How to approach Social Innovations. Lessons from Berlin

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0. Introduction

„Social innovation is the new global obsession”, such was a statement in the Guardian in 2008. In fact alongside with public debates there has been a large number of publications both in the social science literature (Phills 2008; Moulaert 2010; Howaldt and Jacobsen 2010) and as policy documents ordered by public institutions or done by Foundations that have a stake in that field (see e.g. Mulgan a. o. 2007). Moreover some of the research has been financed by political institutions. No wonder then that the label oscillates somewhere between the realm of science, public debates and policy circles (The Economist 2010). Policy makers have very much a stake in this. In Europe especially the EU commission has taken the lead in developing an own concept (Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) 2010) and in focussing its research programs on that topic. Thereby two different things merge to large degrees - on the one hand a social science debate that is concerned with the very notion of social innovation and on the other hand a policy discourse where the meaning „innovation” depends much on various sides in politics, their ambitions and approaches.

Social innovation as a point of reference - enriching or impoverishing analyses and debates?

In the following it will be argued that introducing “social innovation” into a debate on public policies can be helpful and enriching to the degree it reflects and makes explicit the productive character of modern societies, bringing about a plurality of new forms of dealing with social challenges. In the field of welfare politics this has two aspects. The first one is concerning new services, forms of professional and social support, ways to organize them. The second one is about finding appropriate ways to support such innovative services and to make their further implementation and upscaling part of the ongoing search for new modes of governance.

It is only in the last decades that by the debates on third sector organizations that provide different and attractive social goods and services, such as social enterprises or not-for profit service organizations’ concern with the role of civil society, plurality and diversity in creating and inventing anew modes and instruments in welfare have got more influence. The talk on subsidiarity, mixed welfare systems (Evers 1993), new forms of governance that look for intertwining the contributions of state policies and inter-sector-networks in society, an enabling state (Gilbert 2013) a. o. is part of this. However, while these debates focus on synergies, co-decision-making, co-production (Ewert and Evers 2012) and new divisions of labour between different sectors, organisations and services, the social innovation debate brings in an additional dimension. It urges for looking at the possibilities of the respective sides and organisations to bring about something new, different and possibly “better” into the interplay of state, market actors, the third sector and the sphere of communities as co-producers of welfare change and democratic governance.

This way of bringing social innovation into existing trends in welfare, politics and governance that is proposed here, goes along with two implications. First of all, no sphere and organisation has a monopoly on innovation. It may come bottom up from third sector organisations but as well top down from nodal points in state administrations. Secondly it implies to acknowledge the high impact of government discourses but as well of other key actors that shape the context for innovations and the course of their development. In consequence, social innovations can stand for very different directions in modernizing policies and services (see Osborne and Brown 2011). Given institutions and discourses (Schmidt 2010) as well as coalitions in power (Sabatier 1998) will take up innovations in different ways. When it comes to sustain, scale up and mainstream them, it is not only the soft power of culture but as well the hard power of politics that will matter much.

Taking and unfolding such a perspective on social innovations, as it will be done in this paper, is implicitly directed against another view, which we can just mention but not
really analyze in this paper. That view owes much to the history of debates on market
driven innovations, outcomes as material products and their diffusion (Rogers 2003). The
interest in social innovations is then mainly limited on their immediate practical effects
such as saving resources, helping out a specific target group or dealing more effectively
with scarce resources (see e.g. OECD 2010). The belief systems, wider expectations and
hopes that are expressed in so many social innovations matter far less in that perspective
of taking over new instruments. The dominating concern is with immediate usable items
that can be added to existing institutions or fill a gap. This is so, whenever, like in the
search for marketable innovative products, the environment of discourses, institutions and
practices is taken largely as a given that should stay respected or untouched. This means
that the utopian or reformatory “spill over” of innovations that often go beyond the tight
limits of their immediate possibilities for action tends to be neglected or even seen as
obstructive. Finally it all melts down then to a single link that matters - the one with those
in power and the question how sensible and generous they act.

Without being able of showing that in detail in this paper, we would argue that much of
these characteristics of dealing with social innovations can be found in respective
documents of the EU, the OECD and in the discourses that largely equate social innovation
and social entrepreneurship and business (Nicholls 2006; Goldsmith 2010; European
Commission 2011). Here, concepts prevail, that look at promoting innovations foremost by
the measure of their immediate practical effects in a demarcated environment. However
such an instrumental interest mostly implies to cut off social innovations from much of
their roots and allies but as well their adversaries in the societal, discursive and policy
contexts. Debating social innovations and their support by public policies in this vein would
from our point of view impoverish concepts of social and political change.

Along the lines of this introductory reflection on what we see as important when
approaching social innovations and processes of their development, we have already said
something about our definition of the subject. Putting it in a nutshell, it can be formulated
as follows: Social innovations are new ideas and or re-combinations of usually separated
items as they crystallize in practices and organizations; however not everything new is
innovative; it should appear as interesting and promising for a larger public (see: Nowotny
1997). Not only the emergence but as well the further course of social innovations depends
very much on a given socioeconomic, cultural and political context. In non-autocratic
societies this context is marked by a considerable degree of openness and change that
creates freedom but as well uncertainty. And both items define the grounds and
frameworks for the further changes in meanings and outcomes of an innovative
organisation or network.

*Intertwining arguments and empirical findings - the method of this paper*

Rather than developing our conceptualization of social innovations and their role in public
policies by a sole theoretical argumentation we want to combine analytical reasoning with
the presentation of illustrative lessons from a concrete field and place - the realm of
policies for strengthening social inclusion and cohesion as they work on the local level of
urban and welfare policies. The place we have chosen is Berlin and its central area,
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, a district with about 300.000 inhabitants, composed by parts
that represent the history of the former East- (Friedrichshain) and West-Berlin
(Kreuzberg). The framework of our study is a large EU financed research project (see
WILCO 2012; Evers and Ewert 2012) that looks at social innovations and the ways they are
or could be linked with the local welfare systems. It does so in ten countries and two cities
out of these countries, a medium sized urban place and a metropolitan situation.

In order to delineate the area of local policies for cohesion and inclusion without
separating it out as a special field that has little to do with social changes and public
policies at large, we have crosscut in our studies a view on three groups and three policy
fields. The groups are: young people at risk, endangered or affected by labour-market and social exclusion; lone mothers and migrants as groups that perceive such risks generally to larger degrees. The policy fields that we looked at are: housing and urban/community development; labour market related services and policies and services for family and child care. Our studies entailed
(a) an analysis of the local context with an emphasis on the policy and urban welfare system and the values and orientations that guide overall the local policy and the policies pursued in the fields mentioned;
(b) a study of selected innovations in the respective fields (at least three in each city); initially we looked at more innovative cases and selected finally those that were most mentioned in the interviews with key persons in the locality and policy fields. Besides general literature we based our work on interviews with key persons out of the groups, the policy fields and the innovations, furthermore on information derived from focus groups and debates in grass-root meetings bringing the various sides together around topics and items that came out of our research.

Berlin and more specifically Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg became chosen for three reasons. First of all it represents two different histories and traditions with respect to people and politics - that of the former GDR and that of the West-German FRG (Häußermann and Kapphan 2009). Secondly Berlin is known throughout for its vibrant scenes of creativity and innovation reaching from the arts over to social projects and initiatives; moreover, West-Berlin was the city where the new social and cultural movements reaching from feminism over to urban ecology were especially strong and sustainable. Ever since it attracted people open to the challenges of experimenting with new life styles and ways of coping with the hardships of urban life, as they were present in the new dynamic of the city of Berlin after the reunification. Part of this dynamic were and are the increasing challenges of cohesion an inclusion. This is the third reason to choose Berlin. West-Berlin as a kind of isle and ‘frontline city’ had been marked by low economic dynamics, a relative poor population but likewise the impact of much economic and welfare subsidies that went to this showcase of the larger West. It was a kind of protected space affordable both for ordinary people and the ‘alternative’ groups that lived from small income. This has changed much in the last decade with rents rising and gentrification, the effects of investments in mostly luxury-housing related to the partly international trend in opening up Berlin for all those groups interested in its vibrant urban life. Social cleavages have increased much and the ‘spaces’ for the various kinds of economically weaker groups have been compressed considerably by gentrification and a kind of growth that is intense but by no means inclusive. Money has run out for old style welfare policies pampering such dynamics while the innovative ways of coping with the hardships of urban life have difficulties to coexist or even getting support in a city that is increasingly ruled by market dynamics and their laws. In such a situation active welfare and urban policies that are up to these new challenges are needed more than ever - a chance for social innovations to get more attention and support?

How context matters - the line of argumentation
Along the lines of what we have presented in this introduction as our approach and direction where to go in research, we will in the following put forward three issues from our study of social innovations in the Berlin-context that should serve as illustrative points for our thesis that looking at social innovations can enrich analyses of social and policy changes, presupposed they are not focused in a narrow and instrumental way.

- First of all with respect to the aforementioned policy fields we want to point at the richness and diversity of ideas and practices that crystallize in social innovations, their roots in ideas, practices and concerns with change in civil society. Social innovations are then change agents of a special kind questioning a concept of policy and reform where society is limited to making claims and to call for change that
can be brought about only by the politics, regulations and interventions of governments and their professionals. The challenge is to give innovative practices and coping strategies as ‘change agents’ within society a place in welfare systems and their governance (chapter one)

- Secondly we will deal with the limits of solutions that are brought about by organized social innovations. Much of the grand scale problems of capitalism concerning e.g. labour markets and integrative urban development form an influential part of the context but are to large degrees out of reach of what innovative small scale organisations and their new services and support schemes can do; this calls for large scale policy initiative; and it underlines the importance of other actors and realms for bringing about change and innovations: social protest and public opinion building; the possibilities of social innovations then depend on their place in such a wider context and not only on the sensitivity of the given political authorities (chapter two)

- Thirdly we will by reference to a context of moving actors, values, ideas and pressures point at the different degrees and ways a local system of policies may take up innovations; they are reaching from tolerance over ways of incorporating innovations into given practices up to accepting them as parts of cross-sector coalitions for policy change. (chapter three)

1. Social Innovations in four policy fields - where ideas, values, and cultures crystallise

Social innovations do not come ‘out of the blue’ but capitalize on different resources, expression of concepts, circulating values and ideas, socio-cultural groups, available at the locality where they are developed and put into practice. Moreover, social innovations, perceived as indicators and messengers, response to social problems occurring at a particular time and place: They point to local areas and issues blocked off from change and inform about local opportunity structures to tackle social problems and needs. By applying this perspective on social innovations to the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in Berlin, one receives a rather mixed image of a locality that describes itself as young, multicultural, creative and ‘always on the move’. Indeed, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg represents a unique assemblage of different institutionalized countercultures, orientations and discourses such as old style welfarism or the new predominance of economism, market orientation and managerialism that overlap, intermingle and collide with each other at the same time. In particular the district of Kreuzberg, became along with the students revolution and the new ecological, feminist and anti-authoritarian movements and their counterculture ‘the’ vanishing point for dropouts, non-conformists and ‘artists of life’ who built up a collective alternative draft to the (West) German mainstream culture by pursuing innovative social practices such as living in autonomous communities, working in cooperatives or establishing anti-authoritarian forms of childcare (for an overview see: von Saldern 2006)

In the following, we will present social innovations from four policy fields where ideas, values, and cultures crystallise; finally, we give an example of a polysemic innovation materializing across policy fields. We will come back over and again to these ‘key cases’ in the second and third part of the paper.

1.1 Housing and urban revitalization: Neighbourhood Management

Neighbourhood Management (NM) is an illustrative example for an innovative setting where many strands of progressive thinking and new practices crystallize. NM ties up with the approach of “cautious urban renewal”, a major social innovation of its time developed by the planning board of the International Building Exhibition in 1982 that had become a
blueprint for urban revitalization in Berlin till the 2000s. However, NMs have further developed the principle of involving inhabitants, communities, professionals and the local economy in the process of urban renewal by applying integrated schemes of urban renewal that break-up with the tradition of welfare services “organised in separate silos” (Boyle et al. 2010, 7). The innovative core of NM, financed by a federal-regional program called ‘Socially Integrative City’, is relating spatial and urban planning with sectorial policy interventions in a defined territory. Hence, the background approach of NMs (in Berlin are 34 NM areas, eight of them in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg) is mainly about the networking among stakeholders and the pooling of local resources within areas with special development needs. In particular, NMs address residents of social hotspots such as Kreuzberg Zentrum as ‘owners and co-producers of their neighbourhood’ and encourage them to participate in local projects or even realize their own ideas (for which NMs have an ad-hoc fund at its disposal - up to 1,000€ per project). Thus as a neighbourhood located and participative project, NMs embrace the value of collaboration as key for social cohesion. Thereby, the crew of the NM, consisting of a full-time manager and two to five employees, facilitate contacts and exchange between local authorities, service providers (TSOs), cultural associations and residents in order to support informal cooperation and non-bureaucratic help. For instance, NMs invite headmasters from local schools and kindergartens on a regular basis, in order to nudge a discussion on comprehensive educational concepts for the district. Though the core of the management work is to find the right balance between three main tasks of the NM: to be a well-known, low-threshold meeting point in the Kiez, to support residents with daily-life problems through easy-to-access-services ranging from after-school homework supervision to consultancy for various social and bureaucratic problems (employment, housing, care etc.) and to build up networks among local stakeholders. However, it is worth noting that NM does not follow blueprints or best practice models that are prescribed top-down but sets its own agenda in each neighbourhood differently.

In a sense, NM ought to be a remedy for the assumed losers of neoliberal urban development processes in Berlin: the long-term unemployed, poor and/or low educated people, the elderly and migrants. By concentrating more on qualitative (‘social and economic conditions of neighbourhoods’) than on quantitative problems (‘more social housing’), NMs have been marked a paradigm shift in urban development policies. Quite often, housing companies supported NMs as a long-term investment in their housing stock. To put it bluntly: Perceived as crystallization points for innovative modes of thinking and practices that have its roots in different sectors, NM has a wider social meaning than ‘cheap dwellings for everyone’. The approach is backed by a new generation of planners attempting to change the patterns of urban revitalization and community organizing (OECD 2003; Penta 2007). Looking back, NM in Berlin, recently awarded with the ‘RegioStars Award’ as an urban development innovation by the EU commission, has been partly successful. While the general atmosphere and mutual support among residents and stakeholders improved significantly, less has been achieved in terms of recovering the local economy and enhancing administrative cooperation.

1.2 Employment policies: Job explorer

The second social innovation stems from the policy field of employment; particularly, our example concerns youngster’s transition from schools to the working world, a phase that is crucial for later career developments and prospects on the job market. Traditionally, youngsters in Germany complete obligatory traineeships during their school years that quite often represent merely a desultory and routinized attempt to bring pupils closer to the job market. On the other hand, employers increasingly complain that school leavers do not fit to their requests. In order to break-up this mismatch, the ‘job explorer’ project aims at the creation of new ways in the job orientation of youngsters by paving personal links between pupils and employers instead only between institutions (schools and companies). Hence, the project claims to establish a lasting, trust-based dialogue between
tomorrow’s jobseekers and possible employers could be regarded as innovative. A multiphase concept introduces pupils aged 13 to 17 stepwise to the working world, starting already three years before they finish school. ‘Job explorer’ invites young people to discover a certain job practically, while local companies have the opportunity to voice their specific demands on career starters. Thereby, the project avoids explicit references to stigmatizing issues such as ‘precariousness’ and/or ‘underclass’. Youngsters are not a priori perceived as ‘the jobless of the future’. Instead, mutual prejudices should be eliminated, e.g. those youngsters have towards employment in general and, likewise, prejudices employers have towards pupils that (often) belong to less educated homes of long-term unemployed. All in all, the job explorer project attempts to reduce pupil’s distance from the labour market due to consecutive phases of discovering and learning. Thereby, local employers play a pivotal role by co-addressing youngsters as future employees.

Practically, the job explorer team started their work with an extended assessment of needs by profiling a good amount of local schools and companies in advance. Based on this groundwork, cooperation with schools and the local association of entrepreneurs have been established stepwise — something that has not existed before in the district. Particularly, companies, searching for trainees but lacking resources to acquire them appropriately, appreciate support to improve their working relations to schools. In this respect, support provided by the job explorer are much welcomed: Services comprise on the one hand, the coordination of meetings between schools and employers; on the other hand, concrete recommendations how to treat pupils with respect and effectively strengthen their self-esteem — an issue to which the job explorer approach, in sharp contrast to the official jobcentre policy, is in particular sensitive. On the other hand, participating schools, obliged to offer courses for job orientation, value job explorer’s bundles of support free of charge.

Since its start in 2010, job explorer has been embedded in the local welfare system in two different phases. Within the first phase (2010-12), the project team enjoyed the privilege of being relatively autonomous due to its pilot character. Sponsored by a special funding instrument of the jobcentre, job explorer was seen as an experimental investment in new ways of vocational orientation. The project’s impression on local stakeholders during this test phase was extraordinary strong, precisely because job explorer was born out not by authorities but in cooperation with the local economy that voiced their demands on future employers while the project was conceptualized. Hence, support for maintaining the project came from all sites and across parties. As a result, the district council was forced to take action. Since July 2012, the project is financed as an ‘economically beneficial measure’ by the local economic development agency. However, job explorer has to pay a prize for its survival. Owe[d to the new sponsor, a much tighter cooperation with district authorities concerning project aims and ways of achieving them has become necessary. Nowadays, the project competes with other vocational programs sponsored by public money. Hence, the question concerning ‘measurable outputs’, e.g. numbers of mediated trainees, and the ‘scale of the project’ (e.g. number of involved schools) gains importance.

All in all, the innovative core of the job explorer project is its personalised vocational orientation standing in sharp contrast to standardized and fairly impersonal efforts by the job centres. Being less institutionalized and less managerial than mainstream offers for job-seeking youngsters, job explorer represents a new culture of job integration services that are explicitly based on small-scale projects and strong ties to the local economy.

1.3 Migrants and integration policies: Neighbourhood mothers
The situation of migrants in Berlin is a cross-cutting issue; therefore, we will pay special attention to the ‘neighbourhood mothers’ project, collaborating with migrants as a source
for promoting integration and participation in the (local) society. In a nutshell, ‘neighbourhood mothers’, started as a test run in 2008, bridge gaps between (migrant) families’ everyday lives and bureaucratic administrations, both, pragmatically and symbolically. Based on blueprints from the Netherlands and other German cities, the innovative approach is strictly resource-oriented and neighbourhood-related. Basically, the project has further developed the idea of intercultural mediators and mentors helping migrant families with educational and also family-related issues. Kreuzberg’s neighbourhood mothers, mostly migrants that completed a special qualification phase, are dealing with a wide range of topics such as health promotion, language support and child protection. By pursuing a two-way approach, neighbourhood mothers make existing support offers better known and accessible and also translate their clients’ needs and concerns in order to improve district authorities’ awareness towards them. Being a low-threshold service in practice, – neighbourhood mothers are easily identifiable by a red scarf in order to get directly addressed on the street - the project attempts to establish informal support networks and trust by building bridges among (multicultural) communities and authorities. If requested, neighbourhood mothers consult families by regular home visits free of charge. The project may be also a springboard to the labour market: neighbourhood mothers could combine their voluntary work (a small monthly allowance is paid) with a professional training in order to become a social assistant for intercultural family care. The project is coordinated and further developed by two managers of the Diakonisches Werk Berlin Stadtmitte being responsible for recruiting, qualifying and accompanying neighbourhood mothers. In addition both managers are in regular contact to similar projects in Berlin in order to cultivate professional exchange and evaluation. Moreover, the project managers established strong links between the neighbourhood mothers and other local providers of welfare services.

So far, the project has been financed by different sources, stemming from the jobcentre, the local youth welfare office and the ESF. However, after five years of existence, the project is in a somehow odd situation: Practically, neighbourhood mothers are part of the local welfare system, and there is no doubt that their services for families are very much needed. On the other hand, formally, the project is still far away of being a regular offer at eye level with established services providers, even if local partners have a strong interest in the maintenance of its contributions to local welfare.

In contrast to local authorities, pursuing a rather directive style of user interaction, neighbourhood mothers strengthen migrant families in a friendly and cooperative manner. As multipliers of knowledge and mentors, neighbourhood mothers’ services are distinctively ‘family-minded’, including not only individual users but people with their respective links to their families and community networks. The range of daily life matters where neighbourhood mothers offer support and consultancy is rather broad, comprising issues such as basic knowledge on children's development and needs, basic competences on health promotion, nutrition and sports, linguistic development, the German childcare and educational system and problems in family networks (e.g. drug abuse, divorce, violence). What differentiates the neighbourhood mothers most from professional services concerning these issues is its peer-to-peer approach. Most of the neighbourhood mothers went through similar situations as the families they care for. They understand feelings of alienations and particular needs much better than professionals, literally speaking “another language”, may do. Therefore, neighbourhood mothers take ‘real problems’ (e.g. missing knowledge about the German school system) as starting points for support - instead of adapting their services to the structures of the silo-like service departments.

Remarkably, so far the German rules for professional practice bar the ways to a regular funding of the project. According to legislation, ‘neighbourhood mother’ is not an official job profile which is the precondition for achieving the status of a regular public service. This tedious process of receiving professional recognition says much about neighbourhood
mothers’ limited impact towards welfare politics. Representing a new service pattern, combining professional practices and working modes at the crossroads of different spheres, neighbourhood mothers remain strangers in the field of established service providers where ‘to intermediate’ is still perceived as a non-professional task.

1.4 Child and family care: Family centres

As all-in-one service hubs for the whole family, family centres represent a counterpoint to services organised in separate ‘silos’ for singular groups: Whereas traditional child care offers operate more as a substitute for shrinking time to care and compensates difficulties in families, family centres aim at families at risk to take over responsibility and to restore their own capacities. This complementary and holistic approach makes up for a paradigm shift by offering support not only to one group (children) but also to parents. Currently, local centres, mostly initiated by parents and sponsored by the Berlin Senate, have been installed within Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. There, family centres have full support by the local child and youth welfare office pursuing a spatial oriented approach that subdivides the district into eight social environments to be vested with (at least) one family centre.

A multiplicity of family-related services and activities are provided on a small scale: starting from giving families the opportunity to share leisure time together, receiving advice and participating in various courses that strengthen (e.g. linguistic and self-help) competences of children and parents up to regular working groups where service provides and families join in order to develop new service arrangements for the respective neighbourhood. As well-known contact points and low-threshold places to drop-in, family centres also support the work of the child and youth welfare office, e.g., by forwarding feedback from the ‘ground level’ to the district department.

Since 2006, two types of services provided by family centres coexist in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg: On the one hand, traditional kindergarten that revised their conceptual orientation by developing family-minded services; on the other hand, new established centres that were built up with the help of neighbourhood initiatives and/or third sector organizations. In both cases, the focus on families was combined with a much stronger focus on the social and urban space. This two-fold opening is mirrored in organisational terms: In order to address families, instead of children only, family centres need to capitalize on local resources and networks. Hence, cooperation is a key value, be it with existing parent-child-groups, consultancy agencies of welfare associations or, of course, the child and youth welfare office. However, it is crucial for family centres that they are not merely a junction for information about family-minded services in the district but that those services are also offered directly in the centre. This requires much acceptance by professionals and authorities for family centres as embedded instead of competing institutions where exchange, education and consultancy take place. Perceived in this way, family centres may also function as local ‘think tanks’ for networked family care services that have much leeway to propose innovative offers – e.g. theatre and artistic projects in cooperation with freelance artists – due to their practical knowledge on developments and needs at the ground level.

Nevertheless, family centres are still widely perceived by authorities as ‘nice-to-have-arrangements’ than as regular service providers. In the long-term, an anchoring of family centres in the social and urban space needs much more commitment in terms of permanent positions and long-term planning security. The current practice of precarious one-year-contracts makes a consolidation of the relatively new approach difficult. Furthermore, authorities tend to underestimate the cultural change and practical re-learning that is needed to let family centres blossom.

To sum up: Since the last decade, families - including parents, lone parents and the communities where children grow up - have been refocused by policy programs after a long
phase of disregard or even suspicion (see as an overview for the UK: Lewis 2011). As a result, different ‘family-minded policies” (see Clarke and Hughes 2010) emerged, partly attributed with labels such as ‘early excellence’ or ‘sure start’, aiming not only at children’s need but also at parent’s and the whole families’ competences and self-help potential concerning issues such as education and family building. In this context, family centres are a social innovation mirroring a professional rethinking initiated and backed by international development in the field of child and family care.

1.5 A polysemic innovation across fields: Princesses Gardens

In general, urban gardening represents a kaleidoscope of innovative elements: an alternative use of urban space, community building and a work integration perspective for a clientele that is (sometimes) much distanced from the labour market (Blokland 2009; Harnik 2010). In Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, the ‘Princesses Gardens’ project, using urban waste land on a temporarily basis (which means that the project may end abruptly, if the city council decides to sell the area to an investor), generated multi-dimensional returns for the district such as providing a green oasis, educating urbanites in the basics of gardening and farming and bringing very different people together.

Therewith, Princesses Gardens offer a complex attempt to change people’s mind-sets on a broader scale than most of the pragmatic solutions in the realm of welfare. As a part of the international urban gardening movement, the highly attractive project pursues an alternative approach how to use urban space ecologically and sustainably. Without having concrete short-term goals (such as lowering unemployment among youngsters or caring for certain people in need), Princesses Gardens’ activists make a difference on the symbolical level. Since July 2009, the Princesses Gardens’ community accomplished a.o. the farming of agriculture crops, the building of greenhouses and the creating of flowerbeds. According to this whole approach, the rise of public concern, attention and deliberation is of key importance. Therefore, Princesses Gardens, despite its superficial emphasis on manual labour in the urban locality, succeed also to build bridges to major global discourses such as climate change and sustainability. Hence, participants get strengthened practically by making their neighbourhood a greener place to live and as citizens that reclaim a say in the usage of their urban environment. From a social policy perspective, the project contributes to (local) measures of vocational training: the activists attempt to develop new job profiles in cooperation with employers in the fields of gardening and farming.

Until today, three key convictions have been influenced the Princesses Gardens most: First, the garden should be a ‘vehicle for social processes’, second, activists should develop an experiment-friendly do-it-yourself-mentality and third, the garden should be a non-profit project. According to these guiding principles, modes of internal organisation and working have been developed. Backed by Nomadisch Grün, a non-profit limited liability company, the Princesses Gardens have been emerged through a large number of consecutive projects involving up to 2,500 volunteers per year since June 2009. Retrospectively, it is the project’s finely tuned balance between hands-on activities, educational and cultural events in cooperation with local partners that made the Princesses Gardens to a Berlin-wide innovation. Princesses Gardens’ mixed structure of activities is also owed to its organisational form: As a non-profit-organisation, Nomadisch Grün is obliged to invest 51 per cent of its resources into public education and nature protection, while 49 per cent may go to business activities such as the garden café or the selling of vegetables. Hence, the whole endeavour is a good example for a social enterprise in practice. In addition, the project, having a ‘pilot character’ for an innovative urban development policy, contributes to a fresh public debate on an old question: Who owns public space and how it should be used best? According to the managers of the Princesses Gardens, the issue of ownerships concerns not only housing but also non-profit projects like their own one promising ‘social dividends’ instead of easy money. In this vein,
the Princesses Gardens have a strong implicit impact on local politics: they put an issue to the political agenda that was neglected by the mantra of budget consolidation.

To put in a nutshell: Princesses Gardens cannot be understood in terms of measurable output (e.g. seeded plants, harvested potatoes etc.) but in terms of a broader idea that gets real in a specific place where strands of urban development, ecology and ‘friendly spaces’ conflate in the social and urban texture. Viewed from this perspective, Princesses Gardens is a visible example of what is a key characteristic of all social innovations: they have a dual nature consisting of real changes at the micro level and far-reaching (sometimes symbolical) claims for a different urban culture that go far beyond their sphere of influence.

2. Context matters much - challenging a narrow innovation focus

After having presented five fairly successful social innovations that left their mark on Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg’s social texture, one might be inclined to ask: Why do local politics not focus stronger on the up-scaling and extending of those promising examples, combining practical changes and cultural claims? What are the reasons and barriers for putting social innovations not in the centre of political efforts?

While it is inadequate to think about society merely in terms of needs and lifestyle concerns that make themselves heard to politics and administrative professionals by claims, party representatives and then get answered in some way by legislation and professional reforms, it would by a likely reductionism to see politicians and professionals as more or less willing enablers and performers in taking up what is invented by social innovations. There are problems that call for public authorities taking responsibility and there are issues of power that are not just about cultural orientation but about interest and privileges; here NGOs and social protest movements have a role in this powerplay (beyond expressing by voice more than by projects shifts in values and concerns). In this section, we will stress on three problems, being crucial for the context and political constellations in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, challenging a narrow focus that either reduces social innovations to ‘apps’ of the local welfare system or overloads them as examples that show how many small innovations finally make up for a big change.

2.1 Re-emergence of social challenges that call for state regulation

As illustrated in the previous section, social innovations have a positive impact on life in living in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, be it through the involvement of residents in the revitalization of their neighbourhoods or a better integration of migrants in the local society. Though social innovations do make not up the whole picture. The current situation in the district is also characterized by the re-emergence of social challenges that tend to eclipse the goodies and improvements emanating from social innovations. ‘Meta-problems’ such as unstable work situations, low incomes and high rents call for state regulation and a questioning of the neo-liberal agenda instead of promoting innovative but small-scaled projects. The recent ‘comeback’ of those challenges, endangering the social existence of many inhabitants, hits Berlin - a city that benefitted much from the myth to be “poor but sexy” (mayor Klaus Wowereit in 2003) - quite unprepared. For a long time being, Berlin has stood for a social compromise promising ‘a good life for little money’, not at least because of low rents. Furthermore, the city has been cultivated a status of being the home for creative workers, artists, cosmopolitans and young people from all over the world, literally speaking ‘change agents’, that sustainably co-designed Berlin as a place for unconventional life styles and innovative solutions for everyday challenges.

For those groups, discussing for instance passionately whether the usage of ‘state dosh’ (money from the state) for projects labelled as ‘alternative’ at that time is morally and politically defensible, autonomy from the state and public authorities has been a key
Those ‘good-old-times’ when more decent jobs, social housing and the revitalization of city quarters were possible due to a moderate but stable economic development and the fact that West-Berlin was pampered by generous federal subsidies are gone. Especially, in the 2000s, stimulated by the neoliberal swing in politics and the concept of New Public Management, former core values such as equality and protection became outdated by an obsessive strive for ‘efficiency’ and ‘control’. Though, hardships resulting from those reforms, e.g. in the fields of housing and employment, were not noticeably till 2010s. Despite a massive shortage of social housing - the number of state-owned dwellings shrunk dramatically from 480,000 to 270,000 from 1990 till 2010 (Holm 2011) - and above-average unemployment figures, a climate of ‘muddling-through’ had been preserved for a long time. Both politicians and Berlin citizens persisted in the belief of Berlin’s distinctive territorial and social mix allowing, a loosely living together of rich and poor people on the backdrop of a lower industrial development in the city.

Accordingly, an approach for ‘soft urban renewal’ and social cohesion like Neighbourhood Management was ought to remedy early signs of urban decay and two-tier neighbourhoods. Instead of further investments in social housing or the capping of rents, integrated schemes for neighbourhood revitalization became the panacea for social hot spots. At this time, more qualitative elements of housing - e.g. community-based service networks - were appreciated. Nowadays, as the affordability of housing has regained importance, NM turns out to be a rather ‘toothless instrument’. Despite having a good grip on reality in the neighbourhoods, NMs’ impact on the welfare systems is limited; they are not outspoken policy concepts in order to contain processes of gentrification. Especially, in the field of housing, where action requires federal state’s initiative, NMs have no say. ‘Hot issues’ such as the level of rents or the usage of public property are beyond their scope of action. Therefore, NMs are in an odd situation: As junctions of thematic networks they accumulate detailed knowledge about social problems such as housing, segregated schools or long-term unemployment. Nevertheless, NMs are not ‘real players’ in the local governance system able to change structures that do not work in practice. Instead, they are ‘add-on institutions’ working parallel to traditional authorities and welfare providers. While the latter mostly still operate alongside sectors and policy fields, NMs remain insulated counterpoints to the pillarisation of welfare and urban planning. However, in times of economic crisis, services offered by NMs, e.g. homework supervision for children, are increasingly disregard as ‘secondary’ because they do not tackle the main causes of residents’ social problems. Instead the chorus of voices from tenants, citizen groups and local communities asking for ‘meaningful action’ by responsible governments and the state is growing.

2.2 Innovations from the wider civil society are likely to be overseen
As we have shown social innovations have (to some degree) cultural but limited political power. Therefore, the dominating discourse on social innovations that is limited to the promotion of useful and largely uncontroversial substitutions to mainstream welfare and urban renewal policies, like neighbourhood mothers or NM, may also be criticized from a different angle: its blindness towards other kinds of change agents in the wider civil society such as social movements, initiatives and groups that stand in opposition to local politics and/or consciously distanced themselves from the political arena. However, being out of the ‘official context’ where decisions on social and urban policies are negotiated often allows an unbiased view on local challenges. Significantly, as the local debate in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg on gentrification and decent housing gathered momentum in spring 2012, NMs as officially supported social innovation, did not join in. Instead Kotti & Co, an ad-hoc initiative of local, mostly Turkish tenants, building up a permanent protest camp at the Kottbusser Tor in order to denounce massive rent increases in bordering neighbourhoods. Kotti & Co mobilized within a few weeks much more residents than the local NM Kreuzberg Zentrum has ever had because the initiative met the ‘spirit of time’ by pointing to people’s most burning problems: the rising of rents and the scarcity of space
for family living. Kotti & Co differs much from traditional tenants associations, which, as a speaker of Kotti & Co reported, “showed no interest to intervene in the conflict between tenants and housing associations because their clientele is not concerned”. Owed to the persistence of Kotti & Co - a.o. the initiative organised a much noticed conference on social housing in Berlin - local politics were forced to put housing as a political issue back on the agenda, something that NMs did not achieve within a whole decade. The example of Kotti & Co demonstrates that social movements and social protest may nudge the Political Administrative System (PAS) into the direction of change; something that would not take place without such persistent voices. This may change the context and conditions wherein innovative attempts such as the NMs work. Nevertheless, the partial success (the evictions of tenants have not been stopped yet) of those initiatives is rather the exception than the rule; more often innovative contributions of groups being outside the ‘inner circle’ of the local political system are ignored or belittled, even more, if they contest power relations or regulating routines of the PAS. In this case, the potential of social innovation dries out before it has been even realized or tested in practice.

2.3 Underfunded innovations hardly change established systems and welfare routines

A third strand of critique challenging a simple innovation focus argues that innovations under conditions of scarce resources cannot set free massive public investments in terms of generalized support, attention and money. In practice, enthusiasm concerning the transformative power of social innovations has to be curbed due to their limited means to initiate wider change especially in times of austerity. In this respect, the neighbourhood mothers’ project in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg is a telling example. Despite being a family-minded policy intervention par excellence, the project is far from becoming a new prototype for child and family care in the district. In fact, the future of the neighbourhood mothers - since 2007, 150 volunteers have been trained - remains uncertain caused by a fragile funding mix that may collapse abruptly, if one source dries up. Currently, the project is temporarily funded by the local child and youth welfare office and the jobcentre whereas support by the Senate administration for urban development, paying subsidies for five years in a row, has been ceased recently. As a consequence, consolidation of work, e.g. a swift transition of neighbourhood mothers to the first labour market after passing the exam for becoming a regular ‘social assistant’, keeps an unrealized task. Instead the managers of the project are still lobbying for a regular financing scheme that would release them from time-consuming piecemeal applications at different institutions and help them in becoming an acknowledged part of a wider array of professional practices and services. Taken all this into account, the neighbourhood mothers’ project illustrates how important it is to see a social innovation not just as an “app” at the fringes but as a move that calls for changes within the established professional and service system.

In comparison to the project ‘neighbourhood mothers’, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg’s eight family centres are in a slightly better position concerning, both, political backing and resources being at their disposal. Family centres are ennobled as the official strategy of the Berlin Senate to support families under stress. Though, the approach has been realized merely in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg yet; there, 80 per cent of the expenses of family centres are regularly funded by the local child and youth welfare office. All other districts do not provide money for the realization of family centres. As a result, family centres have become a key characteristic of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg’s policy for child and family care, as it is reflected in target agreements, quality assessments and regular exchange with authorities. This long-term planning security is absolutely crucial for family centres, as it is underscored by a staff member: “Regular financing gives us leeway for developing innovative solutions.” However, it is not by accident that in Berlin family centres have become real so far only in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. The district is governed by a strong coalition between the Green party and the Social democrats that is keen to flavour the local child and family policy with progressive characteristics.
In summary we have tried to sketch limits and constraints of social innovations as they showed by structural problems out of their reach like changes in housing markets; by the importance of other actors that take up issues of power and conflict such as protest movements; by tight limits for policies of funding sustainability. These constraints and possibilities to deal with them cannot be understood in a narrow framework that only knows a more or less “generous” and “sensible” PAS on the one and specified social innovations on the other hand. It calls for an approach that makes context - e.g. in terms of other actors, the power of consented policy concepts etc. part of the picture. This finally leads to our third topic.

3. Social innovations and public policies: Ways of co-existence and interplay

Depending from local constellations and configurations wherein ideas and concerns crystallize by projects, social innovation may take different routes and get a smaller or wider impact. Sometimes it is more about the limited impact of the ‘power of ideas’, sometimes, the ‘power of the streets’ is of help when it comes to stabilize or even scaling up innovative projects and practices. Once more context configurations matter very much. Since after all so much depends for welfare systems and urban planning from the PAS, various elements already mentioned play a role: the simple openness for a promising idea, attempts to do different; the political priorities that altogether with cultural openness give limited room for change as e.g. in joint programs for neighbourhood management that includes forms of empowerment as e.g. in joint programs for neighbourhood management that includes forms of empowerment. Berlin shows how many possibilities exist for making use of innovative potentials: they range from limited and interest-driven policies over to policies where the two items of reform and social innovation coalesce and reinforce each other. In this part of the paper, we will discuss, based on our research in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, four different kinds and degrees of interplay between social innovations and public policies.

3.1 Cultural acknowledgement without hard support

Some social innovations are ‘ahead of their time’, for instance the Princesses Gardens. Here, social trends as the do-it-yourself movement and spirits of ecology and sustainability converging with local particularities, foremost, urban space, temporary available for innovative and creative citizens. As a result of these coincidences an ‘urban brand’ emerged that is culturally compelling and therefore not ignorable by local politics. Princesses Gardens have become a worldwide flagship of the ‘beautiful and wild’ Berlin, celebrated in international newspapers and city guides. In order to benefit from this tremendous success, decision-makers - politicians and public servants - culturally acknowledged and de facto tolerated the Princesses Gardens by granting the project a right to exist but avoid, on the other hand, any forms of hard support in terms of fix subsidies and long-term planning security for the project. Actually, the nitty-gritty of this deal is rather unfavourable for the urban gardeners: they have to cope with one-year-contracts and are not treated as local stakeholders at eye level. For instance, the local parks department and other authorities almost naturally used pictures of the Princesses Gardens for marketing reasons on their homepages and advertising material. Moreover, politicians from all parties, especially during election campaigns, frequently visit the Princesses Gardens, praising the project as a hallmark of Berlin. Even if the innovators of the project have learnt to subvert those unfriendly take-overs, e.g. they now retain copyright ownership for pictures and confront politics with claims for a revised policy for urban property, Princesses Gardens remain in a vulnerable position: they may disappear rapidly, if economic interest by the Berlin Senate - private investors offer up to 12,5 million € for the 6,000 m² area - trumps the public strategy of cultural embrace. This situation of permanent uncertainty urges the innovators to increase their entrepreneurialism: In the meantime, Princesses Gardens have become a ‘translocal’ social innovation, existing and working at various spaces in Berlin. Since recently, Princesses
Gardens’ employees offer their skills also to schools, companies and public institutions being interested in courses about urban gardening or concrete actions to green-up their premises. Finally, it has to be stated, that Princesses Gardens’ self image is nurtured by its enormous international reputation, linkages and cooperation. Being a flagship of a worldwide urban gardening movement gives the social innovators also some degree of local power. As unanimously acknowledged beautifiers of the urban landscape Princesses Gardens cannot be ignored by the PAS.

3.2 Financing single innovations with an uncertain future
A second mode of the interplay between social innovators and public policies is characterized by the temporary financing of selected (socially desired) projects. In this case, public authorities are cream skimming the local landscape of innovative projects in order to support those ones who promise short-term use and measurable results. Vice versa, social innovators do the necessary groundwork for receiving subsidies: they promote their projects in local media and set up partnerships with established local stakeholders that may serve as their advocates in the public. In Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, ‘neighbourhood mothers’ and ‘job explorer’, two publicly funded innovations, fit this pattern. Both projects are deemed as promising experiments that may balance weaknesses of the local welfare system: the integration of migrant families and youngsters’ transition from schools to the labour market. On the backdrop of these social challenges, being much debated in the local public, financing ‘useful innovations’ is a kind of opportunistic behaviour. By granting innovators time-limited budgets for realizing their projects, the local welfare system becomes supplemented in a needs-oriented way. However, authorities may withdraw their financial commitment rapidly, if it is requested for another purpose - as it was experienced by the neighbourhood mothers that lost financial backing from the Senate after five years. In fact, this practice may contribute to the emergence of a two-tier system of local welfare providers, consisting of an established core (e.g. traditional welfare associations) and flexible organisations with few permanent employees providing ‘add-on services’, if commissioned to do so. Thus consolidation and sustainability of an innovative approach as the neighbourhood mothers cannot be guaranteed but depends on the ‘market situation’ concerning the most pressing social problems. Likewise, the design of social innovations may be re-shaped by their public financiers as the example of ‘job explorer’ illustrates. Started as a multi-phased program for pupils in the transition from school to working life on behalf of the local jobcentre, ‘job explorer’ turned into an ‘economically beneficial measure’ by the district unit of business promotion, helping local companies to find future employees at the first place. All in all: Financing single innovations could be a popular strategy for public authorities to enhance the scope of welfare services being offered without changing power relations in the local welfare system. In absence of other sources to be tapped, innovators may agree to this procedure despite the risk to lose thereby some degree of their conceptual autonomy.

3.3 Taking up new ideas, values and messages from innovations and installing policies that operate with time limited programs
It has been argued repeatedly that social innovations can also convey new ideas, values and messages that go beyond their immediately practical contributions to the local welfare system. In this case, the sole fact that they understand and do welfare or urban renewal in a different way has repercussions on the public debate on such issues. Gridlocked positions may be loosened and new visions may be surfacing. Once again, much could be learnt in this respect from the Princesses Gardens, an innovation that receives no material support from public authorities except a rather shaky permission to use public ground temporarily. Though Princesses Gardens and similar innovative projects in Berlin set off a lively discussion centring on the question ‘who owns public property’. Therewith, the former Berlin-wide policy to sell unused public property to the highest bidder, a practice that the Berlin Senate applied in times of austerity, has come under pressure for justification. Moreover, the Princesses Gardens have launched a petition, signed by 30,000 citizens,
which helped to withdraw the area they use for their project from the portfolio of the Liegenschaftsfond. Here, Franz Schulz, district mayor of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, supported the urban gardeners and took up their idea of a revised public property policy. “Urban property has to be sold with regard to investors’ concepts for neighbourhood development and requires dialogue with the citizens concerned in advance”, stated Mr Schulz in a newspaper interview, referring to pioneering projects in his district such as the art and creative quarter Südliche Friedrichstadt. There, tendering for vacant lots is based on the quality of the investors’ concepts for urban renewal in the first place and is automatically linked to a coordinated dialogue procedure among residents, applicants and decision makers. While the actual amount of the respective bid plays a role as well, it makes up merely 40 per cent of the final decision. Further calls for a structural policy change on the selling of public property came from a Berlin-wide citizen initiative called ‘Rethinking the city’. As a first success, public pressure by the initiative led to the setting up of a pilot project by the Senate authorities for Finances, entailing the selling of up to 14 state-owned properties for a fair market value to non-profit housing companies. The initiative succeeded in pushing politics forward through bottom-up campaigning and mobilizing considerable backing by citizens - two items that are usually not seen as an attribute of social innovations.

A more concrete way of dealing with social innovators’ concerns is to install innovation-friendly policies that operate with time limited programs. In contrast to the co-financing of singular social innovations as the neighbourhood mothers, taking place rather randomly, public authorities may conceptualize coordinated welfare programs dedicated to certain issues and target groups. Within the last years, much has been invented in this respect in Germany. Besides the program ‘Social City’ for urban revitalization (see the part on Neighbourhood Management), the federal Ministry for Family Affairs launched a project called ‘Local Alliances for Families’, supporting service offers at the local level that complement regular childcare arrangements. Likewise the federal program ‘parent support plus’ aims at improvements in early childhood education through more competent parents being trained and continuously accompanied by professionals (‘parent assistances’). Facing a scarcity of resources, such programs are welcomed by smaller welfare providers in the field of child and family care. In Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, for instance, the intercultural family centre ‘tam’ of the Diakonische Werk Berlin Stadtmitte, a.o. provider of the ‘neighbourhood mothers’ project, has become a model site of the federal program for parent support. Thanks to the program, the ‘tam’ has been able to enhance its family-minded services and enhanced its networked approaches in cooperation with other local providers of family care and education. Moreover various stakeholders are pooled in the local branch of the ‘Alliances for Families’ program in order to make the district more ‘children-friendly’, e.g. by a better fine tuning of existing services and a more ‘networked infrastructure’ for child and family care. While public authorities, launching those programs, may better grasp (and to some extent also streamline) welfare innovations at the local level, services providers are lured by obtaining a time-limited guarantee of survival.

3.4 Creating a shared agenda in transsectorial coalitions and networked policies

As a kind of equivalence to large-scale federal programs, local politics and authorities may involve social innovators as well by creating shared agendas in transsectorial coalitions and/or networked policies. Significantly, those attempts to share responsibilities among the variety of local stakeholders are organised around policy fields and social problems as it is demonstrated by the examples of Neighbourhood Managements (NMs) and family centres. Here, common deliberation and reflection on strategies, e.g. how to facilitate community building or how to address families under stress is of key importance. Ideally, NMs and family centres are local flagships, imbued with a common spirit to pursue integrated approaches within their areas of action. Though, the real impact of such networked policies depends strongly on their position in the local political system and their
ideas about policy priorities. If NMs are merely perceived as ‘nice-to-haves’ but are not vested with real decision-making power, their political clout, for instance in contested issues like housing, remains low (see above).

Finally, so-called ‘citizen platforms’, a procedural innovation that has been applied so far in three districts of Berlin. Citizen platforms - voluntary associations of various civil society groups, non-profit organisations and ordinary citizens - work as follows: participants agree on the most urgent tasks in their social environment and then, based on commonly developed task lists, nudge district authorities to take action. While usually social innovators call for support by the PAS, in the case of citizen platforms the assembled initiatives offered their support to politicians in case they would be willing to take action. For instance in Neukölln, a district that borders to Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, 400 people participated in a recent meeting of the local platform 'We in Neukölln', resulting in an agreement for pushing forward two social concerns: more vocational training for youngsters and a closer meshed provision on medical services. So far, the degree of civil commitment and enthusiasm emanating from citizen platforms is remarkably; especially, in contrast to NMs that are partially lacking volunteers and public support. Apparently, the new deliberative tool is appropriate to channel common requests effectively to decision-makers that are perceived as partners in the co-production of joined solutions.

Strengthening therein innovation as a reference point could enrich the concerns with bridging logics of central state action and the logics of decentralised social action alongside with a new idea of division of responsibilities between professional politics and civic action in public, urban and welfare policy. It is here where the debate on new welfare mixes and on social innovations meet.

4. Summary and Conclusions

This paper attempted to show that the much discussed concept of social innovations and their relations with policy reform can help in understanding how to bring about change in difficult times. We tried to sketch and illustrate an approach on social innovation and their development that acknowledges the importance of their context and embeddedness in a twofold way. On the one hand social innovations testify the richness of ways in search for change to be found in our societies - a context of resources. On the other hand context matters likewise when it comes to the difficulties and ways in giving these organized practices a place in public policies and governance concepts - a context of restraints. In each respect organized social innovations depend from roots in environments. Neglecting that makes it impossible to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of such innovations, their sustainability and further course.

By referring to a study of a handful of social innovations and a context under change in a central part of Berlin, three arguments have been made about what we see as important for a not reductive understanding of social innovations and of policies for dealing with them

First of all we have tried to point at the importance of the contributions social innovations can make. It has been shown that they represent a special way and opportunity to give the manifold ideas, wishes but as well proposals and professional concepts in society a practical face and meaning. Innovations work as kind of crystallisation points, picturing the plurality and richness of (a local) society where besides dominating concepts of living and coping with the challenges of urban life there are many others. Secondly it has been pointed to the fact, that a local society does not only contribute to change in terms of demands voiced by movements and interest groups but as well by cross-points and
organisational forms such as third sector organisations that represent practical forms of “making a difference”, many of them new and innovative.

Secondly we have pointed at limits of social innovations as change-agents in face of contexts marked by institutionalised forms of governance and power. Much, but not everything can be taken up in forms of the various innovative practices at place such as the ones’ that we have portrayed in this paper. First of all there are structural challenges - such as on labour- or housing-markets - that are out of reach of small-scale innovations and that lie beyond the remedies that can be offered by new innovative forms of servicing and support. Gentrification and scarcity of jobs call foremost for central action, state authority and regulation. Learning from innovations and what is within the realms of their possibilities is then insufficient. Secondly as it has been shown with respect to issues such as the interventions in urban settlements and housing markets, that the quality of state action both with respect to innovations and reforms of regulatory politics depends much from inputs of the civil society other than social (service) innovations - e.g. old and new forms of protest movements of tenants and of mobilizing public opinion. Innovative projects have the power of imagination and of setting good symbols; but it needs as well different actors in society to develop power for change.

Thirdly and finally it has been shown that there are very different ways of giving innovatory practices and organisations a place in the architecture of public policies and forms of governance. The example of Berlin shows quite a variety of interrelations between the PAS and organisations and projects with innovatory dimensions (see: Göhler et al. 2010). There are interplays that reach from near ignorance of decision-makers over casual limited support on to inter-sector reform coalitions. In many of these forms of interplay innovations count only in terms of enriching, complementing or changing service provision and mostly little in terms of modes of governing, participation and opinion building. This has been shown in sectors like urban renewal or labour market services. However, as it has been demonstrated with respect (i) to state-supported pilot schemes for a participative neighbourhood development, (ii) to new family centred service support or (iii) to the dialogue between local politicians and platforms of civic initiatives, social innovation that leads to new forms of a more open governance is possible.

On the basis of this summary of our attempt to illustrate an approach for dealing with social innovations and their potential we want to make in conclusion a proposal for further research and policy practice. It is concerning the way to embed innovation research and policy into the framework of concerns with welfare reform and democratic governance. While it is perfectly legitimate for social research to look at social changes and organisations from the point of view of what they mean as innovations and strategies for scaling them up, it may be asked to what degree setting up a kind of special innovation branch or business is really helpful.

There is indeed a centre for funding social innovations in the US-administration with own goals and funding practices (Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation 2013) and there are similar plans in the EU (European Commission 2011a) and perhaps as well by national governments. Pointing at their ‘innovative’ quality can perhaps give additional support for developing kind of policies that give social innovation a place in the overall architecture of welfare governance. However, that the innovative ‘new thing’ is better, has to be argued and proved in concrete terms such as being more fair, human, adapted, etc. and finally as well more efficient in socioeconomic terms. A reference to strengthening innovation will not help in avoiding questions whether an innovation fund e.g. in health policy is meant to support what: a better public health and health promotion? The wellness revolution? A disease management scheme? Being innovative i.e. not just different, but as well ‘better’ will always mean different things for different groups and people.
Once this is acknowledged it might be preferable both in analytic and policy terms to look at the range of forms by which public policies already make use and take up innovations without explicitly using this label. While our paper has just traced some ways found in Berlin, the real panorama will be well much wider. Since decades one finds an increasing role of time-limited social programs, pilot schemes and targeted support-schemes for ‘new’ services, professional practices or rules of the game. In many of these programs and their governance schemes one finds a mix of actors from different sectors: state, business, the third sector of associations, hybrid organisations and groups that represent community action and family concerns (Kooiman and Jentoft 2009; Moore and Hartley 2010). What do we know about the achievements and limits of these forms of relating change agents and mainstream stakeholders? What about their selectivity as forms of scaling up social innovation? Do they just support what works in short term measurable form or do they work as well as social investments where one is ready to take a risk? Into what kind of overarching discourse do the respective partners and participants get involved?

Bringing concerns with social innovations and their scaling up into this context may enrich the already ongoing debate about new “welfare mixes”, divisions of responsibility “paradigms of social interventions” (Vale 2009) and respective ‘mixed’ and open forms of governance. The degree an outspoken reference to innovation makes a difference there, however depends - as we have shown - from two critical issues. One must acknowledge what spills over in social innovations in terms of prospects and visions beyond immediate practical issues. And as a complement there must be a degree of readiness to put the wider context of institutionalised practices and policies at disposal. Otherwise a kind of new dialectic between small scale innovation and wider ranging reform will not get into motion.

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