NEWS LETTER

October 2020

This newsletter gives a preview into the upcoming reports of COHSMO concerning social innovation in Austria.

Social innovation in Austria

This newsletter gives a preview into the upcoming reports of COHSMO concerning social innovation in Austria. Similar insights on social innovation in be on the website soon.

Localities face different challenges due to their social and natural diversity. The territorial differences correspond with needs and social challenges to equality, well-being, as well as life-chances (Neumeier 2012). Social innovation strives to create solutions for social challenges in new creative bottom up ways, often stemming from local civil action. Thereby, social innovation often has an inherent connection to the local context, creating endogenous solutions linked to participation (Moulaert et al. 2017, p. 16f).

The upcoming report from Austria describes four examples of Social Innovation in different localities based on the definition of social innovation as "new solutions that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities" (The Young Foundation 2012, p. 18.). Moulaert et al. (2017, p. 10) conclude their research report by stating that social innovation has three distinct dimensions that

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speak directly to this definition:

(1) Satisfaction: "Collective satisfaction of unsatisfied or insufficiently met human needs"

(2) Cohesion: "Building more cohesive social relations"

(3) Democratic empowerment: "Through socio-political bottom-linked empowerment, [Social Innovations] work toward more democratic societies and communities"

These insights informed our selection as we took four examples of social innovation in the Austrian context from urban, suburban and rural territories to cover a typical range of localities. These four examples of social innovation illustrate different local challenges associated with urban, rural and suburban spaces in the Austrian context: integration and female empowerment, sustainability, city-suburban (cross-border) collaboration, childcare services and female employment in rural localities.

Social innovation in Austria has a relatively good standing. There are private foundation awards for social innovation initiatives (SozialMarie – (Unruhe Privatstiftung 2020), a specific research centre dedicated to social innovation (Centre for Social Innovation 2020), academic curricula on master degree level (Technical College Salzburg 2020)and dedicated funding opportunities for civil society neighbourhood projects sponsored by the city of Vienna and the European Social Fund (Social Innovation Vienna – (Dachverband Wiener Sozialeinrichtungen 2020). Moreover, social innovation is not understood as an exclusively private endeavour. Public authorities and institutions support, foster and enable social innovation in some focus areas like technical innovation (predominantly in the energy sector), sustainability and climate change, work health, migration, rural development

and elderly care.

Common factors that facilitate social innovation in Austria are the active involvement of public actors and public funding as well as networks and collaborations cutting across actor types. Social innovation takes hold in localities and policy areas that are affected by challenges that the usual mechanisms cannot cover anymore. Civil society actors, as well as public institutions, are part of innovation processes that seek to improve life chances locally. Public authorities, as well as private entities, provide funding for new initiatives that solve social issues. In these ways, there is no clear-cut neoliberal approach to social innovation that reduces state involvement in social questions in Austria, as Massey et al. (2016) conclude for the United Kingdom.

However, public actors are also hindering factors for social innovation when funding is short, formal standards or informal norms are too rigid and prohibit an innovative (local) practice. In our examples here, even those hindering factors are sometimes cut through in the practice of social innovation in Austria: be it through international obligations (like the Barcelona goals), consistent lobbying or creative and radical actors that tackle local issues. These lessons learned from the Austrian examples are at the core of their transferability to other contexts. They point to what Pol and Ville (2009) suggest as being crucial for successful social innovation: the involvement of government interventions. Our examples show that government interventions are relevant on two ways. First, in terms of funding and accountability, as key steps determine the efforts and success of social innovation. The example of city-urban management highlights that government support is needed to keep a crucial programme running even though immediate successes are limited. The example of city-urban management high-

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lights that government support is needed to keep a crucial programme running even though immediate successes are limited. Second, in the terms of sparking innovation as well as supporting risk-taking to fuel dynamic initiatives. Social innovation in Austria needs to get a chance to identify challenges and work on solutions without relying on profit indicators, as is illustrated by both the rural childcare and eco-social start-up examples.

From the analysis of the Austrian cases we identified three main lessons on social innovation, as general facilitating factors that may help fostering transferability of innovative actions: (1) media support, lobbying and networking proved to be crucial in diffusing the awareness of new challenges and promoting collaboration among actors especially in urban contexts; (2) creativity in business models and alliances in rural areas refers to flexible forms of interaction that can be effective in tackling previously unmet social issues; (3) finally, public actors can boost social innovation, its transferability and the upscaling of successful practices, in the presence of adequate resources and supportive institutions in all territories.

For more details on the Austrian social innovation case studies as well as other reports

on the links between inequality, urbanization and territorial cohesion, we encourage you to follow COHSMO on LinkedIn and Facebook or keep an eye on cohsmo.aau.dk. Here you will be updated when the various reports are released.

The Austrian team consist of Prof. Yuri Kazepov Ruggero Cefalo, PhD and Tatjana Boczy, MA. All work at the University of Vienna at the Department of Sociology.

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PARTNER FEATURE

GREECE

The Greek project partner is Harokopio University (Athens, Greece), Geography Department. The Geography Department of Harokopio University is one of the two Greek university departments dedicated to Geography, with a view to establishing Geography as one critical scientific field, at the intersection of physical and social sciences, in academia and the Greek society. Prof. Thomas Maloutas is involved in many international and national projects that have been running at the Department focusing on urban socio-spatial inequalities. The COHSMO team consists of Prof. Thomas Maloutas, the Assistant Professors Panagiotis Artelaris and George Mavrommatis, and the researcher Dr. Dimitris Balampanidis. The Greek COHSMO team is the leader team for research and conceptual guidelines.

Thomas Maloutas   **Panagiotis Artelaris**   **George Mavrommatis**   **Dimitris Balampanidis**