Social Innovation at the Local Level: Lessons from the WILCO project

Taco Brandsen

5th of June 2014
Design of WILCO

- International comparative project: 10 countries
- Time period: 2010-2014
- Funded by the 7th European Framework Programme (2.4 million Euro grant)
- Coordinated by Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Background

- Strong social exclusion, perpetuated across generations and geographical areas
- Despite years of public programmes these wicked problems remain
- Social innovations as part of the solution
Goals of the WILCO project

- To identify innovative practices in European cities and the factors that make them emerge and spread.
- To set them against the context of current social problems and urban policies.
- To make recommendations how to encourage local social innovation.
Selected fields

Policy fields:
1. Child care
2. Housing
3. Employment

Groups: young unemployed; single mothers; migrants
An assumption of several studies and public statements is that economic growth and social innovation in cities are part of a single strategy to make cities more attractive, competitive and liveable. Our evidence bears out that this is only partially the case. Social innovation does not necessarily complement strategies for economic growth, nor is it necessarily an adequate substitute for existing welfare policies.
Scaling social innovations

- There is a tendency in publicity on social innovation to discuss only successful cases and those that are scaled up to a system-wide level.
- Yet most social innovations are short-lived and remain small in scope.
- Public policy should not focus singularly on the selective group of innovations that can be mainstreamed.
- Instead, it should pay more attention to the capacity of cities to continue generating new initiatives.
Diffusing social innovations

- Diffusion, again, often misrepresented, as a straightforward transfer of best practices.
- Approaches or projects will in some way need to be adapted to the context into which they are adopted.
- The concept behind a social innovation is less important than the collaborative relationships needed to implement it in a local context.
Governance

- Innovations can more easily gain recognition and sustainability where there is an open governance style.
- To some extent such openness derives from structural features of administrative systems, but policymakers and officials in all types of systems have proven capable of achieving it.
More information

www.wilcoproject.eu