'Social Innovation in Housing: Learning from practice across Europe'

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Author: Darinka Czischke

Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

E-mail: d.k.czischke@tudelft.nl

1. Introduction

This paper presents and discusses the results of a brief scoping study on social innovation in housing in Europe. The research was carried out by Darinka Czischke (Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands) following her being awarded the David Butler grant by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and the Ocean Media Group. The aim of this paper is to help housing practitioners to understand the main issues and benefits of applying social innovation in housing. The report presents a brief reflection on the application of social innovation in the housing context, followed by practical examples of socially innovative approaches to the delivery of housing services across Europe. The paper then discusses a number of 'barriers' and 'enablers' to social innovation in housing as identified by key informants and housing practitioners who were interviewed for this research. It concludes by proposing a set of recommendations for housing practitioners to become more socially innovative.

2. What is social innovation?

Social innovation is becoming an increasingly influential concept across policy, practice and academia both in the United Kingdom and in Europe. Although the term 'social innovation' was already used in the 1960s and 1970s[1], the concept has been revisited in a new light following the rise of the general 'innovation' paradigm as a precondition for growth and competitiveness in the last couple of decades. There is no consensus, however, on a unique definition of social innovation. While the literature has grown exponentially in recent years[2], there is a wide variety of understandings of the concept across academia, policy and practice. Table 1 presents an overview of some of the most commonly used definitions of social innovation today.
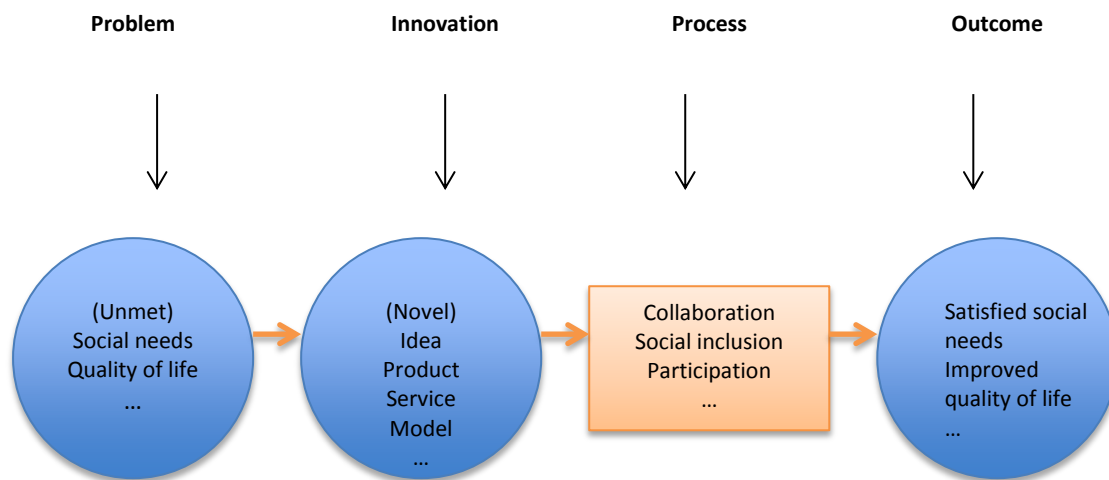
Table 1

Definitions of 'Social innovation' (selected)			
Source	Year	Definition	Core elements
OECD/LEED Forum on Social Innovations	2000	"Social innovation seeks new answers to social problems by: - Identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities; - Identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce." This definition implies conceptual, process or product change, organisational change and	- New relationships - New answers to social problems - New services - Improving quality of life - New labour market integration processes - New forms of participation

Definitions of 'Social innovation' (selected)			
Source	Year	Definition	Core elements
		changes in financing, and can deal with new relationships with stakeholders and territories."	
Mulgan et al.	2007	"Innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social".	• Innovative activities and services • Meet social needs • Organisations with a social purpose
NESTA	2008	"New ideas to tackle social problems or meet social needs. It may be a new product, service, initiative, organizational model or approach to the delivery of public services."	• New ideas (products, service, initiative, organizational model, approach) • Tackle social problems • Meet social needs
Stanford Social Innovation Review	2008	"A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the values created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals. A social innovation can be a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them."	• Novel solution • Social problem • Value accrues to society • Product, process, technology • Principle, idea, legislation, social movement, intervention
Young Foundation / Social Innovation eXchange and BEPA	2010	"New ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations."	• New ideas • Meet social needs • New social relationships • Collaboration
Howaldt and Schwarz	2010	"New combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying and answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices."	• New social practices • Social contexts • Better answering needs and problems

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of OECD (2010) and Ruede & Lurtz (2012)

Despite the variety of definitions of social innovation, some common elements can be identified. While 'innovation' refers to the capacity to create and implement novel ideas which are proven to deliver value, 'social' refers to the kind of value that innovation is expected to deliver: a value that is less concerned with profit and more with issues such as quality of life, solidarity, social inclusion and well-being. Furthermore, an important aspect across definitions is that social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means.[3] In other words, there is both a 'process' and 'outcome' aspect of social innovations. The process component of social innovation is of crucial importance, as it emphasizes a change in the way of doing things, stressing open, collaborative, participative and non-linear aspects.[4] Figure 1 illustrates the process and outcomes of social innovation.

Figure 1

Social innovation: process and outcomes

Problem	Innovation	Process	Outcome

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  ↓              ↓              ↓              ↓

( (Unmet)  )   ( (Novel) )   ┌─────────────┐   ( Satisfied social )
( Social needs ) ( Idea )  → │ Collaboration │ → ( needs )
( Quality of life ) ( Product ) │ Social inclusion │ ( Improved )
( … )         ( Service )   │ Participation │   ( quality of life )
              ( Model )     │ … │           ( … )
              ( … )         └─────────────┘
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In terms of outcomes, three approaches[5] to social innovation can be distinguished, each centring on a different level of the social problems it seeks to address:

i.   Social needs of vulnerable groups that are currently unmet (e.g. homelessness and/or different forms of housing exclusion)

ii.   Challenges of society as a whole (e.g. climate change, unemployment, etc.)

iii.   Systemic reforms of societal configurations, which lead to an increase in overall wellbeing (e.g. public policy reforms that mainstream new types of social relationships).

The third level relates to changes in fundamental attitudes and values, strategies and policies, organisational structures and processes, delivery systems and services, methods and ways of working, responsibilities and tasks of institutions and linkages between them and different types of actors.

Given the limited scope and practice-oriented nature of this paper, the sort of social innovations we will focus on will mainly be of the first type, where specific initiatives or projects aim to tackle unmet social needs in the housing field in innovative ways. In this sense, it is important to highlight that social innovation can be driven by governments, the private sector or civil society[6], or be the result of cross-sector collaboration.

Drawing on the core elements present in most definitions of social innovation we have adopted a working definition of 'social innovation' for the purpose of this study. This definition follows closely the approach by The Young Foundation / The Social Innovation eXchange and the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) (2010). In our view, this definition synthetizes many of the common elements present in previous definitions that are concerned with achieving a positive impact on people's wellbeing while at the same time emphasizing the need to change old ways of doing things towards more participative and collaborative approaches. Thus, our working definition sees 'social innovation' as

> *"New ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. While 'innovation' refers to the capacity to create and implement novel ideas which are proven to deliver value, 'social' refers to the kind of value that innovation is expected to deliver: a value that is less concerned with profit and more with issues such as quality of life, solidarity and well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means."*

3. Why is social innovation important?

The quest for social innovation and its growing popularity arises from the generalized recognition that traditional ways of meeting new and pressing needs are often inadequate. In this context, neither States nor markets nor civil society organisations are seen as able to meet these challenges on their own. The huge impact of recent structural, social, economic and environmental problems such as the global economic crisis, decades of growing unemployment, climate change, major socio-demographic changes (e.g. ageing, international migration, persistent poverty, precarious employment, etc.) mean that new responses are required to face these diverse and complex challenges. In the field of housing, these challenges call for innovative ways of providing, managing and governing housing.

Many of the core characteristics of social innovation are already present in the policies and practices of several housing organisations across Europe. However, examining these actions through the lens of social innovation will contribute to increasing their potential. This will allow not just policy and academia, but most importantly, practitioners and residents themselves, to realize the possibilities beyond individual initiatives and to start integrating these principles in those parts of the housing experience where they seem to add value. Identifying barriers to, and enablers of, social innovation will allow policy makers to channel support to facilitate the successful implementation of these principles.

4. How does social innovation apply to the field of housing?

Despite the wide variety of fields to which the concept of social innovation has been applied so far, housing does not feature amongst these. Only the field of homelessness has received some attention in the public debate on social innovation [7]. The extent to which social innovation is applied to the provision, management and governance of different forms of housing has not been examined to date. To help fill this knowledge gap, we conducted interviews with key informants from the field of housing across a number of European countries to draw on their perceptions of what could be considered 'socially innovative' in housing. In addition, a number of concrete examples were collected both through the interviews with key informants and through questionnaires with housing practitioners from across Europe. This information is presented and discussed in the remainder of this paper. The methodology is explained in an annex at the end of this report.

Defining social innovation in housing

Interviewees were presented with our working definition of social innovation (above) and asked to comment on their own view of social innovation in general, and as applied to the housing field. Key aspects mentioned by interviewees as characterising social innovation in housing were (in no particular order of importance): Collaboration; value creation; novelty; solidarity (understood as ties that bind people together in society[8]); improvement of quality of life; and meeting social needs. In addition, housing practitioners who took part in our survey were asked to rank the importance of the above aspects as seen in their daily practices. An analysis of the results [9] (figure 2) shows the most important elements that define social innovation in housing. In first place was 'collaboration', which confirms that housing professionals also emphasise that social innovation is about building new relations for social purpose. 'Meet social needs' followed in second place and 'improving quality of life for residents' in third place.

Figure 2

Key elements that define 'social innovation' according to surveyed housing practitioners[10]

value creation solidarity
quality of life improvement
novelty
meet social needs
collaboration

So is there anything specific about social innovation in housing?

The very nature of housing with its intertwined physical and social aspects means that new types of social problems require approaches that bring together technical, social and even other kinds of innovations. There is recognition, however, that not all innovation in this field necessarily comes from housing organisations: there are products created in the market that can be applied to housing. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that social innovation may not only be driven by civil society and businesses, but also by government. In the interviewees' views, it is not so much where the innovation comes from, but to what it is applied.

In terms of what could be regarded as the content of social innovation in housing, some interviewees held the view that energy efficiency and related environmental improvements, while innovative, are not directly social in their ends (tending to take the form of technical innovation) but only when they include a process aspect that is related to a social dimension (e.g. inclusion, empowerment, etc.). A case in point is the contribution these innovations can make to tackle fuel poverty in the context of economic crisis and increasing energy bills.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that innovation in housing is very context-specific. What is innovative in one country might not be in another. For example, what would appear to be fairly standard practice in Europe, with highly developed social welfare systems, may be less so in countries without these. The same applies to contextual differences within Europe. Many stressed that some national cultures are more open to innovation and experimentation than others. Some cited the Dutch, for example, as highly innovative in view of their cooperative tradition. When asked, however, some Dutch interviewees pointed out that they see other cultures as more innovation-prone than theirs.

5. How can housing organisations get more involved in social innovation?

Following the defining features described above, the study found many examples of what could be considered social innovations in housing. Although at first sight some of these initiatives might not seem particularly novel, each of the cases presented here were highlighted by key informants or housing practitioners as new ways in which to seek to meet social needs in the housing field. Topics addressed range from tackling demographic change and inter-generational living to new ways of cross-sector collaboration to address severe social and physical decline in social housing areas.

An analysis of these examples shows a number of common features that are present in these cases, which taken together, represent innovative approaches:

- **User involvement**: All projects included a degree of user involvement in one way or another. However, there is recognition that residents' participation alone is not sufficient to call something socially innovative; other features (below) need to be present as well.
- **User perspective**: Not only user involvement but also a user perspective feature as a general characteristic. Many of these projects are conceived taking the view of the user into account, even if the user in question is not able to participate. A case in point is the Norwegian project (see table 4), which adopted a fairly progressive approach to housing extremely vulnerable and homeless persons.
- **Cross-sector collaboration**: All projects had a strong element of cooperation across different sectors and disciplines and even across (national) borders. The idea of 'networks' or more or less permanent collaboration structures was omnipresent. This approach responds to the realisation that different types of interdependencies underlay complex social problems where no single entity holds the key to the solution. An example of this is Boligsocialnet in Denmark (Box 1), a network organisation aimed at enabling and supporting local learning on cross-sectorial approaches that increase urban cohesion.
- **Multidimensional approach**: Problems are recognised to be complex and multidimensional and hence as requiring approaches that integrate this variety of perspectives.
- **Streamlining**: Many of the projects implied a higher degree of rationalisation of existing activities and processes. This is in line with the realization that in order to be more effective, results have to be measured and systems and processes require a higher degree of systematisation, monitoring and evaluation. Projects featuring this element included: establishing a foundation to address profound changes in society noticed by the housing company who set it up (Box 2); creating a European CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) system for social housing organisations (Table 3); and establishing structures of cooperation, such as the European territorial network for social cohesion

and environmental quality of housing (Table 3), or the Danish network organisation for enabling and supporting local learning for increased urban cohesion (Box 1).

- **User empowerment**: A key element of all these initiatives is the aim of achieving the empowerment of users both as part of the process and as outcome. All initiatives mentioned included an element of coaching or transferring information, skills and self-confidence to people facing undermining circumstances.

Box 1

Learning from others:
Creating cross-sector synergies through a network organisation: Boligsocialnet, Denmark

'Boligsocialnet' is a network organisation aimed at enabling and supporting local learning on cross-sectorial approaches that increase urban cohesion across 125 programmes in Denmark. The programmes target social problems in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Participants are BL - Federation of Social Housing Organisations in Denmark and Local Government Denmark (LGDK - the federation for local municipalities). The funding comes from BL and from the Social Building Fund (LBF). Other crucial partners include the local housing associations and the local municipalities. Boligsocialnet also includes cooperation with national and local interests organisations, national government agencies and CSR-teams in different private companies. Activities in 'Boligsocialnet' are organized through a three-tier approach consisting of traditional courses, targeted communication and a platform of network activities where cross-sectorial, national and local agendas are able to meet. One concrete example of these programmes is the **'Boligsociale helhedsplaner', a local community Master plan, which includes projects for local community development.** Its objective is to create safety and opportunities for residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In addition, it aims to contribute to social innovation in the public sector (municipalities) by creating possibilities for delivering services in new arenas and through new methodologies, where civil society, public and private sector organisations collaborate. The local projects focus on seven overall objectives: 1) children, youth and families, 2) employment and education, 3) health, 4) culture and leisure activities, 5) vulnerable groups, 6) image and communication, 7) resident engagement, social capital and democracy. Social housing organisations, municipalities, voluntary organizations, and private sector organisations collaborate in finding new solutions to 'wicked problems' in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Contact:
For Boligsocialnet: Birgitta Gomez Nielsen (bgm@bl.dk)
For Boligsociale helhedsplaner: Anna Flyverbom Nordgreen (alf@lbf.dk)
*Links: www.boligsocialnet.dk | www.bl.dk | **www.lbf.dk***

A thematic analysis of the examples presented in this report led us to distinguish four main topic areas where social innovation can be found in housing, namely: Demographic change in housing, the use of European networks to innovate, rationalising community investment and new ways of helping vulnerable groups in housing. We will now focus on each of these thematic areas in more detail, highlighting key aspects of social innovation in each case by referring to the concrete examples presented in boxes and tables.

5.1. Demographic change in housing

A number of initiatives were found that apply new approaches to address the increasing challenge of a greying population in housing. These included not only addressing the specific needs of elderly people, but also finding new ways to live together across generations. Table 2 presents three projects that, in our respondents' view, represent new approaches to housing elderly people. Amongst the key socially innovative elements highlighted in these initiatives were:

- A strong element of **community living**, which aims at avoiding the isolation of elderly people in their living environment (e.g. intergenerational living in Alicante, Spain; providing elderly people with the *choice* to socialize, should they wish to do so in the Swedish project);

- A more complex understanding of the relationship between **technical and social needs** linked to elderly peoples' housing experience (e.g. a clear differentiation between 'ageing' and disability' and an adaptation between technical and service aspects of the housing, in the French project; implementation of specific recommendations on how to build homes for the needs of elderly people in the Swedish project)

- A process characterised by **partnership and cooperation** (e.g. social and medical care professionals working together in the French project; mutual help and assistance through a cooperative model in the Swedish example; a funding partnership between different agencies in Alicante, Spain).

Table 2

Addressing demographic change in housing through social innovation		
Project name, location	Brief description	Innovative features
Habitat Senior Services Label France: Reims, Echirolles, Yvetôt, Villeneuve d'Asq	Development of a standard to promote at-home policies for the elderly.	• A quality system; • Combining technical adaptations and services; • Building partnerships with the social care and the medical care sectors • Clear differentiation between ageing and disability.
SeniorForum: A whole concept Sweden	Mirum AB is a private limited liability company, registered in 2008 for the purpose of designing and constructing housing for elderly people (and associated activities). The SeniorForum concept for modern living for elderly people was developed as a result of national and European research programmes. The concept involves the provision of affordable accommodation and care for elderly people within a cooperative housing association that all elderly persons in a town are entitled to join. It provides both a residential complex for those who need it and a range of services and social facilities for	• Choice: The project provides choice for elderly people, whether they continue living in their existing home or live in a specially designed home. All members have access to the same services, activities and facilities and can be involved in the decision making of the cooperative. • Cost efficiency: Being based on non-profit cooperation, the model is cost-efficient for the residents. Common costs are shared between all members, even those who do not live in the house; • Social promotion and assessment: Psychological issues such as

Addressing demographic change in housing through social innovation		
Project name, location	Brief description	Innovative features
	those who wish to continue living in their own homes.	loneliness and isolation are significantly reduced as the elderly people live close to others and can choose when they would like to socialise. Through the cooperative, they can also always get assistance and help with gardening, shopping and other activities/services. • An alternative to private or municipally provided care. • Modern living: The combination of the cooperative association concept and the WelHops recommendation on how to build houses for elderly people aims to guarantee suitable, safe and accessible housing that satisfies elderly persons' needs.
Municipal Project for Intergenerational Housing and Community Services in Alicante, Spain	Initiated in 2003 by the Municipal Housing Board of Alicante (PMV), the Municipal Project for Intergenerational Housing and Community Services works to address the specific housing needs of low-income elderly and young people through the provision of 244 affordable, intergenerational housing units in central urban areas. The project not only provides decent, accessible housing but also works to create a supportive, family-like environment and sense of belonging among residents, enabling older residents to maintain their independence and stay in their own homes as they age. A range of services is provided to the wider community and the project has contributed towards the regeneration of the surrounding areas.	• The intergenerational nature of the occupation of the properties allows a generational diversity that helps the functioning of community life, whilst guaranteeing the independence of each user (the building is shared, not the homes). • Other innovations include the self-managed activities to promote social integration and the creation of a 'big family' environment, which has been even more highly valued by residents than the accommodation itself. • Funding has been obtained from a range of governmental sources and the private sector, ensuring flexibility. • The project promotes the use of public land that has traditionally been used exclusively to establish single public services, with a great loss of buildable area, economies of scale and the synergies provided by combining public services and housing.

5.2. Using European networks to innovate in housing

Increasingly, housing practitioners are establishing networks with peers from other European countries in order to learn from each other about novel approaches to tackle a number of common social challenges. These networks are either voluntary and self-funded (see for example EURHO-GR network on table 3) or established within the framework of European cooperation programmes that foster socially innovative approaches (e.g. ERDF, URBACT, PROGRESS, etc. – see list of useful resources at the end of this document). The rise of

social innovation as a paradigm in the European Union provides a number of opportunities to establish cross-national collaboration networks, notably through funding schemes. Amongst the advantages of European cooperation are: cross learning, thinking 'outside the box' through exposure to other perspectives, and the creation of synergies. The latter is particularly important in densely populated cross-border regions with high levels of worker mobility, where housing and other related services become a core area of cooperation across borders.

Table 3

European networks for social innovation in housing		
Project name, location	Brief description	Innovative features
REHABITAT Operational Programme for Territorial Cooperation Spain France Andorra POCTEFA – (2007-2013).	Rehabitat is aimed at improving social cohesion and environmental quality of housing in the project partner cities, as part of rehabilitation and maintenance programmes. The project also seeks to foster residents' participation and social cohesion through the development of initiatives to promote employment and equal opportunities amongst residents. Rehabitat works through the exchange of best practices between programme partners. It includes information and awareness activities in relation to energy saving and renewable energy in housing. The total project budget is € 2.607.553. The ERDF grant is 65%.	• Residents' involvement in the project, from diagnosis to physical implementation (Employment Promotion) • Networking of all organizations operating in the local area. • Improvement of community life through the use of common public spaces. • Improvement of social housing provision through exchange of knowledge and methodologies of European Union program.
EURHO-GR Grenoble, Orebro, Darmstadt, Brescia.	To develop and apply a European standard to be used by social housing companies to report and manage their CSR performance. The project is co-financed by the participating housing organisations.	• A pioneering CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) European reporting system with a common set of indicators to allow comparability. • This approach is reported as having radically improved the relationship between landlords and tenants despite initial resistances.

5.3. *Rationalising community investment*

Social housing providers in many European countries are increasingly streamlining the social and community investment activities they carry out in addition to their landlord core task. These efforts include, for example, policies on 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) or 'community investment' (CI) programmes. The aim is to be more effective with the allocation of resources towards social or community initiatives as well as to capitalize on the positive image that these activities might generate for the company. However, a few housing organisations have gone a step further by establishing foundations to meet the wide variety of social and community needs in their local areas. While the establishment of such CSR programmes and foundations is far from new amongst commercial companies, the emergence of these practices amidst (social) housing providers is a fairly new development.

Benefits include a more rational approach to 'giving' to communities, which is measurable, objective, transparent and accountable insofar as it is detached from piecemeal donations or first-come-first-served proposals from individuals or community groups. While CSR or CI approaches might be considered 'too close' to the discretion of the housing organisations management, a foundation is often regarded as a separate entity with its own criteria. This can be deemed as a win-win situation in that the housing organisation achieves its objectives to contribute to the community as well as to capitalise on these activities (public image) while the community perceives the foundation as largely independent from the organisation.

Box 2

Learning from others:
Creating a Foundation to address social issues: Batigère Foundation, France
The network of social housing organisations Batigère, established 'Fondation Batigère' in 2007 in response to profound changes in society noticed by the company in recent years. The aim of the Foundation is to open more widely the companies' involvement in the life of the local areas where it operates, while continuing its policy of proximity for the most vulnerable groups. The Foundation supports projects in any of its three core areas: '**Promoting of equal opportunities'** (detecting, encouraging and supporting new talent, individual or collective, to promote equal opportunities, allowing each to best achieve its goals according to their skills); **'promoting economic development'** (supporting and assisting creative projects or business structures to contribute to the economic development of an area of the city) and **'promoting all actions fostering social ties'** (improving the living conditions of people and developing outreach activities to contribute to the strengthening and development of social relations in the city.) The Batigère Foundation offers financial support to projects that demonstrate their usefulness in achieving these objectives over the period of two years.
Contact: *Christian Ducasse, General Director, Batigère Foundation (Christian.ducasse@batigere.fr)*

5.4. New ways to help vulnerable groups through housing

Conventional approaches to tackling the many faces of housing exclusion have become increasingly inadequate over the last decades. This holds true especially since the effects of the economic crisis started to become more and more acute. Housing exclusion is not only affecting low-income groups of people any longer; even middle-income households are facing the prospect or the reality of eviction and of being in housing need. Hence, many housing providers have begun to devise new solutions to help a wide range of households to deal with these situations.

Amongst the groups that stand out as facing housing exclusion are young unemployed people (notably, in countries like Spain or Greece) and lower-middle income households facing repossession of their homes due to the crisis (UK, Ireland). Overall, as shown by these examples (table 4), the trend seems to be towards adopting enabling approaches. These involve coaching and accompanying individuals or households in distress so as to empower

them to take charge of their situation by playing an active role in the solution of their own problem. This contrasts with top-down, welfarist approaches to social services that have predominated until recently. It also speaks of more complex thinking by housing practitioners about the types of solutions required, often involving the recognition of a longer-term approach to seeing results.

Table 4

Helping vulnerable groups through social innovation in housing		
Project name, location	Brief description	Innovative features
Microspaces of Solidarity and Youth Residential Inclusion in degraded Neighbourhoods. Bilbao, Spain.	This program is based on collaboration with the University of the Basque Country, in order to create material conditions for access to shared social housing by graduate students, who in turn are willing and ready to contribute to community life in the neighbourhoods where they live.	• Agreement between different social stakeholders; • Cooperation with postgraduate students of multidisciplinary expertise; • Fostering citizenship and active participation.
Bydel, St. Hanshaugen - Housing for Vulnerable Groups. Norway	The overall purpose of the project is to identify and address the needs of extremely vulnerable and homeless persons in St. Hanshaugen. It is recognised that although this is a comparatively small group numerically, they have the right to have their needs addressed. Led by the local housing authority, it was developed in collaboration with a range of different partners in the city, including the homeless persons themselves.	• Recognising and respecting those who live 'unusual' lives and providing support to improve the quality of that life, whilst understanding that many of the issues faced will not be 'solved' but rather need to be accommodated; • Providing accommodation to meet housing needs in a range of different ways, accommodating unusual behaviour – small houses, unusually low levels of support, robust interiors, and tolerant neighbourhoods; • Improved collaborative working methods between the city housing and welfare support and health services, and reaching recognition that these needs should be met and are a joint responsibility of the city authorities.
Mediation program in mortgage debt Zaragoza, Spain.	Support to families at risk of losing their home for unpaid mortgage payments. A team of social workers, administrators and lawyers develop feasibility plans for families facing mortgage debt and accompany them in the negotiation with the bank.	• Contribute to the empowerment of the family to meet this basic social need; • Fostering a climate of consensus and improving banking policy to address this social problem.

6. Making social innovation work in housing: key barriers and enablers

One of the crucial aspects that would help social innovation to work is being aware of potential pitfalls and enabling factors when trying to implement it. To this end, we asked key informants and respondents to our survey to tell us about barriers and enablers that they have encountered in this regard. Our findings are summarized as follows:

Barriers

a. **Resistance to change:** As with any change to the status quo, a natural tendency is for individuals to be wary of innovation in organisational contexts. Furthermore, respondents mentioned the lack of imagination and to risk-adverseness of Boards and / or CEOs as an important barrier to becoming more innovative in general. Professional conservatism was also mentioned, particularly in the case of professional associations. Individual organisations were deemed to be less resistant to innovation.

b. **Excessive regulation**: There is a need to shake up rules and regulations to make things happen. For example, one interviewee mentioned that it is legally forbidden in France for a local caretaker to provide services in the private areas of a building. Hence, the challenge is how to deal with services for specific target groups without intervention in the private areas. In this case, regulations where perceived as a barrier to being innovative.

c. **Lack of time (long term view)**: Innovation is a rupture; hence it takes time for it to be fully accepted by people. Socially innovative projects require time commitment and also a time span to bear fruits, to see results.

d. **Lack of government commitment**: This point was mentioned both in terms of financial resources and of the appropriate regulatory frameworks to facilitate innovation. A concrete example was the availability of cheap land for housing, which can only be granted by government intervention. In this sense, it could be said that governments often do not take advantage of their ability to make public land available for housing development.

e. **Political (counter)pressures**: In some cases, political pressures might conspire against housing practitioners thinking 'outside the box'. For example, in the Netherlands recent regulatory changes affecting the role and scope of social housing are seen by many as restricting the broader role of Dutch housing associations in non-housing activities.

f. **Lack of knowledge and information**: Not being aware of innovations that might improve performance is seen as a strong obstacle to the application of social innovation in housing. Peer exchanges and cross-learning opportunities are the opposite side of this and are referred to in the following summary of enabling factors.

There was no unified view amongst interviewees on the role played by money in fostering social innovation. However, respondents to our survey considered 'lack of government financial support' as the most common **barrier** to social innovation in housing. This was followed by 'lack of time' and 'lack of knowledge and information' as equally hindering factors.

Figure 3

Main barriers for social innovation in housing, according to surveyed practitioners[11]

Source: Survey with housing practitioners

Enablers mentioned by interviewees often corresponded to the opposite of the barriers identified in the previous point. These included:

a. **Openness to experimentation**: Some individuals or organisations are more open to innovation and experimentation than others, less afraid of trial and error, which is key for innovation to happen.

b. **Opportunities for exchange and cross-learning**: The availability of platforms and events for networking, exchanging and cross learning is crucial to spread and stimulate innovation. These allow ideas to circulate and inspire people from different contexts.

c. **Cultural factors**: Some cultures or contexts are more open to innovation than others (e.g. some quote the Dutch – but the Dutch quote others).

d. **Residents' participation**: This aspect was considered particularly important in the face of the diminished availability of financial resources, such as in the context of the recent economic crisis, which has prompted many housing organisations to reduce their staff and / or staff hours committed to social or community issues. Residents' involvement was also said to create a feeling of ownership of the outcomes of a particular project.

e. **Innovative leaders**: People who think 'outside the box', who are creative and who do not fear to risk in order to gain. Usually these innovators are to be found high up the power ladder in the organisation.

Amongst key **enablers,** respondents to the survey mentioned 'residents' participation' as the most important factor, followed by 'leaders who are innovators' in the second place, and by 'staff involvement' in the third place.

Figure 4

Main enablers for social innovation in housing, according to surveyed practitioners[12]

Source: Survey with housing practitioners

Money: barrier or enabler?

Again, there was no unified view amongst interviewees regarding the role played by money (or lack thereof) in enabling social innovation to happen in the housing field. Some considered that investment in housing and housing–related activities necessarily requires money, while others thought that the very absence of funds might act as a trigger for innovative thinking. Thus, some interviewees identified lack of money, either private or from government, as an enabler; for example, in developing countries the lack of a strong welfare state makes people often more innovative.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Evidence[13] shows that organisations providing and managing social / affordable housing across Europe are very often taking the lead in key areas of social wellbeing for local residents, where markets, states and civil society are failing to deliver. Studies[14] show that in those cases where key social services at local level are either missing or are not sufficiently or adequately provided by local authorities (or by the market) social housing providers assume or feel compelled to assume a 'gap filling' role. Fields covered by these initiatives include housing and care for the elderly; environmental sustainability (e.g. improving energy efficiency, recycling, etc.), social inclusion / cohesion at neighbourhood level, training and work inclusion for tenants, etc. Furthermore, self-help housing initiatives, for example, have gained increasing visibility in the context of economic crisis and greater housing and welfare shortages in many European countries.

Social innovation is a common feature in many of these initiatives, including aspects of self-organisation, building of social capital/social cohesion, affordability and often even higher environmental standards. These initiatives represent innovative solutions in the face of a lack of suitable alternatives and / or resources. From a process perspective, many housing actors tend to apply collaborative approaches to management and governance through working with residents and stakeholders to deliver better social services. The latter include residents' empowerment as a more or less explicit element, depending on the particular cases. Areas where social innovation featured repeatedly were: addressing demographic change (the elderly, inter-generational living, etc.) and social exclusion and vulnerable groups; means of systematizing social investment in local communities; and ways to improve cross-sector collaboration and coordination. There was no clear view on whether the lack of financial support by government or the financial crisis enable or stifle social innovation: as one interviewee put it "It is down to specific mind-sets: are people (leaders) visionaries? Are boards brave, supportive?"

What are the benefits for housing practitioners of becoming more socially innovative?

Respondents recognized that being socially innovative had a number of advantages. Three benefits were mentioned as particularly relevant: 'residents' empowerment', 'increasing effectiveness' and 'improving residents' satisfaction'. In addition, key informants also mentioned the potential to become more effective and to produce social services that are tailored to customers' needs by being more inclusive. Furthermore, housing organisations may gain stronger legitimacy and acceptance by society at large by being more inclusive.

In summary, benefits for housing practitioners to engage with social innovation in housing are:

- Increasing the potential of individual actions through their systematization and transfer.
- Integrating socially innovative principles where they add value.
- Contributing to the empowerment of residents.
- Strengthening public legitimacy and acceptance by being more inclusive
- Channelling support (financial, institutional, etc.) at local and national level for the implementation of innovative social practices.

Towards a new paradigm or just 'repackaging'?

Although many of these practices have been documented so far, these have not been understood as social innovations and therefore lack the potential to be further developed and transferred to other contexts. The findings of this short scoping study show that the concept of social innovation resonates amongst housing providers across Europe. Most practitioners and key informants echoed the elements from the working definition. However, there is an overall pragmatism in the way the concept is used, particularly amongst the most experienced respondents. The concept represents more a means to achieve certain outcomes than a new paradigm. This raises the question: are 'old' or 'conventional' approaches to tackling social issues being 'packaged' and 'labelled' as social innovation in order to achieve, for example, higher visibility or as a means to access funding? Or are (some of) these initiatives truly a new way of understanding the production of social outcomes? Is there a new way of doing things emerging – a new paradigm? And if so, is this spreading to housing provision, governance and management as well?

Concerning the latter, one of the key questions may be if social innovation is something to be triggered or managed by professional organisations, or if social innovation (particularly on smaller scale levels), should be something that is evolved primarily by people, with professional organisations 'merely' acting as facilitators. While a clear cut between these two approaches is not possible, at smaller scale levels there more emphasis may even be placed on empowerment of people in governance and management of housing and related services.

Recommendations to housing practitioners

This discussion paper has reflected on a number of issues and concrete examples provided by a range of housing experts and practitioners from across Europe. On that basis, we propose seven key recommendations to housing practitioners to become 'social innovators':

1. **Promote exchange**: Establish platforms for exchange with peers including from other contexts (regions, countries).
2. **Think holistically**: Adopt a multidimensional approach to problems, for example, by bringing together people from different disciplines to work together.
3. **Involve users**: This means not only users' participation, but also adopting their perspective to design and implement new solutions that affect them, and placing them in the lead.
4. **Cooperate across sectors**: Establish partnerships and networks that last so as to allow people from different sectors (e.g. private, public, third sector) to learn to work together in the longer term and capitalize on this cross learning.
5. **Think outside the box:** Carry out exchanges with people working in other contexts and looking at things from a different perspective. This is the case notably with international exchanges; as pointed out by interviewees, often listening to the way a similar problem was approached in a different national context shed a different light on a possible solution back home.
6. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes**: Just as in technological innovation, experimentation requires a willingness to fail and to learn from failure.
7. **Adopt a longer-term view** to reap the benefits and factor in this time in the project's cycle.

Useful resources and information

Centre for social innovation, Vienna (Austria)

www.zsi.at

Delphis

http://www.delphis-asso.org/lassociation/about-delphis/

EIB (European Investment Bank) Social Innovation Tournament

http://institute.eib.org/programmes/action-sociale/social-innovation-tournament/?lang=fr

Euclid network

www.euclidnetwork.eu

EU Programme on Social Change and Innovation (2014 – 2010)

http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1093

OECD Leed programme

www.oecd.org/cfe/leed

The Young Foundation

www.youngfoundation.org

Social Innovation Europe

www.socialinnovationeurope.eu

Social Innovation Exchange (SIX)

http://www.socialinnovationexchange.org

World Habitat Awards – BSHF

www.worldhabitatawards.org

URBACT programme

www.urbact.eu

Methodological annex

Research questions

The study on which this report is based sought to answer the following questions:

1. How can the concept of 'social innovation' be defined in the field of social/affordable housing?

2. What ideas, products, services and models are socially innovative in the field of housing?

3. How are housing providers engaging with changes in the needs, aspirations and lifestyles of their residents/tenants? What innovative processes/solutions are they applying?

4. How are providers working with other stakeholders to deliver better housing services?

Research approach and methods

The research approach combined secondary and primary data collection sources. While the former consisted mainly of a review of existing literature in this field, the second comprised interviews with key informants and a brief questionnaire sent by email to representatives of housing organisations in a number of European countries.

1. Literature review

2. Scoping (telephone) interviews with key stakeholders in the case study countries to grasp key issues.

3. Identification of empirical examples/cases (snowball technique) of 'frontrunners' or pioneers amongst (social/affordable) housing providers.

4. Survey amongst a small sample of (social/affordable) housing providers in a group of European countries (including the UK) identified as particularly innovative according to the previous stages of the research (e.g. countries that share similarities with the UK in terms of types of housing providers, housing systems, size of the sector, etc.)

Activities

1. Conducted a critical review of existing definitions of 'social innovation' and its application to the (social/affordable) housing field.

2. Produced an inventory of existing approaches and strategies (if any) by pioneering housing companies in the field of social innovation.

3. Identified and described the obstacles/issues in the way to becoming more socially innovative.

Interviewees

Interviews with key informants were carried out between March and April 2013. These people were chosen on the basis of their widely recognized expertise and experience in the field of innovation in housing. They also represent a wide spread of countries in and outside Europe.

	Name	Position / organisation	Country
1	Åse Dannestam	Malmo Municipal Housing Company (MKB)	Sweden
2	Francis Deplace	Managing director, Delphis	France / European reach
3	Diane Diacon	Director (past), Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF)	United Kingdom / international reach
4	Martien Kromwijk	Former CEO, Woonbron; 'Ambassador for social sustainability'	The Netherlands
5	Joost Nieuwenhuijzen	Managing Director, European Federation for Living (EFL)	The Netherlands / European reach
6	Michael LaFond	Managing Director, id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability: Experimentcity	Germany
7	Gerard van Bortel	Senior researcher, OTB TU Delft and Chair of the Flemish Social Housing Audit Board.	The Netherlands / Flanders, Belgium

Questionnaires

A questionnaire (appendix Q) was designed on the basis of secondary data and information from the interviews. Questionnaires were circulated amongst housing practitioners from across 12 European countries, using a mix of direct mailing and snowballing technique, the latter through national and regional housing federations. The questionnaire provided a working definition of social innovation for respondents to base their responses on. This working definition was based on the general definitions of social innovation found in the literature and briefly discussed in the first part of this report. The questionnaires were emailed on 26th March 2013 and replies were collected between 5th and 15th April 2013. Five questionnaires covering housing organisations in four European countries (Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Spain) were completed and returned by the organisations listed in the table below.

	Organisation	Country
1	BL − Danmarks Almene Boliger / National Federation of Housing Associations	Denmark
2	Batigere (network of housing providers comprising 13 social enterprises, 1 housing association and 2 cooperatives)	France
3	Dudok Wonen (housing association)	The Netherlands
4	OAL Viviendas Municipales de Bilbao (municipal housing company)	Bilbao, Spain
5	Sociedad Municipal Zaragoza Vivienda S.L.U. (municipal housing company)	Zaragoza, Spain

Each organisation provided three concrete examples of initiatives in which they had taken part, which they considered socially innovative. The data presented in figures 1 – 3 of this report correspond to the number of times the answer 'very important' was given on each of the aspects covered by the respective question.

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Notes

[1] Authors such as Peter Drucker and Michael Young referred to the concept of social innovation in the 1960s (Dench et al. 1995). The term also appeared in the work of French writers such as Pierre Rosanvallon, Jacques Fournier, and Jacques Attali in the 1970s (Chambon et al. 1982).

[2] See, for example: Nicholls and Murdock 2012; OECD 2010; Howaldt and Schwarz 2010; Moulaert 2010; Pol and Ville 2009; NESTA 2008; Phills et al. 2008; Mulgan et al. 2007; Simms 2006; Moulart et al. 2005; Zapf 1991.

[3] European Union / The Young Foundation (2010)

[4] BEPA (2010)

[5] Ibid.

[6] OECD (2010); Mulgan et al. (2007)

[7] FEANTSA (2011, 2012)

8 The term 'solidarity' is generally employed in sociology and other social sciences to refer to the "unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards" (Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 25 Sept. 2013.)

[9] The analysis used a technique that generates "word clouds" from text. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text (www.wordle.net).

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Brandsen et al. (2006); Czischke, D. (2009); Gruis, V. and Nieboer, N. (2004)

[14] Ibid.

Notes

Questionnaire

'Social Innovation in Housing:

Learning from practice across Europe'

Research project

Consider the following general definition of 'social innovation':

"Social innovations are new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. While 'innovation' refers to the capacity to create and implement novel ideas which are proven to deliver value, 'social' refers to the kind of value that innovation is expected to deliver: a value that is less concerned with profit and more with issues such as quality of life, solidarity and well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means."

Taking the above definition of social innovation into account, please answer the following questions in relation to **social housing.**

1. **In the table below, can you please provide details of <u>3 concrete examples of social innovation in housing</u> that your organisation has been involved in:**

Nr.	Project / initiative name	Place (City, country)	Brief description (Objective, funding, participants, etc.)	Innovative features	Contact (Name, role, e-mail, website)	Your organisations' role
1						
2						
3						

* * * PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 2 – 5 IN RELATION TO THE ABOVE EXAMPLES * * *

2. **In your opinion, what are the most important elements of the above definition of social innovation in social housing in the various examples?** (*Please mark 1, 2 or 3 for each factor and each example, 1 being 'very important', 2 being 'important' and 3 being 'not very important'*)

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
2.1. Collaboration			
2.2. Meeting social needs			
2.3. Novelty			
2.4. Solidarity			
2.5. Value creation			
2.6. Quality of life			
2.7. Other (*please mention*)			

3. **What are the main <u>obstacles</u> to become more socially innovative in the housing field?** (*Please mark 1, 2 or 3 for each factor and each project, 1 being 'very important', 2 being 'important' and 3 being 'not very important'*)

	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
3.1. Lack of money			
3.2. Lack of time			
3.3. Lack of government financial support			
3.4. Lack of innovative leadership			
3.5. Risk-adverse boards			
3.6. Lack of knowledge / information			
3.7. Lack of residents' involvement			
3.8. Other (*please mention*)			

4. **What are the main <u>enablers</u> to become more socially innovative in the housing field?** (*Please mark 1, 2 or 3 for each factor and each project, 1 being 'very important', 2 being 'important' and 3 being 'not very important'*)

	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
4.1. Peer exchanges and networking activities			
4.2. Cooperation between government and housing organizations			
4.3. Residents' participation			
4.4. Leaders who are innovators			
4.5. Government financial support			
4.6. Lack of government support			
4.7. Staff involvement			
4.8 Other (*please mention*)			

5. **What are the main benefits to a <u>housing organization</u> of becoming more socially innovative?** (*Please mark 1, 2 or 3 for each factor, 1 being 'very important', 2 being 'important' and 3 being 'not very important'*)

5.1. Empower residents	
5.2. Increase effectiveness	
5.3. Improve public image / legitimacy	
5.4. Improve residents' satisfaction	
5.5. Improve service quality	
5.6. Other (*please mention*)	