Two reports on social innovation trends and possible improvements

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The European social model has been central to the EU vision for years, but enhancing it is a never-ending process. To stay on top of the class, the EU needs a constant flow of new ideas, strategies and concepts. This is called social innovation, and the LIPSE project is playing an important role in its analysis and development with a focus on public sector environments and their capacity to adapt to society's changing needs.

Now in its third year, the project is starting to yield interesting results with the recent release of its first two reports on 'Innovation environments and capacity in the public sector' and 'Co-creation and

citizen involvement in [urban environments](link): cases of social innovation'.

The first report is based on a social network analysis carried out in four municipalities: Copenhagen, Barcelona, Rotterdam and Edinburgh. Researchers produced an inventory of the staff and their structure for each municipal government, performed an online survey among administrators and politicians and interviewed community-based innovators identified thanks to the survey. Valuable information was extracted from the received feedback, such as lists of challenges to and drivers for innovation, innovativeness ratings, and analysis of networking activities. Researchers then focused on identifying the influence of these indicators on each other.

All in all, the report includes interesting conclusions with regards to the close link between more external communications and higher self-rated innovativeness, the roles of brokers, the best types of leadership and the best way of achieving balance between weak and strong social ties. It also stresses the importance of letting informal networks thrive as they are better equipped to innovate than rigid hierarchical structures.

The truth about co-creation

The second report focuses on co-creation, a phenomenon which sees citizens being invited to actively participate in the initiation and design of public projects. A good, beneficial example found by the project team was in Slovakia, where students were working to improve the living conditions of Roma citizens through a crowd-funding initiative. However LIPSE conclusions show that, out of 14 examples in seven countries, many fail to reach the objectives originally fixed by governments when they decided to support them.

'One surprising conclusion was that it seems to us that co-creation does not always make public services more democratic and accessible for a

diverse public. Some of our examples showed us that, especially when governments take a step back from public service provision, it is often the well-educated, prosperous citizens that will be better positioned to fill this gap with new projects,' notes William Voorber from the Erasmus University Rotterdam in a contribution to the project blog.

Although the project underlines the virtues of co-creation – such as the establishment of a stronger community – and the conditions in which it can work best, the team therefore stresses that co-creation shall be seen as a complement rather than a replacement of existing public services. The report also provides valuable advice related to the impact of subsidies.

This already fruitful research is only a glimpse of what LIPSE has to offer. The results of other work packages are expected to be made available soon, including a mapping of the recommendations of ombudsmen and audit offices; and a survey on feedback, and a report on risk definition and risk governance in social innovation processes.

More information: For further information, please visit LIPSE: www.lipse.org/

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