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# ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES IN SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT: a collaborative approach for supply chain monitoring

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Work Package 1

Sustainable public procurement: from the international agenda to actual buying practice



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# Addressing social issues in sustainable public procurement: a collaborative approach for supply chain monitoring

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## Abstract

Sustainable public procurement (SPP) aims to promote sustainable production and consumption by using governments' purchasing power as a lever to develop more sustainable business models. Despite an initial focus on environmental issues, there has been growing attention on developing SPP initiatives aimed at tackling social aspects, such as violations of human rights and workers' rights. Interactions between stakeholders have been proposed as an important element of SPP initiatives, leveraging the potential to develop collaborative approaches; however, within SPP literature, the role and types of collaboration remain underexplored. This working paper considers how social issues are being addressed through collaboration in SPP by analysing the cases of a civil society organisation (Electronics Watch) and a public organisation (Swedish National Secretariat for Sustainable Public Procurement). This research was designed as a multiple case study, collecting data through interviews, secondary data, and direct observation – the data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings of this study explored the collaboration models of Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP discussing common benefits and challenges, the facilitator role of these organisations, and the interaction arenas formed by each model. The interconnection between these collaboration models showed a chain of collaborations that can be a lever for promoting social impact through SPP. The chain of collaborations adds to the SPP literature by providing a more complete understanding of the myriad of actors and their respective interconnections in a collaborative approach to SPP. Chains of collaboration have to be continuously improved to build meaningful interactions in SPP, based on long-term thinking.

**Keywords:** sustainable public procurement; social responsibility; collaboration between stakeholders.

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# 1. Introduction

Sustainable public procurement (SPP) aims to promote sustainable production and consumption (UNEP, 2021) by using governments' purchasing power as a lever to develop more sustainable business models (Brammer & Walker, 2011; Witjes & Lozano, 2016). Several countries are supporting SPP initiatives (UNEP, 2023), considering its potential to contribute to sustainability efforts (Preuss, 2009; van Berkel & Schotanus, 2021). SPP initiatives must be undertaken through a holistic approach that balances the sustainability dimensions (Lozano et al., 2022), considering the interactions between the economic, environmental, and social issues through time (Lozano, 2008b).

SPP initiatives have mainly focused on addressing environmental issues (Grandia & Kruyen, 2020; Guarnieri & Gomes, 2019; Steurer et al., 2007), with growing attention on tackling social ones (Caranta, 2022; European Commission, 2021). Social issues addressed by SPP include human rights (Sattari et al., 2022) and workers' rights promotion (Caranta, 2022; Stoffel et al., 2019), with positive outcomes being accomplished and disseminated (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021; World Bank, 2021). However, addressing social issues through SPP can be complex and challenging (Hafsa et al., 2021; Martin-Ortega, 2018; McCrudden, 2004), especially due to lack of supplier readiness (Amann et al., 2014), knowledge gap between stakeholders (Vluggen et al., 2020), and complexity on measuring human rights and working conditions (Martin-Ortega, 2018).

SPP is a complex process (Igarashi et al., 2015); the already complex public procurement system (Thai, 2001) is complemented by several elements when sustainability is considered (Lozano et al., 2022). For example, the SPP system entails sustainability dimensions (Lozano, 2008b) and sustainability criteria and specifications (Caranta, 2023; Edquist & Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, 2021). Stakeholder interactions (e.g. buyers, suppliers, and civil society exchanging knowledge and co-developing solutions) also compose SPP (Alhola & Nissinen, 2018; Lozano et al., 2022), which adds more complexity (Oliveira et al., 2020) and requires additional capacity and resources (Lozano et al., 2020), but also leverages the potentiality of developing sustainability through collaboration (Lozano, 2008a).

Collaboration between stakeholders can contribute to SPP initiatives by promoting knowledge sharing (Berg et al., 2022; Johnson & Klassen, 2022), reducing transaction costs (Erridge & Greer, 2002), and fostering the co-development of sustainable solutions (Alhola & Nissinen, 2018), especially when supported by facilitators (Lozano et al., 2020). Research on collaborative SPP has offered frameworks for understanding the role of collaboration in certain contexts (c.f. Holma et al., 2020; Witjes & Lozano, 2016) but other contexts and aspects of collaboration within them remain underexplored. There is also a research gap in exploring the facilitators' perspective on collaborative SPP.

This working paper aims to provide depth on addressing social issues through collaboration in SPP by analysing the cases of a civil society organisation (Electronics Watch) and a public organisation (the Swedish National Secretariat for SPP). Each of these is respectively a facilitator of collaboration on the social aspects of SPP and a participant in collaborations — with one another, with other facilitators, and with other individual organisations — in different contexts. This study explores a specific phenomenon of interconnected collaborations: the first within the scope of a public organisation's national work; the second related to the efforts of a civil society organisation (CSO); and the last connecting these two organisations<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This working paper focuses on understanding the collaboration governance established by those two organisations. For more deep insights on how they are contributing to SPP, check available sources for the Electronics Watch (e.g. Martin-Ortega, 2018; Outhwaite & Martin-Ortega, 2019) and the National Secretariat for SPP (e.g. Andhov et al., 2020).

This working paper is structured in six sections. After this introduction, the second section discusses collaboration theory and collaboration in SPP. The third and fourth sections present the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP approaches to collaborative SPP. The fifth section discusses the interconnection between the collaborative approaches presented and offers a new understanding of collaboration in SPP. The last section concludes this working paper and presents future research topics.

## 2. Towards a collaborative SPP

Collaboration between stakeholders is an inter-organisational process aimed at proposing joint responses to common problems (Gray, 1985; Vangen & Huxham, 2003) by creating new solutions and understandings through interactions with a high level of involvement (Denise, 1999; Lozano, 2007). The growing complexity of problems faced by organisations (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Gray & Wood, 1991; O'Toole, 1995) has been demanding solutions based on knowledge built from different perspectives (Lozano, 2022; McNamara, 2012; Webb, 1991), which requires intense joint actions (Gray & Wood, 1991; Lozano, 2008a).

Joint actions between organisations can be based on at least three levels of involvement (Lozano, 2007): 1) coordination, 2) cooperation, and 3) collaboration. Coordination stands for joint actions promoted by formal or informal authorities (Webb, 1991), which orchestrate efforts from different organisations towards a common goal (Bedwell et al., 2012; Denise, 1999). Cooperation denotes joint actions based on common interests (McNamara, 2012), in which each organisation has its own goals but foresees benefits in working together (Axelrod, 1984). Collaboration means joint actions motivated by shared goals and interests and collective responsibility (Bedwell et al., 2012; McNamara, 2012), using divergent insights and spontaneity (Denise, 1999; Lozano, 2007) to build intense and interdependent interactions (Gray, 1985). The three levels of involvement are grounded on communication, by which organisations can transfer information and agree on shifting from acting individually to acting together (Denise, 1999; Lozano, 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the levels of involvement in joint actions between organisations, with collaboration at the highest level.

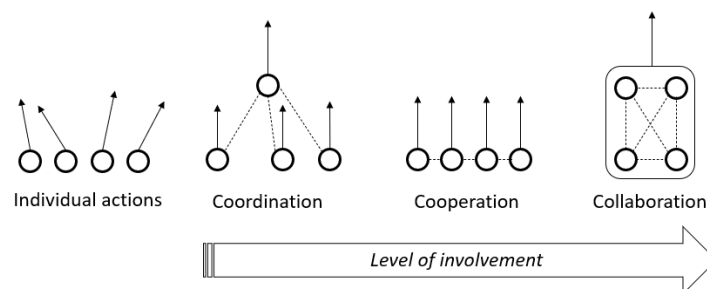


Figure 1. Levels of involvement in joint actions between organisations.

Collaboration between stakeholders requires transdisciplinarity and long-term thinking (Lozano, 2007), which can contribute to setting problems, establishing clear directions, and providing structures to support and sustain joint actions (Gray, 1985). Successful collaboration initiatives can build feedback loops that pave the way for future joint actions (Bedwell et al., 2012). However, collaboration efforts can be hindered by several factors (Lozano et al., 2021), including lack of needs alignment (Lozano, 2007), lack of trust (Webb, 1991), and lack of personnel collaboration commitment (Huxham, 1993).

Collaboration has the potential to contribute to sustainability efforts by supporting interdependent decisions that can have benefits for the whole system (Lozano, 2007), co-developing sustainability solutions (Johnson & Klassen, 2022) and improving the environmental and social performance of organisations (Niesten et al., 2017). Research on collaboration in sustainability includes studies on corporate sustainability (Lozano et al., 2021), circular economy (Barreiro-

Gen & Lozano, 2020; Köhler et al., 2022), and SPP (Glas et al., 2017; Holma et al., 2020; Johnson & Klassen, 2022).

Collaboration between stakeholders in SPP can promote the development of more sustainable business models and supply chains (Witjes & Lozano, 2016) and foster the co-creation of sustainability-oriented products and services (Lingegård et al., 2021; Uttam & Roos, 2015). Benefits of collaborative approaches to SPP include developing sustainability requirements (e.g. specifications and criteria) (Alhola & Nissinen, 2018; Witjes & Lozano, 2016), reducing transaction costs (Erridge & Greer, 2002), and sharing contract monitoring efforts (Daugbjerg, 2023; Sonnino, 2009) – although there are costs in collaboration, such as promoting stakeholder coordination (Lozano et al., 2020).

Collaboration in SPP can also increase the participation of citizens (i.e. end-users of public policies supported by SPP) in the procurement processes (Alhola & Nissinen, 2018; Sonnino, 2009) and improve the knowledge flow through meaningful interactions between stakeholders (Erridge & Greer, 2002). Interactions between stakeholders work as a systemic element of SPP that can contribute to incorporating sustainability in the connection between demand (i.e. buyer's needs) and offer (i.e. supplier's products and services) (Lozano et al., 2022). Figure 2 presents the interactions between stakeholders in SPP, which leverages the potentiality of developing sustainability-friendly demand-offerings through collaboration.

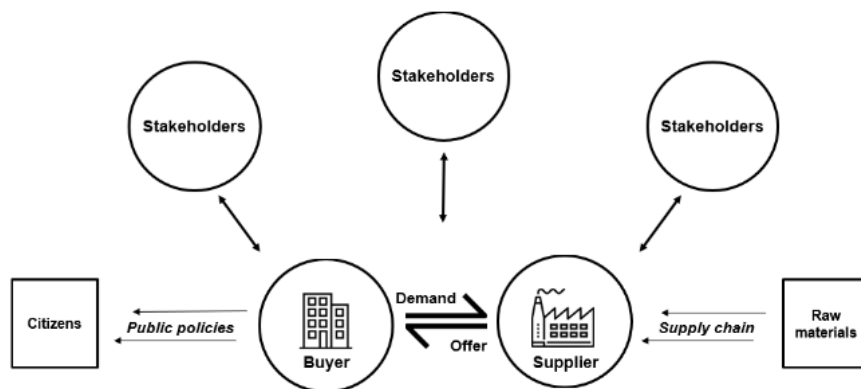


Figure 2. Interactions between stakeholders in sustainable public procurement.

Research has been providing frameworks for understanding collaboration between stakeholders in SPP, including a circular approach to reduce raw materials' use and waste generation (Witjes & Lozano, 2016), a model for early involvement of stakeholders (Holma et al., 2020), and a proposal for involving multiple stakeholders with the support of facilitators (Lozano et al., 2020). However, there is still a research gap in providing a holistic approach to this topic. For example, there is limited research on the role of facilitators in building collaboration in SPP, with exceptions such as Lozano et al. (2020) presenting a case in which individuals working as facilitators (i.e. staff dedicated to managing interactions) contributed to overcoming collaboration challenges and Berg (2022) proposing an understanding of organisations performing a facilitator role by translating, transferring, and creating knowledge between stakeholders.

There is also a research gap in understanding and organising the types of collaboration between stakeholders in SPP. Several types of collaboration between stakeholders can contribute to SPP, such as: a) buyer-supplier (Johnson & Klassen, 2022; Uttam & Roos, 2015; Witjes & Lozano, 2016); b) buyer-civil society (Sonnino, 2009); c) buyer-supplier-civil society (Alhola & Nissinen, 2018; Lozano et al., 2020). Collaboration between public buyers has also been studied by SPP research (Erridge & Greer, 2002; Preuss & Walker, 2011). However, most of the studies on collaboration between public buyers are related to traditional public procurement (not necessarily dedicated to sustainability), which have been long focused on understanding this collaboration type (Conover, 1925; Santos & Fernandes, 2022; Simpson, 1954), considering its potential to

improve the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and resources (Schotanus et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2013), fostering the strategic use of the government's purchasing power (Dimitri et al., 2006).

Public buyers can collaborate in multiple stages of the procurement processes (e.g. developing specifications and criteria, selecting suppliers, monitoring and enforcing contracts) (Munson & Hu, 2010; Santos & Fernandes, 2022) and organise this collaboration through different structures (e.g. informal purchasing groups, central authorities) (Schotanus & Telgen, 2007; Schotanus, 2023). Purchasing groups and central authorities – including central purchasing bodies (CPB) – can build intense communication channels (which can be defined as interaction arenas) that promote successive interactions between public buyers in different procurement processes (Dimitri et al., 2006; Schotanus & Telgen, 2007), especially when establishing long-term thinking (Santos & Fernandes, 2022). However, developing collaboration between buyers in public procurement can be challenging (Bryngemark et al., 2023; McCue et al., 2015), considering factors such as procurement culture and regulations (Behravesch et al., 2022), conflicting policies (Walker et al., 2013), and individualistic behaviour (Karjalainen et al., 2009).

### **3. Methods**

This working paper conducts a multiple-case study to analyse a phenomenon of interconnected collaborations to address social issues in the SPP context. Case studies are suitable for exploring a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014), by conducting an in-depth analysis of organisations, processes, and other case subjects (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019).

The cases studied in this working paper entail collaboration approaches developed by the Electronics Watch and the Swedish National Secretariat for SPP. These cases were chosen considering the opportunity to explore their particularities in working with social issues in SPP and the interconnections between their collaboration approaches.

In this research, the data for exploring the phenomenon was collected through interviews, secondary data, and direct observation. Four interviews were conducted – with 2 representatives from each organisation – to understand how the Electronics Watch and the Swedish National Secretariat for SPP were contributing to SPP implementation. Secondary data included communications, reports, and procurement planning documents. Direct observation was a complementary source of evidence (following the lessons from Yin, 2014), considering the author's role of observer-as-participant (c.f. Saunders et al., 2019), focused on a limited level of participation but a timely position for conducting observation<sup>2</sup>. The collected data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The limitations of this research's methods include (c.f. Saunders et al., 2019): 1) the secondary data was collected for a non-research purpose; 2) an observer bias may have led to misinterpretations, and 3) an observer effect may have threatened the reliability of the data.

### **4. Collaboration to monitor electronics hardware supply chains and remediate identified rights abuses**

Electronics Watch is a CSO founded in 2015 with the purpose of using public procurement leverage to promote and protect the rights of workers in the electronics supply chains. By linking public buyers to each other and civil society monitors in electronics production regions, Electronics Watch provides a shared services model that enables worker-driven monitoring of supply chains in public procurement and provides remediation management based on identified rights abuses. Public buyers can affiliate with Electronics Watch and have access to several

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<sup>2</sup> The author worked as Guest Researcher in the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP during a secondment arranged by the SAPIENS Network, an international training network.

resources regarding fostering human and workers' rights in their procurement processes, such as best practices, standardised requirements (e.g. contract clauses), and a network of local CSOs capable of worker-driven factory monitoring (see Martin-Ortega, 2018). Affiliations can be done a) directly and b) through a consortium of public buyers or framework authority on behalf of its members or buyers<sup>3</sup> (i.e. CPB), the latter with the potential to reduce costs of affiliation and participation.

The benefits of being affiliated with Electronics Watch from a public buyer perspective include:

- Developing capabilities to incorporate human rights due diligence into procurement processes;
- Developing capabilities for effective supplier dialogue during contract management;
- Accessing a portfolio of collaboratively built and tested procurement requirements;
- Increasing relative power to include sustainability requirements in procurement and remediate rights abuses by being part of a network;
- Receiving external support to improve contract management and build an effectiveness-oriented procurement with sustainability requirements;
- Accessing monitoring reports on factories linked directly to procured product models (suppliers, sub-suppliers, etc) that go beyond suppliers' self-assessments or industry-led management-systems audits;
- Participating in stakeholder interactions, including procurement requirements building (with public buyers, industry associations, trade unions, etc), peer networking, successful initiatives sharing, and training;
- Providing inputs for improving accountability and transparency (e.g. in answering control agencies, media, and citizens inquiries regarding sustainability practices).

There are also benefits for the suppliers to work with public buyers affiliated with Electronics Watch, such as:

- Reducing transaction costs by accessing a centralised channel;
- Receiving inputs to justify more proximity with supply chain actors (e.g. resellers, components manufacturers);
- Being familiar with standard procurement requirements, reducing costs of participating in tenders;
- Improving their positive visibility by contributing to sustainable development and strengthening sustainability reports.

The challenges of the Electronics Watch model include:

- Developing public buyers' capabilities (e.g. time, personnel, sustainability commitment and culture) to use the resources provided by the affiliation;
- Building long-lasting relationships and engagement when there is a lack of employee retention at public buyers;
- Repelling artificial engagements from the supplier side, aimed at postponing meaningful contributions to social sustainability (i.e. socialwashing);
- Addressing the different regulatory frameworks and languages of the different public buyers;
- Managing interactions with different stakeholders and fostering affiliates' participation;
- Considering the diversity of maturity levels of affiliates and supply chain actors.

The Electronics Watch collaboration model (presented in Figure 3) can be defined as an interaction arena for fostering human rights in supply chains through public procurement. This arena – in which Electronics Watch takes a facilitator role – develops collaboration between public buyers, suppliers, and several actors capable of working with human rights in supply chains (CSOs, trade unions, sub-suppliers, etc).

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<sup>3</sup> In September 2023, the Electronics Watch's website stated that 1.533 public buyers were affiliates (from 12 countries), of which 48 joined directly and 1.485 through a consortium.

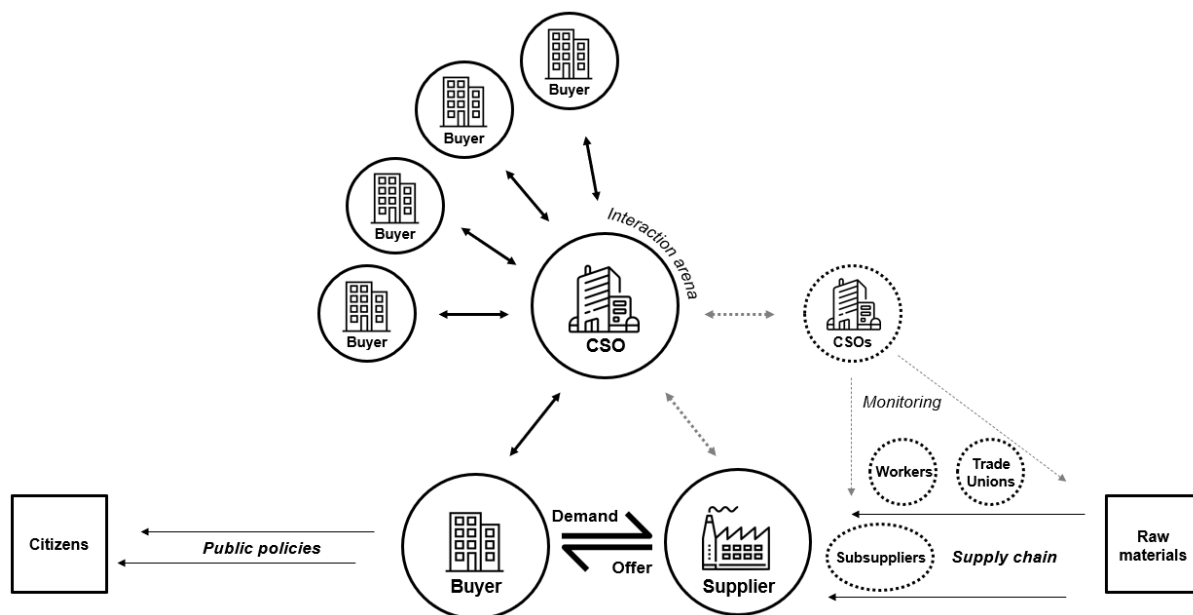


Figure 3. Interactions in the Electronics Watch collaboration model.

## 5. Collaboration to harmonise procurement requirements

Since 2010, Sweden's regions have collaborated in a national effort on SPP intending to identify and minimize risks for people and the environment during the life cycle of the products and services. This work is coordinated by the National Secretariat for SPP (*Regionernas kansli för Hållbar Upphandling*). The National Secretariat for SPP joins efforts with (and is funded by) the 21 regional-level governments to develop guidelines, knowledge, and procurement requirements for implementing SPP in a national scope. These efforts are resulting in a set of action plans, audits, harmonized contract clauses, and risk assessments – organised into seventeen procurement categories, including electronics, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and food.

The development and harmonisation of procurement requirements (e.g. due diligence contract clauses) by the National Secretariat for SPP has been incorporating sustainability through a combination of internal expertise and external inputs – the participation of public buyers and other stakeholders that are affected by the public policies supported by public procurement is a key element of this approach. The National Secretariat for SPP has worked closely with CSOs (including Electronics Watch, as a consortium affiliate), industry organisations, public buyers within Sweden (from the national, regional, and local levels), public buyers from other countries (especially from the Nordics and from the European Union), and international organisations.

The National Secretariat for SPP works as a central body aimed at building public buyers' capacity to improve several stages of their procurement processes. In this model, the focus is on using the synergy of a collaborative approach to developing competencies, communication, and tools that contribute to the implementation of SPP.

The positive outcomes of the National Secretariat for SPP's collaborative approach from a public buyer perspective include:

- Developing common requirements that foster sustainability, with a special focus on business ethics, human rights, labour rights, and the environment;
- Reducing regional efforts to produce singular guidelines and tools;
- Developing communication and interactions between public buyers, using shared responsibility to promote commitment;



- Stimulating the participation of public buyers to foster innovation and sustainable solutions, considering the value of a hybrid approach between centralised (including network building) and decentralised procurement (such as using the proximity with end-users and citizens as input to improve procurement requirements);
- Exchanging best practices between public buyers;
- Promoting training, webinars, and workshops to increase sustainability and SPP knowledge;
- Developing a focal point for networking with international organisations and public buyers from other countries;
- Coordinating and co-financing shared audits on contracts based on harmonised requirements;
- Pooling resources and using the joint purchase power to leverage the dialogues and follow-ups with suppliers;
- Disclosing plans and needs to the market in order to promote shared understandings through preliminary interactions.

There are also positive effects of this approach from a supplier's perspective, such as:

- Developing relationship with a focal point that can represent several public buyers, reducing transaction costs;
- Participating in requirements development, acquiring time to prepare for future supplier selections;
- Presenting the industry *status quo* on sustainable solutions and eventual strategies to move towards more sustainable business models – which is an opportunity to plan transitions to sustainable production through public procurement funding;
- Accessing public buyers to better understand procurement processes and how to incorporate sustainable solutions in their catalogues;
- Preventing repetitive audits from several public buyers by concentrating auditing efforts on one representative organisation.

The challenges of the National Secretariat's approach include:

- Promoting the participation of public buyers in standards development and use, considering that public buyers may keep acting individually (voluntary approach);
- Balancing costs, needs, and political willingness to promote sustainability – each public buyer can have a different approach according to its context;
- Stimulating the market participation in dialogues to avoid limited perspectives on supplier readiness;
- Considering the different maturity levels of public buyers and promoting capacity building.

The National Secretariat for SPP's approach – presented in Figure 4 – can be understood as an interaction arena to share knowledge and resources between public buyers to promote SPP with the support of several stakeholders. This arena has been including sustainability into common procurement requirements, addressing social issues through collaboration between public buyers, suppliers, CSOs, and other organisations that participate in their joint work.

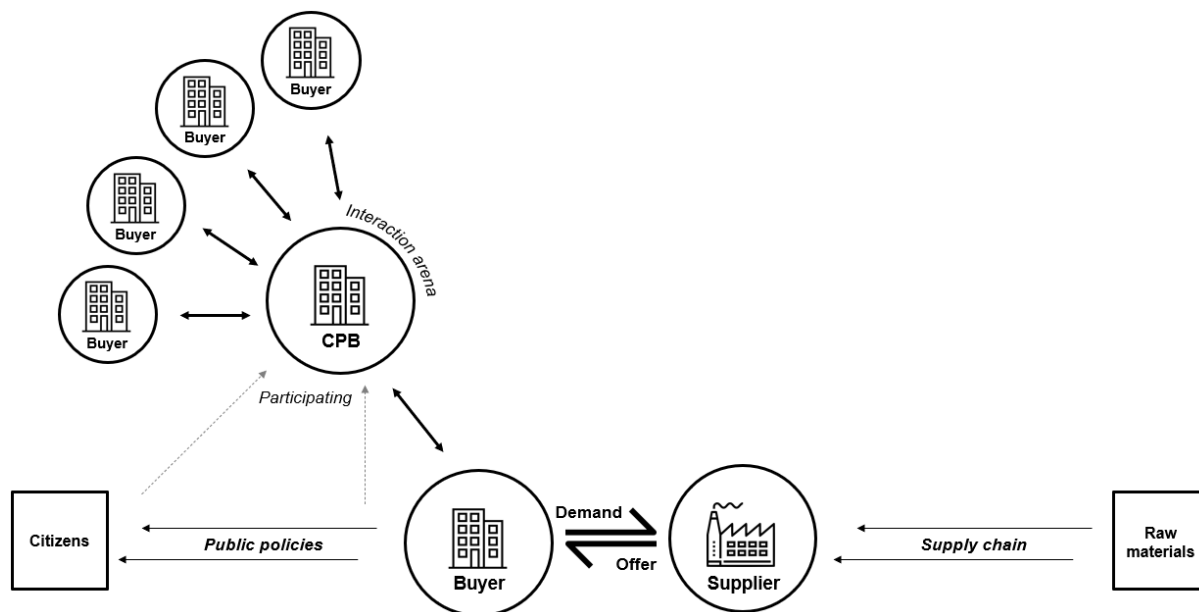


Figure 4. Interactions in the National Secretariat for Sustainable Public Procurement collaboration model.

## 6. Interconnected collaborations in SPP

Collaboration between stakeholders can contribute to developing sustainability through public procurement. This working paper aims to provide a more complete understanding of collaboration by exploring two different cases of addressing social issues through SPP by promoting meaningful interactions.

The findings of this working paper presented two collaboration models: from the Electronics Watch and the Swedish National Secretariat for SPP. The collaboration model composing Electronics Watch's approach has developed an interaction arena for fostering human rights in supply chains through public procurement. The National Secretariat's approach has been building an interaction arena to share knowledge and resources between public buyers to promote SPP – including a strong focus on social issues – with the support of several stakeholders.

The two collaboration models studied have common positive effects for public buyers, such as developing capabilities and knowledge flow (in agreement with Erridge & Greer, 2002), joining relative power to improve contract monitoring (concurring with Daugbjerg, 2023; Sonnino, 2009), harmonising procurement requirements (c.f. Alhola & Nissinen, 2018; Witjes & Lozano, 2016), and reducing transaction costs (e.g. by establishing a focal point for interacting with the market) (in agreement with Erridge & Greer, 2002). There are also shared benefits on both approaches from a supplier's perspective, including reducing transaction costs and being familiar with procurement requirements before tendering processes (acquiring time for adapting their business models). Some of the challenges from the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP approaches are also common: e.g. managing interaction between stakeholders (in agreement with Lozano et al., 2020) and building capacity and capabilities to improve the maturity level of public buyers.

The interconnection between the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat collaboration models also provides insights into the development of interactions to promote social issues through SPP. There are benefits for both organisations in joining their collaborative approaches, for example:

- The Electronics Watch can reduce transaction costs by interacting with a CPB such as the National Secretariat for SPP, which can use its network of public buyers to act as a more capable affiliate (including a higher purchasing power);
- The National Secretariat for SPP can benefit from the Electronics Watch’s CSO network of actors capable of working with human rights in supply chains; and
- Both organisations can join efforts on developing capacity and capabilities for public buyers.

Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP have joint initiatives and the interaction between their models can contribute to promoting social impact through SPP. In this interaction, both organisations work as arena managers for their interaction arenas – taking a facilitator role (in agreement with Berg et al., 2022), although still requiring dedicated staff to manage interactions (as proposed by Lozano et al., 2020).

Figure 5 presents the interconnection between the collaboration models from the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat, providing a more complete understanding of the chain of collaborations provided by this joint initiative. This chain of collaborations can be used to develop initiatives by facilitating interactions, considering a need to improve each connection and stimulate stakeholder participation. The stronger connection between the interaction arenas (CPB and CSO) is essential to hold the chain (i.e. it’s a key element of this model) and has to be continuously developed for disseminating the benefits of this interconnection and building long-term thinking (following the lessons by Lozano, 2007) – and being eventually replicated by other organisations.

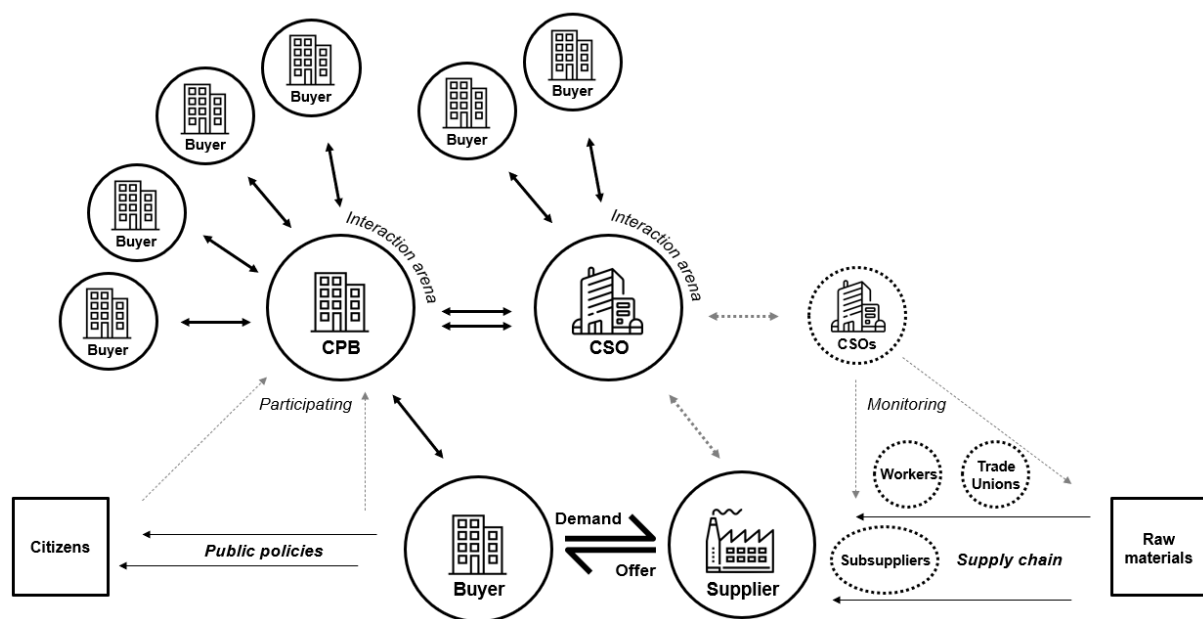


Figure 5. Chain of collaborations in the interconnection between the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for Sustainable Public Procurement.

## 7. Conclusions

SPP initiatives have been promoting sustainable production and consumption and must be undertaken through holistic approaches that balance the economic, environmental, and social needs over time. Despite an initial focus on environmental issues, there has been growing attention on developing SPP initiatives aimed at tackling social aspects, such as human rights and workers’ rights. Addressing social issues through SPP can be challenging – SPP is a

complex process comprising elements such as sustainability dimensions, sustainability criteria and specifications, and stakeholder interactions.

Interactions between stakeholders have been proposed as an important element of SPP, leveraging the potential to develop collaborative approaches for improving the undertaken of SPP initiatives. Collaboration means joint actions with a high level of involvement and can contribute to sustainability efforts, including SPP initiatives.

This working paper presented two cases of collaboration between stakeholders in SPP: the Electronics Watch and the Swedish National Secretariat for SPP approaches to developing human rights and workers' rights through public procurement. This research was designed as a multiple case study, collecting data through interviews, secondary data, and direct observation. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis.

The findings of this study explored the Electronics Watch and the National Secretariat for SPP collaboration models, discussing common benefits and challenges, the facilitator role of these organisations, and the interaction arenas formed by each model. The interconnection between these collaboration models showed a chain of collaborations that can be a lever for promoting social impact through SPP. The chain of collaborations adds to the SPP literature by providing a more complete understanding of the myriad of actors and their connections in a collaborative approach to SPP. The chain of collaborations also contributes to the SPP practice by providing a successful pathway to promote socially responsible public procurement that can be incorporated into collaborative contexts. Chains of collaborations have to be continuously improved to build meaningful interactions in SPP, based on long-term thinking.

Future research should explore each of these collaboration models through dedicated case studies, focused on understanding how the collaboration is materialised and how to overcome its challenges; study how to promote the participation of public buyers in each model; and discuss the challenges of participating in these interaction arenas by a supplier's perspective.

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