

Chapter 2

The Challenges of Managing the Private Institutions of Social Solidarity: Experiences from Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS) are constituted as not-for-profit with the purpose of giving organized expression to the moral duty of solidarity and justice among individuals by private initiative. IPSS helps children, young people and families support social and community integration, assist the elderly and disabled, promote and safeguard health, education and vocational training and resolve housing problems. This study focused on the answers offered to the elderly people, specifically through the service provided on the Social Centers. We tried to analyze existing practices, identify good practices and understand their frequency, while understanding the open-mindedness level to change and innovation. As research methodology we conducted surveys among users and technicians. The study concluded that communication is always present between the different institutions even if in different levels. Networking and good practices customized accordingly to the users keep them satisfied and more active in their daily life.

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INTRODUCTION

Acting in the social area, Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS) management needs not only good performance on its purpose and sustainability warranty but also on customer satisfaction and answer to their needs. Among others, important questions arise around services customization, answering to different styles and limitations of the users themselves and assets efficiency. In this context, the activities and shape of the services are an everyday challenge. The annual activity plan is just the beginning, a base where the technicians support their work. It is always a subject for continuous improvement and many of them may result from communication with other similar institutions or other technicians and users. Partnerships, collaboration and cooperation may help to build bridges to new possibilities, new knowledge, new activities or even small adjustments that add value to people, organization and society.

This paper is focused on the answers offered to the elderly people, especially through the service offered on the Social Centers presented in the Social Charters of Barcelos, North of Portugal. Existing practices are analyzed and good practices are identified. Management challenges are a daily reality not only with regard to management practices, but also with regard to open innovation and open mind. Communication is one key-factor that may spread good practices among actors. Institutional management is the other key to guarantee the success of the communication flux and type as well as to create a culture that promotes innovation and adopts good practices.

However, the performance of organizations depends also on the broader context they are located. Concern with sustainable development must always be present, bearing in mind that sustainable development is necessarily “people-centred and planet-sensitive” (United Nations, 2013), guided by values of equal rights and social justice, enabled by proactive states and well-functioning institutions, and shaped through the participation of empowered populations. Looking at sustainable development through a social lens moves beyond a concern with social issues and problems, to an understanding of the social factors that drive or sustain all development outcomes. It focuses attention on the importance of social structures, institutions and agency in determining social, economic, political and environmental outcomes. It also highlights the complex interactions among multiple determinants of development, the synergies among policies and programmes in different domains, as well as the need for coherence and coordination across sectors, among different actors, and between the local, national and global levels (UNRISD, 2014).

Therefore, this paper aims to provide a qualitative assessment on the role of the IPSS daily practice and user’s satisfaction. It focuses on the Portuguese poorly explored context (Guia, 2011; Lourenço, 2011; Caramelo, 2013), where the Social Sector has been under pressure due to economic crisis and profound reforms. Such reforms have been extensively relying on common projects supported by citizens, communities and society in general and the IPSS in particular. Thus, it is timely and pertinent to carry out an objective assessment on behalf of non-profit organizations on the usefulness of such practices for their daily provided services and user’s satisfaction. At the same time, it should focus on the problems they eventually face regarding the use of these practices and potential span for escalating actions at this level. As a result, the present paper aims to develop within the IPSS an analysis of their practices, an understanding of what kind of communication exists between the IPSSs, an identification of good practices and a proposal for possible improvements, as well as if the IPSS’s management is receptive to the introduction of new practices and innovations.

In the following section, a comprehensive overview of the literature is provided on the role and answers delivered by social innovation and in particular by the Private Institutions of Social Solidarity in Portugal. It is also addressed the concept of benchmarking and ageing as well as quality life in elderly

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