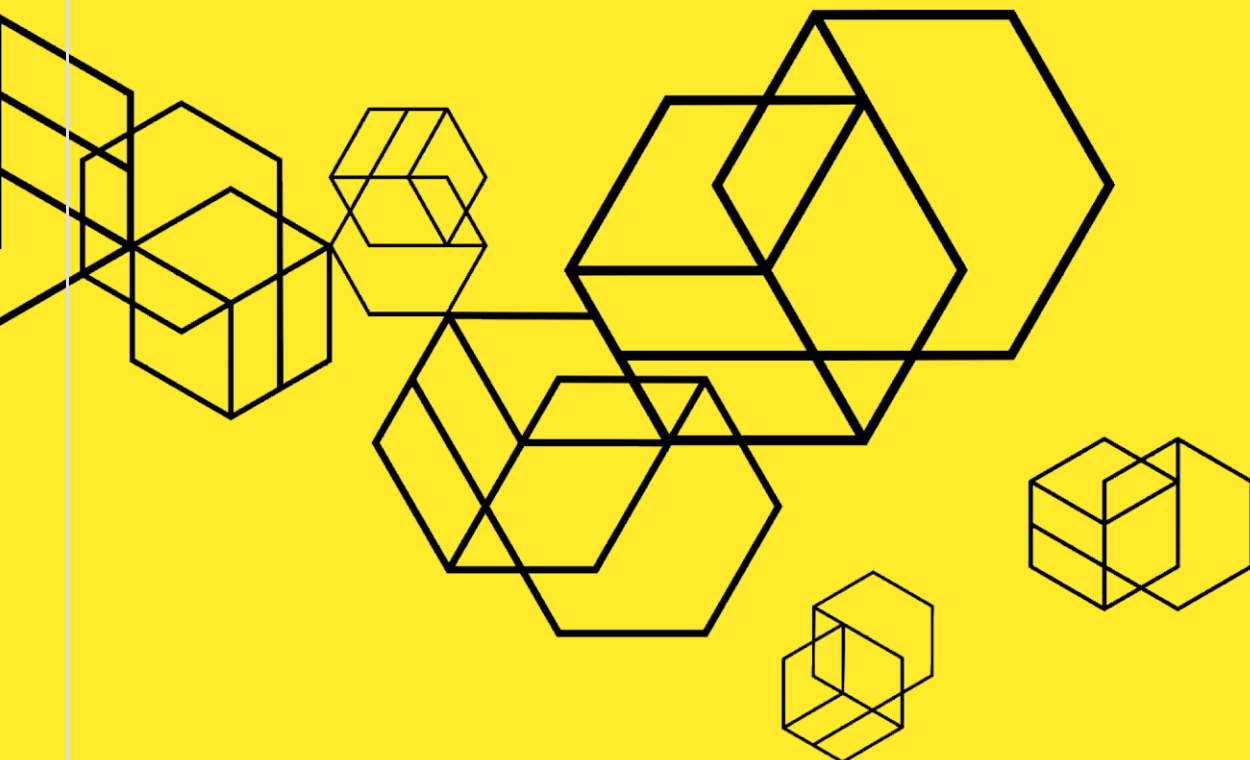




**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
COMMUNITY**

Specialists in building bridges. The SIC Research Community Roadmap. D2.4 of the SIC project

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present roadmap of activities of the SI Community in social innovation research has been distilled from

- A literature review conducted by ZSI of recent SI research and recommendations of European SI projects (see reference list);
- The Lisbon Declaration co-created in several rounds of stakeholder consultations by the SIC project (Social Innovation Community, 2018)
- The output of SIC's WP 2 (Domanski & Kaletka, 2017, 2018a; Kaletka & Domanski, 2017), and the Hot Topic Workshops and Transformative Research Sessions conducted by SIC partners.¹

It cannot claim to represent the views of social innovation researchers across Europe but focuses on those within reach of the SIC project's research activities as partners, network members, event participants, discussants and audiences. It complements the more comprehensive overviews of, for example, the Co-SIRA report (Brandsen, Ecchia, Eschweiler, Hulgård, & Nogales, 2016) or the assessment of the FP7 and Horizon2020 projects by Moulaert and colleagues for the European Commission (Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood, & Leubold, 2017).

The materials were first developed into "bullet points" that became the columns of the overview tables and the content of this roadmap paper. These headings were then tested and further elaborated by participants in the breakout session on "Research in Action" at the SIC Final Event in Sevilla on November 12, 2018.

Arguably, SI research in the view of the SI community around SIC, develops in two directions:

- The development of a distinct, interdisciplinary research field of "social innovation studies", and
- the development of SI research to support and enhance both SI practice and SI policy in the direction of solving social problems, addressing societal challenges and bringing about favourable social change.

Obviously, these two objectives are not mutually exclusive and should not be considered as alternatives. The development of the research field takes place *within* social science or the "inside" of the SI research domain. The development of its connectivity with social innovation practice and policy looks at the networked "outside", at interfaces, networks and boundary-spanning capabilities. Both directions represent two distinct logics of modernity and late/reflexive modernity respectively: specialisation and institutionalisation in the field of science, specifically social science, on the one hand, comprehensive and networked social progress on the other. This is not a purely theoretical distinction,

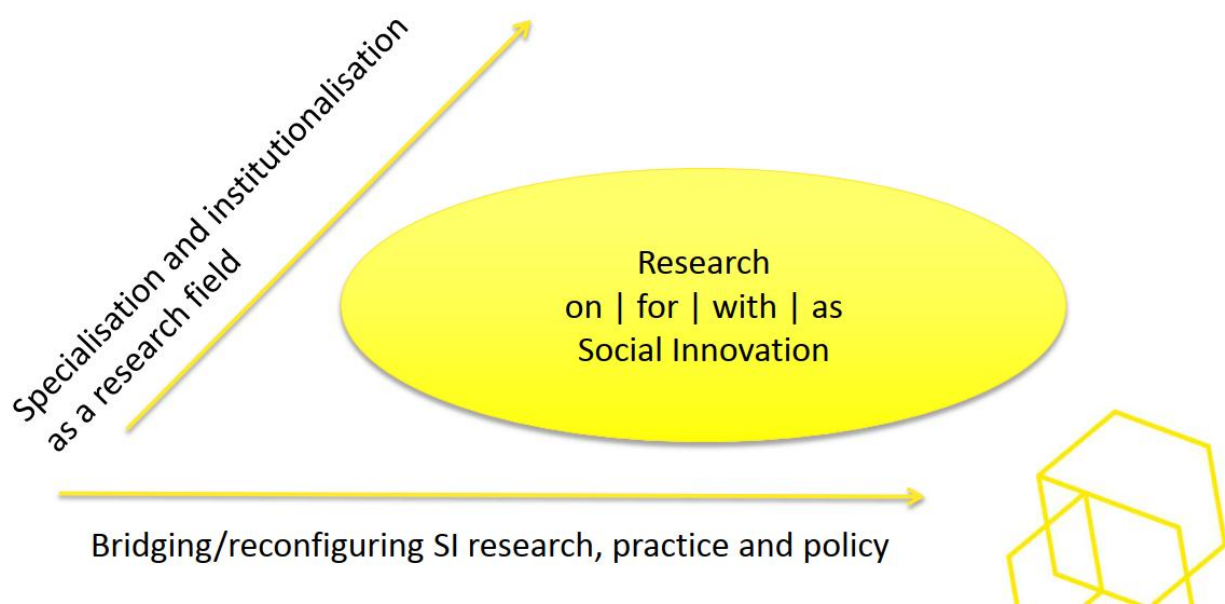
¹ A warm thank you for their contributions is due to SIC partners, workshop participants, reviewers Victoria Boelman and Marie Nicole Sorivelle, and Flor Avelino, Antonius Schröder and Julia Wittmayer who provided valuable input.



but an empirically grounded one: developments and plans for the SI research community can be sorted under these two headings, while paying attention to their interfaces. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the respective objectives and activities of SI research in the short, medium and long-term.

In a third direction, which may synthesise both specialisation and connectivity, research into SI could be said to socially innovate itself, by creating new research practices, roles and social relationships that overcome the distinctions of research and practice, science and society etc. while retaining the powers of engagement, experience, reflection and rigour.²

Figure 1: Two directions of advancing SI research



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developing and institutionalising SI as a research field

This is the strategy of institutionalisation of SI research along the lines of research-specific advances and "normal science" (Kuhn, 1962), that is, the regular professional activities of SI researchers in the field of (social) science. It entails

- establishing spaces for scientific networking and exchange,

² Madeleine Gabriel and Sophie Reynolds develop a similar line of thought with regard to social innovation policy in the SIC project (Reynolds, Gabriel, & Heales, 2016).



- the development of common epistemologies and a theoretical framework,
- the filling of research gaps and discovery of new research topics, and
- furthering the career of young researchers in SI.

This ambition builds on a series of European projects on social innovation at large that have covered distinct facets of social innovation. Nevertheless, the various projects' manifestos and recommendations on SI research argue that the institutionalisation of SI research on a European level requires ongoing efforts beyond scientific business as usual. Ensuring the continuity of both theory building and empirical research on SI, identifying new topics, building knowledge and reaching out into regions and to communities and social groups at the margins of current funding priorities requires some dedicated investment into more continuous research infrastructures that enable further projects to develop.³ For this reason, the Lisbon Declaration (Social Innovation Community, 2018) and other documents demand

- statutory integration of SI into all pillars of the EU's research policy (the Horizon Europe package),
- ensuring continuity of SI research beyond individual projects, for example by establishing an "EU Observatory of Social Innovation Policy".

The central aim of developing SI as a research field in the short term is to publish and sustain the research and scientific outcomes of SIC and its neighbouring projects. In the mid-term perspective, ensuring continuity and sustainability of SI research will be the key objective. This means overcoming the high dependency of the field on a sequence of EU-funded projects with limited timespans and challenges in keeping results current and alive (such as the databases and datasets of social innovations in the SI-DRIVE project or the case studies and toolkits for practice and policy developed by the SIC project). Projects need to be complemented by other forms of funding and investment into research infrastructures, both by dedicated longer-term programmes and the "mainstreaming" of SI contributions and research into socially and ecologically aware studies of innovation.

Universities' and other research institutes' role in SI should expand in all dimensions: research and teaching, the "third mission" of engaging with society, consultancy, exchange, lobbying, and fostering the careers of young researchers. This also means creating centres and labs in the less equipped regions and countries. In the long term, that is, the next ten years, all these initiatives will ideally converge into a professionalised and connective research infrastructure and ecosystem that offers knowledge, skills and reflexive and critical capacities to social innovators, actual and potential social innovators, stakeholders and end-users, and society at large. The overall aims will be to create a critical

³ The argument is similar to that of Mazzucato (Mazzucato, 2013) on technological innovation: Larger-scale breakthroughs in innovation cannot rely on private-sector plus academia (and for our purposes, civil society engagement) alone but the state needs to provide considerable investment and vision on the national and also European level.



mass of research infrastructures that connect the global, European, and the local level and move SI studies into the mainstream of socially and ecologically aware innovation studies.

Bridging research, practice and policy

This strategic direction of SI research aims for better collaboration between SI research and SI practice, reacting to real-world problems and societal challenges and ensuring accelerated mutual learning. This entails demands for

- transdisciplinary transformative spaces of research, experimentation and mutual learning, on local, regional and European levels, especially involving the public sector (Wittmayer & Rach, 2018);
- building, integrating and reflecting knowledge about tools, methods and formats for exchange that "work" in a sustainable way for SI practitioners, researchers, public authorities and policymakers;
- developing methodologies of assessing and increasing social impact into an "evidence ecosystem" (Social Innovation Community, 2018) that gathers, adapts and disseminates the evidence on the potentials of social innovation and on the prerequisites for SI to achieve favourable societal impacts; and
- the adaption of European research programmes to include SI practitioners and support the creation of more permeable roles and careers between research, practice and policy.

The overall objective for bridging of social innovation research, practice and policy in the short term is to sustain and continue current activities, bring them into the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework and ensure the best possible use and exploitation of current research results by a wide range of users that are on the way to becoming co-creators.

The mid-term overall objectives are focused on further outreach and deepening and integration of research-practice-policy networks and communities. In particular, local and trans-local levels will need to be more connected, new actors and intermediaries included, and the necessary skills and competences recognised.

In the long term, the overall objective of SI research is likely to be a wider diffusion or indeed, "mainstreaming" of SI practices, processes and modes of thinking in policy, societal practice and also innovation at large that increases the capabilities of societies to take their development into their own hands, address their challenges, disentangle "wicked problems" and invigorate social progress.

Socially innovating SI research

If the development of SI research in both directions of both specialisation and closer connections with SI practice and policy is successful, this may socially innovate the relationship of SI research and various practice fields itself, into a genuinely co-creative two-way street. In this vision:



1. The experience of SI would feed into research in multiple ways that may be more interactive and self-reflexive and also more responsive to change than conventional empirical social science research with its clear distinctions of the roles of researchers, research subjects, and users of research.
2. Social science and theory would become more directly useful for SI practice through an array of exchange formats, labs, knowledge bases, and opportunities for consulting and co-creation.

Table 1: Developing and institutionalising Social Innovation as a research field

	Overall objectives	“Spaces” for scientific networking and exchange	Development of common epistemologies and a theoretical framework	Filling of research gaps and discovering new research topics	Supporting young researchers
Short-term 2019-2020	<i>Publishing and sustaining the scientific outcomes of SIC and neighbouring projects</i>	<p>Conferences: ISIRC 2019 and 2020</p> <p>ESSI 2019</p> <p>Journals: papers by SIC partners</p> <p>Transferring SIC research content and dialogue to successor websites: ESSI as a “knowledge bank of main research results, blogs and fora”</p>	Atlas of Social innovation – update and sustain	<p>Gathering evidence, cases, approaches and solutions to develop existing mappings of SI initiatives</p> <p>“open”, creative conference formats: e.g. continue “hot topic workshop” formats</p>	<p>Ensuring young researchers’ involvement in SI publishing and dissemination activities</p> <p>→ further analysis of existing data, methodologies etc. through master/PhD theses?</p> <p>Continuation of SIC/ESSI Summer Schools</p> <p>PhD workshops, special subject seminars</p> <p>Marie-Curie-training programmes (submitted)</p>
Mid-term 2019–2025	<p><i>Ensuring continuity of SI research</i></p> <p><i>Overcoming dependency on projects</i></p> <p><i>Growing the research field: Expanding SI research to university departments,</i></p>	<p>Provide input into integration of SI into Horizon Europe package</p> <p>Reaching out to universities to take a stronger, more proactive role in SI (third mission)</p>	<p>ESSI establishing “thought leadership”</p> <p>Developing comparative frameworks (“social innovation regimes”?)</p> <p>Addressing questions of power</p>	<p>Maintaining contact with current and emergent practice fields → Table 2</p> <p>Connecting SI research with innovation research (technological, business, service) at large</p>	<p>Graduate and postgraduate studies in social innovation</p> <p>Support infrastructure of grants, also for small-scale exploration, feasibility studies</p>



	<i>courses, labs in less equipped countries/regions</i>	<p>Lobbying for “EU Observatory of SI Policy”</p> <p>Rendering ESSi platform and its activities sustainable</p> <p>Reaching out to universities to strengthen their role in SI</p>	<p>and politics in SI research</p> <p>Ongoing work on SI and social change/social transformation</p> <p>Connecting SI research with SDGs</p> <p>“SI beyond SI” connecting SI with related areas such as transition research</p>	Integration of SI into “mission-oriented” research	
Long term 2019-2030	<p><i>Creating a critical mass of SI research infrastructures</i></p> <p><i>“mainstreaming” SI into universities’ research excellence and social responsibility frameworks</i></p>	Connecting “spaces” into a professionalised and connective research infrastructure and ecosystem	<p>“holistic concept of innovation”</p> <p>Systemic understanding of transformative change moving into the mainstream</p>	Holistic, socially and social-science-informed innovation paradigms	Professionalisation and recognition of trans-disciplinary social innovation research



Table 2: Bridging Research, Practice and Policy

	Overall objectives	Transdisciplinary, transformative spaces of research, experimentation and mutual learning	Knowledge about tools, methods and formats of exchange and collaboration that “work”	Methods of assessing and increasing social impact, “evidence ecosystem”	European research programmes to include practitioners	More permeable roles and careers between research and practice
Short-term 2019-2020	<p><i>sustain and continue current activities</i></p> <p><i>use and exploit current research results by a wide range of users</i></p>	<p>Retain and develop contacts among academics, practitioners, communities, policymakers, public sector</p>	<p>Continue “hot topic workshop” formats</p> <p>Get SIC successor platforms running and monitor their use by the wider community</p> <p>Find or create publication outlets for reflection on participatory and co-creative methodologies</p>	<p>Gather experience of current crop of SI projects and render body of knowledge accessible to actual and potential users of impact assessment</p> <p>Connect SI impact with SDGs</p>	<p>Input into design of MFF and rendering programmes and instruments more accessible to social innovation practitioners and initiatives across their lifecycle</p> <p>Integrate SI with mission-oriented research</p>	<p>Retain and recognise cross-domain formats of learning, dissemination, research</p>
Mid-term 2019– 2025	<p><i>deepen and integrate research-practice-policy networks</i></p> <p><i>expand outreach</i></p> <p><i>connect local and trans-local levels</i></p>	<p>Reach out further to neighbouring communities of eg arts, social movements, businesses, services</p> <p>Connect better with neighbouring networks (of living labs, citizen science, action research etc.)</p>	<p>Demonstrate contributions of SI research inputs to SI practice and policy</p> <p>Extend possibilities and methodologies for experimentation</p> <p>Extend geographical range of exchange and establish two-way streets</p>	<p>Refine indicators and evidence bases for social progress</p> <p>Develop participatory heuristics and methods that address power and empowerment in social innovation</p> <p>Integrate methodologies of “data and stories” that</p>	<p>Diffuse SI knowledge and approaches across European, national and regional programmes and policy fields</p> <p>Link top-down and bottom-up approaches, include local needs and challenges</p>	<p>Recognise and encourage practical, volunteering, transitional experiences in academic credit in SI-related fields on all levels (students to academics)</p> <p>Take stock of skills and competences required and gained in social</p>



		<p>Linkages between local and trans-local spaces</p> <p>Merge top-down and bottom-up SI agendas</p> <p>Offer research “services” and input to labs, intermediaries</p> <p>Bridge different fields of scientific, practical and political expertise in a holistic and cooperative SI approach</p>	<p>of learning</p> <p>Bring transformative research and learning formats to university programmes and policy agendas</p>	<p>assess various dimensions of impact within and between varied contexts and scales</p>		<p>innovation</p> <p>Fund mutual “secondments” for academics and practitioners in different fields of social innovation</p> <p>Integrate Social innovation skills and modules into various innovation-related training and education</p>
<p>Long-term 2019-2030</p>	<p><i>wider diffusion or “mainstreaming” of SI practices, processes and modes of thinking into innovation systems and policy</i></p>	<p>Attraction of new expertise (e.g. finance, engineering) into social innovation fields and vice versa</p> <p>Diffusion of learning and experimentation practices of transformative spaces into other learning environments</p>	<p>Integrate participatory, social-innovation informed and socially aware processes and methodologies into a wide range of policy fields and levels</p>	<p>Open and sustained “evidence ecosystem” and knowledge base on SI’s potentials and prerequisites to political debate and reflection</p>	<p>Ongoing, participatory knowledge loops that feed knowledge on SI needs and requirements into further rounds of programme design and negotiation</p>	<p>Foster a generation of well-rounded post-professionals with experience in varied aspects, stages and functions of SI</p> <p>a “lifelong learning system” for social innovation for professionals, activists, end-users, amateurs and volunteers</p>

3. DEVELOPING AND INSTITUTIONALISING SOCIAL INNOVATION (STUDIES) AS A RESEARCH FIELD

The state of the art

Social innovation has established itself as a distinct research field. There is an expanding scientific literature that also involves a handbook (Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood, & Hamdouch, 2014) the recent Atlas of Social innovation (Howaldt, Kaletka, Schröder, & Zirngiebl, 2018), and a dedicated journal, the European Public & Social Innovation Review (EPSIR),⁴ a double-blind peer reviewed and interdisciplinary, open access journal that is published biannually. Starting from the Vienna Conference “Challenge Social Innovation” in 2011 (Franz, Hochgerner, & Howaldt, 2012), a series of conferences has been organised by varying networks of partners who are also represented in the SIC project. They took place in London 2013 (“Social Frontiers: The next edge in social innovation research”), Vienna 2015 (“Social Innovation 2015: Pathways to Social Change”) and Brussels 2017 (“Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change”). This amounts to a biannual cycle with an explicit focus on concepts and theories building the core of an upcoming scientific community in the field of social innovation. European projects such as SI-DRIVE, TRANSIT, CRESSI, SIMPACT and SIC took central roles in organising these conferences and developed collaborations across these projects. The next instalment is taking place in Dortmund on October 28-29, 2019 in cooperation with TU Dortmund University and DASA (German Federal Working World Exhibition, Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health), focusing on “Social Innovation and Socio-Digital Transformation”. At the same time, the International Social Innovation Research Conference (ISIRC), an annual format, has organised its 10th edition in 2018. It started with a focus on social entrepreneurship but in recent years has become more dedicated to social innovation research in a wider sense (Kaletka & Domanski, 2017, p. 19).

While the research field is converging and developing as a community of researchers, there is also evidence of some fragmentation. Research in the domains of the SIC networks is unevenly developed, and takes place in varied sub- and trans-disciplines besides "Social Innovation Studies" such as administrative science for public sector innovation, internet science for research into digital social innovation, and so on (Domanski & Kaletka, 2017). In Europe, Social Innovation research itself has chiefly been driven by the European projects of various generations. Recent projects have given considerable attention to the mapping of social innovation cases and also to the building of common epistemological and theoretical frameworks (for example SI-DRIVE or TRANSIT). It appears that

⁴ <http://pub.sinnergiak.org/index.php/esir/index>



theories of social innovation and social change converge around various flavours of action and practice theory (Howaldt, Butzin, Domanski, & Kaletka, 2014; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2016; Moulaert et al., 2014).

However, the finite logic of projects creates additional challenges of rendering these bodies of knowledge sustainable beyond the common 3-year cycles. The "Atlas of Social Innovation" (Howaldt et al., 2018) is an example that continues to gather contributions and also aims to add to the SI-DRIVE project's dataset of SI cases by a self-reporting tool on its website. In sum, "an incipient community of SI research exists but it needs to be carefully nurtured" (Brandsen et al., 2016, p. 22).

Actors promoting the institutionalising and bridging activities described in this roadmap are the following: the SIC partners that conduct research and are collaborating further in other projects and activities of varying scales; the SI Policy Interest Group, the SI Learning platform that hosts tools, case studies and learning formats developed by SIC, and the European School of Social Innovation. Indeed, the European School of Social Innovation⁵, in which a majority of SIC partners are members, emerges as a key successor to SIC's research and also learning activities. It will be connected to the new era of social innovation (announced by the European Commission and Commissioner Moedas in 2018), give significant input to new funding schemes (such as Horizon Europe) by its members (most relevant SI research institutions and scholars) and its research and innovation topics. ESSI is a structured and systematic research base that aims to develop and frame the relevant research topics beyond the current state of the art and to ensure ongoing SI research and implementation. It will also host the SIC research forum. The network will bundle efforts, discuss new needs and impact on research, policy and practical experimentation and implementation in an ongoing and sustainable way.

The short term (2019-2020)

In the short term, in the next two years, the central aim of SIC research activities is to publish and sustain the research and scientific outcomes of SIC and its neighbouring projects. SIC researchers will participate in and co-organise the ISIRC and ESSI Conferences and will publish academic papers on their activities in peer-reviewed journals. Imminent tasks are managing the transfer of SIC's relevant outputs and content to the successor websites of the European School of Social Innovation and the Learning Platform. The "Atlas" is also being updated and open to new topics and approaches and application fields of social innovation.

The learning and discourse formats developed by SIC will also be continued and further disseminated through Summer Schools, policy learning, and the more interactive workshop and conference formats of "hot topic workshops". In collaboration with other projects, special subject seminars and PhD

⁵ <https://www.essi-net.eu/>



workshops can be conducted. To ensure continuity in both the short and the longer term, support of young researchers in SI should be an integral part of these initiatives. In the project-driven field of social innovation research, it is important to ensure their involvement in post-project publication and dissemination activities, and also feed existing data, theories and methodologies into further academic work, Master and PhD theses, both for deeper analysis and continuity of SI research.

SIC partners have begun to access funding for continued activities and will continue to do so. Beyond H2020 and other projects, COST actions, Marie-Curie training programmes and networks may provide such funding of publication, dissemination and other scientific exchanges that complements project-based research. Some SIC partners are currently preparing a proposal for a TransAtlanticPlatform NetworkK on social innovation.

The mid-term (2019 -2025)

In the mid-term, ensuring continuity and sustainability of SI research will be the key objective. This means overcoming the high dependency of the field on a sequence of EU-funded projects with limited timespans and challenges in keeping results current and alive (such as the databases and datasets of social innovations in the SI-DRIVE project⁶ or the case studies and toolkits for practice and policy developed by the SIC⁷ project). Projects need to be complemented by other forms of funding and investment into research infrastructures, both by dedicated longer-term programmes and the "mainstreaming" of SI contributions and research into socially and ecologically aware studies of innovation.

Universities' role in SI should expand in all dimensions: research and teaching, the "third mission" of engaging with society, consultancy, exchange, lobbying, supporting the careers of young researchers, and fostering the careers of young researchers. This also means creating centres and labs in the less equipped regions and countries. Authors from the SI-DRIVE project and Dortmund University in particular argue in favour of a stronger more proactive role of universities in the SI ecosystem. Whereas their role is well established in technological R&D, in social innovation they certainly could enhance their "third mission" of generating positive social impact (Anderson, Domanski, & Howaldt, 2018; Dhondt, Oeij, & Schröder, 2017; Domanski & Kaletka, 2018b; Howaldt, 2019).

Currently, in the social innovation research landscape, this somewhat lagging role of universities is compensated for by the activities of the non-university, independent and third sector research institutes, foundations and think tanks that specialise in social innovation (such as the Young Foundation or Nesta

⁶ www.si-drive.eu

⁷ www.siceurope.eu



in the UK, ZSI - Centre for Social Innovation in Austria). These actors have played pioneering roles in bridging research, practice and policy and developing new methodologies and formats of exchange (see section 4). Some institutes are connected with universities either having been integrated into the local university (such as TUDO's Sozialforschungsstelle in Germany), or spun off from it (such as Dutch DRIFT, or Spanish / the Basque country's SINNERGIAK) (Kaletka & Domanski, 2017). While universities are the likeliest actors to promote the direction of professionalisation and specialisation of SI research, the non-university research institutes have valuable contributions to make in this process, especially in connecting it with the "bridging" strategy. Yet, non-university institutes with their often more project-based and precarious funding have expressed concerns over being "crowded out" of the field, if better-funded universities increase their role and investments do not increase. Aggregating these interests, negotiating the respective roles, areas of co-operation and divisions of labour in a collaborative rather than competitive way is likely to be part of the mid-term agenda of professionalising SI research.

All of this, in the creation of research spaces (for transdisciplinary spaces for collaboration, see section 4) will entail ongoing lobbying in conjunction with the SI policy initiatives: providing input into the integration of SI research into the Horizon Europe package. The European Commission itself argues that building coalitions of stakeholders, an essential prerequisite for social innovation (Westley, Antadze, Riddell, Robinson, & Geobey, 2014), often requires the establishment of a new intermediary, an "objective convener, who can effectively coordinate the disparate actors in the system to advocate for political change" and is not perceived as vested interest. Creating "scaffolding structures" that advocate for change, build capacity and facilitate interactions between and within competence networks, is considered fundamental to push forward social innovation (European Commission, 2017). SI researchers suggest lobbying for a dedicated social innovation institute (Hubert, 2018) modelled on other European agencies (such as the Gender Institute), or an observatory that aims to monitor the performance of social innovations and social innovation policy (Social Innovation Community, 2018) and may both conduct and commission research beyond the scope of projects.

During this time, the European School of Social Innovation will need to become sustainable through its membership fees, in-kind contributions by members, and other possible sources of funds. In developing a common theoretical framework, it aims for "thought leadership" and is becoming a central platform for scientific discourse.

With regard to research content and the epistemological and theoretical framework, experts in the "hot topic" workshops suggested several directions: building comparative frameworks to go beyond the widespread case-based approach to social innovation. This could take an institutionalist approach and analyse entire SI ecosystems, and in this way connect to the literature on innovation regimes and address the political economy of social innovation. Brandsen et al. (2016) explicitly recommend including historical perspectives here. Another important (and related) direction are ways to address questions of power and (micro-)politics in social innovation (Avelino et al., 2017; Wittmayer & Rach,



2018). This could provide additional reflexivity and attention to unintended consequences and developments of social innovations, and an antidote to the more naïve and normative assumptions that SI is by definition "a good thing". Both these angles feed into the ongoing work on a better understanding of the relationship of social innovation and social change or transformation. They will be structured by increasingly connecting with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, as social innovation research continues to establish itself, it needs to pay attention to shifting policy "fashions" that have much in common with management fashions (Kieser, 1997). Developing "social innovation beyond social innovation" means connecting with neighbouring fields and approaches, without being overly territorial ("not invented here"), such as action research, social movements research or transition research.

This also applies to the filling of research gaps and discovery of new topics for research. As social innovation has benefitted from overcoming disciplinary and field-specific specialisms, it will continue to do so by maintaining contact with both neighbouring research and practice fields (see section 4). It will also create closer connections of SI research with innovation research at large, that is, the study of technological, business and service innovations, aiming for a merger of social innovation research and approaches of social science to innovation at large. This amounts to the argument that all innovations are socially relevant either explicitly or through unacknowledged social prerequisites and consequences. Such a holistic approach to innovation will tie in well with an increasing role of research driven by specific, also locally-connected missions that aim to achieve economic, ecological and social goals (Mazzucato, 2018). Moulaert et al. argue SI research should aim for a central part in the social sciences and humanities because with its pragmatic, action-oriented capacitation philosophy and related methodologies it can help social sciences to overcome their inferiority position vis-à-vis the so-called hard sciences (Moulaert et al., 2017). However, this will require social scientists to take new and unfamiliar roles as actual innovators instead of observing, assessing and socially contextualising innovations (Howaldt, 2019).

In supporting young researchers, in the mid-term SI research should see more formalised graduate and postgraduate courses and studies in social innovation research. As social innovation connects local and trans-local approaches and is likely to be open-ended and experimental, this could require a support infrastructure of varied grants, also for short-term exploration and feasibility missions. The infrastructure of the H2020-funded InGRID project⁸ that connects research infrastructures and data sources on the subject of inclusive growth, could be an example.

⁸ <http://www.inclusivegrowth.eu/>



The long term (2019-2030)

In the long term, that is, the next ten years, all these initiatives will ideally converge into a professionalised and connective research infrastructure and ecosystem that offers knowledge, skills and reflexive and critical capacities to social innovators, actual and potential social innovators, stakeholders and end-users, and society at large. The overall aims will be to create a critical mass of research infrastructures that connect the global, European, and the local level, and move SI studies into the mainstream of socially relevant trans-disciplinary research.

If they succeed, they will develop a holistic concept of innovation that also informs technological and business innovation studies and practice, and thus enhances societies' understanding of all types of interrelated and complementary innovations, and their capabilities to shape them in societally favourable ways. A systemic understanding of transformative change will move into the mainstream of the social sciences. Social innovation studies then will mean both studies of social innovation and social studies of innovation, and will have become a professionalised and recognised trans-discipline.

4. BRIDGING SOCIAL INNOVATION RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND POLICY

The state of the art

As we have seen, social innovation research has advanced considerably in building a community, and that community agrees that it is based on interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary collaboration between researchers and practitioners of different backgrounds (Domanski & Kaletka, 2018a; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017; Moulaert, 2010; Osburg & Schmidpeter, 2013). Nevertheless, social innovation "theory" and "practice" are not necessarily developing synchronously. Arguably, the evolution of SI practice has happened ahead of research and theory (Nicholls, Simon, & Gabriel, 2015) - similar to the relationship of technological and business innovations and innovation studies. While SI research activities clearly aim to be open to practitioners of various kinds, mutual misunderstanding and mismatched expectations are still observed. Some social innovation actors surveyed in the SIC Launch Event reported a sense that research and practice still do not very much benefit from each other, and that researchers lack experience in practice (Domanski & Kaletka, 2018a). Policy and European research funding (especially the more applied programmes) also have a tendency to favour "best practice" approaches and promises of scalable social innovations. Researchers of different types then are faced with conflicting incentives: matching other actors' and funders' demand for impact and best practice, versus the demands of scientific careers for peer-reviewed publications and demonstrated research "excellence". Whereas multiple demands are unlikely to be easily resolved, they definitely provide more reasons for mutually challenging and appreciative collaboration. Indeed, it is precisely because of its characteristics of multi-disciplinarity, cross-sectorality and multi-dimensionality that social



innovation can bridge theory and practice, and inform policy-making on these grounds (European Commission, 2017). The intertwining of social innovation research and practice is a strength, and this link is crucial in order to understand research in this area.

For this reason, the more academic (but interdisciplinary) “spaces” for exchange described in section 3 are complemented with more transdisciplinary spaces for learning and experimentation that merge research and practice. Collaborative research provides support in answering practical and activist questions (e.g. through science shops) or addresses broader societal issues in collaboration with practitioners, for example through action research or transdisciplinary research approaches. Such experimental spaces (e.g. Fablabs, Hackerspaces, Ecovillages, Urban Living Labs) often operate with principles that are diametrically opposed to the dominant ways of thinking in academia, media and education: learning from failure, mutual learning, and improvisation are preferred to short-term success, individualism, superficial solutions, and excessive planning.⁹ Hence they have the potential to challenge dominant institutions and modes of thinking well beyond their particular projects and fields (TRANSIT, 2017, p. 11). Apart from getting involved in these spaces, social innovation research has the task to develop, systematise and reflect knowledge about the methodologies, tools and formats, and also the unintended consequences and pitfalls of collaboration, transdisciplinarity and openness.

On the one hand such collaborations are open-ended and need to embrace uncertainty and change in order to be effective, which may entail the challenging of incumbent institutions, power relations and dominant modes of thinking. On the other, social innovation needs to cultivate its institutional, political and public legitimacy (Westley et al., 2014). SI research takes both these roles. In particular, social innovators, policymakers and potential investors expect it to deliver methods of assessing and increasing social impact, figuring out “what works” and gathering this knowledge into an “evidence ecosystem” to guide activities, direct capital, human resources and political and public attention. However, this is not a simple exercise: the 2010 BEPA report already highlighted the challenges of demonstrating quantified impacts in this field (Bureau of European Policy Advisers, 2010). Indicators need to be developed to indicate impacts on complex social problems and for now, there is little ex-post impact evaluation (Domanski & Kaletka, 2017), p.79). This limits possibilities, as the timelines of projects tend to be considerably shorter than the time horizons of (sustainable) social change. For this reason, many impact indicators refer to outputs or outcomes of projects and initiatives, and there is

⁹ Of course, these learning modes have not only been invented under the heading of social innovation. Educational reforms, social movements, critical and emancipatory pedagogy approaches, and pragmatist philosophy apparently need to continuously be reinvented to address the societal challenges of the respective epoch. More recently, there are the agoras as these spaces of interaction are referred to by Mode-2-Science scholars (Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001) expressing the underlying democratising aspiration. Similarly, action research scholars Greenwood and Levin (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) refer to arenas for dialogue. In research on sustainability transitions, they are transition arenas – protected spaces allowing for experimentation with radically different ideas, practices and roles (Loorbach, 2010).



some confusion between output and outcomes (Domanski & Kaletka, 2018a; Millard, Holtgrewe, & Hochgerner, 2017). Hence SI research needs to make advances in navigating usability and adequacy to complex challenges, the needs of context-sensitivity and co-creation of impact assessments and the desire for comparability of "good practices".

All of this requires more accessible and permeable structures of European research programmes to include social innovation practitioners, projects and networks and the newer, more innovative research institutions. SI research does not just require mainstreaming as a trans-discipline but as the collaborative effort that we are describing. Indeed, the numerous think tanks and other third sector institutions in social innovation that combine SI research with practice or intermediary functions, regularly bridge research, practice and policy already, and the SIC project documents ample examples and instruments for doing so. However, these pioneering research institutes typically have fewer resources than universities and as such have much in common with small social innovators. Both, to mobilise and upscale their potential, require rendering European programmes accessible to smaller and newer organisations as many social innovations are small-scale (Howaldt, Schröder, Kaletka, Rehfeld, & Terstriep, 2016). Since bridging research, practice and policy requires skills in all these areas, it both enhances and requires more permeable roles and careers between research, practice and policy. These are already found in the careers of SI researchers becoming innovators, networkers and intermediaries or moving to third-sector research, and vice versa. However, even and especially in individualised European societies, such careers need institutional support and credentials.

The short term (2019-2020)

The overall objective for the short-term bridging of social innovation research, practice and policy is to sustain and continue current activities, bring them into the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework and ensure the best possible use and exploitation of current research results by a wide range of users that are on the way to becoming co-creators.

In the short term, SI research will retain and extend contacts among academics, practitioners, communities, policymakers, and in particular the public sector and get the knowledge gathered in the current series of projects to the respective target groups. Increasingly, this will not just address individual SI initiatives but also the ecosystem of intermediaries, for example those created by projects like BENISI and SIE (Domanski & Kaletka, 2017, 2018b).

This entails getting the SIC successor platforms and repositories running and also monitoring their use by the wider community. If necessary, formats and outreach activities will be adapted and invitations extended beyond "preaching to the converted". The "hot topic workshop" formats conducted in the SIC project and bringing together researchers from varied backgrounds may be continued and extended further. In addition to gathering and describing cases and other data on social innovation, SI researchers will do well to find or create publication outlets for reflection on participatory and co-creative



methodologies. They have developed ample methodological knowledge of formats, processes and experimentation setups to support and explore social innovation simultaneously, but this could be disseminated and exploited on a more academic level.

This also applies to the methodologies of assessing and increasing societal impact. In the short term, the experience of the current series of projects (also those in non-H2020 programmes such as EaSI, ESF, ERDF and Erasmus+) should be gathered and rendered accessible to actual and potential users of impact assessment – which may require some management of the expectations of funders and policymakers. The community is already making efforts to connect the impact of social innovations with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), connecting to discussions “Beyond Growth” etc. (Brandsen et al., 2016).

Lobbying and providing input to the EU’s upcoming research programmes will not be restricted to SI research. The research community is in close collaboration with the SIC’s successor “SI Policy Interest Group” and will provide input into ways of rendering programmes more accessible to collaborative and practical SI initiatives in different stages of their respective lifecycles.

Creating more permeable careers between research and SI practice will need initial steps of retaining and recognizing the cross-domain formats of publications, learning and dissemination that aim to be accessible and handy for practitioners. Such writing and presenting, including social media, is a skill set that will likely gain in importance and should be recognized in academic credit and taught. In many research contexts this is the domain of the younger cohorts of “digital natives” and self-selected social media specialists – hence there may be space for some reverse mentoring and coaching to both junior and senior colleagues.

The mid-term (2019 -2025)

The mid-term overall objectives are about further outreach and deepening and integrating of research-practice-policy networks and communities. In particular, local and trans-local levels will need to be more connected, new actors and intermediaries included, and the necessary skills and competences recognised.

In the mid-term, the social innovation research & practice community will reach out further to neighbouring communities including “unusual suspects”. This term is affectionately used for actors who are grappling with or investigating socially innovative activities in their respective fields without relating to the concept or the community. Trade unions are an example, and many community-led energy and sustainability projects also fall into this category. Without assuming that social innovation is a silver bullet, there may be a role for social innovation research to energise and support these fields (Kaletka & Domanski, 2017, p. 157).



Other actors and fields of interest are: The arts with their various approaches to empowerment are somewhat underrepresented although their multi-sensory, creative approaches provide valuable and challenging contributions. Business, technology and non-profit innovation communities and intermediaries including finance and consulting are developing an increasing interest, first in social entrepreneurship but recently in social innovation as well. On the other side of the spectrum, "prefigurative social movements" (Avelino, Rach, & Wittmayer, 2018; Monticelli, 2018) that explore social alternatives in working, farming, money etc. are likely collaborators. SI research will also discover further common interests with neighbouring scientific-practice communities such as action research, citizen science or Living Labs.

In all these directions, SI research will connect the local and the trans-local dimension of social innovation - and explore these connections horizontally and vertically, contributing to merging bottom-up and top-down agendas of social innovation. With its process perspective, it will also be in a good position to bridge the different fields of scientific, practical and political expertise. Again, orientation towards societal challenges and missions will increasingly provide a focus.

Doing this, SI research will necessarily demonstrate the value of its contributions to practice and policy and extend the possibilities and methodologies for experimentation. Notably, experimentation has two meanings: the creative, open-ended and even playful mode of action, and the controlled, scientific mode. It will also extend the reach of trans-local collaboration and establish a wider range of exchange and two-way street learning. In this process, research will develop a range of more accessible and flexible formats, providing direct support, advice and consulting "services" to a range of social innovators and stakeholders. "Science shops" are an example. Clearly, this is already the current practice of the more application-oriented and nimble research actors in the field.

With regard to impact assessment and the "evidence ecosystem" (Social Innovation Community, 2018) the SI research community will refine indicators and evidence bases for measuring social progress. It will also explore the tensions of contextual and "good practice" approaches further and integrate methodologies of "data and stories" that assess various dimensions of impact within and between varied contexts and scales (Holtgrewe & Schwarz-Wölzl, 2016).

Bringing the research and political question of power relations in social innovation (see section 3) to the transdisciplinary spaces and research contexts, it will develop participatory heuristics and methods that address power and empowerment in social innovation in ways that increase practitioners' and stakeholders capabilities of navigating and limiting power asymmetries.

As social innovation approaches and actors are more widely and deeply embedded in European research and policy programmes, the SI research community and the SI community at large will further diffuse SI knowledge and approaches across European, national and regional programmes and policy



fields, linking top-down and bottom-up approaches, and including local needs and challenges in both policy and research.

With regard to SI roles and careers, a next step could be not just to recognise outputs and contributions of applied and practice-related SI research but the range of practical, volunteering, or transitional experiences in SI-related fields in academic credit. This should not just concern students but all levels (students to academics) and could be integrated into wider self-assessment of universities and research bodies with regard to societal impact - while avoiding the pitfalls of conventional research assessments. The research community will eventually take stock of skills and competences required and gained in social innovation and explore and assess the variety of routes to gaining these skills, being aware of both formalised and experience-based knowledge and learning. Funds should be made available for mutual “secondments” of academics and practitioners in the different fields of social innovation, and such learning experience no longer be focused on “young researchers” as careers and lifecourses are diversifying.

Finally, in the wider, networked, and cross-domain ecosystem of practice-infused SI research, the social innovation skills and learning modules could be “mainstreamed” and integrated into various kinds of innovation-related training and education, not necessarily on the academic level.

The long term (2019-2030)

In the long term, the overall objective of SI research is likely to be a wider diffusion or indeed, “mainstreaming” of SI practices, processes and modes of thinking that increases the capabilities of societies at large to take their own development into their hands, address their challenges, disentangle “wicked problems” and invigorate social progress.

Spaces of increasingly transformative SI research on all scales will aim to attract new expertise (e.g. finance, engineering) into social innovation fields and social innovation experts will be able to transfer their experience to technological, business and service innovation. The learning and experimentation practices of transformative spaces will be transferred into other learning environments. As a result, participatory, social-innovation informed and socially aware processes and methodologies will be integrated into a wide range of policy fields and levels.

The “evidence ecosystem” and knowledge base on social innovations' potentials and prerequisites to effectively achieve favourable changes will be well established and capable to feed into political debate and reflection. This will include varied kinds of expertise, from research to practice and from the general to the strongly contextualised. On the level of European research and policies, ongoing, participatory knowledge loops are being established that feed knowledge on SI needs and requirements into further rounds of programme design and negotiation.



Looking at social innovation (research) roles, on the one hand, both the professionalisation and embedding of social innovation skills in research and practice will have created a generation of well-rounded post-professionals (for lack of a better term) with experience in the varied aspects, stages and functions of SI. On the other hand, the wide diffusion of SI processes and practices will be on its way to create a lifelong learning system for social innovation that offers learning, validation and reflection spaces for all kinds of people on all kinds of levels: professionals, activists, citizens and end-users, workers, volunteers and amateurs in social innovation.

5. CONCLUSION: SOCIALLY INNOVATING SOCIAL INNOVATION RESEARCH

In sum, professionalisation of SI research and its openness to SI practice and policy are intertwined. Indeed, the bridging of research, practice and policy is at the core of SI research and paradoxically, is its very profession. Hence, the SI research community sees its future as a part of a broader social innovation ecosystem, which builds upon the principles of inclusiveness, integration, co-creation and collaboration. It is a network of places for experimentation and mutual learning, which takes place at different geographical levels and connects them. Cities and regions are considered as especially favourable environments for this mode of learning and acting (Domanski & Kaletka, 2018a), but the public sector on all levels will play a central part (Wittmayer & Rach, 2018).

Still, SI research does not aim to dissolve into practice. As research, it brings its own contributions to meeting societal challenges and bringing about social progress. It observes and reflects that practice. It gathers and analyses data, assessing and demonstrating impact. It connects social innovation with the understanding of social change, institutions and organisations, action and structure, and the cognitive and cultural frames around it. Doing this, it also tests and challenges these theories. The positions to which these functions of research are attached may well become more fluid and distributed, as practitioners, researchers and stakeholders mingle. Some conventions of academic life may be challenged in the process.

Indeed, social innovation and transformative research and the experimental spaces that they create are becoming points of possible convergence for the various practice- and change oriented research traditions of transdisciplinary research that have been feeding into it: participatory action research, social-movement-oriented approaches such as feminist and post-colonial research as well as research into organisational reform and change, to name just a few. It appears almost inevitable that they bring about social innovations in research, that is, new or alternative ways of doing, organising, framing and knowing research (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2018). The overall long-term aim can be outlined as the creation of a positive loop of change in which alternative, empowering ways of thinking about and addressing societal problems, challenges or opportunities for progress reach out more widely and move into the mainstream. Yet they keep challenging themselves by paying attention to unintended consequences and persistent as well as emerging blind spots.



Clearly, this vision is an optimistic one. Commitment by SI researchers and practitioners to “their” field has been shown to be alive and growing. Commitment by institutional and political environments in Europe has seen some successes, and SI research is playing a strong part in advocacy as well (Moulaert et al., 2017; SI-DRIVE, 2017; Social Innovation Community, 2018; TRANSIT, 2017). Still, the general political and institutional support system remains somewhat fragmented. Under the current European and global turbulences collective actors on all policy levels may be reluctant to make real and symbolic investments towards generous collaboration, open-minded experimentation, and real democratisation. Yet, social innovation and social innovation research is there to help – and the risks of societies and policies locking themselves into business as usual may be even higher.



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