



# SOCIAL INNOVATION

JAN VRANKEN

Universiteit Antwerpen





# What is social innovation?

## Three types of definitions

- systematic
  - works towards systemic social change and 'social' is defined very broadly
- pragmatic
  - the social entrepreneur as an innovator, going beyond traditional boundaries of the public, private, and non-profit
- managerial
  - a hybrid of the previous two definitions



# Approaches

- *social demand* approach
  - social innovations are innovations that respond to social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society.
- *societal challenge* approach
  - social innovations are innovations that respond to those societal challenges in which the boundary between social and economic blurs, and are directed towards society as a whole.
- *systemic* (not: systematic) *changes* approach
  - social innovations are innovations that contribute to the reform of society in the direction of a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are both sources and outcomes of well-being.
-



# Three dimensions

Three dimensions that should not be confused:

- that of the actor (social entrepreneurship),
- that of the criterion (or reference framework - the creation of added social value)
- and that of selected domain



Social organizations (DIM 1)	III: access of people in poverty or other forms of social exclusion (DIM 3)			
	Education	Health	Income and expenditure	City
Public administrator	Added social value (DIM 2)	Added social value	Added social value	Added social value
General practitioner	Added social value	Added social value	Added social value	
Employer				
Labour union leader				
Director cultural centre/ artist				



# Questions

- Social innovation should **not just be about 'newness'**, but must address real social challenges.
- **Processes** of innovation versus **products** of innovation. (four dimensions!)
- The role of **actors**: entrepreneurship is not necessarily innovative but it can foster innovation, if it is true to its origins – and social entrepreneurship perhaps is closest to this original ideal (Schumpeter)
- The central role of **governance**. Although social innovation may take place within government, within the for-profit sector, within the nonprofit sector (civil society, the third sector), **social innovation implies cross-cutting** the traditional borders and thus the networks linking different sectors (from temporary partnerships to governance regimes) and different disciplines (sociology, economics, organization studies, political science, social geography, history → which types of platforms are needed to facilitate such cross-sector collaborative social innovation?



## Elements to discuss

- Social innovation combines an **instrumental** and **expressive** dimension
- Acquiring and developing **a collective capacity to act and speak**, to voice local needs and to address and act on processes of social exclusion.
- If social innovation is used as a strategy to **replace well-working welfare provisions** (and public services in general) with a collection of loose 'bottom-up' initiatives, it is an excuse for 'going back to the future'.



## Elements to discuss

- **Innovative types of organisations** that are accessible physically, financially, socially, and culturally and are not stigmatising their users.
- **The economic crisis is destroying the future of many people.** Given that poverty during childhood has a very great impact on conditions in later life, an economic crisis is a cause for concern. Inequality, poverty, and exclusion are rooted in prolonged exposure to risk situations – especially during early life-course - and these tend to aggravate during a time of economic crisis.



- Another challenge lies in the hypothesised **collapse of traditional forms of solidarity** and of routines that used to function as mediators between the general value patterns and everyday life and, moreover, fulfilled an important function of social control.
- It is the weakening or even **disappearance of these “spontaneous” routines and reciprocities** that are at the origin of a number of “top-down” initiatives to strengthen or to complement them. It seems as if the ‘natural’ and rather hidden solidarity mechanisms resulting from far-going differentiation in the labour process do no longer suffice to hold society together.



- The social acceptance and use of new technologies
- Energy poverty
- Language & culture