

Social Innovation: a New Innovation Paradigm for Social Development An Interview with A. Schröder, M. Menapace and A. Shabunova



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“The most urgent and important innovations in the 21st century will take place in the social field. This opens up the necessity as well as possibilities for Social Sciences and Humanities to find new roles and relevance by generating knowledge applicable to new dynamics and structures of contemporary and future societies”.

Vienna Declaration 2011: The most relevant topics in social innovation research.

In recent years social innovation has become the subject matter of a large number of research works in the European scientific community. This is due to the fact that the existing «technology-oriented paradigm – shaped by the industrial society does not cover the broad range of innovations indispensable in the transition from an industrial to a knowledge and service-based society...»¹. In the modern world, reality is not nature, as it had been before, nor technology, as it has been recently, but «the social world experienced through the reciprocal consciousness of self and others»². It is quite obvious that «such fundamental societal changes require the inclusion of social innovations in a paradigm shift of the innovation system»³.

The role of social innovations in society has yet to be assessed. But today we realize that they have an increasing impact on people’s lives, they influence how we all, including our society, live and work, how we handle the crises and how we use our opportunities. Scientists and researchers, politicians and businessmen begin to understand that only technological or business innovations will hardly help to overcome the social, economic and environmental problems that our modern society is facing. The number of initiatives in

the field of social innovation is increasing all over the world, and it shows the need for an in-depth theoretical and empirical understanding of this concept.

The past decades witnessed a major breakthrough in the research on social processes. We think that this breakthrough was greatly facilitated by the wide-scale international research SI-DRIVE («Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change»). Launched in 2014, it is the largest project within the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program for Research and Technological Development (FP7). A major objective of the research was to consider current social innovation projects from a theoretical perspective.

The main goal of the Project is to expand scientific knowledge in three directions:

- integration theories and research methodologies to advance understanding of social innovation leading to a comprehensive new paradigm of innovation.
- undertaking European and global mapping of SI, analyzing different social, economic, cultural, historical and religious aspects in eight major world regions.
- ensuring relevant data for policy makers and practitioners through in-depth analyses and case studies in seven policy fields (education and lifelong learning, employment, environment and climate change, health and social care, transport and mobility, poverty reduction and sustainable development, energy supply).

International universities, innovation centers and scientific organizations from 30 countries⁴ participated in SI-DRIVE Project.

¹ Vienna Declaration 2011: The most relevant topics in social innovation research.

² Daniel Bell. The coming of post-industrial society.

³ Vienna Declaration 2011: The most relevant topics in social innovation research.

⁴ Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, UK, Canada, Egypt, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, Lithuania, Italy, Croatia, Colombia, India, the Netherlands, Australia, Chile, Spain, Romania, South Africa, China, Czech Republic, Thailand, New Zealand, France, Ireland, Denmark, USA, South Korea, Belgium.

Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences was the only Russian participant in SI-DRIVE. The Project enabled Russian scientists to make their own contribution to the formation of the theory of social innovation alongside European researchers. Studying the Russian experience on current social innovation projects, their driving forces and barriers to their development within the framework of an international project signifies that it is possible to integrate Russian social sciences and the humanities successfully into global scientific and technological development.

One of the results of SI-DRIVE Project became a monograph of the international research team «Atlas of Social Innovation – New Practices for a Better Future», which will be published in 2018. The Atlas consists of 4 parts: the theoretical foundations of social innovation being a global trend, the analysis of social innovation in world regions, social innovation in 7 policy fields and future challenges and infrastructures of social innovation as a way of solving global challenges. The Atlas will be presented in an interactive map www.socialinnovationatlas.net. It will be possible to submit a proposal for an article or a social innovation initiative on this web-platform and to see the existing examples of SI.

These and other results of the largest international SI-DRIVE Project were discussed by scientists and researchers at the final conference «Social Innovations – Research and Policy of the Future: Towards a Comprehensive Innovation Policy” held October 24-26, 2017 in Brussels. After the conference, we talked to Antonius Schröder (SI-DRIVE Project Coordinator, Professor at TU Dortmund University), Monica Menapace (Officer at the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation under the European Commission),

and Aleksandra Shabunova (Interim Director of Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Economics). We spoke about the essence of social innovation, the results of the SI-DRIVE Project, the contribution made by Russian scientists from the Vologda Research Center of RAS to the Project, and the future of social innovation.

What is «social innovation» and why is it so important to study this concept?

Antonius Schröder. We tried to disclose the definition of this concept in the framework of the Project. In short, social innovations are innovations that are social both in their ends and in their means. Here is an expanded definition: new combination of practices in areas of social action with the goal of better coping with needs and problems than is possible by using existing practice. An innovation is therefore social to the extent that it varies social action, and is socially accepted and diffused in society. Depending on the circumstances of social changes, interests of politics and power, social ideas and successfully implemented social innovations can be transformed and ultimately institutionalized as regular social practices. In the end of such a life cycle, when innovation becomes standard, new needs and subsequent social innovations may arise. We can give one more definition: social innovations are the activities of organizations with the aim to improve the quality of life of socially vulnerable groups by providing them with opportunities to participate in economic and social, cultural and political life. I think that today when we are all facing global changes that pose serious ecological, economic and social challenges, companies cannot achieve sustainable growth and be competitive without this social component.

Aleksandra Shabunova. At present, we realize that it hardly possible to introduce new innovation models if social change is not taken

into consideration. However, before we start designing and implementing social innovation, the processes of its emergence and development should be studied thoroughly. The extensive theoretical and practical material that forms the basis of the strategy makes it reliable and appealing to society from the practical aspect.

The topic of social innovation is not new for European researchers, isn't it?

An.Schr. Yes, it's not a new topic, but it was raised since last 5-6 years, 10 years ago it was only a topic for the few projects. Today we see that social innovation is on the agenda of European politicians and civil society actors, young entrepreneurs and businessmen, universities and scientific communities, stakeholders — all parties who want to find answers to the main challenges that are facing all the inhabitants of our planet. Yes, there were some other projects on SI, but they have a very specific view on social innovation. So let's say the CRESSI project is looking at the third sector, SIMPACT is looking for the economic and opinion for value of the groups. In SI-DRIVE we try to encompass the whole world of social innovation and to give a broad worldwide picture to what is understood for social innovation.

Monika Menapace. Some years ago in 2012-13-14 we supported a lot of research projects dealing with social innovation from different perspectives, so we had different resource topics, addressing specifically in one aspect, e.g. we had something specifically on social entrepreneurship that can also be considered as part of social innovation. This project SI-DRIVE is being supported by the European Commission with the purpose of defining the theory of social innovation because the issue is so broad that it needs to be clarified from the theoretical point of view and mapping the different activities and the contribution to the different policy area. So in this regard this

project is complementing other activities that we supported. All our social innovation projects are currently assessed by an expert, and there will be soon a policy review, taken out the most interesting results from the different projects, assessing how to go on in support in the process of social innovation.

What examples of successfully implemented social innovation can you give?

A. Schr. We selected 1007 cases from various countries, so the examples are numerous. For instance, *Crossics*, a Belgian start up, creates drawing-based books and mobile applications for immigrants to ease communication barriers between them and doctors. *Beyond Food Foundation*, a UK charitable organization, in cooperation with Brigade, a London-based restaurant, provide homeless and socially vulnerable people with catering apprenticeship and employment. In the Netherlands, there is a fashion brand *Granny's Finest*, which sells products knitted by people whose age is above 55.

A. Shab. Russia has several examples of very successful projects of its own. The project *Mama works* provides assistance and support to women on maternity leave. The project Improving *computer literacy of the elderly* implemented in the Vologda Oblast in the framework of «Zabota» (social innovation project «Care») helps the elderly to adapt to modern life, to learn the basics of computer technology, and to learn how to use governmental information resources through the Internet. *City of professions 360+* in the Tyumen Oblast helps students to choose their future profession by presenting real technological and laboratory objects, and business processes in virtual space. VolRC RAS *Research and Education Center* is a good example of social innovation in the Russian education system. It was established in order to train highly qualified personnel for science, economy, and governing bodies in the region,

beginning with schoolchildren of secondary schools and ending with postgraduate students of VoIRC RAS, thus forming a continuous multi-level system of training.

What is the goal of the project? What is its mission?

A. Schr. In the first place, the SI-DRIVE Project aimed to deepen our knowledge of social innovation as a driving force of social change. Understanding social innovation leads to smarter and more target-oriented support measures taken by legislators; in addition, it will help make the introduction and dissemination of social innovation more efficient. The knowledge will help create a foundation for political decisions made by the EU, international organizations, and politicians.

What are the major achievements of the Project?

A. Schr. We are all aware that European society will be undergoing a profound transformation in the coming decades. The power and potential of social innovation shows that it is a major factor that will help us cope with social challenges. In the materials of the SI-DRIVE Project, we have summarized theoretical and empirical research findings, prepared an overview of different types of social innovation in the world regions and major policy fields. These materials will be reflected in the monograph «Atlas of Social Innovation – New Practices for a Better Future» and on a special web platform created in the framework of the project. This software will show the diversity and scope of social innovation, proving the effectiveness of the work of social innovators.

Are there any specific features in the development of social innovation in Russia?

A. Shab. In contrast to the situation in the developed European countries where civil society plays a major role, in Russia, special

importance in the dissemination of social innovation initiatives is attached to the authorities who understand the significance of its development and, consequently, promote social activity in the areas that the government considers most important. Key barriers to the development of social innovation in this case include limited financial resources and a lack of civic engagement. As a result, social entrepreneurship combining both social and economic goals becomes one of the main facilitators of social innovation. However, the lack of clear “rules of the game” (institutions) impedes the development of social innovation in need of a strong legal base, and it often results in a situation when government agencies make their subjective choice in favor of those organizations that receive support (financial, educational, consulting, infrastructure, information, etc.).

However, the number of social innovation projects in Russia increases each year. Society needs change very much, and in a situation when governmental efforts in addressing critical social issues are not efficient enough, people themselves are encouraged to participate in community activities. A special part in this process belongs to the role of the individual. Many projects were created and now operate on an altruistic basis, and their development depends directly on the commitment of their leaders and cohesion of their teams. However, financial sustainability of such projects remains a crucial factor in the survival of social initiatives.

Did the results of SI-DRIVE meet expectations of creators of the Project and European Commission?

An.Schr. In some way, yes, but they were some surprising things. One main surprising thing was that universities have a very low part in social innovation if you compare it with

technological innovation where the universities are the driver, the pusher of innovation. In social innovation they are underestimated. Then, I was very much surprised by the high involvement of companies, and it was a very important aspect as well. In the beginning we had theoretical things in mind but now we've got a clearer picture with empirical evidence that is much appreciated.

M.M. Yes, absolutely, this is an excellent project. An added value of SI-DRIVE is that it managed to cooperate with the other projects we are supporting and to the building of the community of social innovation. And this is something quite unusual, we don't see this happening spontaneously very often in our projects. So I think this project is excellent in many aspects not only scientifically but it has in many regards an added value. It was a pleasure for me to follow it and see the ability to create a community on social innovation.

Will the results of the project be in demand in governance or are they only scientific results?

An.Schr. That's a good question, it's one of the jobs we have to do. We have first efforts to implement social innovation also on the national agenda in Germany and in Lithuania. So, I think we come from the European perspective, we come from science but it has to be road out in practice and has to be road out in the member states at the national level as well, and therefore everyone need it who has access to stakeholders in different countries, for instance, you in Russia. And it's good to have cooperation, international cooperation. So we are invited also in China to push social innovation, to say "this is international perspective movement you can ignore but it's your own fault then".

M.M. In our projects we try to support interdisciplinarity from one side and also the involvement of the stakeholders, so our project

produced excellent scientific results, but not only. It is not sufficient to have the excellent science in, our projects should prove that they are able to engage with the stakeholders those that can change, and they are also able to disseminate and reach the actors that can implement the results at a different level.

Is it possible that Russian scientists will participate in similar programs in the future?

A. Shab. Russian cases in the SI-DRIVE Project have been studied by the research team of Vologda Research Center of RAS for several years. Although the research under the Project has come to an end, we have reached an agreement with our international partners that we will hold a seminar on social innovation in Russia at VolRC RAS next year and an international conference on social innovation in Vologda in 2019.

An.Schr. I want to say that cooperation with Russian partners is bringing in all perspective in it, because the system conditions are very different in your country. When I came to Russia, I was also impressed by the examples of social innovations in Vologda. I like this very much to engage the civil society to get flower parks city and to close digital gap of the population by using students and other people to help these skills development. That's a very good example for social innovation: taking up the social demand and trying to solve it by cooperating engagement of people, who are able to close this gap. You found the way to create new solutions for existing problems and to make them sustainable. We make good experiences in Germany in Dortmund from Dortmund municipality and public administration. They are only giving the ground, they arrange meetings, and they help the people to find other people to come together, they give them infrastructure, a room

to meet and to develop solutions, and then try to analyze it. From my point of view in Vologda you have a good potential to give a ground for new social innovations, for instance, like we do in Dortmund. In the future if I can integrate Russian partner in a project I will do it, because I recognized there is a different perspective on the subject, but it's helpful to deal with different perspective. That's what I like very much and I like to cooperate with Russian researchers and to see how we can learn from each other.

M.M. We strongly support the international cooperation. Russia and Russian researchers can take part in our programs, e.g. in Horizon-2020. Our financing programs are open to all countries with different roles, but we encourage cooperation with countries outside the member states and those associated. So it is always welcome, it is sometimes even strongly

encouraged depending on the specific subject. So I invite the Russian scientists to follow closely our program Horizon-2020 and also contribute to the design of the next one.

One of the central outputs of the SI-DRIVE project became the SI-DRIVE Policy Declaration «Social Innovation on the Rise – Challenges for a Future Innovation Policy». It sets a framework for unfolding the potential of social innovations within a new innovation paradigm and a new innovation policy. The Policy Declaration represents a variety of approaches and successful initiatives, illustrating, according to Prof. Dr. Jürgen Howaldt, the strength and potential of social innovation. They will help to cope with the new challenges that face humanity, and open new ways that allow people to a richer and more fulfilled human life.

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