



Social Innovation in Education and Social Service Organizations. Challenges, Actors, and Approaches to Foster Social Innovation

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Social innovation became a widely discussed topic in politics, research funding programs, and business development. Recent European and US economic and science policies have set aside significant funds to generate and foster social innovation. In view of current challenges such as digitization, Work 4.0, inclusion or migrant integration, the question of how organizations can be empowered to develop new and innovative approaches and service models to social challenges is becoming increasingly urgent. This especially applies to organizations in the fields of education and social services. In education, implementing new ideas and concepts is usually discussed as educational reform, which mostly addresses changes in policy agendas with consequences for national and international education systems. The concept of social innovation however has a different starting point: the source of new ideas and services are identified new, emergent needs in society or re-conceptualized. Such need-based perspectives might bring new impulses to the field of education. Therefore, this paper identifies important existing strands of social innovation research, which need to be considered in the emerging academic discourse on social innovation in education. Looking at social innovation through an education research lens reveals the close relation between learning, creativity, and innovation. Individuals, teams, and even organizations learn, engage in creative problem solving to create new and innovative products and services. From an organizational education perspective, the questions arise, how social innovation emerges and even more important, how the process of developing social innovation can be supported. After a brief introduction in the concept of social innovation, the paper discusses therefore the sites, where social innovation emerges, social innovators, approaches to foster social innovation as well as promoting and hindering factors for social innovation.

Keywords: hybrid organizations, social service organizations, social innovation networks, social innovation (SI), social entrepreneurs, organizational education

SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovation is the term used to describe new products, services, or new combinations of social practices aimed at meeting emerging or previously neglected societal needs (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Examples range from the spread of car sharing to the development of social housing. In contrast to an invention, such as a new technology, innovation is only mentioned when the created

solution is also disseminated to society. However, the concept of innovation describes not only absolutely new, but also relatively new patterns of action.

A business model, a product, a service, or a production method can be innovative. There are no strict criteria to categorize something as new or innovative if it is developed and disseminated. The classical moment of creative destruction is rather pushed into terms like disruption or revolution. Therefore, a distinction is made between disruptive (fast, radical, market-changing) and incremental (evolutionary) innovation (Christensen, 1997).

There are also more normative positions that understand social innovation as aimed to change the social structure to empower the disadvantaged, which are thus strongly oriented toward the idea of a more just society (Moulaert et al., 2010). More widespread, however, is an understanding of social innovation that is primarily concerned with the description of new solutions to social problems in order to improve the social situation in general (Phills et al., 2008) or even more pragmatically as “intentional, targeted recombination, or reconfiguration of social practices” (Howaldt and Schwartz, 2010).

On the one hand, innovations are described as social due to their reference to a social area. They are oriented either to the internal affairs of those involved or to external stakeholders and exhibit organizational, institutional, or procedural patterns of order (Gillwald, 2000). In a narrower understanding, “social” is qualified by the reference of the innovation to a socially accepted but unmet need. This implies the legitimacy of the innovation, which can be established in public discourse. Through the dissemination of newly discovered solutions, social innovations become the basis for social change (Ogburn, 1957) and are thus the subject of modernization theories. Another way to conceptualize “social” is that the diffusion of certain innovations happens mostly through organizations with primarily social purposes (Mulgan, 2006).

Social innovations can work at the macro level as socio-political reform, changes in regulatory frameworks and institutional norms, at the meso level as new business models, new services, new management practices, and at the micro level as the strengthening of user participation and new professional practices that generate added value for the addressees. Social innovation in social service organizations can be, for example, the development of new or improved demand-oriented social services, improved forms of advocacy or models for the new or more effective use of existing resources.

In the field of education, innovation has been a topic since decades, however often linked to the notion of government driven education reform programs (Biesta, 2010). Despite the wide range of social innovation initiatives in an education ecosystem, like social entrepreneurial activities in school development, school reform, social work in schools, and more, there are still few conceptual and theoretical papers that frame the distinctiveness of social innovation in education. Whereas, government driven education reform programs often choose a top-down approach, social innovation processes usually start from an analysis of human needs (of a specific social group

or user group) and cater creative solutions to those needs, which could rather be characterized as a bottom-up approach. However, successful and sustainable socially innovative solutions are not isolated events but usually depend upon favorable environmental conditions. Part of such an environment are regional social innovation networks (including supporters, promoters, investors, knowledge providers, intermediaries, and entrepreneurial actors) (Terstiep, 2016) as well as the domain specific environment, i.e., the national, regional and local education system. As research on education reform in different countries suggest, most education systems are not perceptive or supportive to bottom-up reform initiatives and innovation, due to their bureaucratic governance system and accountability regimes (Biesta, 2015). Therefore, I suggest to look at initiatives in the related and intertwined field of social service provides, which is in most European countries highly regulated and dependent on public funding, to analyze the occurrence, emergence and early success stories, and identify learning for the field of education.

EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION AND THE ROLE OF HYBRIDITY

Social innovation often emerges at or across the boundaries of two or more social sectors, i.e., between market, state, and civil society. Organizations located at these intersections are described as hybrid organizations. Hybrid organizations are characterized by several action-guiding logics or theories of action, such as a market logic and a logic of solidarity. Such diversity is seen as a source of creativity and innovation. Therefore, hybrid organizations are often attributed special innovation potential in the discourse on social innovation (Molina, 2010).

Hybrid organizations are organizations that move between social sectors, such as between the state and civil society, state, and private sector (public-private partnerships) or civil society and private sector (social enterprise) (Billis, 2010; Jäger and Schröder, 2014). Different criteria can be used to determine the hybridity of organizations, such as ownership, governance, operational priorities, personnel, and other resources (Billis, 2010). Hybrid organizations can either be explained as being located on a continuum between non-profit and forprofit or forprofit and public sector (Billis, 2010), or hybridity can be interpreted as a self-evident characteristic of third sector organizations (Evers and Ewert, 2010). A third option would be to regard hybrids as cases of deviation from the organizational norm of one sector. Billis so-called prime sector approach is based on the assumption that every hybrid organization has something like a primary sector in which it has its source and roots and which usually determines its governance principles: “My working hypothesis is that organizations will have “roots” and have primary adherence to the principles of one sector. This is based on the inherent contradictory distinctive and conflicting principles (rules of the game) for each sector” (Billis, 2010, p. 56). The primary adherence to the principles of one sector is justified by institutionalized principles of the respective sectors (“robust set of core distinctive principles” (Billis, 2010, p. 66), e.g., profit maximization vs. distribution of profits) and

by reference to the ownership issue. One of the governance requirements of an organization is that the accounting, tax, and legal supervision departments must know which legal, tax, and accounting principles an organization operates and should be treated according to. It is precisely the necessary compliance, for example with tax regulations, that limits the supposed equivalence of organizational rationalities at the end of the day. The institutional anchoring of the organization thus requires clear governance rules and structures, which must also be defended and enforced against other logics of action. For example, a social enterprise recognized as a non-profit organization must not expand its market-based activities to the extent that a non-profit status is legally or fiscally questioned. This is an argument worth considering against the description of organizational hybridity as a continuum between private and non-profit or public and non-profit: “Thus, hybrids are not on a continuum but have a clear cut off point evident when principal owners take the boundary-shaping decisions (closures, conversions mergers etc.) according to the principles of the different sectors” (Billis, 2010, p. 57).

Hybridity is not static, rather is it possible to distinguish between different *degrees of hybridity* of an organization. For example, there are non-profit organizations in which hybridity has already sunk deeper on the supervisory level (board members from the local authority or private sector) as well as at the operational level (volunteer organization starting to hire permanent staff members). Such changes affect organizational processes and accountability and steering mechanisms, because a completely different level of reliability of the organization is required. Similarly, a distinction can be made between established and grown hybridity: Some hybrids are founded as such, e.g., as a social entrepreneurial spin-off of a traditional non-profit organization, whereas others have evolved toward hybridity over time (Billis, 2010)¹.

In conclusion hybrid organizations are characterized by different blends of social and profit-driven purposes and activities, the co-presence of different sector-specific logics of action and control, which cause organizational fields of tension and in some cases to massive ambiguities in organizations: for example, which governance rules should be followed, which logics of action should guide managers in a situation or which organizational identity should be expressed. The *identity* of hybrid organizations can be explained from an individual focused perspective as identification of organization members with certain organizational subcultures or managers exerting direct or indirect influence. From a structuralist perspective, identity appears as a purposeful stable structure that influences organizational events and management practice. Studies examine, for example, cultural values, organizational

histories, or the organizational use of language. Practical-theoretical approaches consider identity as a discursive practice for, among other things, “making the world,” which reproduces the structure again through action and thus solidifies it. Such multiple identities can remain unconnected, coexist, or be integrated (Jäger and Schröer, 2014). In most cases multiple identities create a field of tension or ambiguities can be examined as dilemma or opportunity. Hybridity often occurs as a dilemma in relevant management and or governance decisions, as explained earlier. It also offers opportunities, as organizational hybridity allows for the development of value creation that draws from the advantages and resources of different sectors. Many value propositions and business models of social entrepreneurs and social enterprises demonstrate such opportunities (Schröer, 2015).

A similar argument about the opportunity of ambiguity and being exposed to more than one logic of action can be found in Meyerson and Tompkins (2007) analysis of change agents. The effectiveness of change agents is attributed to their embedding in multiple institutional environments. While a stable, highly institutionalized context tends to prevent change, constant exposure to different, perhaps even contradictory institutional contexts triggers change (Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007, p. 309). Reasons are seen in the loosening of cognitive anchoring in a context, but above all in the willingness and ability of the actors to become aware of consistency gaps by comparing institutional contexts and to question them. As a result, it is precisely these actors or groups who are particularly likely to become actors of change, who are particularly acutely exposed to multiple institutional contexts and who often perceive conflicts between guiding values and ideas in these contexts. However, such actors often occupy a marginalized position in organizations, which is why their change strategies are often under-equipped in terms of implementation power and resources. Against this background, the secondary analysis of Meyerson and Tompkins case appears particularly interesting, as it shows how embedding in different institutional contexts can be combined with the legitimacy of positions and the legitimacy of actors in different change-relevant communities in order to overcome precisely such obstacles of marginality and under-resourcing.

While the argumentation takes its starting point in the institutional embedding of organizations and actors in various social sectors, the arguments for resulting effects take up actor, cognitive, and cultural aspects. Although the dynamics between public sector, private sector, non-profit sector, and when it comes to innovation academia can be highly conflictual and challenging to actors who operate in an environment located at the borders of these sectors, the previous chapters also demonstrate its productive and creative potential. It becomes clear that ambiguous or hybrid identity can be functionally useful (Jäger and Schröer, 2014); the loosening of cognitive anchors and distance serve as prerequisites for the ability to critique (Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007), the raising of creative potentials through the recognition of diversity and targeted learning and decision training opportunities, or the necessity of a translation function between different rationalities (Schedler and Rüegg-Stürm, 2013).

¹This line of argumentation emphasizes that in hybrid organizations, which operate in several institutional contexts, it is quite necessary and useful to differentiate how strong which institutional influence is in relation to certain decisions. This argument is particularly plausible against the background of the discussion about non-profit organizations and social enterprises, in which, at least since the late 1970s, the work of Edward Skloot and Dennis Young has pointed to the growing tensions between economic goals and goals of public welfare. Since then, the literature on nonprofit management has contained many suggestions on how to maintain a balance between the various goals, demands, and stakeholders.

SOCIAL INNOVATORS

Social innovation does not only emerge in existing organizations, its emergence is often attributed to individual actors, i.e., innovators or entrepreneurs. The most established strand of research therefore focusses on the individual level of (social) entrepreneurs as innovators. Just as Schumpeter (1912) in early innovation research identified the actor type of the entrepreneur as crucial, for some years attention in social innovation research was focused on the so-called social entrepreneurs, in recent years the research also includes social “intrapreneurs” who implement social entrepreneurial actions and social start-up practices in existing organizations (Schröer and Schmitz, 2016).

Social Entrepreneurs develop and implement solutions for social problems by entrepreneurial means (Dees, 2001; Drayton, 2006). Schumpeter’s creative and destructive entrepreneur became a programmatic figure of social entrepreneurship and thus a bearer of hope for social change. Schumpeter understood innovation as a complex design situation in which social conditions are as relevant as the characteristics of the invention itself. According to him, a new idea must always prevail against the familiar and against resistance. In current approaches, this demanding process is broken down into the innovation functions of developing, testing, and disseminating social services, which make the concept of the feasibility of social change through entrepreneurial initiative attractive for current socio-political discourses. Although the term social entrepreneur encompasses various social phenomena (Mair and Marti, 2006), two dominant strands can be identified. On the one hand, since the 1980s at the latest, the Anglo-Saxon debate on non-profit organizations has pointed out that, in view of increasingly unreliable state funding of social services and strong fluctuations in the volume of donations, other sources of income need to be increasingly developed (Skloot, 1983; Young, 2008). The term social entrepreneurship was introduced for non-profit organizations that generate income on (quasi) markets. On the other hand, the term is used in the Schumpeterian tradition. In the relevant literature on social entrepreneurs (Mort et al., 2003; Mair and Marti, 2006; Martin and Osberg, 2007; Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Andersson, 2011) their central competences and orientations are mentioned, which can be summarized in four dimensions:

- Implementation orientation: innovator, proactivity, reflection, simplicity, focus, pragmatism
- Self-reference: Competence awareness, competence reflection, persuasiveness, strong value base
- Relationship to others: empathy, mindfulness, ability to work in a team, motivator, idea sharing
- Networked thinking: translation, sustainability, overview, commitment, economic sensitivity (Schröer, 2017).

Social Intrapreneurs on the other hand operate as entrepreneurs in existing organizations. Their entrepreneurial activity is reflected in the development and implementation of new products, services, or processes in the organization of origin. Intrapreneurship can mean the development of new business areas within the existing company, or the founding of

subsidiaries, as well as the development of new organizational routines and procedures, which can also take place without the knowledge or explicit mandate of management (Stopford and Baden-Fuller, 1994). Within the “Social Intrapreneur Framework”, Schmitz and Schröer (2016) have pointed out that intrapreneurs are characterized in particular by the following criteria “Social Mission Orientation, Business Acumen, Striving for the New, Vibrant Character, People Relations, Knowledge Relations, Organizational Commitment, Outsider-insider Perspective” (Schmitz and Schröer, 2016, p. 14). The framework suggests that personality traits support intrapreneurship even if there is resistance in the organization.

Not only individual actors become innovators, but also teams and networks of actors play an important role in processes of social innovation. These can either be networks of informal exchange or innovation teams deliberately set up to promote innovation. Then there are either departments of an organization, e.g., the research and development department, or a staff unit for innovation management, which can be regarded as innovation drivers. Finally, entire organizations or organizational networks can also be important innovation drivers, such as the cooperation between social start-ups and established institutions or even entire regional social innovation networks (Rehfeld and Terstriep, 2013). Civil society organizations and innovation networks with the participation of civil society actors and their embedding in the local context play a particularly important role in social innovation (Rey-García et al., 2016).

In describing and analyzing the role of innovators, such as entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs the research started focusing on certain competencies, which are seen as crucial for bringing about innovation. In the entrepreneurship literature we find analysis of entrepreneurial competencies, which led to the development of an entrepreneurship competence framework (EntreComp) as a common reference framework. In this framework, Bacigalupo et al. (2016) conceptualize entrepreneurship as a key competence, which is applicable to individuals and groups and is defined as follows: “Entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural, or social” (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 10). The key competence refers to the process of creating ideas and opportunities (creativity), mobilizing, and preserving resources as well as putting ideas into action (planning, cooperation, coping with risk, and ambiguity). The relatively young and interdisciplinary research field of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education addresses the question, how to best educate people with entrepreneurial competencies (Deakins and Freel, 1998; Politis, 2005; Hölzle et al., 2015). Research in education mostly focusses on *creativity* and creative problem solving, but rarely links this individual or team competency to the organizational capacity to innovate (Manhart et al., 2020).

Another link between innovation and educational research is the relation between learning and innovation. Innovation is mostly seen as the result of an (organizational) learning process. Learning, one could argue, leads to innovation. From an educational point of view however, learning is dealing with and creating something new. What one learns is always

new, otherwise one would not need to learn it. And learning processes are inherently open in their results. Their evaluation as creative or innovative is done in retrospect, for example by the leadership of the organization. In the learning process itself, the difference between old and new, creative, and innovative is not relevant. As educational research and learning psychology suggest, individual learning takes place based on complex self-organizing structures that are largely unavailable to consciousness (Manhart, 2016, 2018). Organizations do not have a conscious, which does not hinder them to learn. But organizations cope with inconsistencies, opacity and contingency and thereby learn. Therefore, we can argue that the concept of innovation is based on the results of internal learning processes (Manhart et al., 2020).

APPROACHES TO FOSTER SOCIAL INNOVATION

In the current debate, the possibilities of managed support of social innovations are assessed quite differently. There is an ongoing controversy between classical innovation management procedures, which provide for a planned, rational, methodical support of distinct phases of the innovation process and insights of complexity and practice theory emphasizing the complexity, uncertainty, emergence, and thus low predictability of innovation processes. While it would be plausible to conclude that the latter would lead to an overall skeptical attitude toward ideas of managerial support and would emphasize the necessary improvisation in everyday organizational life or the embedding of knowledge and new solutions in relational and collective practice instead. However, such emphasis on improvisation can be aligned with possibilities of creating informal spaces for innovation processes and in an open model of innovation processes.

In this current “open innovation” model (Chesbrough, 2006), innovation is understood as open process based on both external and internal knowledge. The approach is based on the recognition that not all the best employees work for just one company and that some ideas developed in one company can be much more valuable for another. Accordingly, information processing and product development take place in the interplay of internal and external actors. At the end of the process there are patterns of action, products and services that are not only disseminated in the core markets of the commissioning organization, but also in niche markets, new markets or even markets of development partners (Chesbrough, 2006). Chesbrough and Di Minin (2014) have also applied this approach to open social innovations.

In order to differentiate existing approaches to promote new or improved demand-oriented social services, a four-field matrix is proposed here (cf. Table 1). The focus of innovation promotion is on the one hand characterized by formal or informal structures and procedures. Formal structures and procedures follow the idea of managed support of innovation by establishing structures and procedures with clear goals, rules for decision making, and recognizable responsibilities for innovation within the

TABLE 1 | Innovation support matrix.

		Location of innovation support	
		Internal	in-between organizations
Approach to support innovation	Formal structures and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Innovation manager ■ Information management ■ Innovation center ■ R&D division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Innovation hubs ■ Incubators ■ Social innovation labs
	Informal structures and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Informal Meetings ■ Innovation teams within organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Innovation partnerships (co-creation) ■ Regional social innovations networks or clusters

organization. Whereas, an informal approach is based more on establishing informal communication channels, meetings, and networks, increasing flexibility in the mastery of tasks. The second category to organize innovation support approaches is the location of the support unit, i.e., where the innovation support staff is situated, within or across organizations.

The upper left quadrant shows approaches to support social innovation, which focus on the organization and follow a classical management idea, based on formal structures and procedures. Examples are supporting innovation by sharing and distributing information about newly found solutions and new technologies within the organization in a variety of ways; consistent personnel development to enable employees to acquire an entrepreneurial mindset and skillset; or the creation of an innovation management staff position. Another example are so-called innovation centers, which usually follow strategic goals of the organization to develop new impulses in certain business fields, which are then driven forward in the innovation center.

In addition, there are also internal informal approaches to promote innovation (bottom left): Nock et al. (2013) state that up to now, innovation promotion in the social economy has mostly been done in such informal ways, e.g., in committees with a meeting culture that invites to discuss innovative approaches. Other informal approaches aim to develop an innovative organizational culture that gives innovative employees freedom and ensures that they feel comfortable in the company. Cross-divisional cooperation in innovation teams is strongly networking-oriented. This involves setting up multidisciplinary, multi-professional teams across the line organization, which focus on developing innovation.

In the area of cross-organizational structures and processes, the upper right quadrant contains Innovation Learning Labs, in which companies seek to develop new products and services in cooperation with universities and based on research results. Well-known examples of this can be found in the field of dementia research (Catholic University of Leuven). Business models are also developed in incubators and innovation-hubs, which provide founders with shared office-, work- or meeting-rooms, are lower threshold.

Informal processes exist both in the organization and across organizations (right lower quadrant), such as partnerships between large, established, and young, small but dynamic social start-ups. The most challenging form are regional innovation clusters or regional social innovation networks.

PROMOTING AND INHIBITING FACTORS FOR INNOVATION IN SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Research on social innovation also deals with the framework conditions that promote and hinder innovation development. Such framework conditions can be identified at the macro level of politics and business (e.g., innovation regions), the meso level of the organization (innovation promotion, innovation management) and the micro level of individual actors (heterogeneous teams).

Social service organizations act in the area of conflict between operational stability and flexibility. An obstacle to innovation development is that innovation is often perceived as a deviation that threatens the reliable performance of the core business. However, a functioning core business is the financial prerequisite for being able to invest in innovation processes at all. This perception of deviance is often accompanied by concerns about the devaluation of organizational and individual knowledge, which is replaced by new knowledge, and the disruption of established routines. Added to this is the fundamental uncertainty of the success of new solutions. This results in resistance to innovation and innovators in many organizations. Other obstacles to innovation processes include lack of (development) time, space, and resources (e.g., venture capital) as well as insufficient communication about innovation approaches. Rigid hierarchies are also perceived as an obstacle to innovation processes because direct superiors may not recognize innovation potential (see Nock et al., 2013; Schröer and Händel, 2019).

By contrast, professional and managerial staff in social work name several conditions that promote innovation. At the macro level, these include, first, corresponding specialist discourses and an innovation-friendly political climate, ideally with government funding opportunities for the development of innovative solutions and a vibrant civil society. Welfare associations with their associational structures can also contribute to innovation-friendly framework conditions by stimulating networking and cooperation, initiating project incubators where appropriate (such as Diakonie Baden in its cooperation with Freiburg's Grünhof or the German Red Cross with its innovation laboratory) and providing information on solutions already developed and financial support opportunities for innovation processes. In the organizations of social work, the following conditions are regarded as particularly conducive conditions: staying power, i.e., not giving up too quickly, client (and thus demand) proximity of staff, the existence of an informal culture of discussion and debate on innovation needs, and a variety of disciplines and professions, as well as a mature innovation milieu and a high willingness to cooperate. For the dissemination

of solutions already developed, the size of the organization, its impact in the regional environment, functioning internal communication within the association, interaction between association levels and established contacts to social policy and social administration are identified as conducive (Nock et al., 2013).

Social innovations can thus emerge in social work organizations if—despite sometimes contradictory demands and resistance—relevant actors are willing to take risks in creating conditions and applying methods such as design thinking (Brown and Wyatt, 2010) conducive to the development of new social solutions. This is all the more successful if this willingness to take risks is not only realized on the part of the voluntary welfare organizations, but also by the public providers of welfare state services, e.g., when exercising discretionary powers in connection with the financing of innovative ideas and solutions.

Recent empirical research has shown both conducive and obstructive conditions for the development of social innovations. Empirical research results on social entrepreneurship in Germany in particular provides evidence that larger organizations in the social economy, which are organized by welfare associations, have better founding conditions (access to capital, support from public authorities, established contacts in the social space), but above all, through the associations, also have established dissemination channels for new or improved solutions to social problems. This draws attention to intrapreneurs as opposed to entrepreneurs in the promotion of social innovation (Schröer and Schmitz, 2016; Händel and Schröer, 2017). One of the opportunities and challenges for social work organizations therefore seems to be to identify intrapreneurs and to support them in developing social innovations. Research in organizational education can help to clarify the framework conditions that are conducive to learning processes and the development work of intrapreneurs. Initial findings on this are available from social innovation laboratories (Schröer and Händel, 2019; Schröer and Rosenow-Gerhard, 2019). These results show, how to combine relevant innovation actors (intrapreneurs), the location (at the cross-roads between sectors) and a managed way to provide for informal settings in a third space. This combination seems promising for future efforts to support social innovation in the social and education sector.

CONCLUSION

This paper suggests results of social innovation research, as well as early experiences of social innovation in social service organizations to be considered in the emerging academic discourse on social innovation in education. Social Innovation initiatives mostly start from identifying and analyzing a particular need of a social group (user group), they use creativity and diversity as core competencies, collaboration, and co-creation as key practices and understand the location at sectoral borders and across the borders of public, private, and non-profit sectors not primarily as conflict, but as potential for diversity and therefore creativity in an innovation process. Experiences in fostering social innovation in the field of social services suggest

the importance of special locations (third spaces) that allow for productive usage of differences among actors and perspectives in open processes that have some autonomy from the daily routines of social service delivery. Examples of such locations are social innovation labs, hubs, and accelerators, embedded in regional social innovation networks. Such initiatives are likely to be more successful, if local, regional, or even national governments are part of these networks and help to develop more favorable environmental conditions for innovation processes. Social innovation labs and their respective regional networks help organizations to overcome the classic obstacles to innovation, such as the lack of resources, information, space, and time to develop innovative solutions. Therefore, it is not surprising to see national as well as European policy efforts to create better framework conditions for the social innovation ecosystems in the field of social services, such as paragraphs that allow funding

of experimental solutions, public sector involvement in social innovation funds and an increasing amount of public tenders for social innovation projects.

These experiences, challenges, and opportunities provide insights for the conceptualization of social innovation in the field of education. A field that is currently mostly driven by top-down reform programs based on student and school performance measurement programs. Change that arises from such government-driven reform programs can and should not easily be called social innovation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of Interest: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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