



WP 9- International Workshops

Pushing research further: international expert meetings on innovation in social services

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Summary

This report identifies future scenarios and new research gaps and problems related to social service planning, provision and evaluation developed through the INNOSERV project and based on inputs from academic and high level experts collected during two international workshops held respectively in Budapest (8 May 2013) and in Brussels (17 May 2013).

Key issues related to the EU framework for innovation, possible barriers and specific aspects of innovation in social services are identified in the report. These inputs will feed into the preparation of the INNOSERV Research Agenda.



1. Background: The role of Work Package 9 in the INNOSERV project

The objective of INNOSERV Work Package 9 is to organise two international workshops bringing together academic researchers and high level experts of social services to assess the status quo and identify future challenges related to innovation in the social service sector in Europe. The feedback collected about the identification of trends, gaps, future challenges, future drivers of innovation, agents of change are intended to be used to feed into the process of elaboration of the INNOSERV Research Agenda.

This report - realised by SOLIDAR in collaboration with the Budapest Institute - illustrates the main findings which emerged during the discussion in the two workshops that took place, respectively on 8 May (Budapest) and 17 May (Brussels).

1.1 Methodological approach

In order to debate the future scenario of innovation in social services, a participative approach has been chosen. During the workshop discussion, barriers and main trends regarding innovation in social services have been identified and desirable and undesirable scenarios related to the development of innovative social services have been assessed. Participants tried to look at a longer-term future of society. This provided a basis for developing future strategies and identifying research gaps. The approach required participants to take an active role in the whole project process of identifying bridges between the available knowledge and the future agenda for research on innovative social services.

1.2 Workshop topics

The topics addressed in the two workshops were identified by project partners during the INNOSERV Consortium meeting in Budapest on 18 and 19 March 2013. The discussion was based on the main research gaps and debated issues which emerged from the preliminary results of the other Work Packages (Phase 2 of the INNOSERV project). In particular, participants, divided into two working groups, tried to identify the issues regarding innovation in social services that required further discussion with academic and high level experts in the sector and that could be interesting to provide inputs for the drafting of the research agenda. The following key topics have been identified to guide the discussion during the two workshops:

- The EU framework for innovation in social services
- Possible barriers to innovation in the social service sector
- Innovation and the quality of services
- Territorial/functional/organisational aspects of innovation (explanatory factors of innovation)

The same four topics have been discussed during both the workshops. However, the two workshops had different focus points. The workshop in Budapest (8 May) focused on the issues of locality, transferability and up-scaling of innovation in social services. Priority was given to participants' expertise in those fields. The workshop in Brussels (17 May) focused



on the financial, policy and legal EU framework of innovation in social services. Priority was given to high level experts familiar with the EU policy framework as well as researchers working in other FP7 projects on social innovation (i.e. TEPSIE, IMPROVE).

2. Topics discussed

2.1 First topic: The EU and innovation in social services

One of the main issues discussed by participants in both the international workshops was the need to develop an EU framework for innovation in social services. Social innovation has become a hot topic in the EU policy arena. The concept is a major issue within the European agenda, although there is not a clear definition yet. Social innovation is a theme that runs through many of the Commission's key initiatives underpinning the Europe 2020 Strategy, from the New Skills Agenda and the European Platform against Poverty to Horizon 2020, the 8th EU framework programme for research and innovation, that commits to addressing societal challenges, including making progress towards 'inclusive, innovative, secure societies'.

Participants discussed about the existing tools at European level to finance innovation as well as the possibility to improve those tools and to create a more integrated framework to promote and enhance innovation in the social service sector.

The following questions were used by moderators to guide the discussion:

- *What is the EU framework for innovation?*
- *How are on-going activities financed if innovation is the “buzzword” for funding?*
- *How to ensure continuity of services?*
- *What should be the best environment to support innovation at local level?*

The first reflection coming out from the discussion is that innovation in social services is characterised by **incremental changes** and adaptations rather than disruptive processes. Most of the time, an innovative solution is characterised by the implementation of a new idea or a new step into a pre-existing process in order to better adapt it to new needs and/or make it more efficient. This kind of cumulative changes can have greater impact on the quality and responsiveness of social services in the long-term but they are not always visible in the short-term. This is also due to the fact that, as stated by participants, in particular in the public sector, users and practitioners follow „informally“ new procedures because they know that the „formal“ ones do not work but they have no time or will to institutionalise those new procedures.

When reflecting on the role of the EU, participants highlighted some contradiction and confusion between the messages that the EU is sending out on the topic of social innovation: in particular participants highlighted the lack of an integrated approach on the issue of social innovation and the definitions provided in the different legislative proposals, recommendations, EU programmes and EU research projects.

Regarding the issue of **financing innovation**, participants highlighted that the EU Cohesion Policy and, in particular, the Structural Funds can significantly contribute to



promote innovative solutions.

Over the years, the EU has supported social innovation through several instruments, including EQUAL and PROGRESS programmes and the European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP). The draft legislative package on cohesion policy for the period 2014 - 2020, which was adopted by the Commission last October, will continue this policy: the proposals for the European Social Fund (ESF) regulation, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) regulation and the new EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation (EPSCI) will support investment in and scaling-up of social innovations and facilitate capacity building.

However, participants pointed out that before thinking about how to foster and scale up innovation, it is necessary to clarify what kind of innovation should be promoted. Therefore, participants suggested that in order to strengthen and support the implementation on innovative solutions meeting real needs and promoting social inclusion, a close cooperation with users, social partners and civil society organisations should be reinforced. While welcoming EU support participants also highlighted its possible negative effects and the crucial importance of fund targeting in order to avoid “innovation for the sake of innovation”.

Social innovation is also supported in the communication adopted by the European Commission in November 2012 on the 2013 Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which kick-starts the third European Semester. This document, setting economic policy priorities to guide Member States through the crisis and to renewed growth, stated that *‘Investments in education, research, innovation and energy should be prioritized and strengthened where possible, while ensuring the efficiency of such expenditure’*¹. This statement paves the way for the idea of supporting innovation in the social service sector as a tool to implement the active inclusion strategy and tackle the social consequences of the economic crisis. However participants highlight that a clear definition of what is meant by innovation is missing in the Commission’s communication and this can have the counterproductive effect of pushing Member States to activating policies on social innovation while not giving the due attention to issues of quality and sustainability.

The **sustainability** of innovation seemed to be an important factor for participants. A debate arose around the question whether it is advisable to engage in socially innovative projects, even if they are short lived. Participants concluded, that even short term innovation can prove useful, since it promotes related innovative ideas and can serve as an example and lesson – even if unsuccessful – for upcoming projects.

Also, participants underlined the crucial importance of sustaining the funding of innovative projects. Since many civil projects depend on governmental or international funding, it must be a priority to ensure their “survival” even after the closure of one funding cycle.

Some participants observed that the EU can be considered as a “box containing knowledge and managing ideas”. Many **platforms** have been created in the framework of the FP7 projects to collect knowledge and share best practices: participants suggested that sustainable solutions should be developed to better use this knowledge and merge the information available into a better integrated “database” that could be used by all stakeholders to learn about new ideas and funding opportunities as well as to use training manuals and new publications. Moreover, some of the participants suggested that to better

¹ European Commission, Communication on the Annual Growth Survey. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/ags2013_en.pdf



exploit the potential of the existing platforms, more activism should be built around them improving communication and accessibility levels of these tools.

Some participants observed that EU institutions should support innovation to promote **accessibility** of social services. They can use the awareness raising, exchange of practices and get these new aspects into the education and learning of professionals (i.e. new professional skills).

Participants discussed also about the **transferability** of innovative practices and adaptation of new solutions to different contexts. It is sometimes difficult to transfer innovative practices as they arise at micro-level and under particular and given local conditions. However, ideas and basic principles can be transferred but in order to do that, we need to *operationalize* them (this links up with the more general debate about measuring social innovation and assessing outcomes).

Participants observed that in the social service sector, undergoing restructuring reforms mostly results in budget cuts, innovation is perceived as a way to keep on offering services using less financial resources. Therefore, there is the risk that “**efficiency**” in times of crisis is perceived only as a way to reduce costs. There should however be no efficiency without quality. According to participants, it would be interesting to assess how innovation works in times of crisis. And broadly speaking, does the political framework influence the development of innovative solutions in the social service sector in terms of impact and priorities.

The topic of **measuring social innovation** was mentioned many times during the workshops. It is connected to many of the future developments for innovation in social services suggested by participants, as well as to the creation of a more sustainable financial framework for social innovation. Participants acknowledged that the EC is more and more asking for an evidence based innovation, meaning that the outstanding idea is to create a system measuring the outcomes of certain policies and practices and assessing their value. Participants discussed the idea of having an EU framework setting clear indicators to evaluate innovation and assess the outcomes of innovative policies: on one hand participants highlighted that a clear framework is lacking. On the other hand, participants realised that a very structured framework could have the counterproductive effect of inhibiting innovation as it is usually happening at micro-level where the level of coordination is lower. Participants were not able to find a common vision on this aspect and continued discussions about the pros and cons of developing tools to ‘measure social innovation’. This topic is intensively debated as it is also related to the issue of measuring the social value of “soft” policy outcomes. Participants considered that further research on this aspect is needed.

2.2 Second topic: Possible barriers for innovation in social services

In this session workshop participants tried to identify possible barriers to social innovation, and pinpoint the main common hindrances that individuals and organisations engaged in social innovation deal with. Inevitably, in order to define the barriers, the subject of



innovation drivers came up. Interestingly a couple of factors were named as both drivers and barriers (e.g. economic factors). Participants also tried to come up with possible solutions to solving these problems and methods to work around these obstacles.

The following questions were used by moderators to guide the discussion:

- *How can innovation serve the objective of sustainability?*
- *How to prevent the “risk to fail”?*
- *To what extent can social innovation serve purposes other than what the innovators have in mind?*
- *What can actually be scaled up?*
- *What innovation should be followed-up and mainstreamed?*

Participants observed that one possible barrier to innovation is the **lack of skills** or tools to connect different actors/organisations/competences and develop more integrated and person-centred social services that go beyond the traditional division of competences in the public sector.

Another important barrier to innovation identified by participants is the **resistance to the introduction of new technologies** by staff. The capacity to adapt to changes is a skill that needs to be developed within the learning activities; it is also the result of education and mentality. These things could be improved. A barrier in the public sector is the **risk-avoiding attitude** in the managerial mentality, as well as unwillingness to change the status quo.

The economic and financial factor was a key point in the Budapest discussions. Both the lack and the availability of **funding** were listed as barriers, but also as a driver of innovation. In some of the participants’ views, modest economic conditions may lead to innovative, cost-effective ideas that are capable of achieving social change, but might have never been thought of in more favourable financial situations. Participants also argued that easily accessible funding paired with inadequate targeting may lead to ‘innovation for the sake of innovation’ but also to the disappearance of the human factor in social services (i.e. innovation becomes a money-making endeavour, rather than a clever, empathetic solution to a social problem).

Other barriers mentioned have been the legal framework, pressure of time or needs.

Participants highlighted that sometimes challenges are also barriers. For instance, **competition** is a barrier to knowledge sharing and transparent communication between organisations.

It is often requested that innovation be sustainable and having identifiable and measurable outcomes from the beginning – yet, this is, by definition, impossible. How can it be possible to make innovative ideas that are “allowed to fail”? (so that ideas can be tested, tweaked and improved until a good model is found and established).The **risk of failing** represents another of the barriers to innovation highlighted by participants: sometimes organisations do not have enough incentives to start thinking about developing innovative policies/practices because there are no mechanisms taking into account the risk of failing (innovation needs time to be developed as well as a given space alongside the workflow of the organisations, it also needs to be accepted and embraced by the target group and the



local community).

2.3 Third topic: Innovation and the quality of services

In this section participants were asked to debate the impact of innovation on the quality of social services.

The following questions were used by moderators to guide the discussion:

- *Until when/to what point is a project or a service innovative?*
- *How does innovation increase the quality of services?*
- *How is quality measured? (linked to the more general topic of measuring social outcomes)*
- *Innovation as a creative/destructive process: What might get lost in this process? What is replaced with new, innovative ideas?*

Before discussing the relation between innovation and quality of services, participants attempted to define, what quality is or how quality can and should be understood when talking about social services. A good indicator of quality seemed to be the extent to which a service fulfils the needs and expectations of the service user (e.g. frequency of providing a service, kindness of the care-taker etc.) or the extent to which a service increases the independence of users.

Participants also identified a number of drivers that might increase quality such as favourable economic and demographic changes.

Reflecting on the **binomial innovation-quality**, participants agreed on the fact of considering innovation as a means to ensure quality of social services (and not the other way round). This should be the core element: quality as a precondition to innovation. However, it is important also to distinguish between quality (in terms of social dimension and impact of certain policies and practices on society: social value) and outcomes (in this case participants underlined the need to have clear indicators to assess the quality of outcomes produced by a certain practice). Are we talking about one quality or qualities of different social services?

Accountability is a very important aspect to think about. How can we create values?

Participants also stressed the importance of the fact that quality should bring a **win-win situation**, to improve the situation of both the service user and the provider (e.g. raise the quality of life of the client and the quality of the job performed).



2.4 Forth topic. Territorial/functional/organisational aspects of innovation

The following questions were used by moderators to guide the discussion:

- *Is there more innovation in cities than in rural circumstances?*
- *Is innovation happening more in NGOs than in public organisations? What about for profit social services?*
- *How is innovation different in Eastern and in Western Europe? Is there any specificity about post-socialist countries?*

At the beginning of the discussion participants were divided about the **urban/rural** binomial: according to some of them cities are the best incubators for innovation (because of the better opportunity for interaction and mutual learning), according to others in rural areas, innovation is paradoxically faster because there are more urgent needs to be addressed. It was also highlighted that the basic idea of some innovative policies is to make the place where the policy is actually taking place less important (abstract the innovative idea from the local dimension).

Regarding the **organisational binomial** (public sector/ NGOs) participants pointed out that innovation can be promoted independently in any kind of organisation, adapting the rules according to the different structures. Moreover some participants highlighted that the special formula of a successful team depends on the form of interaction and communication and not from the type of organisation itself.

The Budapest workshop had a particular focus on the **territorial/regional aspect of innovation**. Participants coming from both Central-Eastern and Western European countries could compare and contrast and had a chance to reflect on the differences between these two major European regions.

Participants agreed that innovation is contextual and highly dependent on **local culture**. What might seem innovative in one country or region is not perceived as such in another. This also influences the transferability of certain social services. For example, it is much more difficult to implement a successful northern or western European project that focuses on individual self-care of the elderly in southern or eastern European countries, where the cultural norm is for the family to take care of their elder members.

Another aspect of local differences is the perception of monitoring and evaluation, especially when it comes to **self-evaluation**. According to participants in many Eastern European countries evaluation itself, as a concept, is novel. The necessity of monitoring is often undervalued, thus the opportunity of improvement of existing services is seriously hindered.

User participation – while more and more frequent or moreover, commonplace in western countries – it is still very new and often even disliked, perhaps because of the very hierarchy-dependent culture in Central and Eastern Europe. It seems that it is very hard to find clients who are willing to participate in evaluative processes, since they feel alienated or tend to lack the capacity to think in abstract terms about what a good service should be like.

Another important difference identified by participants is the **funding of innovative social**



services. In the central-eastern part of Europe, innovative services are usually internationally funded. Innovative projects are seldom funded from the state budget, and public (state-owned) services are very rarely considered innovative. In Central-Eastern European countries awareness-raising, mobilization, lobbying are all necessary to make change happen and put innovation on the agenda.

3. Conclusion and next steps

Key issues related to the EU framework for innovation, possible barriers and specific aspects of innovation in social services have been identified by high level experts during the international workshops. These inputs will feed into the preparation of the INNOSERV Research Agenda, which is the final objective of INNOSERV Work Package 10.



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Appendix 1: Practical information on the workshop in Budapest

The first international workshop was held in Budapest on May 8. Petra Edina Reszkető welcomed the participants from nine countries on behalf of the organising team (Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis, Hungary - BI). INNOSERV Consortium leader, Professor Johannes Eurich (Heidelberg University) presented the INNOSERV project to the participants.

Successively, Professor András Kelen (Social Innovation Foundation, Hungary) held a stimulating presentation on the divide in innovative social services perception as reflected by two prestigious awards (*ProBono-Prize Hungary and Sozial Marie Prize Austria*). Both aim to award projects from Central-Eastern Europe, however there are several differences in how each of them perceive innovation (sometimes the same projects are nominated, and praised by one and neglected by the other). Stimulated by this presentation participants engaged in a lively debate on the definition of innovation and the role of the state in funding, supporting or even engaging in innovative social services. The question arose whether social innovation is a discovery or is it invented in the specific community. Participants agreed that innovation is highly dependent on a local context. It is a novelty for the local community, countering local problems, and different states, even different governments respond in different ways. The participants in this discussion expressed the need to connect innovation in social services and social innovation; they felt that this is the way for it to lead to social change. Participants also saw eye to eye on the fact that the inclusion of users is a crucial aspect of innovation: inclusion of users and empowerment of users is the next big step in social innovation – very well done by participatory social enterprises. This could be followed then by user-managed services.

After Dorottya Szikra's presentation of the filming process, the morning session was concluded by the viewing and commenting of two films, namely:

- Community building through art-education - Realpearl Foundation, Hungary
- Mobile health services for hard to reach people - Center against human trafficking, Denmark

The afternoon session started with parallel group discussions based on selected short films. Participants were divided into two workgroups and each viewed a number of different films, as follows:

- Work Group 1 – moderator: Professor Hanne Marlene Dahl (Roskilde University, Denmark)
 - Managing care services to support independence - VITALITY – Changing focus for old age, Denmark
 - User involvement for independent living and personal assistance – CIL, Serbia
- Work Group 2 – moderator: Balázs Váradi (Budapest Institute, Hungary)
 - Care for older people in a community setting – Ammerudhjemmet, Norway
 - User driven service evaluation – Nueva, Austria
 - Empowering people to manage their finances - Humanitas Financial Home Administration Programme, The Netherlands

Following the discussions the working groups met and the moderators presented in



plenary the common points and lessons learned in the group discussions. The next item on the workshop agenda was the concise and very accurate presentation of Professor Peter Herman (EURISPES, Italy) on what makes a social service innovative. He talked about whether innovation makes more effective systems or whether social integration means helping people to promote their interests. He pointed out that social innovation depends on the four „Ps“: provision, protection, promotion and public responsibility. He stated that while the EU is still thinking in citizens instead of human beings, there is a need for change. He called for normalisation stressing the need for flexible but common legal framework. He concluded by encouraging participants to take up social responsibility.

After the closing remarks of Professor Johannes Eurich the workshop ended with a social event followed by the launch of the Hungarian book “Knowledge and Policy” that presents the findings of the Knowledge and Policy research project (2006–11), funded by the European Commission.

All in all the films were very well received by the audience at the Budapest workshop and inspired lively debates. Participants mentioned several times the advantages of using audio-visual material as a means of communication, since it formulates the message clearly, concisely, and moreover, creatively.

Appendix 2: Practical information on the workshop in Brussels

The second workshop was held in Brussels on May 17. INNOSERV Consortium partner, Professor Simon Güntner (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences) presented tasks and objectives of the INNOSERV project to the participants. Furthermore, dr. Heiko Prange-Gstöhl (European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, Unit B5 “Social sciences and Humanities”) provided information about the future research programme Horizon 2020. Successively, four videos out of the 20 videos realised in the project were presented to participants to give an idea about the examples collected in the framework of the INNOSERV project. Namely:

- Care for older people in a community setting – Ammerudhjemmet (NO)
- Social enterprises for integration and development – Place de bleu (DK)
- Integrated housing, social and health services for mental health rehabilitation – Light Residential (IT)
- Breaking the Poverty Cycle: Early Child Development and Parents’ Employment – Katymar (HU)

INNOSERV Consortium partner, Chris Hawker (University of Southampton, UK) provided a preliminary overview of the practitioners feedback collected so far about the INNOSERV videos.

In the afternoon session, participants discussed different issues related to innovation in social services on the basis of the information presented during the morning session. Professor Flavia Pesce (IRS), Professor Simon Güntner (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences) and Chris Hawker (University of Southampton, UK) facilitated the working group



discussion.

General comments and feedback on the videos:

- General remark by participants: the videos used in the INNOSERV project represent a very interesting new form to disseminate information and to encourage the debate (all participants were enthusiastic about the format).
- From a German perspective the example of the innovative nursing home (Ammerudhjemmet, NO) is interesting but not completely new: in Germany there are already similar projects to tackle the demographic changes and fight isolation of older people.
- Regarding Place de Bleu (DK), some of the participants highlighted that it could be improved by finding ways to create more integration and avoid stigmatisation.
- General remark by participants: from a Trade Union perspective an important aspect to be taken into account is whether innovation interlinks with the improvement of quality of work and employment condition)
- Some of the participants pointed out that the examples in the videos show that the approach to social services is switching from a “sectorial” perspective (traditional ‘silos’) to a person-centred perspective: the person is a complex whole and cannot be classified into different sectors. All the support has to be designed around the person and this fact calls for the need of interdisciplinary work to better integrate existing tools and actors.
- New trend in society: independent living and more interest by people to get involved and participate in decisions. This results in the emerging role of volunteering and community-based projects and activities to empower people and to ensure users’ involvement in the design and implementation of social services. Some of the participants expressed the fear that the raising active role of users in the design and provision (through volunteering) of social services can represent a way to dampen a State’s responsibilities.

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to describe innovation in one word. These are the results of this creative exercise:

- Changing mentality
- Three step process: participation – learning attitude – sharing the findings
- Creativity and fun
- A means to do something else and not an end in itself
- Increase participation
- Pioneering
- Networking
- Political willingness
- Democratic interaction



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