

**NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES
MULTIDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL
FIELD: ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES**



DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY



SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

Prof. Univ. Dr. ANI MATEI

PhD STUDENT:

Vilceanu Denisa Maria

**NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES
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***SOCIAL INNOVATION AND CITIZEN
PARTICIPATION***

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Vilceanu Denisa Maria

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SOCIAL INNOVATION AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The title of the doctoral thesis is "Social Innovation and Citizen Participation" and refers to the role and contribution that citizens have in the process of social innovation. The title refers directly to the issue of the paper, namely to the involvement of citizens in the innovation process, which must develop and support the organizational and social transformations necessary to achieve the innovation objectives. Innovation depends on people, their ability to generate knowledge and ideas and apply them at work or in society.

Murray et al. (2010, p. 3) define social innovation as "new ideas (products, services and models) that address social needs more effectively than existing solutions and create new relationships or collaborations that benefit society as a whole."

The concept of social innovation covers a wide range of activities, including local initiatives, government policies, and social entrepreneurship programmes. Definitions of social innovation vary according to context and discipline, but all emphasise the aspect of solving social problems through innovative methods.

More broadly, social innovation is the process of developing and applying solutions to occasional or systemic social and environmental problems for social progress. The concept of social innovation involves the highlighting of ideas and solutions that bring social value, but also of the processes through which they are generated, regardless of their origin. Innovation is often complexly defined. The simplest definition, however, is offered by Geoff Mulgan, namely he considers innovation to be new ideas that work (Mulgan, 2006).

Innovation processes have as their starting point new ideas, the finding of which involves creative thinking. It can be said that creative thinking, creativity, represents the raw material of innovation. The link between human resource management and the innovation performance of organizations is a theme developed in many publications, especially in the last decades. In the 1990s, many studies focused on "new practices in human resource management", the global label given to a series of changes related to: the organization of work relationships (including teamwork, decentralization of management and employee empowerment), continuous learning,

access to information, dissemination of internal knowledge, rewarding performances (Chen & Huang, 2009).

Although, social innovation as a phenomenon has been constantly present in the evolution of society, the concept of social innovation "has emerged in social science discourses only during the last decades, scattered in various disciplines such as public administration, history, management, social psychology, economics and social entrepreneurship" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p. 44). The literature offers a multitude of approaches to social innovation, including linking social innovation to sustainable development (Eichler & Schwarz, 2019), capacity building, digitization and urban development. At the same time, citizen participation projects address a range of related issues, including environment and biodiversity, sustainability development and health (Wang et al., 2019). These synergies between citizen participation and social innovation show their interconnectedness. The connection between these two concepts is twofold: on the one hand, citizen participation leads to social innovation, and on the other hand, social innovation amplifies and diversifies citizen participation.

Unlike other forms of innovation, "social innovation is not about maximizing profit and creating competitive advantage, but is driven by concern for communities (a social need or social problem), resulting in social change among large numbers of people" (Dawson & Daniel, 2010, p. 10).

"Social innovation is characterized by innovation, agents, structures or institutions and a social system" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p. 9). Thus, the relationship between actors and structures is the key to social innovation.

The change that results from social innovation concerns social practices. It manifests itself in "changes in attitudes, behaviours or perceptions, resulting in new social practices, new institutions and new social systems that allow the visualization of a real transformation of society" (Cunha et. al., 2015, p. 626).

Citizen participation in itself results in a change in social practices. Therefore, citizen participation can be seen as social innovation (Butkeviciene, et al., 2021). Social innovation and citizen participation share many commonalities. Both are topical, embrace (technological) advances and social goals. However, it still needs to be investigated whether citizen participation can produce long-term changes and thus also transform social systems. Citizen participation has increased in recent years, as has social innovation. Citizen participation has been framed as

social innovation in its own right and can also be the basis for social innovation and thus social change.

Social innovation and citizen participation serve similar purposes and are therefore interlinked. "Social innovation is aligned with several goals, such as: it encourages diverse changes (e.g. social, political, systemic, behavioural), involves creativity, acts for the good of society (e.g. solving social problems, improving quality of life) and opens the way for new opportunities" (Lagares Izidio et al., 2018, p. 10). Citizen participation is also a process-oriented social innovation that induces social interaction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Social innovation is about pursuing social and economic progress, and is fundamentally about distributing value to address social problems.

In the following, three relevant theories on social innovation and citizen participation have been identified, which, stem from a review of the academic literature, and consider how different disciplines and sectors approach the subject and work. These three theories highlight and open up distinct ways of thinking about social innovation and citizen participation. These theories provide a solid conceptual framework for understanding social innovation and citizen participation. Social change theory explains the mechanisms by which societies evolve and the role of social innovation in this process. Social capital theory stresses the importance of social networks, norms of reciprocity and trust in facilitating collective action and social innovation. Participatory democracy theory emphasises the need for direct and active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes to ensure transparency, accountability and legitimacy of governance. Taken together, these theories highlight the interdependence between social innovation and citizen participation and offer valuable insights for the development of effective policies and practices.

Social change theory explores the processes by which societies evolve over time, identifying the mechanisms that lead to significant social transformations. This theory focuses on identifying the factors and forces that influence changes in social structures, power relations and collective behaviour (Smelser, 1963). Social change is characterised by the following mechanisms: innovation (the introduction of new ideas, technologies and practices that change existing social structures), social conflict (tensions and struggles between different groups that

can lead to significant changes in society), resource mobilisation (the ability of social groups to mobilise their resources to achieve collective goals) (Tilly, 2004).

Social innovation is often a catalyst for social change, providing new solutions to social and economic problems.

Citizen participation is key to mobilising resources and supporting social change initiatives.

Social capital theory focuses on the value of social networks, norms of reciprocity and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation between individuals and groups. Social capital is seen as a resource that can be used to achieve collective and individual benefits (Putnam, 2000). The key elements of social capital are: social networks (the structures of relationships between individuals and groups that facilitate collective action), norms and values (the standards of behaviour and beliefs that support cooperation and reciprocity), trust (the level of trust between members of a community that is essential for effective collaboration) (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social capital stimulates social innovation by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and resources within social networks.

Civic participation is closely linked to the level of social capital in a community, with trust and norms of reciprocity fundamental to active civic engagement.

Participatory democracy theory argues that genuine democracy requires the direct and active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, not just representation through periodic elections. This theory stresses the importance of citizen participation in all aspects of political and social life to ensure transparency, accountability and legitimacy of government (Pateman, 1970). The principles of participatory democracy include: direct involvement (citizens participate directly in the decision-making process, not just through elected representatives), community development (citizen participation contributes to the development of civic capacities and skills), legitimacy and accountability (decisions made with citizen involvement are more legitimate and better reflect the popular will).

Participatory democracy fosters social innovation by promoting a culture of collective involvement and responsibility.

Active citizen participation is essential to the functioning of a participatory democratic system, ensuring that citizens' voices are heard and taken into account in decision-making processes.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE CHOICE OF RESEARCH TOPIC

In a world characterised by rapid and complex change, social innovation and citizen participation become essential to address contemporary challenges. Issues such as climate change, social inequalities, economic crises and global pandemics require innovative solutions and active citizen engagement. In this context, social innovation and citizen participation are not just theoretical concepts, but practical tools that can generate real and sustainable changes in society.

The importance of social innovation - Social innovation provides new and effective solutions to persistent social problems. For example, microfinance has enabled access to capital for millions of poor people, stimulating entrepreneurship and reducing poverty in many communities around the world (Yunus, 2007).

By creating new business models and services, social innovation contributes to sustainable economic and social development. Social cooperatives and social enterprises are concrete examples of initiatives, which promote social inclusion and provide employment opportunities for vulnerable groups (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010).

Social innovation is not limited to generating economic profit, but aims to create social value. This includes improving quality of life, increasing social cohesion and strengthening communities (Murray et al., 2010).

The importance of citizen participation - Citizen participation is fundamental to the functioning of a healthy democratic system. The active involvement of citizens in public decision-making processes ensures the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of governments (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Citizens' participation in civic and social activities contributes to fighting inequality and promoting social justice. Through volunteering, activism and community involvement, citizens can influence public policy and bring about positive change in their communities (Putnam, 2000). Involving citizens in the design and implementation of public services can lead to more effective services that are more responsive to the real needs of the community. Participatory governance initiatives demonstrate how collaboration between citizens and authorities can improve the quality of life (Arnstein, 1969).

The choice of the theme "Social innovation and citizen participation" is justified by its relevance in addressing contemporary challenges. Traditional solutions are no longer sufficient

to cope with the complexity of today's problems and social innovation and citizen participation offer promising alternatives. Although there are many studies that address social innovation and citizen participation separately, there is a need for research that explores the interdependence between these concepts. Understanding how they can be mutually supportive can provide valuable insights for the development of effective policies and practices.

Research in this area can have a direct impact on public policy and organisational practice. Identifying factors that facilitate social innovation and citizen participation can help develop more effective interventions and improve the quality of life in diverse communities. Investigating the links between social innovation and citizen participation can contribute to the theoretical development of both fields. Developing an integrated theoretical model can provide a solid basis for future research and guide the implementation of practical initiatives. In the context of globalisation and rapid economic change, social innovation and citizen participation become essential for building resilient and sustainable societies. Studying these phenomena can provide valuable insights for policy makers and economic decision-makers in developing long-term strategies.

Social innovation and citizen participation are crucial for addressing contemporary challenges and promoting sustainable development. The choice of this research topic is justified by its societal relevance, gaps in the literature, potential practical impact and contributions to theoretical development. By investigating these issues, research can provide innovative solutions and stimulate the active involvement of citizens in the process of social transformation.

These points underline the importance and relevance of social innovation and citizen participation, justifying the choice of this topic for further research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to establish the interdependence between social innovation and citizen participation, theories of the two processes were explored. The main purpose of this research is to investigate which driving forces can be considered predominant and influence social innovation in citizen participation processes. In this thesis different perspectives of social innovation and its development in the conceptual framework of participation motivation in the process of social innovation are unified. This paper focuses on the theoretical aspect of social innovation, which motivates citizens to participate in social innovation activities, since, they

deeply understand this process and know the reasons why they would choose innovation projects, for social change.

The research strategy used in the development of this research involves three stages:

- The first stage is the study and analysis of an extensive bibliography, through which a portfolio of papers, databases, applied and theoretical studies related to social innovation, citizen participation, co-production, co-creation, e-participation and e-governance were highlighted.

- The second stage is the deepening of the research, the preparation of the paper structure and the drafting of the chapters.

- The third stage consists of applying social innovation methods in participatory processes, using and summarizing all the research results, in order to understand the key concepts of the PhD thesis as consistently as possible.

The methodological strategy in this paper can be framed within the classical research models by combining the empirical approach to research problems with the theoretical approach. In terms of research methodology, this paper falls within the typology of qualitative research, as it aims to gain a better understanding of the concepts around which the research revolves, namely social innovation and citizen participation. The method of systematic analysis contributed to identify, evaluate and synthesize the existing scientific knowledge on social innovation and citizen participation, through which relevant conclusions were extracted at the level of each chapter and at the level of the PhD thesis, the validity of the research hypotheses was analyzed and the way in which the research objectives were met was assessed.

As qualitative research is mainly used, the predominant research method in this paper is the systematic literature review, which has led to a thorough review of the literature and has led to the identification and detailed analysis of studies on the topic under investigation, as well as to summarize the results obtained in a personal way. Thus, in this thesis we find several case studies that provide us with a sufficient amount of information to help us understand the phenomena of social innovation and citizen participation in real contexts. These case studies have been developed and adapted after studying the websites of different public institutions or companies. This allowed the collection of reliable and specific information about the processes studied.

At the same time, the comparative method was also used, whereby, based on the general frameworks specific to the various processes analysed in the thesis, comparisons of various

aspects, with priority given to empirical and best practice, extracted and revalued from the literature, were analysed.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the research stems from the analysis of the current state of knowledge on the evolution, perspectives and new approaches of the two social processes - social innovation and citizen participation, whose interaction forms the basis of this PhD thesis.

It is formulated as follows:

G.O. *Knowledge and deepening of the content, characteristics and ways of bidirectional interaction of social innovation and citizen participation processes, in the specific global context of social and economic development of the public sector.*

The general objective formulated will be taken into account through the structure and content of the doctoral thesis organised in such a way as to meet the following specific objectives:

S.O.1. *Research on citizens' involvement in the implementation of measures needed for social innovation in the public sector.*

S.O.2. *To analyse the ways in which citizen involvement can be achieved in decision-making and public policy-making processes, as citizen participation contributes to increasing the transparency of the decision-making process and the effectiveness and efficiency of government activity.*

S.O.3. *Study social innovation in e-government and e-participation processes, given that digital initiatives are essentially innovative projects, public administrations need to be able to identify and deepen the specific characteristics of innovative processes.*

S.O.4. *Design analysis models, developed according to the specific features of the processes studied, namely: social innovation, citizen participation, co-creation and co-production and integrate them into the logical and systemic framework of the research approach.*

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In this doctoral thesis, the following research hypotheses are considered:

Ip.1. *Social innovation processes can be carried out more efficiently with the help of civil society participation;*

Ip.2. The contribution of the European Union accelerates the research, implementation and use of methods that are the basis of social innovation, thanks to the allocated resources and well-developed strategies;

Ip.3. Citizen involvement is essential for the development and implementation of new solutions.

CHAPTER II – SOCIAL INNOVATION

Chapter II presents a brief history of the concept of innovation, a concept around which the present paper revolves. There are many definitions given to the term innovation, however, in this research, only those that clearly highlight the essential characteristics of social innovation have been selected. Thus, following the presentation of several definitions of this concept, it was concluded that social innovation is innovation that has a social character both from the point of view of the goals pursued and the means used, and which, by applying new ideas, responds to certain social needs. Afterwards, some aspects related to social innovation in Romania were presented, where it was highlighted that social innovation in Romania is at a premature level, because there is no legislative and institutional framework for funding, which provides continuous support from the state budget. This is also due to the fact that the specialised infrastructure and the evaluation of research and innovation results are still in the process of materialisation. At the same time, this argument is supported by the fact that the funding allocated to research and innovation is inefficiently used and that initiatives in this area are not sufficiently well developed. On the other hand, the National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation 2022-2027 has brought significant changes in the field of research and innovation in Romania. This strategy aims at considerable investments in the field of innovation and research so as to increase scientific output, raise the quality of life and increase jobs, leading to higher expectations of citizens and research organisations. This strategy, unlike previous strategies, also targets smart specialisation and is closely aligned with Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030.

This chapter also includes some general aspects of social innovation in European countries. It was found that the European Union is very active when it comes to social innovation, but it should be more competitive in order to keep its position in the international innovation ranking.

Then, we find issues related to the European Union's innovation policy, but also issues related to different research and innovation programmes in the European Union.

This chapter is also about engaging citizens in the social innovation process, which helps to define long-term policy priorities, improve the quality and legitimacy of policy decisions and increase the visibility of innovation in society. A SWOT analysis of the process of engaging citizens in social innovation was also carried out to assess its positive factors, negative factors, opportunities and threats. Nowadays, innovation is the driving force behind the most important developments in society. Social innovation, in particular, has the potential to change the world in a significant way. The six stages of social innovation have therefore been explored.

The last part of this chapter presents some of the most current and important innovations in the constitution of the democratic process, namely co-design and participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is an effective democracy-building process that can improve service delivery while increasing trust, involvement, transparency and accountability between citizens and governments. On the other hand, co-design brings together lived experience and professional experience to learn from each other and improve things by design.

CHAPTER III – CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Chapter III outlines the notion of "citizen participation", mainly referring to the involvement of citizens in public decision-making, as social innovation targets the main problems of society and involves the involvement of citizens in any field. So, when citizens are involved in recovery strategies, it is mandatory for public authorities to take into account how they establish their citizen participation processes. The continued participation of citizens in public policies and decision-making processes should be a natural action.

In democratic states, the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes is a progressive action, which means that certain stages must be completed, which interfere with the two levels of participation. In recent years, communities around the world have expressed a growing need and desire to be directly involved in local decision-making, and this can be achieved through the two levels of participation, information and consultation.

Subsequently, the interaction between social innovation and citizen participation was established. The introduction of the notion of innovation in the process of citizen participation is the improvement of public consultation actions by establishing and implementing new ideas,

methods and technologies to enhance the quality of public consultation. This chapter also presents the benefits and risks of involving citizens in decision-making processes, the advantages and disadvantages of participation, and the values and principles of civic participation. As tempting as the idea of increased citizen participation in decision-making is, we have to admit that the advantages of citizen participation are numerous for governments, communities and citizens, but the enthusiasm for involving citizens in every public decision fades when the disadvantages of this process are recognised. Involving citizens in decision-making processes also brings many benefits, including: the ability to build community support for a project and improve relations with stakeholders, better public understanding of the responsibilities of public authorities, improved technical knowledge of authorities and citizens, improved quality of decision-making, greater access to citizens' skills and knowledge.

In this part of the paper, issues related to the principle of consultation of citizens were also addressed. Citizen consultation is a participatory mechanism that seeks to know the opinions, suggestions or proposals, comments and contributions of users, citizens and interest groups on projects, standards, policies, programmes or procedures carried out by public authorities before they are formulated.

CHAPTER IV - CO-CREATION, CO-PRODUCTION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN PUBLIC SERVICES

Chapter IV illustrates that citizen participation is considered a necessary condition for social innovation in the public sector, and it is important to have systematic knowledge about the conditions under which citizens are ready to embark on the 'social innovation journey'. (Voorberg et al., 2015, p.3). This chapter begins with information on the conceptual and relational framework of the co-creation process, followed by a systematic review of the academic literature on co-creation and public co-production. Co-production and co-creation occur when citizens actively participate in the provision and design of the services they receive. These processes have increasingly entered the agenda of policy makers as interest in citizen participation has soared everywhere. Citizen participation in the creation and production of public services is one of the main topics of current research on public administration and public management. Co-creation refers to the active participation of citizens who are users of a product or service. Thus, citizens are seen as creative partners rather than end-users, and in this way they

collaboratively create services at a strategic level. On the other hand, co-production is associated with user involvement in the production phases.

After establishing these two concepts, a number of similarities and differences between them were identified. These concepts have several important characteristics. Firstly, they relate to processes and are therefore characterised by a temporal dimension and often iterative cycles based on user feedback as a crucial operating mechanism, as opposed to limited and rigidly defined activities. Another common core aspect is the participatory dynamic, which fosters collaboration between a diversity of stakeholders, who can be involved on a variable scale, from groups to the whole community. Ultimately, both concepts refer to open processes, where the outcome is built collaboratively through a bottom-up approach. Often the underlying principle is that the process is as important as the outcome, if not more so. In terms of the differences between the two concepts, we can say that co-creation is common, to create partnerships between two or more startups or companies. We understand this because co-creation means that, belonging to the same group, which, focuses on creating products or services from a single company or Startup. Co-production, on the other hand, is about involving customers during the service production process, i.e., that moment when the necessary raw materials are brought together and combined to generate something new.

Also in this chapter, we find issues related to the national and international political and administrative context of public co-creation and co-production, which provides a brief overview of the most important features in the administrative context of Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, the United Kingdom and Romania.

The last part of this chapter contains information on citizen involvement in public services, but also on the link and importance of co-creation and co-production processes with social innovation and citizen participation. Thus, the involvement of citizens in the delivery of public services is an issue of great importance for the community life of the country. On the one hand, it substantially affects the quality of life of the population, as this results in the well-being, life and health of citizens, and on the other hand, it concerns the coverage of the population, as it affects the basic needs of all beneficiaries of public services. At the same time, it can be said that citizens' involvement in public services can be considered both a right and a duty. In other words, it is not only a duty deriving from being a citizen, but also an obligation for each of us.

CHAPTER V - E-GOVERNANCE AND E-PARTICIPATION - PROCESSES ADJACENT TO SOCIAL INNOVATION AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Chapter V is an interesting chapter because new technologies are tempting, as they often bring better solutions and offer attractive possibilities for changing operating methods. This chapter has been introduced in this research because the two processes, e-government and e-participation, provide the foundation and tools for the development of both social innovation and social participation, while being a catalyst and an effective support for their interaction.

E-government has two important roles. The first role, the most widely used and technologically advanced, is the role of transaction. This role concerns how governments use e-government to improve the efficiency of public services and engage citizens. The second role of eGovernment is to enable the use of ICT to build public support for policies and to increase citizen participation in public decision-making or policy-making. E-government is thus understood "as a channel for citizen participation" (Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011, p. 414).

The use of digital tools to promote citizen participation, i.e. either e-participation or digital participation, has spread around the world and most large cities promote citizen participation through the use of ICT and media. The Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on physical gatherings have also contributed to the increased demand for these tools. Innovations in digital participation tend to facilitate two-way communication between citizens and governments, and provide expanded opportunities for citizens to take an active part in public decision-making processes. Social innovation and collaborative networks should be fully used to stimulate public and civil society participation in EU policy making and management.

It is considered important, from an eGovernment point of view alone, that public authorities pursue specific policies and interventions aimed at bridging the digital divide. Privacy and security issues have been raised in this chapter. In this respect, it can be said that most citizens do not use e-government services because they do not have the guarantee of privacy and security. On the other hand, public authorities have an interest in maintaining citizens' trust (e.g. they need to assure citizens that they do not use their information for other purposes). In terms of legislative and regulatory barriers, it can be said that success depends to a large extent on public authorities establishing an appropriate legal framework. Also in this chapter, issues related to the lack of common technical frameworks and infrastructure have been raised, as well as issues related to certain disruptive factors and their stages.

While the first part of the chapter is about the notions of e-government and e-participation, the second part is about social innovation in e-government and e-participation processes. Thus, as digital initiatives are essentially innovative projects, public administrations need to be able to deal with the specific features of innovative processes. The introduction of digitised channels can in fact overlap, replace or supplement existing channels. Digitisation, computerisation and virtualisation make available new approaches to social innovation that enable (through digital platforms and cyber-physical systems) the transformation of present representative democratic models into more direct ones. Open government is also seen as a part of social innovation that is transformed and implemented through new means of external input in a public setting. The concept of open government has been clearly introduced in opposition to closed government, which legitimises secrecy for state reasons. Open government is a doctrine of government that argues that citizens have the right to access government documents and procedures to enable effective public oversight. Over the years, the concept of open government has gradually expanded from identifying the disclosure of politically sensitive government information, to a broader concept of transparency, and then to an even wider range of government objectives and functions, including public participation, public sector innovation, open data, use of ICT, and improving public services and government efficiency.

Finally, this chapter presents some examples of good practice in innovative e-government from countries such as Spain, Finland and Romania, as well as developments in e-participation as an expression of citizen participation. As artificial intelligence is currently a hotly debated topic, this chapter also addresses the relationship between artificial intelligence and co-creativity. Thus, the positive future of creativity and artificial intelligence lies in a harmonious collaboration that can benefit everyone, which can lead to a new level of creative productivity while respecting ethical considerations and human values during the creative process.

CHAPTER VI - APPLICATION OF SOCIAL INNOVATION METHODS IN PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Chapter VI uses and summarises all the research results, which, contribute to the understanding of the interdependence between social innovation and citizen participation. The main objective of this chapter has been to develop some models of analysis, systematised on the basis of fundamental elements of social innovation processes and citizen participation.

Thus, in the first part of this chapter we find an example of good practice from Romania, namely: Evaluation of collaborative government - the case of Timis County. The choice of Timis County was determined by the fact that the city of Timisoara was among the first cities in Romania to recognise the importance of technology and information in different policy areas and, at the same time, among the first cities to adopt social innovation initiatives. In this study, the results of the content and functional investigation are presented for the most representative local authorities, i.e. Timisoara City Hall and Timis County Council. For the presentation of data specific to this study, online features have been assessed and the websites of the two institutions have been studied in detail to provide a complete and comprehensive picture. Data analysis and interpretation of the research results are reported through tables, relating to information availability features, delivery features and democratic enhancement features. Thus, information was collected in a logical and unified form, which led to the conclusion that innovation and building of electronic interfaces cannot yet eliminate the traditional system of information and service delivery.

Next, in this chapter, some examples of good practices on innovative methodologies in participatory processes in Spain, England and Finland have been described, in order to highlight the differences in terms of innovation and citizen participation between our country and other European countries. Therefore, after studying the Consul Project platform in Spain, the Involve project in England and the KANE Advisory Council in Finland, I conclude that:

- Public authorities in these countries promote citizens' proposals by putting them on the agenda;
- They use methods and mechanisms that allow the involvement of all, including rural communities;
- Stimulate research activities and use their results to determine new innovative solutions in the participation processes;
- Promote and stimulate cooperation and interaction between public authorities and civil society;
- Use appropriate tools and technologies to ensure that citizens actively participate and use public services;
- Uses innovative platforms that guarantee citizen participation in all phases of the design and development of public policy initiatives;

- Uses user-friendly platforms and websites that encourage citizens to submit suggestions and proposals and to support various public policy initiatives;
- Frequently implements new ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSIONS

From the conclusions of the thesis, we can identify in a synthetic way the contribution of the work to the consolidation of scientific results in the studied areas, especially that of social innovation and citizen participation. As it appears from the title of the research, the basic notions are *social innovation* and *citizen participation*.

In this research I tried to identify the major themes of social innovation related to this type of collaborative governance, by carrying out a conceptual analysis of the scientific literature on social innovation. The growth of the social innovation process expresses dissatisfaction with innovation as we know it and its ability to deliver fair and sustainable results. However, social innovation is also vague as a concept, thus calling into question whether the concept offers real improvements or alternatives.

In the present paper I tried to think of social innovation as a collaborative concept. The conceptual framework shows collaboration rather than contestation to provide a space for different perspectives and actors to work together. The collaborative conceptual framework attempts to explain a diversity of uses. Highlighting the key features of social innovation as a collaborative concept, it seeks to contribute to an emerging practice that makes the various contributions part of a progressive conversation about social innovation, the evaluative ideas associated with it, and the evidence from policies and projects.

Identifying transformative, taxonomic and transitional-skeptical uses of social innovation, the paper highlights the importance of analyzing the evaluative aspects of multisectoral reconfigurations associated with social innovation, so as to keep track of its role for justice and sustainability.

The belief that individuals should be given a voice in governance appeals to our democratic ideals, and this has long been recognized internationally. While there seems to be universal agreement that citizen involvement in government decision-making is a good idea, there is little agreement on the best way to achieve meaningful involvement. There are many

ways to consult the public and get a sense of what they see as problems and opportunities, it is quite another to actively involve citizens in the decision-making process.

This research explores the challenges and dilemmas associated with direct citizen participation, reflects on different models of citizen-government interactions, and makes recommendations for moving beyond conventional participation. Although the benefits of including citizens in the deliberative process are widely recognized, citizen participation is not routinely sought in the decision-making process.

Critical analysis of the general objective of citizen participation reveals basic conflicts between participatory democracy and professional expertise. Planners and other urban professionals have faced many problems in trying to encourage citizen participation in shared decision-making. Some of the dilemmas can be resolved by recognizing and adopting a participation strategy specifically designed to fit the needs of societies.

In this research I have tried to discuss how increased and meaningful participation can lead to better projects and a more predictable and equitable development process, and to highlight some of the tools that the public and private sectors have begun to use. In the development process, community members need information about a range of possible alternatives before expressing their choices or concerns. In most citizen participation processes, only a small part of the community engages in decision-making because of socio-economic, linguistic or educational class barriers. To better engage all citizens, local governments and the development community can get creative in identifying and using new ways to request, respond and share information. Reaching out and engaging with citizens in a meaningful and lasting process will enable communities to realize their vision of where and how to grow next.

Once society builds the individual and institutional capacity of its citizens, then it can fulfill the conditions and tasks of civil society. Dissemination of procedures and standards for policy making and analysis empowers all citizens by providing them with knowledge on how to effectively manage change, thus creating a climate of optimism and trust.

VALIDATION OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Over the years, the present research has examined the relationship between social innovation and citizen participation through processes such as co-creation, co-production, co-design or participatory budgeting. Given that the topic has been one of interest and very

complex, the present work has been carried out by combining theoretical and empirical approaches to achieve the research objectives and hypotheses.

* Given research **hypothesis 1**, entitled "*Social innovation processes can be more effectively realised with the help of civil society participation*", we have identified, through a thorough assessment, the link between social innovation and citizen participation.

In order to test the validity of this hypothesis, this paper demonstrates that orienting the research and innovation system towards participation, the shared intelligence of society, the integration of high standards of integrity and ethics, and the development of interest in science are very important.

With the completion of the paper, we conclude that **this hypothesis is validated**, with the caveat that citizen participation also entails risks, highlighted in the thesis, which, in particular, can generate harm when contextual factors are not taken into account.

In support of this conclusion, we make the following arguments:

Chapter 2 highlights that social innovation aims to improve the quality of life of citizens and is based on social initiatives and relationships developed through collective action by civil society. In Romania, NGOs and other social economy organisations play a crucial role in achieving social innovation by addressing urgent social needs.

Chapter 3 underlines the importance of citizen participation in decision-making processes, showing that it contributes to transparent and effective governance and increases the accountability of public authorities. Active citizen participation improves the quality of decisions and their legitimacy.

Chapter 4 describes co-creation and co-production as methods of social innovation that directly involve citizens in the development and implementation of services, highlighting the importance of their active involvement in order to achieve more effective solutions tailored to real needs.

While active participation in research and innovation, through full citizen involvement, can improve the quality of research and innovation, make it more meaningful for society and have important benefits for those who participate, participation also carries risks of generating additional harm, particularly when it is practiced in a way that does not take account of these contextual factors.

* In order to test the validity of **Hypothesis 2**, entitled "*EU contribution accelerates research, implementation and use of methods underpinning social innovation, thanks to allocated resources and well-developed strategies*", an overview of social innovation in Romania and in European countries was made and the EU innovation policy through the EU research and innovation programmes was described.

At the European level, there are various operational innovation programmes, which are valuable sources of funding for public and private companies. The European Union, through its allocated resources and strategies, pursues the development of its Member States through innovation processes, because innovations lead to improved living conditions, social progress and economic progress.

Based on all the information collected in this research, we conclude that **this hypothesis is validated**. In support of this assertion, the following arguments are presented:

Chapter 2 and **Chapter 3** mention that the European Union supports social innovation through specific funding programmes and policies, such as Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. These programmes provide financial resources and infrastructure to develop and implement innovative solutions in various fields, including health, education and local development.

Chapter 3 shows that EU support includes financial mechanisms and initiatives that promote collaboration between Member States, public authorities, civil society and academia to tackle complex social problems. Cohesion policies and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) are clear examples of the EU's commitment to supporting social innovation.

Chapter 5 discusses e-government and e-participation, EU-supported processes that improve administrative efficiency and citizen participation, thus contributing to social innovation.

Therefore, companies that receive financial support from the European Union have a higher level of innovation compared to others that, due to a lack of resources, are not able to increase the level of innovation.

* In order to verify the importance of citizen involvement, we formulated **hypothesis 3** expressed as "*Citizen involvement is essential for the development and implementation of new solutions*".

A similar hypothesis exists in the field of social innovation: involving people in the development of new ways to address social challenges will lead to more effective and legitimate

solutions. It certainly seems inconceivable that we could develop any long-term solution to any of the growing economic, environmental or social challenges, such as youth unemployment, ageing society, chronic diseases or climate change, without the collaboration and involvement of citizens.

To better involve all citizens, local authorities and the development community can become creative in identifying and using new ways of soliciting, responding and sharing information. Reaching out and collaborating with citizens in a meaningful and lasting process will allow communities to realize their vision of where and how to grow next.

Based on the information gathered during the doctoral stage, we can confirm that this **hypothesis is validated**. In support of this claim, we provide the following arguments:

Chapter 3 details the benefits of citizen participation in decision-making processes, showing that their involvement leads to more informed and legitimate decisions. Citizen participation helps to identify and implement solutions that are more effective and better adapted to the needs of the community.

Chapter 4 presents co-creation and co-production as key methods in social innovation that actively and continuously involve citizens. These methods enable the development of innovative solutions through collaboration between citizens and authorities.

Chapter 6 provides concrete examples from Romania and other European countries, demonstrating that involving citizens in social innovation projects leads to their success. The case studies show how the active participation of citizens contributes to improving public services and creating more resilient communities.

Involving citizens enables researchers to better understand social and societal needs and can increase scientific output. However, these participatory processes should be more ethically robust and accountable to ensure the integrity of the research and to produce rigorous and error-free results. Citizen involvement in science should also respect the scientific standards, methods, principles and procedures essential to research, to ensure fairness and validity and to be truly beneficial to research.

Therefore, the arguments presented support the hypotheses of this research, highlighting the crucial role of civil society and citizens' participation in social innovation processes, as well as the importance of EU support in accelerating research and implementation of innovative solutions.

MEETING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

* **General objective:** To understand and deepen the content, characteristics and modalities of the two-way interaction of social innovation processes and citizen participation in the specific global context of social and economic development of the public sector.

To demonstrate the achievement of this objective, we argue the following:

Chapter 2 and **chapter 3** demonstrate the importance of the interaction between social innovation and citizen participation. Social innovation is defined by civil society's capacity for initiative and collective action that improves the quality of life of citizens.

Chapter 4 and **chapter 5** detail how co-creation, co-production, as well as e-participation, are key ways in which citizens actively engage in social innovation processes, thus contributing to social and economic development.

* **S.O.1.:** Research on citizens' involvement in the implementation of social innovation measures in the public sector

To demonstrate the achievement of this objective, we present the following:

Chapter 3 shows that citizen participation in the implementation of social innovation measures is essential for their success. Citizens bring valuable insights and feedback, which improve the quality and relevance of implemented solutions.

Chapter 4 highlights that participatory methods, such as co-creation and co-production, enable citizens to become co-creators of solutions, leading to greater acceptance and sustainability of social innovation measures.

* **S.O.2.:** Analysis of ways to involve citizens in decision-making and public policy-making processes, as citizen participation contributes to increased transparency in decision-making, but also to the effectiveness and efficiency of government activity.

We believe that this objective has been achieved, and in order to demonstrate that it has been achieved, we argue as follows:

Chapter 3 highlights the importance of transparency and accountability in governance, emphasising that citizen participation in decision-making processes contributes significantly to improving the quality of decisions and increasing their legitimacy.

The examples of good practice presented in *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 6* demonstrate how citizen participation, through various platforms and initiatives, can lead to better informed and more effective public policies.

* **S.O.3.:** Studying social innovation in e-government and e-participation processes, given that digital initiatives are essentially innovative projects, public administrations need to be able to identify and deepen the specific characteristics of innovative processes.

Specific conclusions for demonstrating the achievement of this objective are as follows:

Chapter 5 discusses the essential role of e-government and e-participation in social innovation. Digital initiatives, such as the "Decide Madrid" platform, exemplify how technology can enhance citizen engagement and government effectiveness.

E-participation enables citizens to actively contribute to decision-making processes, facilitating access to information and their continuous involvement, which is essential for successful social innovation.

* **S.O.4.:** Design analysis models, developed according to the specific features of the processes studied, namely: social innovation, citizen participation, co-creation and co-production and integrate them into the logical and systemic framework of the research approach.

Specific findings to prove that this objective has been met are as follows:

Chapter 4 and *Chapter 6* provide detailed analytical models for the processes of social innovation, citizen participation, co-creation and co-production. These models are embedded in a systemic framework that facilitates their understanding and application in diverse contexts.

The case studies presented in *Chapter 6* show how these models can be adapted and applied in the specific context of Romania and other European countries, demonstrating their flexibility and effectiveness.

Through the analysis of the text provided, we have highlighted the systemic interaction between social innovation and citizen participation, the crucial role of co-creation and co-production, the importance of e-participation and e-governance initiatives, and the contribution of case studies and good practices to theoretical deepening. We also highlighted the catalytic role of artificial intelligence and the impact of EU policies on social innovation and citizen participation. These findings support the fulfilment of the general and specific objectives of this research.

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