SOCIAL INNOVATION THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER

The Social Innovation Landscape in the Republic of Ireland 2017

Bold Ideas Build Better Communities

Fiona Descoteaux is the CEO of Innovate Dublin, in the Republic of Ireland. *Our services change lives. We reimagine and reframe the world we live in by putting people first. We help people solve old problems in new ways, in the places they live, work and play. With an exciting blend of fresh thinking, design, technology and common sense, we work with communities to create and deliver projects that contribute to better futures. Our projects are created through a tested process of Research, Discovery, Prototyping, Testing and Implementation. These can include the creation of new services, products, processes or regulations. Collaboration is key to our success; we work with local authorities, statutory bodies, business, not-for-profits, universities and individuals. At the heart of all our work is the ambition shape dynamic projects that create positive economic and social development for all.*

Thoughts on the Social Innovation landscape in the Republic of Ireland to start a conversation…

As in any European country at a time of major budgetary constraints, social innovation is an effective way of responding to social challenges, by mobilising people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources. Often, social innovation involves not just new ideas but the remaking and reuse of existing ideas. Social innovations can take the form of a new service, initiative or organisation, or alternatively, a radically new approach to the organisation and delivery of services. **Social Innovations are not only good for society but also enhance society's capability to act.**

The need for Social Innovation to be developed via policy and practice in the Republic of Ireland, doesn't make us that different from Northern Ireland or other European countries…

There are various vehicles for driving social innovation, **politics and government** (for example, new models of public health), **markets** (for example, open source software or organic food), **movements** (for example, fair trade), and **academia** (for example, pedagogical models of childcare), as well as **social enterprises** (microcredit and magazines for the homeless). Many of the most successful innovators have learnt to operate across the boundaries between these sectors and innovation thrives best when there are effective alliances between small organisations, entrepreneurs and big organisations which can grow ideas to scale. Innovations then scale up along a continuum from diffusion of ideas to organic growth of organisations, with the patterns of growth dependent on the mix of environmental conditions (including effective demand to pay for the innovation) and capacities (managerial, financial etc.).

In the Republic, the financial crisis of 2008 changed our social infrastructures immeasurably. With funding and resources for public spending at an all-time low, we are seeing a reorganisation of both wealth and power structures on a grand scale. Central and local governments are increasingly working with the private sector, and new forms of partnership are growing to achieve efficiency and value for the public. The crisis has seen a polarisation of wealth among the few, which is impacting on how cities, systems and environments are being designed. The openness and transparency afforded to the public by technology has the dual effect of making planners and decision makers more accountable, while at the same time offering a new role for citizens to participate in how hardware (built environments) and software (service experiences) is designed.

However, our Social Innovation landscape maybe different to yours…

In the Republic of Ireland we have no official policy or leadership from Government in social innovation. However, several Ministers and their departments have supported the work of social innovation

INNOVATE DUBLIN

Bold Ideas Build Better Communities

organisations in the Republic; Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton has been an advocate of the work of both Young Social Innovators and The Social Innovation Fund. Whereas the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Simon Coveney has championed the work of the newly launched Social Innovation Fund. However, at this time social innovation is not officially documented as being central to developing our local economies, or as a support to working towards achieving stable economic growth in communities.

Our social innovation ecosystem in the Republic of Ireland is in its infancy. It is also a disjointed ecosystem, with little cohesion and joined up thinking when it comes to adding value via economic and societal development. In the Republic we have clear areas of development in our social innovation ecosystem; **public sector, intermediary** organisations, **digital** social innovation, **research** and **corporate social innovation**.

Local government understands the added value of **public sector social innovation** for economic growth within local communities, and this is evidenced indirectly through local authorities Local Community and Economic Plans, 2016-2021 in some counties across Ireland. An example of this work was first seen in Dublin City Council where they delivered a bottom-up, user centred approach (community-led social innovation) to solving community issues, called Beta Projects. The aim was to develop new approaches to innovation and better management of change within Dublin. It was a cost-effective approach to experiment with new ideas, processes and services while learning from these experiments to aid future implementations. Beta Projects commenced as a trial by the City Architects department in 2012 and ceased in December 2016.

Intermediary organisations are those organisations that have a role to play in supporting social innovations and facilitating growth.[1] Examples of national and city-wide organisations that equate to this definition are listed below:

- Young Social Innovators- promotes education for social innovation.
- Social Entrepreneurs Ireland- seek out social entrepreneurs who have the most potential to positively impact upon challenges in Ireland.
- Social Innovation Fund Ireland - to provide growth capital and supports to the best social innovations in Ireland, enabling them to scale and maximise their impact.
- ChangeX – a platform of proven innovations from across the world – building a community of change makers.
- Social Innovation Corridor - builds on existing inter-city networks of innovation to create a thriving social innovation corridor aimed at meeting social needs, through more effective and enhanced delivery of social services in particular.
- Innovate Dublin – uses design thinking to develop social innovation projects resulting in new services and businesses for local economies.

Digital Social Innovation is, "a type of social and collaborative innovation in which innovators, users and communities collaborate using digital technologies to co-create knowledge and solutions for a wide range of social needs"[2]. One key example of this is SMART Dublin, an initiative of the four Dublin local authorities to engage with smart technology providers, researchers and citizens to solve city challenges and improve city life.

---

[1] Domanski, D. and Kaletka.C. (2017). *Exploring the Research Landscape of Social Innovation* , A deliverable of the project Social Innovation Community (SIC)

[2] Bria, F., Gascó, Mila, Baeck, Peter, Halpin, Harry, Almirall, Esteve, & Kresin, Frank. (2015). *Growing a*

digital social innovation ecosystem for Europe. DSI final report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. URL: http://bookshop.europa.eu/uri?target=EUB:NOTICE:KK0115069:EN:HTML [16.03.2017]

INNOVATE DUBLIN

Bold Ideas Build Better Communities

Universities in the Republic have a large role to play in social innovation research and development of the Social Innovation ecosystem, via the delivery of practical examples i.e. through H2020. University College Dublin (UCD) has been actively involved in developing and delivering EU funded projects within Social Innovation; via H2020. For example, from developing and testing processes for co-creating open, innovative and impactful digital public services to reduce isolation and loneliness in youth, to developing community led-nature based solutions to co-develop local economies.

Corporate Social Innovation in the Republic is not officially recognised by government or the business sector. Alternatively it is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which is advocated and developed by Business in the Community, and supported by Government. In 2014 Ireland's first National Plan on CSR, "Good for Business, Good for the Community" was launched by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation. Thus there is very little in the way of discussion on corporate social innovation and the value of such at this time.

The social innovation ecosystem in the Republic is progressing, albeit it seems to be developing in a fragmented manner. Learning needs to be taken from economies that have more advanced social innovation ecosystems, to support our development in the Republic. Looking to our neighbours in Northern Ireland, and the rest of the UK, would offer the opportunity of a benchmark and shared learning to co-design, co-develop and launch policies and associated ecosystems that add value to our existing economic and social structures, and ultimately work to advance our communities for the benefit of our citizens.

Innovate Dublin welcomes your comments on this interesting discussion of Social Innovation in Ireland –post your thoughts on @innovate_dublin #socialinnovationireland.

INNOVATE DUBLIN