SHIINE multi-disciplinary innovation for social change

cost EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Public Sector Innovation labs for societal resilience

or

How to increase openness in the public sector and stimulate active citizenship

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Executive statement

In this policy brief we recommend that in order to face numerous societal challenges such as migration and climate change, regional governments should create a culture of innovation by opening up themselves and stimulate active citizenship by supporting so called Public Sector Innovation (PSI) labs. These labs bring together different types of stakeholders that will explore new solutions for societal challenges and come up with new policies to tackle them. This method has been developed and tested in a large EU funded research project.

Key messages and recommendations

Problem: regions face complex and interdependent social challenges and need to govern continuous transformation through innovation.

Recommendations:

- Regional governments should support the development of initiatives for active citizenship;
- Institutionalisation of PSI labs within regional governments;
- Regional governments should take an active role in developing and maintaining existing PSI labs.

From challenge till change

Regions in Europe and beyond are facing numerous challenges, ranging from climate change till rising inequality and increasing incoming migration. In addition, they are also still recovering from COVID and are struggling with inflation and rising populism. These challenges are not only complex, expensive and time consuming, but also interdependent. Innovation has proven to be key in tackling these challenges.

However, firstly 'traditional' linear innovation practices are no longer working sufficiently and secondly many regions are struggling to create a culture of innovation (Fig 1.).

Because of this, governments do not make fully use of stakeholders outside their own institution and citizens do not feel attached to politics.

In order to fully exploit the potential from non-governmental stakeholders and actively engage with them, it is essential to allow innovation to flourish within the government and society.
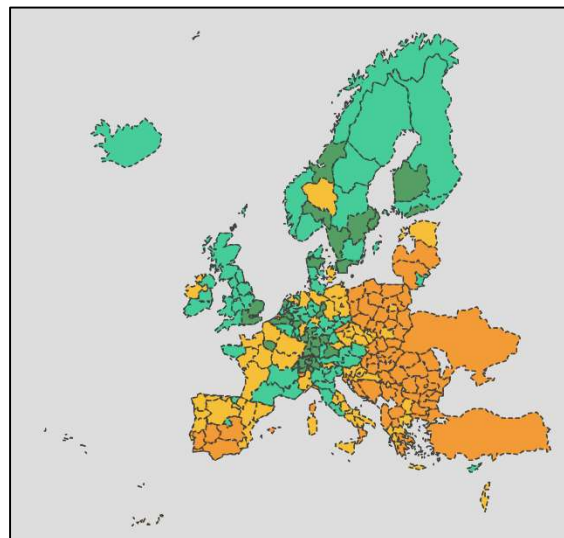

Figure 1 Regional Innovation Scoreboard. Dark green is innovation leader, green is strong innovator, yellow is moderate innovator and orange is emerging innovator.

Results from the EU funded "SHIINE" project show a way forward...

The SHIINE project analysed Public Sector Innovation, by sending out and analysing questionnaires from great examples of PSI in the European Union and beyond. We found that developing a culture of innovation is depending on regional context (see Fig. 1.) and that universities are playing an increasingly important role in this type of innovation.
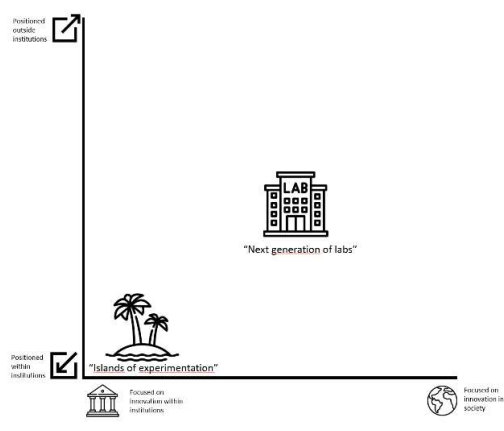

Figure 2 Types of PSI labs. Islands of experimentation are needed for internal innovation within governments and the next generation of labs for innovation in society (Meister-Broekema et.al., 2022).

We also realised that PSI labs have different shapes and should be an integral part of the government and a more outward facing type of innovation lab (Fig 2.).

Based on literature and the results from the questionnaire, the group developed a prototype for a Public Sector Innovation Lab that could respond to urgent emerging topics.

This lab could be characterised as a social hackathon that includes students. This prototype was tested and it not only led to innovative solutions but also to enhanced active citizenship among students. The latter is essential for the future.

Recommendations for regional and local policymakers

A culture of innovation is essential. Our research showed that this can only be accomplished by focusing on internal and external innovation with different types of stakeholders. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that innovation is sustainable and part of an ecosystem in which governments are co-creating with universities, companies and citizens.

Recommendation 1: support active citizenship

Actively regenerate spaces that could be used for networking with stakeholders and co-creation. Participation of students is essential, so regional governments should have incentives for co-creating innovative solutions for societal challenges. New policies should mandatory include consultation with stakeholders. Communicate the results of the co-creation and consultation activities.

Recommendation 2: Institutionalise PSI labs within the government

Create an organisational unit within the regional government where policymakers are stimulated to think outside the box. These innovation labs are spaces for open innovation, engaging stakeholders to develop and experiment new ideas and possible solutions for societal challenges. Further they need to function as a learning space for education and training and for promoting and diffusing a culture of openness.

Recommendation 3: develop and maintain existing PSI labs

PSI labs should include students because they provide innovative solutions, however a PSI lab should be an instrument and not a goal. Therefore PSI labs should train future trainers of PSI labs, to be sustainable. In addition, employers should also be included in these labs to learn from students and provide input for potential new skills for active citizenship. In addition regional governments should develop legal frameworks to develop and maintain PSI labs.

Acknowledgements

More information

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- Meister-Broekema, P., Bulder, E. A. M., & Horlings, L. G. (2022). Same same, but different…? The emergence of Public Sector Innovation Labs in theory and practice. Management & Marketing, 17(s1), 344- 363. https://doi.org/10.2478/mmcks-2022-0020
- Alvarez-Torres, F.J. & Schiuma, G., (2023) Innovation Integrality Index: a Tool to Integrate Rational and Emotional Sides of Innovation in the Organizational Resilience.