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An integrated transformative process model for social innovation in cities

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Abstract

Due to the demographic and climate changes cities are identified as key players challenged to ensure both quality of life and the capability of continuous societal change. To adequately address these challenges, cities are increasingly in need of new governance instruments to deal with the dynamics and turbulences that come with the necessary transformation. We propose a transformative process approach based on the transformative capacity framework (TCF, Wolfram 2016) and linked with the process model based on co-creation and network governance (Wilhelmer, Wagner 2015). The resulting integrated model provides a procedural framework for transforming existing urban governance routines into more adaptive and resilient practices which better answer societal challenges.

Keywords: social innovation; urban transformation; network governance; process model

1. Introduction

Due to the demographic and climate changes cities are identified as key players challenged to ensure both quality of life and the capability of continuous societal change. To adequately address these challenges, cities are increasingly in need of new governance instruments to deal with the dynamics and turbulences that come with the necessary transformation. Traditional coordination mechanisms - state and market - are increasingly challenged by the rise of new actors producing goods and services in a collaborative way by social entrepreneurs. At the same time, citizens are taking action to directly provide solutions to the most pressing urban problems and finding new tools to influence public policy in all its phases (formulation, decision and implementation).

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Though there is a growing interest (and need) for social innovation in European cities, there is neither a shared definition of what social innovation nor a common understanding of the impact of social innovation in European urban context. "Fundamental to the understanding of social innovation (…) is that it means innovation in social relations. As such, we see the term as referring not just to particular actions, but also to the mobilization participation processes and to the outcome of actions which lead to improvements in social relations, structures of governance, greater collective empowerment, and so on" [1]. Alternatively, 'social innovation' can be defined as new ideas which refer to products, services and models that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act. Social innovation links 'new ideas' with 'unanswered demands' and by doing so enables solutions to increase people's living standards.

To let transformative change become a reality in cities, a socio-temporal communication architecture with a clear process perspective is required. In a process perspective, networks as a specific instrument for context governance are based on novel interconnections between actors. The context provides the necessary communication set-ups, i.e. the roles and rules which enable innovation milieus for entrepreneurial "cells" and co-creation. Network development follows a specific sequence of distinct phases. Each phase generates specific needs, i.e. goals of the networks.

A process-based approach has been developed and implemented in the European Commission-funded project SEiSMiC (2013-2016) which aimed at informing European RTI policy-making on how to best support research, policy, and practice of social innovation in cities across Europe. SEiSMiC (Societal Engagement in Science, Mutual Learning in Cities) aimed at facilitating a process of mutual engagement and learning to identify and discuss needs for social urban innovation and their consequences for research and policy. Since urban development and therefore also the societal needs for urban development are highly dependent on the local context - its cultural, economic and social conditions, its size and geographical location but also legal frameworks - this debate needed to be grounded in specific local settings. On this level, the engagement of civil society actors and their cooperation with other urban actors and researchers can lead to concrete actions and generate a tangible impact. SEiSMiC established national networks in ten European countries to provide platforms for discussing concrete needs for social innovation, develop ideas for future projects and reflect on the framework conditions and topics that should be considered by policy and research. National networks were rooted in their local context, bringing together urban innovators with city administration, research, business and representatives of civil society. Although network partners came from very different backgrounds and may have pursued different goals, they all shared the ambition to improve their cities through social innovation.

We propose an integrated transformative process approach for social innovation in cities based on the transformative capacity framework model (TCF, [1]) and linked with the process model of network governance [2]. Our understanding of transformative governance in cities is based on social systems and network theories and encompasses three building blocks: strategy, structure, and culture. This paper shows how the components of the TCF interact with(in) a process perspective. Firstly, the conceptual transformative capacity framework (TCF, [2]) is described with its different components. We will then empirically illustrate the process model developed to foster bottom-up social innovation in cities across Europe. Elements of the conceptual TC framework are identified and positioned in the process model. Finally, an integrated model for urban transformation in the field of social innovation is presented.

2. The Transformative Capacity Framework (TCF)

The conceptual transformative capacity framework [2] identifies ten interdependent "capacities" (C 1 to C10) which are grouped into (1) agency and interaction forms, (2) core development processes, and (3) relational dimensions affecting all other components (p. 126.-129):

2.1. Agency and interaction forms

- Inclusive and multiform urban governance (C1)
  Urban governance characteristics form the central component of the framework. To develop the legitimacy, trust,