



Measuring societal innovation potential, a interdisciplinary pilot study for the investigation of self-regulative and regulative elements within the social innovation process

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Abstract:

The thematic area of “social innovation” has received increased attention in politics, science and practice because of its core dimension to address societal challenges that have gained new dynamism especially in times of demographic changes, growing social inequality and exclusion as well as ecological conflicts. It is, therefore, an explicitly interdisciplinary endeavour asking questions from different disciplines such as Geography, Sociology, Political Sciences, and Economics. In order to tackle the new societal challenges societies and governments are called on to innovative actions.

Social innovations have their origins from motivational and cognitive factors of individuals and social groups. If there is a consensus in the society on a social need in a specific social context and thus the need fulfils the criterion of legitimacy

through the society, the search for new ways to meet these challenges starts. As a result we have a social innovation. On the one hand social innovation consists to a high degree of individual and societal self-regulation and can be understood as a result of active adaptation by social groups to continuously changing living conditions. On the other hand regulative elements within the process of social innovation include structural conditions set through governmental action and determined by tendencies of rationalisations and economizing in social fields.

But how can we measure social innovation in particular? Which are the appropriate indicators for social innovation at the societal macro level? And which spatial patterns of social innovation potential can be identified?

There are several considerations of how to measure innovation in a more general sense or how to capture specific social dimensions whereby looking partially at these aspects from a discipline specific view. The measurement approaches already in place capture aspects like the progress in wellbeing (e.g. OCED Better Life Index), norms and values in civil society (e.g. Civil Society Index), the competences of societies for the future knowledge-based society (e.g. TTT-Index) or, have particular focus on public sector innovation (e.g. NESTA's Innovation Index Project). Furthermore, there are numerous established economic and technology-based innovation measurement approaches (e.g. EU Innovation Union Scoreboard). But up to now there is no reliable measurement approach that could identify the essential characteristics of social innovation and finally provide a coherent theoretical approach.

In the pilot study we carry out a qualitative study in order to assess and test the significance of the blueprint of social innovation indicators developed within the EU-sponsored project TEPSIE. Through this investigation, relationships and factors relevant for the process of social innovation from invention to diffusion will be identified. Only by doing this interdisciplinary validation procedure the blueprint will be proven to work in practice. Measuring social innovation is an important step towards capturing structural and individual requirements and phenomena of social

innovation and thus contributes towards a better understanding of the concept of social innovation. Through the development of the social innovation indicator suite following an interdisciplinary approach from Human Geography, Sociology, Political Science, and Economics, the research project is conducive to the macro-level recognition of self-regulative societal elements and regulative aspects within the process of innovation.