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Social Innovation Ecosystem - focus on Public Policy - a case study of the Aveiro Region, Portugal

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Abstract

Social innovation has progressively occupied a prominence place in supranational, national, and increasingly regional and local political action. It is with this scenario by the literature review and research by national, regional, and local strategic documents that the profile of public policy support in the Aveiro Region (NUTSIII) is obtained. In the Central Region, the University of Aveiro and other entities has been working in partnership with the Regional and Local Authorities to promote the Social Innovation Ecosystem, however, without the expected intensity in the involvement and training of the local community.

Introduction

The concept of Innovation and Social Innovation (SI) has evolved over decades, the latter having more than 200 years of theorization. While market-oriented innovations are motivated exclusively by private economic purposes, SI is driven by the resolution of societal challenges, not satisfied by the Market or by the State. "SI are innovations that are social in their purposes and in their means" (BEPA, 2010, p.33). By the positive social results, they are not only good for society but also enhance their ability to act. This mobilization of individuals is reflected in the 4th helix (4H) of the development model - Quadruple Helix Innovation System Framework - which proposes an addition to the 3 helices (3H) (Government, Industry and Universities), with the introduction of participation and joint co-creation with civil society (Carayannis et al., 2018; OECD, 2021). This concept is related to the Social Innovation Ecosystem (SIE). This metaphor imported from ecology, is based on the existence of a network of actors who work to promote the development of SI (Bloom & Dees, 2008). Some authors listed some actors who "gravitate" in the SIE: (i) social entrepreneurs; (ii) market; (iv) beneficiaries; (v) and public policies (PP). Most SI has a local or regional geographical scale, with a strong territorial affiliation (OECD, 2021). Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the dynamics of public political support in the Intermunicipal Community of the Aveiro Region (ICAR), the dynamics of social innovation in the region.

Literature Review

The paradigm of innovation and innovation systems (IS) is changing. This new concept is based on: (1) opening the innovation process and its contribution to the co-creation of solutions; (2) orientation to major societal challenges and (3) change in social practices. SI (re)emerged mainly after the 1990s, as a way of dealing with the sharpening of the socio-economic consequences of the global crisis and the need for new social responses. SI are new ideas that meet social needs (better than alternatives) and challenge social relations, focusing on value creation and social transformation through the motivation of society to act (BEPA, 2010; EC, 2013). The development model based on the knowledge society - 4H's innovation model, relates the Government, University, Industry, with the essential role of civil society (Roman et al. 2020). This interdependence in the achievement of effective solutions presupposes the existence of a "constellation of networks" of actors and institutions (formal and informal), which collaborate to promote social innovative responses and the restructuring of social relations, as well as connections to the territory and its

resources (Pinto et al., 2021; OECD, 2021). It is mainly in the 1970s and 1980s that SI gained new perspectives, especially its role in the development of the regions. SI in the territory is fostered by several social actors capable of proposing sustainable change¹ in the point of view of Moulaert et al., (2017) SI is considered as a common denominator for collective action (Moulaert et al., 2017), where Governments may empower their action to find innovative, resilient solutions that unlock the unknown potential of the territories. They are expected to create PP and develop instruments to support the emergence and development of SIs (OECD, 2021). The national governments are supported by European strategies, under which, national and regional tools are developed. It is above all on this last level that governments should facilitate cross-sectoral relations and create networking opportunities. If the SI objective is social change through the transformation of social relations and power at various levels, it is still, by itself, dependent on the broader political, social and cultural context, with the State often playing a key role in promoting, dissecting, integrating or hindering SI (Pinto et al., 2021).

This process can happen in several ways from: (i) inspiration in bottom-up solutions; (ii) creation of experimental niches and subsequent escalation to PP; (iii) mobilization of human and financial resources for its dissemination (Moulaert et al., 2017; OECD, 2021). Its importance is expressed because this is at the heartwood of the PPs agenda in Europe. It is above all with the Europe 2020 strategy that: "SI has become more visible on the political agenda (...) and the Structural Funds are used to promote them (...) and Horizon 2020 marks a clear break with the past by introducing SI into its priorities" (BEPA, 2010). Priorities remain in the European Union Funds for 2021-2027. However, according to Silva Flores and Morillo (2022) main obstacles to the SIE are: the presence of a dominant bureaucratic culture and conflicting objectives among the actors and the lack of participation. In this context, the main objective of the IS PP should be to accurately identify these obstacles and provide agents with the necessary resources (p.6). In Portugal, SI PP supports came "driven" by European lines. Although they gained visibility especially after the 2008 crisis (mainly thanks to third sector organizations), their roots were already present in the editions of the LEADER program and in the Community Support Framework III. As such, the SIE isn't robust and is recent (Pinto et al., 2021). Portugal was one of the first countries in Europe to set up, in 2014, a program using the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to promote SI: Portugal Social Innovation program. Not only that, but recent legal changes have been introduced in the social sector, such as the creation of the Framework Law on Social Economy (Pinto et al, 2021). According to Portugal 2030, SI will be mobilized in Regional Programs and will focus on disadvantaged communities faced with pressing societal problems. Its effects are felt mainly at regional and local level.

¹ - Currently, the Quintuple Helix Innovation System Framework replaces 4H and focuses more on the environment and sustainability. In this sense, the EIS operates "within a triple mandate: social, financial and environmental excellence" (Carayannis et al. 2018).

Methodology

This study contributes to a quantitative and qualitative research, based on a literature review and research by national, regional, and local strategic development documents: CENTRO2020; Strategic Vision for the Central Region 2030; Research and Innovation Strategy for the Smart Specialization of the Central Region (RRIS3) and its revision in the period of 2021-27; Strategic and Action Plan for the Aveiro Region; Integrated Territorial Development Strategy (ITDS - 2014-20); Strategy for Growth and Innovation of the Aveiro Region (2014-20) as well as other Regional and Municipal Plans and Programs (available on the websites of the municipalities), and in the database provided by the Portugal Social Innovation Mission Structure (EMPIS), within the framework of its funding models (translated here into "Results" as "Social Investment"). The identification of initiatives of interest was created by the definition of SI suggested above. This region was chosen as the object of study due to being the: (i) conference venue and interest for external speakers of knowledge of the particularities of the region; (ii) 2nd most funded region under Portugal Social Innovation; (iii) location of the UA, whose SI dynamics reflects the support of many initiatives.

Results

The CENTRO 2020 Program supports the testing of SI solutions and new social responses, a lesson that is reinforced in the EMPLOY AND APPROACH AND CONVERGE pillars, with the aim of promoting social and territorial cohesion. This is established in the Strategic Vision for the Central Region 2030 that advocates "a new cycle of support for projects (...) according to an SI perspective." There is a commitment of confidence in the public sector, reflected in the funds provided by the OP Center (COVID-19 Reprogramming), for a total of 33 million EUR, making this region the second most funded under the heading SI, at national level. CCDR-C, in turn, seeks to monitor and boost as established and emerging dynamics, having produced a document characterizing the social economy and social innovation at the regional level, that allows capturing a picture of the main initiatives of SI in the Central Region. The RRIS3 (2014-2020) did not mention the SI, but on the other hand, the review of the RRIS3 for the period 2021-27 presents a guideline called "Promotion of SI initiatives" in 4 typologies of action from: demography; poverty; unemployment and education and capacity building of institutions and the community, highlighting its importance for social and territorial development. The ITDS (2014-20), elaborated with the technical coordination of the University of Aveiro (UA), has a guideline aimed at "strengthening and empowering communities in an inclusive way" with "incentive to SI projects that enable new responses to the challenges of social cohesion". This strategy foresees the Intermunicipal Entrepreneurial-Political Region Program of Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation and Promotion of Scientific Culture, based on the platform of the Business Incubator of the Aveiro Region (BIAR), with the support of the Industrial Association of the District of Aveiro (IADA). Also, within the framework of the ITDS of the Aveiro Region, the Regional Program for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Employment was launched, for valuing entrepreneurial culture and IS, whose dynamics of stimulus to IS carried out by ICAR is part of the Platform for Support and Valorization of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (PSVEI), created within the scope of BIAR and with the participation of the UA. This program includes the dissemination of the SI potential in Aveiro Region; integration of Alumni of the UA² and the realization of the Social Innovation Workshops, through the mapping of opportunities and resources of SI. Still within this framework, to highlight the existence of a partnership between IADA, ICAR and UA, has resulted in actions such as the Territorial Partnership to Support Local-based Entrepreneurship, namely in its implementation by the Local Action Groups (LAG) Rural North and South, with more than 30 local entities. In addition, the Strategy for Growth, and Innovation of the Aveiro Region (2014-20) also aims to ensure a "Favorable Context for SI". At the Municipal level, a summary table of incentives, plans, measures, and prizes guaranteed

by the 11 municipalities that belong to ICAR (Águeda; Albergaria-a- Velha; Anadia; Aveiro, Aveiro, Estarreja; Ílhavo; Murtosa; Oliveira do Bairro; Ovar; Sever do Vouga and Vagos) is shown below.

In this municipal context, all ICAR Municipalities have a Business Incubator in the context of BIAR. With the exception of Ovar, Murtosa and Anadia, all of the others have SI projects under the Initiative of the Government Portugal Social Innovation. 4 of the 11 municipalities have initiatives such as Participatory Budgets. Also Albergaria-a-Velha, Aveiro, Estarreja, Ílhavo, Ovar and Vagos have local Strategic Plans, aligned with the principles of SI.

Conclusion and Implications

IS, from a PP perspective, values community involvement throughout the PP cycle, considering that traditional PP results are not always efficient. An approach that is possible to implement collaborative actions is desirable. Companies' investment in R&D; developing links between them and universities; the use of know-how and creativity of citizens and the absorption and inclusion of these outputs in public services and PP, are important factors for the development of territories and in the sustainable use of their resources. SI has been one of the political priorities at European level and is increasingly entering the political agenda in Portugal, with Portugal 2020 and 2030, which claims that SI will be mobilized in regional programs. The main regional programs and all the others regional and local strategies such as the CENTRE 2020; Strategic Vision for the Central Region 2030; and RRIS3 presents SI as a fundamental pillar for overcoming contemporary societal challenges. However only the later and the Intermunicipal Policy of Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation and Promotion of Scientific Culture suppose a component of community empowerment – "Promoting culture and creativity as factors of socio- economic empowerment of the local community, including through the focus on entrepreneurship and SI." In addition to regional policy instruments, several municipalities adopt programs and create/assist SI initiatives in their strategies of social action and territorial development. Highlight for the municipality of Águeda with 19 in total. ICAR's political action profits from cooperation with the UA and IADA. The first contribute politically and with projects such as the Platform for Social Innovation; 4change Students Project; SIKE; L3P and the EIS Analysis Project in Portugal, in collaboration with EMPIS and creation of the pro-rectory in this area. It would be expected, without, however, greater involvement and capacity of the community.

² - The UA has a University Platform for SI (4is) in the UA Alumni Association (AAAUA) which reflects the concern to support the academic and non-academic regional communities in the development and implementation of IS projects.

Table 1. Quantification of the number of IS initiatives in ICSR Municipalities

Municipalities	Programmes	Initiatives/ awards	Social Investment	Total
Águeda	IIII	X	V	19
Albergaria a Velha	IIII	VII	IIII	15
Anadia	II	XI	-	13
Aveiro	IV	VII	I	12
Estarreja	V	V	II	12
Ílhavo	IV	VIII	I	13
Murtosa	III	II		5
Oliveira do Bairro	IIII	IV	II	10
Ovar	III	IX	-	12
Sever do Vouga	IV	I	IIII	9
Vagos	III	VII	IIII	14
Total	40	71	23	134

Source: Own elaboration with data of the webpages of the municipalities

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