



## Social Innovation Community

# Driving the agenda for change

The Social Innovation Community (SIC) project, coordinated by AEIDL, is coming to the end of its three-year duration with two key events in November that allowed the team to showcase its achievements and to discuss with policy-makers and stakeholders how best to advance the social innovation agenda.

*Jon Eldridge (AEIDL)*



*SIC Final Event, Seville, 12-13 November 2018.*

A delegation from the Social Innovation Community (SIC) project presented its [SI Declaration](#) at the high-profile Web Summit, which took place in Lisbon on 6 November, inaugurating the very first '[Social Innovation Village](#)', showcasing how technological innovation can be harnessed for social progress. Organised by Social Good Accelerator (SOGA) and supported by the European Commission, this pioneer display has helped grow the social innovation community. The Declaration, one of the defining results of the SIC project funded by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme, received a strong policy support from European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation Carlos Moedas in the presence of Portuguese and French national ministers. In his address, Commissioner Moedas said: *"Innovation today is about purpose, about doing something that can fulfil us as human beings. In the EU we are going to put*

*more money into social innovation, not because it is trendy, but because we believe that the future of innovation is about social innovation.”*

The project’s Declaration was the culmination of a public consultation to identify the key policy challenges to realising the potential of Europe’s social innovation community. The Social Innovation Declaration outlines the policy needs and interests of social innovators, social entrepreneurs, activists, civil society actors, cooperatives and researchers, among those comprising this diverse community. According to Márta Márczis, president of AEIDL, the Declaration recognises the *“urgent need to create the appropriate ‘space’ at a local, regional, national and European level, for social change-makers to be able not only to act, but to be present in policy dialogues and decisions,”*

The Social Innovation Community project carried out a series of online activities and discussions to assess the wide range of approaches and policy needs across Europe’s SI community. Working with the community, these efforts culminated in the shaping of a Declaration that sets out a clear policy agenda for supporting social innovation. The community’s input was vital, comprising contributions from more than 350 people from 19 Member States.



Commissioner Moedas at the Web Summit on 6 November in Lisbon.

## SI Declaration

The [Declaration](#) includes 10 specific policy recommendations that address the most important issues and recognising that social innovation must be a cross-cutting priority area for all EU policies and programmes ([European Social Fund Plus](#), Horizon Europe, etc.). The document outlines several proposals for creating strategic partnerships among EU, national and regional authorities to realise the power of communities and smaller organisations to drive change.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYyn6khryGk&t=105s>



Final event breakout session, "Citizen-led solutions to systemic challenges".

### Closing conference: next steps forward

The presentation of the Declaration was followed by the project's final event *'Beyond Imagination: a socially innovative Europe'*, held in Seville on 12-13 November. It brought together 38 speakers and more than 120 participants from 19 countries, including European Commission representatives from DG GROW, DG EMPL, DG RTD and the Joint Research Centre. This event was a chance to learn more about the results of the project. It started with 5 site visits to ground the event in Seville city, an opportunity to engage with local projects and to see social innovation in practice. One of them was organised by Aleksandra Kowalska, SIC social economy network facilitator, to the Tejares 11 cooperative ("[T11](#)"), which provides co-working spaces for freelancers from creative industries in Seville, as well as meeting, training, fully equipped workshop spaces for handcrafted and digital manufacturing and areas for wellness activities such as yoga. *"We share costs and resources by providing a common roof for a range of projects and activities in the name of creation, invention and recycling; but we also share knowledge, energy and hope,"* says Antonio J. Pérez, one of the co-operative members. The T11 initiative is a good illustration of the SI Declaration agenda in action, especially the recommendation to set up strategic initiatives that enable smaller socially focused organisations, enterprises and facilitators to gain access EU funding.

Designed as a future looking event, mainly framed around the SI Declaration, the event challenged participants to explore how we can all build on the success of the project, alternating between projects presentation, provocative debates and practical workshop sessions. On the first day, participants could experience the different dimensions of SIC results by joining one of the 4 breakout sessions dedicated to participatory learning, research in action, experimentation and policy influencing; on the second day, after a plenary debate involving DG RTD, [G5+](#), the European Anti-Poverty Network ([EAPN](#)) and the European Network of Cities & Regions for the

Social Economy ([REVES](#)) introducing and discussing the SI Declaration, 6 breakout sessions allowed participants to look at how to turn the Declaration into reality.

One of the SI Declaration five priorities is to make funding suitable for small-scale experimentation, by making it an overarching priority in the new EU budget, and concretely through enhanced instruments like Horizon Europe and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Timing is key, as a number of budgets and programmes are currently being discussed. For AEIDL ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform the event highlighted the significant contribution that ESF can make to driving social innovation. But if *“social innovation is to live up its potential within ESF+, it is crucial that managing authorities and intermediate bodies explore ways of building capacity”*. One of the ways that they can achieve this aim is by making Social Innovation education and training available to enhance the capacity of the ‘support environment and support the exchange of experience and knowledge around experimentation management methods.

SIC coordinators, Armelle Ledan and Patricia Martinez Sáez from AEIDL, conclude that despite the end of the H2020 project, the adventure will go on. The political will and backing from the EC should now be followed by national and regional authorities to unleash the power of communities and smaller organisations to drive change and translated into concrete actions.



Márta Márczis.

### **Reasons to be optimistic**

Márta Márczis, who represented AEIDL board at the Seville conference, says that the event made it “inspiringly visible that there is social innovation everywhere around Europe, crossing territorial, mental and thematic boundaries! After this event and seeing the success of the SIC project, it is impossible to be pessimistic; I am deeply impressed how many committed innovators are working to create a new European social dialogue and a renewed common language for all the different stakeholders. At stake is no less than the future of Europe, and all its places and

communities; its original spirit, democracy, equal opportunity, sustainability and its quality of the life.”

AEIDL celebrated its 30th anniversary this year by creating a new strategy that will transform it from an association of local developers into a knowledge hub. Ms Márczis says that this new strategy will be applied in cooperation with relevant European networks, including the social innovation community. *“I am convinced that the Social Innovation Community is a long-term initiative, which must be empowered to go beyond its project duration and become an important permanent European change-maker.”*

**More information:** <https://www.siceurope.eu/>

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