



## FOSTERING INNOVATION AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICES

### DRAFT MEETING REPORT

12 May 10h - 13 May 13h15 2014

Hosted By: Diakonie Österreich, in the Albert Schweitzer Haus, Vienna

12 May 2014

Prior to the start of the meeting a devotion was led by Michael Chalupka, Director of Diakonie Austria. Laura Jones from Eurodiaconia welcomed the participants, introduced the meeting and participants spent time sharing their background.

The first presentation titled “**The old is the new new – what is really innovation?**” was given by Martin Schenk, Senior Social Policy Officer at Diakonie Austria. He outlined six points regarding social innovation that he felt were important to reflect upon: (1) crucial is not the new but the better; (2) innovation always means rediscovery, so to learn from the old to discover something new; (3) the old and traditional ways have to be taken into account to create something new and not be forgotten; (4) instead of always looking for something new it is important to discuss the question of what is needed in order to live a good life; (5) the definition of social innovation is too broad and the identity of the non-profit sector isn't reflected in the definition anymore; and lastly (6) when improving social services it is important to consider what is good and better instead of focussing on what is new.

During the discussion participants pointed out that it is always important to look back and have a healthy critique towards new trends. It was also highlighted that it is more important to involve a wide range of stakeholders rather than having just ‘the entrepreneur’. In that regard a participant from Kerk in Actie informed the group about a summer school project for innovative ideas that his organisation is carrying out on a yearly basis. Anyone from the organisation can submit ideas and a committee of 5 persons chooses three ideas that will be spread throughout the organisation.

The second session was a discussion lead by Laura Jones from Eurodiaconia on the Social Platform's position on Social Innovation. The position paper lays out principles that should be met when carrying out innovation in an organisation, including focussing on meeting needs and reinforcing human rights, user-orientation as well as up-scaling and mainstreaming a particular approach. Participants were interested in the question of protecting ideas and whether it was necessary in order to ensure that they are implemented in a meaningful way. This is also relevant when talking about preventing that potential partners become competitors when applying for funding for social innovation.

Florian Pomper, who is Head of the Innovation Unit at Caritas Vienna gave a presentation on the life-cycle of innovation and examples of good practices. He pointed out that a lot of times employees are too busy with their day-to-day work with little room and resources for creative thinking and idea development. In his experience innovation was therefore something happening randomly than intentionally. Ideally, a lot of time should be invested in the invention process. He also pointed out other challenges to innovation, such as treating





innovation as a closed process excluded from the rest of the organisation. Therefore, interaction with different groups from the organisation is essential. At Caritas the innovation unit employs three staff that are focussing only on social innovation. Nevertheless, they include all employees in the process of shaping innovation in the organisation.

Participants pointed out during the discussion that there is a need for a clear internal policy on how to deal with innovative processes and to also put aside a budget for this purpose. Diakonie Duesseldorf have also opened an office to focus solely on social innovation but also looking to connect people within Diakonie to the outside world. This is achieved through public consultations to gain feedback from the community regarding innovative service ideas. Diaconia Valdese on the other hand has an operating group that connects to the grassroots level. Participants agreed that the question of funding innovative ideas was pressing and there was a debate about whether innovation should be institutionally funded or whether there should be businesses involved.

In a “speed dating” session participants had the chance to learn how to support different stages of innovation through best practice examples provided by other participants. The list below gives an overview of what has been discussed:

#### *1. Identification of new / unmet / inadequately met social needs*

- Street retreat
- Exposure method
- Keep all levels of organisation informed about changes in context/territory
- Environment needs to be ready

#### *2. Designing a solution in response to these social needs Engaging users/persons in need /*

- check there isn't already a solution that could be examined
- Ensure sufficient time is dedicated
- Ideas scout
- Ongoing communication and cooperation

#### *3. Supporting the development of a concrete project/service, technically/financially*

- Don't forget press/PR work
- Investigate whether society/government is ready to accept the solution at that time
- Keep thinking outside the box
- Consider an innovation structure – innovation management, specific budget for supporting it

#### *4. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the project/service in meeting the needs*

- Sharing knowledge of different methods among Eurodiaconia members
- Address both output and outcome
- Quality management processes
- Prioritise evaluation that simultaneously develop knowledge about social challenges, attempts to mitigate those consequences and efforts to fight the root causes
- Show impact, not performance reporting

#### *4. Scaling up / disseminating the innovation beyond a pilot*

- Involving the key actors/decision makers
- Ensure a system is in place to protect the quality of a service or approach
- Be careful about forcing a solution developed in a different context



## 5. Mainstreaming – when it's accepted in general by funders as a key approach to meet needs

- Networks, partnerships
- Invite politicians to see projects
- Visibility – promotion, publications

## 6. Cross border transferability

- Consider culture – similar culture facilitates transfer of approach (e.g. Serbia → Macedonia; Norway to Eastern Orthodox (basic idea)
- Publicity and modern communications
  - Make information available about project outcomes in English
- Mutual learning in Eurodiaconia and beyond
- Determination, commitment

### 16h00 study visit

In the afternoon participants went on a study visit to Amber Med at the outskirts of Vienna: <http://www.amber-med.at/>. Amber Med is a health institution (just operating with volunteering doctors and other staff) for people not covered by health insurance in Austria. They are also providing drugs and counselling. One innovative aspect of this project was that they focused on preventative measure (such as nutrition classes) apart from delivering medical care. Furthermore, the institution is able to provide their patients with free medicine, which is collected by the Red Cross. Service users can remain anonymous and don't need to enclose any sensitive or personal information in order to get support.

### 13 May

Prof Dr Johannes Eurich **presented the results of German research into innovation in the social welfare organisations and the outcomes of the Innoserv project.** The project focused on social and health services and aimed to implement a multi-level dialogue process involving a wide range of stakeholders from research, policy making and practice communities, produce short visual examples combined with theoretical case studies of 'innovative' practices, produce publications to summarize the results of the debate and formulate future research needs. (For more information see here: <http://www.inno-serv.eu/content/research-agenda-valid-and-feasible-0>)

He talked about certain “framing conditions” that currently affect the debate and development of innovation in social services. One is the increasing market orientation of the sector, along with this a concern for return on investments, outputs and efficiency. Another is the increasing number of cross-sectoral movements; hybrid organisations, networks, people outside the historical not-for-profit service sector. New societal needs and the service user/client participation/empowerment focus influence the developments. Austerity clearly has a big impact, pushing organisations to find new sources of funding and new methods. He also spoke of the idea of intrapreneurship; increasing internal innovation in for example ways of working. He stressed the need for space for innovation, of creating an innovation friendly organisational culture. Elements of this would include good communication, identifying people responsible for innovation and facilitating collaboration.

Uwe Schwarzer gave an **overview of research on innovation in German welfare organisations.** (Handout available) In one piece of research 92,2 % of the interviewed organizations had introduced a new or significant enhanced service for the last three years, 87,8 % had introduced a process innovation and 63 % of the interviewed Organizations referred own resources as the source of funding; with sustainability being a key challenge.

Some main findings regarding the innovation award include voluntary work in many cases is driver of innovations, recipients are able to find long term and sustainable financing of their projects. Drivers of innovation included companies with readiness/willingness to take risk as well as a skill-building culture of the.



Some recommendations by the Federal Association of Non-statutory Public Welfare are: the subsidy law, the benefit law and the taxation law have to be reformed which seem to be in part innovation-resistant, individual budgets too can stimulate innovation potential, there is need of European bespoke funding instruments. Other proposals from diaconal organisations included the simplification of the admission access to public project sponsorship and development of a basis for skilled personnel.

Theresa Schlage gave a presentation on **where EU funding can support innovation in social services**, focusing on the Horizon 2020, Easi and European Social Fund programmes. (Presentation available)

Group work then took place in two groups, one **addressing external barriers to innovation**, the other on overcoming barriers to **an organizational culture supportive of innovation and service development**.

External barriers to social service innovation and development and solutions:

Decision makers' lack of support or interest for new or different approaches was seen as a key barrier, and the fact that funding can rest on a political whim or preferences. Sometimes departments in public authorities don't communicate and this means that support may be there in one but not in another which blocks progress, bureaucracy, short term-ism due to elections (no immediate impact of a service seen), lack of information, different priorities to the provider, commercial interests being stronger, complexity of the approach and a lack of budget are issues here. This can mean that projects do not take place, entailing additional problems for the target group as well as increased costs for society in the long run and a cementing of prejudice in the community.

Finance per se is an oft-seen barrier; which can be sometimes a timing question, funding not being available at all stages of development or funding availability does not correspond to the emergence/development of service user or provider needs, as well as often being challenging to be sustainable over the long term. Often there is money out there but organisations lack the capabilities or knowledge to source the funds, whereas they may have a very good knowledge and understanding of unmet needs. Bargaining in public procurement is challenging as the risk is that a provider only asks for the minimum to be sure of winning a bid; risk of compromise of service and commodification of ideas/approaches to compete against tender rivals.

Solutions include: more awareness-raising through publicizing results, ideas, through PR and advocacy. More work on showing impact, evidence basis and testimonies from service users. Discussions about long-term sustainability should be integrated from the start.

Internal barriers to social service innovation and development and solutions:

Theological/ideological barriers to partnerships – not used to cooperation; cultural – cross-faith dialogue not systematised

- Increase dialogue with non diaconal organisations

Difficulty to involve staff; too much bureaucracy/hierarchy:

- Recruit people with vision and willingness to be flexible; Ensure easy access of staff to management; Create staff forums

Innovation threatens existing services/jobs:

- Involve staff from the start to ensure understanding about why new approach is necessary, reallocate across services, change management

In the **evaluation of the meeting and next steps** participants shared what they would take away from the meeting and how it would impact their work. A number said they would take the approaches other members used and discuss with colleagues further to see what could be incorporated into their own work. For some this



was a useful introduction to the concept of innovation in social services, it broadened their horizons, whilst for others it was an encouragement to carry on. The importance of communication would also be taken on board.

In addition to the meeting report and toolkit, the group proposed that Eurodiaconia work on its own principles for innovation in social services, to collect “innovative” approaches and to organise further study visits and exchanges and to investigate the possibilities for such activities to be funded through EU project money.