



Innovative Social Investment: Strengthening communities in Europe (InnoSI)

The case for Social Investment

European welfare states were designed to offer support against Twentieth Century social and economic risks. But European societies are changing in a number of interlinked areas including demography, globalisation, ecological sustainability, family structure, employment, poverty and social inclusion. The implications of these changes are profound. The effects of the 2008 financial crisis are not just economic. Uncertainty, austerity and the associated high levels of unemployment and reduction of wages have destabilised labour markets. European citizens demonstrate an increasing lack of trust, not only in relation to financial institutions, companies and the free market overall, but also in relation to democratic institutions and politics at European, national or local levels (Vandenbroucke et al. 2011, Hemerijck 2012). The economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath have emphasized that EU Member States will have to adopt distinctive social welfare reforms to improve their resilience and prepare for future economic and social risks.

In 2013 the European Commission adopted its 'Social Investment Package'. It stresses that welfare systems fulfil three functions: social investment, social protection and economic stabilisation.

Social investment involves strengthening people's current and future capacities. . . . In particular, social investment helps to "prepare" people to confront life's risks, rather than simply "repairing" the consequences. (Bouget et al. 2015: 4)

In contrast to a straightforward redistributive approach to social policy, social investment considers welfare as entailing investments to improve prospects for future economic and social participation (Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck, 2012).

The challenge

To date, implementation of social investment approaches has been uneven across Member States and much remains to be learned, especially with regard to the regional and local realities of social investment. Many models of social investment are possible depending upon how policy, social and managerial roles are distributed between the public, private and third sectors and the specific legal and financial frameworks that are used. However, new innovative policies also bring risks including, welfare chauvinism, nationalism and that social groups which do not contribute to economic growth as measured by GDP may be ignored.

About InnoSi

INNOSI asks how we can design robust social investment strategies which can deal with emerging socio-economic challenges and the aftershocks of the 2008 economic crisis. Our overall approach is based on our distinct



understanding of social investment which recognises:

- the importance of regional context in social investment policy;
- the role for social innovation in social investment;
- the need to recognise and measure social as well as economic value when evaluating policies; and
- how beneficiaries' experiences of social investment policies help shape civic identities in Europe.

The research will identify innovative approaches to social investment at national and regional levels across the 28 Member States with in-depth case study evaluations taking place in 10 Member States. Within the programme of research special attention is paid to the legal and regulatory frameworks required for innovation in social welfare policy and different approaches to funding social welfare policy including the potential role for third sector and private sector organisations.

However, this is not a traditional research project. Key to the project are community involvement and policy impact. We believe that to develop approaches that will support effective social reform for vulnerable groups it is essential to involve them in the research and the process of policy development and implementation. User involvement thus runs through the heart of our project, ensured through recruiting a minimum of 100 'community reporters' and training them in core social media skills such as photography, podcasting and film making using 'technology in the pocket' devices. Approximately a third of the resource on this project is devoted to impact generation. Results from the research

are assimilated in a foresight analysis where we consider options for social investment in the future. Our 'impact partners' (typically NGOs or representative bodies) will act as 'knowledge brokers' taking research findings from the case studies and foresight exercise, translating them into policy-relevant material with which to engage policy-makers. Their aim is to generate impact from the research during the lifetime of the project and lay foundations for ongoing impact from the body of work generated during the project.

About the team

The consortium is led by the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (www.mmuperu.co.uk) based at Manchester Metropolitan University. They are joined by nine other universities from across Europe:

- HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht
- Turku University of Applied Sciences
- Universitat Politècnica de València
- University of Debrecen
- Karlstads University
- Uniwersytet Wrocławski
- Westfälische Wilhelmsuniversität Münster
- University of Bologna
- Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences

A group of impact partners is led by the Euclid Network (www.euclidnetwork.eu).

For more information visit our website at <http://innosi.eu>