

Project Full Title: Social Innovation by and for Citizens: Social Innovation Acceleration in Cities (SIAC)

Abstract

This proposal builds on an already existing and active network of social innovators in Europe: The **Social Innovation Acceleration in Cities Network (SIAC)**. The aim is to **connect co-creational practices** of network partners **to research** focusing at the development of a transdisciplinary and transnational understanding of social innovation in urban neighbourhoods. This project will implement and strengthen existing **locally contextualized Citizen Living Labs (CLLs)** in eight European cities which will be the platform for **People-Public-Private-Research-Partnerships (PPPRPs)** and comparative analysis. Following an **explorative research approach** that is embedded in society and societal framework conditions, the CLLs will provide **space for learning, experimentation, failure and co-creation of decision-making processes** on divergent pathways to create an innovative SI-friendly ecosystem. Within the CLLs, innovators get access to a local network, knowledge and/on funding structures. SIAC's methodology is built around the development of an **open access participatory online-network** tool that connects and supports social innovators across Europe and provides a valuable data source to measure social innovation at the local city level and (trans)national level. The network tool in combination with the **peer-to-peer networks** will become **self-enabling over time** enhancing innovative projects which will be analysed with regard to their impact, scalability and transferability.

Objectives and Targets

Two Dutch professionals provided voluntary support to **social innovators being challenged in their daily practice**. By doing so they understood that there was a need for a more structural form of support and also for knowledge exchange. In June 2015, they managed to establish a transnational network of social innovators and entrepreneurs, researchers and policy makers who all have extensive experience in social innovation and living labs (see Annex): The **Social Innovation Acceleration in Cities: Social Innovation Acceleration in Cities Network (SIAC)**¹.

Initial Situation: Both social innovation (see Avelino and Wittmayer 2014, Avelino et al. 2016, Cajaiba-Santana 2014, Haxeltine et al. 2015, Urbact 2015) and living labs (see Franz 2015, Schuurman 2015) have received much attention in research, policy and public discourse in Europe during the last years. They also have been important in addressing the societal challenges that we are facing ranging from (youth) unemployment, demographic changes and migration, health issues (see Rabiee 2016) energy challenges and climate change among others (for a full overview of challenges see the Europe 2020 agenda). But despite their potential, social innovation living labs are not a panacea and many social innovators and entrepreneurs, researchers and policy makers face considerable challenges in their daily practice. The challenges have different levels, but are all connected:

- There is an increased quantity of knowledge, but there remains to be a **limited knowledge on how social innovation emerges** and what **conditions** and **variables** are critical² in this process. Social innovation is also not always a key to success and it is critical to understand when social innovation leads to empowerment.
- **Social innovators** and entrepreneurs are **challenged in their daily practice**. They experience a tension: there is a strong need for them to be successful and to find solutions. However, as they work in an innovative and experimental manner they cannot always be successful and there needs to be room for failure.
- **Policymakers** are confronted with the **knowledge gap and with the practical challenges** (see Kazepov 2009, Oosterlynck et al. 2013). They formulate policy that guides public spending and ideally they fund reliable projects that can go scale, which are based on well-known 'conditions for success'. In reality, those conditions are not known and even more, only focusing on success will not create a breeding ground for experimentation and innovation.
- Despite the increased focus on co-creation, inter- and transdisciplinary research³ (see Bruzzese and Pacci n.d.), and various forms of partnerships it remains **challenging to bridge the different worlds** in which researchers, policy makers, social entrepreneurs and researchers are operating and the inclusion of citizens is usually very difficult.
- The **increased quantity of knowledge and data that becomes** available paves a way for working in a **smart manner**, but in reality it is not always easy to find, collect, digest and use it. Besides,

¹ The SIAC network aims to develop and disseminate knowledge and looks for various ways to do so, it is an important driver behind this application. This JPI Urban Europe research project is an opportunity to build on the knowledge that is existing within the network and beyond. The SIAC network gives the JPI project the opportunity that the outcomes of this project will be sustained even after the duration of the project.

² see <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/blog/>

³ Interdisciplinary research is research bridging different disciplines with research, trans-disciplinary research goes a step further by also engaging 'practitioners' or 'non-academics' in research and reflecting on methodological development.

potential users often find it hard to judge the quality of the knowledge and data. Additionally, much of the knowledge about social innovation and living labs is very **context-specific and it is not easy to transfer lessons** from one context to another.

Objectives: In this project we aim to address the above identified challenges and we intend to achieve the following:

- **Citizen Living Labs (CLLs):** Give room for real-life experimentation, in a safe environment that is systematically observed and studied. Establish various platforms where co-creation and inter- and transdisciplinary research can take place, the platforms should follow from urgent challenges that are identified in cities and should explicitly engage citizens.
- **People-Public-Private-Research-Partnerships:** Stimulate smart ways of working by facilitating knowledge sharing and the use of data for, with strong quality control between the various platforms and actors.
- **Transferability and Scalability:** Increase our understanding of the emergence of social innovation, focusing on the critical conditions and variables in this process. Increase our understanding of the tension between the need for success and the importance of room for failure (as a key characteristic of experimentation).
- Self-sustaining **peer-to-peer network** and **open access participatory online-network** tool: Connect and support social innovators across Europe and create a valuable data source to measure social innovation at the local and city level.

Conceptual Approach: The approach for doing so is further elaborated in the next section, but it consists of establishing (or building on existing) platforms for the development of social innovation: **Citizen Living Labs (CLLs)**. Those labs are the place where experimentation takes place (aiming to develop ‘social innovations’) and in order to grasp the complexity of this process, this process is observed, documented and studied. The actors that are engaged in this process come from various backgrounds and sectors and are united in a **People-Public-Private-Research-Partnership (PPPRPs)**. The findings are then shared in a digital network-platform that connects all the CLLs: the **open access participatory online-network** tool. This tool builds on existing data-systems that were developed by SIAC partners: the Social Innovation Factory in Flanders and the data repository that is developed for the TRANSIT project⁴.

The SIAC research project predominately includes ‘**applied research**’ and having a strong linkage to relational approaches and action research (see Jessop 2005, Reason 1998). The applied research focus is the systematic analysis of the co-creation process that takes place within the Citizen Living Labs (CLLs) between citizens, actors from the private and public sector, including politics and researchers for accelerating social innovation. It aims to understand the role of the context and it focuses on drawing context specific and generic lessons for the improvement of participatory decision-making processes. Additionally it facilitates the sharing of the findings by the establishment of a participatory network tool. By doing so it aims to find answers that are directly

⁴ One of the SIAC partners is part of the EU FP7 funded research project Transformation Social Innovation Theory (TRANSIT) in which a data repository on Critical Turning Points is developed. This repository also has a conceptual importance for since it is an example of a *process theory* approach as opposed to a variance approach (Haxeltine *et al.*, 2015).

relevant for a variety of users. The topic of **'innovation and implementation'** lies in the aim to improve the acceleration function of the CLLs by developing new knowledge and making this new and existing knowledge accessible in an open-data participatory tool for dynamic data collection on social innovation. The SIAC network has already been preparing a networking tool and system. In the course of this project, it will be developed into a customized network tool being complemented with mixed reality-digital tools that will be tested with regard to usability, user-friendliness and international market potential. Finally, the type of **'strategic research'** can be found in the goal to contribute to existing theoretical foundations underlying social innovation and livings labs research. This will be complemented with a strong empirical approach; quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from the network tool will be applied in order to ensure a more nuanced understanding of social innovation based on a multidisciplinary approach. Through international case study comparison, the SIAC research project will be able to identify the importance of context and of certain (process) conditions and variables in the trajectories of social innovation and their critical turning points (see Langley 1999, Haxeltine et al. 2015) .

Added value of European transnational co-operation

The added value of SIACs trans-national co-operation is the learning from international cases embedded into contextual framework conditions. This ensures the transferability of learnings into divergent urban regimes without falling into the “best practice” trap. SIAC argues that not only **scaling up of** social innovative solutions is not a linear process but **also transferability of innovative solutions is not a copy-paste situation**. By establishing structural PPPs in all our consortium countries, we will be able to identify similarities and differences, processes of convergence or divergence with respect to social innovation, and we will be able to test and experiment transnationally with these (im)material parameters in order to **define the necessary features for vivid long-lasting local partnerships**.

At European level, the SIAC project will provide a more differentiated and interdisciplinary understanding of Citizen Led Social Innovation. **At a National level**, the SIAC project will contextualize the social innovation potential by embedding processes of social innovation into national framework conditions, such as political regime, welfare state model, cultural and societal characteristics. **At a City level**, the SIAC project will gain knowledge for policymakers and social innovators by providing cross-city comparative research, learning and transferability, to enable the development of CLLs, social innovation policy and to strengthen planning, commissioning and design functions. **At a Neighbourhood Level**, the SIAC project will enable more systematic relationships between key agencies and citizens, to develop civil resilience and capacity by driving place based social innovation.

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