

CONFERENCE

Encouraging social innovation in Europe, from research to action

SYNTHESIS

On Friday 11th of March 2022, the IMPACT TANK organized a web conference on “Encouraging social innovation in Europe, from research to action”. During three hours, research experts and policymakers from all around Europe discussed how to promote social innovation. Discover their 8 key messages !



1.

Researchers need to keep studying the specific features of social innovation to help the European policy-makers build a common understanding of what social innovation is

Every speaker agree on defining social innovation as **new answers to unsatisfied or badly satisfied social needs**. Nevertheless, they raised other criteria such as the **answer to environmental challenges** and the **process of coproduction** that should involve all the stakeholders.

Jürgen Howaldt (TU Dortmund University, Germany) also reminded us that social innovation remains a **recent topic of research** that still needs to be investigated.

Both **Thierry Sibieude** (ESSEC Business School, France) and **Frank Moulaert** (KU Leven University, Belgium) observe a global interest for social innovation and see as a priority the development of a **shared language**.

2.

The field of social innovation must also include grassroots movements and citizen-led initiatives, which empower civil society

The discussion highlighted the key and yet underestimated role of citizens in promoting social innovations. **Anna Seravalli** explained how she uses **participatory design** in her Design and Innovation for Sustainability Lab at Malmö University (Sweden) as a way of learning, trying initiatives and fostering change.

“Local food systems have been marginalized by institutions because they see these systems as opposed to technology. It is precisely because we co-create new knowledge and data with the stakeholders that we were able to show that short food supply chains are part of the future.”

— **Yuna Chiffolleau** (INRAE, France).

Amélie de Montchalin, the French Minister of Public transformation, introduced the **Accelerator of citizens’ initiatives**. It is aimed at supporting and upscaling citizens’ project, by providing them with the necessary boost (resources, expertise, and synergies with public administrations).

3.

Social innovation requires places and skills to conduct collaborative experiments

“The biggest challenge is that participatory initiatives do not bring only different roles but also different logics. [...] In the Malmö DESIS Lab, we focus on giving space to silenced and marginalized actors.”

— **Anna Seravalli**

All speakers joined **Jürgen Howaldt**’s will of creating infrastructures such as social innovation labs to provide **institutionalized processes and spaces for experimentation**.

Yuna Chiffolleau’s recommendation is to “have participatory action-research to create new data and knowledge to collectively assess and practice social innovations”.

For **Frank Moulaert**, “Social Innovative Action-Research is about rebuilding and solidifying social relations around the value of mutual aid: in rebuilding collaboration and support.»



4.

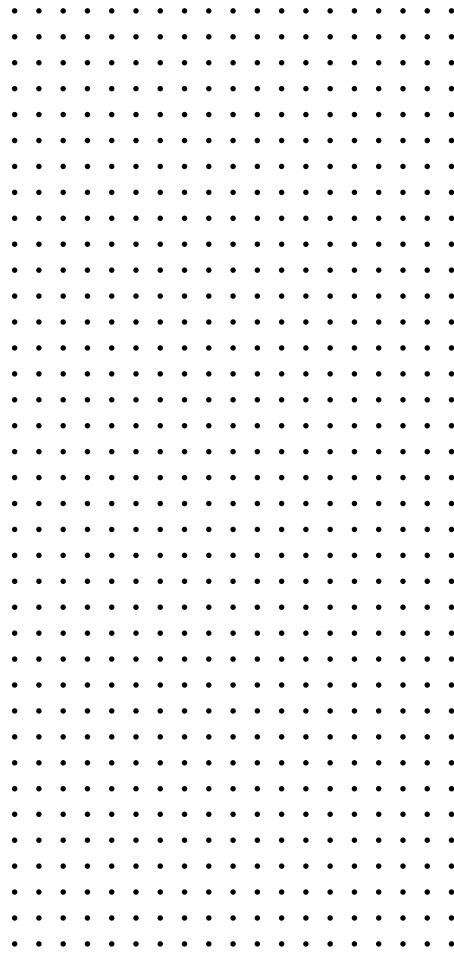
The European Union plays a key role to support and coordinate social innovation at the intercountry level

Risto Raivio, Senior Expert at the European Commission presented the **European Social Fund+** and expressed the need to have other European programs explicitly addressing social innovation and its challenges.

“The European Commission is also adopting new regulation to encourage every member state to address social innovation specifically, to build ecosystems, get involved in programs, etc”.

— **Risto Raivio**

For **Jürgen Howaldt**, “The European Green and Digital Transformation need to be aligned with the concept of social innovation: we need mission-oriented social innovation policy”.





5.

The European Union must learn from social innovations and help them scale

The speakers noted the important number of European research projects but highlighted the **lack of discussion and application of the conclusions by the policymakers**. **Risto Raivio** mentioned that the European Union has a new set of measures focusing on upscaling and replicating social innovations and opened a call of proposals on these issues.

“We are currently financing competence centers at the European level to promote social innovation ecosystem and capacities building and recently, we opened the European Social Catalyst Fund looking at the upscaling challenge of social innovation.”

— **Risto Raivio**

6.

Every social innovator should evaluate and work on improving its social impact

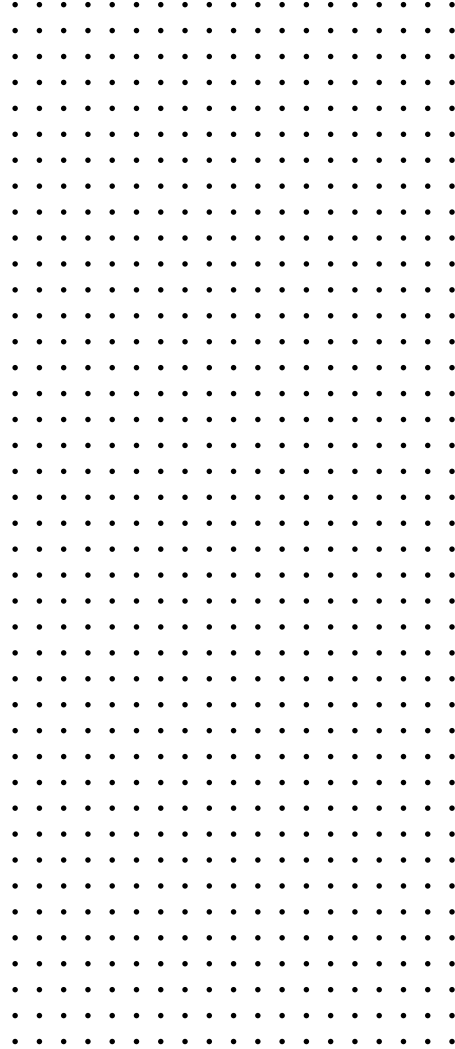
“In terms of the social sector, there is more a tradition of measuring the impact that the financial sector could learn from. [...] Assessing the impact of an activity is a way to properly rectify one organization’s strategy and allocate efficiently resources to increase social impact. For this, it needs to be integrated into the decision-making process.”

— **Lisa Hehenberger** (Esade, Spain)

“Social innovation is about enhancing the capacity of the society to act and I think it is very important to assess this kind of transformation.”

— **Gorgi Krlev** (University of Heidelberg, Germany)

Furthermore, **Jürgen Howaldt** emphasized the **need to discuss how we can enhance the impact of social innovations**.



7.

Working on Data is critical for impact assessment

Gorgi Krlev described the difficulties faced while trying to build **indicators to measure impact**: “One of the key challenges is that we do not have enough data available to assess how social innovation is concretely promoting the society’s wellbeing. We need to tackle this challenge and policymakers can play a big role.”

As an inspiring example, **Amélie de Montchalin** presented the **Barometer of the results of Public Action** as a tool to guarantee the transparency and efficiency of public action. It follows the changes in key indicators with updated data at the territory level.

Yet, if speakers see assessment as a need, they do identify a **risk of standardization**. For **Lisa Hehenberger**, “the choice of indicators need to depend on the field, on the issue and on the beneficiary group”.

8.

Social innovation leads to innovation in education

“To foster social innovation, we need to internalize new forms of education (blended learning, online work, practices, volunteering, and experiential learning trips) as formal practices to engage students. [...] Students do not only practice new skills in a safe environment but they also contribute to problem resolution and develop their entrepreneurial skills.”

— **Carmen Paunescu** (Université de Bucarest, Roumanie)

Thierry Sibieude carried on the same view: “When you teach social entrepreneurship, you need to be very practical which is a challenge for universities who focus on research.”

