

Open discovery processes for local missions with multi-level perspective

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The world we currently live in is facing a series of crises that are interconnected and have the potential to amplify the negative impacts of each other. These crises encompass a wide range of issues, including but not limited to, the aftereffects of global pandemic, climate change, wars, economic instability, social and political unrest, and humanitarian emergencies. Furthermore, climate change is exacerbating natural disasters, leading to increased displacement and humanitarian crises. Societies are paying a high political, economic, social and ecological price. Prioritizing sustainability becomes crucial, prompting us to reconsider our behaviours, consumption habits, and overall approach to development. This necessitates a shift in public policy ambition, transitioning from managing incremental change to embracing transformational change (Pontikakis et al., 2022). With aim and ambition for transformational results, public policy simultaneously is expected to anticipate, orient and coordinate responses among various stakeholders and levels (Borras and Edler, 2020). This underscores the importance of governance, coordination, and especially a multi-level approach, as they can enhance the integrity and ownership of policies.

Mission oriented approach play an important role in shaping policies that prioritize addressing societal challenges, offering a valuable overarching goals or complementarity to other priority-setting methods (Janssen et al., 2021). Local ownership of policy is crucial for traction in implementation of sustainability initiatives. Policies co-developed with the active involvement and input of local communities are more likely to resonate with the specific needs and context of those communities. This leads to a sense of ownership and buy-in from the local population, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and long-term impact. Furthermore, local ownership fosters a sense of empowerment and agency among community members, as they are directly involved in shaping the policies that affect their lives. This can lead to greater accountability and transparency in the implementation process, as well as increased trust in the governing authorities.

Local missions can act as an organising principle for collaboration in complex and fragmented decision-making structures, especially with an aim to bridge multi-level perspective. It allows different levels and fields of governance to work together, creating a more inclusive and aligned policy framework. Local missions tackle issues alongside local stakeholders who may be underrepresented in larger scale policy discussions. Mission oriented approach serve as an organizing principle that extends beyond research and development efforts, encompassing a range of actions in regulation, skills development, business investment, consumption subsidies, and the enhancement of physical and digital infrastructure. Additionally, a guiding principle for mission-oriented approach should be the modifications or transformations of the production systems and consumption patterns (Bianchi et al. 2024, Larrue, 2021).

Mission-oriented approach and transformative innovation policies go beyond industrial change, focusing on systemic innovation and a more equitable balance between technological, political, cultural, and institutional change (Mazzucato et al., 2020). These policies rely heavily on collective thinking, discovery, and planning. Collective thinking and discovery processes also play a crucial role in formulation and implementation of industrial and innovation policies. Entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) was a key component of the design and implementation of S3 policies (Laranja et al., 2021). Recent empirical evidence shows that EDP has been evolving in practice to match the changing

conditions and expectations for policy development (Laranja and Reimeris, forthcoming). By becoming a more inclusive and open, the Open Discovery Process (ODP) tackle the issues from a local perspective with the participation of local stakeholders that can offer approaches with continuous ownership with the focus on local problems faced by large cross-sections of citizens and can therefore mobilise stakeholders who are usually underrepresented in policy discussions (Laranja et al., 2022). The ODP is critical to continuously engage with a broader range of stakeholders and co-create plans, design a local mission or formulating a policy and action mix. The ODP is based on inclusivity and transparency, and provides directionality by having stakeholders working backwards from societal problems to agree on a shared vision (Bianchi et al., 2024). Therefore, it has the potential to address a multi-level perspective while maintaining local ownership, by ensuring policy integrity through local missions.

A recent report by high level expert group on Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe proposed that next generation of the Cohesion Policy could follow the challenge-led localised approach as a potential organizing principle – based on place, people and performance (European Commission, 2024). This approach aims to address diverse challenges and promote place-based development pathways and local missions could be a suitable instrument for that. However, following such an approach would require substantial improvements in governance capacity (Molica et al., forthcoming).

While it is expected that coordination efforts to facilitate transformations will be extensive, as transformation cannot occur at just one level – a multi-level approach is necessary. The efforts at the national level to introduce and accelerate transformation may not always align with other levels, creating opportunities and initiatives for place-based transformation. Generally, local levels experience different but fewer issues, embrace a more participative approach, possess legitimacy, and have a clearer understanding of the challenges and how to address them. There is a great potential for ODP to be positioned at the core of the place-based approach maintaining multi-level integrity in sustainability initiatives.

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