



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING



This policy brief on Social Innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning is based on the empirical mapping of social innovations within the EU funded project “Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change” (SI-DRIVE). The stock of the results is taken from 211 mapped cases and 18 in-depth case studies on social innovations gathered in the SI-DRIVE policy field of Education and Lifelong Learning. Based on the empirical results, policy recommendations were elaborated in the second Policy and Foresight Workshop held in spring 2017 looking for appropriate policy approaches. The main challenge of this policy field is to improve awareness of the added value of social innovations for and beyond the formal education system. Here public policy is in charge of taking over a new role which gives more leeway and support for bottom-up initiatives, unlocking the innovation potential and stocktaking of successful innovations.

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INTRODUCTION

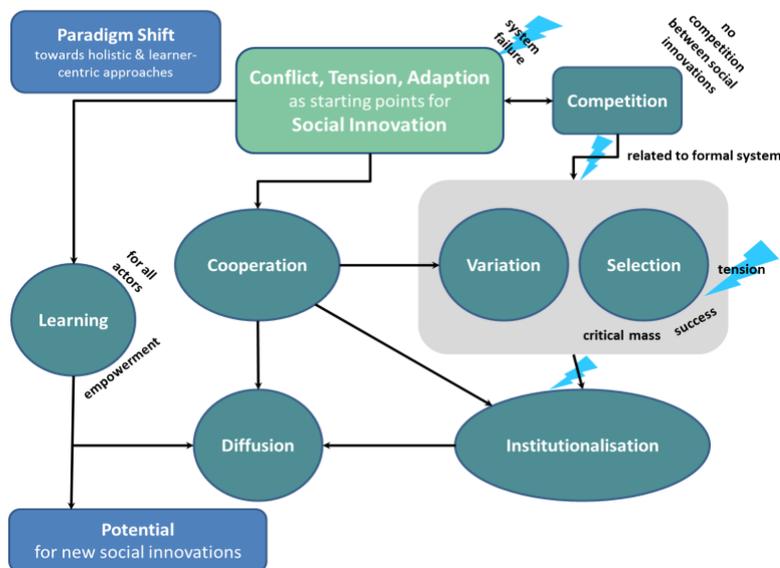
As described already in the first policy brief in 2016, the overall European and global challenges of this policy field (as highlighted in the Europe 2020 Strategy and UN Sustainable Development Goals) show the cross-policy field relevance and holistic approach of social innovations. Underlined by the empirical results, societal challenges (e.g. ageing societies, skills shortages and unemployment) and local social demand indicate that the policy field of education is deeply interlinked with other policy fields, especially employment and poverty reduction.

Skills, competences, and qualifications have to be constantly improved and updated for any societal and economical participation. In this respect Education and Lifelong Learning provides an adequate answer to continuous and profound technological, social, economic and demographic changes. In Europe the focus is primarily on *education and training (lifelong learning)* as a key component in making the EU more competitive as well as fostering social cohesion and enhancing growth, whilst on a global perspective providing education, ensuring its quality and guaranteeing equal opportunities (e.g. access to education) are the main focus.

This challenging background is reflected by the 211 mapped social innovation initiatives and the 18 in-depth case studies of SI-DRIVE. Concerning Education and Lifelong Learning, the SI-DRIVE

support mechanisms, the bureaucratic/silo-thinking of ministries as well as a lack of institutional support (for instance the provision of access to schools). Such barriers can also be related to an overall **lack of awareness** of the concepts and potential of social innovations on side of policy. Overall, social innovations in Education and Lifelong Learning reveal an ongoing **paradigm shift** from the institutional to the learners' perspective. This leads to a **holistic approach** from top-down to bottom-up, as well as from teacher to learner centric approaches based on a comprehensive understanding of learning and offering milieu specific solutions. In fact, the holistic approach adopted by social innovators can be considered a legitimization for social innovators as they work separately from the formal system.

The mechanisms of social change analysed in the in-depth case studies of SI-DRIVE reveal that **conflict, tension and adaption** can be considered the starting points driving social innovations in Education and Lifelong Learning, often closely related to the gaps and failures of the formal system. This tension can lead to **cooperation** – which is considered a success factor – not only for influencing **variation** and **selection** (which depends significantly on the formal education sector) but also highly relevant for **diffusion** (across regions) and **institutionalisation**.



Competition among social innovation initiatives is not an issue. Instead there is a kind of “competition” with the formal system concerning the best way of improving education. Moreover, **learning** is a highly important factor for all actors involved in the social innovation process (as it leads to empowerment) and happens more or less as a side effect. It is also essential for diffusion as it is often based on knowledge gained in the process of innovation. Moreover, learning from different stages and for different actors leads to new potential for additional or further innovations.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy implications and recommendations have to take into account the dependency of social innovations on the formal system and the silo-thinking of public institutions - necessitating a new role of public policy actors within a social innovation eco-system.

Dependency on the formal system

Most social innovations in Education and Lifelong Learning have a strong dependency on the formal system. As a result, social innovation solutions generate a creative “tension” to national, regional and local education systems. However, this tension can lead to a kind of “competition” between the public sector and civil society for system improvements. Subsequently, social innovations not accepted, supported or tolerated by the system may face failure more often.

Silo-thinking by policy makers

Becoming more flexible and deviating from silo-thinking within bureaucratic structures is a relevant precondition for allowing social innovation to flourish and currently represents a major challenge for policy. As social innovation initiatives often use non-traditional approaches to solve specific local issues, issues that are not necessarily only working in the educational sphere but have intersection with other policy areas (e.g. employment) it is becoming important that administrative capacities to support social innovations are strengthened on national, local and regional level.

New role for policy actors

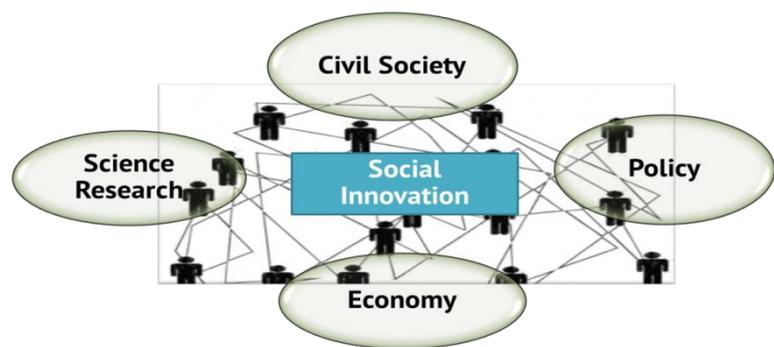
Interaction between social innovation actors and the formal system has to be improved so that bottom-up initiatives and top-down governance mechanisms are mutually driving and reinforcing each other for **overarching** solutions (e.g. transition from school to work, education and employment, social inclusion). This requires **new governance structures**: cooperation instead of

fearing the loss of responsibilities, collaboration across and within the silos, focusing on the learners' demands and not the institutional perspective, from fragmentation to overarching structures, avoiding competition, and guaranteeing stock-taking of and integrating social innovation solutions.

Public policy actors will have to take over a new role in supporting and fostering social innovations and their impacts, not only by providing adequate funding schemes, but by coordinating and integrating social innovations into the existing (formal) system, giving leeway for grassroots and bottom-up innovations. Ideally, public policy should be involved in social innovation solutions (**policy as a part of the solution**), thereby granting the required support to disseminate and scale the solution across local and regional borders.

Moving on from the fragmentation of education and lifelong learning (with separate rationalities and target-orientation, different public responsibilities) to overarching and connected **governance structures (eco-system of relevant actors and stakeholders from policy, economy, civil society and science)** between centralised and decentralised public government, market and civil society driven structures will be beneficial. This means a common management of resources (infrastructure, staff, etc.), competences, learning offers and programmes to secure and improve effectiveness for the learners and the regional-local area, and to increase efficiency by a common use of resources. This also includes an extended role of **universities and consultancies** (knowledge provision and exchange, evaluation, new ideas, process moderation, advocacy for social innovation, technological development support learning possibilities and access, and others).

Ecosystems of Social Innovation
Development of new Alliances / Cross-sector Fertilization



Interactions between the formal education system and social innovation actors are mutually reinforcing each other: Furthermore the formal education system can be described as a driver for social innovation activities due to its initiation, funding and assimilation of (successful) bottom-up solutions into its structures. Formal system players could act on social innovations as (1) **initiator**: relevant development partner benefiting from an experimental sphere without any risk; (2) **integrator**: fostering scaling and institutionalisation (by initiating or assimilating and integrating social innovations within the system or benefiting from complementary solutions staying outside the system), and (3) **supporter** or **'tolerator'** of stand-alone initiatives (with more or less acceptance, and little or no support).

A **paradigm shift** from an institutional and teacher-centric approach towards a learner-perspective (individuality of the learner, support self-actualization, extend personal competencies and enable individual improvement) leading to a more comprehensive holistic approach, tackling several societal issues and demands simultaneously by offering a sector overarching solution (employability, labour market, skills matches, etc.) is necessary. To achieve social change and improvement of education and lifelong learning there has to be more leeway for addressing and repairing system gaps, changing and improving system institutions and frameworks in order to make the formal system more receptive for social innovations.

Conclusions

Collaboration between social innovation actors and the formal system has to be improved, so that bottom-up initiatives and top-down governance mechanism are mutually driving and reinforcing each other for

- Overarching solutions for Education and policy field (transition from school to work, education and employment, social inclusion)
- More **leeway** for grassroots / bottom-up innovations: new ideas, cooperation instead of fearing to lose responsibilities
- **Compatibility** of social innovations with the formal system (eco-systems)

- Making **policy part of the solutions**: avoiding competition with the formal system, stock-taking of and integrating social innovation solutions
- **New governance structures**: collaboration across and within the silos, focusing on the learners' demands and not the institutional perspective, from fragmentation to overarching structures
- Extended role of **universities and consultancies**: knowledge provision and exchange, evaluation, new ideas, process moderation, advocacy for social innovation, technological development to support learning possibilities and access, and others.

Nevertheless, there are a lot of initiatives in Education and Lifelong Learning that are not labelled as social innovation. Compared with other regions (e.g. Latin America) and other policy fields (e.g. poverty reduction and sustainable development, environment and climate change) **visibility, awareness, recognition and acceptance of the social innovation concept** have to be fostered. Furthermore, focusing mainly on repairing, improving and transforming primary, secondary and tertiary education often leads to **Lifelong Learning** for adults being neglected by social innovation initiatives as it not part of their mind-set. Both issues together show the highly undeveloped potential of social innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning.

To **unlock the potential of Social Innovation** for Education and Lifelong Learning:

- A better understanding of social innovations has to be fostered - examining what is needed to support the development and diffusion of social innovations; understand its added societal value and its diversity.
- National or regional Social Innovation Strategies have to be developed.
- Coordination between ministries, institutions and political entities has to be enhanced; decentralization and cross-sectoral responsibilities of political competencies should be improved, involving the public sector as part of the solution.
- An innovation friendly environment with formal leeway for experimentation within and outside the boundaries of the education system has to be provided.
- Initiating, fostering and upscaling of social innovations by new governance, social innovation eco-systems and greater flexibility of the formal system is the task.
- Diffusion of good practices has to be enabled, e.g. through the development of exchange platforms, the visibility of new or best options and success stories, by creating blueprints for supportive environments and solutions.

Policy advice in order to boost social innovations in the field of Education and Lifelong Learning as a concept are related to a better, more coherent understanding and visibility of this kind of innovation. This can be achieved by fostering collaboration and transparency about deficits and conflicts, by engaging stakeholders in education via cooperation and networking, as well as by giving social innovation initiatives within and outside the education system leeway for experimentation. Less compliance and recognizing the added value generated by social innovations, more promotion of the emergence of social innovations as well as dealing with and learning from the diversity of social innovation initiatives are also characterizing new policy approaches in the policy field of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Consequently, policy makers have to focus on providing a framework for de-centralized, tailored support for civil society initiatives serving solutions that could not be or are not covered by system actors. In order to achieve this goal, administrative capacities are crucial for policy makers to realize adequate pathways for initiatives to benefit from funding and support opportunities. This requirement becomes particularly important as policy makers in the respective context might not be aware of the concept, possibilities and potential social innovation provides. The policy field and its actors have to find new collaborative **solutions for the learner and with the learner, across given responsibilities and possibilities**.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

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:

- 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 initiatives, thereby addressing different social, economic, cultural, and historical contexts in twelve 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.

SI-DRIVE involves 14 partners from 11 EU Member States and 11 partners from other states of all continents, accompanied by 13 advisory board members, all in all covering 30 countries all over the world.

Research is dedicated to seven major policy fields: (1) Education and Lifelong Learning (2) Employment (3) Environment and Climate Change (4) Energy Supply (5) Transport and Mobility (6) Health and Social Care (7) Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development.

The approach adopted ensures cyclical iteration between theory development, methodological improvements, and policy recommendations. Two mapping exercises at the European and the global level were carried out in the frame of SI-DRIVE: Initial mapping captures basic information of more than 1,000 actual social innovations from a wide variety of sources worldwide, leading to a typology of social innovation. Subsequent mapping focused on well documented social innovation, leading to the selection of 82 cases for in-depth analysis in the seven SI-DRIVE policy areas. The results of the global mapping and the in-depth case studies were analysed on the ground of the developed theoretical framework, further discussed in policy and foresight workshops and stakeholder dialogues - carefully taking into account cross-cutting dimensions (e.g. gender, diversity, technology), cross-sector relevance (private, public, civil sectors), and future impact.

Beneath the comprehensive definition of Social Innovation and defined practice fields, five key dimensions (see figure) are mainly structuring the theoretical and empirical work.

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.



PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME SI-DRIVE - Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change.

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Austrian Institute of Technology – AIT -, Vienna, Austria
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 Centre de recherche sur l'innovation sociale, Center for research on social innovation
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BUDGET

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WEBSITE

www.si-drive.eu.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FURTHER READING

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 SI-DRIVE Policy Briefs 2017: Social Innovation in Education, Employment, Environment, Energy Supply, Transport and Mobility, Health and Social Care, and Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development. <https://www.si-drive.eu/?p=2834>
 SI-DRIVE Newsletters (http://www.si-drive.eu/?page_id=333)