

Exploring Barriers to Social Innovation: Swedish Experiences from Nine Research Circles

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Abstract : Innovation is a necessity for the evolution of societies and it is also a driving force in human life that leverages value creation among cross-sector participants in various network arrangements. Social innovations can be characterized as the creation and implementation of a new solution to a social problem, which is more effective and sustainable than existing solutions in terms of improvement of society's conditions and in particular social inclusion processes. However, barriers exist which may restrict the potential of social innovations to live up to its promise as a societal welfare promoting driving force. The literature points at difficulties in tackling social problems primarily related to problem complexity, access to networks, and lack of financial muscles. Further research is warranted at detailed at detail clarification of these barriers, also connected to recognition of the interplay between institutional logics on the development of cross-sector collaborations in networks and the organizing processes to achieve innovation barrier break-through. There is also a need to further elaborate how obstacles that spur a difference between the actual and desired state of innovative value creating service systems can be overcome. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate barriers to social innovations, based on qualitative content analysis of 36 dialogue-based seminars (i.e. research circles) with nine Swedish focus groups including more than 90 individuals representing civil society organizations, private business, municipal offices, and politicians; and analyze patterns that reveal constituents of barriers to social innovations. The paper draws on central aspects of innovation barriers as discussed in the literature and analyze barriers basically related to internal/external and tangible/intangible characteristics. The findings of this study are that existing institutional structures highly influence the transformative potential of social innovations, as well as networking conditions in terms of building a competence-propelled strategy, which serves as an offspring for overcoming barriers of competence extension. Both theoretical and practical knowledge will contribute to how policy-makers and SI-practitioners can facilitate and support social innovation processes to be contextually adapted and implemented across areas and sectors.

Keywords : barriers, research circles, social innovation, service systems

Conference Title : ICSSSI 2015 : International Conference on Service Systems and Social Innovation

Conference Location : Madrid, Spain

Conference Dates : November 12-13, 2015