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Social Innovation for Social Cohesion

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Introduction

In light of the major challenges facing societies and political and social systems in Europe, there is an increasing focus on micro-scale social innovations. But what can such innovations contribute? How can they best be understood? And how can a positive interaction between these forms of social innovation and public policies for reform be ensured? The EU-funded international research project, 'Welfare Innovations at the Local Level in Favour of Cohesion' (WILCO) aimed to explore how social innovations can help political actors as well as organisations and movements from civil society in finding better coping strategies with respect to social inclusion. The project analysed both specific social innovations and the ways in which they are taken up by established local welfare systems. This remit implied studying both sides of the social innovation phenomenon: first the projects that represent social innovation; second, the developments that have been set in train within established welfare systems as a consequence.

This chapter, however, focuses on the former of these aspects only: the nature of social innovation itself. It is based on case studies involving seventy-five social innovations¹ in twenty cities and ten countries across Europe.² The chapter describes and analyses the approaches and instruments used in these local projects, which all have a strong innovative dimension. By doing this, the aim is to bridge the gap between social innovation debates, on the one hand, and wider discussions about public policy and welfare system reform on the other.

The phenomenon of social innovation (and its various promoters, agents of change and social entrepreneurs) is seen as distinct from social movements that theorise new 'utopias' as solutions to social problems.

The effects of social innovation typically work ‘in the here and now’ in the places in which they are operating, but they also contain wider messages concerning values, hopes and assumptions. Social innovations are practical devices, but they can also act as larger symbols of hopes and aspirations. Other actors, such as the political-administrative system, can then engage with and react to social innovation in various ways. They can borrow successful instruments, adapting them to their own administrative and policy frameworks. But equally, these other actors may also feel challenged by the underlying hopes and aspirations of the innovators themselves. There is, then, a significant difference, as well as significant room for variation, between *making use* of social innovations, their methods and instruments, and actually learning from them and the background of aspirations and convictions that motivates them.

The analysis of the social innovations included in the WILCO research aims to facilitate such a broader concept of policy learning that goes beyond making (greater) use of some instruments and devices alone.

This chapter, first, outlines definitions and methods used in the WILCO research into social innovation. It then presents a number of approaches and instruments that public policy could use and learn from and, finally, a series of questions are raised about learning and change in welfare systems and related public policies.

Definitions and methodology

For the purposes of the WILCO project, social innovation was defined in terms of both products and processes, namely new ideas translated into practical approaches that were also new in the context where they appeared. However, the problem with defining social innovation resides less in innovation and more in the meaning of ‘social’. Studying the current literature on conceptualising and defining *social* innovation, it is clear that ‘social’ is mainly equated with ‘improvement’ (Phills, 2008), finding a better answer to basic social needs and improving social relations (Moulaert, 2010), amongst other ‘good things’.

However, while most analyses apply this broad consensus on the positive definition of the social aspect of social innovation (see BEPA, 2010, and Mulgan, 2006), the values, actions and outcomes of social innovations will, in fact, be widely contested. By definition, innovations differ from prevailing routines, forms of thinking and acting. It is possible that they may become a mainstream practice, but this is never the case at the outset. They can be linked with a diverse range of goals and come to take on different meanings over time. Just as important

as the initial goals of social innovation are the wider political concepts and institutional systems in which they become embedded (see e.g., Osborne and Brown, 2011): how the social and economic environment reacts to them in terms of the better strategies and solutions that they advance. Hence, social innovations are, over the course of their development, marked by a high degree of risk and uncertainty.

For these reasons, the definition used here seeks to avoid objectivising what is 'social' or 'better', since this is a normative issue, subject to widespread debate and an evolving area of study that remains subject to a great deal of uncertainty. The simple criterion was applied: *social innovations are those that, at any given moment, raise the hope and expectations of progress towards something 'better' (a more socially sustainable/democratic/effective society)*. Whether or not these hopes and expectations come to fruition is harder to ascertain, depending on the values and strategies of the observer and the impact of the social innovation, which can often only be fully understood in retrospect.

Since the dynamics of social innovation were examined as part of the project, only projects that had progressed past the initial start-up stage were selected for analysis. Each innovation that was selected involved a practical project that had been realised. This project could take the form of an organisation or an organisational subunit with new services that clearly differed from the services already on offer in the field. It could also include legislative measures or interventions such as a new economic transfer, tax or resource arrangement. Innovations could be manifested in a local network rather than a single organisational unit, or they could be experimental models and units found in plural forms in a local setting (e.g., new family centres). So, within the WILCO project, 'social innovation' may refer not only to a large project but also to a cluster of smaller, similar projects. One requirement was that in each of the twenty cities under scrutiny, a minimum of three and a maximum of six innovations had to be featured and analysed by each team. The actual number of cases chosen in a city depended largely on the complexity of the respective cases.

When selecting case studies, each team had to include three policy fields (child care, employment and housing) and three target groups (single mothers, young people and migrants) that had been agreed by the WILCO project team. For the purposes of comparison, every innovation had to cover a specific field. However, this was challenging since, in practice, innovations can cut across several fields and groups at once. Therefore, as a general guideline, it was agreed to make sure that all fields and groups were at least somehow covered when selecting

innovations. As well as reviewing documents and programmes, interviews formed another key source when analysing social innovations. The number of interviews carried out was linked to the number of innovations selected. On average more than three interviews were conducted for each case.

The main aim of the WILCO research was to look at common international innovatory trends that were manifesting themselves despite otherwise diverging national trajectories. The project was not concerned with whether innovations make a difference to a particular type of national welfare culture or regime (liberal, conservative or social democratic) or, indeed, to its form of governance (such as corporatist). It was concerned with the differences across shared patterns of welfare and governance in the European region. Two elements can be seen as widely shared across welfare regimes:

- The commonalities of post-war welfarism (Wagner, 1994), such as standardisation and the search for uniform regulations in welfare institutions, which corresponds to the minor role of participative elements and civil society in welfare systems and democratic decision-making; and
- The influence of new public management, neoliberal economic policy and associated managerial concepts, with their desire to rationalise welfare agencies and cut costs, both using concepts of governance that originated in the business sector.

Interestingly, the social innovations that were recommended by local experts to WILCO interviewers as 'socially useful' and 'promising' were consistently characterised by their difference from the practices, services and regulations that are part of the two welfare traditions mentioned above.

When it came to singling out these differences, this also showed that quite a number of the characteristic patterns of these social innovations relied on something that is shared in positive terms – with each other and in relation to the context in which they have developed. This demonstrates the existence and impact of a third element: of cultural and social aspirations and social movements that have developed since the 1970s and continue to develop today. All European countries have, in some form or another, gone through phases when cultural and social movements have revitalised elements of self-organisation and created new forms of social solidarity. These range from the social movements of the early 1970s and the democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern

Europe, through to a new wave of movements linked with the issues of economic growth, the environment, sustainability and participation as they have emerged at the beginning of the new century (Evers, 2009).

Moreover, the first field visits and the later process of selecting innovations confirmed a difference between the sample and the kinds of social innovations that have typically been portrayed in the mainstream literature. The latter usually looks at social innovations with a focus on social service innovations (see, e.g., Mulgan, 2006; BEPA, 2010; Osborne and Brown, 2011). What was discovered during the first city surveys and international meetings of the WILCO teams, however, was that innovations touch on more than services and the organisation of service provision. Changes in rules and regulations (e.g., concerning access to financial benefits), in governance (new forms of democratic participation, how decisions on priorities in welfare are taken, and so on) and in modes of working and financing are all equally important fields for social innovation.

The central task and mandate of the WILCO research project was to look at the impact of social innovations on local welfare *systems*, that is, the pluralism of the 'welfare mix' or mixed economy of welfare as it is constituted by contributions and actors from the state/public authorities, the market sector, the third sector of various associations and the community sector, including families and various informal networks (see Evers and Wintersberger, 1990, and Jenson in this book). For this reason, the findings are presented with an eye to the constitutive elements of welfare systems and not along the lines of *separate* policy fields.

This factor also had an impact on the research concept used here and the dimensions of innovation that were explored, as shown in Table 5.1. Organising the findings into various dimensions should mean that they can be integrated not only into current debates within the community of researchers on welfare and social policy, on urbanism and local policy, but also on public policy research more generally.

When analysing the case studies of innovation it was the aim to find out whether there are recurring features that give them a distinctive profile. It has already been said that together they represent forms of acting and thinking that can be defined first of all in disruptive terms – breaking with the traditions of both 'industrial welfare' and the more recent wave of managerial and neoliberal reforms. However, these innovations can also be defined in more creative terms. Recurring features of them point to a style of doing things, a shared culture and perspective of thinking and acting across national borders that brings about positive change. Table 5.1 sketches out the types of innovation found in

Table 5.1 Five dimensions of recurring innovative features

Dimension	Recurring innovative features
Innovations in services and how they address users	Investing in capabilities Approaches that avoid stigmatisation Bridging the gap between professional services and people's lives Developing personalised support packages
Innovations in regulations and rights	Creating flexible forms of ad hoc support that meet newly emerging risks 'Social contracts' with individuals and groups
Innovations in governance	Fostering units and types of organisation that operate in a more embedded and networked way Giving a voice in the public domain to new concerns and groups Building issue-related coalitions and partnerships
Innovations in methods of working and financing	Various working collectives Professionalism that combines previously fragmented knowledge Short-term and time-limited funding: combining resources from different stakeholders
Innovations that concern the whole of (local) welfare systems	Reaching out to all sectors of local welfare systems Aiming for less standardisation, more diversity and more localisation in welfare arrangements Upgrading the community component in mixed welfare systems Integrating economic and social logics Integrating welfare and urban politics

Source: Authors' compilation.

the cases that will be explained and illustrated further in this chapter. Some of the cases of innovation illustrated only one of the dimensions or merely one of the sub-categories listed in the table. Others were interesting with respect to several of the five dimensions, in different ways and to different degrees.

The innovative dimensions and hallmarks synthesised in the table above do not represent a kind of social or political programme. Rather, they represent a loose assemblage of elements of a kind of 'cultural turn' in dealing with issues of welfare and, more specifically, with social inclusion. Different political actors and parties may take up the concerns and

aspirations of a social innovation and direct it towards different uses and ends. Therefore, the real impacts and meanings of the categories listed in the table may only become clear over time, according to the way the wider social and policy context integrates them in its discourses and actions (Schmidt, 2010). For example, linking social and economic concerns or striving for more flexibility and personalisation can end up with quite different meanings and implications. This point about the importance of (discursive) contexts and the different faces of mainstreaming innovations will be discussed later in the chapter. Each category is now discussed in turn.

Innovations in services and how they address users

The majority of the social innovations that were chosen for inclusion in the study were service innovations. Since services are generally organised along less closed and standardised lines than – for example – pensions systems, it is little wonder that they have provided more ground for small-scale innovations. Four features characterise the differences between social innovations and service systems as these have developed in tandem with the main post-war welfare traditions and the more recent trend towards managerialism in public and private services. These features play a role not only in the specific field of social inclusion policy but also more generally across the field of personalised social services.

Investing in capabilities

The characteristic of ‘investing in capabilities’ was found in most of the social innovations in this study. These services were less about filling gaps in provision and were more oriented towards establishing the kind of relationships that reduce the dependency of users by opening up new opportunities for them or enhancing their skills. This aspect was linked with the ‘activation’ and ‘empowerment’ rhetoric familiar in the debate on public welfare. Different discourses on these subjects produced service innovations that aimed to strengthen capabilities in various ways. A telling example in this respect was the project called ‘Her Second Chance’ from Varazdin, Croatia, which aimed to support women and mothers who encountered special difficulties in acquiring skills, seeking to enhance their employability and self-esteem in a way that led them back to paid work (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 53).

Approaches that avoid stigmatisation

Most of the occupational and social integration programmes provided as part of ‘workfare’ policies (unemployment policy that links benefits

to active engagement with the job market: Handler, 2004) employed strict targeting that clearly indicated who was ‘in’ and ‘out’, along with detailed rules and requirements governing the process of admissions and integration. Thus, being entitled or forced to take part in a special programme for the long-term unemployed was linked with various forms of categorising, classification and control. This carried a high risk of stigmatisation. By contrast, many of the innovations that addressed issues such as occupational and social integration took a looser and more open approach that did not impose admission requirements on (potential) users and did not prescribe in detail how re-integration should proceed and which stages it should include. While personal help and advice played an important role, the whole approach was less top-down and less prescriptive. An illustrative example was the Family Office in Münster, Germany (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 143), which provided support in a way that was open to all – even though some families would need it much more than others.

Bridging the gap between professional services and people’s lives

Cultural and ethnic diversity and the problems of poverty and social exclusion have increased in the age of large-scale migration, unemployment and growing inequality. This makes it increasingly difficult for services and professionals to reach the groups that might need their help most, often because the services offered are simply not known about, are too hard to understand or are not taken up due to a lack of trust. As such, bridging the gap between professional services and real people’s lives has become ever more challenging. One example from the sample that related to this problem was ‘Neighbourhood Mothers’ from Berlin, Germany (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 124). This project engaged as mentors women from Turkish families who were well connected and trusted in their communities but who were – after a short special training course – also experienced in dealing with welfare administrators and the services and entitlements that they could offer.

Developing personalised support packages

While public administration and welfare bureaucracies have, during the course of their development, sought to differentiate between groups and their needs, specialisation has made it hard to address the complex and sometimes unique needs of clients within a highly segmented welfare system. Bundling existing support measures tends to be complicated and discouraging. However, among the selection of innovations that were studied here, there were a number of organisations that provided

service-offerings that allowed access to otherwise separate, siloed, forms of support. Various schemes included in the study operated with personal advisers, care- and case-managers and various forms of 'one-stop entry-points'. A good example of this was in Nantes, France (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 96), where a scheme offered joint assessments of the needs of families in terms of linking access to jobs and day care, something that was especially important for single-parent families.

Innovations in regulations and rights

Creating flexible forms of ad hoc support that meet newly emerging risks

Increasingly, patterns of working and living are changing and becoming less continuous, and the zones of transition between life situations and life stages are becoming more complicated (Bovenberg, 2008). Traditional services cannot always cope with these complexities. This may mean being out of school but not yet in a job or on the track back to employment but without access to somewhere to live. Often this coincides with other acute problems that may require immediate help. What some have called 'new social risks' (Bonoli, 2005) cannot be dealt with using the manual of standard risks that typically shape the range of social services and transfer-systems of post-war welfare states. Innovative ways of offering a quick fix, often provisionally, may well be the critical missing link when it comes to providing living and working arrangements that keep people 'in the game'. Quite a number of the social innovations studied in the WILCO project involved establishing this kind of short-term, time-limited, *ad hoc* support. One telling example was the 'Welfare Foundation Ambrosiano' in Milan, Italy (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 182), that aimed to support individuals and families with a quick supply of credit who were temporarily in need for various reasons (redundancy, illness, and so on), regardless of their previous or current type of employment contract and country of origin.

'Social contracts' with individuals and groups

Traditionally, most public welfare services have the status of rights that are unconditional insofar as they usually simply require a set of material preconditions to be fulfilled. A new tendency in welfare arrangements, particularly in the field of workfare, has been for clients to enter a form of contractual relationship where the preconditions for support concern their future behaviour. These types of contractual relationship involve the clients taking exclusive responsibility for themselves.

Among the set of innovations studied here, there were also other types of contracts, that defined the notion of 'giving something back for what one gets from society': more broadly, people got access to some goods and services once they committed to doing something for others in the form of volunteer work or providing clearly defined personal support for vulnerable people in the community. One example of this phenomenon was 'Time for a Roof', an inter-generational home-share service in Nantes, France (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 93), that offered cheap accommodation to students who entered into an inter-generational co-habitation arrangement.

Innovations in governance

The social innovations that were studied all represented a combination of new social 'products' and new social 'processes', the latter term referring to the internal organisation of decision-making and interaction with the environment, the public, various stakeholders, social partners and political and administrative authorities. Many social innovations that sought to develop new kinds of services also had a novel governance dimension. However, for some innovations, influencing and changing the system of governance was found to be their core focus. This was the case, for example, in Bern, Switzerland (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 355), where new integration guidelines that became mandatory for public stakeholders were worked out in a cooperative process by a group of administrators, experts and representatives of local NGOs.

Fostering units and types of organisation that operate in a more embedded and networked way

Traditional service organisations and systems focus very much on their respective special tasks, effectively functioning in silos (Boyle *et al.*, 2010). This limited degree of cooperation and sharing also applies, however, in those parts of the service landscape that have been shaped by managerial reforms. Social innovations, by contrast, are characterised by bringing together what is usually separate, whether this is ideas, concerns or practices. Since the social innovations that were studied have a highly localised character, they were much more embedded than organisations that were part of a hierarchical system, whether in business or in centralised welfare administrations. A good example of an unconventional form of networking was the 'Neighbourhood Stores for Education, Research, and Talent Development' in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 208), where teachers and students

from universities cooperated with activists in a community development programme that linked governmental, not-for-profit and business organisations together.

Giving a voice in the public domain to new concerns and groups

Innovation also means addressing issues, concerns and related forms of self-organisation in a way that is more up-to-date in terms of emerging challenges and pressures. Conventional methods of presenting and organising concerns are often no longer effective (Westall, 2011). When it came to women's concerns, both the 'MaMa Foundation' in Warsaw, Poland, and the 'RODA' initiative, Zagreb (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 246; p. 37) had overcome the traditional restrictions placed on women in a labour market designed for men. They highlighted other concerns that had previously been seen simply as private issues, exposing local systems that, both under socialism and post-socialism, displayed little interest in the manifold challenges of childcare, and then raising awareness of new ways of working and family life on the public policy agenda. These, and other, innovative projects and initiatives had been eager to discover new ways of organising debates, deliberation processes and publicity in order to set agendas and establish a new consensus on priorities. A related project from the Western context was the 'Maggio 12 Initiative' in Milan, Italy (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 187). This project aimed to bring together concerned citizens, experts, politicians, professionals and administrators as part of an organised consultation process on a new agenda in the field of children and childhood.

Building issue-related coalitions and partnerships

Coalitions, partnerships and alliances can be seen as denser forms of networking that are often concerned with raising awareness of a particular issue. Establishing these kinds of partnerships, which are both unified and plural, can be seen as an important and innovative aspect of policy making, fostering participating in governance. As well as examples from the field of urban housing and neighbourhood regeneration, the 'Foundation Ambrosiano' in Milan, Italy (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 182), provided a good example of bringing together stakeholders from quite diverse social and political arenas and binding them into a coherent alliance.

Innovations in methods of working and financing

When innovation means dealing differently with a given challenge or pressure, this often needs to involve a way of accepting and living with worsening material conditions. This tends to increase the imbalance

between ambitions on the one hand and conditions and means on the other hand. Innovative projects and organisations with precarious funding may then be marked even more by those negative trends to be observed in today's labour markets, such as time-limited working contracts that offer no job security. This may be counterbalanced by the fact that people working in innovative projects and earning their money there may enjoy an atmosphere of creativity and cooperation and more 'positive' stress than the negative type that comes from hierarchies and lack of appreciation. Trust-based relationships may cause many contributors to participate for short periods and accept short-term contracts, secure in the knowledge that a new contract is a possibility once circumstances allow. Innovative elements such as building trust, cooperation and unwritten rules of respect are part of the working climate. However, they can hardly be seen as an adequate antidote to low levels of job security. Making them part of the working conditions in innovative projects is, therefore, essential but not sufficient.

Various working collectives

Models for individual engagement in social innovation projects were typically much more diverse than in the public or business sector, since they included not only various forms of (casual) paid employment but also many forms of voluntary and civic contributions. The latter ranged from short-term activism to regular, unpaid, volunteering over the long term or from hands-on volunteer work to regular contributions in the form of civic engagement on a board of management. Various working fields were taking shape that linked paid work, volunteering and civic engagement. It was remarkable how blurred the boundaries were becoming between those who operated inside organisations and those that were considered as 'co-producers'. An illustrative example, which is representative of many other similar instances, was an initiative named 'Bimbo Chiama Bimbo' (Child Calls Child) in Brescia, Italy (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 164). This project offered various forms of support for households with children through collaboration with neighbourhood and municipality stakeholders. For the organisational network and the profile of its activities, both professional and lay contributions were indispensable. About 400 volunteers were active in addition to full-time staff within the core organisation and supporters from other cooperating local organisations.

Professionalism that combines previously fragmented knowledge

The kind of professional found in many innovative projects and initiatives typically had to manage tasks that often fell outside the limits of

traditional professions and the divisions of labour that these imply. Professionals working within social innovations may have to learn to converse with various kinds of users, clients, co-citizens and volunteers: they were sometimes specialists, entrepreneurs and managers simultaneously. Many of them needed both technical and social knowledge. This kind of 're-professionalisation' process may, for example, involve co-operators that were professionals by training but worked simultaneously as community organisers and mediators. The social innovation based in Lille, France (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 73), that supported those renovating their own houses called 'Companion Builders' (Les Compagnons Bâisseurs) is a good example here. It managed, trained and supervised activities that were mostly confined to the margins and not seen as part of the professional field of architecture.

Short-term and time-limited funding: Combining resources from different stakeholders

Many, if not the majority, of the social innovations that were studied were based on combining multiple sources of funding. The mix varied and often state financing remained the most important component, but usually there was a degree of (financial) co-responsibility on the part of other organisations from civil society or the business sector. Furthermore, funding arrangements were very often precarious and time-limited. Here, once again, innovative elements were combined with difficulties that would ideally be reduced or prevented completely. An interesting example of such possibilities and limitations can be found in the social innovation 'Job Explorers' in Berlin, Germany (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 119), an initiative that matched money from the local Chambers of Industry and Commerce with the local labour market office through programmes that built links between schools, their young apprentices and local employers.

Innovations that concern the whole of (local) welfare systems

The WILCO project sought to examine the possible contributions of social innovation in terms of changes and developments in local welfare *systems*. It was understood that this label meant that more was being addressed than just local welfare-state institutions. Referring to a welfare system usually means including – in addition to the local welfare state and municipal welfare – welfare-related activities and responsibilities from the third sector, the market sector and the spheres

of community and family. The cases of social innovations that were examined demonstrated the mutual relationships that exist between all of these four components of a (local) welfare system – (local) state, business sector, third sector organisations and the, often informal, networks of community and family life.

Reaching out to all sectors of local welfare systems

Even though there was considerable variation in the level and impact of state funding and support for the social innovations that were studied, overall it could be stated that these initiatives were concerned with establishing links with all sectors and that the organisations involved thereby often took on a hybrid character. It could be argued that most social innovations would have liked to receive more state and municipal support, but equally it can also be assumed that they would not have wished to be incorporated into the public sector. It can be suggested, therefore, that social innovations could best be captured by concepts of welfare that were based on a deliberate mixing and pluralism among actors, resources and responsibilities. Needless to say, the share of state-public welfare contributions of various kinds of third-sector organisations, ranging from associations to social enterprises, from NGOs to community networks and, finally, the level of corporate social responsibility was a matter that involved some controversy and conflict. Such conflicts not only concerned ideas and finances but also power.

Aiming for less standardisation, more diversity and more localisation in welfare arrangements

Innovation became difficult, if not impossible, wherever the right to act, organise or provide differently was denied. This could be the case in both large private-sector business organisations, which were managed centrally, and in certain market sectors that were controlled by private sector oligopolies. This means that those who wanted a more important role for social innovation would have to secure a degree of decentralisation, diversity, difference and, moreover, the possibility of unconventional mergers between elements that were usually separate. What is more, supporting innovation meant opting for arrangements that allowed for a new balance between guaranteed universality and diversity in localised arrangements. A good example of what is involved in combining and balancing concerns with universalism and diversity could be found in those municipalities that had worked to secure the right to develop their own options for occupational integration strategies, such as the 'Optionskommune' in Münster,

Germany (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 137). This is an example of one of many municipalities in Germany that had opted for local responsibility rather than being part of an integrated centralised service system.

Upgrading the community component in mixed welfare systems

Given that the community sphere was often subsumed within the third sector of voluntary associations in society, excluding family relationships and informal neighbourhood-communities, it was all the more important to see that a major aspect of many social innovations was developing innovative forms of community. A good example of combining the public and community spheres and sharing the responsibility for care between these two was the 'Children Cafés' in Lille, France, which opened up the tasks and concerns of family life to the community. Another example was from Amsterdam (the Netherlands), where a housing corporation decided to support community organisations ('Neighbourhood Management Companies') in their housing as it was being reconstructed (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 80; p. 203). It should certainly be noted that many social innovations were, in various ways, challenging traditional interpretations of welfare, in which community, building on a shared sense of duty, was seen as a rather parochial element to be gradually substituted by more state-public, professionalised and completely voluntary elements.

Integrating economic and social logics

In contrast to the previous point, the integration of social and economic logics is much better established as a concern in the debates on the profile of future welfare systems. The creeping economisation of all spheres of life, and an increasingly productivist attitude that evaluates all social actions and relationships primarily with respect to their quantifiable economic effect, is just one side of the coin. The other side can be found in the debate on the welfare state as a 'social investment state' (Morel *et al.*, 2012) that advocates modernising public welfare through an approach that stresses the positive economic effects of social policy interventions in education, family support, and occupational and social integration. In urban regeneration, those social innovations that sought to combine the active participation of people as co-producers and co-decision-makers with public and private investment could be seen as part of this perspective on social investment as a means of societal development.

Integrating welfare and urban politics

Policy fields that are usually excluded from the welfare system, such as environmental policy or cultural activities, played an important role in

socially innovative developments. The two examples of innovations in the sample that were linked with the urban gardening movement, the 'Gardens of Life' from Varazdin, Croatia, and the 'Princesses Gardens' from Berlin, Germany (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 57; p. 116), showed the role of this urban element in environmental politics. This led to the important policy field of spatial planning and development – whether on the level of regions, cities or neighbourhoods. The innovative element here consisted of linking urban transformation and social intervention, something quite new in local politics, based on combining knowledge and professionals from a range of fields (architects, economists, educators and social workers). A good example was the 'Omradesprogrammet' which aimed to regenerate several districts in Malmö, Sweden (Evers *et al.*, 2014, p. 338), using the cooperation of 'resource groups' in fields such as city development, the elderly, young people, culture and recreation and the labour market and economic growth. It is no coincidence that the collection of social innovations considered in this study was in large part located at the intersection of welfare and urban development. Traditionally, local and urban politics have been less prominent in the system of public policy making. This may change, as Barber (2013) has argued. He asserted that cities, and the mayors who run them, are the primary incubators of the cultural, social and political innovations that shape our lives, offering in many ways the best new forces of good governance.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented some of the research findings of the WILCO project regarding recurring patterns in the approaches and instruments of localised social innovation. This has been done in a way that suggests that such patterns may well become useful tools within established welfare systems themselves. Public welfare policies could do more than just use social innovations – they could learn from them. To conceive a form of interplay between social innovation and welfare politics that could grow and develop, broader issues such as the impact of given welfare discourses (Schmidt, 2010) are very important – that is, the way in which key actors and the public understand the nature and tasks of welfare policies and what this means for the place occupied by social innovation. However, so far there is a considerable gap between the established perceptions of social change by 'welfare reform' and thinking in terms of social change by social innovation. So far the latter has hardly found yet a place in welfare discourses. When it comes to

bridging the gap between welfare politics and social innovation, four points are of particular importance.

First of all, it should be taken into account that many social policy textbooks have a narrow focus on just state policies, debates and decisions on reforms within state institutions, whereby societal actors are brought in through their role within social movements and pressure groups that try to influence the nature of state decisions on welfare – in other words by protest, negotiation and deliberation. However, when it comes to welfare provision (i.e., socio-economic contributions), organised societal actors often get little attention in mainstream textbooks. It is usual to find the state, the market and the family cited as the three pillars of welfare provision (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 2002). Civil society and the third sector, which contribute to new and innovative welfare arrangements not only through participation in the decision-making process but also by creating and preserving all kind of social services, are typically not mentioned. There is, therefore, a need to learn more about the history of welfare as *a history of social innovations* – a feature of a civil society. There has always been an important role for many social movements and organisations in inventing and creating welfare arrangements of their own – mutual organisations in the field of social security, co-operatives as early social enterprises and voluntary associations that have run all kind of services. This rich history of a social economy of invention, innovation and creation throughout Europe (Evers and Laville, 2004) was not simply a forerunner of the ‘real thing’ in the form of state-based social security and service system; rather, it entailed a voluntary, not-for-profit and community sector that has, right up until the present day, included an important role for social innovation. Therefore, when discussing potential links between social innovation and welfare, welfare systems and welfare mixes (Evers and Wintersberger, 1990; Evers and Guillemard, 2012; Jenson, 2012 and in this volume) that encompass this third sector should be seen as the framework of reference and not just state action alone.

Second, strategies that want to give more space for social innovation have to *rethink the balance between equality and diversity*. In various ways, historical welfare policies have sought to ensure greater equality in society. It is generally agreed that all people should have access to the same institutions and facilities, whether in health, social support services or education. Standards should be guaranteed in both urban and rural areas, and the same quality and procedural standards should ensure that this is always the case. This idea of equal provision was primarily linked with hierarchical systems of decision-making and administration.

However, uniform and centralised school and health systems, as well as centrally regulated workfare services and the attitudes of their professionals typically allow little space for social innovation. The latter needs, by definition, institutional space to do things differently; it often builds on the specificity of local contexts and traditions, something that is frequently viewed with mistrust from a conventional welfare perspective, as well as by system managers. How can the need for standardised and uniform regulations be balanced with the space to experiment with something new and different? To what degree should – for example – different and new forms of schooling and education be allowed to grow and receive state support? How can innovation and diversity be combined with reliability and equality? These are questions that the community of welfare researchers is only just beginning to reflect on (see, e.g., Anttonen *et al.*, 2012).

Third, dealing with social innovation calls for *a new balance between change by comprehensive reforms and a policy of democratic experimentalism* (Sabel, 2012). Much policy making has traditionally been guided by the concept of building comprehensive institutions and regulations top-down. To be effective, therefore, socially innovative concepts either have to make it to the top of political and professional elites that design far-reaching reforms or have to find a niche at the margins. However, there has always been a second tradition in policy making that has gained in influence over the last decade, especially at the local level: initiating change and paving the way for reform through time-limited programmes that take up an innovation, support it for a limited time-span, evaluate the results and then decide on whether to roll out the reform in a longer-term and more far-reaching design. Among the social innovations that have been studied, many have formed part of such programmes: trying out new methods of urban regeneration, family support, or occupational and social integration. A great many social innovations may become mainstreamed in this way. However, not all programmes succeed, different schemes reflect different concepts and priorities, and changes often remain incomplete. But does this diversity and incompleteness not in some ways reflect the needs of society better than the dream of an ultimate ‘grand design’? A metaphor may be found in the history of urban planning and its often rather frightening attempts to construct completely new cities by following a single design logic throughout.

All that has been argued before points finally to the need for *thinking of the current politics of welfare reform and policies for social innovation together, even if they mostly do not go together well*. Each of the overarching

discourses on the future economic and societal priorities that currently coexist in our societies attributes different meanings, roles and incentives to social innovation. How credible is, then, a policy discourse that promises an effective alliance between support for innovations and their intentions and the established priorities in modernising societies? At a time of economic turmoil and crisis – with widespread calls for the further slimming-down of the welfare state, particularly in welfare benefits and services that can be seen as consumptive and protective rather than productive (expenses for social protection, elderly care, etc.) – a focus on social innovation and its support by public authorities may well be a difficult proposition. The combined effects of less labour market regulation, rising levels of in-work poverty, the increased difficulty of being employed, less old age security, and so on probably cause more social disintegration than could ever be addressed by socially innovative services that try to empower people and communities. When it comes to social cohesion, there is a need to think about the net-balance of the current scaling-back of basic welfare systems and regulations of protection, on the one hand, and the diversity of attempts to innovate services and local networks, on the other. How do EU policies for economic and welfare modernisation (European Commission, 2010) and the planned special programmes for stimulating social innovation (European Commission, 2013) go together? To avoid the rather cynical conclusion that local social innovation essentially represents – in light of the massive structural problems that welfare democracies are suffering – a ‘mission impossible’, it is crucial to think about the links and tensions between policies for welfare reform and policies for upscaling social innovation. Are social policy researchers and social innovation researchers prepared for that?

Notes

1. All cases of social innovations are available as an e-book, edited by Adalbert Evers, Benjamin Ewert and Taco Brandsen (Evers *et al.*, 2014).
2. The sample included the following cities: Zagreb and Varazdin (Croatia), Nantes and Lille (France), Berlin and Münster (Germany), Milan and Brescia (Italy), Warsaw and Plock (Poland), Barcelona and Pamplona (Spain), Stockholm and Malmö (Sweden), Berne and Geneva (Switzerland), Amsterdam and Nijmegen (the Netherlands) and Birmingham and Dover (United Kingdom).

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