



Catalonia working with Europe

Supporting the active participation of Catalan institutions and citizens in European cooperation

#CATALONIA WORKING WITH EUROPE COMMENT#

WHAT DOES SOCIAL INNOVATION MEAN?

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Social innovation is becoming a very important topic and need in Europe.

Why?

For many reasons, but the important ones are: because we face increasing unemployment, we have more old people, the state cannot (or will not) finance social provisions as in the old days - and because social problems constantly change and become more complex.

Social innovation sounds academic and complicated. It is neither.

Social innovation can be described in very simple but important words.

Authentic social innovation includes several aspects or principles, such as:

- › Solving social problems and meeting social problems in new ways
- › Involving the citizens in the creation of the new solutions
- › Basing new solutions on new forms of collaboration in the community
- › Building social capacity among the involved players in the process
- › Financing the solutions in innovative ways, including in unexpected ways, but always aiming to create new solutions from existing resource levels
- › Mainstreaming the solution in different ways, from establishing a private company to passing a law or creating an NGO

As can be seen, social innovation is easy to understand, but difficult to create.

Authentic social innovation includes all the above principles, not just a selection.

Why is that?

Because in social innovation the process of creating the solutions, and therefore the social capacity building, is as important as the results.

Sometimes the process is even more important than the outcome, as the social change process generates social capital.

Building social change capacity among groups of citizens and building new forms of collaborative infrastructures between players and sectors is a key principle.

Citizens and users must be co-drivers of the mission and of the process, and stakeholders of the outcome.

Therefore social innovation can be about all sorts of “social problems or needs”, as the social change process is the most important, not necessarily the problem addressed.

Social innovation can address a wide range of *existing* challenges, such as for example childcare, elderly mobilization, access to technology, migrant inclusion, family support and empowerment, just to mention a few.

But social innovation can also address *emerging* challenges and help counter serious social situations through preventing interventions.

And, last but not least, social innovation does not have to address a problem, but can *create* new social values through innovative use of available resources.

All this makes social innovation a most interesting action field for social entrepreneurship: unemployed, professionals, seniors and young people can engage in open social entrepreneurship, create most interesting and valuable missions and perhaps even end up making a living from the initiatives - and at the same time social innovation is a perfect playground for cross-sector collaboration in the community.