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## **Social Innovation in the Netherlands**

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### **The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands social innovation is a relatively new concept. It is on the rise roughly since the beginning of the new millennium and became more and more a hot topic since 2006, when the social economical council put it on the agenda. It is striking, taking the international discussion in perspective, that the concept in the Netherlands is generally limited to the context of work place innovation and labour productivity. Often, it is seen as a methodological approach of human resource management. The 'social' refers to the focus on human capital instead of technology.

The reason for this point of departure is probably that the dominant parties and authors at the forefront of the Dutch discussion on social innovation are to be found in the corner of the labour and economic institutions such as unions and employers organizations. In addition, social innovation is advocated by management scholars, and in its wake consultancy companies, as strategy for organizational development. Not surprisingly the concept of social innovation is often substituted by the concept of 'working smarter'. As a consequence the approach of a pivotal organization in the field, the Netherlands Center for Social Innovation (NCSI), is an exponent of this perspective and the agents involved.

Innovation *for* the social, however, is hardly an explicit organized movement or field in the Netherlands. 'Social' goals (beyond the organizational context) are not very dominant on the national innovation agenda. Nonetheless, plenty of initiatives, organizations and social entrepreneurs are active in the social field:

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### **Government**

There is, for example, an active citizen movement advocating and experimenting with open data. Moreover, from inside the government there are several initiatives to innovate the role and ways of working of the public institutions. An urgent question is how government can redefine its role in the context of the knowledge society. How can citizen's knowledge be strengthened and put to use?

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### **Media**

Experiments with citizen journalism are emerging here and there. Dominant organizations in the field are looking for new strategies to work with citizen journalism en new players pop up as they make use of the new media possibilities. It is clear that large, centrally organized media institutions no longer monopolize the news.

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## Health

Also, when it comes to health services, inspiring examples of social innovation exist. An organization such as Buurtzorg Nederland introduced a concept of care professionals working in independent networked teams. This has been an answer to the dominance of management bureaucracy and the lack of patient (and professional) focus.

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## Sustainability

Sustainability is in the Netherlands probably one of the most popular themes that can be related to social innovation. Several NGOs, government programs and businesses focus on innovation in this particular field. A variety of sub-themes exist, from energy to lifestyle. However, it is sometimes hard to separate real ambitious innovation from very standard subsidy programs (government) or superficial marketing strategies (businesses).

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## Education

The discussions on changes in the educational field in the Netherlands are historically heated and dynamic. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science recently initiated a large-scale national innovation program that supports bottom-up innovation. The program could be interpreted as a reaction to earlier criticism that changes in the field have been organized top-down for years. Efforts to innovate come from several movements and individual organizations in the field as well. Innovative culture and solutions in schools differ nonetheless a lot from school to school.

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## Future challenges

A key challenge for social innovation in the Netherlands is how this relatively active but dispersed movement can join forces, gain more influence and broaden the concept of social innovation towards innovation *for* the social. What is necessary is new knowledge on how social innovation can be stimulated and scaffolding organizations that can function as a bridge between different fields and the politics.

Some organizations that position themselves explicitly in the field of social innovation in the Netherlands are the Centre for Social Innovation, The Hub, Knowledgeland, Knowmads and research institute TNO.