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Vulnerable Peoples View of Social Innovation – Insights from the 1st Stakeholder Workshop

Brussels, October 17, 2014: The EU funded research project SIMPACT asked stakeholders of vulnerable groups to present their perspectives on social innovation. A major outcome of the recently held workshop underlines the importance of a «social innovation eco-system» that fosters cooperation between various actors and builds on good communication and trust.

As means of involving stakeholders in the process of identifying drivers and barriers for social innovations, SIMPACT held its first stakeholder workshop with experts from various fields of social innovation for vulnerable people. Organised by the Sozialforschungsstelle Dortmund (TUDO) and hosted by Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), 12 experts, representing stakeholders of vulnerable groups in Europe, social innovators, research and policymakers, came together on 30th September 2014 in Brussels, to contrast the project's initial desk research on economic underpinnings of social innovation with the experts' «hands on» perception.

«Social innovation strongly builds on a co-operative ecosystem of social innovation that brings together policy makers, research, civil society and economy», says Dr. Bastian Pelka from TUDO. «And this expert workshop brought them all together to identify drivers and barriers for social innovation.» In a half-day workshop, Dr. Christoph Kaletka and Dr. Bastian Pelka (TUDO) and Dr. Mehtap Akgüç from CEPS facilitated discussions with experts representing as different organisations as the Red Cross, Eurodiaconia, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants or the European association of telecentres. They all share the mission to provide aids and empowerment for vulnerable or excluded people and see social innovation as one of their core practices.

The workshop produced a collection of drivers for social innovation which articulates a strong will of «the field» to provide social innovations. This will is driven by the individuals' perceptions of (either individual or societal) needs. From the stakeholders' perspective, the strongest driver for social innovation is the rise of social needs that is brought

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by economic crises, governmental failure or human emergencies. Speaking in economic terms, this «market» seems to have both, a supply of innovation and a demand driving social innovation. The preliminary analysis also provides insights into the functioning of this market: a cooperative and communicative environment, including quadruple helix of actors - seems to build the backbone of social innovation activities. A good connection of these actors and a productive use of communicative infrastructure – quite often via social media – is viewed as essential for the growth of an «ecosystem of social innovation».

Barriers are often related to such ecosystem concern likewise the need for professionalization, availability of resources for (potential) innovators, the knowledge offered by researchers, as well as communication and cooperation within the ecosystems and conflicting interests of actors in the system. Actual cash flow was surprisingly rarely mentioned as a barrier – this might be interpreted as the *modus vivendi* in traditionally low budgeted systems.

Following the identification of drivers and barriers of social innovations, the participating experts were invited to combine the identified aspects to construct a grounded scenario of «how to most effectively block social innovation in society». This challenging change of perspective produced those barriers that the participants are facing in their practice: Missing co-operation, contradictory legislation and «silo thinking», caging necessary supporters in their own system's logic. Bundling the actors' activities in this scenario, the main approach to block social innovation is to stay in each actors' own logic – in a «silo» of own perceptions. If policy tries to steer in a «safe» way that is not «disturbed» by external influence, economy strives to gain short impact, research avoids the risk of «investing» in this new field and society shows to be risk-aversion to secure existing practices, each actor will stay in its inherent logic. Hence, the ecosystem of social innovation seems to build on a cooperation of these actors, leaving their own fields of interest.



SIMPACT has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under Grant Agreement No. 613411