

CREATING SPACES FOR INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Social Innovations within Education and Lifelong Learning are still under value, their potential has to be unlocked!

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The transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and constant technological and societal change is challenging Education and Lifelong Learning (E&LLL), demanding more and more short-termed and new structural answers. Beneath different approaches to modernise and improve E&LLL, Social Innovation is becoming prominent in policy, scientific and public debates globally.

INCREASING IMPORTANCE AND UNDEVELOPED POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The policy field of Education and Lifelong Learning is characterised by different national education systems, differing sometimes across the regions of a country and divided into separated regional or area related responsibilities. While the formal (primary, secondary and tertiary) education system mainly is centralised, Vocational Education and Training (VET), as well as Lifelong Learning

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(LLL) of adults, are mainly decentralized (local municipalities and/or industry sector related). Although there are a growing number of social innovation initiatives in Education and Lifelong Learning a lot of initiatives are not labeled as such. A comparison across global regions

demonstrates that policy visibility, awareness, recognition and acceptance of the Social Innovation concept still need to be fostered. This would lead to the need to unlock the quantitative (in terms of numbers of initiatives, diffusion and imitation) and qualitative (in terms of success and impact) potential of Social Innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning.

Yet, there is already a great variety of social innovations, mostly related to gaps and failures of the formal education system. The context of social innovations is characterised by the dominance of the (*formal*) education system, affecting tangential societal *function systems* (such as politics, law, and economy), different target groups and *subject areas* (disadvantaged groups, family, employment, rural areas, etc.) and substantive *concepts of reference* (e.g. self-actualisation, individual learner personality).

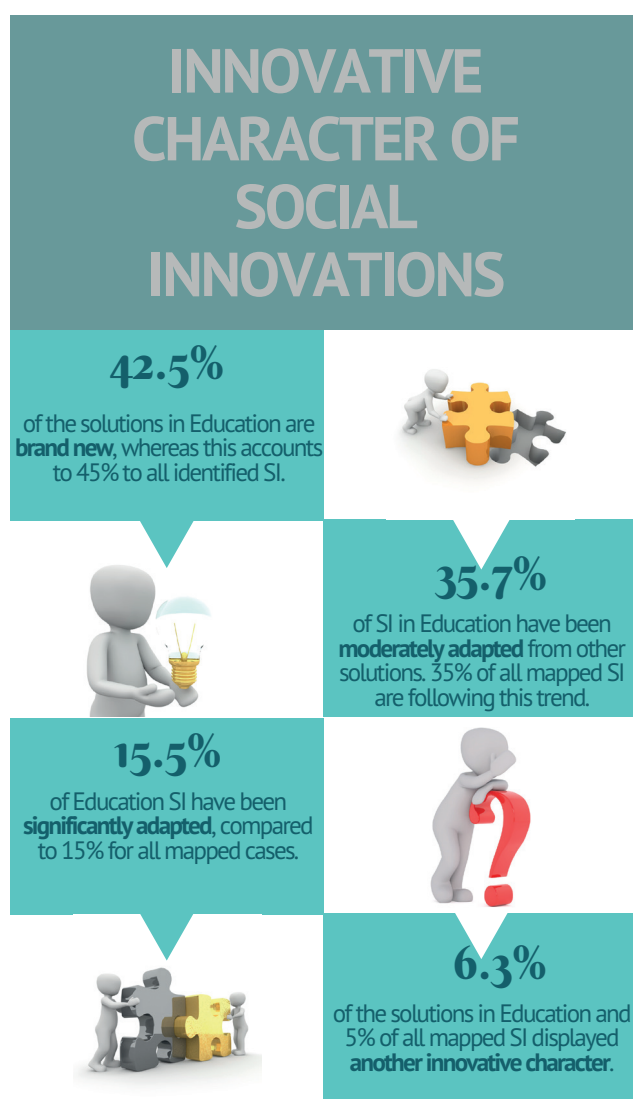
New social practices in Education and Lifelong Learning are developed in an incremental way, mostly in relation to the formal education systems, its structures, frameworks and policies – serving local demands and using leeway on the regional/local level. The main motivations, triggers and drivers mentioned in the global mapping of SI-DRIVE have been (local) social demands and (general) societal challenges, individuals/groups/networks and, not to forget, charismatic leadership. About half of the initiatives are intending a systemic change. Brand new practices appear as well as the copying of new solutions with modifications.

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS ARE DRIVEN BY DEFICITS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Social innovations are often identifying and solving the deficits and limitations of the education system. A lack of official solutions or programmes for the problem at hand

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is the main starting point. While knowledge about the impacts and recommended routes of reform (from, for example, the PISA and PIAAC studies, labour economics and also education sciences with an increasingly comparative focus) is widely spread, the institutionally dense education systems with their often interlocked regional, national and federal state-level responsibilities have strong path dependencies and vested interests that encourage the development of *rather compensatory than transformative* social innovations.



Innovative character of solutions in Education and Lifelong Learning compared to all mapped social innovations

PARADIGM SHIFT TO A HOLISTIC APPROACH OF LIFELONG LEARNING

All in all, social innovations in Education and Lifelong Learning reveal an ongoing paradigm shift from an institutional to a learners' perspective, leading to a holistic approach: from top-down to bottom-up as well as from teacher to learner-centred approaches, based on a comprehensive understanding of learning and a need to offering milieu specific solutions. In fact, the holistic approach adopted by social innovators can be considered the legitimation for social innovators as they work distinct from the formal system.

Combining Social Innovation with the Lifelong Learning strategy, the individual personality of learners and the learning process (not just learning phases or punctual activities) have to be the starting and reference point for every learning environment. On the one hand this leads to the already described holistic approach of social innovations with a comprehensive understanding of learning (taking into account all areas and forms of learning and competences) and the learners personality, environment (e.g. family learning history) and biographical (learning) history. On the other hand this comprises a *paradigm shift from an institutional perspective to a strict learner's and learning process perspective*, enforcing new overall and comprehensive structural principles within the education system and beyond. The reconstruction and partly new construction of traditional structures of education are necessary, building up a Lifelong Learning system instead of innovating only within the borders of (formal and separated) educational institutions and areas, arranging Lifelong Learning possibilities in a more flexible way, especially at the local level.

NEW GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES NEEDED: ECOSYSTEM OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

Individual engagement, charismatic leadership and communities of practice as drivers of Social Innovation have to be embedded in collaborative governance structure to deal with the multifaceted problems and solutions in a holistic way. Aiming at enriching the top-down governance with a bottom-up perspective social innovations need a development of given structures *from fragmentation* (with separate rationalities and target-orientations, different public responsibilities) *to overarching and connected governance structures*. New governance structures should improve collaboration beyond, across and within the silos and focus on the learners' demands instead of an institutional perspective.

However, an *innovation friendly environment* is important, fostering collaboration between different sectors (e.g. through the implementation of networks as platforms to

learn, exchange knowledge and expand the solution), between research and practice, and guaranteeing the availability of seed funds specialised to support practical experimentation and new forms of learning. This also includes an extended role of universities: knowledge provision and exchange, evaluation, new ideas, process moderation, advocacy for Social Innovation, technological development to support learning possibilities and access, and others.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the empirical results of SI-DRIVE, the concept and implementation of Social Innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning should be fostered intensively. To conclude, policy has to:

- Unfold the potential of Social Innovation by improving acceptance, understanding and visibility of the concept of Social Innovation
- Set-up new governance structures and promoting an education social innovation ecosystem
- Provide more flexibility, leeway for (bottom-up) innovation, for new forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning, compatibility of social innovations with the education system
- Take over a new role, fostering Social Innovation and its impact, not only by funding, stimulating and unlocking Social Innovation but also by coordinating and integrating them in the existing system, giving leeway or changing the education and lifelong learning system if necessary
- Take into account variety and regional, local differences
- Focus on the holistic and cross-sectoral approach, taking the Lifelong Learning strategy and concept serious, focusing on the learner's perspective: "Solutions for the learners and with the learners".

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