

## **Social Innovation in Ireland**

By NorDub Co (the North Dublin Development Coalition)

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From an Irish standpoint, one definition from the literature on social innovation states that it is

“comprised of new strategies, ideas, concepts and organisations that meet social need. It aims to save or better lives, improve social ills and solve problems. Social Innovation is carried out by social entrepreneurs and social enterprises. “(Adding Value, Delivering Change, The Role of Social Enterprise in National Recovery 2010.)

According to a report of the Social Enterprise Task Force 2010, the social enterprise sector in Ireland has the potential to grow significantly to represent 5 % of GDP and to generate at least 65,000 jobs. It recognises that the sector is underdeveloped, currently at 3% GDP and growth is hindered by a number of historical factors; a lack of policy focus and direction, an over reliance on grant aid and assistance ,limited access to support structures similar to those available to the SME sector.

A number of sectors with the field of social innovation in Ireland are developing.

### 1. Academic Institutions encourage development–

Many 3rd level organisations in Ireland are providing space for social enterprises or education programmes. Dublin City University (DCU) and DCU Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship currently offer an (MSc Management in Innovation and Social Enterprise). University College Cork currently offers a Diploma and an MBS in Social Enterprise. In Jan 2009, Trinity College Dublin’s Centre for Non-profit Management launched the Initiative in Social Entrepreneurship, an intellectual centre for research, education and dialogue on social entrepreneurship in Ireland. Social enterprise education and research is growing all the time.

### 2. Organisations Supporting Social Innovation

A number of organisations have been working for several years in Ireland to create the right environment to realise the potential of the social innovation sector , for both local economic development and employment opportunities.

The North Dublin Development Coalition (NorDubCo) was setup in 1996 to promote the economic and social development of the North Dublin Region

The Social Enterprise & Entrepreneurship Task Force (SEETF) was setup in 2009 to promote social enterprise and social entrepreneurship as a viable part of the Irish economy and has helped to put social enterprise on the political agenda for the first time with the publication of its report Adding Value – Delivering Change : The Role of Social Enterprise in National Recovery (June2010).

Socialenterprise.ie (an online and social media platform and network), was established by SEETF to develop a network of social enterprises and create a forum for the social enterprise community in Ireland.

3. Awards and Funding. The grants and awards area is active, with the Arthur Guinness Fund and Social Entrepreneurs Ireland among others, providing substantial monetary social innovation awards to the an ever increasing number of social enterprises. Social Finance, (a means of providing support to social enterprises by way of repayable investment loans) is primarily delivered through organisations like Clan Credo & Ulster Community Investment Trust

The social innovation sector in Ireland is very much in its infancy. There has been much debate and disagreement as to what classifies a social enterprise. Ireland lags behind many other countries in this respect. There is a need for the sector to be mainstreamed into the greater economy. The Irish government needs to recognise that social enterprise can contribute to helping Ireland work its way out of the current economic crisis.