



Meeting of Europe's Foundations, Regions and Cities for Social Innovation

"Promotion of social innovation in Europe"

24-25 October 2012

Committee of the Regions, Brussels

Conclusions

On 24-25 October 2012, the European Network of the Foundations for Social Economy (PEFONDES) organised the first Meeting of Europe's Foundations, Regions and Cities for social innovation. Over 90 representatives of European institutions, foundations, regions, cities, networks and non-profit organisations from 17 countries took part in this event, which took place at the Committee of the Regions, in Brussels.

The Meeting allowed participants to:

- a) define their vision of social innovation;
- b) discuss the role public and private players could play to support social innovation;
- c) explore collaboration opportunities between the foundations and the European Commission;
- d) exchange their best practices related to social innovation.

a) Definition of a common vision of social innovation

For PEFONDES, 'social innovation' encompasses:

- a new solution for a defined social problem;
- a well adapted approach for one or several target audiences;
- the implication of a variety of public and private players;
- a principle of co-creation of solutions, together with the recipient or the end user.

For the European Commission, social innovation consists in finding means to better tackle some of the most difficult social and societal problems. Social economy enterprises have been acknowledged as key players of social innovation and crucial players for the success of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Participants agreed on the fact that social innovation requires citizens to get involved, as well as all economic players (those from the public sector as much as those from the private sector). Moreover, it was acknowledged that social innovation mainly develops at local level; therefore, it wasn't encouraged 'bottom down', from big general policies. The main reason for this is that today's social problems and challenges (e.g.: ageing population, unemployment, poverty, global warming etc.) occur at the level of the citizens' everyday life.

b) Discussing the role public and private players to promote social innovation

The financial crisis had major repercussions on companies' and the government's capacity to fund projects, to invest in and to bet on the future. Social economy and innovation are directly affected by this context.

Undeniably, all those who can and really want to act must provide a coordinated response in order to keep on solving yesterday's problems and facing today's challenges within a crisis context. But such a coordinated response necessarily presupposes both new and diversified cooperation partnerships and agreements, between the various players, be they public or private.

Most of the foundations being private non-profit organisations, they often are the best motors facilitating this synergy. Moreover, by their very nature, the social economy foundations identify particularly with social economy principles and values and they specifically aim at promoting and supporting social innovation initiatives in that the latter are very often held by social economy enterprises.

Besides, through their presentations of concrete projects social economy foundations showed they already have some experience in working as public authorities' partners in their immediate context.

c) Exploring new collaboration opportunities between the foundations and the European Commission

The Innovation Union, an ambitious project revealed by the European Commission in October 2010 focuses on the public sector and on social innovation. This key initiative of the Union's Europe 2020 strategy presents a strategic approach aiming at mastering innovating solutions to face urgent challenges, such as global warming, energy, health and the ageing population.

As part of that strategy, the European Commission recently launched the initiative Social Innovation Europe, a virtual network platform and an expertise centre for social entrepreneurs, the public sector and the service sector. This initiative aims at contributing to create an energetic, dynamic and innovating Europe, as well as meeting the objectives of an inclusive, intelligent and sustainable growth.

The Union currently promotes and coordinates social innovation in Europe by launching a series of other initiatives. For instance, the European Social Fund (ESF) achieved big investments into social innovations: supporting local partnerships, reinforcing capacities and the networking of local parties involved, implementing active policies and partnerships on the labour market within the EU's EQUAL initiative etc. As part of the Structural Funds, many instances of social innovation in cities and rural zones exist. The framework programme for competitiveness and innovation and the framework programmes for the funding of research and innovation at the service of technologies enabling the elderly to live longer autonomously on the one hand, and social science researchers working on social cohesion in towns with NGOs and individuals on the other hand.

On 1st October 2012, DG Enterprise and Industry launched the European Prize for Social Innovation, which invites participants to propose ideas in order to create more jobs and better quality throughout Europe. Anyone can participate: entrepreneurs, students, charities etc. All semi-finalists and finalists will get 9-month professional guidance to help them transform their idea into a company. In May 2013, the Commission will award three € 20,000 prizes to the winners.

On 24 October 2012, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion launched a call for propositions for Social Experimentation intending to improve the quality and efficiency of social policies and to facilitate their adaptation to new social needs and societal challenges. Thanks to the present call for propositions, the countries taking part in the Progress programme and involved in social protection reforms get financial support to assess the reforms and political changes considered before being implemented on a large scale should they be successful.

Participants and the foundations attending the Meeting in particular welcomed all these initiatives. Nevertheless, what the European Commission is expecting from the foundations – and from the social economy foundations specifically –

yet remains to be determined in order to keep on jointly support social innovation in Europe.

d) Exchanging best practices related to social innovation

The Meeting for social innovation also was an opportunity to stress the interest of sharing one another's experiences so as to learn from successes and failures. Indeed, facilitating best practices exchanges and encouraging transregional and transnational projects are two essential conditions for the success of social economy and innovation, which only are fully fruitful if the principles they convey freely go about and constantly are appropriated, corrected and adapted according to situations. In that respect, network collaboration on different scales of the European space is necessary.

The various public and private players' presentations can be downloaded clicking on the following link:

http://www.pefondes.eu/spip.php?page=article&id_article=166&id_rubrique=36&parent=2

Recommendations

- Citizens, civil society and the Foundations, and in particular social economy foundations, must be at the heart of the European strategy aiming at promoting social innovation.
- The public and private players concerned must keep exchanging and working together, particularly so through such platforms as PEFONDES and Social Innovation Europe, as well as through launching transnational projects.
- Exchanging (best) practices must also allow the various players to learn from each other's mistakes.
- Public and private players need efficient tools to be able to measure and assess the social innovations they're promoting.
- It is essential that the European Institutions keep on making public and private players aware of the issues and challenges of social innovation, particularly so through conferences and training seminars in which the foundations (and particularly the social economy foundations) always are ready to take an active part.
- The European Institutions should always stress the importance of public/private partnerships in every single call for propositions related to social innovation or experimentation and they should always pay particular

attention to the part the social economy foundations may play within those projects.

- The Meeting's participants ought to commit to working together on the long run; they also ought to organise more opportunities to exchange and think how to get together more often.

