SOCIAL INNOVATION IN WESTERN EUROPE: NETWORKS AND PROGRAMMES AS DRIVERS

Networks and cooperation are vital for social innovation (SI). Policy which stimulates the development of SI ecosystems is likely to encourage the sustainability of social innovations. This chapter focuses on Western Europe, detailing how networks, individuals and groups are the main drivers in social innovation and providing examples of such networks.

Peter Oeij / Steven Dhondt / Suzanne Solley / Amanda Hill-Dixon

INTRODUCTION

Many studies of social innovation (SI), such as SI-DRIVE, point to the role of networks and collaboration as drivers of success [1], although we cannot say conclusively that these are necessary conditions for social innovation. In countries like Turkey, China and Russia, for example, the data shows that governmental support for social innovation is indispensable. Secondly, networks and collaboration operate differently in Europe than elsewhere, due to societal differences. In many European countries, people have relatively high trust in the government/democratic system. Moreover, several SI-DRIVE cases represent innovative ways of solving of social issues without public body involvement. The article will explore what the SI-DRIVE data tells us about:

- the importance of networks and collaboration;
- stimulating the dissemination and scaling of SI through networks;
- institutionalising SI and installing SI ecosystems as examples of a structural approach to networks.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AND NETWORKS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Social innovations are not new, but have gained increased recognition in recent years, especially in Western Europe. They do however differ from pre-1990s initiatives, mainly due to the context: in a period of austerity, social innovations are seen as substitutes for public tasks. SI-DRIVE has explored 1005 cases of social innovation globally, of which 256 were based in Western European countries.

The adoption of social innovations, and the development of environments that foster them, differs between countries.

For example, in the 2016 Social Innovation Index, the UK came 2nd after the USA, whereas Spain was ranked 28 of 45 OECD and G20 countries reflecting their respective capacity for developing SI. This suggests the UK has an institutional framework and policy context suited to SI. The extent to which other Western European countries have developed enabling environments for social innovation differs, with some common themes:

- In the past five years, SI has become increasingly popular at a European, regional and national level. The recent financial crisis and austerity policies have driven the demand for more SI.
- There is still great disagreement regarding defining social innovations. Such debate is particularly evident around the extent to which highly commercial initiatives like Airbnb and Uber should be considered as social innovations.
- Cooperation between stakeholders via networks is seen to be crucial to the success of social innovations.
- We will focus on this last observation: how do networks help?

KEY DRIVERS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The SI-DRIVE mapping suggests that while an innovative environment, ICT, financial resources, solidarity, and governance and politics are important for the development of social innovations, 'networks, individuals and groups' was particularly significant. Table 1 illustrates that this is more relevant in the EU (63,6 %) than in the rest of the world (51,4 %). Within the EU itself, these drivers are seen to be slightly more relevant in the North (71,6 %) than in the West (66,4 %), and financial resources were much less significant as a driver in these regions. Solidarity, closely connected to 'networks, individuals and groups', was the second most

	EU Regions					
	North	West	East	South	EU	Non-EU
Networks, individuals & groups	71,6%	66.4%	47,6%	57,1%	63,6%	51,4%
Innovative environment	20,3%	22,1%	29,4%	31,8%	24,5%	24,6%
ICT	28,1%	33,3%	38,9%	40,7%	34,3%	44,4%
Solidarity	5,7%	34,3%	27,8%	39,5%	29,4%	22,2%
Governance and politics	36,4%	30,4%	21,1%	6,3%	28,2%	38,0%
Financial resources	13,0%	14,5%	39,3%	23,5%	20,4%	33,8%

Table showing the percentage of initiatives which regarded these drivers as being among the top three most important (% importance; N=1005)

frequently reported key driver of SI in Western Europe (34,2 %), reiterating the importance of collaboration for SI in the region.

Qualitative research conducted with 82 of the 1005 case studies (of which more than a third were in Western Europe) concluded that factors which constrain and enable social innovation are relatively similar across different policy fields. The case study analysis illustrates that at the beginning of a project, human capacity and learning are the most relevant factors. Cooperation is subsequently a key mechanism for the latter stages of diffusion, scaling, adaptation and institutionalisation. Although concerning a wider scope than Western Europe, this qualitative research also found that institutions and their cultural environments were particularly vital in the sustainability and scaling-up of social innovations. The research also evidences the crucial role of a complete and well-functioning 'ecosystem' for social innovations to successfully scale.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Related to networks, individuals and groups, among our 82 in-depth case studies, we found that cooperation is more common in Western Europe and outside Europe, than in the rest of Europe and it is more common for social innovations in Western Europe to act in partnership (75 %) than to operate alone (58 %). Partnerships in the study were built across a number of actors: between the social innovator and either public organisations, private organisations, civil society/NPO/NGO(s), and with research institutions/universities. However,

the number of cases does not allow a deeper indication of the importance of these partnerships.

The SI-DRIVE research suggests that existing cooperation, partnerships, networks, individuals and groups are significant drivers in the development of SI in Western Europe. The next section looks into the impact of EU programmes as drivers for networking and collaboration.

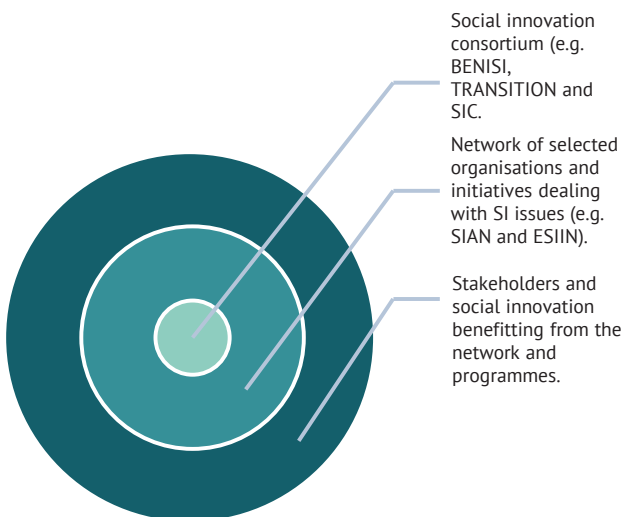## EU PROGRAMMES TO DRIVE COLLABORATION

BENISI was a three year project working and connecting with 13 partners, the majority in Western Europe, and 300 social innovations. It supported the scaling-up of social innovations across Europe. Its focus was creating new and meaningful jobs for young people who experienced unemployment and underemployment.

TRANSITION was a 30 month programme built around a consortium of eight organisations from the UK, Italy, France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, across six scaling centres, supporting a pool of 300 social innovations. TRANSITION involved the scaling-up of social innovations across Europe in order to expand their reach and impact. It also provided learning output on effective scaling methodologies in different regions.

In this section, we briefly explore examples of key EU programmes which have facilitated collaboration and networks of SI in Western Europe.

Evidently, the main commonalities between the programmes are the support provided for scaling-up, creation and development of networks and shared learning for social innovation. From these consortia, networks are developed, which in turn involve and integrate society more broadly. We give two examples of these supporting networks for social innovation. ESIIN and SIAN are networking initiatives developed from TRANSITION and BENISI consortiums. Both of these networks involve the identification, promotion and scaling-up of SI initiatives by joining skills, resources and capabilities of its members.

	Western Europe	Rest of Europe	Non-EU
Operation alone	58%	50%	60%
Co-operating with one or more partners	76%	60%	84%

Percentage of social innovations working alone or working with 1+ partners (number of cases ranked 1, 2, 3 within the policy field; multiple responses)

To understand the impact of these networks, we look at two cases, Make A CUBE3 (Italy) and BEEODIVERSITY (Belgium), that have benefitted from membership of the ESIIN and SIAN networks. The results are from our interviews and observations.

Social innovation consortium (e.g. BENISI, TRANSITION and SIC.

Network of selected organisations and initiatives dealing with SI issues (e.g. SIAN and ESIIN).

Stakeholders and social innovation benefitting from the network and programmes.

An illustration of social innovation networks and consortiums

Networks like these have played an important part in the development of social innovations, providing experimentation and a link to social innovation labs such as ENOLL. In doing so, the networks have contributed towards building a social innovation community in Western Europe. Social Innovation Community (SIC), a Horizon 2020 project, is one such project.

MAKE A CUBE3 is a social innovation incubator based in Italy. They connect SMEs, non-profit and for-profit organisations with local start-ups to produce innovative organisational cultures, processes, products and services. MAKE A CUBE3 has benefitted from membership of ESIIN as the network allows them to connect with other experts working on related social business projects. They also benefit from the knowledge of markets and local contexts of other organisations.

BEEODIVERSITY is a project designed to boost food diversity and human wellbeing by protecting bees and their natural environments. The organisation conducts numberous non-commercial activities with various actors to bring about global change. BEEODIVERSITY was a member of SIAN and has been able to expand quickly and efficiently through access to local knowledge, contacts, funders and businesses in the network.

CONCLUSION: NETWORK CONTEXTS CAN BE STRATEGICALLY USED

We have seen that networking and collaboration is crucial and has been built upon the sharing of knowledge, experiences and resources of those involved. EU programmes have helped to support community building and disseminate examples of social innovations in Europe.

From BENISI and TRANSITION, a number of recommendations connected to networks and partnerships were made:

1. There is a strong need for a mechanism to foster partnerships and peer-to-peer support. Through partnerships, accelerators can provide better curriculum, connections, and expertise on specific dynamics.
2. Foster collaboration amongst impact enterprises, starting a business to address these issues involves common growth challenges, which all impact enterprises face.
3. The strength of the network lies in sharing, learning and scaling for the benefit of innovators.

Future research should focus on the best strategies to support network contexts. More attention to SI ecosystems may be necessary. The SI-DRIVE study indicates that, whilst such ecosystems are important, universities and knowledge institutes are less often a partner compared to economic-technological ecosystems. The advantage of future SI ecosystems is that networking support can be made more sustainable.

REFERENCES

[1] Howaldt, Jürgen/ Schröder, Antonius/ Kaletka, Christoph/ Rehfeld, Dieter/ Terstriep, Judith (2016): Comparative Analysis (Mapping 1). Mapping the world of social innovation. A global comparative analysis across sectors and world regions. TU Dortmund University: Dortmund

[2] Boelman, Victoria/ Heales, Charlotte (2015): Social Innovation Strategies – Regional Report (D3.6 internal report).