Open Societal Innovation

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the concept of open societal innovation is briefly described. Regarding government, administration and society, the first early pioneers have made their experiences in combing open innovation approaches with information technology. A compact analysis summarizes already experienced strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this approach in the public sector.

General Terms

Management, Human Factors

Keywords

Open Innovation, Open Societal Innovation, Foresight Process, National Dialogue on Germany's Future, Geovation Challenge.

1. INTRODUCTION

The strategic opening of the innovation processes of organizations towards their environment is called "open innovation" in business administration. The aim is to extend the circle of those who potentially provide and use ideas to improve the innovative strength of an organization by people who are not necessarily employed by the organization. This extension allows external actors to contribute with their ideas to an existing organization (outside-in), to use internally generated ideas (inside-out) and thus enhance ideas in a common effort (coupled). Companies such as Dell (http://www.ideastorm.com), Deutsche Telekom (T-City Friedrichshafen: http://www.t-city.de) and Tchibo (https://www.tchibo-ideas.de) already benefit from open innovation for some time. They rely on customers and suppliers as sources of ideas for innovation and further improvement of existing products and services.

Johann Herzberg shows in his work on state modernization through open innovation that the concepts of open innovation are under certain circumstances transferable to the public sector. He combines the approaches with state modernization research, innovation management, knowledge management, and aspects of open government. He sees open state modernization primarily as a learning process in which politics and administration are equally involved [2]. Henry Chesbrough and Alberto Di Minin propose to speak of "open social innovation" in social innovation context [1].

2. OPEN SOCIETAL INNOVATION

Both sides, politics and government, have a long standing tradition of benefitting from these thoughts in the established state organization. Politicians, especially newcomers in the political arena, propose regularly new ideas and impulses in various political parties. Parties extend their electoral and government programs with adequate external ideas and suggestions, especially if they increase the attractiveness for their voters. Citizens elect in regular intervals new members and party representatives in parliaments, which bring their own "wind of change" in the parliamentary work. This has its effects: Parliaments decide about these impulses, now transformed in legal text and formulated not only by the ministerial bureaucracy, the representatives and their team, but also improved by hearings and consultations through the participation of external stakeholders, lobbyists and professors. The public administration is then responsible for the consequent implementation and enforcement of these laws. In case the bureaucratic procedures are inadequate and in need of improvement, these could be revised quickly within the administrative organizational and process management. The implementation of the laws is also accompanied by the media, which tracks undesirable developments, describes them pointedly and comments them with recommendations for improvement. In addition, open innovation might also be used to solve social issues and to generate social innovation in society, politics and economy.

In the 2012 alemannic definition the approach is understood as follows: "Open societal innovation refers to the adaptation and subsequent sustainable use of appropriate open innovation approaches from business, adapted and utilized by state and society to solve societal challenges" [3:1]. But politics and public administration are not the only institutions for introducing and implementing external impulses. Also the civil society and the citizens can be a major source to increase the innovative potential of society and for all areas of civic life, for example in education, art, culture, sports and recreation. Particularly desirable is the creation of an "innovation culture" that appeals to and includes all societal actors equally, thus providing innovative potential for the community. Creativity workshops, world cafés, open space conferences, citizens' councils, foresight processes and future conferences are just a few among already established event formats.

Openness in this context signalizes the socio-cultural willingness to open for a dialogue and the ability to learn. Strategic openness emphasizes the strategic commitment to thematic openness, to result openness, to process openness and thus towards an open statecraft within open structures while simultaneously waiving exclusivity. The operational openness detects the actual will to focus on citizens and to more technically oriented approaches such as open data, open information and open knowledge and to vitalize them [4:10].

3. THE FIRST EXAMPLES

As catalysts, information and communication technologies, particularly web 2.0 and social media, can accelerate such innovation processes. Existing innovation and creativity potentialities and available tools, services, methods, and events can also be used for technical, organizational, political and civic issues via the Internet. Often it is useful to link online platforms for brainstorming, creativity and innovation with real events to address the appropriate trendsetters. This could lead to novel innovation platforms and hybrid open innovation events such as bar camps and hack days. Through collaboration and the so-called "wisdom of crowds" (crowdsourcing) valuable contributions can be collected and continuously be improved [3:2].

A good example is the national "Dialogue on Germany's Future" by Chancellor Angela Merkel (Zukunftsdialog: https://www.dialog-ueber-deutschland.de), which was conducted by the German Federal Chancellery in 2011 and 2012. In this pioneering political foresight process initially 120 external experts from academia and practice were selected in 2011 to contribute with impulses for the following three questions about the future of Germany: How do we want to live together in future? How do we want to earn a living? How do we want to learn? After a first round, Chancellor Merkel opened in 2012 the additional civil dialogue. All interested citizens could bring in their ideas and suggestions for the same three questions using the internet platform "dialog-ueber-deutschland.de", three citizens' dialogues and conferences. As a result, there are a number of proposals which were partly taken for immediately implementation, partly adopted in the party election programs for the federal election in 2013 [6].

The British Ordnance Survey relies on open innovation since 2009. With their Geovation Challenge (http://www.geovation.org.uk/geovationchallenge) it has already institutionalized this approach in form of a competition. The Ordnance Survey devotes itself on a regular basis to a specific question with social importance. It publishes the associated spatial data, runs workshops (pow-wows and bar camps) and invites innovators to submit solutions: How can Britain feed Itself? How can we improve transport in Britain? How can we transform neighborhoods in Britain together? How can we help British business to improve environmental performance? How can we encourage active lifestyles in Britain? The winners receive a reputable start-up investment for implementing their idea, ideally combined with more business development services and support in the early stages. This approach is focused on entrepreneurs, developers, social groups and innovators. Government and administration promise themselves valuable impulses from these groups for the further development [5][4:26].

4. COMPACT ANALYSIS

Diverse approaches and procedures are possible for open societal innovation. As part of the project "eSociety Bodensee 2020" (http://www.esocietybodensee2020.org), funded by the international Lake Constance University, the participating universities and schools are collecting suitable open societal innovation tools and event formats in order to develop an online database for further usage (TOSIT: http://www.tosit.org). It is expected to get an overview over a small but very dynamic and fast-growing market from this free and open accessible collection. Politicians, civil servants and civil society should get an impression of already available services and their purposes. The team collects relevant services for government, administration and society. Categories of tools comprise of idea management, problem collection, problem solving, design, innovation management, open data management and foresight processes. The gained knowledge and the transparency of this service portfolio are relevant points for a successful implementation, but the knowhow, the motivation and the right choices are much more relevant.

Therefore, it is also essential in a second step to transfer the knowledge how to work with these tools and services. Initiators, coordinators and activists, which have high hopes for their concerns, must be schooled and trained how to use these services. It is crucial to create the necessary creative environment with the right question and the right tools for finding solutions for an addressed challenge. In fact, the number of impulses and the number of instigators could be increased by targeting interested citizens in all social areas of a networked society. This opens further access to the distributed knowledge in government, administration, political parties and society at large. This can also lead to real innovation, balanced opinion making, and common creation and design of ideas, concepts, offers, and events by and with citizens, businesses, government agencies and other relevant social groups [3:2].

Open societal innovation is not appreciated by all groups. The first concern relates to a possible increase and variety of incoming proposals, suggestions and demands, which seems to be hardly manageable in a conventionally paper-based world. The evaluation and selection of the expected volume might overwhelm the system. Yet, modern electronic tools provide elegant and new ways to deal constructively with the flood of proposals, without crushing the coordinating and supporting offices through inacceptable workloads. Existing opinion makers and policy players might fear a loss of meaning, whenever new actors successfully make their own point. In a democracy, however, this should be welcomed, because in the competition of ideas the best proposals should become more profiled and not only those proposals of already profiled masterminds. The associated costs of human resources, time and funds should be affordable with regard to new stimuli and their effects. But these should not be underestimated. For an efficient cooperation, it is advisable to think of inter-agency and inter-municipal cooperation through coordinating offices and service centers. In this way required skills could be quickly developed and transferred to all levels of government [2:96-97].

In addition, open societal innovation always bears the risk that the approach is deliberately misused by third parties to harm the state, administration and society. Especially in times of escalating conflicts and military confrontation, paid provocateurs could use such platforms to confuse with surprising claims, to undermine the constitution and to sabotage the state. As such, these services should also be deactivated if the situation requires this. Likewise, it must be expected that well-organized interest groups and lobbyists exploit these services to support their own interests unilaterally. However, each debate can be controlled much better and balanced with a visualization of intentional propaganda. Another risk lies in the possible ignorance of contributions by those who are in charge of the process. If proposals are neither heard nor accepted, or possibly even deleted, this could create a feeling of pseudo participation among the participants. This would strengthen the disenchantment with politics and should therefore be appropriately reflected [2:96-97].

Nevertheless the chances of open societal innovation for government, administration and society outweigh their potential risks. Good ideas and constructive suggestions of citizens will get a better chance of being noticed, supported and implemented. Lived participation can contribute to the enchantment of politics and to further identification with the founded results. Of course, not all proposals can be considered. However, the legitimacy of a decision process could be increased through open discourse. In addition, the expansion of the circle of innovators also means a democratization of state, administration and society to the inside and to the outside [2:96-97].

Open societal innovation refers to the sustained release of the innovative power from all social actors. Its goal is the strategic use and the stabilization of the innovative strength of society as a whole. This openness causes a change for established politicians and the public administrations with all their experiences in the political and parliamentarian process. New competences and skills are required. New opportunities open up further possibilities to include the creative and innovative potential of citizens and therefore to improve society as such [3:2].

5. FINAL REMARKS

Civil society benefits from the innovative power of its citizens in two ways. On the one hand, this is done by the constructive ideas for the further development of state and administration which could be introduced by citizens via numerous channels. This may also involve social innovation impulses. On the other hand, there is an increasing identification of citizens with government, administration and society, which should be a desirable goal for a civil society in which the state acts on behalf of the citizens and for its citizens.

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