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Chapter 5 - The Impact of Social Innovation on Local Welfare Policy: Lessons from A Capability Perspective

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Socially innovative (SI) initiatives have gained consensus in recent years as one of the modalities through which citizenship can promote democratization of local welfare provision. The bottom-up approach and the communitarian practices that characterize such initiatives have opened up processes of co-production and responsibility-sharing in which citizens can have a greater say on and actively mobilize for their own well-being. However, evidence demonstrates a socio-economic bias in participation in these initiatives, with high-skilled (although not necessarily affluent) middle-classes benefitting more from social innovation compared to more vulnerable individuals. This evidence therefore questions the capacity of SI initiatives to tackle social inequalities.

This chapter focuses on the contribution that the debate on Capabilities and empowerment can make to the analysis of the relationship between social innovation and inequalities. There has been huge scientific and policy interest in SI in the past two decades, but less attention has been paid to the possible influences that SI initiatives can have on policy learning and innovation, focusing especially on the provision of local welfare services. Analysing SI under the Capabilities frame allows us to answer the question: is social innovation capable of improving the capacity of citizens to live the life they value? Even more important: are local public bodies able to learn from successful SI and improve their capacity to cope with the increasing diversity of needs of citizens?

We argue in this chapter that SI can foster the empowerment of those receiving local welfare provision as it allows them to pursue their own values, in accordance with the principles of the Capability approach. However, the tension between democratization and socio-economic bias in access to SI can only be resolved by the full integration of service users into local public welfare provision. Though local public policy plays an important role in determining the set of entitlements offered to citizens, its role and relationships with SI have largely been ignored within the scientific literature. In fact, to date, the literature has mostly focused on how public policy can foster SI, with much less attention to how innovation can trigger a process of policy learning by public bodies. We argue that SIs in themselves are rarely able to generate collective empowerment in society, because of their limited number of participants, the difficulty of scalability outside their original context, and their incapacity of involving the most excluded and vulnerable population strata. However, their capacity to cope with the increasing diversity of citizens' needs can inspire public intervention. At the same time, public leadership can preserve the redistributive nature of policies, which may be undermined if social innovation is led by private promoters (Martinelli, 2012). The capacity of the public sector to learn from SI can produce positive benefits for local public policy, which can be transformed to intercept and respond to the needs of citizens in general, or to those of target groups, thereby increasing collective empowerment. Therefore, SI is a potential

win-win outcome, but only if public policy learns from rather than delegating services to it.

In this chapter we start filling this gap by addressing the potential of local policy innovation to impact on citizens' welfare and on social inequalities. Particular attention is given to how SI may have a role in southern European Welfare states (Ferrera, 1996). In fact, Southern European welfare models have been particularly vulnerable to the 'new social risks' triggered by the post-industrial transformation (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005, 2007). These new social risks have impacted particularly hard in the familiastic system which characterize South Europe (Saraceno and Keck, 2011; Marí-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes, 2013). Social innovation may thus play a role in how inequalities are tackled by public policies in these societies (Martinelli, 2012).

The chapter is organised as follows. We first reflect on the definition of SI in the light of the Capability approach. Next, we consider the socioeconomic bias that often characterises experiences of SI. We then explore why SI is relevant to local public policy, and consider the challenges and policy lessons raised. We conclude with a reflection of how Southern European Welfare States may provide a complex context for SI.

Defining Social Innovation using the Capability Approach

The concept of social innovation has been extensively debated in recent years across several different disciplinary perspectives. It has reached the status of a "quasi-concept" (Jenson, 2015), since it remains empirically controversial, is characterised by multiple meanings, and has been advocated by neoliberal and democratic advocates in policy debates (van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016; Montgomery, 2016). Several attempts to define it have been proposed, but the neoliberal definition offered by BEPA (2010) remains that most widely adopted (Martinelli, 2012). In this definition, what is stressed is the capacity of SI to improve the capabilities of individuals and to enhance the society's capacity to act, through innovations which are both "*social in their ends and means*" (Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018).

In contrast to the idea that innovation is associated with new marketable technological products, the adjunct of the adjective "*social*" stresses the importance of going beyond market relationships to address unsolved social problems (Ziegler, 2017). There are three main components associated with this "*social*" nature. First, SI refers to collective solutions that address social needs unmet by either the market or state (the practice component). Secondly, these solutions are distinguished by their capacity to change existing social relations (the process component). Thirdly, the participation of users should be a transformative process (the empowerment component) (Moulaert et al, 2005; Gerometta et al, 2005; Moulaert and Mehmood, 2019; Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018). Applying the principles of the Capability approach, empowerment implies that SI should enable participants to achieve what they value and have reasons to value, by participating in the definition and provision of services that are able to meet their freely chosen unmet needs. It is important to differentiate two of the main concepts relating to empowerment in the Capability perspective: what people could do ('capabilities') and what people *actually* do ('functioning') (Chiappero-Martinetti, 2008). Functionings are achieved through capabilities – which SI potentially enables (Ziegler, 2010) - while realised functioning are those beings and doings that a person enjoys at a given point of time (Tiwari, 2007). Thus, functioning is the goal of capabilities.

Empowerment links the content and processes of SI (Oosterlynck et al, 2013). The concept of empowerment is firmly embedded within a Capability definition of SI, as it can be defined as an expansion of agency (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). In Sen's view agency is the critical component of empowerment: it is the ability to make one's own choices and translate them into desired outcomes (Sen, 1999). Empowerment is thus the result of the combination of functionings, capability and agency that can occur at different levels (individual or collective) (Tiwari, 2007). A distinctive contribution of the Capability approach lies in the fact that agency is not assessed simply using the formal rights and entitlements of any particular social system, but in relation to *actual* capacity to define what one has reason to value and enjoy within such a system (Sen, 1999). Under the Capability approach framework, SI may be thought of as a conversion factor, a concept that refers to the goods and services which enable desired functionings to be achieved (Tiwari, 2007).

Three elements define relative empowerment. First, empowered individuals have agency, i.e. the ability to define their goals and act to obtain them. Second, empowerment imply resources, which is access to material and non-material assets to exercise agency. Third, there are outcomes: the combination of agency and resources may lead to a social change in which all participants have the capacity to achieve their goals (Haugh and O'Carroll, 2019). Empowered individuals exercise agency to remove social barriers and overcome obstacles that may hinder their own and others' wellbeing, that is, factors that may constrain agency (Kabeer, 1999; Haug and Talwar, 2016). In this sense, SI and empowerment are connected through the concept of social transformation (Rappaport 1987).

From this perspective, the relational nature of empowerment becomes central to defining SI. Following Ayob et al. (2016), it is possible to identify two traditions in the academic debate on SI: a weak tradition, which considers social innovations to be new or alternative practices that achieve an increase in personal utility (individual empowerment); and a stronger tradition, which considers SIs to be collaborative co-productions that change existing power relations (collective empowerment) (Ayob et al., 2016; Chiappero et al., 2017). Individual empowerment occurs when a person, following their involvement in SI, develops greater efficacy, personal competence, and the capacity to exercise agency. Collective empowerment occurs when groups and organisations acquire the capacity to influence the distribution of economic, political, and social resources and impact upon existing inequalities (Haugh and O'Carroll, 2019). We argue that one of the ways in which collective empowerment can be measured is the capacity of the SI to influence public policy, at least at local level.

In theory, one of the explicit goals of SI is to empower communities and the individuals involved in the activities within them (Sinclair and Baglioni, 2014). The key element that triggers the process of individual empowerment is thus the direct participation of citizens, as SI implies that solutions are developed with and by the participants (Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018). But if individual participation is enough to meet the conditions for the weak SI tradition, the collective empowerment required by the strong tradition goes beyond mere individual participation. In fact, from this perspective, the key element of socially innovative projects are mobilisation-participation processes: these processes should be able to trigger a transformative social change, with a consequent impact on social relations and the governance of local public policy (Moulaert et al, 2013). In the end, one of the main characteristics of SIs is their intention to invest in capacity-building, fostering the empowerment of those involved (Ewert and Evers, 2014).

This focus on collective empowerment reprises how SI has been conceptualised in the French tradition: not only as the outcome of an unmet need, but also as a politically oriented collective project (Chambon et al, 1982; Fontan et al, 2004). For this reason, SI's relationship with public bodies is central, as it can offer the possibility not only to institutionalise, but also finance SI activities and to sustain them politically. Thus, one of its main goals of SI is to change the social and institutional context in which it operates, and by which it has been incubated. Consequently, local public bodies are natural interlocutors of SI projects - not only do they have a direct relationship, but they also influence SIs by offering resource and political recognition, and learn from them (Fontan et al, 2004).

In conclusion, the collective empowerment dimension of SI highlights the resilience of public policies (i.e. their capacity to respond to changing socio-economic conditions) and increases socio-political capabilities and access to resources through individual and collective involvement in SI (The Young Foundation, 2012). However, to be successful, collective empowerment should change local public policy provision and welfare outcomes (Häikiö et al, 2017). But empirical evidence demonstrates that social innovation does not empower people equally, increasing the risk of confirming and magnifying rather than reducing inequalities (Cruz et al, 2017; Maestripieri, 2017; Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019; Avelino et al, 2019; Arampatzi, 2021).

Socio-economic Biases of SI

In theory, citizen-led SI initiatives propose new products and services that are aimed at satisfying social needs. However, these new solutions are tailored to the needs of the citizens who actively engage in promoting and managing them. In their view, these practices cover their needs more effectively and efficiently than existing institutionalised (public and private) provision models. According to the literature, the citizens participating in SI initiatives are more active and of a higher socioeconomic level than the average population in their communities (Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019). Thus, on the one hand, SI conveys positive aspects, such as improving the capacity of these citizens to make their opinion heard through participation, and increasing the capacity of local welfare services to cope with diverse needs. But, on the other hand, it may contradict redistributive policy aims; which is particularly important in the context of scarce resources following local welfare retrenchment resulting from austerity and the rescaling of policies (Kazepov, 2010).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that SI might create new inequalities (Martinelli, 2012; Cruz et al, 2017; Maestripieri, 2017; Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019; Avelino et al, 2019; Arampatzi, 2021). On the one hand, not all citizens have the capacity nor agency to engage in social innovations: studies have demonstrated that social innovators are usually more educated and active than those who access conventional services (Maestripieri, 2017; Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019). It is, in fact, empirically proven that the most empowered and participative strata of society participate in socially innovative initiatives, to the detriment of the most vulnerable and socially excluded strata (Cruz et al, 2017; Arampatzi, 2021).

On the other hand, the need for SI emerges when current welfare systems fail to satisfy citizens' needs; in this way support for SI might be used to justify reduced investment in public policies (Oosterlynck et al, 2013). The rhetoric of SI has been strong in promising the democratisation of welfare by increasing the participation of recipients (Moulaert,

2013), but it has been also applied in the context of retrenchment to justify reducing the responsibility of public actors to provide goods and services (Oosterlynck et al, 2013). A reduced role for the State is supposedly compensated for by increased action from civil society and private actors. But more welfare actors does not necessarily imply more support for all citizens equally. In fact, the most innovative and disruptive SIs are able to involve only a small number of participants. This seriously calls into question the capacity of SI solutions to scale-up and meet the needs on a wider scale (Häikiö et al, 2017). The support municipalities have given in recent years to innovative welfare initiatives has been accompanied by a reduction in direct public investments in conventional welfare provision (Avelino et al, 2019). When resources for welfare are tight, requirements for accessing services becomes extremely selective, targeting only populations that have multiple problems, leaving some other vulnerable citizens in need. Thus, the reduction or absence of public policy may reinforce inequality, if market failings are only compensated by social innovations (Martinelli, 2012; Arampazi, 2021).

As a result, the attempts at empowerment involved in SI initiatives may have unintended counter-effects, in that policies designed to empower often require people to already be sufficiently empowered to respond to a new policy (Avelino et al, 2019). The absence of policy in the area of SI may lead to the systematic exclusion of populations who lack the skills and agency necessary to participate in initiatives, and risk reducing the capacity of local welfare to cope with increasing demands.

The Relevance of SI for Local Public Policy

Public policy addresses problems, demands and needs beyond individual interests. The concept of public policy requires institutional involvement, which can come in a variety of forms (regulation, provision, etc.) and through a variety of mechanisms (discourse building, economic support, sanctions, control, evaluation, etc.). In democratic contexts, public policy also requires citizens' participation, which can come through different channels and degrees of involvement. Thus, one of the main challenges for public policy is addressing the heterogeneity of needs and diversity of demands in a community (Kraft and Furlong 2021).

Most social innovation is a local experience (Ewert and Evers, 2014). In the rhetoric of the strong tradition (Ayob et al, 2016), SI favours the mobilisation of "hidden resources" from civil society and helps visualise the diversity and liveliness of the local context (Moulaert, 2013). It entails the mobilisation of actors at a local level that position themselves between the market and public provision. These include social entrepreneurs, third sector organisations, and community and family networks (Häikiö et al, 2017). SI triggers the empowerment of welfare beneficiaries by disrupting traditionally top-down service-provision and stimulating a bottom-up process where citizens actively co-produce their welfare together with third sector organisations, private funders and the State. Thus, the 'consumers of welfare' become cooperating actors. Citizen-engagement extends to the point that they actively work to ensure the provision of services, with the risk of exploitation that free (or low paid) labour entails (Arcidiacono et al, 2018). In the most disruptive conceptualisations of SI (Ayob et al, 2017), such as that of Moulaert et al (2013), social innovation emerges from the direct participation of citizens in decision-making processes, who contribute to the co-production of welfare services.

Advocates of the strong SI tradition affirm that it achieves collective empowerment, with beneficial returns for the capacity of local public policy to increase citizens' capability.

Scholars who support SI highlight the failures of conventional service delivery to meet demand for welfare, which, particularly at the local level, is becoming increasingly diverse. Socially innovative initiatives promote solutions grounded in social relations and, thanks to the direct involvement of the beneficiaries, offer solutions tailored to their needs (Moulaert et al, 2013). SI has caught the interest of scholars of local welfare because such initiatives have been successful in meeting unsatisfied welfare needs. SI has also offered emancipatory practices that have developed in opposition to public social services and the increasing pervasiveness of market-based provision (Häikiö et al, 2017). On this basis, applying a “socially innovative” analytical framework to local policy welfare (Moulaert et al, 2013; Ziegler, 2017) underlines the involvement of multiple actors and the participation of citizens in defining social policies and in delivering services. SI allows citizens to regain their voice, increase their autonomy and actively shape how the services they need are provided.

The localised dimension of SI derives from its very nature: SI initiatives are pragmatic solutions to needs not sufficiently tackled by the state nor market. They are context-dependent and embedded solutions and, as such, typically developed by local communities at neighbourhoods or city level (Oosterlynck et al, 2013). The local level determines their development and consolidation, as local conditions and relationships are the arena in which SIs are nurtured, grow and consolidate (Martinelli, 2012; Saruis et al, 2021). The role that SI plays in the local welfare systems depends on the landscape in which they are embedded: they fit into and around institutions by doing what they are allowed to do or what no one else will. They are in a symbiotic relationship with public bodies, a relationship that is dynamic in nature and that can evolve over time (Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018).

However, the scope and activities of SI in local welfare depends upon the extent to which local authorities endorse initiatives which involve communities and integrate social logics that go beyond public and private provision (Brandsen and Evers, 2019). The role of public actors is that of enabler rather than direct provider, in a situation where the ‘privatisation’ of social services is led not by markets but by local communities and service users (Moulaert et al, 2013). However, the state’s role as an enabler might also entail exclusionary processes and effects: if SIs involve only the most capable citizens, what happens to the rest? SI might become a justification for budget cuts and outsourcing welfare services, which could increase inequality and reduce the capacity of local public bodies to innovate themselves (Avelino et al, 2019; Arampazi, 2021).

Public Policy Lessons from SI

Social innovative initiatives are a source of valuable information for policy learning, offering potential solutions to address heterogeneous and diverse needs, and dynamic channels to enable citizenship participation and effective governance networks. Interpreting public policy in terms of the Capability approach implies ensuring that everyone has the capability to achieve the functionings that are recognised as valuable by citizens. Assessing the capacity of a policy to tackle individual needs is concerned with what individuals are actually capable of being and doing. Potential achievements constitute the Capability Set of a person, that is, their real freedom to be what they want and do what they freely chose. Public policy should not focus on outcomes (functionings, in Sen’s terminology), but should provide the environment necessary for real freedom of choice that constitutes each person’s capabilities set (Bonvin, 2006). Entitlements - rights provided by the state - and commodities - goods and services offered on the market - are

not enough to guarantee genuine freedom, as this condition depends on what a person values and has reason to value in terms of beings and doings. From this perspective, the purpose of public policies is to create conditions which allow individuals to choose the life they have reason to value (Bonvin, 2006).

Policy innovation may result from learning and drawing lessons from policy precedents or societal experiences (Moyson, et al. 2017). Local welfare initiatives are “collective practices that arise at the municipal or neighbourhood level for creating or sustaining the welfare of individuals, groups or communities through the provision of services” (Häikiö et al, 2017: 281). In contrast to citizens-led initiatives, public policy is inextricably linked to institutions acting to intervene in a wide variety of issues in society. Although public policy may involve complex governance dynamics, the involvement of public authorities is a defining feature (Howlett and Tosun, 2021; Knill and Tuson, 2012). A policy respecting the principles of the Capability approach should allow participation in the policy of all relevant local actors, each of whom should have a voice in the definition of the policy objectives, actions and assessment (Bonvin, 2006).

Chambon et al (1982) see SI as a form of resistance against institutional immobility, as a way to produce new ways of meeting social needs that are not subsumed in the current institutional offer. However, to actually achieve the potential of transformation implied by SIs, their proposed solutions should be scaled-up and diffused outside the limited audience of innovators (Häikiö et al, 2017: 281). This is why assessment of the impact of SI should include its capacity to be institutionalised and become part of public policy (Martinelli, 2012; Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018). Institutionalisation is a concept that refers to the capacity of local socially innovative initiatives to have an influence on public discourse and on wider policies. The SI literature observes that successful projects have the potential to be scaled up and become integrated into the conventional provision of local welfare, thus consolidating policy change. These studies point out two ways in which this could happen: (i) changing the public discourse and legitimising the broadening and diversity of practices and solutions; (ii) the initiatives being recognised and formalised beyond the local scale, as a legitimate alternative for welfare provisions (Häikiö et al, 2017).

Social Innovation in Southern European Welfare States

Social innovation has been a promising concept in the discussion of local welfare states in recent years. As shown in this chapter, the promise of democratization of welfare services and the supposed capacity to tackle diverse needs have been arguments used by local policymakers to promote support for SI (Baglioni and Sinclair, 2018). However, the evidence has demonstrated that the case for SI has also been used instrumentally by policy makers to hide retrenchments and local devolution of service provisions, reducing the capacity of welfare systems to protect citizens from risks (Oosterlynck et al, 2013; Avelino et al, 2019; Arampazi, 2021). In fact, SI does not emerge in the neighbourhoods in which the needs are more evident and pressing, but rather in neighbourhoods with stronger social capital and civic capacity (Cruz et al, 2017; Blanco and Leon, 2017; Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019; Arampazi, 2022).

These considerations are particularly relevant in the context of Southern European Welfare States. The development of Southern European welfare regimes – namely, those in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – was inextricably linked to transitions to democracy, starting in the 1970s for all countries (except Italy), and to European-Commission led

welfare policy diffusion processes (Ferrera, 1996; Mari-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes, 2013). In contrast to other European welfare states, the Southern models emerged and consolidated over the 1980s, in the context of profound, ongoing structural changes that have led to welfare state retrenchment and recalibration from the 1990s to the present (Gallego *et al.* 2005). This welfare model is marked by its low levels of social spending – which is consistent with its development during the late industrial society when political consensus over social spending was already going down – and by the relevance of the traditional family model, based on the figure of the male breadwinner and the gender roles this entails (Castles 1993; Esping-Andersen 1999; Vesan, 2015). Some studies highlight the importance of religion and culture in explaining the survival of these traditional family values (Castles 1994; van Kersbergen and Manow 2010). This welfare regime type is characterised by the distinctive role of family care (Mari-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes, 2013). But despite the emphasis placed on the role of the family, this has not been accompanied by social policies that reinforce the family's capacity to provide well-being in the absence of institutional help. Several studies (Gallego *et al.* 2005; Saraceno and Keck, 2011; Mari-Klose and Moreno Fuentes, 2013) have highlighted the demands – and even overload – which this places upon some families, in which unpaid work is mainly provided by women (even when they work full time), in a context in which public and private service provision is insufficient to meet families' needs. This familialist approach does not compensate for the weakness and fragmentation of public assistance and social care policies supporting young people leaving the parental home, providing care for dependents or addressing the challenges of labour market transformation (Mari-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes, 2013).

Given this context, the emergence and impact of “new social risks” (NSRs) has been particularly disruptive in Southern European societies (Ranci *et al.* 2021). NSRs refer to the difficulties raised by the transition to a post-industrial society (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005 and 2007). NSRs include inadequate welfare protection stemming from labour market precarity: low-paid work; unemployment due to obsolete skills; unstable jobs and careers; and the difficult of reconciling paid and unpaid family work, etc. Some SIs have found non-standard solutions to these risks which were not covered by the welfare system inherited from industrial society (see: <https://www.socialinnovationatlas.net>).

Although policies which combat NSR follow EU regulations, they differ considerably not only across Southern European welfare regimes, but also between regions with devolved powers (Gallego and Subirats 2011, 2012). It seems that leftist governments and expansive economic periods put a premium on NSR policies' unstable, intermittent, and often reversible development (Bonoli 2005). NSR have placed the family “pillar” of the Mediterranean welfare model under unsustainable pressure such that families can no longer perform their traditional “shock absorber” role (Vesan, 2015). Middle-class households have been increasingly exposed to financial insecurity and vulnerability in southern Europe, putting into question the capacity of this welfare model to protect against risks (Ranci *et al.*, 2021).

Further analyses point to profound transformations since the 2000s in these countries, which are shaking up the Southern European welfare model. First, European integration and later the 2008 global crisis led to fiscal austerity and cost-containment policies, together with the retrenchment and calibration of income-maintenance and service provision policies to counteract population aging. The step-back of public bodies as services providers opened up new spaces for market-driven solutions, but also created space for civil society to step in (Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019). Second, the sharp transition

to a post-industrial society, with a service-based economy and with family and gender relations much closer to the neighbouring northern European countries, has sparked unprecedented challenges for Southern European welfare regimes (Marí-Klose and Moreno-Fuentes 2013). Women – entrapped by the double demand of care provision and labour market participation – have been unable to compensate for the lack of services provided by the public, while the cost of market solutions makes these inaccessible to most of the working and low-middle classes. This has left families increasingly exposed to a lack of welfare. Citizens have been forced to resort to new care strategies outside the traditional family provider model (Caïs et al 2020) and SIs have been one of these strategies (Evers et al, 2014; Häikiö et al, 2017; Saruis et al, 2021). For example, the municipalities of Athens and Madrid have both promoted SIs to abdicate from their role as services providers, assuming instead the role of local development facilitator, to the further detriment of their citizens' welfare (Arampazi, 2022). In policy discourse, the social is often considered a resource available for promoting cost-effective strategies in restructuring the local welfare services (Avelino et al, 2019).

Can we thus argue that SI might improve the capacity of Southern welfare states to provide their citizens' well-being? Pol and Ville (2009) argue that pure social innovations occurs when markets are not able to address needs. This can only occur where satisfying needs does not create sufficient profit incentive, either because the need is not sufficiently widespread or because those in need lack sufficient resources to pay for market solutions. Studies show that in such situations bottom-up mobilisation of citizens address needs (Gerometta et al, 2005; Blanco and Leon, 2017), but only rarely does the benefit created spillover outside areas with high social capital (Eizaguirre and Pares, 2019; Arampazi, 2022) and the most active citizens (Cruz et al, 2017). These initiatives require continuity beyond their purely voluntaristic nature (Maestripieri, 2017), in order to foster scalability beyond the local (Häikiö et al, 2017). The role of the public bodies is crucial (Martinelli, 2012).

The public sector role should intervene to facilitate the emergence of citizen's SI initiatives – through incentive schemes – or, more effectively, propose a process of institutionalization in which local welfare systems learn from the most effective social innovations and extend these to the general citizenship (Pol and Ville, 2009; Martinelli, 2012; Häikiö et al, 2017). One such case is the success of socially innovative provision of care for young children in the city of Barcelona (Gallego and Maestripieri, 2022a). In the most recent education plan (published in April 2021), the city has decided to invest in the promotion of a new service – called *Espai Familiars*. This service has been tailored based on the experience of SIs, and widened to the entire citizenship by public support in terms of spaces, human resources, and knowledge. What was before accessible only to those who could afford the higher price of SI provision, is now available to all those who need an alternative to traditional early education provision. This process has promoted policy learning and reformulated policy for early childhood (Gallego and Maestripieri, 2022b).

Southern European societies have been particularly capable of promoting SI at local levels (Arampazi, 2021): there are many such initiatives which address a wide variety of experiences. Examples include time banks, complementary currencies, consumption cooperatives, parents-led childcare services, co-housing, and community gardens, among many others (see: <https://www.socialinnovationatlas.net>). All have triggered increasing social participation in cities and neighbourhoods affected by crisis and social exclusion in the south of Europe (Blanco and Leon, 2017). However, as the case of early years childcare demonstrates - only through institutionalisation are SIs able to go beyond the

limitations of their voluntaristic nature (Fraisie et al, 2021; Gallego and Maestripieri, 2022a and 2022b).

To conclude from where we began: the potential of social innovation for empowerment lies in its capacity to foster innovation in public policy. It is still largely policies provided by local public bodies that allow citizens to access services that address their unmet needs, especially among the most vulnerable and excluded parts of the population. SI is extremely important in drawing attention to unsatisfied needs, but to avoid the socio-economic bias highlighted in this chapter, public policy has to step in, promoting the general empowerment of citizenship. This is especially crucial in Southern European welfare regimes, in which SI should not become a justification to trigger processes of retrenchment, budget-cuts and dismantling current welfare state arrangements (Avelino et al, 2019), but an opportunity for public policy learning, as shown in the case of Barcelona (Gallego and Maestripieri, 2022a and 2022b).

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