



**SAPIENS  
NETWORK**

# Collaboration between stakeholders in sustainable public procurement

10<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Felippe Vilaça Loureiro Santos

Work Package 1

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



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 956696.

# Collaboration between stakeholders in Sustainable Public Procurement

Felippe Vilaça Loureiro Santos

Marie Skłodowska-Curie PhD Fellow in Industrial Engineering and Management / University of Gävle

*This document is directed at sustainable public procurement practitioners, including government (policymakers, public managers, procurement officers), market (suppliers, industry organisations), and society (non-governmental organisations) representatives.*

## Executive summary

Collaboration between stakeholders has been proposed in policies, guidelines, and regulations aimed at including sustainability issues in public procurement. Although organisations can join efforts to better contribute to sustainability through sustainable public procurement, the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration should be balanced. Implementing collaboration requires organisational changes that should be planned considering the forces driving and hindering these change efforts.

## Introduction

Sustainable public procurement (SPP) has been using government purchasing power to foster sustainable consumption and production, contributing to sustainable development efforts<sup>1</sup>.

The complexity of implementing SPP initiatives has required the development of policies, guidelines, and regulations aimed at including sustainability issues in public procurement. Collaboration between stakeholders – meaningful interactions aimed at proposing joint responses to joint problems<sup>2</sup> – has become frequent in such institutional efforts<sup>3</sup>. However, there is limited research providing an understanding of the impacts of interactions between stakeholders in the SPP system.

There are also research gaps in 1) offering a systemic understanding of collaboration channels (who collaborates with whom), mechanisms (how to), benefits (why to), and drawbacks (why not to); 2) exploring the facilitators' perspective on implementing collaborative SPP initiatives; and 3) providing an understanding of how organisations can change for implementing collaboration in SPP.

This policy brief is based on the author's research on collaboration between stakeholders in SPP.

## How does the author's research contribute?

The author's research contributes to the topic by:

- Providing a holistic understanding of the SPP system, considering its elements (e.g. sustainability dimensions, stakeholder interactions) and their interconnections.
- Analysing the drivers for and barriers to organisational changes towards implementing SPP.
- Developing a more complete understanding of collaboration between stakeholders in SPP.
- Providing depth to organisational changes towards implementing collaboration in SPP.
- Offering a comparative approach to collaboration in SPP by analysing data from different world regions.

## Research methods

This research aims to contribute to the development of collaboration theory and organisational change management by analysing the SPP context through hermeneutics, inductive approaches, and comparative studies. Data collected with Brazilian and Swedish practitioners was analysed to explore the phenomenon of collaboration in different SPP contexts, including legal frameworks and bureaucratic cultures.

## Key findings

Stakeholder interactions are an important element of SPP<sup>4</sup>, which leverages the potential for collaboration. Collaboration has been driving changes for SPP<sup>5</sup> and overcoming barriers to SPP<sup>6</sup>.

Collaboration in SPP can occur in different contexts (e.g. legal frameworks and bureaucratic culture); however, there are limits to which aspects of SPP can be addressed through collaboration. Collaboration has 27 benefits (e.g. developing requirements) and 10 drawbacks (e.g. coordination costs) to be considered while structuring collaborative initiatives in SPP – and balanced to reach optimal collaboration<sup>7</sup>.

Different stakeholders can collaborate in SPP, entailing 4 channels: intragovernmental, government + market, government + society, and government + market + society. There are at least 14 mechanisms of collaboration (e.g. dialogue as a service) impacting the procurement stages. These mechanisms can be built with the support of individual or organisational facilitators – which contribute to establishing and maintaining collaboration.

Collaborative SPP initiatives require planned organisational changes that are influenced by (mainly) different forces when compared to changes for implementing SPP. There are 24 drivers for changes towards collaboration in SPP (e.g. personnel collaboration commitment), 40 barriers to collaboration in SPP (e.g. lack of trust), and 24 strategies to overcome such barriers (e.g. organising suppliers' summits).

## Conclusions

Collaboration between stakeholders can contribute to implementing SPP initiatives and may be determined by individual commitment and organisational capacity to navigate the legal and bureaucratic pathways to SPP. However, collaboration has limitations and implementing collaboration requires specific organisational changes.

## Policy recommendations

*Collaboration between stakeholders can drive SPP by creating new solutions and understandings. However, collaboration is not a silver bullet for addressing the complexity of SPP – benefits and drawbacks should be balanced. Collaboration initiatives may not be determined by context but by individual commitment and organisational capacity to navigate into the legal and bureaucratic pathways to SPP. Organisations engaged with SPP can decide when to collaborate by analysing the benefits and drawbacks, evaluating their expertise in developing collaboration mechanisms, and assessing the availability of facilitators. Implementing collaboration in SPP requires organisational changes.*

## References

---

<sup>1</sup> UNEP. (2017). Global Review of Sustainable Public Procurement 2017. United Nations Environment Programme <sup>2</sup> Gray, B. (1985). Conditions Facilitating Interorganizational Collaboration. *Human Relations*, 38(10), 911–936.

<sup>3</sup> For example, World Bank. (2021). Green Public Procurement: An Overview of Green Reforms in Country Procurement Systems. World Bank Publications; UNEP. (2021). Sustainable Public Procurement: How to “Wake the Sleeping Giant.” United Nations Environment Programme.

<sup>4</sup> Lozano, R., Santos, F., & Barreiro, M. (2024). Developing a harmonic sustainable public procurement framework. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 26(1), 2291–2306.

<sup>5</sup> See Sparrevik, M., Wangen, H. F., Fet, A. M., & De Boer, L. (2018). Green public procurement – A case study of an innovative

building project in Norway. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 188, 879–887.

<sup>6</sup> See Delmonico, D., Jabbour, C. J. C., Pereira, S. C. F., de Sousa Jabbour, A. B. L., Renwick, D. W. S., & Thomé, A. M. T. (2018). Unveiling barriers to sustainable public procurement in emerging economies: Evidence from a leading sustainable supply chain initiative in Latin America. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 134(February), 70–79.

<sup>7</sup> As proposed by Lozano, R., Barreiro-Gen, M., & Zafar, A. (2021). Collaboration for organizational sustainability limits to growth: Developing a factors, benefits, and challenges framework. *Sustainable Development*, 29(4), 728–737.