

Social Innovation Processes in and around Multinational Companies: The Role of Social Activists and their Transnational Networks

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Transnational Networks

Multinational companies (MNCs) as key mechanisms of transfer of practices across borders, including of social innovations

But the boundaries of the multinational are not where social innovations start and stop

This is particularly important when looking at the ‘social’ aspect of innovation – for such issues, the networks that encompass suppliers, NGOs, pressure groups, arms of government, etc. are important

Hence, the focus on ‘transnational networks’



Inequality

Why inequality?

Evidence of long-term growth in inequality e.g. in income and wealth, in skills and labour market opportunities

And long-term divides in the labour market remain e.g. by gender, ethnicity, migration, social class, etc.

Policy and regulation have not reversed these trends and arguably have worsened them – hence the need to explore whether ‘private’ forms of social innovation might do so

Method

Five Countries: Netherlands, Canada, the UK, Brazil and Mexico

Two phases of data collection:

Phase 1: Around 40 cases of social innovation studied, at least two interviews in each, analyzed through QCA

Phase 2: Around five ‘critical cases’ of social innovation with multiple forms of data collection (interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, etc.)



Matching the Programme and Project Aims (1)

Programme

What role did entrepreneurs (social, political, economic, cultural) play in bringing about the innovation?

Our Project

- In what circumstances is it in the interests of social activists within, and linked to, the multinational firm to bring about social innovations?
- What resources, strategies and social skills do social activists deploy in and around the multinational to bring about social innovations?

Matching the Programme and Project Aims (2)

Programme

What were the specific context conditions that led to the innovation, and how did the process from some creative act to a social innovation process unfold?

Project

- What characteristics of the institutional environments in which MNCs operate facilitate social innovations that reduce inequality?



Matching the Programme and Project Aims (3)

Programme

What is the upscaling potential of the innovation, and can it also apply to other fields and circumstances?

Project

- How can we characterise the outcomes of social innovation?



Matching the Programme and Project Aims (4)

Programme

What was the particular “social” aspect of the innovations and what sets it apart from other kinds of innovations?

Project

Not a particular question, but this underpinned the whole project – how do the social elements of an innovation co-exist with the corporate elements?



We are looking forward to the discussion ...