

## Social Innovation in Spain: A brief update

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*Further to the contribution by our colleagues from SIS, in this text we present an update on recent developments related to social innovation in Spain. The text is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to highlight some recent developments regarding social innovation that have taken place in the country.*

Social innovation in Spain has not received the amount of attention it deserves when compared to other EU countries such as Italy, United Kingdom or Germany. Despite the existence of a national framework programme for innovation in general, the largest contribution in recent years has come from actors within the social and solidarity economy, higher education institutions, and some unique municipalities backing citizen-led initiatives or pioneering their own socially innovative strategies.

The main impulse has come from the European Commission mainly through the 2010 Social Innovation report from BEPA (updated in 2014 with the title “Social Innovation: A decade of changes”). Although Spain is mentioned only twice in the first version of the report (as host country of one of the Sociable Project pilot initiatives and in relation to the University of Mondragon) and once in the 2014 update these documents have been quite influential insofar as they provided some concrete examples and an analytical framework for social innovation. It is safe to say that since the reports were published some interesting initiatives have emerged in Spain, confirming the interest on the part of key stakeholders in it. The 2014 version of the report offers an interesting compendium of initiatives, actors and lessons learned. For the time being, we would like to highlight the ecosystem approach to social innovation favoured by the European Commission as well as the quite fragmented nature of the social innovation community, which a specific call in the Horizon 2020 program aims to address.

In the case of Spain, various elements of the ecosystem are in place so the potential for a thriving and diverse social innovation community does exist. However, two major barriers are the fact that many actors do not recognize themselves as part of such community and that social innovation as a concept has not permeated related spheres of activity (be it the traditional social economy or more recent ones such as the collaborative economy). In a country with a long social economy tradition including well-articulated sectoral federations and regional umbrella organizations (Spanish Enterprise Confederation of the Social Economy, CEPES) as well as a thriving solidarity economy movement (Spanish Network of Solidarity and Alternative Economy, REAS) a double-movement strategy is required: on the one hand, raising awareness and engaging newcomers to the field of social innovation while on the other, activating and

connecting extant players in the related fields of the social and solidarity economy.

In this context, it is remarkable that within the Spanish context of political and economic crisis, social innovation is also oriented to democratic transformation of the whole society. For instance, an extensive set of solidarity-based economy initiatives has been becoming an innovative driven force to make the local socio-economic development more sustainable, democratic and participative. They are frequently considered as an experimental laboratory that goes beyond the traditional social economy or a perspective of social innovation exclusively entrepreneurial. These grassroots initiatives are original in both content and form. The provision of new products, services, actions, and practices aiming to adequately meet human needs is only one side of the story. All of them cannot be dealt with separately from renewed organizational models based on democratic governance, empowerment and solidarity. Within the solidarity-based economy, social innovation has also to do with the articulation of new modes of social interaction based on voluntary and egalitarian cooperation in favour of the effective involvement of the people concerned. Since the crisis, we have been witnessed the increase of social innovation projects –specially linked to the new cooperative movement– under the umbrella of REAS.

Replication of initiatives coming from other countries has also fuelled social innovation in Spain. In terms of successful examples of social innovation replication, we would like to mention the case of SMartIB, a cooperative aiming to offer a stable and secure legal and administrative status to precarious workers in the arts, culture and creative sectors. About to celebrate its second year of activity it counts with 1,000 members across the country. By mutualizing risks and benefits, SMartIB is able to address concrete administrative needs from its members while creating a community in a sector characterized by fragmentation and instability. The larger SMartEU has presence in nine other European countries, which allows for mobility and exchange of creative professionals within its Europe-wide network. Other successful examples of social enterprise scale-up in Spain also exist and are being promoted by the recent event organized by Ashoka Spain where seven social entrepreneurs from around Europe “pitched” their ideas to local citizens and organizations willing to adapt it and launch it in Spain.

An important element that raises the profile of social innovation in Spain is constituted by EU-funded research projects that have paid attention to the development of social innovation in the country. The WILCO project, recently finished, was a comparative project that included two unique Spanish social innovation cases at the local welfare system level, one in Barcelona (“Acord Ciutadà per una Barcelona inclusiva”) and the second in Pamplona (“Casas Amigas”). WILCO illustrated the potential for collaboration between public authorities and civil society organizations through innovative programs that have paved the way for a more inclusive city and a more democratic and participative

public arena. These cases as well as detailed national and city reports include a contextualization and a discussion around social innovation at the local level and are available on the WILCO website.

The second relevant initiative relates to the DSI European ecosystem, described in the report coordinated by Nesta and commissioned by the European Commission, DG CONNECT. Not surprisingly, the UK leads this silent and citizen-led revolution with 500 projects mapped; however, Spain has reached the fourth place in the ranking with 155 projects. From the perspective of a country like Spain, the “hidden links” among the 1,000 digital social innovation organisations identified represent untapped potential for mutual learning, exchange, adaptability and mobility.

Some programs led by public administrations and educational institutions have also appeared. At the regional level, some interesting initiatives have been led by public administrations either single-handedly or in collaboration with the sector. Since 2010, the Framework Programme for Social Entrepreneurship @Emprensocial promoted in Catalonia has supported the viability of 90 projects. The main goal of this program is strengthen the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship and making it more visible in the region. During 2014, as part of this program, it has been updated a map of 92 organizations and institutions – public, private and mixed– that provide services in matters of social entrepreneurship in Catalonia. It has also been released an electronic publication of 'best practices of social entrepreneurship in Catalonia', to highlight interesting and noteworthy cases.

An influential pilot initiative developed in the Basque Country is RESINDEX, a Regional Social Innovation Index designed to measure social innovation. Inspired by the need identified in the above mentioned EU publication, “Social Innovation: A Decade of Changes”, the aim of this index is to elaborate a model (dimensions and indicators) to develop a social innovation regional index.

In Andalusia, the EU-funded project “Social innovation and cooperatives: the social impact of cooperatives and socially innovative experiences” recently published in the form of a report and several videos highlights the relevance of the cooperative form as a vehicle to crystallize and carry out social innovation projects. It also identifies some promising sectors for social innovation in the upcoming years such as the environment, health and finance. Such developments begin to be visible via some renewable energy source cooperatives (also known as REScoops) that have appeared recently in Spain.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some of them include SomEnergia nationally, GoiEner in the Basque Country, Zencer in Andalucía, EnerPlus in Cantabria, Econactiva in Castilla-La Mancha, Nosa Enerxia, Galicia, etc. For more information on REScoops in general and how to set them locally, visit the website of the European Federation of REScoops ([www.rescoop.eu](http://www.rescoop.eu)).

Some leading business schools have consolidated their mission of supporting for-profit and non-profit business sector to incorporate social innovation to its entrepreneurial dynamic.<sup>2</sup> From the CSR departments of large private for-profit corporations to NGOs and a wide variety of social entrepreneurship initiatives, social innovation is progressively seen as key to re-orientate business creating social value and a positive impact in the whole society. There is an increasing interest of incorporating a social dimension, and not only technological, into business spirit.

More recently, the national “CreActiva Network” launched in 2013 offers a forum for sharing and transferring knowledge and best practices around social innovation and social entrepreneurship. It gathers all kind of stakeholders (young citizens, civil society organizations, public administration representatives, citizens’ associations and movements, etc.) wishing to coordinate socially innovative initiatives as a strategy to foster youth employment, creativity and alternative socioeconomic actions promoting citizen participation.

Considering the impulse from Europe, the increasing opportunities to learn from and to share with other Member States, and the interest from citizens in shaping the way societies will look tomorrow it is likely that social innovation actors and initiatives continue to thrive in Spain in the coming years. It is our hope that the required support from public administrations at all levels mirrors the effort of citizens as a way of optimizing the energy put into the social innovation ecosystem both from the bottom-up and from top to down.

What challenges are being addressed by social innovation?

- Citizen participation
- Involvement of youth
- Local development strategies
- Urban and rural development
- Unemployment
- Services for cultural and creative professionals

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<sup>2</sup> See the ESADE’s Institute for Social Innovation, IE’s Social Innovation Lab and its program “Inside Social Innovation” and IESE’s Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation Platform.