

HOW DO NEW LEADERSHIP APPROACHES AND WORK CULTURE PROMOTE SOCIAL INNOVATION WITHIN CITIES?

REPORT ON THE ONLINE CHAT SESSIONS ORGANISED ON THE 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

Moderated by Per-Anders Hillgren (Forum for Social Innovation Sweden, Malmö University).

Topics covered

We have addressed questions related to the following points:

- Local authority leadership role: origin of this leadership
- Focus on top-down leadership
- Role that can be played by URBACT

Participants

The following people took part in the chat:

- Fernando Barreiro Cavestany, USER URBACT project lead expert
- Stéphane Vincent, La Region 27
- Furio Honsell, City Mayor of Udine (IT)
- Miguel Correira de Brito, USER URBACT partner – Lisbon
- Anne De Feijter, City of Amersfoort
- Magnus Johansson, Urban Studies department, Malmö University
- Bjarne Stenquist, R&D and social sustainability unit City office, City of Malmö

Summary of discussions

Social innovation has been used increasingly by some cities : they stimulate, facilitate, initiate and sustain its use in order to tackle wicked issues, unsolved through traditional market and public approaches.

In a first part, we have covered the following issues:

- Concrete examples of social innovation, results and role of the local authority
- The need to adopt changes to use social innovation
- Drivers influencing the adoption of these changes
- Key lessons learnt.

The second part has focused on “New City Leadership”

Note: the notion of ‘city leadership’ doesn’t necessarily refer to the level of decision makers but to the global capability of the city to lead changes and developments in the field of social innovation. The definition of leadership in Wikipedia hereafter can help focusing this notion here: leadership has been described as “a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task”. For example, some understand a leader simply as

somebody whom people follow, or as somebody who guides or directs others, while others define leadership as “organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal”.

What are the main practices observed in terms of cities using social innovation?

Public administrations seem to take a more supportive, collaborative and coordinating role to embrace social innovation in cities compared to the traditional model where processes are controlled, owned and driven by the municipalities themselves.

Sometimes this becomes present through a change of attitude. One example is the city of Amersfoort where they slowly are moving away from an attitude characterized by 'always knowing the best' towards a more humble attitude that require knowledge contributions from others; 'we don't know the exact answer either, but we would like to search of it together with you, city'.

Many of the practices build on a broad horizontal approach involving many different actors looking jointly at the real challenges. A common approach is to facilitate bottom up initiatives or provide tools for local organizations. It can for examples be to enhance their connectivity or try to allocate the requests received from citizens on-the-fly as in Udine, Italy. It can be to support them financially and have a dedicated team that is 100% with the local partners or to set up a decentralized support office with the presence of the municipality (including politicians) to promote urban regeneration as in the BIP/ZIP Program in Lisboa, Portugal. It can be to use urban gardening as a tool for involving different groups in a dialogue about neighbourhood development as in the case of Malmö.

The emerging practices are not only focusing on supporting grass roots but also new formats of collaboration. One example is how the municipality in Malmö through the Regeneration dialogue project have supported and influenced privately owned property companies to hire unemployed tenants if they want to get their regeneration contract.

Other cases include new partnership models between municipalities and external consultancies that go beyond a traditional client- consultancy model. One example is how LaRegion 27 has worked with municipalities rather than for them. In this work they have brought in design methods and helped the municipalities to work more "cross-disciplinarity", deepened their citizen engagement and created space to re-interrogate problems. In these cases municipalities are not only interested in the results but also in the processes.

In all these collaborative practices the role of brokering has become important (not at least among the various agencies in the public sector that has had a hard time breaking out of their respective silos). It also seem important to allow longer time frames to, as reported from Malmö, create a common understanding of both the "wicked problems" and possible solutions. One example of this is how the in Lisboa have been working everyday for 4 years with the local partners. Also the work rhythm in municipalities has to be adjusted to match different stakeholders needs e.g. people who are engaged in voluntary work.

What are the main drivers?

The main drivers behind this change of working procedures towards social innovation include everything from the economic downturn to the fact that administrations have started to realize that traditional approaches don't work anymore. The latter is reported from France as well as from Lisbon where the municipality's traditional top-down approaches couldn't cope with social housing adequately. Similar, in Malmö they could not achieve, nor finding financing for investments in

reduction of co2 gases, if they did not connect it to the social situation with high-unemployment, disappointing school results, below average life-expectancy etc.

Another interesting driver comes from the fact that citizens put pressure on the municipalities. This is the case in Amersfoort where the citizens successfully have requested a more co productive and participating municipality. Also International programmes, like Urbact are seen as very helpful in stimulating municipalities to work with innovation.

These drivers have in many cases been very strong and created significant impact.

In Lisbon they report it as a real change of mentality towards approaches that are more bottom up and citizen centric. In France, LaRegion 27 today gets the opportunity to collaborate with 20-40 civil servants rather than a few when they collaborate with municipalities on innovation projects. Similar results are reported from Amersfoort where the demands from citizens have led to that politicians unanimous have accepted to work with co-production practices.

Main obstacles for cities to promote and make the most out of social innovation

Although social innovation practices seems to spread in many cities, several obstacles have also been reported. Some that is reported from Udine is the lack of incentives for pushing or pulling municipality officers as well as hierarchic and to rigid administrations including generation inequality that makes it hard to employ younger people. Several cities report that it is hard to tackle horizontal issues that cover a number of different areas of responsibility. Municipal officers are often working in a specific "silo" that is specialized within a limited domain and they don't feel any ownership or responsibility for broader issues. Another obstacle described from Malmö is the tension between the need from the municipality and the need from local groups. Also the municipality have to better adjust to the rhythm of voluntary work.

One of the major barriers that several participants brought forwards is relating to how New Public Management (NPM) approaches strongly have influenced the way operations is done within cities. NPM is often associated with management approaches imported from the business sector that stress the importance of formulating clear and unambiguous goals that are possible to operationalize within given time frames and a strong command and control system. Several cities report that NPM have its strongest proponents among higher echelons of managers while more local units and authorities have started to request new models and ways of working.

The critique of NPM that is brought up regards its inability to allow public administrations to be flexible and to deal with complexity and surprises. NPM also affect the possibility to learn, especially because its mostly pay attention to measure the success of reaching pre-defined goals. Whether these goals are really relevant is not questioned and all the learning at the "fringes" of projects are seldom really picked up. Also, if not enough time is invested in understanding the real problems, as they look from the citizen's point of view, the learning will be quite superficial.

Learning also becomes harder because public administrators on a local level sometimes "fly below the radar", and initiate and support social innovations, but then they work hard to re-frame those initiatives so they fit into the established organizational structures. The real actions that happened below the radar (and helped develop the social innovations) are never reported.

Some approaches to overcome obstacles and barriers

One strategy to handle the "silos" that was suggested by the participants is to develop a shared understanding of the problems. Then people could work within the silos, but develop a common understanding on what they need in each silo in order to support more general solutions. This includes developing a shared language and a shared understanding of concepts. Here URBACT could play a role as an arena for knowledge sharing and for collecting good examples. There is also a need for a leadership that could help those in the silos to understand what they need to do to each other. To use the metaphor of a football team; each team member need to understand the general tactics and what they need to do as individual in order to win. According to the participants specialized units and "Silos" will always be there and specialization might also increase. Then we need a more coaching leadership that could bring different professional groups together. This new leadership must foster dialogues between different, and conflicting interests and professional groups.

Regarding how to deal with the obstacles caused by New Public Management several strategies were suggested. First of all NPM needs to be taken into account if you want to succeed with innovation, and often individual administrators have to frame social innovations into a new public management setting, so they could fit into the organizational discourse. One idea that was suggested was to explore if NPM could be combined with for example the public value management (PVM) approach (that is suggested Gerry Stoker). PVM builds on *An open-minded, relationship approach to the procurement of services and is framed by a commitment to a public service ethos (Stoker 2006 p 48)*. It further goes beyond a divide between client and contractor and rather emphasizes sustained relationships (ibid)

Another idea related to the trend of glocalisation of city management, where managers around Europe imitate each other and the fact that some actually have started to work with social innovation. A promising strategy would then be to capture and highlight these cases, something that potentially could lead to that these practices could be spread through imitation. (This is similar to the scope of this project and could be supported by URBACT.) It's also important to go beyond the "projectification" of urban development and create stability in organisations where you also allow time for civil servants to summarize different kinds of experiences from projects. This could then better support long-term learning than NPM. Another strategy would be to start seeing management as a craft rather than a science. This is in line with what Donald Schön terms a reflective practice and that is a typical characteristic of skilled practitioners performance (Schön 1983).

Maybe the strongest approach to overcome the obstacles of NPM would be to bring the citizens voices forward and through them demonstrate that NPM often don't produce any value for them. As suggested from Amersfoort the citizens can become a strong force in affecting the political leadership towards social innovation. By systematically capturing, empower and directing citizen voices directly towards the council members transitions can become stronger compared to when civil servants suggest changes.

"We (city administration) need to participate with citizens and other local stakeholders to not only make policy documents, but to work on actually achieving policy goals" (Anne deFeijter, Amersfoort)

Another strategy that several participants highlighted was to start with small projects to create confidence, to establish links and communication at a local level that will bring a proximity to the issues and people and that you can capitalize on as a slow but consistent learning experience. The small projects would preferably have a horizontal character e.g. focus on sustainable food and involve a lot of active citizens, later you can bring together managers of all departments that have something to do with the content.