

SOCIAL INNOVATION WITH ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

In the future, social innovation in Environment is seen to have an even stronger role in enabling positive changes in behavior and often they have an explicitly local role. However, it is also the ambition of many social innovation initiatives in Environment to bring new solutions to environmental problems in providing a local context to often global environmental problems.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Detrimental environmental impact can take a multitude of forms, many of these, like the deterioration of oceans and marine habitats, the stratosphere or rainforests, cannot be felt everyday by individuals on a local level. However, these areas of the environment are influenced by the everyday behavior of individuals on a local level which is often motivated by short-term profit thinking and an emphasis on individual over social benefits (tragedy of the commons).

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problems. SI in the area of Environment combines at least social and environmental goals. However, it seems a particularity of the area that many SIs add economic goals as well (see figure on the goals of SI in environment and below).

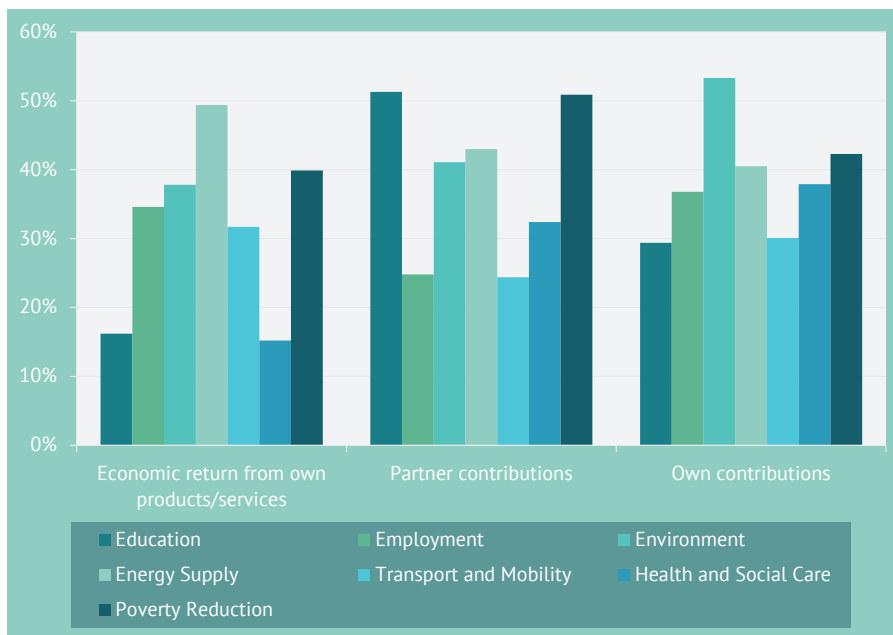
A more sustainable economy is a major issue in SI in the area of Environment. This is hinged to more sustainable production chains, to all aspects of the circular economy (i.e. long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling) and to consumer patterns and consumer choice. The strong dependence on consumer choice entails increased awareness of (un)sustainable behavior and puts emphasis on citizens' engagement and inclusion more generally. Manifold challenges in the areas of environmental and climate policy are currently addressed at different levels – national, EU and global; and focus on e.g. climate change, air pollution, energy efficiency, resource efficiency and sustainable consumption & production, biodiversity, or water management and water pollution [1].

Environmental goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reduce waste ❖ Repair items ❖ Spare food
Social goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Integrate homeless ❖ Engage rural populations ❖ Employ jobless
Economic goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Start a business ❖ Survive on the market ❖ Grow in size

FUNDING CHALLENGES

In Environment, many initiatives rely on private companies. This seems a “special feature” of all three sustainability related areas, i.e. Environment, Energy Supply and Transport and Mobility. The strong involvement of private companies as actors in the SI initiatives in Environment also explains the prominent role of economic returns from own products and services in the funding of these SI initiatives. In general, internal funding through own contributions are most relevant for environmental initiatives (53%), followed by partner contributions (see figure on the main sources of funding).

As many SI initiatives actually add a third set of goals – economic goals – to their predefined social and environmental goals, latent demand becomes a critical factor. The supply of environmentally motivated, innovative social services often starts without actual estimates of markets, customers, or demand. Initiators of the SI initiatives perceive a tension or societal challenge, often kickstarted by statistics or personal experiences, and they do not have in advance knowledge if their business ideas sell. Successful SIs are those where demand “pops up” as soon as service offerings take concrete form. Thus, SI initiatives have an important role as they provide real feasible alternatives to the existing ways of doing things. But they face additional challenges in coping with economic goals as well.



Main sources of funding of SIs in Environment

POLICY CHALLENGES

In the policy field of Environment, relations to policy are not one-directional [3].

On the one hand, there is impact from policy on SI. SI initiatives do receive active public support, be it in the form of financing through public programs or buy-ins through politicians. On the other hand, SI initiatives in Environment often develop because they want to have an impact on policy, or compensate for missing policy – social innovators want to influence policy. Here, policy change is in focus and policy is seen as the arena to achieve change. And a third connection to policy is that some social innovators desire explicit measures to support SI initiatives, e.g. more favorable fiscal and legal conditions for SIs to be implemented.

CONCLUSION – THE FUTURE ROLE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION IN ENVIRONMENT

The future of SI is very much seen as a bridge between society and government, where governments are in a (governance) crisis and prone to populism. They may provide feasible alternatives to incumbent practices in matching hidden supply and demand (e.g. repair, food waste). Thus, in the future SI is seen to have an even

stronger role in enabling positive changes in behavior and often they have an explicitly local role. However, there is also a fear expressed by many social innovators that the increase of SI is connected to a withdrawal of governments’ responsibilities (austerity policies).

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