

Policy Brief Education and Lifelong Learning, December 2015

## ***Social Innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning***

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This policy brief on Social Innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning takes stock of challenges and practice fields of social innovations gathered for the State of the Art Report of this SI-DRIVE Policy Field. It further is based on policy foresight and recommendations elaborated in the first Policy and Foresight Workshop on Education and Lifelong Learning which took place in autumn 2015.

### ***European and Global Challenges in the Policy Field***

From a **European perspective** the Europe 2020 Strategy defines **overall challenges** with a close relation to education and lifelong learning, which are (1) *ageing societies*, (2) *skills shortages* in the workforce, and global competition, but also the high (3) *unemployment rates*. Since the European labour markets are nationally diversified and dynamic, the policy fields of education and employment are interlinked: Skills, competences, and qualifications necessary for societal and economical participation have to be adjusted continuously. This includes beneath occupation related skills, knowledge and competences more and more also *transversal skills*, such as the ability to learn and take initiative, and *entrepreneurial skills* contributing to employability as well as supporting business creation. Furthermore, it is important to better identify and manage the availability of required skills, competences, and qualifications to *prevent skills gaps and mismatches*.

Lifelong learning has been one of the guiding principles in the European development of education and training policies since the adoption of the

*Ageing societies, skills shortages, and unemployment are interlinked challenges*

*Skills, competences and qualifications are relevant for social inclusion and economic participation*



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*Education and lifelong learning as a key for European competitiveness, growth and social cohesion*

EU Education Council Conclusions. The EU Lifelong Learning policy now has to be seen in the wider context of the Europe 2020 strategy. Both the underpinning philosophies and actual objectives (strategic and operational) as well as the programme architecture and content aim to *use education and training as a key lever* in making the EU more competitive, fostering social cohesion and enhancing growth.

*Ensuring quality of education and equal opportunities*

When taking a **global perspective**, similar challenges can be identified within different world regions. In many countries, the transversal topic is not about providing education, but rather ensuring its quality and guaranteeing equal opportunities (e.g. access to education). Policy directives in all educational fields are formulated for the formal education sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary education) and within a broader lifelong learning perspective (from early childhood education to the transition from school to work and so forth).

*Activating skills supply*

According to SI-DRIVE's educational experts from the different world regions not only addressing the development of relevant skills is of importance but also activating skills supply and encouraging people to offer their skills and deploying them is a key.

*Lifelong learning offers an answer to constant changes*

To overcome recent and future challenges on employability and social inclusion in a mid and long term perspective, a continuous improvement of education and lifelong learning is necessary for European societies and the world. Formal primary, secondary and tertiary education and further education and training that is framed within the overarching concept and strategy of lifelong learning (covering all kinds of learning including non-formal and informal learning) are seen as providing an adequate answer to constant and profound technological, social, economic and demographic changes. Lifelong learning is guiding the strategic objectives and the improvement of the challenges and targets defined by the European Commission. These are increasing early childhood education, reducing the number of early school leavers/drop outs and increasing the quantitative and qualitative participation of people in lifelong learning, to just name some.

*EU challenges*

The *main current strands* of social innovations in SI-DRIVE refer to these European challenges. The following list summarises the practice fields of social innovation identified by the policy field experts of SI-DRIVE:

*Practice fields of social innovation*

- Skills shortages, miss-match and lack of professions, skills and competences: occupational orientation, early pupils' career planning, strategic partnerships of education and economy, entrepreneurship education and promotion, transition management (from school to work, from outdated to new occupations), redeployment and retraining.
- Improvement of participation in education and extended learning biographies: new strategies and structures for lifelong learning, recognition of non-formal and informal learning, early childhood education, empowerment.
- Improvement of learning possibilities and options / expansion of educational opportunities: new learning arrangements, interactive education, new digital and virtual learning environments.
- Improvement / reforms of formal educational systems and institutions: updating education institutions and programmes, quality improvement, new forms of collaboration of educational institutions (local, regional, national and international), pupils support, guidance and counselling, prevention of school dropouts, rural areas integration, improving infrastructure and mobility.
- Social inclusion of vulnerable groups / equal opportunities: reduction of educational disadvantages, digital inclusion, specific learning arrangements and networking for vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, handicapped, disadvantaged people), prevention of school violence, second chance education, training guidance, diversity management.

- Attraction of teachers and increasing competences of teachers and trainers: attraction of young professionals to the educational sector, alternative forms of education (towards consultancy, mentoring), quality of training, new teaching practices (e.g. active learning, andragogy), specific teaching competences such as pedagogical techniques and IT competences, integration of vulnerable groups.

### ***Foresight Results***

When taking a look at the results from a foresight perspective, drivers and ambitions as well as enablers and barriers for social innovations come to forth.

The most important *drivers* for social innovations discussed in the foresight and policy workshop on education and lifelong learning of the SI-DRIVE partners are:

#### *Drivers for social innovations*

- a growing frustration and resignation with traditional ways of teaching and learning and a low perceived attractiveness (especially in Eastern Europe);
- a rising awareness about the quality of *individual* learning arrangements and education, teachers, tools and methods, new (didactical and digital) learning environments;
- the mismatch between economic needs and the aspired qualifications of school leavers;
- social change as a driver itself, especially concerning transformations in East European and Arab countries (Arab Spring);
- a growing demand of (high qualified) people in terms of more and better higher education and a higher teacher qualification but also from a gender equality perspective; and
- NGO's as drivers of bottom-up social innovations.

These drivers, however, vary within the practice fields and geographical areas under scrutiny. This applies also for the current and future *ambitions* for social innovations.

Ensuring a better match between economic demand and supply of school leavers by increasing the critical mass of people with up-to-date qualifications is of high importance. This means that in the future a greater collaboration between industrial and educational institutions must take place in order to enhance the educational profile of pupils.

#### *Ambitions for social innovations*

For effective social innovations to take place it is important to enhance and support cooperation and synergies of various actors at regional level. This also implies improved communication between the stakeholders.

"Leave no child behind" is becoming an important statement. Ambitions are therefore related to equal opportunities and access to education as well as alternative learning arrangements. Moreover, all children should receive the support needed to be included within the education system.

It indicates a need for more flexible and tailored education. However, tailoring education to pupils' needs should not result in lowering educational standards.

Similarly, the empowerment and inclusion of disadvantaged persons in society by means of providing equal access to education is an important ambition for now and when considering, for instance, migration streams in Europe, also for the future. As such, education should establish a common cultural understanding. Nowadays, most disadvantages are often a result of differing, even conflicting, values and cultures.

The comparability and recognition of the different educational systems as well as the degrees obtained by students should be an ambition for the future. This also implies enhanced recognition and appreciation of diversity.

More flexibility at institutional level is clearly needed. Hence, room to adaptive capacity building and distribution of knowledge must be given.

Teachers' education should be updated (constantly) according to upcoming needs (e.g. ICT, migration). Teachers thus should be motivated, qualified and open-minded (to new ways of teaching).

In addition, digital environments should become accessible to everyone.

As a result, societal awareness about the importance of education and lifelong learning is built up, social innovations in this field will be appreciated and collaborations and corporations between different actors are taken for granted.

*Frustration with current systems and institutions*

Drivers and motivators, ambitions and goals as well as barriers and enablers are very closely related to each other. In some cases, barriers can even become drivers, e.g. when society's attention is drawn to existing problems. It seems that society's frustration about current systems and institutions as well as the dissatisfaction with market failures can act as an important driver for social innovation (even if this is not always the case).

*Government as an enabler and barrier*

Government can act as an enabler through funding, sponsoring and facilitating initiatives outside the system, but being dependent on financial support from government and the given governmental structures can act as a barrier as well. *Drivers* named by the SI-DRIVE partners are new pedagogical approaches, new collaborative learning platforms, market demands for new jobs, co-working and cooperation, and the self-organisation capacity of the civil society. Main *barriers* are missing continuity of policies and strategies as well as the inflexibility and the persistency of national or regional institutions and systems, a high degree of bureaucracy and administration and missing financial and administrative resources.

### **Policy Issues**

The following policy challenges related to fostering social innovations were discussed in the SI-DRIVE workshop:

*New governance*

*New governance*: networking and collaboration across institutions and areas; coping with and coordination between different actors (ensuring stakeholder integration); taking into account civil society and the economy; setting up and qualifying intermediates and enhancing their acceptability; new balance of centralization and decentralization.

*Promoting a social innovation eco-system of collaboration (policy, economy, civil society and education)*

*Promoting an education social innovation ecosystem*: inform and educate people about the possibilities of SI; understanding the process of how social innovation evolve and spread and the aspects (e.g. cultural context) to consider when initiating a SI; educational institutions need to be adaptive and relevant; examine and understand the context in which social innovation should take place.

*Greater flexibility*: balancing (sometimes) conflicting demands (e.g. the quest for greater flexibility versus standardisation); focusing on comparable skills and competences and at the same time ensuring cultural tolerance; promoting collaboration despite formal responsibilities; overcoming inertia and bureaucracy.

*More flexibility and leeway for social innovation*

*Giving leeway for social innovation:* having a “good” and functioning formal education system by – in parallel – providing enough space for social innovations to flourish; too much change in too short time without giving the system and society time to react.

Next to this, also *regional differences* should be taken into account when considering policy issues that foster social innovations. Regional differences matter in the following ways:

*Regional differences concern the role of civil society; the historical, social and economic context; the quality of life, the system stability and capacity and digital accessibility*

- Consider the *role of civil society*: the degree of government’s involvement as well as the imposed restrictions play a major role in the success/failure of SI
- The historical (path dependency), political and social context is important and differs from region to region
- Differences exist also due to economic specialisations
- The quality of life is different from nation to nation and from region to region; hence, different approaches are needed
- System stability is not always given and the capacity to develop long-term strategies is not always available (e.g. a lack is observed in some African countries) which makes the development or acceptance of social innovation more difficult
- IT/ICT development/access in different regions

### ***Policy Recommendations***

The policy recommendations of the SI-DRIVE workshop relate to the challenges of fostering and upscaling social innovations. They are as follows:

*Compatibility, involving public sector actors and considering path dependencies are relevant for the upscaling of social innovations*

- The compatibility of any social innovation to the given regime, in which the social innovation is embedded, is important. If it is not compatible, social innovation face challenges in scaling up.
- The public sector has to be involved even in grassroots initiatives; however, the role of its actors is twofold: on the one hand, they can play an important bridging role as they possess the knowledge about the boundaries as well as the do’s and don’ts of the current regime. On the other hand, the public sector itself can act as incubator or facilitator for social innovations.
- Another important factor that hinders or fosters successful scaling of social innovation is the path dependency: decisions once made in the past may no longer be relevant but influence decisions in future.

*A better understandings and visibility of the social innovation concept is needed*

Policy advice to boost social innovation in education and lifelong learning related to a better and coherent understanding and visibility of this kind of innovation is needed: This has to be done by fostering collaboration and transparency about deficits and conflicts, engaging stakeholders in education via cooperation and networking, giving social innovative initiatives within and outside the education-system more room. Less compliance and promoting more the emergence of social innovations as well as dealing with diversity and learning from diversity are also characterising new policy approaches in education and lifelong learning.

## Conclusions

*Lifelong Learning as a strategy and concept has to be taken serious and fostered by social innovations*

Education has to be embedded in an overarching lifelong learning strategy and in new learning structures that are established across the different institutions and areas and that are oriented at the individual learning biography and demands. **When the lifelong learning concept is taken seriously it requires a paradigm change** from an institutional to a learner perspective, and thus a reorganisation of institutional structures.

*Top-down and bottom-up, involving all the relevant stakeholders and from a learner's perspective*

Therewith, top-down governance is enriched by social innovations with a bottom-up perspective of learners and learning processes. The country and regional reports inform that social innovation in education are needed that go beyond the borders of (still) separated education areas, explicitly by looking at transitions and demands from a learner's (and not an institutional) perspective. To unlock and use the potential of social innovation, public policy has to take over the role of enabling, up-taking, fostering and giving leeway for social innovations as well as finding new ways of balancing centralisation and decentralisation.

*System change or revolution?*

In the SI-DRIVE Policy and Foresight Workshop two scenarios were discussed: a "System Change Model" and a "Revolutionary Model". While the system change scenario smoothly optimises education and lifelong learning through providing space and leeway for social innovation, an alternative system is developed in the revolutionary scenario that leads to a more private and autonomous, but also industry-led education system.

*Solutions for the learners and with the learners*

In any way, management of change must be empowered by unlocking the potential of social innovation through effective participation of civil society and an integration of people concerned (top down *and* bottom up). The recent social innovation approach focuses on the empowerment of education and lifelong learning: with **"solutions for the learner and with the learner"**, with links to inclusive growth and new pedagogical approaches, including economy actors and the establishment of sustainable collaboration with educational institutions on curricula and training programmes. Public policy actors will have to take over a new critical role in fostering social innovation and its impact, not only by funding, stimulating and unlocking social innovation but also by coordinating and integrating social innovations in the existing system, giving leeway or changing the education and lifelong learning system if necessary.

*New role of public policy actors*

**About SI-Drive**

“Social Innovation – Driving Force of Social Change”, in short **SI-DRIVE**, is a research project aimed at extending knowledge about social innovation (SI) in three major directions:

*Research objectives*

- Integrating theories and research methodologies to advance understanding of social innovation leading to a comprehensive new paradigm of innovation.
- Undertaking European and global mapping of social innovation, thereby addressing different social, economic, cultural, historical and religious contexts in eight major world regions.
- Ensuring relevance for policy makers and practitioners through in-depth analyses and case studies in seven policy fields, with cross European and world region comparisons, foresight and policy round tables.

*Global partnership*

SI-DRIVE involves 15 partners from 12 EU Member States and 10 partners from all continents, accompanied by 13 advisory board members, all in all covering 30 countries all over the world.

*Seven policy fields*

Research is dedicated to seven major policy fields: (1) Education (2) Employment (3) Environment and climate change (4) Energy (5) Transport and mobility (6) Health and social care (7) Poverty reduction and sustainable development.

*Iterative research approach*

The approach adopted ensures cyclical iteration between theory development, methodological improvements, and policy recommendations. Two mapping exercises at the European and the global level will be carried out in the frame of SI-DRIVE: Initial mapping will capture basic information of about 1000+ actual social innovations from a wide variety of sources worldwide, leading to a typology of social innovation. This will be the basis to examine the global social innovation distribution. Subsequent mapping will use the typology to focus on well documented social innovation, leading to the selection of 70 cases for in-depth analysis in the seven SI-DRIVE policy areas. These case studies will be further analysed, used in stakeholder dialogues in seven policy field platforms and in analysis of cross-cutting dimensions (e.g. gender, diversity, ICT), carefully taking into account cross-sector relevance (private, public, civil sectors), and future impact.

Up to now five key dimensions (summarised in the following figure) are mainly structuring the theoretical and empirical work:

*Five key dimensions*



*Outcomes*

The outcomes of SI-DRIVE will cover a broad range of research dimensions, impacting particularly in terms of changing society and empowerment, and contributing to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**More information: [www.si-drive.eu](http://www.si-drive.eu)**