'Critical' questions for analysing social innovations in the field of labour market and social policy

(clustered alongside the 4-i-processes of social innovation;
amendments to the criteria used by SozialMarie[1]

(ZSI, Scoppetta, 2012)

1. IDEA - NOVELTY

1.1. Area of concern: Meeting social demand/societal challenges

Which social demands or societal challenges are met by the project? Is the issue at stake thoroughly analysed (background, nascency, stakeholders) and understood? Are previous activities in addressing social challenges reflected? Does the project look at a social problem in a new way? What is the new social approach or new solution offered by the project? Does the project answer complex problems?

1.2. Area of concern: Target group

How was the target group involved? What is the concrete and enduring use of the project for the target group? Does the project further the potential of the target group? Does the project contribute to society's esteem for the target group? Does the project address target groups that receive little attention?

1.3. Area of concern: Idea generation process

In which circumstances was the idea born? Who (individual/s, target group, organisation, cooperation, etc.) developed the idea? Were different views integrated into the idea (e.g. via cooperation established between different disciplines/competencies/groups)?Which obstacles have been faced when including relevant (core) partners?

2. INTERVENTION - INVOLVEMENT

2.1. Area of concern: Territorial and socio-economic context

How is the project integrated into the local and regional environment? Are relevant social, economic and environmental circumstances incorporated into the project? Which is the strategy towards target groups: Bottom-up involvement, top-down involvement, service provision? Are relevant local/regional stakeholders engaged into / informed about the project?

2.2. Area of concern: Setting up an fruitful environment

Does project realisation happen in an inventive, resourceful, creative and courageous way? Does the project foster dialogue / cooperation with other institutions / organisations? Is information on different aspects e.g. decision-making, finances and monitoring and evaluation openly shared within the project? Does the project change with changing needs (i.e. as to the target group: the way of approaching the issue or a changing project environment)?

2.3. Area of concern: Development process

Which individuals/organisations can be regarded as the "drivers" for the change? What were the success factors of the further development of the idea towards an invention? Which failures were observed? And how were they overcome?

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[1] Please see http://www.sozialmarie.org/?language=en

3. (SUCCESSFUL) IMPLEMENTATION / INSTITUTIONALISATION - EFFECTIVENESS
3.1. Area of concern: Acceptance by society

Has the project put strategies in place for reducing barriers (i.e. the promotion of: positive government policies; supportive legal and administrative framework, good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation; connections with organisations capable of scaling up the innovation; opportunities for increasing skills and expertise)? Has the idea been supported and accepted by the (region's) society?

3.2. Area of concern: Sustainability

Has the project broadened its funding base (i.e. non-dependency from single donors/mentors) as well as its knowledge base (i.e. know-how transfer between stakeholders)? Are connections to existing transnational/national/regional/local programmes, structures and strategies e.g. relationships with Structural Funds, ERDF and others being made?

3.3. Area of concern: Mainstreaming & Scaling up

Does the project encourage options for ongoing learning from both successes and failures? Have key lessons learnt led to project modifications? Have other organisations, media, sponsors, politicians been made curious? Is there a structured and supportive development process in place which assists in mainstreaming and scaling up at both governance and project levels?

3.4. Area of concern: Implementation process

Did/How did the "ownership" of the project change over time (i.e. from a single ownership of an individual/organisation towards a widely supported project)? Is the responsibility of the project shared between stakeholders? Which crucial factors were observed when building a solid basis for the project (stable financial fundament, skills and know-how of persons involved, etc.)? Have obstacles successfully been overcome (e.g. legal, financial, economic, institutional difficulties i.e. obstacles preventing the system from evolving)?

4. IMPACT - DISSEMINATION
4.1. Area of concern: Process of generating Impact

Is monitoring and evaluation ensured? How can the range of impacts be determined: By the size of groups affected (target groups and by dissemination and replication)? Are there indirect effects beyond the target groups and objectives in focus, and maybe unintended negative effects? What is the time-horizon of immediate and potential future impacts? Is it feasible to assess the end of the innovation's life cycle (i.e. becoming common practice) in short periods like months or years or e.g. generations? Have the impacts been measured? How and when were they measured (e.g. external evaluation or self-assessment; e.g. ex-post/ex-ante)? Which impacts were generated (e.g. ecological impacts, economic efficiency, distributional equity, etc.)?

4.2. Area of concern: Contribution to change

What effects – and on who – of this social innovation can be observed? Did the project effectively meet social demands or societal challenges as intended? Did the project contribute to systemic change? Did the project contribute to changing roles (of individuals, Civil Society Organisations, corporate business, and public institutions), relations (in professional and private environments, networks, and collectives), norms (at different levels, legal requirements) and values (customs, manners, mores, and ethical/unethical behaviour)? Have societal challenges been resolved, accepted, adopted and utilized by the individuals, social groups and organizations concerned?