

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA BOARD

ERAB views on Social Innovation

1. Times are changing

The world of S&T and Innovation is witnessing a range of changes related to social innovations. Open innovation brought more diverse, distributed and cumulative innovation patterns. The principle of open access to publications, in an increasingly multi-polar world environment, generates new possibilities for research to feed innovation. More in general the label 2.0, usually associated with web applications that favour social interactivity and user-centred or driven design, could be grafted into a Research-Science 2.0.

Recent European reports recognise the contribution of social innovation to the overall economy and define it as innovation which is social "both in its ends and its means". Therefore, social innovation is not only responding to social needs and addressing societal challenges but also improving the capacity of society to act and innovate¹. It hints at end-user driven, bottom up, cross-cutting collaborations and in doing so increases the social capital and strengthens the resilience of society.

The Innovation Union flagship relates the dynamics of Social Innovation to an observed need to "rethink" R&I away from the "business as usual"². This echoes the first ERAB report "Preparing Europe for a new Renaissance" (2009) which also advocated for a new way of doing research, but also for a revolution in science and new types of relationships between human beings, between human beings and knowledge and technology, and between human beings and culture.

Recent developments in academia, the labs and industry, indicate an inexorable progress towards more open, dynamic, shared, distributed and networked systems and processes. Closed circuits and pyramidal relationships seem features of the past. In particular:

- Innovation is increasingly delivered as a collaborative process accumulating capabilities, embracing all domains and involving many more elements beyond technological change;
- Open source and wide cooperation and coalitions become common practice for innovation;
- The whole planet (and increasingly the emerging countries) becomes a research and innovation laboratory;
- Policy makers have to face new challenges and limited resources could become a compelling driver for innovation and change.

But Social Innovation is also needed in the sphere of governance: governance of science, governance of society, governance of institutions, governance of partnerships and networks. Distribution of research funds, private investments should be approached from a social

¹ Including the recent Commission reports "Empowering people, driving change: Social innovation in the European Union" (BEPA, 2010) and "This is Social Innovation in Europe" (DG Industry & Enterprise 2010)

² Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union (adopted by the EC on 6.10.2010)

innovation perspective. Classical in-put/out-put formula does not work anymore. Financial crisis and reduction of research spending will trigger thinking in the direction of do more with less. Thus, Social Innovation should help creating new approaches and policies in order to deliver efficient science financing mechanisms.

Finally, Social Sciences and Humanities have to play a leading role in Social Innovation because they have accumulated the best knowledge on societal needs and interests, social behaviour, as well as institutions and organisations. They can play much more active role in adopting the earlier suggested multidisciplinary approach and in setting agenda for science and defining research priorities across the whole spectrum of sciences, as well as serve as driving force behind Social Innovation.

2. The challenge

ERAB sees the contribution of Social Innovation dynamics as vital for enhancing collective R&I intelligence (e.g via crowd sourcing) and knowledge harvesting which are urgently needed to maximise and spark Europe's research and innovation thinking and processes. The power of networks and bottom up approaches could bring important added-value to the research and innovation systems, especially in addressing grand challenges. But, it also means a challenge for our innovation systems as they have institutionally to adapt to the changes associated with Social Innovation.

Therefore European Union decision makers are encouraged to reflect on the following questions:

- How to ensure quality and promote excellence in this evolving context of R&I? (Who will be the new 'gate keepers'?) What are the new filters and standards?
- How the above developments impact on priority setting, evaluation, financing, regulation and governance?
- What would be the conditions for the R&I systems of the future to be more adapted to the needs and wishes of researchers and innovators?
- How the present EU R&I ecosystem can overcome inertia and be best opened up through social innovation?
- What would be the impact of open and distributed R&I processes in disseminating a risk culture and what the role of IPR?
- What could be the role of Social Innovation in reforming/opening/innovating the next R&I Framework of the European Union?

RECOMMENDATIONS

To answer these ERAB recommends:

1.) **Wake up, now!** Establish a "think tank" with young excellent researchers and research policy makers, members from the publishing world, IPR-world etc. to inform "established policy makers" on the changing environment for Research and Innovation. These changing frame conditions will be most relevant and useful for the design of the "Future Framework Programme for Research and Development";

- 2.) **Stimulate Research into Social Innovation:** As part of the CSF we suggest a topic "Research into Social Innovation";
- 3.) **Create a clearing house for Social innovation:** The EU could create a data base of Social Innovation that could serve as a tool for the implementation of Innovation Union accessible to interested partners.