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Learning for Change: How Social Innovations empower young people in risk of marginalization and engage them in community action

September 20, 2017

Bryan Martinez

How can social innovation empower young people in risk of marginalization and engage them in community action? "By creating a means for everyone to discover and succeed in work they want to do, with the support of their community."—DBA, The Main Man (HUMAN) 193 Cooperative

The session was based on a panel of individuals whose experience and knowledge of social innovation in their communities have contributed to transitions towards a more sustainable economy. While participants shared their experience in the field and discussed the alternative forms to involve youth in social innovation, they also challenged the audience to dig deeper on how Social Innovations create new spaces and formulas to empower new generations in community action.

One in particular, TimeBank, is a mechanism of exchange where the currency is time; that is, it offers a chain reaction of connections that enable individuals to do something for themselves. Whereas a TimeBank is the mechanism, the facilitator in the community, the people are the fuel. This form of time-based currency provides a provision of services that can be measured in a time unit: one hour equals one service credit. In this type of system, an individual can volunteer to give one hour of service to another, and receive one time credit that can be received by another member in return.

As mentioned by Director/Co-ordinator at TimeBank Hull and East Riding Kate Macdonald,

"Timebanking is a way of connecting people and organizations to exchange skills and resources where time is the principal currency."

Therefore, the key to its success lies in the value it provides members of society with—a community dedicated to social change and building relationships full of connections that last a lifetime.

Learning for change : Blockchains as social innovations

September 20, 2017

Jerôme Beks

We all know about the rise of bitcoin. Bitcoins are a blockchain. Can we somehow use this technology to make social innovation rise as well? This was the question that Francisco Santos asked himself, while challenging us to develop social innovative blockchains.

Bitcoin is a blockchain, a blockchain is a chain made out of blocks. Each block contains a certain amount of information. When a block is full, it will be encrypted and linked to the previous block. These blocks altogether make up the blockchain. Everybody uses the same blockchain, so nobody can corrupt the information within it. And because of the encryption each person can only read the information accessible to them.

How can we use this technology for social innovation? At the moment we know bitcoin mostly because its usage by the dark web. A blockchain by itself is nothing more than a really big ledger and is a neutral entity. We gave bitcoin a value that is expressed in money. But we can also use this technology to record other things of value.

During a group exercise, my group suggested to share time in the spirit of the sharing and participation economy. At the moment when you volunteer, you do it out of altruism. We looked for a way to stimulate people helping other people without it costing money. Our social blockchain records the time you spent for example doing groceries for a disabled person. This person rates your help and after he reviewed, you receive this time in your wallet. This time you can later use when you need help. For example when you're old or if you just had a baby and require help. If you are truly altruistic you can of course still donate your time to the needy.

So can we use blockchain for social innovation? This session showed that yes, there are social applications to blockchain.

Learning for Change: Practical tool to identify Critical Turning Points in Social Innovations

September 19, 2017

Rouming Hu

For achieving transformation, there are decisive events, encounters and actions that push social innovations forward. Within the TRANSIT project, more than 450 Critical Turning Points (CTPs) in their social innovation initiatives were identified with the use of a tool. On the first day of the Learning for Change conference, participants were given the opportunity to test the tool in a 90-minute-session to identify CTPs in their own social innovation experience.

Practical tool to identify Critical Turning Points in Social Innovations

By looking at the Critical Turning Points (CTP) in social innovation, we can learn about decisive events for achieving transformation. One of the session organizers, Saskia Ruijsink introduced a practical tool to analyze the process of a social innovation and to identify these planned and unplanned events, encounters and actions that drive change. This tool has been applied in the TRANSIT project which has resulted in more than 450 CTPs elicited.

After a brief summary of the theoretical background, the conference-goers practiced the tool themselves. In groups, one of the participants shared an experience of a social innovation initiative. The rest of the group analyzed the narrative by using the tool to discover CTPs in the various phases of that particular experience. Analyzing the narrative in retrospect and discussing the events, actions and moments plotted on a timeline allowed to decipher what the CTP was that made the social initiative to alter. Furthermore, by sharing related experiences and other perspectives on the case the group discussions exemplified social learning.

Curious to find out more about the CTPs? Go to the TRANSIT database of the CTPs: www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/sii

Learning for Change: Are we all Ali Baba's? If opportunity knocks, build a door!

September 15, 2017

Sari Hallaj

The session set itself out to use the wisdom of the audience, based on the principle that everybody has knowledge. The organisers of the session work with JPI Urban Europe, which aims in part to bridge the gap between policy makers, social innovators and researchers.

In that spirit, the workshop focused on an interactive role-play based on a real world scenario. The organisers put forth the case of an initiative based in Utrecht: De nieuwe Jutter. This initiative, which is a citizens' initiative that instigates and organizes activities for the elderly in the neighbourhood, faces the threat of having its centre shut down if it is unable to provide new solutions for sustainable funding.



photo by Jonas Bylund

The attendees were asked to play the role of one of the 5 different case stakeholders: the social innovator; the researchers; the Alderman; the business owner; and a professional healthcare and welfare organization.

After familiarizing themselves with their roles, the attendees participated in an initial 20 min round of discussion, which brought the stakeholders together to find a solution. The audience was then asked to remark upon the round of discussion in order to pinpoint potential solution tracks and possible barriers.

Another 20 min discussion ensued, with a new cast of audience members playing the roles of the stakeholders. After this second round of talks, the audience was again asked to brainstorm possible tools in order to navigate to a solution.

The participative nature of this workshop allowed the crowd to put themselves in the shoes of stakeholders that they sometimes deal with within their own initiatives and research. It also led to a number of pertinent comments that allowed the organizers to restructure the problems that they presented. By utilizing the collective intelligence of the crowd, the session touched on the different dynamics that shape social initiatives, and gave an inclusive and encompassing vision of the challenges that stand in the way of modern social innovations.

Learning for change: Blockchain - its rise and origins

September 15, 2017

Joana Cavaco

As Francisco Santos begins to introduce his session on "Social innovation and blockchains" he explains that since he started his thesis on blockchains, he realised how diverse the world of social innovation can be. He asks the audience what social innovation is and the answers are plural.

The introduction of the first laws of technology tackle the idea that technological advancement is neither good or bad, but neutral. Bitcoin as a digital currency and even blockchains are seen as ledgers and Santos is quick to explain the story of Mr. Nakamoto, the inventor of bitcoin. At this point the session is taking a classroom vibe and it's interesting to see the participants in the panel interacting and answering questions while reflecting on the anonymity paradigm that reflects bitcoin and its currency crashes.

"What do you work for?" Santos asks the audience. "For the money" someone in the audience answers.

The globality and workability of bitcoin's processor's- the miner's- helps the audience understand that there is the creation of a chain in order to make the currency go from place A from place B. Miner's are paid in bitcoins so just like the participant, these individuals work for the money.

“What do you call a blue bitcoin? A blue bitcoin”. Francisco clarifies that the meaning of things affects how they are shared. And that effectively means that there is a new possibility for a new financialization of the world.

Ethereum is a good example of the use of blockchains- and this is blockchain 2.0. The revolutionary idea behind this is the introduction of contracts. This mechanism works for the creation of smart contracts. But how can we develop more projects like this? How can we transition to a world of sharing economies?

“Take Uber for example” is there a possibility of making it more centralised and introduce a contract system like the one from Ethereum? In the end, technology is neither good or bad.

For the speaker blockchains are the future. Working towards a circular economy is a part of social innovation and it could work with a coordination of efforts between businesses, governments and of course, citizens.

But the bitcoin market value is still somehow unstable- which causes the instability of tokens and lead to massive inflation- “10,000 bitcoins for a pizza”- but there is a positive note here, if bitcoin works to buy pizza, we can use it for many other things. Nevertheless, as for the example of inflation, there are other challenges faced by bitcoin- hacking, scaling, scamming, forking, robbery and lack of legal ownership.

With some guidance from Santos, the audience begins designing an example blockchain in smaller groups.

A system where time can be used to hire individuals to perform a specific services while contributing to the pensions of the elderly and a database that would record the genetic history of seeds by providing transparency to the agricultural chains are some of the ideas proposed by the participants. Santos is able to prove his initial point that the utilization and potential of blockchains are (and could be) the future of social innovation.

At this point of the session, the conclusion is somehow natural- we need to generate a narrative that keeps the collective together- but where will that narrative lie? Smart contracts? Francisco Santos says the discussion on blockchains is hard to conclude but hopefully more sessions like these will come generating discussion, ideas and plans for the future.

Learning for Change: Learning from Critical Turning Points

September 15, 2017

Michaela Sieh, The World Cafe Community Foundation; Coordinator Europe



Learnings and insights from the interactive workshop on Critical Turning Points that was part of the final conference of the TRANSIT project - Learning for Change: A Journey through the Theory and Practice of Transformative Social Innovation (Rotterdam, September 14, 2017). This workshop was hosted in an excellent way by Saskia Ruijsink (researcher at Erasmus University Rotterdam).

Transformation can be “a journey along a bumpy path”. Some decisive moments during that journey are less planned. These critical turning points mark moments or periods of transition in which a social innovation enters in a new phase. It was very inspiring to work “hands-on” with the Critical Turning Points tool: with the basic set-up, with the timeline and with the detailed questions. This approach creates a space for curious and deep listening and for bold conversations. The framework brings powerful questions and a clear focus for change-makers and social innovation initiatives. Looking back, reflecting, re-framing, re-imagining and then co-designing the “way forward” - a beautiful and inspiring process. I am reminded of the words by Bob Stilger who speaks about “disaster as a springboard”. Critical turning points can

indeed be springboards for social innovation initiatives - when we take the time to reflect and learn from them. I am very much looking forward to reading more about the work of the TRANSIT project team: more than 70 timelines, more than 450 critical turning points (<http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/sii>).

For our work at the World Cafe Community Foundation, this workshop provides inspiring new perspectives about the deeper developmental patterns of organisations working in the field of social change. Our thanks go to all partners of the TRANSIT team for their highly valuable contributions - indeed journeying through theory and practice of transformative social innovation. So much to explore and learn from and with each other!

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Learning for change: Work, life and policy - transformative ideas on basic income

September 14, 2017

Joana Cavaco

Basic income as a panel discussion brings together students, researcher and believers that the idea of basic income is more tangible than the world thinks. According to one of the panelists, basic income is "unconditional" and a platform on how to live. This idea, that is considered very simple, brings into discussion ethics, philosophy, politics and complex human-to-human relations.

But this topic is not only about social innovation, is about how to convince society that basic income can be beneficial and how to also include politicians, institutions and administrators in the conversation.

Internet activism, referendums and even experimentations are only a few examples on how the infrastructures of basic income have been developed and even advocated for.

The first round of the panel discussion focuses on the obstacles encountered when providing evidence to the established policy system regarding basic income (BI)- what kind of evidence do you need to present to have a discussion going and what counts as evidence to pre-established institutions?

The Basic Income Earth Network is a good example on how the idea of BI has become universal. Nevertheless, in the Netherlands alone half of the populations

agrees that there should be a BI (and this is an evolution since in the 90's the popularity of BI was on the mere 20%). But the practicalities of implementing such an idea is challenging- taxes or even contributions are considered, nevertheless, the pre-established belief systems that these ideas encounter might be the biggest obstacles to the implementation of the BI system. Storytelling is a part of the solution- connect the receivers of BI with those who contribute to it and hopefully a sense of solidarity can be slowly created.

Contributions are considered, nevertheless, the pre-established belief systems that these ideas encounter might be the biggest obstacles to the implementation of the BI system. Storytelling is a part of the solution- connect the receivers of BI with those who contribute to it and hopefully a sense of solidarity can be slowly created. But how can these stories be told and how can you convince people to commit to the idea of BI? That is the main focus of the second round of panel discussion. One of the panelists explains how his organisation created a card system implemented in which you are able to collect points, based on the idea that a BI society can be tangible and used as a model of sustainable transition. On the other hand, even with such a wonderful initiative in place, another panelists arguments "the idea of free money for everyone might be not so constructive on some areas" and that the key for a sustainable social transition towards a BI society relies actually on how this idea is presented to policy makers, politicians but most importantly, society itself.

The last round of debate concludes with a note for the future- the panelists discuss if the movement for BI should become more concise and rely on organisation interply or if "everyone should individually cook their own soup". In the lines of healthy inter-agreements, the panelists believe that cohesion is definitely better that dispersion, and that the movement relies on the interconnectivity between the different national and international organisations. The tone of the discourse is wonderfully hopeful- the panelists all coming from different organisations and groups firmly believe the movement is going global and will soon become up for discussion in many political agendas all across Europe and one day, across the whole world.

Learning for change: With and for citizens - a change from within

September 14, 2017

Joana Cavaco

As the room warms up, the participants of the session "Citizens: how to do research, design and delivery of public services" listen carefully to the speaker, who explains that this workshop will be an active exchange of practices and experiences regarding the collaboration between public servants, citizens and their ability to design research in a sustainable away while still being able to create policy and deliver public services efficiently.

"Why should we work with citizens to research, design and deliver public services?"

The struggles are many. For example, one participant explains that during a research project on poverty conducted in Amsterdam, the difficulty in using a bottom-up approach happened when the attempt to include the individuals affected was overpowered by their life and economic responsibilities. But regardless of an obstacle such as this one, there is a general feeling that a shift in policy making is happening: cold data is being replaced by warm data who is defined by the interconnectedness between those who make policies and those who are affected by it.

"You do ask people to participate in your research based on their experience but for them it has real implications in their lives" explains one of the participants as the discussion progresses in smaller groups.

At the moment, the key point of discussion is to what extent a researcher should take care of, for example, a participant from a highly precarious background who faces a serious obstacle in their personal lives.

The opinions are somehow divided yet similar- the boundaries of what is the role of the researcher is blurry in such a situation. But in the end, humanity prevails and the group agrees that helping in such cases would be the preferred course of action. This shows once again that making policies and conducting research involving vulnerable groups is incredibly complex and it depends on various contingencies such as resources and the nature of the group itself.

The solution to an issue such as this one and to the overall problem of establishing relations between citizens and researchers is the exchange of good practices and most importantly, finding citizens who are willing to participate in such projects and become a peer researchers.

Nevertheless, even with citizens that find themselves in highly precarious situations, the speakers explain that the rate of participation can be stabilized by creating relations of trust between the citizens, the researchers and the project for which they will be working. Naturally, monetary compensation is essential but the creation of standards is the most important part of the solution.

As the end of the session approaches, the speakers share their experiences in how to balance their role as researchers, as team leaders and still be able to keep the citizens participating in research projects safe. Besides this, it is also important to understand how can the publication of research results be published in a humane and sincere way that reflects the human side of the project. Participatory research is becoming more collaborative and research data can now be analysed together which allows for the creation of storytelling and it avoids the research itself being reduced to just numbers and figures.

The conclusion is then upon both the group and the speakers: warm data, ethical researching and plural methodology will eventually transform the way research is done- a change from within by, and for, both researchers and citizens.