

CASE STUDY

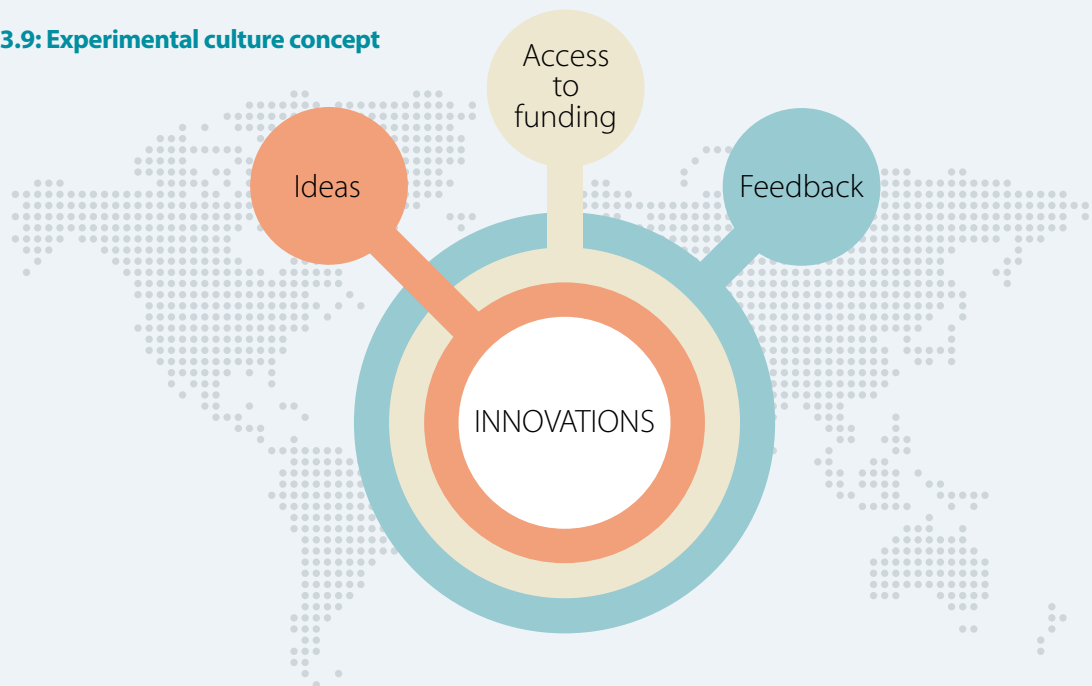
Place to Experiment – Finland

SUMMARY

Finland is launching a digital platform entitled *Kokeilun Paikka*⁴⁰ (Place to Experiment) to support the government's key goal of supporting an experimental culture to find innovative ways to develop public services. Through the creation of a digital tool to support this ambitious goal, the government of Finland aims to provide a platform to market innovations; collect feedback, advice, and funding sources for innovators; and connect reformers with government and vice versa. Ultimately, the goal is to shift the method of developing services from a top-down dictated process to a more co-created – in some cases even crowdsourced or crowdfunded – process for public sector innovation, and in this way help to redefine citizen-government boundaries in the country. The government views an experimental culture as a two-way street that takes grassroots innovations and provides an avenue for acceleration through capacity building and by linking innovators with reformers and sources of funding. At the same time, this culture enables countries to divide complicated issues into smaller component parts.

Although still in its early phases, the aim of the digital platform is to highlight innovative solutions and improvements in services, promote individual initiatives and make use of citizen-driven operating practices. More broadly, the goals are to improve Finland's capacity to solve social problems, public trust and transparency, citizen engagement, and the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of policies and services.

40. See www.kokeilunpaikka.fi.

Figure 3.9: Experimental culture concept**THE PROBLEM**

The government has identified key obstacles to spreading innovation and improving the relationship between the government and citizens. These obstacles include a lack of flexible financing and connections among innovators, and an absence of information about viable solutions and innovative approaches. Furthermore, experimentation at the grassroots and local level is very common in Finland, but there is a lack of a central overview of the experiments being conducted. Learning is thus often coincidental and ad-hoc.

AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

The Finnish government believes that experiments are a reliable and efficient means to gain concrete evidence on how legislative, organisational structures and operational models should be developed. In collaboration with the non-governmental organisation Demos Helsinki (which also created the Design for Government national experimentation framework discussed in Trend 5) and the Finnish Environment Institute, the government analysed the funding of experiments, tests and policy trials in Finland. Based on their findings, they decided to establish a new digital platform for piloting and experimenting public innovations. This platform is designed to promote useful initiatives and new practices by supporting small trials initiated by citizens, as well as by funding large-scale, precisely evaluated experiments backed by the

government. The platform also enables users to obtain conclusive evidence on how initiatives work in practice and to disseminate their benefits more effectively.

Given that ideas need time and inspiration to merge, develop and improve, the platform allows users to browse content, obtain ideas for their own project, and communicate with each other to help market and share their innovations. The digital platform separates innovations into three levels: the strategic level, pooled pilots and partnerships, and the grassroots level. At the strategic level, the government selects five to ten pilot studies that are connected with broader strategic objectives and key government projects. Pilot studies include those related to basic income, service initiatives and local government trials. These pilots will be monitored and supported by the Experimental Finland Team in the Prime Minister's Office.

The pooled pilots and partnerships level includes pilot studies that promote the objectives of the government programme, but that are developed by regional governments, NGOs or businesses. The goal at this level is to identify and support the best results from local and regional experiments and ultimately to test them on a larger scale. Finally, at the grassroots level, municipalities, academics, civil society organisations and citizens can use the application to promote their innovation, with

each actor individually monitoring their own activities. The government hopes that users will reach into the thousands, and that the platform will enable innovators to establish links with support and funding networks. The government further believes that this method represents a democratic way to develop the public sector.

NOVELTY

The combination of an open platform that connects innovators directly to sources of capacity building and funding, while promoting an open and democratic response to developing public services, appears to be unique. While experiments, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding are on the rise around the world, the designers of this tool have not found any examples of a similar approach elsewhere.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

Given that the platform was launched only recently, it is too early to gauge impacts or assess results.

REPLICABILITY

Even at this early stage, it is clear that the platform’s rapid development (under 6 months) and relatively low costs should help facilitate replication in other countries. Furthermore, the platform constitutes a relevant example for countries looking to increase citizen engagement in policy

making and co-creation. The tool’s ambitious goals, rapid development and practical approach all serve to make this an innovation that has the potential to shift the boundaries between the government and its citizens – and may also serve as a global model for similar cases worldwide.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The design and creation phase of the digital platform presented a challenge, as the tool needs to attract users and ultimately be successful enough to impact the development of public services. Its development was made more difficult by the tight timelines. However, many of the primary challenges facing this digital tool will arise with usage, including those around developing the processes and structures to support and maintain the platform’s functions. Other key challenges will involve ensuring users join and stay involved and that the platform continues to receive political support.

Furthermore, the rapidity with which the tool was created means that a number of issues are still open for discussion. Most crucially, there is still some debate regarding who will evaluate the experiments and how best to manage the provision of capacity building. Additionally, the Government of Finland must decide how best to ensure continued political support and buy-in after the remaining two years of its mandate, so as to ensure sustainability.

Figure 3.10: Place to Experiment process



Source: Finland Prime Minister’s Office.