



# Co-creating a **SOCIAL INNOVATION RESEARCH AGENDA** for Europe

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"The Tree - self-sufficient system at Huerto del Rey Moro, Seville (CTRL+2 and Luciano Furcas)" by Emek Filogullari ([www.filogullari.com](http://www.filogullari.com)), May 2016

# Co-creating a Social Innovation Research Agenda for Europe

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The document in your hands constitutes a confirmation of how various research communities interested in the field of social innovation can come together and collaborate in the framework of a common project, a co-created Social Innovation Research Agenda (co-SIRA). Under the coordination of a Core Academic Team (CAT) stemming from the [EMES network](#), co-SIRA was collectively thought and developed although we realize that there are areas to improve and strengthen, the 'experiment' worked and it proved that researchers are ready to work across institutional affiliations and ad hoc consortia if the right conditions of quality, seriousness and focus are present. We thereby, would like to encourage research funding organizations and public institutions as well as universities to provide the room to conduct more open-ended experiments like this one. Only if this space is provided with reasonable funding and resources can unexpected connections be made and thus unique new directions and findings come up.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the researchers who have taken part in this effort. Particularly, we would like to thank the coordinators of the 15 European projects, on-going or completed, who took the time to react either in writing or via telephone to the various draft documents that we have shared with them along the way. Luckily this is a long list and we would like to make sure that they all appear here: Flor Avelino, Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (TRANSIT); Taco Brandsen, Radboud University Nijmegen (WILCO); Chiara Davalli, EBN Innovation Network (TRANSITION); Vincent De Coninck, i-propeller (BENISI); Johannes Eurich, Heidelberg University (INNOSEV); Jürgen Howaldt, Technical University Dortmund (SI-DRIVE); Marieke Huysentruyt, Catholic University of Leuven (SEFORIS); Flavia Martinelli, Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria (SINGOCOM); Georg Mildenerberger, Heidelberg University (ITSSOIN); Alex Nicholls, University of Oxford (CRESSI); Stijn Oosterlynck, Antwerpen University (IMPROVE); Ralph Richter, Leibniz Institute Erkner (RurInno); Marta Soler, University of Barcelona (SOLIDUS); Judith Terstriep, Technical University Hamburg (SIMPACT); Enrico Testi, University of Florence (EFESEIIS).

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You all have contributed to the existence of co-SIRA and to the opening of a promising exercise for the field. Hoping that our paths will cross in the social innovation way, we wish you a fruitful reading.

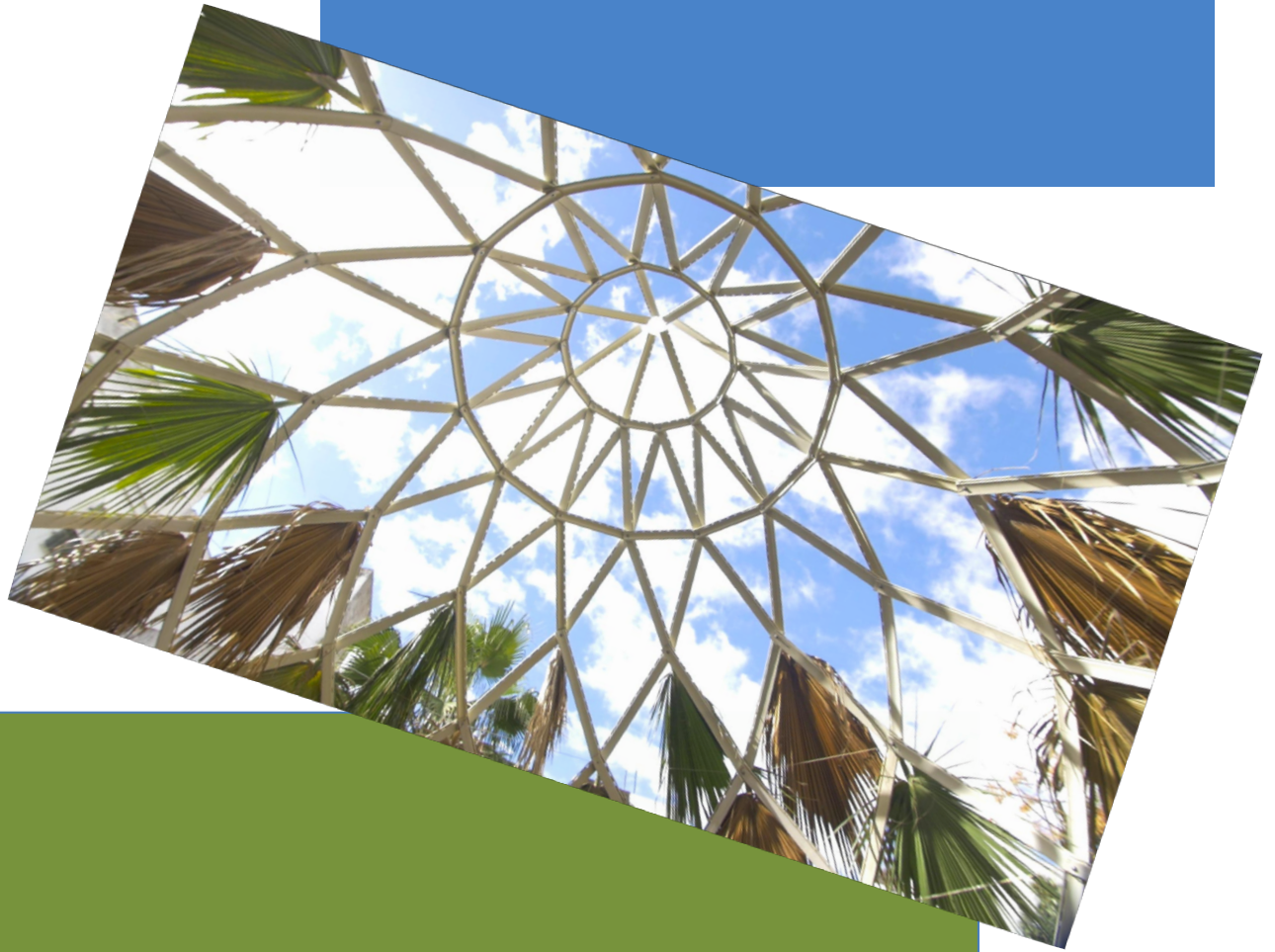
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Part 1.  
Objectives and rationale



## 1. Objectives and rationale

As part of the Social Innovation Europe initiative, EMES was asked to produce a research agenda on social innovation (SI). To date, SI practice has been ahead of theory, but research has been catching up in recent years, partly owing to increased interest (and investment) from research funding bodies. It is widely acknowledged that SI research and practice need to be better linked through a mutual recognition of their different purposes in contemporary society. Thus, our goal is to give researchers the opportunity to co-create a future research agenda in collaboration with other stakeholders.

The fragmentation of a growing SI community across Europe is present in the social sciences and humanities research community. A myriad of SI approaches and definitions exist across different disciplines (sociology, business administration, economics, political science, communication studies, etc.), which is positive for advancing science and exploring new avenues for research. However, there is also plenty of repetition and overlap in some of the research already conducted as well as recurring gaps that remain unaddressed.

Some pioneering efforts have been made in the framework of recent EU projects, namely WILCO and TEPSIE. WILCO teamed up with DG Research to organize the first attempt at having a collective reflection around key topics for research on SI and related topics and various methodologies. This initiative included gathering of over 60 scholars working on SI across Europe and the dedicated work of two external experts from Canada, Jane Jenson and Denis Harrison, who conducted a transversal analysis of 16 EU-funded projects relating to SI.<sup>1</sup> The second initiative relates to the SI Research Portal led by TEPSIE, which represents the first effort to gather and create an on-line forum for exchange for SI researchers.

The next step in the crystallization of this emerging research community would entail a collaborative process of creating a joint research agenda that also reflects the views of relevant stakeholder networks. This document would offer not only a powerful tool for aligning visions for the sector where new avenues can be explored but also a unique tool for engaging in debates with policy-makers about future research support and coordination activities.

Instead of taking the easy way to do this (simply doing an updated literature review and listing a number of topics that we believe to be relevant to SI research), EMES decided to embark in a co-creation process inviting academic stakeholders across Europe. It was an experiment that had never been tried before with such meagre resources but it was an intense learning exercise whose result is included here.

Essentially, the SIE research agenda aims at building a community that shares the purpose to identify approaches to study SI free from instrumental objectives. Research approaches represent different perspectives on how SI can be studied: as an aspect of an evaluation process, a policy area, an organisation, a technological trend. In order to reach this objective

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<sup>1</sup> "Social innovation research in the European Union: Approaches, findings and future directions", Policy Review, WILCO Project, European Commission. Available at <http://www.wilcoproject.eu/social-innovation-research-in-the-european-union-approaches-findings-and-future-directions>

we identify a selective number of topics and actions, covering different types of topics based on past and future consultations, which are by no means exhaustive: stages in a process, policy fields, communities etc. We then use these to highlight possible approaches to study or further the study of SI - where we stand with research on these topics and what is necessary.

The bulk of the interactions with researchers took place via bilateral email and Skype or telephone conversations although we also developed group activities both online and offline (see the Methodology section below for more detail).

Before moving on, we would like to make explicit the shortcomings and limits of the present exercise:

- This is not a 'definite' document but rather a snapshot that should be completed and updated.
- The stock-taking exercise is limited in terms of analysis of the information gathered.
- The geographic nature of the study is purposely European but considering the global playing field, with an openness towards epistemological diversity.
- The wish is to contribute to a reinforcement of a cross-national dialogue, also in the area of a SI research agenda.



## Part 2. Methodology



## 2. Methodology

Given the radically different approach that we wanted to give to building an agenda we started with a document inviting the research community to be self-reflective around the question “What, how and why a co-created research agenda?” (see Annex 1). A crucial part of this document was a simple analysis matrix to collect SI research approaches as well as emerging topics to work with, taking into account past consultations. We aimed at transforming different ‘points of interest’ (stages in a process, policy fields, communities, etc.) into ‘points on the agenda’ by assessing where we stand with them and how to move forward. We agreed on six areas of inquiry for future research on SI:

- 1) Individual intrinsic motivations of social innovators;
- 2) Organisational changes and SI;
- 3) Measurement of SI;
- 4) Theories and models of SI;
- 5) Public policy innovation; and
- 6) Critical perspectives in SI research.

Fig. 1: Co-SIRA matrix to collect SI research topics and approaches

TOPIC	STATE OF THE ART	ACTION
Measurement of SI	Topic has been on the agenda for many years and is well defined. Problems are (1) the exchange of knowledge between disciplines; (2) how to integrate this knowledge.	We organise a targeted exchange between disciplines on this topic, e.g. through a special publication or event. We encourage policy experiments to get measures for SI into the policy process.
Organisational changes and social innovation	The global crisis prompted the need for welfare system change amongst key societal actors (State, market and civil society) and motivated them to think of different ways of producing added value. This situation has initiated a wide-ranging process of fundamental institutional change involving a range of key actors. This has stimulated the emergence of a new breed of hybrid organisations that doesn't fit neatly into the standard descriptors used in the private, public or non-profit sectors. The topic has been analysed from different research organizations around Europe.	We organize training programmes to empower the non-profit organisations' human capital with skills and competences required to manage hybridization processes. We encourage research projects able to support this processes in order to simplify it, for example through comparing different situations, studying success stories and proposing solutions.

Throughout the entire co-SIRA process, informal feedback on the process and documents was gathered through the various channels set up for the community to participate. A [Facebook](#) and [Linkedin group](#) generated some but limited input. It was shared with interested stakeholders at different conferences and meetings, where participants were invited to give input and remain involved in the process (2014 SI-Live conference in Lisbon, Portugal; 2015 EMES Conference in Helsinki, Finland; and 2015 Pathways to Social Change conference in Vienna, Austria).

We also created an [online survey](#) to collect more focused information from our target groups (November 2015 until January 2016). Participation was limited but provided interesting input for the process.

We completed a review of 15 EU-funded projects on SI with a view on identifying salient traits and suggestions for research topics to be included in the agenda, based on responses by project coordinators who showed great commitment of researchers to advance knowledge in the field. Finally, from February to April 2015 we mobilized a group of experts composed by EMES members and some external experts and asked them to find salient trends, ideas across projects. In a second step we asked them to provide input on the final version co-SIRA. The members of this experts group are Adalbert Evers (University of Heidelberg, Germany), Agnès Hubert (Sciences Po, France), Jean-Louis Laville (CNAM/LISE, France), Frank Moulaert (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium) and Simon Teasdale (Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom). All input from the research community is included throughout the co-SIRA.

## Part 3. Main results



3.1. Learning from other European projects

3.2. Technological versus emancipatory approaches to SI

3.3. A co-created SI research agenda

3.4. Collateral benefits of co-SIRA

## 3. Main results

### 3.1. Learning from other European projects

Looking at projects funded under EU calls Horizon 2020, FP7 (those that were not yet included in the project review produced within the framework of the WILCO project, FP5-7 – recommendations from this review below as the basis to analyse development and new research challenges). A number of projects mentioned by the European Commission as Research projects in the field of SI funded under FP7 were left out, because SI is not a particular focus but rather assumed to be one result of third sector or public policy activity (i.e. TSI, assessing the impact of the third sector to the social and economic development in Europe, including well-being, citizen participation, etc., RECOWE focussing on work and welfare, and GUSTO, looking into coping mechanism in the face of economic uncertainty). One FP5 project, SINGOCOM, is included in the list, because other projects refer to conceptual work done in relation with the project (i.e. RURINNO, IMPROVE).

Recent research (INNOSERV, WILCO) focuses more on bottom-up social innovations in their environmental context, applying different contextual lenses (political, economic and cultural factors, networks) in relation to strategies and organizational form.

In recent years there have been intense and much-needed attempts at theory building, developing theoretical frameworks that capture the diversity of SI drives systemic approaches. Projects are building theories assuming the interplay of structures and agency, and how it affects choices for strategic action (TRANSIT), types of business models (SIMPACT), types of social innovations (SI-DRIVE), linking SI research to theoretical work on the welfare state and social policy (ImPROVE), or specific types of welfare innovation (WILCO).

Projects that are in their initial year analyse SI as one approach to solidarity (SOLIDUS) or in relation to social entrepreneurship in rural areas (RURINNO), taking a further step that already assumes a role for SI in fostering well being.

There is not much focus on individuals in SI, except in EFESIIS and SOLIDUS.

### Salient considerations from the analysis

Summarizing the main findings of and objectives of 13 EU-wide comparative projects in a single document would be a pretentious and futile exercise. Nevertheless, we asked the coordinators for their input on some key features of their projects to help us carry out a comparison. Based on their responses, we tried to identify some unique aspects of each of the projects as well as some transversal elements, which formed the core of a reflection on the situation of SI research in Europe.

Overarching theme and focus is the strong context-dependence of SI, locating innovation and organizational activity in the political, economic and cultural context at urban and na-

tional levels that shape actor's strategies (1). However, there are also internal factors driving success, such as managerial skills or knowledge of the field (2) and maintaining collaborative networks to enhance strategies, public and financial support as well as to reduce risk when scaling to other geographical settings (3). Scaling seems to work best for ideas behind Social innovations, rather than for finished products, due to the context-dependence of initiatives (4). Some new research builds on earlier assumptions that SI overlaps with social entrepreneurship, but is not the same. Neither does it see its origin confined to the third sector. However, it is important to remember that there is conceptual ambiguity, and not one definition of SI exists (5). Theory building of SI increasingly takes the importance of environments, appropriate business planning and networking into account (6). Work needs to be done to capture SI impact, which tends to be decentralised, short-lived and not necessarily linked to SI by practitioners (7).

### **1. Actors and enabling environments**

Several projects focus on the interplay between actors and ecosystems: IMPROVE and WILCO analysed local social innovations in their welfare-institutional contexts, addressing a range of important governance challenges for social innovations (e.g. fragmentation of welfare mix, institutionalisation of social innovations, participation, balancing equality and diversity, enabling legal framework, etc.). WILCO identified the complex relations between social, political and economic factors at the city level that hinder or support innovation in different ways. ITSSOIN, SI-DRIVE and TRANSITION reflect the specific grass-roots character and participatory governance structure of many Social innovations against framework conditions (policy frameworks, economic and cultural context).

EFESEIS identified the lack of resources for welfare as a driver and motivation for social innovators to achieve more with less, indicating that a lack of financial resources might be a defining factor that sets SI apart from other forms of welfare provision, independent of who delivers it.

SIMPACT, on the other hand, demonstrates how different types of actors deal with uncertainty and scarce resources, using innovation biographies (IBs) to study the time-space dynamics of knowledge and ways of knowledge integration within innovation processes (SIMPACT). It finds that non-profits often generate a kind of hyper-efficiency, combining efficiency (use of scarce resources, fragile business plans, bricolage) and effectiveness (outcomes). Looking at how local and national context influence the way that social innovations develop and scale up, TRANSITION experimented how incubation methods and tools can better support, empower, scale up SI in Europe.

Already back in 2003 SINGOCOM described SI as path dependent and contextual. It referred to those changes in agendas, agency and institutions that lead to a better inclusion of excluded groups and individuals into various spheres of society at various spatial scales. Recent projects shed light on how Social innovations successfully deal with resource constraints adapting their strategies accordingly. This seems to be true for grass-roots, third sector and public sector innovation. Several projects (i.e. WILCO, TRANSIT)

also highlight the transformative results of co-production between bottom-up and public actors.

## **2. External and internal barriers for the development of SI**

Linked to SI environments, the lack of better financial conditions is identified as the main barrier (i.e. SI DRIVE, WILCO) but there are many others. SIMPACT finds a strict relationship between the configuration of the environment of SI and the emergence of obstacles and sources of resistance. In particular, Social innovations suffer from unfavourable policy such as laws, regulations and long-term funding options.

Internal barriers include lack of financial and managerial knowledge and lack of vertical knowledge of the industry where the commercial branches of the mission-driven organisation operate (i.e. SI-DRIVE). The urge to achieve immediate social impact is among the main reasons for failure or for limited and suffering growth (SIMPACT). TRANSITION adds the lack of networks as a barrier for SI success.

## **3. The role of networks in fostering SI**

The relevance of networks was confirmed by projects such as SIMPACT, identifying networks as key element of the theoretical foundation of the economic dimensions of SI, as they provide exchange and combination of distinct ideas, resources, capabilities and values, shifts in roles and relationships of actors, as well as integration of private capital with public and philanthropic support; and EFESIIS for which the creation of networks represents the key element to efficiently produce innovative solutions as well as an “on-going lab” environment. Moreover, as a Coordination and support action (CSA) TRANSITION harnessed the power of a larger network (ESIIN) to support local projects ‘bridge’ common social problems at a wider geographical level, mainly to reduce the risks associated with trying to work between two countries. Incubators should help social innovators build their networks - with peers, funders, customers, partners, collaborators, advisers and others as a way of sharing tools and practices and building capacity.

## **4. Scaling-up SI**

Scaling was the core business of two major projects, TRANSITION and BENISI, which paid particular attention to the impact of incubation in scaling up SI, facilitating the creation of network of incubators across Europe. TRANSITION set up a transnational Startup Lab, envisaged as a mechanism by which Social innovations could rapidly prototype in a new location. As mentioned in section 3, social innovators were far more likely to want to scale by building partnerships rather than growing their organisations into new countries.

SIMPACT is investigating which business models are most appropriate for scaling and diffusing SI. It found that SI often exhibits mechanisms of “scaling out” that disseminate the idea behind the SI rather than the solution, i.e. mechanisms of dissemination, learning, and adaptation that support the core idea of the SI to be scaled and diffused. WILCO concluded that diffusing innovations is not essentially different from innovating, since

they are usually initiated to solve a local problem. Moreover, SIMPACT found that Social innovations scale through complex, open and participatory processes, supporting findings of the importance of networks.

While local SI is often done with little resources (doing more with less) there is general agreement that scaling and diffusion needs sufficient structural support like secure financing. EFESEIIS identified social franchising as a useful way to scale-up social innovations (EFESEIIS). RURINNO will focus on this approach in a rural context.

### ***5. Importance of the connection with social enterprises and the third sector***

Despite the findings of two reviewed projects (SI DRIVE and WILCO) that there is not always a link between social enterprise or social entrepreneurship and SI, RURINNO will look into the innovative potential of social enterprise and ITSSOIN set out with the assumption that SI is a main component of the third sector.

However, past (WILCO) and interim findings (SI-Drive, ITSSOIN, EFESEIIS are on-going research projects) do not seem to support the assumption that SEs or third sector are more or less innovative than other sectors in society. Incubation project TRANSITION worked successfully with different types of entities to incubate and scale social innovations, from early-stage entrepreneurs developing new ventures to 'intrapreneurs' in large organisations, community members delivering voluntary, informal projects, and established SMEs looking to scale up. Supporting SI is a broader task than supporting social ventures to scale and grow. SI overlaps with, but is not the same as, social entrepreneurship.

### ***6. Definitions and analytical frameworks***

To date, there is no unified theory of SI although theory-building attempts are being carried out in the framework of some of the projects reviewed here. There has been an increase in conceptualisations of SI, which is a challenge due to the "particular and specific character of individual initiatives within their time and space" (SINGOCOM). On the whole, at this point, this work remains quite diverse and depends on the specific focus of the research effort.

The crosscutting nature and relational complexity of SI necessitates a systemic perspective, taking into account environments, scale, networks and SI impact. Assuming that the properties of third sector organisations and volunteering make the formation of Social innovations particularly likely, ITSSOIN attempts to frame a SI theory that looks at the impact of framework conditions (historical, welfare-state, markets) on innovativeness, while SI-DRIVE tries to build typologies of SI. SIMPACT contributes an economic dimension, focussing on the development of stronger and more coherent concepts of SI including alternative business models for financing, distribution and employment to understand the success mechanisms of SI. The project identified four different types of business models for SI. Similarly, WILCO developed an analytical model of service innovations, focussing either on regulations and rights, governance, modes of working and financing or



a transcending approach so welfare innovation. TRANSIT is developing and testing a theory of SI that focuses on strategies for transformation in terms of empowerment and change in society, based on insights from other theories like transition theory, social movement theory and institutional theory.

Looking at the different working definitions of SI proposed by the projects, there are some common (albeit very general) assumptions: all definitions include the reference to SI producing new social practice and relations (INNOSERV, RURINNO, IMPROVE, TRANSIT, ITSSOIN, EFESEIIS, SI-DRIVE, SINGOCOM) or products (CRESSI, TRANSIT, WILCO, TRANSITION), based on collaboration and participation of end-users that equip them with legitimacy (ITSSOIN, SI-DRIVE) in relation or response to different needs and structural deficits: the provision of welfare (IMPROVE, WILCO), rural (RURInno) or urban development (SINGOCOM), failing markets (CRESSI).

Some definitions are adding a general empowerment dimension to SI (IMPROVE, SIMPACT, CRESSI, SINGOCOM), well being (EFESEIIS) and the power to change institutional structures and processes (TRANSIT, ITSSOIN, WILCO, SI-DRIVE).

## **7. SI impact**

Research projects focus on different SI impact, i.e. solidarity (SOLIDUS), social transformation (TRANSIT), or wider economic and social impact (SIMPACT). An important aspect identified by several projects is the fact that SI is not well understood by policymakers and practitioners, making it harder to identify impact. To this end incubation project TRANSITION often worked with innovators to help them recognise and develop the social impact potential within their innovation.

However, research also shows that social innovations tend to remain local and are rarely sustainable. Having said that, WILCO also points out the cumulative effect of the many small, temporary initiatives that are of high value within their local context.

## **3.2. Technological versus emancipatory approaches to SI**

The appearance of the concept of SI at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century is linked to the crisis of the synergy between the market and state that had previously existed. But it would be fairer to speak of "crises" in plural, as we can distinguish two crises that occurred and became established.

The first is a somewhat forgotten crisis of a cultural nature. We could define it succinctly as the erosion of the "ideology of progress". It manifested itself through the "new social movements", to use the terminology of the time, who questioned the remaining forms of domination in the welfare state, and that took the form of the providential satisfaction of needs. We could also think of the criticism of the Westphalian Social State by the feminist movement or even of all of the new issues introduced by the ecological movement that criticised the lack of limits and excess of speed of the system for it to be sustainable. These dynamics over time became linked to changes in forms of public engagement, characterized by

an emphasis on pragmatism, local action, concrete experiences, which in turn lead to a change of terminology.

We then see a shift from the "new social movements" to "social innovations in civil society". Many of these initiatives for SI therefore identify with initiatives grounded in the solidarity economy that can be considered at a certain level as a re-politicization of the social economy and as a reaction against its earlier trivialization (economic, social and political).

All the issues that had been raised in the course of this cultural crisis remain topical, since none have been truly resolved. However, they were overtaken by the economic crisis that corresponds to a second conception of SI. It is no longer perceived in relation to citizen initiatives, but in relation to economic performance.

With the growth slowdown in the 1980s, the idea that technological innovation contributes to economic recovery began to spread and became a major issue for political scientists. Furthermore, broadening the understanding of technological innovation led to the idea that a condition for success is the transition to organizational innovation, integrating the concern for the organization's coherence so that the technological "insertion" is not rejected.

Finally – relying on a number of currents that put forward the concepts of national systems of innovation, local production systems or actor-network theory – there is a growing recognition that innovation is not just technological or organizational, but also inter-institutional in a given territory and thus is a deeply social process.

We can thus see that the differences between the two main approaches to SI (technological versus emancipatory) explains why we now have some difficulty understanding what is happening in terms of SI. Furthermore, over time, there has been a certain crossover between these two distinct ways of looking at SI and new promising combinations that are being developed. Thus, on one hand we see citizens' initiatives that were initiated as a result of democratic issues that have now evolved marked by the significance of entrepreneurship. On the other hand, all the questions that have been posed about economic performance have extended the field of "scientific technological society", that have led to the emergence of new problems, be about politics of participation or the citizens' scientific movement.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.3. A co-created SI research agenda

Below we have summarized the main findings in terms of research areas and possible concrete themes that could guide future research calls. Considering the feedback received from the research community, we can say that the majority of the researchers recognize the impor-

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank Jean-Louis Laville (CNAM/LISE, France) for this subsection. You can read more about his view on solidarity and on SI in the recent "Civil Society, the Third Sector and Social Enterprise. Governance and Democracy" (Laville, J.-L., Young, D.R. & Eynaud, P. (eds.), Routledge, London/New York, 2015) and "Social innovation in Europe: what relation with solidarity economy? Towards a plural European vision of social innovation" (Laville, J.L. and Roque Amaro, R., 2016. Available at [http://www.socioeco.org/bdf\\_fiche-document-4518\\_en.html](http://www.socioeco.org/bdf_fiche-document-4518_en.html)).

tance of advancing our understanding about these themes. We do not claim that there is consensus about this overview but we are confident that future discussions about it will help fine-tune this initial attempt and even set a priority order for future research.

## Area of inquiry 1: SI agency

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The question of agency has long been in focus of SI research. However, more insights are needed on actors' behaviour within their institutional contexts and how they make choices whether to innovate within existing settings and frameworks or to start entirely bottom-up. This line of inquiry helps understand broader contexts of SI.

### Possible lines of research:

#### **1. *Individual intrinsic motivations to engage in acts of solidarity.***

As already pointed out in the literature, research might explore under what circumstances greater citizen and civil society engagement in various phases of SI produce different societal outcomes (Ayob et al., 2016). What triggers people to engage, especially those who are not 'repetitive' activists? Why do they join existing initiatives, why do they set up their own?

#### **2. *Collective versus individual agency in processes of SI.***

Under this topic specific biographies and trajectories of SI could be studied in order to understand to what extent we can speak of new breeds of SI (e.g. a new generation of social entrepreneurs?) or of everybody involved in the SI process. Identify and analyse communitarian approaches to SI (i.e. Kerala community governance model) and compare them with individual and institutional innovations with focus on political and social empowerment, policy change, and financial investment vs. capacity-based investment to understand the nature of SI.

#### **3. *Types of entities and institutional arrangements best equipped to innovate.***

The core issue here is to understand if SI is more likely to take place within institutional settings that have traditionally been associated to it in the political discourse (civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs) or whether other individual, collective and institutional actors play a role. If so, it is important to understand the roles and the presence of these varied roles across different SI stages.

#### **4. *Innovation potential within existing social services and other institutions.***

How and why do people within organisations trigger SI should be further studied. In this context, the issue of intrapreneurship should be explored together with new forms of volunteering and the interplay between cross-sectorial volunteering and support.

## Area of inquiry 2: Organisational changes and SI

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According to some definitions, SI leads to organisational change if it takes place within an established institutional setting, i.e. by restructuring existing power relations in form of co-production and co-governance. Even though some research has focussed on SI in social services, the range of possible topics in this area of inquiry remains wide.

### Possible lines of research:

#### **1. *SI in rural contexts, health and the financial sector***

These three areas were particularly emphasised as deserving further research in the Jensen and Harrison Policy Review conducted within the WILCO project. Regarding rural and sparsely populated areas, despite their structural weakness they represent a promising area for SI. Health and aging population constitute real challenges and new models of and attitudes toward service provision have appeared, offering a promising area for SI. As for finance, traditional “lenses” are applied when approaching the field although financial actors and institutions are undergoing different levels of transformation and the appearance of “alternative” financial systems offer a window of opportunity for new solutions and profound mutations. Particularly, more understanding should be developed in the fields of social networking, communication, local anchoring and organisational management. Along these lines, research focusing on the intersection of these areas should also be explored.

#### **2. *Skills required along the life cycle of SI***

Substantial research needs to be carried out on how organisational changes are processed when new needs arise, new skills are required and new markets need to be opened. The same applies in terms of training and education: what are the new capacities that need to be built for managers and workers of these organizations? Research in this topic could start with a collection of empirical data and case studies supporting the theoretical assumption that better skills in organisations are a positive driver for SI. However, it would be useful to frame such research a comparative setting (i.e. create an international database accessible to researchers as a starting point for an empirical validation of the theoretical prior).<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that some scholars (as in the WILCO project) have fundamentally criticised the notion of a SI cycle as being too closely modelled on market products.

#### **3. *Innovative capacities of third sector and volunteers as participatory and empowerment dimensions***

Organisational change is frequently the result of agency. The role of social movements for SI has been studied by research projects in the past, but the shift towards outsourcing public services to the third sector, often working with the help of volunteers, might open a way for new actors to shape institutional performance, introducing a new paradigm of

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2012), Skills for Competitiveness: A Synthesis Report, available at [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/skills-for-competitiveness\\_5k98xwskmvr6-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/skills-for-competitiveness_5k98xwskmvr6-en)

social intervention. Related to this process is the question, how administrative and policy-making bodies absorb and diffuse messages from bottom-up SI.

#### **4. *Assessing the role played by social enterprises in SI in Europe.***

Social enterprises potentially play a role in developing SI initiatives in Europe, although, as noted before, the evidence on this is mixed and depends on the definition of SI. A research topic on assessing the role of social enterprises in SI could be based on European case studies and best practices on techniques and tools for assessing and reporting on social impact, which could be applied in this new context.

#### **5. *SI within existing social services promoting health, education and welfare in relation to frame conditions.***

The research on this topic could start from the development of the idea of hybridisation between public and private organisations, both profit and non-profit, dealing with social services. Innovative examples in the field above portray the relevance of different logics - public, private and non-profit - as a driver for SI.

#### Other possible lines of research:

6. *Potentials from SI to drive transformative social change and reciprocal empowerment.*
7. *Which business models are most appropriate for instigating, improving, resourcing, sustaining as well as scaling and diffusing SI*
8. *SI development, testing incubation in different types of SI and contexts.*
9. *Governance, strategies and argumentation of local Social innovations in relation to public welfare policy, institutions and actors.*
10. *How Social innovations are organised in different (local) environments.*
11. *Dynamics that nourish or create SI action.*

#### Area of inquiry 3: Measurement of SI

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The main issue with this area of inquiry relates to the complexity of measuring what lacks a shared understanding. The way existing projects have dealt with this limitation in the past is by framing measurement within a SI context /definition. Considering SI as an outcome measure may constitute a pointless exercise since it lacks a robust definition and it is ever changing. However, issues related to assessment of SI processes and, some times, outcomes/outputs are highly relevant in the context of markets and the public sector, where there is a strong emphasis on demonstrable achievement.

Possible lines of research:

**1. *The link between innovation and impact.***

Future research on measurement should consider an approach that develops ex ante hypotheses and ex post evaluations comparing the expectations, the results and the time horizon.

**2. *Measurement of the economic and social impact of SI***

After several attempts to find methodologies, the importance of proving the uniqueness of SI through the measurement of its social (and environmental) value requires that the 'measure' arguments be refined. Knowledge based on a common stocktaking exercise of research projects dealing with "beyond GDP" should be developed.

Other possible lines of research:

3. *Success factors of SI.*

4. *Focus on SI as the main component of third sector impact.*

Area of inquiry 4: Theories and models of SI

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As pointed out several times, there is no unified concept of SI. While several on-going research projects are working towards theory building it is likely that some conceptual ambiguity will remain, partly due to the variety of forms of SI and cultural, political and social contexts. Modelling of SI can address this challenge, as well as approaching SI from different disciplines and perspectives in a structured way.

Possible lines of research:

**1. *Empirical description and theoretical conceptualization of innovation practice.***

From an empirical point of view it is necessary to move from a descriptive approach (narrative or anthropological narrative case studies of SI) towards a more structured qualitative analysis (possibly also quantitative). To this goal, it would be interesting to launch a European wide project (see for instance the ICSEM project gathering over 300 researchers in over 60 countries) joining forces with the Social Innovation Community project (see recommendation 7 below). In order to better use this new empirical data, SI practitioners and researchers should design a common ground for theoretical modelling with testable hypotheses.

**2. *Channelling of solidarity by third sector, SI and co-creation of public goods.***

With research on a conceptualization of solidarity in Europe under way as part of H2020 (SOLIDUS project) this line of inquiry could focus on grassroots SI, linked to acts of solidarity with socially excluded groups, and how they can be channelled into social policy.

This could be done in a comparative way, looking at similarities and differences between actions to support specific socially excluded groups, building a database of evidence of SI as the product of sentiment, and how much it is dependent or independent of structural factors.

### ***3. Understanding SI from different theoretical approaches, environments and experiences.***

Conceptualisation of SI should be understood as an exercise of drawing from different disciplinary theories, without ignoring historical developments and national, regional or local contexts.

### ***4. Dependency of SI on framework conditions***

Power relations and institutional and perception environments can be considered enablers or deterrents of SI. Research needs to understand how the combination of different groups in the generation of ideas and solutions affects outcomes for these groups and wider societies. Longitudinal studies offer the potential of unpacking the power dimensions within these new forms of collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

### ***5. Contribution of SI to productivity***

Which are the enablers for and characteristics of SI's contribution to productivity facilitating smart and inclusive growth in their specific cultural, economic, spatial and social contexts? This includes learning more about 'workplace innovation'. The role of traditional for profit firms should be studied from a comparative perspective in order to gauge their possible contribution beyond Corporate Social Responsibility and modalities for collaborating with existing SI actors.

Other possible lines of research:

*6. Models for the creation, roll out and diffusion of Social innovations and transformative change.*

*7. Theory of transformative SI in terms of empowerment and change in society, building patterns or typologies.*

*8. Defining SI in social services.*

*9. The relationship between the emergence of (different types of) SI and welfare systems.*

*10. Models for local innovative development.*

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<sup>4</sup> Ayob, N., Teasdale, S. and Fagan, K. (2016) "How Social Innovation 'Came to Be': Tracing the Evolution of a Contested Concept", *Journal of Social Policy*, 1: 1-19. Cambridge University Press.

## Area of inquiry 5: Public policy innovation

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SI as a means of modernising welfare states is at different stages of adoption and development in different countries. These approaches might usefully be studied to identify differences and similarities by, for example, welfare regime type and with a particular emphasis on differences between strong and weak traditions. In developing countries, which do not have developed welfare states, SI might be seen as a means of bypassing the need for welfare state development. But given the very different relationships between state, civil society and citizens in these areas it remains to be seen whether, and how, more authoritarian governments can build closer and less hierarchical relationships between these groups. Regional comparisons offer an alternative fruitful approach avoiding focus research solely on Western countries.

### Possible lines of research:

#### ***1. Role of SI in reshaping structural issues that organize an economy to address the causes of marginalization.***

SI has been too much considered as a phenomenon and studies have overseen its rootedness in European history. Despite current policy discourse presenting it as the ultimate solution for wicked problems, we know little about how it came to be or how it evolved throughout history, including clashing approaches. Despite recent attempts in that direction, the connections of SI to a long-standing history of civil society and modern forms of solidarity as well as economic and technological development must be established and better known.

#### ***2. Conducive policy frameworks for SI***

Public sector innovation is still not given enough political attention and encouragement while it is crucial again for transformational models. Research on this area should include modes of policy production and public policy instruments that best support the acceleration of SI based on benchmarking and peer review processes at the local level but also on policy experiments conducted at national and European levels.

#### ***3. Role of local SI in increasing or overcoming fragmentation of welfare mix.***

At the end of the 19th century, the institutional architecture that dominated the 20th century, and especially after WWII, was established. The resulting welfare state through public redistribution mechanisms and in synergy with the market was an attempt to ensure that economic and social development reach the widest groups of citizens possible. After the retrenchment of this model in numerous Member States, the ubiquity of SI in the policy discourse and initial research findings pointing toward the fact that new arrangements between new players and new dynamics are at play in our societies.

### Other possible lines of research:

#### ***4. Future challenges and appropriate policy responses.***



5. *Measures and tools for SI incubation and sustainability.*
6. *Forms of involvement of public institutions and the state at various spatial scales in social innovative initiatives.*
7. *The link between research on SI and capacity building.*

## Area of inquiry 6: Critical perspectives

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There is an urge to “repoliticise” SI and to connect it with the history of collective action in Europe. Moreover, research stemming from business administration and economic-driven approaches needs to be reconnected to sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches. As researchers, we must remain critical about SI mainly in the policy and research domains. This applies to both structural and procedural aspects (How does SI research develop and how is it legitimized? Through which actors?) as well as to thematic elements (What fields, projects and areas are subject of SI research and which are ill- or not addressed at all?).

Suggestion for possible lines of research:

### **1. SI and socio-political transformation**

Although the political transformative dimension of SI is only partly recognized in the literature, the results of any social transformation co-created with citizens include a political dimension that should be addressed. In addition to the warnings with relationship to the normative nature of SI,<sup>5</sup> new critical outlooks need to be further developed.<sup>6</sup>

### **2. SI and social change**

There’s an ultimate assumption about the scarcity of resources that should be critically examined. Historically, SI appears in policy agendas and as a central policy issue at a time of austerity trends but how is this assumption legitimised? What seems to fail are not the resources (which are there) but the way they are accumulated in fewer hands and the inequality has increased. Moving and distributing this accumulation in the most efficient way constitutes, ultimately, the goal of SI.

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<sup>5</sup> See Brandsen, T., Cattacin, S., Evers, A., Zimmer, A. (Eds.) (2016) *Social Innovations in the Urban Context*, Springer (Available at <http://www.springer.com/us/book/9783319215501>) and Nicholls, A., Simon, J., Gabriel, M., Whelan, C. (Eds) (2015) *New Frontiers in Social Innovation Research*, Palgrave MacMillan (Avalaible at <http://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9781137506795>).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Adam Greenfield “Commoning systems, part II: On the ahistoricity of “social innovation” defending the “tactics of survival” as the right way forward. Available at <http://speedbird.wordpress.com>  
See also the interview to Frank Moulaert, “L’innovation sociale et le développement urbain intégré”, *Le Journal du Conseil*, p.3-5 (December 2015). Available at <http://ces.irisnet.be/fr/publications/le-journal-du-conseil/decembre-2015>

### ***3. Participatory and empowerment dimensions in SI as 'new' paradigms of social intervention, building patterns or typologies.***

Although the participatory and empowerment dimensions are highlighted as central to SI in several definitions, the approach to how participation and empowering processes emerge and develop, can be fostered or hindered in the framework of SI remain to be studied. An additional aspect deserving further research would be the ability of administrative and policy making bodies to absorb something from the "messages" of SI and social innovators as well as the how this key factor could be analysed for diffusion and mainstreaming.

### ***4. Connection with debates on transition, urban commons, post-foundational politics, etc.***

Commons are not just property; they are "co-activities", collectively conducted activities that enable people to progressively define rules. Learning and democratic forms of socialization allow new institutions to emerge. They fall under established institutional forms stemming from civil society (e.g. associations, cooperatives, mutual societies) characterized by their willingness to combine protection and emancipation. Together with new approaches and practices around transition societies and framed in post-foundational politics, they constitute a new and fertile soil for SI to thrive. However the interconnection among these various strands are far from being understood and further research would be necessary in order to establish patterns of evolution, future trends and their effect on public policy and citizen action.

### ***5. Reflexive criticism on SI research***

Critically, institutional settings that are promoting the understanding and promotion of SI should be analysed making sure that critical approaches are included. In addition, tacitly assumed notions and axioms need to be questioned. For instance, while networks and cross sector cooperation are crucial, some authors (Bauwens) alert about the "network capitalism" imposing new power relations. In short, SI policy agendas might be explored within their wider contexts – to what extent is SI used as a smokescreen for cuts in public service delivery – for example by tracing expenditure flows.

## **Transversal issues**

In addition to the broad six areas of inquiry identified above and the associated topics for future research, two transversal issues ought to be applied to any research effort seeking to inform policy-making at all levels:

1. **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY:** In light of growing levels of inequality across Europe, research on SI needs to address how is SI inventing new economic (productive and reproductive), social (redistributive) and political (participatory) model(s) in order to reverse the dangerous trend of exponential growth of inequalities.

2. GENDER: Basically no research has been carried out on gender and SI. However, and related to the previous transversal issue, a gender-driven analysis could be instrumental for the understanding of how inequalities function. As it has been the case in previous instances of feminist approaches in critical theory revealing domination patterns, a gender perspective could offer a crosscutting critical question in all topics and projects paving the way to identifying reasons, patterns and ways to overcome the structural inequalities that challenge European societies today.

### 3.4. Collateral benefits of co-SIRA

Beyond the possible academic contribution of co-SIRA, a collateral benefit for SI research is the confirmation that an incipient community of SI researchers exists but it needs to be carefully nurtured. Different types of actors have different responsibilities in order to reach the potential of articulating a lively galaxy of communities stemming from various disciplinary and geographic traditions. All of the researchers who have contributed to this process have expressed their interest in participating in the process and, most importantly, of being kept abreast of future developments. In this context, the launch of the Social Innovation Community project to set up a network of networks provides a unique opportunity window for doing so (see recommendation 7 below).

In addition, the inclusion of non-Eurocentric approaches in co-SIRA opens the door to stronger connections with researchers beyond Europe as well as to new epistemologies. For instance, we had the opportunity to work with one of the EMES members, P.K. Shajahan of the Tata Institute for Social Sciences in Mumbai, India, during the session organised in Helsinki, where he presented the state of SI research in India. After a short overview of poverty rates among excluded groups (due to caste, tribe or ethnicity in both rural and urban areas which is exceptionally high regarding their overall percentage of the Indian population) he categorised the different interventions by state, market and civil society to alleviate poverty, and concluded with the lessons for SI research. Despite a large number of social enterprises and social innovators in India, research in this field has so far been marginal.

Fig. 2: Mapping the SI field in India, using the co-SIRA matrix developed to collect topics and research approaches

TOPIC	STATE OF THE ART	ACTION
Addressing Poverty	State-led and NGO initiatives	Status paper on state, market and CS-led initiatives for poverty reduction
Social exclusion	Affirmative actions, Social movements, Political processes	Study how mainstream approaches deal with social exclusion, compared to new ways of addressing exclusion with SI
Policy Imperatives	Spurt of welfare policies in the last decade in the rights framework	Analysing SI in these policies – framing of issues, approaches, strategies etc.

Prof. Shajahan’s contribution demonstrated that the matrix is indeed useful for mapping the field and drawing conclusions on how to research phenomena that we can define as Social innovations. We should also be careful to consider a possible Eurocentric bias in our approaches and perspectives, and constantly seek to learn from and compare with agenda setting, practices and research into the area of SI at a global level.

It is our impression, that much activity is taking place, especially in Asia and Latin America, in building SI capacity among scholars and practitioners. Whereas professor Shajahan addresses this from the perspective of people-centred SI, stakeholders in Latin America often connect the building of a SI research agenda to the area of solidarity economy and emancipatory actions. In both aspects, an epistemological sensitivity is needed if we want to realize the ambition of co-creating a sustainable SI research agenda.

## Part 4. Looking forward



4.1 Building on existing recommendations

4.2 Novel recommendations from co-SIRA

## 4. Looking forward with some lessons in mind

The moment to close this riveting collective exercise has arrived. Before doing so, there are a number of lessons that we have learned and that we would like to share with you. We hope that beyond agreeing or not with them, you will be inspired and moved to action by them.

We have divided our recommendations in two sets. The first one results from the revision of the eight recommendations proposed by the previous research review conducted in the framework of WILCO. The other one stem directly from the input gathered from all the channels and actions undertaken in the framework of co-SIRA.

### 4.1. Building on existing recommendations

In 2014 already, it was made clear that the SI community does not constitute an epistemic community in which there is consensus about cause-and-effect relationships or about policy recommendations (EC, 2014). Two years after this statement was made, we can confirm that this continues to be the case although initiatives like this co-SIRA and the Social Innovation Community Project currently under way represent steps forward in making the group of SI researchers at least a community of practice whose members understand the need to identify common goals and move forward in a coordinated manner.

Indeed some “boundary work” has been completed in the last years and it is likely to continue in the next years. In this sense, international recurrent events like the ISIRS or the EMES research conferences represent unique opportunities for researchers interested in SI to meet.

In the Policy Review produced in the framework of WILCO based on the analysis of 16 research projects, eight recommendations were put forward. In view of the present project review conducted in the framework of co-SIRA, a number of reflections can be made on those recommendations:

*1. Work on SI should be concentrated at the institutional (meso) or the individual (micro) levels of analysis, not the societal level.*

This recommendation was based on the difficulty of operationalizing concepts such as ‘good for society’ or ‘society’s capacity’ in the projects analysed. According to Jenson and Harrison, the authors of the review, this makes working at the level of society highly challenging and they thus recommended avoiding it. In light of the new batch of projects on SI, it is positively surprising to see projects that have tackled this operationalization challenge by focussing more on Social innovations in their environmental contexts, applying different contextual lenses (political, economic and cultural factors, networks) in relation to strategies and organizational form, and on modes of working to produce particular services. Only TRANSIT is focussing on the transformative power of SI at societal level.

A number of FP7-funded projects have organised joint meetings during the last few years, i.e. SIMPACT, SI-DRIVE, CRESSI and TRANSITION organised SI conferences and conference sessions (e.g. Social Innovation 2015 – Pathways to Social Change; ISIRC 2015 – session on economic underpinnings, a related session for 2016 is scheduled).

TRANSIT co-delivered their mid-term event with three other EC-funded SI projects (BENISI, TEPSIE and SI-DRIVE) and prepares a joint publication “Scaling Social Innovation: Experiences and first success stories of the two European networks of incubators for social innovation” with sister project BENISI.

*2. Encourage useful cross-level discussion among projects, in order to derive even more and fuller benefits of this research, by promoting additional activities across projects. New venues would probably need to be created.*

*3. Create a forum to discuss when and under what conditions SI is best treated as an input (independent variable) or as a result (dependent variable).*

Progress on this recommendation is still pending. Most current projects are treating SI as the dependent variable, looking at the way environments are shaping SI (i.e. SIMPACT, SI-DRIVE, ITSSOIN), including in positive ways as a driver for creative solutions (EFESEIIS). However, SI is sometimes treated as input variable, depending on the focus of research. While we recognize that this is a matter of research design and focus, understanding why research chooses one versus the other has implications on how the field is circled.

A lot of progress has been made on this recommendation, also due to a new stakeholder engagement focus by the European Commission. When looking at the new batch of projects, we realize that in addition to traditional activities aimed at stakeholders (conferences, policy seminars, roundtables), innovative practices were put in place. Ranging from BENISI’s “Social Innovation Accelerators Network” (SIAN) which unites organisations specifically interested in SI from a variety of sectors and with a wide geographical spread; over TRANSITION’s Transnational Start Ups Lab’, which took six Social innovations developed in one country to pilot them in another, led by innovators’ own perceptions and understandings of social need with the aim of increasing their impact and learning about the processes of scaling SI internationally; to SIMPACT’s

*4. Encourage researchers to include in their proposals the shareholders as co-producers of Social innovations knowledge, and to design dissemination activities that include shareholders as the main recipients of knowledge transfer and mobilisation when it is possible.*

simulation & scenario building workshops with social innovators, intermediaries, investors and policymakers. Stakeholder experiments

INNOSERV recommends to stronger integrate 'intrapreneurs' in future research, which was to some extent done by WILCO with their case studies of SI in welfare services, however, without drawing generalising conclusions. TRANSITION actively supported intrapreneurs in large organisations looking to scale up.

*5. Including historians in projects or projects by historians as well as a focus on historical precedents would provide necessary perspectives on what is 'new' in the domains examined by SI research*

Is there anything "new" to SI, something that sets them apart from the ways communities, social movements, civil society have always been innovative in their approaches, tactics or modes of working in order to address a grievance, rectify a political situation or change attitudes? ITSSOIN is addressing the historical dimension of innovation. In its attempt to build a solid theory on the external factors shaping the organisational form of Social innovations and actor involvement it employs social origins theory in addition to economic and welfare state regime components.

IMPROVE emphasised the importance of a historical and comparative perspective and looked at the historical evolution of SI from a model of bottom-up

social action in the 1970/80s towards a top-down social policy instrument over the last years. However, such efforts bring out the path-dependence of Social innovations more than a clarification of what is specifically 'new' in SI.

Research.eu, a result of Tepsie, addressed the WILCO recommendation, this co-SIRA is an experiment to take it further, with the potential to trigger more discussion if it could be institutionalised as an on-going open-process forum.

It already shows that all definitions include the reference to SI producing new social practice and relations (INNOSERV, RURINNO, IMPROVE, TRANSIT, ITSSOIN, EFESIIS, SI-DRIVE, SINGOCOM) or products (CRESSI, TRANSIT, WILCO, TRANSITION), based on collaboration and participation of end-users that equip them with legitimacy (ITSSOIN, SI-DRIVE) in relation or response to different needs and structural deficits: provisions by welfare state (IMPROVE, WILCO), rural (RURInno) or urban development (SINGOCOM), failing markets (CRESSI).

*6. Create a forum for a cross-project assessment of commonalities in the conceptualisation of SI as well as the reasons for any variations considered necessary.*



Some definitions are adding a general empowerment dimension to SI (IMPROVE, SIM-PACT, CRESSI), well being (EFESEIIS) and the power to change institutional structures and processes (TRANSIT, ITSSOIN, WILCO, SI-DRIVE).

*7. Create a mechanism for cross-project work on the definition or set of nested definitions of the concept of SI that could be deployed in a consensual way.*

Prior to this publication co-SIRA tried to get a discussion going, using a Facebook group and offline gatherings at international research conferences. Hopefully, this review will trigger further feedback, as we are circulating it among project coordinators, EMES experts and the wider SI community.

Clearly there is a need to agree on definitions, rather than make them up according to one's own objectives, as the blurriness of the concept might still hinder policy-makers to draft enabling policy recommendations and changes (EFESEIIS).

It seems that this recommendation can only be implemented in "special focus" research, adding a SI perspective. The SOLIDUS Project, for instance, brings different disciplines and thus methodologies together to approach solidarity (human geography, sociology, gender studies, SI). If there are other projects bringing a specific humanities perspective to SI we are not aware of it at this point.

*8. Consider the normative as well as empirical grounding of concepts such as 'good' and 'new.' Include in the discussion and therefore the research projects specialists on philosophy and ethics drawn from the humanities*

## 4.2. Novel recommendations from co-SIRA

Based on the background research and literature reviews, internal discussions and various rounds of consultations with stakeholders through the different channels activated, a number of recommendations concerning methodological approaches and strengthening the ecosystem in which SI can strive emerged for the research community but also other stakeholders. These recommendations are listed subsequently as they can be considered as novel outputs of co-SIRA.

While new phenomena emerge requiring novel research, our understanding and explanatory capacity is **currently limited by understandings of welfare models and traditions as well as their institutional structures**. In parallel to this, different **levels of governance are gain-**

**ing relevance.** Particularly **cities and the governance style of local authorities directly** impact the success or failure of SI. In this new narration the welfare mix becomes crucial, of which SI can be conceived as one element. For instance, research tends to suggest an open governance style at local level could gain recognition for SI and increase their sustainability. While such openness may be related to institutional factors (e.g. decentralisation vis-à-vis the state structure or collaboration with the third sector tradition) it also depended on the nature of local politics, the prevailing discourse and availability of intermediaries ('boundary spanners') and translators.

Current research indicates that different societal sectors are relevant for Social innovations on a more or less equal footing, indicating that **cross-sectorial collaborations are of great importance.** A general dominance of the third sector or social entrepreneurship cannot be detected. Different **forms of governance** might facilitate transformative SI and citizen empowerment. An economic perspective on SI finds that lack of better financial conditions is the main barrier for Social innovations. Networks are identified as key success factors for SI and key element of the theoretical **foundation of the economic dimensions** of SI, not neglecting **internal factors like skills** of social innovators for SI **success and sustainability.**

#### Recommendation 1 – Establish a database on SI research, comparing topics, approaches

An open database giving overview of research topics, analytical frameworks, and definitions should be established and hosted somewhere, where new researchers can refer to and enter new information. This would also expand the effort to build SI typologies, building on those developed by projects, without choosing one over the other, but listing all categories brought forward (governance styles, scaling strategies, networks). Typologies deducted from the wealth of case studies will also reflect the many different definition approaches, depending on what focus the study employs; shed light on 'what works' in incubating different types of SI, in what context and why; and help clarify lifecycle models that are meant to analyse the SI process and those that are meant to support the generation of new Social innovations (SIMPACT). Such a database should be opened up to other non-EU funded projects, like the various activities on scaling-up by private foundations and other organizations.

#### Recommendation 2 – Develop more uniformity across cases

Paradoxically, despite the many case studies and "SI Biographies" (SIMPACT) no unified case study series exists to date that gathers and illustrates the huge variety of existing examples documented. We would then recommend developing an analytical template that builds on the various dimensions brought forward across all projects. Ultimately, a database of SI case studies created under the same research coordination

would be a unique data source for future research on the topic. Such effort, however, should involve as many researchers as possible who have participated in the EU-funded projects.

### Recommendation 3 – Expand the methodological palette

Regarding methodology, there seems to be an overreliance on single case methodology and narratives of anecdotic case studies. While these are a great exploratory and illustrative methodology, an idea could be to use comparative historical analysis to understand how institutions “in the sense of clusters of norms” (Rueschemeyer, 2009) influence SI processes across different countries.

### Recommendation 4 – A critical perspective toward the study of SI

While some researchers have already looked into the normative fallacy that the SI discourse can hide, more consistent analysis using critical theory approaches is needed. Doing so would feed a cross-disciplinary effort mobilizing sociologists and political scientists but also psychologists, philosophers and anthropologists. Such critical approach, including unorthodox authors and theories, may be able to offer an explanatory power to internal contradictions and gaps existing in the current research propositions. For instance, the apparent motivations of social innovators as documented by projects like SIMPACT (belonging, trust, solidarity, etc.) should not be articulated only using the exchange allocation mechanisms that characterize markets, even if it is to develop “markets for the poor” or “alternative business models”. Doing so is reducing their potential for transformation to the realm of market relations.

There seems to be an assumption that the third sector is particularly prone to innovate. However, SI-DRIVE could not identify more SI potential within third sector and social enterprises than in other societal sectors. Similarly, ITSSOIN has found few hints on innovativeness, even though this might also be due to current lack data on third sector impact. This opens the field to scrutinize further the origins of SI and reiterates the question what is ‘new’ about SI as a concept. Related to this is the question why the majority of SI remain local and last only a limited number of years (WILCO)? Is it just a matter of scale or of nature of the processes and actors involved, i.e. intrapreneurs as raised by INNOSERV?

### Recommendation 5 – From ‘hero entrepreneur’ to ecosystem back to actors

Future research should refocus on the actor dimension of SI. A lot of important work has now been done to investigate enabling environments. However, individuals shape both policy contexts and bottom-up innovation, as a lot of the early SI and SE literature pointed out. Theory building should avoid a focus uniquely on structural factors, as there is a reciprocal relationship between agency and institutions that shape the scope for action. E.g. SIMPACT recommends to regard social innovators as brokers - connecting actors from the public and private field as well as civil society and to examine re-thinking and recombining in the SI process to comply with the duality of social and economic objectives.

### Recommendation 6 – Data on impact

There is a need for SI impact to spread knowledge among policy makers and further the implementation of policy frameworks that facilitate SI. Several research, advocacy and policy initiatives are currently working on frameworks to assess impact (TSI, EESC, Volonteuropa, to name a few), but all need to pressure further statistical agencies to implement similar measurement tools, based on similar indicators that allow drawing conclusions on social innovations and allow comparative research.

### Recommendation 7 – Connect to Social Innovation Community

It is important to raise awareness of the specifics of SI among all stakeholders in society by continuing an engaging research process, inviting both social innovators and policy makers to participate and thus diffuse knowledge on SI process, enabling and hindering factors and realistic expectations. Most TRANSITION Scaling Centres felt that SI was not well understood in their country and that while many people might be already be doing it, they may not recognise it or identify with the term. There is also the need to work towards an understanding of public authorities to not entrench themselves in categories like ‘social business’, ignoring the diversity of the third sector including for-profit oriented social innovations.

The EC-funded Social Innovation Community aims to create opportunities for different SI actors to engage and connect with policymakers. Involving SI more closely in tackling public challenges would require creating open spaces for SI actors to connect and engage with not only policymakers, but governments, municipalities, European institu-

tions, academics, corporates and others to define and develop genuinely impactful solutions together.

### Recommendation 8 – Go beyond Eurocentric views

Adopting a global perspective is important for theory building outside usual welfare regime frameworks and it helps to identify additional common factors at actor level when comparing across political regimes. A global mapping comparable to the ICSEM mapping of social enterprise models could be a way forward, to be incorporated in a joint case study and research approach database.

The spirit of co-SIRA is to consider the process of setting up a research agenda as on-going work to be continued and updated periodically. If you would like to share your impressions about this document with us, we would be delighted to hear from you through the various channels that we have set up:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1609053715990055>

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=8235387>

[sieagenda@emes.net](mailto:sieagenda@emes.net)

<http://www.emes.net/what-we-do/research-projects/social-innovation/2532-2>

## Annexes

Annex 1. "The Social Innovation Research Agenda: What, how and why"

Annex 2. List of EU projects reviewed



## Co-creating a Social Innovation Research Agenda for Europe

*List of EU projects reviewed*

### Projects reviewed by co-SIRA <sup>1</sup>

#### H2020

1. SOLIDUS (June 2015 - June 2018)
2. RURINNO (Feb 2016 - Mar 2018)

#### FP7

3. BENISI (Mar 2013 - Mar 2016)
4. CRESSI (Feb 2014 - Feb 2018)
5. GUSTO (Mar 2009 - Feb 2012) \*
6. EFESIIS (Dec 2013 - Dec 2016)
7. ImProve (Mar 2012 - Feb 2016)
8. INNOSERV (Feb 2012 - Feb 2014)
9. ITSSOIN (Mar 2014 - Mar 2017)
10. SEFORIS (Jan 2014 - Apr 2017)
11. SELUSI (Jun 2008 - Aug 2013) \*
12. SI-DRIVE (Jan 2015 - Dec 2017)
13. SIMPACT (Jan 2014 - Dec 2016)
14. TRANSITION (Sep 2013 - Mar 2016)
15. TRANSIT (Jan 2014 – Dec 2017)
16. WILCO (Dec 2010 - Jan 2014)

#### FP 6

17. RECOWOWE (Oct 2006 – Oct 2011) \*

#### FP 5

18. SINCOGOM (Jun 2002 - Aug 2004)

### Projects covered by WILCO Policy Review <sup>2</sup>

#### FP 7

1. CITISPYCE
2. COCOPS
3. CSEYHP
4. INCLUD-ED
5. LIPSE
6. SERVPPIN
7. SOCIAL POLIS
8. SPREAD
9. TEPSIE
10. WILCO

#### FP 6

11. CIVICWEB
12. KATARSIS
13. LIFELONG LEARNING 2010
14. RESPONSE

#### FP 5

15. CONSCISE
16. PERSE
17. PUBLIN

<sup>1</sup> Projects marked with an asterisk (\*) did not submit the analytical grid prepared for the review and so they were reviewed based on available information for the public.

<sup>2</sup> “Social innovation research in the European Union. Approaches, findings and future directions” available at <http://www.wilcoproject.eu/social-innovation-research-in-the-european-union-approaches-findings-and-future-directions>