

Project consortium

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The ITSSOIN Project:
Investigating the Impact
of the Third Sector as
Social Innovation

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ITSSOIN.eu
Social Innovation & Civic Engagement

About ITSSOIN

The **ITSSOIN** project (Impact of the **Third Sector as SOcial INnovation**) investigates the impact of the Third Sector and of civic engagement on society beyond their economic benefits or the natural virtue of caring for others.

Project purpose

Since it is difficult to establish causality and to assess social properties when researching into this impact, especially at the societal level, ITSSOIN narrows the investigation on the Third Sector impact down to one priority aspect: social innovation – understood as the Third Sector organizations' capacity to generate novel ideas as well as new ways and methods of acting or of implementing objectives, and of addressing diverse public and social problems.

Examples of social innovations are: social impact bonds as a new mode of governance and financing, new models of elderly care such as multigenerational homes, or civic renewable energy projects that significantly influence energy provision.

Main hypothesis

The project's main hypothesis is that in comparison to the commercial sector and the state, the Third Sector is best placed to produce social innovation, especially through stimulating civic involvement and participation.

Explanation

By investigating the nexus between the Third Sector and social innovation, ITSSOIN helps developing our understanding of why and how this sector is central to functioning, cohesive and viable societies. The project enhances the sector's conception by extending and building on previous research traditions that focused on the Third Sector's different roles such as service provider, minority advocate, guardian of values, driving force of economy, or sphere of social interaction.

Project structure



The ITSSOIN project explores the influence of non-profit organizations' and civic engagement structural characteristics on social innovations by means of empirical portraits of the Third Sector in nine countries, thereby focusing on organizations (properties and practices) and context conditions (discourses and policy frameworks).

Developing a framework for social innovations

A standardized framework for a comparative data collection and for an analysis of illustrative cases (including for instance organizations, networks, informal groups) of social innovation and civic engagement will be developed. The aim is to evaluate the vast variety of the existing social innovations and of civic engagement at different levels within this specific third sector fields.

The fields which will be investigated include culture, arts, social services, health care, environmental sustainability, consumer protection, work integration, and community development.

Case-based work

Hypotheses developed at the very beginning of the project will be tested empirically. The advantages of the case-study approach are: a clear definition of the analyzed object, the use of a variety of information sources, and the researchers' closeness to their object of analysis.

Project outputs

By synthesizing the conceptual and empirical investigation findings, the larger impact potential of the Third Sector will be assessed. The main objective will be to identify policy implications in terms of incubation strategies, cluster building, regional development and the encouragement of civic engagement in the wake of fostering social innovativeness on the level of municipalities and regions.

The project's objective is to provide answers to questions such as:

- Which factors enable Third Sector organizations to be socially innovative?
- Which contribution does the sector provide in terms of social innovation?
- Which impact does the Third Sector have on socio-economic development in the EU?
- How can policy frameworks contribute to foster social innovation ecosystems within the Third Sector?
- Which particular role does civic engagement thereby play?

