



Project no.: 727058

Project full title: **Inequality, urbanization and Territorial Cohesion: Developing the European Social Model of economic growth and democratic capacity**

Project Acronym: COHSMO (Former Hans Thor Andersen)

Deliverable no.: D8.12

Title of the deliverable: Policy Brief, 7

Contractual Date of Delivery to the CEC:	31.12.2020
Actual Date of Delivery to the CEC:	18.12.2020
Organisation name of lead contractor for this deliverable:	Aalborg University
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Participants(s):	AAU, UWE
Work package contributing to the deliverable:	WP6, WP8
Nature:	DEM
Dissemination level:	PU
Version:	1.0
Total number of pages:	12
Start date of project:	01.05.2017
Duration of project:	54 months

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Abstract:

Drawing on the outputs of WPs 3, 4 and 5, WP 6 has carried out a cross-evaluation of existing spatial development policies at regional, national and supra-national levels to provide guidance for future recommendations and provide examples of good practices that can support and complement existing EU-cohesion policies and instruments. Drawing on the outputs of WP 4 (assessment of policies and multilevel governance) and WP5 (assessment of service provision), WP 6 has developed a framework for the cross-national evaluation and identification of 'good practices' and social Innovation that can provide the basis for policy learning between regions and countries experiencing similar problems of spatial inequality and lacking territorial cohesion.

Keyword list: Social Innovation, social cohesion, collaboration across sectors, horizontal and multi-level governance, local leadership, third sector organisations, COHSMO case studies.



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Abbreviations

ALMP – Active Labour Market Policy

VET – Vocational and Educational Training

WISE – Work Integration Social Enterprises

ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care

SIS - Social Investment Strategy



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European

POLICY BRIEF 7

Executive Summary

It is clear from the analyses of the cases in WP6 that in practice social innovation takes many different forms and must be understood in relation to the context in which it takes place. Indeed this is consistent with what was pointed out in the brief literature review in Section 3. What is also clear is that many of the social innovation initiatives are embedded in local contexts and not easily transferable in any straightforward sense. Nevertheless, it is worth looking at the mechanisms and processes associated with social innovation in the different contexts that provide the opportunity for lesson learning.

Many countries have experienced prolonged austerity regimes that have seen major reductions in government funding which has either led to withdrawal from the provision of some services and/or severe reductions in their standard and availability. This may have served as a stimulus for local forms of social innovation to fill in gaps and to develop new forms of service delivery at local level that are better targeted and address the needs of marginalised/excluded groups. This can take a variety of forms such as creating new joined-up delivery systems, linking people in to welfare services, employment training or entrepreneurial activities. These activities may represent a win-win process given that local authorities need third sector organisations to respond to increasingly complex social needs, and the third sector actors need the local authority for visibility and the organizational infrastructures. However, they may also reflect a wider restructuring of welfare provision and entail the ‘abandonment’ of the most marginalized/excluded sections of the population and this means that social innovation can become a ‘double-edged sword’.

In a general sense several of the case studies pointed to the significance of creating spaces (physical and virtual) where relevant groups/subjects, especially marginalised/excluded individuals and groups, can be approached in an informal setting by a social employee who understands their social needs and tries to reconnect them to the existing welfare services or to the new services being provided. This mechanism would be particularly useful in contexts characterised by significant gaps between

social needs and existing welfare policies. Such approaches tend to be based on the role of third sector organisations.

There is a need for greater coordination and collaboration across, between and within sectors. Who takes the lead role in this kind of social innovation is significant and this will vary from country to country and place to place. In some countries, local government needs to take on this role, especially where the third sector is relatively underdeveloped. But this requires local government to take a less ‘directive role’ and more of a facilitative role. In other countries, greater responsibility can be devolved to third sector organisations while in others still, the business sector may be more involved through the establishment of public-private partnerships. Whatever particular form coordination and collaboration may take at local level it is quite likely it will need support from higher levels (e.g. national or European) in terms of resources. As a result, this entails addressing issues of both horizontal and multi-level governance; in some cases, it may also involve territorial governance where problems cut across administrative boundaries.

It is also worth pointing out the increasing significance of web-based platforms that can act both as sources of information and spaces of interaction. Clearly, these are places that many people feel comfortable operating in, but they may only be a first point of contact, while for others access may be a problem. This means that more traditional physical spaces should not be neglected. What are needed are places/spaces configured to encourage people to attend and which are run and staffed by knowledgeable people from third sector organisations based in the locality and trusted by those who use these spaces. The combination of web-based and physical spaces would seem to be the most appropriate way forward.

Local leadership also appears to be important, although again this can take a variety of forms. Nevertheless what is clear is traditional top-down bureaucratic and directive forms of leadership do not support social innovation and the presence of forms of what has been termed ‘facilitative leadership’ and ‘consensus building leadership’ are important. Moreover, what are termed social entrepreneurs can play an important role in catalysing social innovation as well as inspiring the transition from ‘pure’ social initiatives to socially responsible businesses that can generate a profit and benefit the local economy. Without these forms of leadership, it is unlikely that the sort of space needed to allow social innovation will be created.

The Austrian and Italian examples in particular point to the need for an ‘infrastructure to support social innovation’, particularly if social innovation is to become an ongoing and sustainable activity rather than a one-off event related only to particular initiatives. The role of government at all levels

(from European to local) is clearly significant, but so too is the role of private foundations, independent research centres focussed on supporting social innovation and the embedding of social innovation in educational curricula. In addition, resources need to be made available to support it. Also, and this is significant, there should be a willingness to recognise that some initiatives will ‘fail’ and that lessons need to be derived from ‘failure’.

Another important issue is related to knowledge and the need to bring together in a coherent and focussed manner different knowledge forms including scientific, managerial, economic, entrepreneurial, local, everyday and professional in order to understand what the problems are, how to address them in a coherent manner and establish new models of service provision, maximise their impact and thereby create better ways of meeting the needs of different groups of people. This also may mitigate against a one-size fits all approach.

One other issue stood out sharply from across the CHOSMO case studies that is worth considering in a little more detail. This is the under representation of social innovation initiatives in suburban areas. Suburban areas are not a homogenous category; some suburban areas are a ‘town’ while others are commuter zones, rather than ‘a place’, and these different types of places makes for different conditions for social innovation.

We have found a variety of potential explanations for the under-representation in suburban areas, and some of these are:

- Such areas may have a looser/less developed social infrastructure, or a more fragmented social infrastructure that is not conducive to social innovation;
- That they are struggling with a less well-defined sense of place identity;
- That the above means there is a need for processes of community building, e.g. building bridges between ‘newcomers’ and ‘old residents’;
- That social projects are required that may, over time, act as a catalyst for community building processes to develop;
- In some urban sprawl areas or urban hinterlands there is greater population turnover, which make it harder to sustain community action for social innovation.

What the above does suggest is that there is no single-factor explanation for the under representation of suburbs.

2 Policy Recommendations

What becomes clear from our examples, is that examples of social innovation cannot be transferred between geographical and institutional contexts in any straightforward or simple manner. Social innovation practices are embedded in their social and economic contextual conditions, which are related to the different levels of territorial assets, social cohesion and collective organising capacity characterising each practice. Our view is that an alternative approach would be to consider the mechanisms and the processes that are helpful in creating conditions conducive for social innovation and these might be disseminated and embedded in other contexts. Indeed this seems to be entirely compatible with the place-based approach.

Moreover, the links between social innovation and social investment policies related to ALMP, VET and ECEC have to be consciously constructed in each place (e.g. as in Gdansk where links were made between ALMP and VET or in suburban Kaunas where links were made between ECEC and the labour market). However, very often such links are beyond the scope and capacity of the relevant initiatives. What all the examples we have provided do address are inequalities, often of access to welfare services or in terms of meeting previously unmet needs or new emerging needs. In addition, a number of the examples address issues of social cohesion. However, these tend to be place specific (e.g. at the neighbourhood level) and the problem remains of scaling up. Given these context dependent complexity in the relation between cohesion, innovation and social investment policies we have chosen to focus on identifying ‘factors’ (including processes and mechanisms) that are conducive to social innovation, however, they will not necessarily lead to social innovation, much depends on the actions taken in each place.

3 The General Policy Environment

In order to support social innovation there needs to be what might be termed a supportive policy environment. Support from different levels of government can be provided in a variety of ways. For some years, the European Commission has supported and encouraged social innovation (see European Commission, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2018). Funding is available through a variety of funding streams and there is a plethora of advice websites under the banner of the European Union. At the national and subnational level among our case study countries Austria stood out as an example of the creation of a supporting infrastructure for social innovation. This involved not only government, but private foundations and the education system. Italy and Greece, to varying degrees, also had elements

of such a system. If countries were to take social innovation seriously then it would seem sensible to put in place an appropriate version of the Austrian approach.

There are a variety of EU funding opportunities available to support social innovation, as well as research into social innovation through programmes such as Horizon 2020 and its successor. The LEADER programme has had innovation at its heart and there is much to be learnt from this. While it was mainstreamed in the 2013-2020 programming period for the Structural Funds it is worth looking at its experiences. In this programming period, Community Led Local Development also had supporting social innovation as one of its core aims. Finally, the experiences of the various URBACT programmes provided a wealth of information on social innovation. It might well be sensible to create a single European ‘clearing house’ website that can be accessed and provide information and advice to those looking for support on social innovation. This would offer a single ‘one-stop shop’ to which groups and individuals can easily refer. COHSMO builds on these and adds to them by providing a range of social innovation case studies that cover urban, suburban and rural places. While appreciating the embeddedness of most cases of social innovation this provided the opportunity to compare social innovation in different very contexts and identify common processes and mechanisms along with factors that facilitate social innovation. This adds substantially to the existing stock of knowledge and enhances the basis for policy learning.

During a period of austerity, the role of private foundations that support social innovation should be acknowledged and encouraged. Their flexibility may allow them to respond more quickly than the state sector to new needs and processes of experimentation to meet those needs. The results from the Austrian, Greek and Italian case study reports point to the significant role such foundations have played in supporting social innovation. It would be sensible for the EU and all countries to look at taxation regimes and consider if these could be amended to encourage such foundations where they exist and the setting up of them where they are absent.

Moreover, there is a need to demonstrate how individual initiatives can become part of the general policy environment through networks and collaboration between sectors and where relevant across administrative boundaries.

Media support, lobbying and networking can be crucial in raising awareness of new challenges and promoting collaboration among actors and disseminating lessons learnt from individual initiatives. Much of this is about raising the profile of social innovation and ensuring its relevance is understood and appreciated by a wider audience of policy makers, business leaders, private funders and local communities.

4 Factors Supporting Social Innovation

What is clear from our case study reports is that social innovation can take a wide variety of forms according to the different times and places. Given this there is no 'off the shelf' social innovation pack that can simply be picked up and transferred elsewhere. Nor is there a simple 'check list' of social innovation that can be followed. Correspondingly it would seem unwise to try to develop a 'general policy'. However, based on our cases studies it is possible to identify a number of general factors related to and likely to support the development of social innovation that can be drawn upon and used as 'lesson learning' aids for a wide range of places (i.e. urban, suburban and rural situations).

These are:

1. At a very general level, it is important to recognise there is a *problem* and that past policies have failed to address it. This in itself is a generic issue, but nevertheless important;
2. In part related to (1) political *leadership* that acknowledges past failure(s) and the necessity of developing a new approach;
3. Following on from (2) it increasingly appears to be the case that the more traditional top-down directive form of leadership is inappropriate and that a form of leadership, which is more collectively orientated, is required. A leadership approach that is open to co-decision making and *enhanced democratic engagement*. In a sense it may be described as *facilitative leadership and consensus leadership*;
4. A multi-actor partnership approach that combines public, private and voluntary/community sectors as the situation requires;
5. As far as possible reducing bureaucratic requirements that may hinder the supply of services in the long term;
6. Stable funding regimes that are multi-annual that give social innovation initiatives a degree of freedom to develop and experiment;
7. Related to (6) utilising endogenous resources, such as training individuals from relevant communities/groups to be active, in both a paid and voluntary capacity, in the initiatives and interact with the relevant groups and individuals;
8. As part of this approach to innovation it will be necessary to bring together a range of *different knowledge forms* (e.g. professional, managerial, local, every day) to inform policy development;

9. Following on from (8) embedding social innovation in relevant educational, professional and managerial curricula;
10. A crucial element is *empowering local communities and voluntary sector organisations* to address problems at the local level as part of a wider approach;
11. Innovation in terms of addressing what are often complex and multifaceted problems requires bringing together a wide range of *key actors and decision-makers* from a diverse range of organisations;
12. Selecting the most appropriate scale (i.e. the most effective one) for policy interventions in order to make them place-sensitive on one hand, and to efficiently manage the available territorial assets and organizational resources on the other;
13. Developing suitable web based platforms and associated physical spaces staffed by trained individuals, preferably from the local community, who can meet with relevant individuals/groups and help assess their needs and link them into existing services;
14. Where necessary developing new services and/or service delivery systems to meet existing or emerging needs.

By engaging in the above, or an appropriate combination of them, this will help create collective ownership and the sustainability of any innovations. It is, however, important to adapt them to the particular problems and situation of individual places as part of a context sensitive place-based approach that takes into account the need to simultaneously address and promote economic, social and territorial cohesion.

More generally and in relation to Cohesion Policy social innovation needs to be a key part of the place-based approach as advocated by the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and the Barca Report (2009). The Barca Report is aware of many of the general issues noted and the need to engage in institutional change if this approach is to be successful. In every case there are multifaceted problems to be addressed and as the report points out:

The intervention needed to tackle these problems should take the form of the provision of integrated bundles of public goods and services aimed at triggering institutional change, improving the well-being of people and the productivity of businesses and promoting innovation. The goods and services concerned need to be tailored to places

by eliciting and aggregating local preferences and knowledge and by taking account of linkages with other places (Barca 2009, p. XI).

If such changes are to take place arrangements for citizen/community participation will need to be developed that bring together spatially and socially disparate groups to create ‘deliberative fora’ that can adequately represent their interests in policy development and implementation.

To date the problem has been that while documents such as the Green Paper and the Barca Report have pointed to the significance of social innovation this has all too often not been translated into action at the local level or supported by national programmes. What the COHSMO project has done is to provide clear examples of how, in a wide variety of places (urban, suburban, rural) various forms of social innovation can be developed, with appropriate exogenous support, and have a real impact on the local context helping to improve the local economy, improve employment opportunities, enhance social cohesion and improve the well-being of people. Moreover, it has identified a range of mechanisms, processes and factors that facilitate social innovation. Taken together these examples can provide learning opportunities for others, contribute to the existing evidence base and inspire other places to develop forms of social innovation appropriate to their local situations and needs.

5 References

Barca, F. (2009), “An Agenda For a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations”, Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy, Brussels.