HOW CAN CITIES PROMOTE SOCIAL INNOVATION THROUGH BROKERAGE ROLE HAVE CITIES AND CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES?

REPORT ON THE ONLINE CHAT SESSIONS ORGANISED ON THE 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

Moderated by Anne De Feijter (City of Amersfoort).

Topics covered

In the first part of the chat we focused on two general questions:

- General trends and the experiences of the participants in recent developments in this area. How have local governments worked together with local stakeholders and citizens in a more co-productive/collaborative way?

- How can new leadership approaches and work culture embrace social innovation within cities?

After this, the session focused on two specific topics:

- City brokerage role (Which results can be achieved by playing a more connecting, brokerage role, working together with other local stakeholders and citizens? What are the obstacles and barriers in this? Etc.)
- Capacity building (How can a local government get trained or get experienced otherwise? Who needs to be trained? Etc.)

Participants

The following people took part in the chat:

- Mireia Sanabria, 4D Cities URBACT project lead expert
- Steve Marriott, Expert in sustainable cities
- Lia Bouma, City of Amersfoort
- Thijs van Exel, Kennisland
- Per-Anders Hillgren, Forum for Social Innovation Sweden, Malmö University

The session was moderated by Anne De Feijter (City of Amersfoort).

Summary of discussions

Cities and Social innovation

1. New ways of bringing relevant stakeholders together around an urgent topic. Don't choose between top-down or bottom-up, but bring the best of both together. Co-production and designing together allows bottom up creativity and top down resource and experience to be combined. Multi stakeholder groups that work together to tackle local problems should involve the people that feel these local problems in their daily life and invite them as equal

participants. One of the important tasks of a local government in this, is to try to ensure/secure that all stakeholders are being involved.

2. Civil servants working together with citizens, professionals, entrepreneurs and local organizations in equal networks and working teams.

Lab Amsteldorp

Thijs van Exel – Kennisland

Bringing relevant stakeholders together around the topic of ageing population in a deprived neighbourhood. Goal was designing scenarios for improvement with a multi-stakeholder group of citizens, civil servants, designers and other professionals. Initiator was Kennisland, an independent social innovation lab. Kennisland worked with the city administration 1) to identify the theme & location; 2) in a co-design team 'on the ground'; 3) by using the outcomes and case study to leverage change inside the local government: scaling up. Solutions in the deprived neighbourhood: meeting places organized by and for citizens, pop-up stores in empty shops and a social map.

A specific concern was the problem of ensuring that weaker voices were included, that all stakeholders were being involved. Kennisland searched for formal and informal support structures and networks in this lab. Not everyone wants to or is capable of engaging in the structures that are being designed for an innovative lab as this.

Interpreters can be helpful. Community connectors, such as social professionals, who are mapping assets, common concerns, aspirations, etc. They are used to learning about people's real values, building relationships of trust and getting them participating at their conditions. Participation channels need to adapt to each collective or group.

4D Cities project Leeds (UK)

A process to identify the best innovations to increase care outside the hospital, as part of broader local strategy on health innovation, supported by the NHS (National Health Service). 150 ideas came up in an initial brainstorm from stakeholders such as transporters, carers, patients, nurses, general public, etc. Three criteria were used to make a selection: 1) Scope of impact – 2) Number of people – 3) Evidence that it works/scalability. The ideas that scored best were the best suited for the project of reducing care in hospitals and allowing people to stay at home longer. Leeds Innovation Health Hub (LIHH) is a special purposed vehicles (SPV); a public-private-third sector partnership, that works on the implementation of the local health strategy. LIHH is made up of Leeds health and social care system stakeholders, with strong links to the Academic Health Science Network.

3. Local government gives space for social innovative initiatives of citizens and/or local organizations. Experimental land use, temporarily use of empty offices, etc.

The Severn Project in Bristol

Steve Marriott – Bristol

A social enterprise supporting and helping people from socially excluded groups to re-integrate. The

project achieves this by involving people in the production and supply of the highest quality food at an urban farm. The people involved are being trained in food production and are then offered a plot to grow food themselves. This food is then sold by the Severn Project and profits are shared. The administration has supported the project by making land available at very low rent and facilitated its development informally through contacts with other public agencies and community projects.

Some approaches to overcome obstacles and barriers

New city leadership

4. Strong city leadership can help to speed up processes of new collaboration. It is not a must, though.

5. Support from the city administration is crucial, whether it comes from the Mayor, city councillors or from low-ranked civil servants who come out of their offices a lot.

6. There is an evolution in the role of elected representatives from decision makers to also be the organizer or moderator of the co-production between the city administration and other local stakeholders. Crucial in this is, again, their role in ensuring equal participation or rebalancing the participation when some lower voices have not been heard.

7. The City Council is willing to reflect the democratic processes and structures to societal change and make sure it can still actively support it. They find new ways to be informed on what is going on in the city.

In Igualada (Spain) a city councillor meets local health groups (companies, medical professionals, patients associations, relatives, etc.) to gather feedback on the local project of a Hospital Simulator, a sort of a hospital living lab. Collaboration among the different stakeholders and the key role of bird-view from the city council has proven to be of key importance.

In the case of Baia Sprie (Romania) the Mayor is the interlocutor with companies (sponsors) and local groups to gain support to reopen a local hospital.

In Amsterdam much of the push for collaboration comes from bottom-up, not top-down.

Support from the city administration is key, though. Kennisland tends to start by collaborating with people in the lower level of the governmental organization (the neighbourhood manager or the social worker) and build trust and practice. At the time a project is becoming successful, city leaders often can't avoid it any longer.

The City Council in Amersfoort is realizing that it is very important that democratic processes and structures reflect societal change and that they actively support it. Politicians need to adapt, listen and manage more instead of make decisions themselves. It is searching for new ways to be better informed and be more approachable for citizens and other local parties. In city cafe's councillors meet citizens, companies and other local organizations and can talk with them longer and in a more informal way than during the public meetings of the council.

City broker role

8. Local government plays a brokerage role, using its local network to connect initiatives to other public agencies, community projects or companies and help them build their initiative.

9. Not every civil servant is suited to work as a broker. It requires specific competences, that you can partly train (capacity building), but also learn on the job.

Civil servants often want to 'right the wrongs' that they are observing in the field. That is what they have been trained to do. But sometimes those 'wrongs' may be exactly what people want for themselves. In any case, they may not want intervention or interference.

Playing a brokerage role means having a strong focus on quick outputs and results, that functions within the present system. Taking risks or trying out uncertain opportunities are not to be favoured, because aiming at the "high hanging fruit" often means producing less quick results.

The City of Bristol has devolved the brokerage role to a small number of key agencies within the city; a community support agency, a social enterprise support agency and a foundation bring together local philanthropic funds.

At the Lab Amsteldorp project, Kennisland spent a lot of time to shape the team at the beginning of the process. Staff members are being selected on three crucial factors: 1) you need to be able to spend the time and sometimes be willing to make extra hours if needed; 2) don't be judgemental; 3) you need to be open to learn new skills and insights and leave your natural reflexes out for a while to give room for new ways of collaboration and designing change together. These competences are the same for all participants: civil servants, professionals, citizens.

10. Capacity building is necessary at all levels. As all roles are changing, civil servants, service providers, but also city councillors, mayors and even citizens should all acknowledge the need to build new competences and should get or take the opportunity to experiment with them.

11. Important competences to train are: advisory competences, process guidance competences and thinking from the perspective of another stakeholder. These can be trained in courses, by learning on the job, by hiring citizens or business people to work within the city administration, by working with mixed training groups or in exchange programs.

Basic competences that are necessary for working in a brokerage role are advisory competences, such as listening, asking questions and react on the information the 'client' gives you, instead of 'preaching' your own knowledge. This also requires to put the tendency to 'right the wrongs' or to spread knowledge to a hold. Knowing what is going around in the city, but not automatically get involved or act on it. Being a broker means first to connect, and after that to let go and just monitor the outcomes.

To be able to work in networks or multi stakeholder projects it is important to train process guidance competences, such as: being open about interests, ensure a secure and open atmosphere, to appoint aspects of the group process, meta-communication, etc.

An important competence to train is: thinking from the perspective of another stakeholder. Training this, for example by working in multi disciplinary teams, will help to feel responsible for the final compromise and not only for defending your own interest or working field. This is crucial to come from fragmentized to horizontal policy making or project management.

Another idea to train this effectively is to have mixed groups of participants in training courses. In Amersfoort there has been a successful experiment with the course 'Working with Networks'. Civil servants, city councillors and citizens were part of the training group. All participants stated that the

mixed group was a bonus on top of the content of the training. It gave opportunities to talk about each other's changing role, to learn to think from someone else's perspective and to start working together on the basis of mutual respect, trust, equality and personal contact. A learning environment is safe enough to talk about the change of operational processes and procedures within the city administration.

A promising development is the fact that citizens or people working at local companies are being invited to temporarily work at a project in the city administration, together with civil servants. They can fulfil a brokerage role and/or function as an intermediary between city and city administration.

A last development in building capacity is the organization of exchange programs, in which civil servants and practitioners travel to other cities and actively participate in innovation groups to solve local problems.