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► To cite this version:

Céline Merlin-Brogniart, Lars Fuglsang, Ada Scupola, Anne Vorre Hansen, Rolf Rønning, et al.. Public Service Innovation Network for Social Innovation: A European overview. 30 th RESER International Congress: Value Co-creation and Innovation in the New Service Economy, Jan 2021, Alcalá de Henares (on line), Spain. halshs-03333560

HAL Id: halshs-03333560

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03333560>

Submitted on 3 Sep 2021

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30th RESER International Congress: Value Co-creation and Innovation in the New Service Economy

Public Service Innovation Network for Social Innovation: A European
overview

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In the context of the modernization of public management in Europe, the attention paid to social entrepreneurs for innovation is increasingly important. This paper reveals that these actors significantly contribute to the development of collaborative governance aimed at improving social innovation related to public service through their role as initiator, boundary spanner or network leader. However, the public sector actors involved in the governance also have a significant role to play in enabling these innovations to emerge. This paper analyzes the forms and processes of innovation taken by this multi-actors collaborative governance. It is based on the study of 25 case studies associated with five countries of the European Union.

1. Introduction and Context

Innovation has always been mentioned as a solution to the society's major changes. In the context of the crisis in which Western society has been trapped since the end of the 20th century, accentuated by the 2008 financial crisis and now by the sanitary cri-

sis, experts and governments are interested in the innovative capacity of other stakeholders, especially social entrepreneurs. These actors would complement governments, whose resources are becoming scarce, with their innovation capabilities to address social problems and provide public services.

Since the mid-2000s, researchers have been interested in the emergence of new types of tertiarized innovation networks. However, this literature is still young regarding collaborative governance and particularly collaboration dedicated to Social Innovations (Sørensen and Torfing, 2010; Desmarchelier et al. 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how social entrepreneurs participate in the development of social innovation related to public service within collaborative governance in Europe. How do the innovation process and collaboration between stakeholders take shape? What is the role of the different stakeholders involved in this collaboration? Do these innovation networks belong to a specific governance paradigm? To answer these questions the analysis is based on a collection of 25 case studies located in different European countries. These case studies offer a comparative analysis to understand whether there is a common development of the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship related to social innovation networks.

2. Literature review: social innovation, collaborative governance and innovation process

The theoretical framework of this paper is twofold:

- Depending on the research on social innovation, and on the fields of intervention of these authors within social innovation, the boundaries attributed to social innovation can be very different (Cloutier 2003; Hillier et al, 2004; Dandurand, 2005). However, it is possible to classify the main conceptions of social innovation into three groups (Richez-Battesti, Vallade, 2012). From the three conceptions of social innovation emerge different conceptions of the social entrepreneur: First, the construct of the social entrepreneur may be related mostly to individual initiative (American conception); second, the notion of the social entrepreneur may be linked to collaborative processes or collective action to respond to social problems (European conception); and third, the conception of social entrepreneurship may be applied to the combination of collective action and strong participation of individual “fiery souls”. This type of cooperation includes experimentation at the local level. These conceptions generate different types of governance. In addition, social entrepreneurship researchers and governments are seeking to circumscribe the scope of social entrepreneurship and to encourage the creation of social entrepreneurship by providing a legal framework for these enterprises in order to either renew forms of public action or to encourage change. The introduction of a formal framework in only some countries suggests that there may be differences in the actors and types of governance surrounding social entrepreneurship.

- In order to better identify the process of innovation and the emergence of these modes of collaborative governance surrounding social entrepreneurship, we refer to the findings of Greenhalgh et al. (2004). This author identifies three processes of diffusion of service innovations (let-it-happen, help-it-happen and make-it-happen). The make-it-happen feature signifies the planned development and dissemination of a readymade innovation to designated adopters. The help-it-happen feature describes

the enabling of innovation by public sector managers allowing adopters to co-innovate, negotiate and adapt the innovation to their local conditions. The let-it-happen feature allows actors to develop their own solutions, without inducing a model. These features will serve as a starting point to develop our typology of collaborative governance types in the context of social innovation networks with a public service purpose.

3. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach. To identify the role of social entrepreneurs, and the different features of innovation processes, five European countries have been selected. In each country, five significant case studies have been carried out, a case report has been written for each case and validated by the case organization¹. To ensure national and sectoral comparisons, the cases are based on the same social issues (elderly care, education, immigration, long-term unemployment, environmental protection), and have been carried out with the same “case study framework”. The case studies were detected mainly by keyword via the Internet and through literature review. Our aim was to have a set of case studies that involve different types of innovations, innovation processes, and innovation networks. The research method used is in-depth interviews with the key actors of the network from the third sector (or civil society) and the public sector.

The case study framework of interviews is composed of five key dimensions: The type of innovation/type of innovation process, the type of innovation network, innovation drivers and barriers, institutional factors and the impacts or performance of the network. When needed, the guidelines were refined depending on initial meetings with key informants. Relevant documents from each organisation have been analysed as supplementary data.

4. The participation of social entrepreneurs in the development of social innovation related to public service within collaborative governance

The three features of social innovation collaborative network activation:

Following Greenhalgh (2004), it is possible to identify three types of development of collaborative innovation related to social innovation and entrepreneurship seeking to produce public service. These three features are not mutually exclusive. They can intervene successively during the development of the social innovation.

The first feature is top-down according to a well-known make-it-happen process. This method corresponds to a planned, regulated, programmed innovation. The second feature, help-it-happen leads to a negotiated, influenced and enabled innovation process. The third feature, bottom-up, corresponds to let-it-happen feature, i.e. an unpre-

¹ Fuglsang, L., Vorre Hansen A., Scupola A., (2019), Merlin-Brogniart C. (2019), Rosta M., Révész E., Katona M. (2019), Magnussen S., Rønning R. (2019), Peralta A. et al. (2019)

dictable, uncertain, emergent, adaptive, self-organizing innovation process. Depending on the country or context, some of these features are more present than others. This can be explained by the conception of social innovation and the place assigned to social entrepreneurship in the country or context.

It is suggested that for the same type of innovation, it is possible that one feature is encouraged in one country whereas another feature is promoted in another country depending on the characteristics of public sector and public management in each country. More specifically, if a social innovation relates to a social problem over which the public sector usually has a prerogative to act, it is more likely that the help-it-happen feature will be favored since the public sector will seek to keep a certain level of control over these social innovations, in particular concerning the way in which public services are delivered. For example, the help-it-happen feature provides an approach to changing the way a public service is delivered which led the public sector remain in control over issues of equal treatment of users and the continuity of service.

The forms of innovation identified in collaborative innovation:

The innovation is primarily social, but is also accompanied by a series of other types of innovation which may contain technological elements but are fundamentally non-technological:

Conceptual innovation has been identified by the use of new wording or new roles. These conceptual innovations are aimed at transforming the way in which a problem is addressed and often consider the problem as a whole (systemic innovation).

Organizational innovations, internal or external to the network, are innovations related to the realization of innovation in a "new way", to "new forms of cooperation", or to the creation of new organisations.

Product or service innovations are often associated with the use of new technologies (IT solutions, senior knowledge bank). They also concern the delivery of the service.

Process or methodological innovations: For this category, two types of methods can be distinguished, those concerning the process of innovation production and methodological innovations not related to innovation production.

The case studies did not indicate a link between features and types of innovation.

The role of stakeholders:

Social entrepreneurs have a very significant role as initiators of solutions and network builders. They also often play the role of boundary spanner to allow the network to take shape. They facilitate the hybridization of resources (commercial, redistributive), resulting from the cooperation between different actors. The social entrepreneur, in line with the "social innovation" school of thought approach, performs a dynamic role of creativity and leadership (Petrella, Richez-Battesti, 2014).

While social entrepreneurs are often at the initiative of social innovation, they are not the only ones to have an important role in this type of collaborative governance. Government or more generally the public stakeholder (local governments such as municipality) also have an important role to play. The public stakeholder can be a co-producer

of services or only initiate the process. It can be present to control the whole process from creation to delivery. It may act as a service development facilitator of the social network and support system. It could act as a complementary service provider (the civic actor provides services independent of, but complementary to, public services). Finally, the public stakeholder could be a driving force for the involvement of social actors (role of controller, evaluator, bridge-builder). In this case, the public actor does not intervene directly in the network.

5. Conclusion

Do social entrepreneurs contribute to collaborative governance regarding social innovation with a public service aim? Do social entrepreneurs cover the same reality in European countries? This paper shows that the role of social entrepreneurs is becoming essential in the development of social innovation related to public service within collaborative governance, but the way in which networks of actors emerge may differ depending on the country and the type of public management at work in the country in consideration. Thus, the room for manoeuvre of the social entrepreneurs depends on the country (some social entrepreneurs can easily initiate a solution on a local scale, whether in others countries, it will depend on the law and public prerogatives).

Social entrepreneurs have several roles to play: initiators of solutions, boundary spanners, leaders of the innovation network. These networks can emerge in a self-organized way. This type of network can be explained by the lack of public solutions to a given social problem, or by the ineffectiveness of the existing solutions. However, in this type of collaborative social innovation with a public service aim, the public actor also often has a significant role to play. The public stakeholder may also play the role of initiator and leader of the network, but it is more likely that, in a search for modernization of the public service, the public actor seeks to accompany the social entrepreneur in his/her business, in structuring or supporting these innovation networks, helping him/her to reduce obstacles such as legislation. In some cases, the public stakeholder can also become an entrepreneur, but the term "institutional entrepreneur" is then a more appropriate term.

The innovation produced by these networks covers a wide variety of non-technological dimensions of innovation as well as technological aspects. The four most noticeable forms of innovation associated with social innovation are conceptual innovation, organizational innovation, product or service innovations, and process or methodological innovations. The innovation processes are mainly based on an interactive dynamics of innovation centred on multi-agent collaboration with the objective of value co-creation.

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Declaration of interest statement

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 770356 "Understanding value co-creation in public services for transforming European public administrations"

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