SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT: DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOCAL SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Cities are the birthplace of most social innovations. This chapter describes which types of local social innovations exist and how they survive and spread. It points out that, although social innovation literature tends to highlight successful, scaled examples, many local social innovations neither scale nor survive.

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INTRODUCTION

The effort to strengthen social cohesion and lower social inequalities is among Europe's main policy challenges. At the urban level, these great challenges become visible and tangible, which makes cities a microcosm of society. Local welfare systems are at the forefront of the struggle to address this challenge – and they are far from winning. While the statistics show some positive signs, the overall picture still shows sharp and sometimes rising inequalities, a loss of social cohesion and failing policies of integration and inclusion [1]. It is clear that new ideas and approaches are needed to tackle these very wicked problems.

Contrary to what is sometimes thought, a lack of bottom-up innovation is not the issue in itself. European cities are teeming with new ideas, initiated by citizens, professionals and policy makers. The WILCO project (www.wilcoproject.eu) examined 77 of such cases of social innovation, in twenty European cities, focusing especially on local welfare [2, 3]. In this chapter, we will discuss which types of local social innovations exist and how they survive and spread.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOCAL SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

In the WILCO project, we defined social innovations as ideas, turned into practical approaches; new in the context where they appear; attracting hopes for better coping strategies and solutions; and marked by a high degree of risk and uncertainty due to the specific context in which they appear. We grouped such innovations according to five dimensions that we regard as the most important recurring approaches and instruments (for a freely downloadable collection of case descriptions: [2]). One initiative can incorporate several types of innovations. For example, the 'Young people with a future' initiative in Barcelona constituted both a service and a governance innovation.

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1. Innovations in services and their ways to address users: The majority of the social innovations we studied were service innovations. Since personal social services are by definition a special form of social relationship between people, this is not a surprise. Moreover, services are more accessible to small-scale innovations by social entrepreneurs, groups of citizens and other change agents than most high-tech products. Innovations focused on investing in capabilities; open approaches avoiding targeting with stigmatizing effects; initiatives that bridge the gaps between professional services and people's life worlds; and services that connect separated forms of support and access, allowing for personalised support. A telling example was the project "Her second chance" from Varaždin (Croatia), which supported women and mothers experiencing special difficulties in acquiring competences and self-esteem in a way that might facilitate a re-entry into paid work.

2. Innovations in regulations and rights:
In addition to reinventing services, social innovations can also pertain to the rules governing such services. Innovations of this type included creating flexible forms of ad hoc support; developing offers beyond fixed social and

participation rights and entitlements that meet newly emerging risks; and working with "social contracts" for individuals and groups. A telling example was the targeted discretionary housing payment scheme from Birmingham (UK), which helped people on their way from welfare to work through time-limited payments that eased the costs of transition, e.g. in meeting rent arrears.

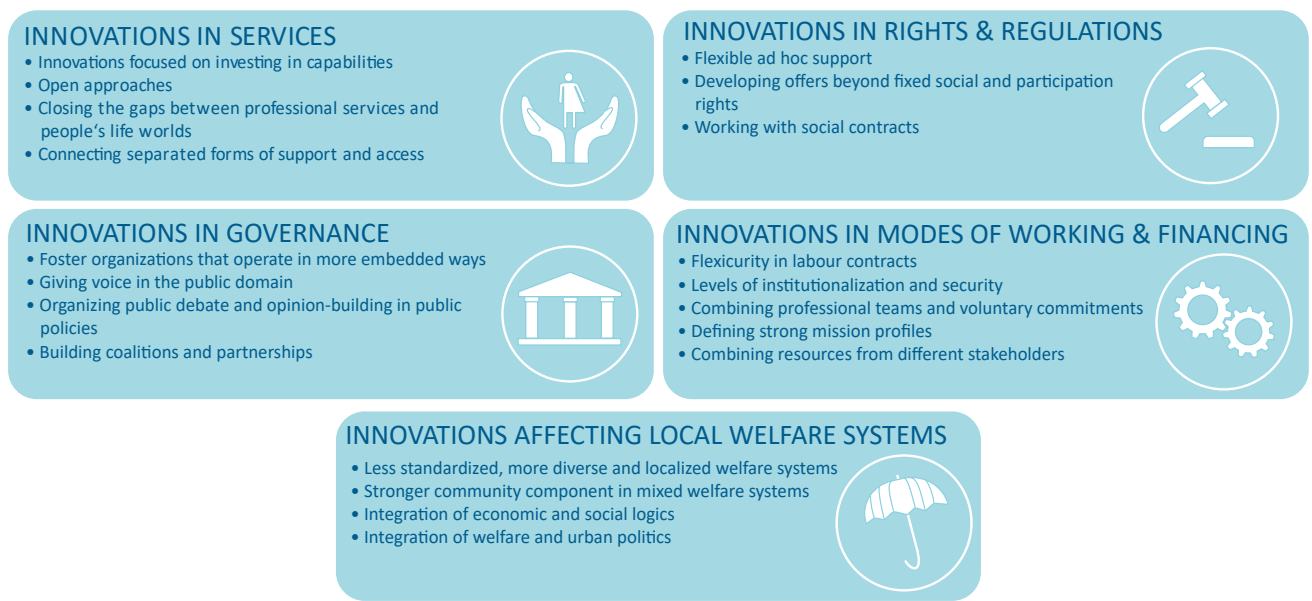**3.** Innovations in governance:
Social innovations represent a combination of new "products" and new "processes" (including the internal organisation of decision-making and ways of interacting with the environment). Most innovations that aim at developing new kinds of services also have a governance dimension. For some innovations, this is a core issue. Governance innovations foster organizations or organisational units that operate in more embedded and networked ways; giving new concerns and groups a voice in the public domain; organizing more intense forms of public debate and opinion-building around challenges in public policies; and building coalitions and partnerships. Impressive examples in our sample were initiatives in post-socialist countries for and by mothers. Both the MaMa Foundation in Warsaw and the RODA initiative in Zagreb overcame the traditional restricted focus on getting the same role as men in a male-shaped labour market, by highlighting other concerns that were before seen as merely private issues, protesting against systems that showed little interest in the challenges of care and the difficulties of combining working and family life. Their actions gave caring tasks an upgrade in public and policy agendas.

4. Innovations in modes of working and financing:
These include flexicurity in labour contracts; levels of institutionalization and security below traditional standards; combining professional teams and voluntary commitments; defining strong mission profiles; and combining resources from different stakeholders. This often entails accepting worsening material conditions. For instance, innovative multi-stakeholder approach have often emerged in a chronically underfunded local public sector, making it difficult to differentiate between winning additional societal support and using local partners as a spare wheel. A good example were "Les compagnons bâtisseurs" (Companion Builders) in Lille, a social innovation supporting housing self-renovation—managing, training and supervising the implementation of a self-renovation process in a region where such practices have been marginal and unprofessional.

5. Innovations affecting local welfare systems:
Finally, we examined innovations that affected the broader development of local welfare systems. Such types of innovations encouraged less standardized, more diverse and localized welfare arrangements; a stronger community component in mixed welfare systems; and the integration of economic and social logics (entrepreneurial action, developmental welfare) and of welfare and urban politics. Good examples in which the public and community spheres were intertwined were the Neighbourhood Cafes in Lille, which opened up the tasks and concerns of family life to the community, and the Neighbourhood companies in Amsterdam, where a housing corporation decided to support the local community in self-organizing housing reconstruction. These initiatives challenged an understanding of welfare in which community was seen as a rather archaic and parochial element, to be substituted where possible by public provision, professionalism and/or entirely voluntary initiatives.

INNOVATIONS IN SERVICES
- Innovations focused on investing in capabilities
- Open approaches
- Closing the gaps between professional services and people's life worlds
- Connecting separated forms of support and access

INNOVATIONS IN RIGHTS & REGULATIONS
- Flexible ad hoc support
- Developing offers beyond fixed social and participation rights
- Working with social contracts

INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE
- Foster organizations that operate in more embedded ways
- Giving voice in the public domain
- Organizing public debate and opinion-building in public policies
- Building coalitions and partnerships

INNOVATIONS IN MODES OF WORKING & FINANCING
- Flexicurity in labour contracts
- Levels of institutionalization and security
- Combining professional teams and voluntary commitments
- Defining strong mission profiles
- Combining resources from different stakeholders

INNOVATIONS AFFECTING LOCAL WELFARE SYSTEMS
- Less standardized, more diverse and localized welfare systems
- Stronger community component in mixed welfare systems
- Integration of economic and social logics
- Integration of welfare and urban politics

Five different types of local social innovations

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

In addition to analysing the types of emerging innovations, we also made some observations with respect to how they continued to develop. There is a tendency in the publicity on social innovation to discuss successful cases and those that are scaled up to a system-wide level. Based on our evidence, it must be concluded that the reality of local social innovations is a different one. The majority remain local and last only a limited number of years. The emphasis on success stories and scaling-up is an important one with implications for the direction of future funding, but it is equally important to realize that the majority of local innovations (especially those not originating in professional organisations) do not fit such a pattern of growth and that one should not disregard the cumulative effect of the many small, temporary initiatives that are of high value within their local context. Public policy should therefore not focus only on the selective group of innovations with a high growth potential, but also on the capacity of cities to continue generating many new initiatives of a highly local nature.

Of the innovations that we studied, the majority were either discontinued after a few years or faced an uncertain future in the short term. Cutbacks in public sector funding no doubt played a part in this, but the underlying structural dynamics, such as project-based funding, dependence on charismatic initiators and shifting political fashions, suggest that the underlying conditions are of a structural nature.

The most sustainable innovations were those that were either fully integrated into the local welfare administration or even initiated by the local authorities. Generally, local authorities tended to favour innovations that were complementary to their growth strategy, aimed at making the city more dynamic and attractive (e.g. urban gardening). This means that there is not necessarily a smooth fit between social innovation and economic growth agendas.

Another factor that affected innovations' chance of survival was whether they involved a wide coalition of parties. Such parties could include the third sector, local governments, businesses and groups of citizens. A broad alliance made it easier to sustain the innovation even when one of the parties (like the local authorities) withdrew its support. Highly vulnerable were those innovations, which were primarily dependent on European funds.

Finally, what also mattered to a large degree was the governance style of local authorities. Innovations could more easily gain recognition and sustainability where there was an open governance style, that is, where authorities proved open to contributions to local welfare by different parties. To some extent such openness appeared related to institutional factors, such as the level of decentralisation within the state structure and historical traditions of working with the third

sector; but it also depended on the nature of local politics, the prevailing discourse and availability of people who could act as 'boundary spanners', connecting institutional and life worlds.

THE DIFFUSION OF LOCAL SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Another way for social innovations to gain a longer life is for them to be diffused to other cities and countries. Most of the publications on the diffusion of innovations are based on business contexts and on products, rather than services, which means that it is important to identify clearly how local social innovations are different. The nature of products made for the commercial market is that they are not made primarily for the local market, but deliberately designed to spread widely to other places. Local social innovations, by contrast, are usually initiated to solve a particular local problem. Wider diffusion is only of secondary importance to the innovators, if not irrelevant. The image of the highly visible entrepreneur giving TedX talks is, in this case, unrepresentative. By implication, it is especially important for this type of innovation to have intermediaries, who know the situation on the ground and assess what it takes for innovations to take root elsewhere. There was no evidence that EU channels played a significant role in this process.

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Unlike many products, which can shift places easily, social innovations have to be 'translated' to be effective elsewhere. It is rare to have a straight transfer from an idea from one place to another, although we did find some examples of this (for initiatives that were typically low-resource, low-skill). Approaches or projects will in some way need to be adapted to the context into which they are adopted. For instance, what is originally a project to keep young people socially active may elsewhere be justified with the discourse of unemployment or crime prevention. The shape of a collaborative arrangement may have to be altered, for example, because responsibilities for a certain policy area are distributed differently over governments at different levels, or because services are provided privately in the country and publicly in the other. The innovation will need to be re-shaped. The adaptation may concern the structure of an innovation, e.g. its formal organisational shape, but also the regulation that supports it, the instruments through

which it is implemented, or the discourse with which it is described and justified. Innovations are therefore usually hybrids of different ideas and inspirations.

Given that such a process of reconstruction and translation must take place, it requires new ways of collaboration, for example, between governments and citizens, and new ways of thinking. Our material shows that, in local welfare, this process does not start when an innovation is introduced, but usually well before that. Rather, it is the other way round: an innovation is adopted when minds are ripe. A good idea is not convincing in itself – it comes when people are open to it. What this means is that adopting an innovation from elsewhere is, from the perspective of the adopting parties, not fundamentally different from inventing one. After all, it requires similar breakthroughs in institutional routines, whether of content, collaboration, or other aspects of working. In that sense, there is interaction between innovations that target specific aspects of services or regulations, and those which aim at changing the nature of governance or of the local welfare system.

It means that the process of diffusion starts before the actual adoption of an innovation. Research on diffusion tends to focus on the process after the adoption, and then especially at successful cases of adoption. Yet the innovative capacity of a city is not only reflected in what is adopted (a specific approach to solving a problem), but also in the groundwork that is done before the adoption (getting the right people together, getting minds ready for new options). This is highly relevant to public administration reform, because it means that simply finding the right kinds of solutions is in itself not enough. It requires a different approach to governance.

CONCLUSION

Research on social innovation has progressed slowly in recent years, hovering unsteadily between abstract (meta-) theories and conceptualisations, a flood of interesting illustrative examples and a barrage of practical guidelines on a largely intuitive basis. It would certainly help if research on social innovation more wholeheartedly embraced failure and thwarted ambition. The road to realising social innovations is a rocky one and many are left behind. Our evidence shows that the failure of social innovations is in part due to widespread risk-averse attitudes when it comes to social experimentation. Despite paying lip service to innovation, authorities tend to prefer what is known and tested – be it in the tradition of state regulation and standard setting, or through a swing towards approaches that work well in the business sector. Innovations guided by other social values and assumptions than those prevailing traditionally in administrations and businesses (i.e. those which affect governance or local welfare systems more fundamentally) have a harder job surviving. They need supporters that show some readiness to take a risk and help to realize at least some kind of open space, some clearings within the otherwise rather dense jungle of regulations and standards.

In the face of innovations with the potential to revolutionize the economy and areas like labour market relations it would be silly to argue that new common rules and large scale regulations are not needed. Local social innovations, however, need another kind of state intervention. They are often dispersed and precarious. This calls for enabling policies that give room to experimentation and listen to the messages of innovators.

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