

## Social Innovation in Spain

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The Spanish government has set innovation as one of its main lines of action for economic growth, and in this sense has developed an ambitious agenda called the State Innovation Strategy (E21) with a primary emphasis on technological innovation, business innovation financing and internationalization of innovation. From this, it is apparent that concept of innovation used in government programs is more technological and scientific than social.

Nevertheless, the limited presence of social innovation in the political debate has not limited the emergence of bottom-up initiatives from civil society. We could even say that it has facilitated this growth. A considerable number of pressing social issues, such as high unemployment, school failure, lifelong learning and economic, social and cultural integration of the immigrant population have been addressed by these initiatives. Important challenges that the country will face in the medium-term have also been addressed. These issues include the aging population and its impact on the health sector, housing or leisure, transportation in large cities, and access to energy sources to name a few. The difficulties of government in supporting a welfare state with wide social coverage, and an increasing demand from civil society for participation and co-creation of common solutions has shifted the balance of action. All this is making companies, entrepreneurs, academia and local and regional administrations aware of the need to address all these issues with innovative approaches, in addition to approaches generated from the techno-centric view of innovation.

Regionally, the Basque Country is an early adopter of the term “social innovation” with its incorporation into the Strategic Plan of regional government action. The most relevant initiatives here are Innobasque, the Basque Agency for Innovation which recently presented the Strategic Plan for Social Innovation for Euskadi, the commitment of the City of Bilbao in the implementation of the Centre for Social Innovation EUTOKIA and the ambitious DENOKINN Social Innovation Park in Bilbao.



In Catalonia, the gradual proliferation of social entrepreneurship is pushing the regional government to focus its initial efforts on the implementation of a program to promote social entrepreneurship. Besides, there are a significant number of Spanish Ashoka Fellows originating in Catalonia. Further, in recent years there have been various government and public-private partnership initiatives to empower civil society through knowledge and the use of new technologies, among them Citalab Cornellà or MediaLab Prado in Madrid.

In Spain, the networks of cooperative enterprises and the social economy have traditionally defined themselves via the principles and values that guide their work in the field of social innovation. Social innovation, defined this way, does not, however, tell the whole story. We have observed that large corporations have been spending part of their budgets for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in private initiatives for the study and promotion of social innovation. We should underline in this respect, the Bankinter Foundation for Innovation, Caja Madrid, Fundación Telefónica, Repsol Foundation, and the project *Momentum* of BBVA and ESADE. From the investment point of view, the sector is in a very early stage although it is timidly beginning to flourish. Next July, 2012, the first forum of social investors will be held in IESE.

In the academic world, the ESADE's Institute for Social Innovation focuses its efforts on research, outreach and training for social innovation. The IE Business School works on collaborations with leading private initiatives for social innovation. The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya has developed 4 specialized programs in areas related to social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Similarly the University of Barcelona, the Menéndez Pelayo University and IESE will soon be launching a specific program on innovation and social entrepreneurship.

It is, however, in civil society where we find the most lively collection of dynamic and diverse social innovation projects. In 2010 several new initiatives have emerged such as the Madrid hub, Upsocial which is a network of social entrepreneurs, and SIS—the community of innovators and social entrepreneurs in Barcelona. Also, there has been a recent increase in blogs about social

innovation/entrepreneurship (Cambio y Corto, Cerillas en la oscuridad, innovasocial.com, del yo al nosotros). Further, an extensive set of social entrepreneurs in different areas are working across sectors, with particular emphasis on the integration of groups with special difficulties, projects to improve and protect the environment, renewable energy, access to funding through P2P structures, and so on.

All these initiatives and projects are independent of the public initiative, and are part of a movement of new civic attitudes toward co-responsibility and the resolution of common problems. The opportunity lies on being aware of these changes, empowering these different groups and people, connecting them, and providing a fertile environment in which to develop and create a lively community of social innovation in the country.

This document has been created by SIS Social Innovation (sisbcn.org) as a collaboration between Josep Miró (josepmiro.com) and Patricia Saez (delyoalnosotros.com). It is a work in progress, if you have additional information that could be implemented, please contact SIS Social Innovation at [host@sisbcn.org](mailto:host@sisbcn.org)