



Encouraging social innovation in Europe

from research to action

Discussions prepared, moderated and
synthesised by the IMPACT TANK



ENCOURAGING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EUROPE

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The conference **“Encouraging social innovation in Europe, from research to action”** took place on Friday 11th of March 2022 with European academics involved in the social economy sector.

In the framework of the French Presidency of the European Union, the IMPACT TANK organized this webconference with the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Agnès Audier, President of the IMPACT TANK introduced the conference and Emeline Stievenart, the Scientific Director moderated the two round tables and welcomed the researchers Anna Seravalli, Jürgen Howaldt, Gorgi Krlev, Lisa Hehenberger, Carmen Paunescu, Thierry Sibieude, Frank Moulaert, Yuna Chiffolleau and policy makers Amélie de Montchalin and Risto Raivio.

Social innovations are new answers to unsatisfied or partially satisfied social needs. These solutions are diverse; driven by the public or private sector, they address

issues such as climate change, inequalities, or poverty, etc. Social innovations are also **new ways of working, of making decision and of conducting research**, that involve stakeholders, especially the civil society.

Now at the core of non-profit organizations, companies and institutions' agenda, social innovations drive social, economic and environmental change. The number and range of citizen-led initiatives is also increasing.

The IMPACT TANK believes that researchers are key actors to support social innovation by researching, teaching, implementing, evaluating, and disseminating promising initiatives as well as inspiring public policies. The European Union also has a role to play in promoting and recognizing the diversity of social innovations, as well as in financing and developing tools to help prove and improve their impact on society.



JÜRGEN HOWALDT

How to develop social innovation at the European level ?



***Jürgen Howaldt** is a world-renowned researcher in the field of social innovation. Most of his research focuses on the theory, practices, and ways to promote social innovation. He has coordinated the SI-Drive¹ project and advised European policy makers. He teaches and leads the Social Research Centre at TU Dortmund University in Germany and founded the European School of Social Innovation.*

What role for the European Union in promoting social innovation?

Europe has become the core of social innovation research on the global level. The European Union needs to implement a joint strategy and comprehensive **mission-oriented** social innovation policies. So far, many research projects dedicated to social innovation were launched such as TRANSIT² and SI-Drive, and social innovation became a transversal topic on many programs. The Atlas of social innovation (2019), gives an overview of the plurality of social innovations in countries around the world.

However, social innovation remains a recent topic of research. **We need new research teaching concepts and new funding formats to explore the specificities of social innovation and merge social and technological innovations** in a synergistic way. Technology enables us to develop new social practices as it has been proven during the pandemic and new technologies also require social innovation to have a positive impact on the society. In this way, **the European Green and Digital Transformation needs to be aligned with the concept of social innovation.**

What ecosystems must be created to support social innovation?

The greatest challenge for social innovation activities is creating social practices that participate in building an inclusive, peaceful, equitable, democratic and participative society.

We need infrastructures such as **social innovation labs to provide institutionalized process and spaces for experimentation.** There is also an **upscaling challenge** as most of social innovations remain on the local level.

In this regard, civil society must be supported and empowered. We could follow the example of the city of **Dortmund in Germany**, which has been chosen last November as the **European Capital of Innovation**. The city has focused on social innovation in the neighborhood with the idea that social innovation is created by a diversity of stakeholders working together. In this way, the city developed an open communication culture and built broad participation processes.



Further resources

Howaldt, Jürgen et al. *Atlas of Social Innovation. 2nd Volume: A World of New Practices*. Oekom, 2019.

Howaldt, Jürgen et al. *A Research Agenda for Social Innovation*. Elgar Research Agendas, 2021.

¹SI-Drive, <https://www.si-drive.eu/>

²Transformation Social Innovative Theory, <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/>

AMÉLIE DE MONTCHALIN

How can the public sector be accountable for its impact to citizens and support their own initiatives for the common good ?



***Amélie de Montchalin** is the French Minister of Public Transformation and Service. She is the first head of this ministry created in 2020 by President Emmanuel Macron to modernize and structure the public service. It aims to simplify the organization, to facilitate the access and to improve the efficiency and quality of public services.*

How to improve public action's transparency and efficiency?

Public action must focus on its impact and involve local players such as citizens and local officials to shape successful reforms.

The **Barometer of the Results of Public Action** assesses the change made by public policies in every French department from 2017 to 2022. It enables Ministries to know the results of their action and define their objectives for the years to come. The data is available in open access and analyzed by several think tanks. This Barometer could inspire European countries and institutions to create similar tools to demonstrate the impacts of their public action in the daily life of citizens.

Why and how can the state foster social innovations?

Social innovations play a key role in building solutions for the common interest. The pandemic has made visible and accelerated the social innovations carried out by civil society. With the climate change, the **states need to welcome, encourage and support citizen-led initiatives.**

The French government has launched **The Accelerator of Citizens' Initiatives** to support and provide the necessary boost to citizens' associations. These initiatives need to fit the values of public service, of transparency and contribute to the public good. During 3 months, a pool of mentors help the development of these initiatives. Through this tool, the French state gives visibility to promising projects, facilitates the access to resources and expertise, develops collaboration and synergies with public administrations and accelerates their scaling up.



Further resources

["Baromètre des résultats de l'action publique", Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique](#)

["Accélérateur d'initiatives citoyennes", Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique](#)

How to scale-up social innovations and make them inspire public policies?



Risto Raivio is a senior expert in The European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. He coordinates the European Social Fund + and leads the ESF policies promoting social innovation. The ESF+ focuses on building capacities, financing and upscaling social innovation.

What challenges for European Union to better foster social innovation?

During the last 10 years, a lot of work has been done to recognize social investment. **The European Commission has published a social investment package** and social innovation is now visible in many EU programs and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Many European programs addressing society challenges are also creating opportunities for social innovation without mentioning it specifically. It is the case for example for smart specialization strategies created in regions and cities.

In this respect, **European officials need to ensure the participation of citizens and stakeholders to these European programs**, to give access to information to stakeholders and ensure that they use the opportunities available. The second challenge is to recognize social innovation. The European Union aims to encourage governments to create enabling conditions for social innovations to emerge and develop. In this regard, we need **evidence based research and policies based on their results**. There is also a challenge of communication and advocacy.

What does the European Union do to develop, research, finance and upscale social innovation?

The European Union develops new programs and research regarding specifically social innovation. Recent examples would be the **Action Plan for Social Economy**, which has a precise chapter on social innovation, and **The European Social Catalyst Fund** that looks at the upscaling challenge. However, huge scaling up of social innovation are rather rare. With our programs, we focus more on learning from the impacts of a few of social innovations working on the same issue.

Regarding the European Social Fund +, the new regulation adopted by the European Commission requires every member state to address social innovation specifically by creating programs and building dedicated ecosystems. ESF+ also continues the work done by the EU Program for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) and to support European level networks.

The European Union is currently financing competence centers at the European level and in the member states. These social innovation ecosystems should promote capacities building and synergies among actors, as well as give access to more resources to the stakeholders. In France and Belgium, for instance, we funded the project VISES on social impact assessment.



Further resources

[“The European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)”](#), *European Commission*

[“The European Social Catalyst Fund”](#), *ESCF*

GORGI KRLEV

To what extent measuring the impact of social innovation is necessary and how to generalize its practice?



Gorgi Krlev is a senior researcher on social enterprise and social innovation at the Centre for Social Investment of Heidelberg University and a teacher at the Business School of Politecnico di Milano on impact investing, sustainable energy and social economy. He has been working on developing and testing social innovation indicators in European projects such as the German project IndiSI, and has been awarded the 2021 Research Prize for Social Market Economy for its research on measuring the social added value of organizations in a society.

Why and how to assess the impact of social innovation?

Impact assessment has become a real matter of interest. A lot of investing companies want to create social impact and on the other hand, social innovation is now a priority for policy makers and citizens. **Because social innovations aim to enhance the capacity of the society to act, it is crucial to assess the transformations.**

Impact assessment needs to be **multi-level**. It is necessary to look at the country's context, the region, the organization and the civil society. We need to understand how much citizens are engaged and self-responsible when addressing society challenges.

We are also diving into data on social media to see what kind of discourses and problems are being evoked, which coalitions are being built in order to identify where social innovation might happen.

What are the challenges to standardize social impact assessment?

While working on creating indicators for the **IndiSI** project, we faced a lack of access to data. **We do not have enough data available to assess how social innovation is concretely promoting the society's well-being.** We need to tackle this challenge and policymakers have a key role in this process. The OECD is moving in this direction and published a **Social Innovation Ecosystem Report** to push the work for indicators system.

We also lack of a joint idea of social impact assessment and we are far away from standardization. We need to think about social transformations and assessment at a Meta level, to conduct larger studies and to ask the policy makers to give it a push. **Instead of waiting for the social innovation to be materialized to think about its impact, we should work on anticipating the assessment process.** I believe that understanding social innovation and its impact at a broader level would allow standardization.



Further resources

Krlev, Gorgi et al. *Social Innovation. Comparative Perspectives*. Routledge Studies in Social Enterprise & Social Innovation, 2019.

Krlev, Gorgi et al. *Financial Social Innovation. International Evidence*. Max-Weber-Institute for Sociology Centre for Social Investment of Heidelberg University and Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland e. V., 2022.

LISA HEHENBERGER

What are the different practices of impact assessment and investing?



***Lisa Hehenberger** is the director of the ESADE Center for Social Impact in Barcelona and a visiting scholar at Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. She is a member of impact funds and a researcher and professor on impact investing, impact entrepreneurship and impact measurement and management. She also works as a scientific member at the OECD to analyze their impact standards.*

What does it imply for a private organization to assess the social and environmental impacts of its activities?

Once an organization decides to engage into impact assessment, the first step is to **set aside resources**. The organization needs to name someone in charge of assessment, maybe with the help of an external consultant at the beginning. They must set up goals based on the social change they are trying to achieve as a social organization and quantify this change by choosing certain time periods and a key matrix of indicators on which the key stakeholders must agree.

Impact assessment also requires to collect and to use data. The data collected should help the organization understanding the change made by its activities and defining its strategy. For this, the data needs to be actionable and integrated into the management system.

What kind of indicators do the organizations use?

There has been a lot of progress regarding the standardization of indicators, with IFC operating principles for example. **Indicators should remain specific to the field, the issue and the beneficiary group. In impact investing, organizations usually refer to the sustainable development goals. However, these goals are not directly integrated at the operational level, partly because they are macro.** We need to rethink those indicators as actionable within the organization and allow cooperation between organizations.

How can we generalize the practice of social impact assessment?

There is a certain resistance from investors; they would report on their impact if they see concrete benefits, they are pressured by their pairs or forced to measure the impact. Standards have been developed so that investors are pressured to follow those standards, to integrate impact in their investment process, have a public disclosure and external verification. Incentives such as tax benefits could encourage companies to do impact investing and assessment.

In the social sector, there is more a tradition of measuring the impact that the financial sector could learn from. But social sector organizations do need financing and capacities building to assess their impact.

What is the interest of Impact investing?

Impact investing is driven by the will of retail investors to know the outcomes of their investment, by the institutional investor's pressure on the funds and by the EU regulation and green taxonomy.

Impact bond is one example of impact investing for which investors get a financial return only if the project they finance reaches its impact goals. Even if questioned, it allows public-private partnership and collaboration between actors that do not collaborate with each other usually.



Further resources

Hehenberger, Lisa et al. *Impact measurement in practice: In-depth case studies*. European Venture Philanthropy Association, 2016.

Hehenberger, Lisa and Louis Boudoux d'Hautefeuille. *The Governance of Impact Measurement in European Impact Investing Funds*. Esade Center for Social Impact, 2021.

CARMEN PAUNESCU

How to promote social innovation on the field from higher education to entrepreneurship?



Carmen Paunescu is a professor of business and innovation at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies in Romania. Her research focuses on fostering social innovation in higher education in collaboration with local communities and entrepreneurs. She is the chair of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action working group “Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Social change and transformation” for 2019-2023.

How to engage students in creating social innovation?

Students are now looking for a job where they can develop themselves, work in a flexible way and have an impact. Our school tries to raise their awareness on what is the value they want to create and how to measure it. In this way, **we need to internalize the new forms of education such as blended learning** to help the students engage with organizations. By building ecosystems with academic actors, the public and private sectors and the civil society, higher education fosters social innovation. These connected governance structures give the opportunity for students to practice their skills in a safe environment and contribute to problem resolution. We should also develop the **culture of volunteering and value creation**.

Setting examples would be among others:

A research accelerator. It can be a collaborative network, a program, prizes, etc. to translate the research activities and results into useful outcomes for the private and public organizations and for the local communities. Local communities can identify problems that need to be solved and deliver feedback on the research results.

Community innovation labs or living labs are also interesting online or offline spaces of multidisciplinary learning. Universities are key actors to design local communities' agenda and through collective intelligence, they drive community change.

Discipline-based projects involving multiple actors and sectors of activity. These practices are created so that students engage with organizations and contribute to problems solving.



Further resources

Carmen Paunescu et al. *Social Innovation in Higher Education – Landscape, Practices, and Future Opportunities*. Innovation, Technology, and Knowledge Management (ITKM), 2022

Carmen Paunescu et al. *The rural social enterprise guidebook of good practice: Experience from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Romania and Scotland*. University of Helsinki and Ruralia Institute, 2022.

THIERRY SIBIEUDE

Key learnings of the session with French perspective



In 2002, **Thierry Sibieude** co-founded the Entrepreneurship and Impact Innovation Chair at ESSEC to build a French expertise on social impact assessment. This Chair works on both teaching students, and supporting social entrepreneurs to create and assess impacts. He also created an incubator to accelerate social entrepreneurs' projects. In 2018, he opened a Social Impact Assessment Laboratory (E&MISE) based on research action programs and a Social Impact Assessment Observatory.

How university can train social entrepreneurs?

20 years ago, the subject of social innovation was less popular - if not ignored - and founding an academic chair on it was an innovation. The **Entrepreneurship and Impact Innovation Chair at ESSEC** is built upon an interdisciplinary and practical approach. **Teaching about social entrepreneurship needs to be very practical and it is a challenge for universities who focus more on research.** We need a change of mindset in universities, to combine scientific approach and global comprehension. The academic structure encourages everyone to be very specialized on a narrow topic but social entrepreneurship needs to have an interdisciplinary approach.

In our school, we help students to define their objectives and then we give them tools to develop social innovation and measure its impact.

What role universities and the public sector play in promoting social innovation ?

If the concept of social innovation in France has been defined (PACTE law) and is now used by a diversity of actors –not only by social entrepreneurs, **social innovation is yet to be recognized and financed the way technological innovation is.** If impact is at the heart of social entrepreneurs' work, they need a common framework. It requires political will and the

collaboration of every actor to create a better definition of social innovation and think about the assessment of its impacts. **The public sector** plays an important role in defining a global framework and **needs to increase its financial investments to upscale social innovations and guarantee their sustainability.**

With the Social Impact Assessment Laboratory (E&MISE) we would like to contribute to standardize and structure a set of indicators to get a real social and environmental assessment. Our goal is to give tools to everyone and create a common language. Assessment tools must be verifiable, useful and recognized by all. We also need to engage private companies in creating positive social and environmental impacts. In this, the European Union can help by implementing a social taxonomy such as tax credits.



Further resources

["Laboratoire E&MISE Évaluation et Mesure d'Impact Social et Environnemental", ESSEC Business School.](#)

Sibieude, Thierry et al. *Entreprises à mission et raison d'être - Changer l'entreprise pour un monde plus durable.* Dunod, 2020.



FRANK MOULAERT

Overview and framework of social innovation action research



Frank Moulaert is a professor of Spatial Planning at the Faculty of Engineering KU Leuven in Belgium. He initially studied econometrics and the limits of quantitative approach to measure social innovations' impact. Frank Moulaert holds a long interest for the action-research approach and has contributed to its development in the European Union and more. He compiled his years of research by creating a framework of Social Innovative Action Research.

What is Action Research?

Social innovation is about satisfying human needs but also about rebuilding and solidifying social relations around the value of mutual aid. Action research has a very long history in different parts of the world and works towards **social and political empowerment and transformation**. Social scientists too often work far away from the people having the need they intend to cover and actors on the ground need the data produced by researchers to defend themselves, to build enterprises, etc.

With Action Research, there is a changing role of theory from narrow disciplinary approaches to a meta theory where there is room for theoretical explanations coming from different disciplines and for the practitioners' narratives. Social Innovative Action Research also highlights the role of grassroots democracy in reaction to neoliberalism. These social innovative initiatives should be able to develop **in protected economic spaces** and not according to productivity and competitiveness.

How to conduct Social Innovative Action Research?

An Action-Research program should start from a particular issue addressed by researchers or citizens, policy makers, etc. For our network, we used a transdisciplinary approach and started by looking at partnerships, alliances and local development projects to

build a synergetic dialogue between different academics and local actors. Examining project by project, we came with a wide and evolving methodological diversity: consortium building, communication methods (collective observation, open discussions, design interdisciplinary multi-party analysis) and modes of governance. To study local initiatives, we also research at a bigger scale to understand the opportunities and constraints created by the social and political context and by the real estate sector. We did participatory observations in neighborhoods as well as shared analysis, collective strategy definition and integrated area development.

What is the emancipatory power of social innovative action research?

Governance models are key and action-research consortium must be founded around the values of self-evaluation, listening, reflexivity, etc. Social innovative action research is about **learning interactively**: we develop new models of co-learning, co-decision making, etc.

In this way, social innovative action research carries many opportunities: it closes the gap between activists, scientists, politicians, develop shared languages and experiment bottom linked democracy and methodological hybridization. However, we must be careful about the replicability of our local solutions and avoid supporting a cheap welfare state operated by NGOs.



Further resources

Moulaert, Frank and Abid Mehmood "Towards a social innovation (SI) based epistemology in local development analysis: lessons from twenty years of EU research", *European Planning Studies*, vol.28, no.3, 2019, pp. 434-453.

Moulaert, Frank et al. *Social Innovation as a Trigger for Transformations - The Role of Research*. European Commission, 2017.



ANNA SERAVALLI

What is the participatory design approach and how do you use it to develop and implement social innovation?



Anna Seravalli is a Sweden researcher on sustainable transition and design for social innovation. She holds a PhD in Design and Social Innovation and teaches at The School of Arts and Communication of Malmö University. Anna Seravalli is also the coordinator of The Malmö University Design and Innovation for Sustainability Lab, where she uses the participatory design approach based on the works of the founder of the DESIS Labs, Ezio Manzini.

What is the participatory design approach?

Action-research as a collaboration of actors is fundamental to foster the processes of creating capacities and knowledge. Design can be one way of doing action-research with its capacity of making things tangible, by giving people the possibility to experience.

Scandinavian participatory design emerged in the 70s to answer the threat workers felt with the arrival of technology in their work place. **Participatory design was a way to involve both users and workers in shaping new ways of working.** In the last twenty years, the concept moved to societal questions and social innovations. **Participatory design is now used by and with citizens and the public sector to foster change by trying initiatives and learning.** The strengths of participatory design are to be contextual based and its capacity of prototyping by creating small-scale initiatives.

What social innovations do you support at the Malmö DESIS Lab?

The Malmö DESIS Lab is a community lab focusing on civil society to give space to silenced actors and support bottom-up processes and social innovations. The design approach works on creating shared experiences and initiatives to develop a common language. We moved a bit from the idea of directly developing solutions because they often remain isolated and did not create the change we hoped for. We focus now on how we can create capacities within the public sector and universities to support social innovations.

One of our biggest challenge is to **find how the different roles and logics of actors can meet and how to challenge the power relationships.** Participatory design adds a political layer by forcing the actors to pay attention to these dynamics. In this way, we work a lot with the municipalities to design with citizens projects of city planning, culture, waste and water management. The expected outcomes would be internal changes within the structure, even if we know that is challenging to integrate these new ways of working.

Further resources



Seravalli, Anna et al. "Design in the public sector: Nurturing reflexivity and learning". *The Design Journal*, vol. 25, no 2, 2020, p. 225-242.

["DESIS LAB"](#), Malmö University

YUNA CHIFFOLEAU

How do public and private actors co-produce and implement sustainable food systems?



***Yuna Chiffolleau** is a French researcher and teacher at The National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE). Expert on sustainable agriculture, Yuna Chiffolleau participated to the European Sustainable Agriculture Dialogue (ESAD) in defining EU's research and innovation post-2020 objectives. Promoting the upscale of short food supply chains, she launched the research network RT Alimentation Locale and the trademark ici.c.local.*

How are short food supply chains a social innovation?

Short food supply chains are a solution to diversify small entrepreneurs' revenues and provide healthier food for consumers. It is a way to **re-appropriate food and empower producers, sellers and consumers**. Short food supply chains as a social innovation has long been marginalized and there are few resources to develop them. Thanks to the knowledge and data co-produced in these networks, we were able to show that short food supply chains are part of solutions for the future.

How does the network RT Alimentation Locale create new knowledge and norms?

RT Alimentation Locale is a French research and development network dedicated to short food supply chains. Founded in 2015 by the French Ministry of agriculture and food, researchers from various disciplines and stakeholders, it aims at producing collective expertise and tools to facilitate the development of short food supply chains. It is a **living lab which co-produces solutions to problems that are not taken in account by the policies or by the market, and encourages a change toward sustainable food norms**. In this way, this network shares new performance indicators such as trust, biodiversity, preservation and democracy. This knowledge is then diffused in the network and more largely via webinars and documents that are available for all and for free.

How does Ici.c.local promote, improve and upscale social innovations?

In 2014, I created with local elected officials from Montpellier, citizens and professionals the trademark Ici.c.local. It is a **free and participatory labelling system for products coming from short food supply chains** and sold in open-air markets. Used in more than 20 French cities, we are discussing to upscale the trademark to all open-air markets in Lyon. We also use this network as a living observatory of agricultural practices and food behaviors and we look how it makes evolve local and national policies.

Its participatory and territorial approach is a social innovation itself: in each territory, a local community gathering local inhabitants, producers, consumers and sellers determine criteria for local and sustainable products and ensure the well-functioning of the system. Each city also has its facilitator that can be a Chamber of Agriculture or a consumer association. As the national coordinator, I am in charge of training facilitators and facilitating exchanges between local comities so can they can improve this trademark and network.

We need participatory action research to co-create new data and indicators and collectively assess, practice and raise awareness around social innovations.

Further resources



[“RMT Alimentation Locale”, RMT Alimentation locale](#)

Chiffolleau, Yuna et al. “The impact of COVID-19 on alternative and local food systems and the potential for the sustainability transition: Insights from 13 countries”. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, vol. 28, 2021, pp. 591-599

ABOUT THE IMPACT TANK

Launched in October 2020 at the initiative of GROUPE SOS and four universities (Sciences-Po, Sorbonne University, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris Dauphine - PSL), the **IMPACT TANK** is the first think-and-do tank dedicated to the positive impact economy and to the promotion and scaling of positive impact social innovations. Combining academic expertise and field experience, it encourages the scaling up of the most promising social innovations and the collaboration of all the actors involved in a culture of measured impact in the service of a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

The Impact Tank is committed to being at crossroads between social innovators, companies, public authorities, researchers, foundations and funding organizations. This plurality of stakeholders is thus brought together in each of our actions.

© IMPACT TANK
15 rue de la Fontaine au roi
75011 PARIS

<https://impact-tank.org/>
Twitter : @ImpactTank
LinkedIn : IMPACT TANK

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