EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Social innovation: urban strategies in a context of change. The case of the city of Valencia

In recent years, the concept of social innovation has been receiving a lot of attention from both social scientists and decisions makers. The most widespread idea among the latter is that it can be a viable alternative for solving social problems, because it seems that they can offer solutions to problems that neither government policy nor the market have been able to solve. Despite this, research on social innovation in academia is still scarce and it largely focusses on the analysis of case studies. Besides having a definition, it is essential to know the factors that brought about its materialization, as well as the process leading to its consolidation and spread.

With a view to identifying, making visible and disseminating good practice, and also reflecting on the concept, the project of the social innovation map for the city of Valencia was raised, as a result of the collaboration between the University of Valencia and Las Naves Foundation of Valencia City Council. The city of Valencia is one of the large Spanish cities that has suffered most intensely the effects of the recent economic crisis, due to the immense importance that the real estate sector and lesser technological activities had acquired in previous years. Economic regression has had important social effects, giving rise to an extremely augmented and increasingly polarised urban space. In this context, the aim of the project is to learn about the social innovation initiatives that exist in the city of Valencia, their type and origin, as well as to understand and analyse the specific social scenario in which they are developing.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative techniques have been applied alongside each other in the study, working mainly on two lines of research.

The first focused on analysing the concept of innovation, with the aim of defining common criteria which would allow us to select and characterise the initiatives. The techniques applied to this end have been: (1) documentary research, (2) conducting an online consultative survey of 51 university professionals from different disciplines on the most important aspects of social innovation, and (3) holding a focus group with experts on the matter from both academic and professional spheres.

The second line of work consisted in gathering and analysing case studies in the city of Valencia. Given that there was no existing information, local calls for projects were consulted, as well as trawling through social networks, webs and various documentary sources. This initial enquiry enabled us to register a total of 112 initiatives, which, after filtering these, were reduced to 79, classified in seven

categories depending on their main objective. Their geographical location in the urban environment allowed us to deduce some important aspects of the environment in which they arose.

RESULTS

Contributions to the definition and use of the concept

Social innovation is a term that has many and varied interpretations. As common aspects, the experts taking part in the focus-group pointed to the following elements:

- It is preferable to talk about sociocultural innovation, because there is not a single social process that is not at the same time cultural; if there is no cultural change, there can hardly be any social innovation.
- Social innovation requires creativity, which brings with it the following elements: originality, adaptation, a future-oriented approach and the ability to solve social problems. However, the criterion of originality opens up a debate between, on the one hand, opinions based on the definition of social innovation according to Stanford Social Innovation, and on the other, those who support the definition of María Elisa Bernal, based on the experiences of UNECLAC. This latter proposes that social innovation involves new ways of doing traditional jobs, and that these jobs must be replicable in different contexts, so that the novelty is not as important as it is for the experts at the University of Stanford.
- Another point of agreement is the role of the Administration. Although this acts as a source of different processes for social innovation, there are administrative structures which often inhibit initiatives being taken, and which still continue to promote standardised and unidirectional responses to complex multi-dimensional problems. There is a lack of dialogue, collaboration, synergy and confusion among the different agents promoting Social Innovation. Innovation in the public sphere is too limited to certain environments and restricted by its own economic, organisational and relational structure.

Moreover, the results of the surveys of university teachers show us the conceptual differences arising from the various disciplinary perspectives. So while economists and sociologists give great importance to social challenges, geographers, historians and healthcare professionals consider aspects relating to community development important. However, within these two groups there are also differences: On the one hand, while geographers and historians attach no importance to putting the idea into practice, this for doctors is one of the most significant aspects. On the other hand, economists highlight novelty, whilst sociologists do not.

Type of initiatives found, geographical location and relations with districts

The 79 initiatives identified have been grouped into seven categories organised according to the aim of the innovation in each of them, the category 'Social dynamics and inclusion' being the one that groups the largest number of initiatives (24% of the total), followed by the one called 'Exchange and collaborative economy networks' (19%). In all of them the Third Sector predominates over other organisational forms such as self-organisation and the private and, above all, public sectors. The date initiatives started shows a significant upturn as of 2013, which can be related to the socio-political context at the time.

Concerning the factors that propitiated their appearance, the results show that this is closely linked with the socio-demographic, economic and territorial conditions of the environment in which they appear. The innovative initiatives identified are concentrated in three main urban areas: 1) the district of Ciutat Vella and the neighbouring district of El Botànic; 2) Benimaclet, and the neighbouring districts of Algirós and Rascanya, and 3) Els Poblats Marítim.

Although it is evident that we find ourselves facing complex social processes in which different variables intervene, and whose interpretation cannot be made except after a detailed qualitative analysis, this location points to the importance of the following variables:

a) Firstly, the existence of initiatives seems to be related to the income level of the population. Literature on social innovation considers that this arises as a means of combatting social exclusion and enhancing the quality of life; this would explain the practical absence of these types of projects in districts inhabited by populations with a high income and the absence of conflicts relating to multiculturalism.

b) However, the income variable is an insufficient explanation, since the most active hubs of social innovation do not necessarily match with the worst situation. Therefore, a second explanatory variable points to the link with social and citizen movements, in our case with the "indignant" movement, which had particular impact on the city of Valencia. The date on which they arose indicates this (65% of the ones detected grew up between 2014 and 2016) and their intensity in the districts which presented a larger percentage of votes for parties related to this movement in the 2015 local elections.

c) But perhaps the most important variable is the social and associative fabric, the networks and the social capital consolidated over time. Thus, the three main innovation nuclei coincide with areas with a long tradition of formal or informal sociability, important associative hubs, linked to a powerful neighbourhood movement, an exceptionally dense festive framework, and different types of recreational or cultural associations; social networks which have been set up in response to a situation of prolonged marginalization and to territorial and social conflicts that have affected them.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research conducted enables us to conclude that, although there is a coincidence between the various specialists when pointing to the main aspects of social innovation as cultural change, creativity, adaptation, looking to the future and problem-solving ability, there are also marked differences arising from the different level of familiarity with the concept, and diverse disciplinary perspectives. In this respect, a significant point of agreement is the limited role of the Administration which, although it occasionally acts as a source of different social innovation processes, presents administrative structures which inhibit taking initiatives and continue to promote standardized and unidirectional responses to complex and multi-dimensional problems.

Moreover, the empirical analysis has enabled us to point to the importance of geographical conditions (socio-demographic, economic and territorial) in the emergence of these initiatives. Among these conditions, the poor socio-economic situation must be highlighted, but also, and decisively, the link to social and citizen movements, and the existence of social networks and the social capital consolidated over time.

KEYWORDS: Social innovation, Urban crisis, Neighbourhoods, Valencia.

1. Introducción: el concepto de innovación social y su relación con el desarrollo

En los últimos años, el concepto de innovación social está recibiendo gran atención por parte tanto de los científicos sociales como de los tomadores de decisiones. La idea más extendida entre estos últimos es que puede ser unaalternativa viable para la solución de problemas sociales, pues parece que este tipo de iniciativas son capaces de ofrecer soluciones a problemas que ni la política del gobierno ni el mercado han sido capaces de solventar (Choiy Majumdar, 2015). La innovación social ha sido, y es, objeto de relevancia política en las agendas de Estados Unidos y de la Unión Europea. En el primer caso, en 2009 la administración Obama crea la Oficina de la Innovación Social y de la Participación Ciudadana[1], dependiente directamente de la Casa Blanca, que nace con el fin de apoyar el desarrollo de ideas innovadoras que se dirijan a fines sociales. Surge en particular como respuesta al enorme potencial de desarrollo y crecimiento de las organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro con fines sociales que, a pesar de los demostrados beneficios que suponen en un país como Estados Unidos (en 2012 empleaban a 13,5 millones de trabajadores y generaban el 5,5% del PIB), se enfrentan a la escasez de recursos y a la dispersión de los esfuerzos. Entre las políticas y programas desarrollados hasta la fecha, destaca la Fundación para la Innovación Social[2], creada como entidad de colaboración público-privada con el objetivo de coordinar los nuevos enfoques vinculados a las iniciativas de innovación social con las necesidades sociales, favorecer la financiación privada (filantropía) y pública de dichas iniciativas, y realizar la evaluación de los resultados a partir de evidencias de éxito.

El concepto de innovación social que utiliza la administración estadounidense está basado en el acuñado por la *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, cuyos editores en 2003 la definen como el proceso de inventar, asegurar apoyo e implementar soluciones novedosas a necesidades y problemas sociales. Sin embargo, el incremento de este tipo de iniciativas en los últimos veinte años ha exigido la

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1.- *Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/sicp*
2.- *Social Innovation Fund: https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/social-innovation-fund*