

CO-PRODUCING A EUROPEAN SOCIAL INNOVATION DECLARATION

The Lisbon Declaration on Social Innovation sets out ten policy proposals for the EU and its member states. Madeleine Gabriel and Sophie Reynolds (Nesta) describe how the Social Innovation Community project co-produced the Declaration and look forward to the future of social innovation policy in Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

It's January 2016. The European Commission (EC) has funded over 30 social innovation research projects as well as competitions, accelerators and networks for social innovators. But despite all this activity, the community as a whole feels fragmented. There are some strong networks – among them researchers, digital social innovation, social economy organisations – but many others take part in the movement without identifying with it.

Enter Social Innovation Community (SIC), a project funded through Horizon 2020. SIC aimed to help the community become 'more than the sum of its parts'. Through research, experimentation, learning, policy and communications activities, SIC engaged with researchers, social innovators, citizens, policymakers, support organisations and intermediaries, businesses, civil society organisations and public sector employees to build new connections and strengthen their social innovation practices.

In October 2018, SIC launched the **Lisbon Declaration on Social Innovation** [1]. Co-produced with over 350 people from 19 EU countries, the Declaration included ten policy proposals aimed at EU institutions and member states. This article reflects on why we produced the Declaration, what we achieved, what we learned – and what we are doing next.

WHO NEEDS ANOTHER DECLARATION?

Before SIC, several other EC-funded social innovation projects had created manifestos and declarations. The SI-DRIVE Policy Declaration and the Manifesto for Transformative Social Innovation set out visions for socially innovative policymaking in Europe, while the Digital Social Innovation

Manifesto proposed policy ideas to facilitate more digital social innovation. Going further back, the 2014 Strasbourg Declaration on Social Enterprise [2] was co-created between the EC and social entrepreneurs – and sought to strengthen European policies for social businesses.

Importantly SIC did not plan to create a Declaration from the outset. So why did we do it?

First, it was timely. By 2017, EU institutions and member states were already negotiating the EU's next long term budget (the Multiannual Financial Framework, or MFF) and what the priorities would be for the 2021-2027 programming period. In previous negotiations, the social innovation community had had little influence – we wanted to change that.

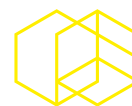
Second, with the MFF as a clear target, we could make concrete proposals about how to shape new, strategic EU programmes like Horizon Europe and European Social Fund Plus to support social innovation – and achieve societal objectives – more effectively. However, we did not want to reinvent the wheel; we started by synthesising the principles, values and policy ideas expressed in other manifestos and declarations, using this as a starting point for our own document.

CAN POLICY IDEAS BE CO-CREATED?

In developing the Declaration, we aimed to be user-centred and inclusive (reflecting the values we wanted policymakers to adopt). At the same time, we knew that crowdsourcing creative policy ideas would be difficult. We had already run a series of ten 'policy idea generation workshops' as part of SIC, and found that because policy is a new topic for most people, they often find it hard to devise actionable ideas and proposals.

AMASSING THE MANIFESTOS

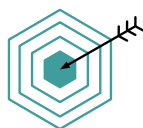
What do people in the social innovation community think future policy should do? We've summarised three declarations and manifestos from EC-funded social innovation projects.



**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
COMMUNITY**

GOALS

We want



- To challenge, alter and replace the dominant institutions that are ingrained in society
- Social innovation at the heart of policy
- More people and organisations to develop and share innovative digital solutions

- Social innovation should never be an excuse to dismantle public services
- We have rights to innovate and to be involved in decision making

PRINCIPLES

We believe



- To engage with politics
- New collaborations
- To empower local networks of innovators
- New narratives
- New forms of governance
- Space for experimentation
- Openness, transparency & democracy
- Skills

- **Invest:**
Skills for innovation
Digital skills
Infrastructure - labs, networks
Evidence
- **Lead by example:**
Use public procurement to support social innovation
Be the first to adopt digital social innovation approaches
- **Institutionalise social innovation:**
Set up a new European social innovation agency
- **Support social innovators:**
Accelerate promising projects
Increase access to alternative sources of finance
- **Transform innovation policy:**
Remove barriers to innovation
Value social and technological solutions
Provide incentives for multidisciplinary
Give social innovators a role in public research programmes
- **Raise awareness:**
Among citizens (opportunities)
Among public authorities (practices)



ACTIONS

Policymakers should...

OBJECTIVES

We need



Read the originals:



SI-DRIVE Policy Declaration
www.sidrive.eu



Manifesto for Transformative Social Innovation
www.tsimanifesto.org



DSI Manifesto
www.dsimanifesto.eu

Amassing the manifestos

So we combined two main approaches. **First**, we developed a short online survey that focused primarily on understanding priorities and needs. We made it available in French, German and Spanish as well as English and circulated it through SIC's newsletter, mailing list and social media. We received over 200 full responses. These helped us pinpoint some of the community's main policy concerns, such as the unsuitability of EU funding and regulations for small-scale social innovation experimentation that could eventually scale impact or that citizens and civil society would like to play a greater role in using EU funding to launch their own local community-led innovation initiatives.

Second, we organised several workshops to discuss specific policy areas. These included a large workshop at the EC's Lisbon conference, as well as a series of online roundtables focusing on policy challenges such as spreading social innovation to regions where it is currently not well supported. Another 150 people participated in these discussions.

In the end, some of the proposals in the Declaration – like the idea for 'Social Innovation Fellowships' – came directly from the community. Others came from the SIC consortium, and were developed and refined with input from members of the wider community and policymakers at the EC.

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WHAT DOES THE DECLARATION... DECLARE?

The Social Innovation Declaration calls on the EU to make social innovation a core part of its strategy and programming for the 2021-27 period. Drawing on the themes that emerged from our consultation activities, it sets out five priorities that Europe should address in order to help the social innovation movement achieve its potential. They include:

- Making funding suitable for small-scale experimentation, spreading and scaling impact
- Enabling citizens and civil society to lead local change initiatives through community-led innovation
- Strengthening the capacity, skills and incentives for public officials and policymakers to support and draw on (citizen-led) social innovation
- Making public procurement an instrument of social innovation policy
- Prioritising the spreading of social innovation to regions where it is needed most

The Declaration calls on the EU to make social innovation a core part of its strategy and programming.

The Declaration also distils core values expressed in the various manifestos and declarations that other social innovation initiatives have produced, and proposes that European policymakers should follow as they negotiate the new EU budget and programming. These include, for example, putting openness, democratisation and inclusivity at the heart of innovation, and ensuring that social innovation is never used as an excuse to divest from public services or leave citizens less well off.

The Declaration then makes ten policy proposals, each backed up with ideas for implementation and a brief justification. The recommendations are organised into three distinct but interdependent groups.

Recommendations one to four aim to bring social innovation from the margins to the mainstream of EU policy, by making social innovation a cross-cutting priority in all EU policies and programmes. They include:

1. Creating a cross-service European Social Innovation Action Plan, to create a coordinated approach to social innovation across parts of the European Commission and other institutions of the European Union
2. Using the Multiannual Financial Framework to create long-term investment and support for social innovation across all Commission services, including, for example, research and innovation funding, InvestEU and structural funds
3. Creating a new European Observatory of Social Innovation Policy to help share good practices and spread social innovation policy approaches across member countries
4. Setting up a pan-European network of social innovation evidence centres to provide insight and evidence on the impact that social innovation is having in tackling societal challenges.

Recommendations five to eight focus on actions that require strategic partnerships between EU, national and regional authorities to unleash the power of communities to drive change, including smaller organisations. They include:

5. Launching a Europe-wide initiative to expand the number of regional social innovation support organisations, with a particular focus on places where the social innovation ecosystem is less well developed
6. Supporting the creation of locally-controlled asset-based community bodies in all European Member States, to encourage community-led social innovation
7. Establishing 'Social Innovation Fellowships' to cover living costs for people developing local change initiatives, to enable individuals from a variety of backgrounds to take part, and to alleviate problems of 'volunteer burnout'

8. Setting up a strategic initiative to help smaller, socially-focused organisations to access EU funding, since these are often the most innovative and closest to communities, but can find bureaucracy and eligibility requirements for EU funding overwhelming.

Finally, recommendations nine and ten recognise that the public sector can also be an important supporter, incubator, partner and purchaser of social innovation – particularly if the goal is to tackle some of the biggest societal challenges facing the EU. Our consultation found that there was a critical need to strengthen public officials' capacity, skills and incentives to support social innovation. Recommendations nine and ten therefore seek to foster social innovation in the public sector, by:

9. Embedding social innovation actors in governments through a new 'Innovate4Europe' initiative
10. Establishing 'Public Procurement Pathfinders' to improve social innovators' access to public contracts.

CAN DECLARATIONS INFLUENCE POLICY?

We knew that simply creating a document would not be enough to ensure 'policy uptake'. Instead we took a more direct approach. We set up 'Policy Action Teams', where SIC partners worked together on specific areas, such as research and innovation policy or structural funds.

We also set up an online petition to collect endorsements (by early 2019 over 650 people had endorsed the Declaration, from 27 EU countries). We wanted high-level recognition from the EC, and worked with Commissioner Moedas' cabinet (the European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation) to arrange a presentation at the Web Summit in Lisbon 2018. The Commissioner received the Declaration on stage and stated that the EU "will put more money into social innovation" [3].

Some of the Action Teams' recommendations were accepted by the MEP 'rapporteurs' preparing the European Parliament's responses to ESF+ and Horizon Europe proposed regulations. The Committee of Regions subcommittee also adopted some of our suggested definitions for social innovation and social experimentation (Article 2), and a moderate version of the budget allocation we suggested for Article 13.

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We also held conversations with EC officials to explore opportunities for specific recommendations to be funded, and used the Declaration to structure discussions about social innovation policy in cities like Athens and Amsterdam.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

For many social innovators, influencing policy feels like a distant goal. SIC tried to give greater voice to the social innovators we worked with. Here are some of our key insights about how to influence policy:

- **Be opportunistic:** The constraints of a grant-funded project made it challenging to reorganise our resources when preparing the Declaration. But the opportunity to influence policies which could make a big difference for our community – like the MFF negotiations – informed our overall decision.
- **Find common ground:** We tried to understand policymakers' objectives as well as those of the SI community, and in some cases, we compromised to have a better chance that our proposals would be accepted. For example, we removed a target for how much EU funding should be spent on social innovation, since this was likely to mean that politicians would not support the Declaration.
- **Be tactical:** We formed 'Action Teams' to make good use of our limited resources, and tapped into SIC's consortium and international network to promote the Declaration.
- **Find a champion:** Committed individuals in the EC, the European Parliament, and civil society networks helped champion our cause, opening up opportunities to influence senior decision makers.

WHERE NEXT?

SIC ended at the beginning of 2019, a critical year for European policy with elections to European Parliament and a new Commission taking office. We didn't want our work to stop just because the project was ending. To continue our policy work, we created a new European Social Innovation Policy Alliance – a coalition of organisations aiming to keep pressure on European institutions and member states to make space for social innovation.

Europe's social innovation community still doesn't have nearly as much lobbying power as some well-funded industries – like the pharmaceutical or automotive industry. But the positive reception the Declaration and our social innovation policy work received underlines a vital truth – more and more people across Europe are crying out for the purposeful, collaborative, empowering cross-sectoral experimentalism that social innovation represents.

Through the Alliance we hope to engage with more policymakers across Europe to work with us on translating this vision into real action.

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