

Transformative
social innovation –
What have we
learned in
four years
of research?



1. Starting the TRANSIT research project

2 In 2013, the European Union invited the scientific community to more systematically study the role of social innovation in addressing societal challenges. This call was linked to an increasing interest in the ways that social innovation could contribute to solutions to many of the problems associated with government budget cuts, stagnating economies, high unemployment, and other pressing social needs and environmental concerns. Starting from a contention that 'business as usual' approaches were not enough, a group of researchers joined forces to better understand the relation between social innovation and transformative social change. Under the banner of the TRANSIT project, our aim was to develop a theory of *transformative social innovation*, based on learning from empirical cases.

We embarked on a journey of theorising transformative social innovation, informed by previous work in transition research, social psychology, political theory, institutional theory, and several other fields, and grounded in the data obtained from new empirical research on some 20 translocal social innovation networks and **100+** related social innovation initiatives; we studied for example the Global Ecovillage Network, as well as individual ecovillages in Germany, Portugal, Scotland and The Netherlands.



basic facts

Transformative Social Innovation Research Project

2014 - 2017



25+

Researchers



~5

million



4

years

3



Universität für Bodenkultur Wien
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empirical basis



Network to support social entrepreneurs



Discuss & promote basic income



Network of different types of credit cooperatives



Linking food to sustainable development



Research, development & innovation



Digital fabrication workshops open to local communities



Network of eco-villages and other intentional communities



International Network for sustainable energy NGOs



Design for social innovation and sustainability



Facilitating reciprocal service exchange



Participatory Budgeting Network of communities & municipalities reinventing how public money is spent and prioritized



User driven digital fabrication workshops



International Co-operative Alliance Cooperatives for sustainable inclusive housing



Sharing Cities: Connecting urban sharing initiatives



Defending seed freedom & biodiversity



Global Network of Local Hubs for Social Entrepreneurs



Network for the promotion of social solidarity economy



Living Knowledge The International Science Shop Network Network of science shops



Grassroot communities working on 'local resilience'



Family farming to promote social justice



This TRANSIT brief describes our main results – both in terms of scientific insights and in terms of the societal implications of the research. Scientifically, our research focused on addressing the following questions:

- How do we conceptualize and study transformative social innovation?
- How, to what extent and under which conditions does social innovation contribute to transformative change?
- How are people empowered (or disempowered) to contribute to such processes?

In keeping with an ambition that insights generated should be relevant to both practice and policy, we produced a series of ‘briefs’ and organised seminars and other forms of interaction with practitioners and policy makers.

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In this brief, we start by describing how the TRANSIT research was conducted (section 2). Next, we present some key theoretical insights about the relations between social innovation and transformative social change (section 3), followed by some key insights regarding the themes of governance, social learning, resourcing, monitoring and the changing societal context (section 4). The final section looks forward to the emergence of a transformative social innovation community (section 5).

2. Methodologically advancing the field of transformative social innovation

Social innovation practice is of great societal relevance and therefore deserves to be supported by insights, which are developed in a solid, systematic and reflexive way. TRANSIT has made a dedicated effort to increase the knowledge base regarding research processes, designs and methodologies for researching transformative social innovation. We have done so by reflecting on the specific methodological challenges encountered, and finding ways to address these challenges. We did so not in isolation but in collaboration with others. Our three main methodological advances covered: 1) stepwise ‘middle range’ theory-building, 2) reflection on the appropriate units of analysis, and 3) the construction of an online database on ‘critical turning points’ in transformative social innovation processes.

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Photo source: TRANSIT image bank

Methodological challenges in social innovation research

In February 2017, TRANSIT organized a workshop on ‘Methodological challenges in social innovation research’ inviting 23 researchers to share, discuss and reflect on different approaches for researching social innovation. Presentations included concrete research approaches such as design thinking, mapping, Delphi and participatory action research as well as more general reflections on long-term analysis, units of analysis, sampling and theory building. TRANSIT researchers have acted as guest editors for the European Public and Social Innovation Review to collect the insights from the workshop in an open access special issue.

Further reading: Wittmayer, J.M., Pel, B., Bauler, T. and F. Avelino (2017) *Methodological challenges for Social Innovation Research. European Public and Social Innovation Review* (2).1.

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Developing a ‘middle range’ theory of social innovation

Discussions in social innovation research frequently call for either more ‘solid’ theory on social innovation, or for theory that ‘empowers’ social innovation practice. TRANSIT sees the two as going hand in hand: any truly practical advice will have to account for the fact that transformative social innovation is a dynamic and complex phenomenon. From early on in the research, we sought to identify the ‘pitfalls’ involved in building theory on transformative social innovation. One is easily misled, for example, when taking a single case as a basis for talking about social innovation more generally. Or when reducing narratives about social innovation to the activities of certain innovation ‘heroes’. Or when naively assuming that the impact of social innovation is inherently desirable for all stakeholders, in all aspects and in all stages.

One important way of confronting these pitfalls is by opting for a ‘middle range’ theory approach. This is a way to strike a balance between abstract theorizing and in-depth observation of concrete empirical cases.

Crucially, it involves a constant interplay between abstract reasoning and conceptualization, and learning from (sets of) empirical cases. Important milestones in this iterative process were three ‘integration workshops’ at which we collectively confronted our theoretical understandings with insights on the large set of social innovation initiatives that we had studied. These iterations helped us to achieve an understanding of transformative social innovation that avoided potential pitfalls. The theory is informed by practices ranging from social enterprises to progressive governments. It acknowledges that transformative social innovation can originate in a community context, but also through businesses or government. It articulates some of the inherent ambiguities of social innovation, such as the fact that social innovation initiatives both transform society, and are themselves transformed by society, and that, rather than simply implementing a clear-cut set of solutions, transformative social innovation is a process to reflexively guide.

Further reading: *Haxeltine, A., Pel, B., Wittmayer, J.M., Dumitru, A., Kemp, R. and F. Avelino (2017) Building a middle-range theory of Transformative Social Innovation; theoretical pitfalls and methodological responses. European Public and Social Innovation Review (2).1.*

Photo credits: Xiang Hu



Reflection on appropriate units of analysis

Social innovation, like innovation more generally, is the result of the activities of many different individuals and organizations. Nowadays this is almost common sense: whilst passionate individuals come up with certain ideas, numerous ensuing activities, including marketing, certificating, testing, refining or lobbying are needed for these to gain prominence. Still, it remains a challenge to live up to this understanding of networked innovation in the empirical investigation of social innovation: Where to look? Which actors and activities to follow? How to handle the camera (the lens of inquiry) when there are several relevant scenes and actors entering the stage? Or in methodological terms: What are the relevant units of analysis? In our work, we focused on social innovation initiatives as focal protagonists and conceived of them as part of globally connected social innovation networks. We studied their socially innovative ideas, objects and activities as well as their interactions with dynamic contexts.

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Further reading: Pel, B., Dorland, J., Wittmayer, J.M. and M.S. Jørgensen (2017) Detecting Social Innovation agents. Methodological reflections on units of analysis in dispersed transformation processes. *European Public and Social Innovation Review* (2).1.

Critical Turning Points database and meta-analysis

A frequently lamented barrier for developing systematic insights about social innovation is the focus on single cases – adding up to a body of available evidence which is anecdotal and fragmented in nature. TRANSIT has seized the opportunity to move beyond that. Our open-access online database on Critical Turning Points (CTP) in Transformative Social Innovation provides qualitative accounts of **more than 450** ‘critical’ episodes in the evolution of **80+** social innovation initiatives in **25+** different countries. This database contains timelines, and accounts of phases and turning points as well as interactions between social innovation initiatives and various other actors. The focus on turning points helped us to appreciate the conflict between ‘transformative social innovation logics’ and other logics and internal conflicts concerning strategies, the use of money, and the positions of people within the network.

Such CTPs differ from initiative to initiative. For example, the Participatory Budgeting Amsterdam initiative considers the reorganisation of the municipality of Amsterdam as a CTP for their development as it resulted in a setback in their access to financial data from the municipality. For the Impact Hub King's Cross a change in ownership was considered a CTP as it opened up opportunities to improve its financial situation. For Ecovillage Bergen the discovery of an international ecovillage network and the existence of other ecovillages was a CTP as it encouraged the founder to continue with developing an ecovillage.

Forced co-production

After rejecting a first invitation to participate in the first iteration of budget monitoring the district municipality of Amsterdam East decided in 2012 to become involved. Their involvement is critical for budget monitoring to reach one of its main aims.

[Read more](#)

4 related events

Fall 2012

Letting go of human rights perspective

In 2015 the CBB let go of the human rights perspective. To the trainer this perspective was crucial for him to support budget monitoring and he also perceives this change of direction as a form of institutionalization where the tool loses its radical potential.

[Read more](#)

2 related events

2015

Launch of Neighborhood budget instrument

The neighbourhood budget instrument is an online web application allowing citizens of the city of Amsterdam to track the spending of public money in their neighbourhoods. It was developed in co-creation with the center of budget monitoring and citizen participation.

[Read more](#)

3 related events

18 september 2015

Re-organization municipality of Amsterdam

In march 2014 the district municipalities of Amsterdam were abandoned from the governance model of Amsterdam resulting in a centralized governance model. While aiming for an 'area focused' way of working, this implied also a large administrative reorganization.

[Read more](#)

5 related events

March 2014

The database provided us with the possibility to refine our ‘middle range’ theory propositions as part of our theory development. However, the usefulness of the database goes beyond that. The database will remain as an online resource after the formal end of the research project. Researchers can use the data for exploring and developing new insights on transformative social innovation. Entrepreneurs, activists and policymakers can gain insights into and learn from how (other) social innovation initiatives navigated CTPs in their development. The CTP accounts, are based on interviews with members of social innovation initiatives and are all structured along six basic topics. The database allows for targeted searches, with a set of key words that address the core themes in transformative social innovation theory. The CTP accounts, are based on interviews with members of social innovation initiatives and are all structured along six basic topics. The database allows for targeted searches, with a set of key words that address the core themes in transformative social innovation theory.

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Further reading: Pel, B., Bauler, T., Avelino, F., Backhaus, J., Ruijsink, S., Rach, S., Jørgensen, M. S., Kunze, I., Voss, G., Dumitru, A., Lema Blanco, I., Afonso, R., Cipolla, C., Longhurst, N., Dorland, J. Elle, M., Balázs, B., Horváth, J., Matolay, R., Wittmayer, J., Valderrama Pineda, A., Serpa, B., Rösing Agostini, M., Lajarthe, F., Garrido, S., Picabea, F., Moreira, J., Trentini, F., Bidinost, A., Weaver, P., Heimann, R., Skropke, C., Hoffmeister, K.L., Tawakol, D., Olivotto, V., Tsatsou, A., Zahed, Y., Moet, R., Zuijderwijk, L., Renema, J. and Kemp, R. (2017) *The Critical Turning Points database; concept, methodology and dataset of an international Transformative Social Innovation comparison*. TRANSIT Working Paper #10.

3. Theoretically advancing the field of (transformative) social innovation

TRANSIT focused on studying the link between social innovations and transformative change. We approached *social innovation* (SI) as a process of introducing new social relations, involving the spread of new knowledge and new practices (where the newness is a matter of degree and perspective). Examples are: the trading of services against hours through a TimeBank, the influencing of local government budgets through participatory budgeting, or the practice of social entrepreneurs sharing a physical space and working towards collective social goals through Impact Hubs. Social innovation can also be understood as a qualitative property of ideas, objects, activities, and different groupings of people. A *social innovation initiative* is a collective of *people* working on ideas, objects or activities that are socially innovative, and a *social innovation network* is a network of such initiatives.

Transformative social innovation is defined as a process of changing social relations, involving challenging, altering or replacing the dominant institutions in a specific context. Participatory Budgeting redefines the relations between citizens and local government by challenging who decides on the spending of public money – in cities such as Porto Alegre in Brazil it is not the local government but the citizens who are taking budget decisions.

Transformative social innovation exists in a reciprocal relationship with the transforming context; transformative social innovation individuals, initiatives and networks shape, and are also shaped by, changing social relations and the associated institutional dynamics. Throughout the more than 25 years that participatory budgeting is practiced in Porto Alegre, it has been undergoing changes, which can be closely related to the ruling party's political orientation.

To develop a theory of transformative social innovation we studied a broad range of social innovation networks and local initiatives, many of which have explicit transformative ambitions. We identified four 'clusters' of processes, covering the different aspects of transformative social innovation dynamics and agency: a) the social relations within initiatives; b) processes of social innovation network formation; c) the relations to processes of institutional change; and d) the relations to the broader (societal) context. These four clusters provided a useful way of organising the development of theoretical insights around four interlinked 'meta-processes' at different aggregation levels, that are each important to the overall dynamics and agency of the 'transformative social innovation journey'. Key insights from the transformative social innovation theory are therefore presented around each of these four clusters.

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Relations within social innovation initiatives

Social innovation actors are dissatisfied with current institutionalized social relations – such as individualisation or social alienation. This motivates them to search for new arrangements that better satisfy their needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. They strive to create and practice different social relations based on values of trust, intimacy, and connection in their initiatives. Social innovation initiatives often are aware that interpersonal relations are important, also as a basis of societal change. Such awareness leads to explicit strategies for working on such interpersonal relations, constituting social innovation initiatives as spaces for experimentation with alternative social relations.

Elaborating a common identity is a key challenge for a new social innovation initiative—it defines the boundaries of the initiative and constructs it as a social actor. For individual members, it provides a sense of belonging and meaning, while being a source of support when difficulties are encountered. At the level of the collective, it provides a means to overcome differences and tensions arising from previously defined roles and relations among members. Social innovation initiatives such as credit cooperatives, Slow Food, Impact Hub, or RIPESS, gather politically divided actors such as religious and environmental organizations, farmers and chefs, and other entrepreneurs together under a new collective identity, thus enabling a re-configuring of social relations and of collective agency.

In their initial development, social innovation initiatives strive to create spaces for reflexive experimentation with alternative values, practices, and interpersonal relations. They do so for example by using governance approaches such as sociocracy (Ecovillage Bergen), holacracy (Impact Hub Amsterdam) or do-ocracy (Hackerspaces). As they grow, they adjust their strategies through interaction with the broader context. This involves the danger, that their organizational forms and practices can come to embody the very institutions they reacted against in the first place. Doing so, they thus run the risk of becoming disempowering and losing their ‘alternative’ appeal. Social innovation initiatives must find ways to navigate this dilemma if they are to remain empowering and attractive to members.

Photo credits: Jason Wong



Network formation

As social innovation initiatives emerge and develop as empowering collectives of transformation-minded individuals, they will build a network with related social innovation initiatives and actors supportive of their social innovation. Local social innovation initiatives tend to empower themselves and gain access to resources by connecting, joining or initiating networks of like-minded initiatives. We observed four distinct mechanisms for empowerment: a) funding; b) legitimacy; c) knowledge sharing, learning, and peer support; and, d) visibility and identity. Being a member of the Impact Hub network allows individual Impact Hubs to provide its members access to not only a worldwide network of working places but also a worldwide community of like-minded people. They can tap into the IT infrastructures, logos and branding provided by the network as well as the shared identity of social entrepreneurs aiming for positive social impact.

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Social innovation networks engage in active 'branding' through logos, websites, slogans, etc. They accelerate and disseminate their specific social innovations through a diverse range of mapping exercises, learning platforms, discussion sites and re-tweeting circuits. However, these activities imply a complex dynamics of 'translation' (creation of hype, diversification of framings, emergence of parallel social innovation initiative, etc.) which can lead to fragmentation and disempowerment of social innovation initiatives.

Related to networking, social innovation initiatives and networks thus face the challenge of how to spread new ideas, values and practices while prevent to 'water them down'. This leads to the dilemma that to be successful social innovation actors need to create collective identities through their networks but in doing so these identities 'dilute' and become less coherent.

Engaging with institutional change

In attempting to challenge, alter or replace existing institutions, social innovation initiatives need to be aware of two things. They need to consider which existing institutions to transform and how to actively draw upon and recombine them. The result are new 'hybrid' alternatives. The Impact Hub Amsterdam for example, challenges the strict division between for-profit and non-profit in the current economic system by efforts to get 'social enterprise' recognized as a legal entity in its own right in the Netherlands. As 'institutional entrepreneurs' or 'systems entrepreneurs' they need to 'play the field' to make it more conducive to their vision for change.

To this end, they combine strategies, and adapt and update them in response to changing circumstances. Strategies observed included: advocacy, lobbying, and protesting to promote changes to existing institutions; the provision of local alternative arrangements that can either supplement or 'shadow' existing arrangements; attempting to directly embed a social innovation into existing institutional arrangements; manoeuvring for advantage within the field of relations that they operate in; and engaging in discourse formation around the need for specific institutional changes.

Over time, the narratives and nature of activities may change, as happened in the case of the Transition movement, which originally consisted of local groups preparing for an 'energy descent': a radical reduction in energy usage in the face of e.g. climate change and 'Peak Oil'. They did so through the development of more localised systems of production and consumption such as local food provision (e.g. community supported agriculture schemes), community energy, and new ways of resourcing such as community currencies, etc. The 'innovation' was mainly in how these elements were brought together in novel combinations that suited the specific circumstances faced.



Photo credits: Filip Pizl

After the financial crisis of 2008 (and subsequent austerity measures) and the receding of Peak Oil as a compelling narrative in public discourse, the emphasis shifted towards 'local economic resilience'; thus, both the narrative and the focus of efforts were adapted significantly in response to developments in the context. As well as acting locally, the Transition movement has cooperated strategically at the EU level in e.g. the ECOLISE network to explicitly influence policy-making.

However, interactions with dominant institutions come with dangers of 'co-option' or 'capture'. The dilemma is that social innovation initiatives may find themselves trying to change the very institutional arrangements which they rely on to sustain their existence. Despite the dangers of co-option or capture, doing something that incumbents consider to be important or that fits with their agendas, can lead to better access to vital resources. Without a strong interaction with incumbents, there is much less potential for having a transformative impact on the wider society. Such co-option and capture dilemmas not only lead to confrontation, but can also lead to reflections that are critically important for finding a balance between on the one hand becoming overly dogmatic by sticking too rigidly to core values, or, on the other hand, being exploited by the status quo and giving up on core values too easily.

Relations to the broader societal context

Transformative social innovation is shaped by broader contextual developments. Important contemporary developments include: the rise of network society through ICT and new social media, demographic change, migration, growing inequalities, emancipation, transformation of work and social welfare, and the marketization of society.

Transformative social innovation involves not a single transformation but diverse transformations based on different social relations, values and ideas of progress. Diversity of directions, institutional forms, ways of funding and collaboration are an integral and inherent element of the social transformations that are enacted and aspired to as part of TSI.

This diversity of transformation processes, not only forms a backdrop to how transformative social innovation manifests in real-world change processes, it also has important implications for the dynamics of transformation processes. If things go well, and transformative ambitions start to be realised, this can lead to further empowerment, and further impetus for change. If things go in the other direction, and transformative ambitions are not realised, this can lead to a loss of motivation, and a loss of faith in the currently proposed alternatives.

The dilemma here is that proposals about a 'basic income' or 'science for society' for example may get accepted but for the wrong reasons, e.g. for cutting public spending or for making scientists work for commercial business. We may thus get transformations of the 'wrong kind', even when starting with the right intentions. There are other (often more powerful) dynamics in the societal context, that greatly influence how a transformative social innovation takes root and is adapted to the societal context.

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Further reading: Haxeltine, A., Kemp, R., Cozan, S., Ruijsink, S., Backhaus, J., Avelino, F. and A. Dumitru (2015) *How social innovation leads to transformative change – Towards a theory of transformative social innovation*. TRANSIT Brief #3.

Avelino, F., Wittmayer, J.M., Pel, B., Weaver, P., Dumitru, A., Haxeltine, A., Kemp, R., Jørgensen, M.S., Bauler, T., Ruijsink, S. and T. O’Riordan (2017), *Transformative Social Innovation and (Dis)Empowerment, Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.

Haxeltine, A., Pel, B., Dumitru, A., Avelino, F., Kemp, R., F., Bauler, T., Kunze, I., Dorland, J., Wittmayer, J., and Jørgensen, M.S. (2017) *“Towards a TSI theory: a relational framework and 12 propositions”*. TRANSIT working paper #16.

4. Increasing the knowledge base and reflexivity of the social innovation community

Ensuring the societal relevance of our research has been a common theme throughout the project. We focused specifically on making our research relevant for those people engaging in the social innovation networks and initiatives under study. In addition to the opportunities for transformative change arising from a changing context, the topics of governance, social learning, resourcing and monitoring were considered important.

Key insights about a transforming societal context

In TRANSIT, we paid attention to the interactions of social innovation initiatives with the wider context in the case analyses. We also convened an expert workshop to increase our understanding of the broader societal context using the concept of ‘game-changer’ in different geographical contexts (see Textbox below). One of those game-changers discussed during the workshop that was dominating the wider European context during the project period was the economic recession in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008.

Many of the cases that we studied were already highly critical towards capitalist and neoliberal models, and the economic crises tended to therefore merely serve to confirm the dangers of financialisation and the urgent need for various forms of ‘alternative’ economy.

In certain ways the context is becoming more congenial to social innovation: In the UK, performance-based contracts offer opportunities for social innovation initiatives offering services for which the government is prepared to pay; social enterprises are gaining legitimacy; the need for a transformation of the energy system was confirmed by the Paris agreement in 2015; and alternative indicator systems focusing on well-being are under development. In some cases, the networks that we have studied are involved at the forefront of these developments. For example, Timebanks UK managed to create a deal with tax authorities ensuring that Timebank activities are not taxed and allowing benefit claimants to get involved without penalty. Timebanks fulfil an important role with regards to reaching many strata of society but are not yet paid for such services of inclusion, however negotiations take place. There are more of these kinds of opportunities for social innovation initiatives to play into, such as ongoing discussions on a localisation of the economy, responsible business conduct, community-based forms of care, the possible introduction of Basic Income allowing people to work outside the market economy in activities of their choice.

The great humanist Fritz Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful* said: “I cannot predict the wind but I can have my sail ready”. For sailing the winds of change, social innovation initiatives should orient themselves to the greatest possible extent to the realities (both challenges and opportunities) of the changing context that they face.



Photo source: TRANSIT image bank

Game-changers in transformative social innovation

How do we make sense of the societal game-changers of our times? How do economic trends, climate change, technological revolutions and other such macro-developments relate to social change and innovation as manifested in context-specific initiatives? These are the questions that inspired a 2-day academic workshop organized by TRANSIT in September 2014. 25 scholars gathered to discuss the role of 'game-changers' in transformative social innovation processes, from the perspective of various interdisciplines and world regions. The focus of the workshop was on unpacking and discussing – both theoretically and empirically – the global 'game-changers' of our times (e.g. climate change, economic crises, increasing inequality, ageing and health, migration) and to explore how these game-changers relate to different forms of social innovation and transformative change. Subsequently, TRANSIT researchers acted as guest editors of *Ecology & Society* to collect the insights from the workshop in nine paper contributions in an open access special issue. These contributions place game-changers at relatively high levels of aggregation, with the majority being of global or international nature, and they consider game changes as either (1) (economic) 'crises', (2) national policy interventions, or (3) the intertwining of the social and material – both in 'socio-technical' and in 'socio-ecological' terms. The editorial discusses main points across these contributions, such as the possibility as well as limits of the 'game' metaphor, the different perspectives on the role of agency with regards to game-changers and the intertwining of social innovations and game-changers with socio-material elements across socio-spatial scales.

Further reading: Avelino, F., Wittmayer, J.M., Kemp, R. and A. Haxeltine (2017) *Game-Changers and Transformative Social Innovation. Ecology & Society. 22(4):41.*

Loorbach, D., Avelino, F., Haxeltine, A., Wittmayer, J. M., O'Riordan, T., Weaver, P. and R. Kemp (2016) *The economic crisis as a game-changer? Exploring the role of social construction in sustainability transitions. Ecology and Society 21 (4):15.*

Cipolla, C., Afonso, R., Pel, B., Bartholo, R., Silva, E. and D. Proença (2017), *Co-produced game-changing in transformative social innovation: reconnecting the 'broken city' of Rio de Janeiro, Ecology & Society 22(3):3.*

Following the economic crisis, many observers have stated the need for an alternative narrative as the dominant one of a market economy and state-based protection is becoming less and less compelling. The networks we have studied not only have such narratives about an alternative economy, they are already practicing or experimenting with it – think about the sharing economy, social entrepreneurship, degrowth and relocalisation as well as the solidarity economy. In this context, George Monbiot speaks of a “politics of belonging” uniting people from the right and left, and Henry Mintzberg of the need for “rebalancing society” with an important role for a plural economy. When such narratives take hold the status of social innovation will be elevated. The evolution of democracy will be an important factor in this regard. Recent ‘volatile’ voting behaviours, distrust of experts, identity politics, and growing opposition to exploitative capitalism are all testimony to the turbulence of the present age.

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Further reading: Longhurst, N., Avelino, F., Wittmayer, J., Weaver, P., Dumitru, A., Hielscher, S., Cipolla, C., Afonso, R., Kunze, I. and M. Elle (2016) *Experimenting with alternative economies: four emergent counter-narratives of urban economic development*. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 22, 69–74.

Wittmayer, J. M., Backhaus, J., Avelino, F., Pel. B., Strasser, T. and Kunze, I. (2015) *Narratives of change: how social innovation initiatives engage with their transformative ambitions*. *TRANSIT working paper #4*.



Photo credits: Yuriy Rzhemovskiy

Game-Changers Tool for Transformative Social Innovation

Social innovation initiatives need to engage with and navigate the societal context and its developments. TRANSIT developed a training tool for trainers and course participants (from social innovation practice, policy and academia) who want to teach and learn about transformative social innovation journeys, system change, game-changers and storytelling.

What is the tool about?

This tool helps to reflect on the interaction between game-changers and transformative social innovations. It introduces concepts that are relevant for understanding the dynamics of social innovation, such as Transformative Social Innovation, Narratives of change, System innovation, Game-changers and/or macro-events, and Societal transformation. The tool has two modules: Module 1 outlines the relations between social innovation and societal transformation and Module 2 introduces a canvas that helps social innovation initiatives to develop their own transformative social innovation story by understanding ongoing societal dynamics and how they relate to them.

Further reading: *Zuijderwijk, L. (eds.), Becerra, L., Juarez, P., Olivotto, V. and Wittmayer, J. (2014), Transformative Social Innovation: 1st Training Tool with Modules and Online Canvas. TRANSIT Deliverable 6.3.*

My TSI story

Which societal transformation do you envision unfolding in 2050? How did social innovations that existed or emerged in 2014 contribute to this societal transformation?

Start your TSI story here!

Which societal transformation do you envision unfolding in 2050?

e.g. theme of system innovation or social innovation and leadership/innovation strategy

SYSTEM INNOVATION

Which system does the social innovation target? What was the system innovation? When did it occur or emerge?

e.g. economic, environmental, social, technological, political, cultural

MACRO-TREND

What was it? When did it occur or emerge?

What was it? When did it occur or emerge? What "story" were you inspired by?

NARRATIVE OF CHANGE

e.g. inclusion, digital banking, which build on...

How did your current initiative (expressed in terms of a social innovation) contribute to this societal information?

2014

2020

2030

2040

2050

1. Have you seen our recommended resources? [add link]
2. Start by imagining your 2050-world at the right of the canvas
3. Ask yourself, how your initiative contributed to this world?
4. Use the ideas of 'system innovation', 'macro-trend' and 'narrative of change' to build your storyline
5. Use the following symbols to describe the relations that you discover between concepts: ↑ ✕ ?

Key insights about governance

Social innovation is often considered as a beyond-the-state activity, or as a manifestation of new social movements that operate in the shadow of or against the state. But governments have a crucial role to play in creating a favourable environment for non-state social innovation initiatives. The Universal Basic Income exemplifies how some proposals for new social relations are not a matter of ‘supporting grassroots initiatives’ – government will ultimately have to do it. The ‘evidence-based’ activism of the BIEN network shows how academics can contribute significantly, by developing thorough economic underpinning and nuanced moral-political justifications. Likewise, citizens can contribute through civic petitions and awareness-raising meetings; creative social entrepreneurs have crowd-funded individual basic incomes to show glimpses of a possible basic income future, and various local and national-tier governments across the world are warming up for basic income-inspired experiments.

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Therefore our understanding of transformative social innovation underlines that it is not just a matter of ‘bottom-up’ initiatives needing support, permission to exist, or regulating frameworks ‘from above’. Social innovation is about the introduction of new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing. Obviously, such activities can be initiated from any position in society. Our case research shows how certain positions in society allow for certain kinds of social innovation, whilst others are out of reach.

Important for transformative social innovation governance is that it is about challenging, altering or replacing dominant institutions – whether formal ones such as regulations, or informal ones. The institution of property is redefined and experimented with in initiatives like Timebanks, Shareable, and the members of the International Cooperative Association, but accepted in others. The DESIS network seeks to transform the basic understandings of ‘products’ and their ‘value’ by reconsidering how design practice should be taught in education. Similarly, ecovillages consider education and upbringing as a key in challenging dominant institutions.

Transformative social innovation governance should thus be understood as a widely distributed set of activities involving actors outside social innovation networks. The recent #metoo outburst illustrates the point clearly: Challenging the notoriously persistent gender imbalance involves governance well beyond government and 'social innovation initiative'.

Further reading: Pel, B., Weaver, P., Strasser, T., Kemp, R., Avelino, F. and L. Becerra (2015) *Governance: co-productions challenges in Transformative Social Innovation*. TRANSIT Brief 2.

Pel, B. and T. Bauler (2014) *The institutionalization of social innovation: between transformation and capture*. TRANSIT working paper #2.

Pel, B. & Backhaus, J. (forthcoming), *Realizing the Basic Income; the promotion of transformative knowings through competing claims to expertise*, *Science & Technology Studies*

Avelino, F. and J.M. Wittmayer (2016) *Shifting Power Relations in Sustainability Transitions: A Multi-actor Perspective*. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 18:5, 628-649.

Governance Tool for Transformative Social Innovation

Based on these governance insights, TRANSIT developed a training tool for trainers and course participants (from social innovation practice, policy and academia) who want to teach and learn about governance and transformative social innovation.

What is the tool about?

This tool is about governance in the context of transformative social innovation. This is not the same as addressing the question 'how governments should facilitate decision making for transformative social innovation'. Governance is about decision-making beyond government as social innovation initiatives 'govern' as well. The tool is structured in modules that all discuss dedicated content and include a series of exercises:

1. General transformative social innovation & governance concepts
2. Actors, perceptions, (frames) of problems and dependencies (drawing on the Multi Level Perspective and the multi actor perspective)
3. The governance of networks (drawing on Network Governance)

Further reading: Pennink, C. and L. Zuijderwijk (2015) *Governance Tools for Transformative Social Innovation: 2nd Training tool*, TRANSIT Deliverable 6.4.

Key insights about social learning

Members in social innovation initiatives learn many things as individuals and reach new worldviews and understandings that have an impact on their behaviors. We speak of social learning, when social innovation initiatives reach *new shared meanings, through interaction, collective experimentation and joint reflection, and these become situated in shared norms and practices*. Social learning is an important mechanism through which social innovation initiatives contribute to wider transformations. To deal with power struggles many social innovation initiatives put special emphasis on educating their members for cooperation, conflict resolution and gaining social competences.

For fostering social learning and building an alternative to existing social and institutional arrangements, members of social innovation initiatives have to: 1) acquire specific knowledge about how particular institutions and systems work and how they perpetuate values and practices that are not desirable; 2) develop competencies for cooperation and dealing with tensions in order to create new social relations and maintain motivation in the face of obstacles; and, 3) develop effective strategies of engagement with other relevant actors and institutions, in order to achieve their objectives, which often include changing existing states of affairs.

Each of those points is shortly illustrated for the case of eco-villages. Ecovillages have invented or elaborated on a range of innovative techniques for fair and participatory decision making processes for avoiding conflict over power imbalances. Ecovillages had to learn to be sensitive towards the reservations of local village residents. In the case of 'Sieben Linden', local residents were excited that so many young people would move to their marginal area but they were also sceptical about ideological ambitions. The ecovillage initiative had to ensure that they would respect the local way of living and not try to evangelise or take over too many abandoned houses in the region.

And for establishing themselves, ecovillages had to develop new knowledge about shared property, legal frames, appropriate business concepts and constructing eco-buildings.

Networks also play an important role in social learning. They facilitate interactions between practitioners of social innovation initiatives worldwide and thereby provide opportunities for enhanced learning, practical support and the experience of belonging and connectedness. The feeling of being part of a movement can lead to a sense of increased impact. This often leads to new ideas, renewed enthusiasm and stronger motivation for members of local social innovation initiatives. The networks also contribute to the legitimacy of local initiatives.

Further reading: Dumitru, A., Lema-Blanco, I., Kunze, I., Kemp, R., Wittmayer, J., Haxeltine, A., García-Mira, R., Zijderwijk, L. and S. Cozan (2017) *Social learning in social innovation initiatives : learning about systemic relations and strategies for transformative change.* TRANSIT Brief 4.

Social Learning Tool for Transformative Social Innovation - Building Learning for Transformative Social Innovation

Based on these social learning insights, TRANSIT has developed a (Spanish) training tool for trainers and course participants (from social innovation practice, policy and academia) who want to teach and learn about social learning and (transformative) social innovation

What is the tool about?

The main objective of this tool is to design learning strategies oriented towards resolving problems experienced by social innovators. The tool consists of three modules.

1. Concepts and theory concerning the importance of learning strategies for transformative social innovation
2. Instruments to design and plan learning for social innovation
3. Case studies about social learning in socially innovative approaches. Case 1 is about the importance of water for development and case 2 about recycling approaches (documented in videos)

Further reading: Becerra, L., Juarez, P., Ayala, S., Carenzo, S. and Universidad Nacional de Quilmes (2016) *Training tool on social learning for Transformative Social Innovation.* TRANSIT Deliverable 6.5.

Key insights about resourcing

To grow and “mushroom” social innovation initiatives must find reliable ways of resourcing particularly their basic costs, and not only for specific activities or one specific project but in a sustained way. External partners may offer those resources but in doing so may come with demands which may undermine the lifeblood of social innovation initiatives.

The resourcing issue is critical to achieving transformative impacts, because without resources there will not be a locally rooted social innovation initiative for people to participate in.

Resources can be obtained via three pathways (Weaver and Marks, 2017).

- *External Funding* where initiatives seek investment and/or income by delivering services to external sponsors, especially services that help reduce costs on public sector agencies. This comes with clear ties, specified in contracts.
- *Autonomous Funding* where a social innovation initiative develops an own-income stream to self-finance its activities and fund continuity and growth. An example is the use of tuition fees for providing trainings on organic farming in an eco-village.
- A strategy of *Embedding* where the social innovation initiative partners with an existing larger organisation that is wealthier or better funded and with which there is some complementarity of mission. This pathway is used by several Time Banks in the US embedding themselves with Medical Insurers, Hospitals, large faith organisations (Catholic Diocese) and large charities as partners.

There is a risk that any social capital built up gradually and progressively over several years of operation of a social innovation initiative can be lost if a break in funding disrupts operations. The social capital built from earlier years of investment can be lost quickly, but can only be rebuilt slowly.

For social innovation initiatives to expand the resource pool must expand. At present, social innovation initiatives are fishing in the same pond. Competition for grants between and within social innovation initiatives is therefore often a zero-sum game which may discourage cooperation. The processes of competing (often for very small and very short-term grants) and reporting for auditing purposes is a significant diversion and drain on the human resources of social innovation initiatives, including at grassroots level. This needs to be understood by policy makers.

Further reading: Weaver, P. M., Marks, M. B, Hogan, L., Wittmayer, J., Ruijsink, S., Bacerra, L., Cozan, S., Kemp, R., Strasser, T. and L. Zuijderwijk (2017) *Resourcing, monitoring and evaluation : scaling challenges and pathways*. TRANSIT Brief #5.

Marks, M. B., Hogan, L. and P. M. Weaver (2017) *Success case examples of sustainable social innovation: resourcing strategies in the United States*. TRANSIT working paper # 12.

Weaver, P. M. and M. B. Marks (2017) *Social innovation resourcing strategies and transformation pathways: a first-cut typology*. TRANSIT working paper # 11.

Photo credits: Evan Kirby



Resourcing Tool for Transformative Social Innovation

Based on these resourcing insights, TRANSIT developed a hands-on tool for social innovators who want to learn about resourcing and (transformative) social innovation. The tool introduces different approaches for defining a resourcing strategy.

What is the tool about?

The tool's main objective is to help design resourcing strategies useful for social innovators. This implies that it acknowledges the importance of learning (which is about knowledge, skills and attitude) for resourcing. The tool is organized in three modules:

1. Resource assessment methods: how to identify the resourcing problem and the different resourcing types including i) monetary resources; ii) human resources; iii) collective and individual resources; iv) internal and external resources; and v) technological (soft and hard) resources;
2. Resource management strategies: how to identify the appropriate strategy for a transformative social innovation?
3. Learning as an integral part of a resourcing strategy: how to solve new resourcing challenges and how to continuously improve the general strategy?

Further reading: *Becerra, L. and P. Juarez (2017) Deliverable no. 6.6 : Training tool on "Resourcing for social innovation initiatives", TRANSIT Deliverable 6.6.*

Key insights about monitoring and evaluation

In line with the reasoning of public policy that social innovations can play a role in addressing societal challenges, there is strong interest by government and social impact investors in paying social innovation initiatives for the creation of social impact. This comes along with the need to monitor and evaluate their performance. Ideally monitoring should do two things: 1) showing positive net impact to satisfy funders and 2) obtaining lessons for improving performance through an asset-based approach.

When social innovation initiatives receive public money for taking over or complementing state services (for example in areas of welfare delivery), they have to provide proof of social impact and measure financial performance for reasons of transparency and accountability.

One popular tool is the ‘social return on investment’ analysis, a social impact measurement tool in which all benefits are monetarized. Social impact assessments of this kind involve complex matters of attribution and valuation and consume considerable resources. Social innovation initiatives are often indisposed to such method for practical and ideological reasons. They prefer to spend their scarce resources on *making* impact rather than on *measuring* it.

For the second goal of monitoring and evaluation, obtaining lessons for doing things in a better way, *developmental evaluation* may be used (Patton, 2011). Developmental evaluation helps members of a social innovation initiative to reflect on their assets, theory of change, and the mechanisms of change utilised and opportunities and dangers afforded by a changing context. It also accepts that each stage in a social innovation process has different measurement needs, and that therefore the measuring approaches and tools used, such as indicators and metrics, will need to change from one stage to the next.

In general, monitoring should be fit for purpose and maximum efforts should be undertaken to make it so. Action research can be used to find useful ways of monitoring. In action-based forms of evaluation, evaluators do not take distance but immerse themselves in contextual specifics, they “co-create interpretations and arguments, examine the evidence and reason together” (Patton, 2011, p. 287).

Further reading: Weaver, P. M. and R. Kemp (2017) *A review of evaluation methods relevant for social innovation: with suggestions for their use and development*. TRANSIT working paper # 14.

Weaver, P. M., Marks, M. B, Hogan, L., Wittmayer, J., Ruijsink, S., Bacerra, L., Cozan, S., Kemp, R., Strasser, T. and L. Zijderwijk (2017) *Resourcing, monitoring and evaluation : scaling challenges and pathways*. TRANSIT Brief #5.

Monitoring and Evaluation Tool for Transformative Social Innovation

Based on these monitoring and evaluation insights, TRANSIT developed a hands-on tool for social innovators who want to learn about monitoring, evaluation and learning in and from (transformative) social innovation. The tool is a practical and flexible process guide.

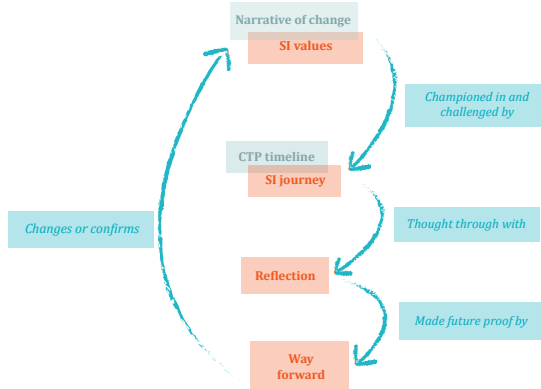
What is the tool about?

This tool is focused on development in dynamic environments. It is structured in phases:

1. Getting Started: Identify the need for an evaluation process and based on this form a team
2. Narratives of Change: Identify, discuss and clarify the theory of change of the (T)SI
3. Critical Turning Points or “how did we get here”: Construct the timeline of critical turning points (CTPs) in the journey of change of the social innovation initiative, focusing on co-production and mobilization and use of resources.
4. Reflection: Are we walking the talk? What were the main changes? Are the CTPs in line with the narrative of change? What are the lessons?
5. Looking Forward: Revise narrative of change (optional) and define strategies on co-production and mobilization and use of resources.

Further reading: *Becerra, L. and P. Juarez (2017) Deliverable no. 6.6 : Training tool on “Resourcing for social innovation initiatives”. TRANSIT Deliverable 6.7*

A cyclical learning process



5. Building a Transformative social innovation community

Throughout the last four years, we have actively engaged in building a transformative social innovation community – engaging with people who are working towards making the world a more sustainable, just and resilient place. First and foremost, these were the people engaged in the social innovation initiatives and networks studied – whether as activists, entrepreneurs, researchers, critical intellectuals or policy makers. They are joined by others working in adjacent fields and on similar questions.

The outreach and community building activities were numerous. We made a specific effort to make our results readily available through deliverables, a working paper series and conference presentations. We used digital means (including website, newsletter and social media) to reach out and engage in ongoing virtual discussions. Face-to-face encounters (including workshops, conferences and symposia) offered the possibility to share and validate our insights and results and to learn from others about how to sharpen them. We also coordinated efforts to collaboratively write a Manifesto for Transformative Social Innovation as a common call for action to help to create focus and momentum for collaboration.

'Beyond' Transition? Understanding and Achieving Sustainable Consumption through Social Innovation

In November 2015, TRANSIT and the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI Europe) organized a workshop on the nexus of social innovation, transformations and sustainable consumption. This workshop gathered 27 participants to discuss three main issues: 1) similarities and differences between notions of 'transition' and 'transformation' and their relevance to the governance of sustainability, social innovation or sustainable consumption; 2) case studies or examples of social innovation or sustainable consumption and their relevance to transformation; and 3) actions, roles and interactions of diverse participants in potentially transformative social innovation or sustainable consumption initiatives. TRANSIT researchers have acted as editors for Routledge to harvest the insights from the workshop in a book volume.

Further reading: Backhaus, J., Genus, A., Lorek, S., Vadovics, E. and J.M. Wittmayer (eds.) (2018) *Social Innovation and Sustainable Consumption: Research and Action for Societal Transformation*. Routledge.

Haxeltine, A., Avelino, F., Wittmayer, JM., Kunze, I., Longhurst, N., Dumitru, A. and T. O'Riordan (2018) *Conceptualising the role of social innovation in sustainability transformations*. pp 12-25

Backhaus, J., van Lente, H. and R. Kemp (2018) *The idea(l) of a 'sustainable sharing economy': four social science perspectives on transformative change*, pp 26-40

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activities & outputs



publication outputs



2 open access special issues published



20 case study reports



20 peer-reviewed articles

16 working papers



7 book chapters

6 briefs

2 edited books



special events



people reached

15

workshops

375+

2

conferences

500+



dissemination

people reached

43

presentations at scientific conferences

1750+

112

workshops

4250+

53

lectures & seminars

1350+

12

keynotes

1250+



digital outreach



FACEBOOK

1,279 Page likes/followers
Reached in 2017 ~29,000

TWITTER

868 Followers
926 Tweets
340 likes
10,000 impressions/month



NEWSLETTER

770 Subscriptions

WEBSITES

2017
Viewers 3,5K
Average Time Spent 5min
Bounce Rate 37%



Research engagement

One way in which we interacted directly with practitioners was through our empirical research on selected social innovation initiatives and networks. Although the primary purpose here was to gather data for the development of an 'empowering' theory on social innovation, the empirical research has also catalysed, or in some cases built on, lasting two-way interactions with practitioners in many of the cases studied. So, for example, one TRANSIT researcher has become deeply involved in the further development of Time banks UK and others are now working with practitioners in the Transition network to develop an analysis of the 'theories of change' that might inform the work of that network going forward.

Photo source: TRANSIT Engagement Workshop



In these ways the TRANSIT research team took up the challenge to avoid ‘extractive’ empirical research, aiming instead for an interaction that was fair and acceptable to both sides. We formulated an ethics of engagement to help in navigating the research relations with members and practitioners of the networks and initiatives studied. These included considerations regarding the quality of the research relationship and the negotiation of mutual benefit. For example, for doing research with the Impact Hub Amsterdam, this included negotiating a contract detailing these benefits. Through the TRANSIT engagement with the Global Ecovillage Network, two TRANSIT researchers contributed to the establishment of a GEN Research working group, including hosting workshops at GEN conferences, networking and translating between researchers and ecovillage members and compiling a guide for researchers on how to approach ecovillages. Other considerations concerned reflecting on the normative commitments that we had as researchers and on the need to ‘balance’ the degree of proximity with initiatives – especially in those cases where researchers had been or had become directly involved. By reflecting on our normative commitments in these ways, we aimed to both maintain the position of ‘critical friend’ to the initiatives and networks studied, and to also engage in ways that allowed us to ‘give something back’ wherever such opportunities arose.

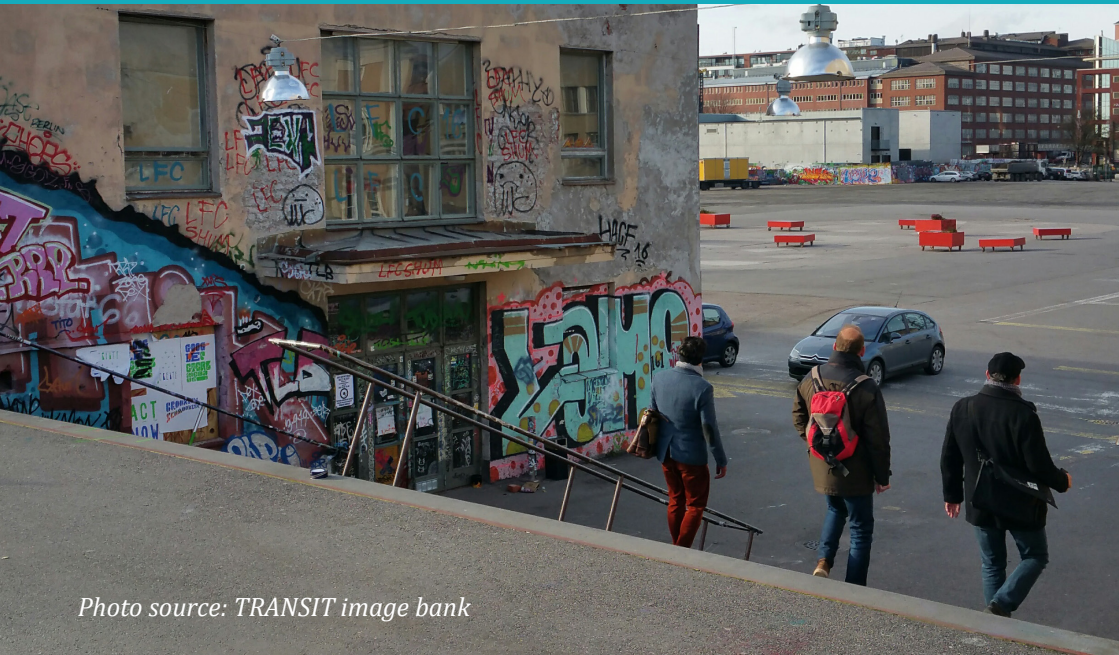




Photo source: TRANSIT image bank

Transformative Social Innovation Manifesto

Our commitment towards the *empowerment* of transformative social innovations in addressing urgent societal challenges is also reflected in our efforts towards the creation of a *manifesto* on transformative social innovation. Through our research, we learnt that there are more and more people who are taking action to shape the development of radically more sustainable, just and resilient societies. Together with such activists, entrepreneurs, policy-makers, concerned citizens, and critical intellectuals, we formulated a common call for action to both help create a focus and generate momentum for further collaboration on transformative social innovation. With this ‘TSI manifesto’ (short for transformative social innovation manifesto) our intention is also to contribute to a collective realisation of the extreme urgency of many of the societal challenges that we are now facing. We hope that in the coming months, it can help in bringing together people, who are interested in contributing to transformative social change, to identify complementarities, synergies, common insights and also challenges. It is currently a ‘manifesto in the making’, a ‘version 0.1’, that we hope will serve as a starting point for further discussions and action; ‘transformative social innovation people’ are invited to adopt and adapt it according to their own local contexts and transformative goals.

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Manifesto for transformative social innovation

Please join us at tsimanifesto.org



International Centre for
Integrated assessment and
Sustainable development



TRANSIT is a research project which aims to improve understanding of how social innovation can bring about empowerment and societal transformation. The research team is carrying out in-depth case studies with around 20 transnational networks and the use of engagement with social innovators, social entrepreneurs, policymakers and scientists in workshops, to gain new insights into the field. The outcomes will include training tools as well as policy and practitioner briefings like this one, to share this knowledge and help support social innovators for sustainability.

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TRANSIT – Transformative Social Innovation Theory

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Duration: 2014 - 2017

Funding scheme: FP 7 – Social Innovation – empowering people, changing societies, no. 613169

Project website: www.transitsocialinnovation.eu

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