

LANDMARK Conference – Moving Towards Socially Responsible Public Procurement

Bremen, 27.03.2014 | Report

LANDMARK forever?

With over 140 participants from more than 20 countries, the final ‘LANDMARK Conference – Moving Towards Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP)’ was a real success. The conference stimulated active dialogue among the participants from all different societal domains (academia, public procurers, NGOs as well as suppliers) and revealed the major outcomes of the three year project collaboration. The conference was organised in cooperation with the ‘Cotton on to fair trade procurement’ project and also saw the launch of the Fair Cotton Procurement Awards ceremony.

Welcoming, introduction and plenary discussion

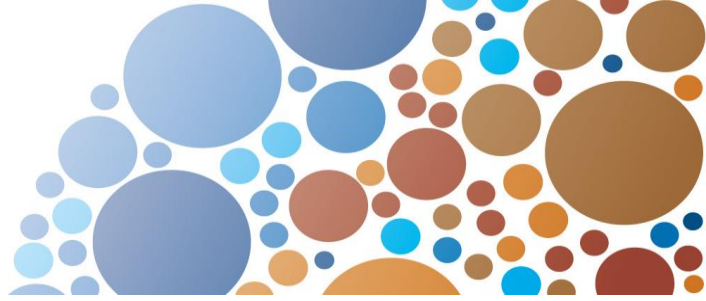
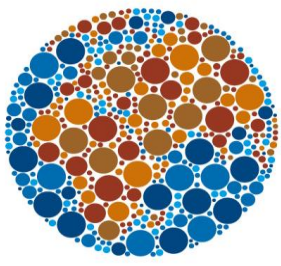
Bremen Councilor Hans-Henning Lühr cordially welcomed the participants and opened the conference by praising the progress that has been made in terms of collaboration between public procurers and NGOs, which “would have been unthinkable about a decade ago”.

LANDMARK project coordinator Philipp Tepper introduced the conference by acknowledging the project partners courage to pioneer the topic of socially responsible public procurement (SRPP) involving unforeseeable risks, especially in times of a burdensome financial crisis. He further praised the substantial contributions LANDMARK made in terms of awareness raising on SRPP.



The next speaker, Dr. Kirsten Wiese from Bremen’s Senator for Finances, presented the City’s successful approach to SRPP, focusing in detail on how LANDMARK has shaped the market with tenders worth over €70 million.

Then, Liz Kistner, who guided the participants through the conference, opened the floor for the plenary discussion, which shed light on the



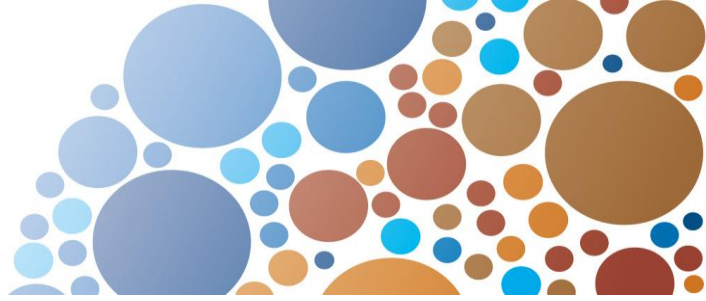
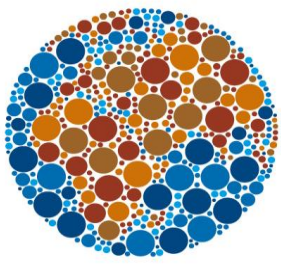
future challenges in and solutions to socially responsible public procurement. The plenary discussion saw a dynamic dialogue between the panel participants Anna Lipkin (European Working Group on Ethical Public Procurement), Matthias Goost (Managing Director, Bierbaum-Proenen Textiles, Germany), Carsten Schulz (Head of Central Purchasing Body, Immobilien Bremen), Jim Cranshaw (People & Planet) and Solobamady Keita (Secretary General of the National Union of Cotton Producers' Cooperative Societies of Mali). Critical questions from the audience further stimulated discussion.



Matthias Goost, Managing Director of the Bierbaum-Proenen Textiles was the first German company to participate in the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF). They conceded room for improvement, but also highlighted their commitment and efforts to buy fairly produced materials for their production and the difficulty of succeeding in the balancing act between remaining globally competitive and investing an economically reasonable amount of resources into ensuring socially responsible production processes. As a response to the question, whether he regrets having joined the FWF, he answered: “No, quite the contrary, the membership of the FWF positively influenced the company’s working atmosphere, as it created some sense of ownership among its staff, motivating them to contribute to a good cause”.

Mr. Goost added that the private sector can only change its production patterns incrementally: “We cannot switch our sourcing activities from 0 to 1 over night” said Mr. Goost as a response to a question from the audience demanding further efforts from the private sector. Having been asked about what Sweden has learned from the LANDMARK project collaboration, Anna Lipkin replied that the use of verification schemes using labels or other appropriate tools was of particular interest to Sweden. Carsten Schulz highlighted the institutionalisation of SRPP as a major outcome of the LANDMARK project in Bremen and that public procurers generally have a better standing at the city now.





Overall, the plenary discussion brought to mind the complexity of socially responsible public procurement and the great number of perspectives and interests involved. Raising awareness, engaging in dialogue and streamlining expectations appeared to be crucial components for a transition towards SRPP and at the same time illustrated major outcomes of the LANDMARK project.

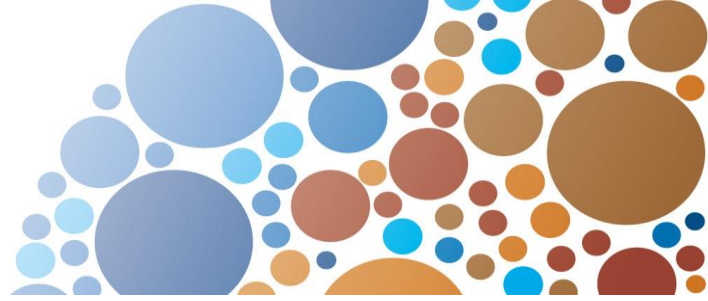
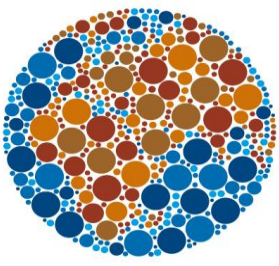
Keynote Contributions

Subsequently, two keynote contributions addressed the practical dimension of SRPP: Dr. Matthias Zieres (Kropp • Haag • Hübinger Advocates, Germany) first gave an overview on the opportunities that the new EU Procurement Directives offer for public procurers in terms of implementing SRPP, followed by Binay Kumar Choudhury (Textile Division Manager Control Union Certifications, GOTS-Auditor, Mumbai, India), who reported on his practical experience with auditing production lines for public procurement and the chances and challenges it entails.



Workshops – how to implement socially responsible public procurement?

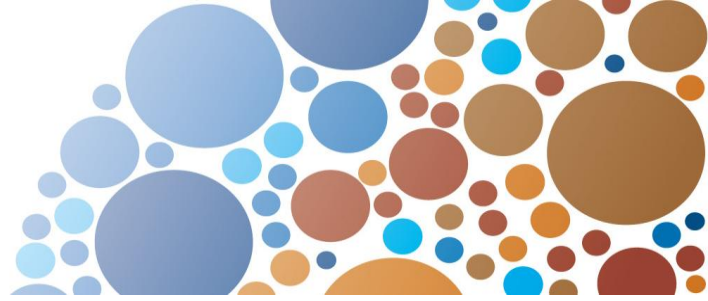
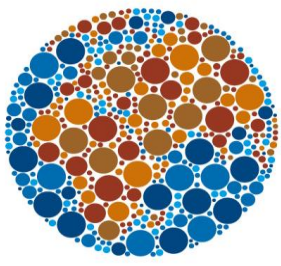
The afternoon of the conference saw four workshops allowing participants to engage. The workshops focused on a range of topics, including: what others can learn from the Scandinavian model of monitoring supply chains in public procurement; how public procurers can gain competences in applying social criteria; effective ways to use labels, auditing systems and other schemes for reliable verification; and the why and how of fair trade cotton and supply chain justice in public procurement.



The workshops included two presentations respectively and a subsequent group work, which allowed the workshop participants to discuss the challenges and potential solutions related to the topics under discussion and to eventually create a piece of art, symbolising the outcome of their discussions. The four art installations were commonly interpreted in plenary, making clear that the path towards a more sustainable trajectory in public procurement can be “messy, complex and challenging” requiring reconciliation of different perspectives, both locally and globally. However, it was also acknowledged that there is no need to reinvent the wheel, as most components for a successful SRPP already exist and that the different pieces just have to be put together.

Doing so will best be achieved by engaging in a market dialogue, sharing knowledge, pooling resources and implementing socially responsible public procurement in practice.





Procurement Awards

The Conference was topped off with the European Fair Trade Cotton Procurement Awards, moderated by Elba Estrada, which recognised the city of Paris and the French Post office, the municipality of Traun in Austria and the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom for their excellence in Fair Trade cotton procurement.

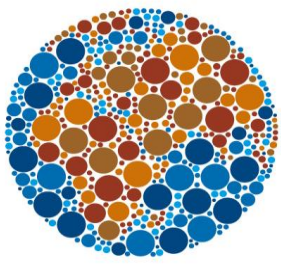


Conclusions

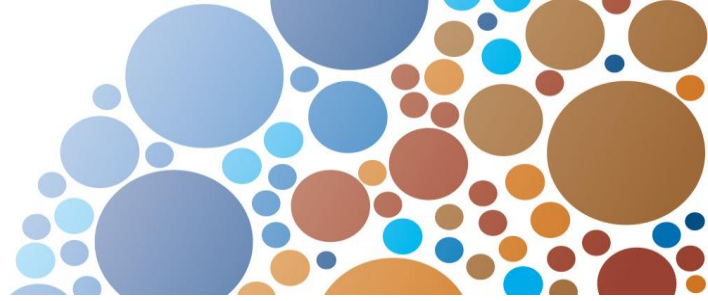
One thing became clear during the conference: the transition from conventional public procurement to SRPP cannot happen overnight, as it is a challenging and complex process that requires commitment and collaboration between many different actors. However, the conference stimulated dialogue and revealed different ways of how to overcome the challenges that public procurers currently face when trying to purchase more sustainably.

Problems of intransparency, time and money intensity, lack of knowledge, unreliability or even non-existence of suitable verification schemes, require a close collaboration between different actors involved, including public procurers, NGOs, market actors and researchers.

The conference has shown that Europe is on a good way to overcome these challenges and to put SRPP into practice.



**THE
LANDMARK
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MOVING TOWARDS
SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE
PROCUREMENT



In his final statement, LANDMARK project coordinator Philipp Tepper made it clear that reconciling environmental, social and economic aspects in the procurement process, both locally and globally, requires a holistic view and a high level of expertise. He closed the conference encouraging further collaboration and dialogue in the field to allow for a transition towards socially responsible public procurement.



The LANDMARK project was a crucial step to refine this transition, as it raised awareness about the topic, fostered dialogue and allowed for sharing experiences thus leaving all participants with “a rich basket of experiences”.

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