscape levels. The analysis of findings with regards to the first research question showed that each organization addressed relevant targets of these two SDGs through tailored programs and partnerships that improved job opportunities and reduced inequalities. The second research question explored the challenges these social innovations face in Malmö's existing immigrant integration setting. Findings showed that funding constraints, limited visibility, and inadequate cross-sector collaboration significantly hinder their ability to measure impact, scale up, and navigate market demands. Insights from this research reveal that while all three organizations contributed positively to SDGs 8 and 10, the nature of their contributions differed due to their unique business models and community engagement strategies. Yalla Trappan emphasized women's empowerment and inclusivity in employment, Botildenborg utilized sustainable agriculture to bridge cultural gaps, and Mitt Liv leveraged mentorship to help immigrants access suitable employment. However, each faced systemic barriers that limited their capacity to expand and measure impact.

Three key findings emerged from this study. First, social innovations can be powerful tools for achieving SDGs if they receive adequate funding and policy support. Second, visibility and cross-sector collaboration are vital to maximize impact and establish synergies between different initiatives. Third, tailored frameworks and partnerships are necessary for sustainable growth. Future research should further explore how niche organizations can navigate regime and landscape challenges to better align with global SDG strategies. The study's practical recommendations could provide valuable guidance for stakeholders to bolster the potential of social innovations in Malmö and beyond.

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Appendix

The interview Questions:

<u>Brief Background of Research</u>

> This research explores the relationship between social innovation and the integration of immigrants in Malmö, Sweden. This study focuses on the role of local social enterprises, such as Yalla Trappan, Mitt Liv, and Botildenborg, and their contribution to integrating immigrants into the labor market. It aims to understand how these innovations address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). With a focus on the city of Malmö, this research aims to shed light on how social innovations help navigate the changes in Sweden's migration policies and their impact on immigrant communities and the broader society.

1. **Questions for the actors**

- Could you elaborate on any social innovations that have emerged to meet the specific needs of immigrant communities to join the labor market, and how these innovations are supported by the municipality?

- Can you describe the process for undertaking initiatives to facilitate immigrant integration and support/promote social innovations? How are social demands and needs identified? At what intervals do plans change? How global goals (SDGs) and national policies are aligned with local needs?

- How do action plans align with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 8 (economic growth) and 10 (reduced inequalities) and national and local policies?

- How do you assess the effectiveness of these initiatives in terms of actual outcomes in immigrant integration into the labor market? Do you use any particular indicators and tools to measure impacts or you rely on statistics?

- What are the most significant challenges you face when implementing these programs?

- How does the municipality foster collaborations with local social enterprises and other stakeholders in the integration process? Is there a community of practice to share success stories? How does the city use the lessons learnt from the relevant social initiatives? Is there a process to support scaling up of successful initiatives? Do you see your role as an enabler?

- In your opinion, what are the key elements that contribute to the successful integration of immigrants into the labor market in Malmö?

- How do you envision the future of social innovation and integration policies in Malmo Municipality?

- What kind of support or changes at the policy level do you think would further enhance the municipality's integration efforts?

2. Questions for social innovators:

- Can you tell me about the inception of [Name of Initiative] and its core mission in the context of immigrant integration?

- How does [Name of Initiative] uniquely address the challenges immigrants face when entering the labor market in Malmö? Does your intervention only focus on labour market? Or housing, health and education as well.

- Could you describe the process of engaging immigrant individuals or families with your program? Are they identified and approached by your enterprise or introduces by any governmental organization? Is there any accessible database for you?

- (MLP perspective) What policies (at Macro, meso and micro levels) have proven most effective in fostering sustainable immigrant integration and economic empowerment? Have these policies changed in the past few years?

- How do you measure the impact of your work, and what indicators do you use to track progress toward SDGs 8 (Decent work) and 10 (Reducing inequalities)?

- How do the current policies incentivize your enterprise?

- What barriers or resistance have you encountered (in terms of national or city regulations), and how have you adapted your approach in response?

- In terms of partnerships, how do you collaborate with the public sector (namely Malmö stad), private companies/enterprises, and other NGOs and social initiatives? Has there ever been a community of practice among similar initiatives to share success stories and lessons learned?

- Looking forward, what innovations or changes are you planning to implement to enhance the effectiveness of your initiative, because of the rapid changes taking place in the city of Malmö?
- From your experience, what advice would you give to the decision-makers, planners and other social entrepreneurs aiming to contribute to immigrant integration and labor market inclusion?