

Challenges in social housing – and social innovation. Fafo-report 2013:49. Inger Lise Skog Hansen, Anne Skevik Grødem and Vidar Bakkeli

Summary

Challenges in the social housing field are extensive, both related to how to provide good services to users and how to organize social housing work. This report addresses the need for social innovation in social housing. The purpose of the project was to develop a policy analysis of the role social innovation and social entrepreneurship can play in the social housing area and within the framework of the Norwegian welfare state. The analysis is based on the literature on social innovation and mapping of the social housing field. In addition, as part of the project it was organized an innovation forum where preliminary findings from the project were presented, and participants in the field gave their feedback.

Social housing, understood both as a housing issue and a social policy issue, emerged as a separate policy area at the turn of the millennium. There have been several governmental efforts. The first, Project Homelessness, initiated in 2001, led to extensive innovation in housing and services provision to homeless people and drug addicts. The following national strategy, The pathway to a permanent home, built on the lessons learned from the first phase, but extended the social housing field by involving several other policy areas in the strategy. The current phase, social housing development programs, involves a closer collaboration between the Norwegian State Housing Bank and selected municipalities with the largest social housing challenges.

Social innovation is new solutions to social needs, which help to achieve social goals. It can take place within one sector, but often involves actors across sectors (state, market, civil society and the voluntary sector). It involves a variety of actors with different resources and expertise, and is characterized by transparency, participation and collaboration, and a bottom- up approach. Social entrepreneurship is more business oriented activities aimed at addressing social needs, where profits from the activities are reinvested in the business or in other social purposes.

The mapping of social housing in Norway uncovered few examples of social entrepreneurship, but larger involvement of actors from the voluntary sector. Institutional context and the welfare regime can influence the extent of civil society engagement and social entrepreneurship. In Norway, the state has an active role in many areas. The public sector is expected to be the main provider of social welfare, consequently there is less room for other actors in welfare provision.

Social innovation in social housing in Norway is strongly stimulated by the state, and the Norwegian State Housing Bank has an important role. Effective tools of the state

includes the establishment of networks within the social housing field, the creation of fora for exchange of ideas, enhancement of competence, and provision of governmental funding. In the first phase (Project Homelessness), bottom-up-approaches, and stimulation of involvement of other (non-governmental) actors was emphasized to develop new work approaches and measures. This has not been emphasized in the same degree in later phases. According to the analysis of this report there is less innovation within the field of social housing in recent years than what was seen in earlier phases.

One reason for the reduced pace of innovation may be that the social housing area is entering a new phase, an implementation phase. Although there still is a need for innovation in this area, previous efforts have established knowledge about effective models, best practice and approaches. This leads to more attention paid to ensuring that local authorities and other key actors implement what is known to be effective methods.

There seems to be skepticism in the municipalities of involvement of other actors within the field of social housing. This may be due to a municipal need for control of the field, and little faith in the value added by the involvement of other actors. It may also be due to uncertainties related to the possibilities of cooperation with non-commercial actors within the public procurement regime.

Public sector and private non-commercial actors have different roles in the production of welfare. While the public sector is to ensure legal protection and equal treatment in welfare service provision across the country, private actors in a larger degree can contribute to trying out new ideas and new approaches. They also do not have the limitations of established service structures in the public sector and bureaucratic systems. Private actors may not experience the same degree of risk aversion. Thus, they have larger scope of action.

The diffusion of new methods and measures are an important part of the innovation process. The public sector plays a crucial role in ensuring that new ideas that are proved effective are not fleeting and restricted to certain providers, but contributes to the development of public services. This means that the Housing Bank has an important role as a bank of competence and as a diffuser of best practice, new ways of working and effective measures.

There are two main tasks for the state to promote further social innovation:

- Contribute to the dissemination and implementation of social innovation. This means developing good systems for the dissemination of ideas, good models and effective approaches.
- Creating room for further social innovation by bringing together actors and establishing networks to develop new solutions and approaches within social housing. This means inviting not only public actors, but also users and private non-commercial actors. As an important part of this there is a need to clarify the possibilities and limitations of cooperation between municipalities and non-profit actors in the light of the public procurement regime and other regulations.