Social Innovation Northern Ireland

Report of Public Events

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Background

The Building Change Trust see potential for Social Innovation as an organising concept that be employed across public, private and third sectors to improve the fabric of society and tackle social problems. As the Trust prepares to wind down (in 2018), it aims to convene and leave Social Innovation Northern Ireland as a legacy of its work. The Trust has commissioned The Melting Pot, Scotland’s Centre for Social Innovation to facilitate this process.

This is a report of two public events convened by the Building Change Trust and facilitated by The Melting Pot. The events took place on 3rd December 2015 in Belfast and 14th January 2016 in Derry/Londonderry with around 90 people in total participating. Together they created the start of a shared understanding of social innovation in Northern Ireland, identified transferable, adaptable and scalable innovations and supports, and built relationships between them.

The public events are at the start of a process – “phase one” in figure 1- of establishing connections, vision and organising principles to strengthen an ecosystem that is capable of catalysing and supporting increased capacity for social innovation. The aim of The Building Change Trust is to achieve, over the next few months, distributed ownership of a co-designed concept of Social Innovation NI, which will be sustainable in the longer term.

Figure 1- Anticipated process for developing Social Innovation NI.
Attendee profile

Around 90 people attended and most shared some details of their interest in social innovation on badges designed specially for the events. The majority of those attending the public events said that they had some kind of enabling role with respect to social innovation, with 31% only taking that role and a further 37% who both enable others and “do” social innovation themselves.

![Image: Are you a Doer or an Enabler of Social Innovation?]

Figure 2- How participants categorized themselves

Attendees were asked what they thought about social innovation. A small number were unsure and another handful of participants felt it was just renaming of something that had been happening for a long time. The majority of comments point to participants thinking social innovation is important or important but difficult and many commented on the collaborative and co-productive potential of social innovation.

![Image: Social innovation is:

- Vital as we need to find smarter ways to deliver solutions where govt/tax money is reducing and demand is increasing.
- An imperative! Needs to be part of the fabric but not an end in itself.
- Increasingly important. Need to facilitate meetings/relationships across different sectors and not rely on serendipity.
- Exciting! Potential for greater cross sector collaboration and "real" involvement of beneficiaries in the process from start to finish.

Figure 3- quotes about social innovation from participants


Social Innovation NI Context

Building Change Trust (BCT) shared their report "Social Innovation Ecosystems, what the concept means, how this has been applied elsewhere, and a proposal for Northern Ireland” with participants before the event. At the start of each event Paul Braithwaite of BCT also shared a presentation, which included highlights from the report such as a definition, examples and clarity on the proposal. Links to these resources:


A snapshot of social innovation knowledge

At both events participants shared examples of social innovations, and supports for social innovations on cards. These were then reviewed by those present and the potential for them to be adopted, adapted and/or amplified (scaled) was considered. In both locations, most of the examples were judged to have high potential as figure 4 illustrates.

Around 100 examples of social innovations and 30 examples of supports were shared and rated by participants across the two events. Building Change Trust are looking into using this as the start of an online, crowd-sourced knowledge bank around social innovation.

The innovations and supports were also categorised by participants according to extent to which they worked in an open, social manner (social means) and the extent to which they have social rather than private purpose were considered with nearly all of the innovations and supports identified as having both social purpose and social means.

Innovations and supports were also categorized against the point on an innovation spiral that they are operating, or aim to support. There is a bulge in the number of innovations who are at prototype stage (figure 5).
Similarly to the stages of social innovations themselves, the supports for social innovation taper off from 21/28 that are focused on prompts to only 2/28 identified as supporting system change. We recognise that it may be difficult to capture social innovations that have been scaled or are system-changing, since they may no longer seem to be innovative. Nonetheless the extent to which system changing innovations can be supported may be an interesting topic for Social Innovation NI going forward.

We also categorised the social innovations by sectors or themes (figure 6). The highest percentage could be classified as health and wellbeing innovations. Many of the innovations could be categorised in more than one theme, e.g. iPad Engage could be considered both a health and well-being and a technology innovation. This is significant for Social Innovation NI, since over-focus on particular topics might limit potential.
We have also categorised the **social innovation supports** by type, these were spread fairly evenly across five categories, as shown in figure 7.

The examples of supports for social innovation that were shared at the events do not include the full range of potential enabling approaches as identified in the Building Change Trust report on social innovation ecosystems (figure 8) and the finance and funding examples were mostly of grant funding.

Partners involved in taking the Social Innovation NI initiative forward may wish to consider the mix of types of supports in relation to the classification in this diagram (figure 8) and or to develop and expand their own version.

Participants also fed back a few key points in plenary sessions at the events:

- There is potential to engage more people from the private sector in this process.
- Think about different groups who might become involved, e.g. students, and how they might become aware of social innovation, and be supported.
- A social innovation award might be a good mechanism to help with profile of the concept and recognise promising practices.
- Look more at the role of technology
- Consider thematic linkages
- Convene a cross-sector working group, where do all sectors come together/overlap?
Feedback

Building Change Trust collected feedback on the events using an on-line survey. The majority of comments were positive; here are a few:

- “Best event of this type I’ve been to in some time.”
- “Very well constructed and paced”
- The best bit was... “Networking with others and finding out the social innovations they are involved in”

It is very encouraging that 37 of the participants stated that they wanted to be strongly involved in the next steps of the initiative. Participants were asked to write what they thought Social Innovation NI could achieve on the reverse of their badges towards the end of the events (figure 9).

Figure 8 - Opportunities for Social Innovation NI
Finally, participants responses to the barriers that they saw to Social Innovation NI fulfilling these opportunities are shown in figure 10.

Figure 9- Barriers to achieving the opportunities identified

A Storify capturing some of the Twitter coverage of the events is available at: https://storify.com/inglisjen/social-innovation-ni-derry-londonderry-14-01-16

**Next steps**

Building Change Trust is working with The Melting Pot to bring those who might provide social innovation support under a Social Innovation Northern Ireland umbrella together in one or more workshops. The immediate aim is to create a vision for what might be possible, start to shape a theory of how Social Innovation NI might support change. We may also identify groups of “end users” of Social Innovation NI in order to scope further engagement to better understand their need and hopes.