



# Social Innovation

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## *A Briefing Paper*

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# Social Innovation

*“Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance individuals’ capacity to act”*

*(EU Commission, Guide to Social Innovation, 2013).*

## Introduction

This paper looks at the ways in which the education and research missions of the University of Exeter can help social innovation to flourish in Cornwall. It does so in the context of a new Government, with new priorities, and against the background of continuing economic, social, and environmental challenges for the Duchy. Social innovation has recently grown in political importance and has formed a central strand in the Europe 2020 strategy as well as North American social strategies and policy initiatives to “deliver the kind of inclusive and sustainable social market economy we all want to live in” (BEPA, 2010a: 16). Central to the concept of social innovation is the belief that a participatory citizenry can be mobilized to identify and solve social problems. Hence social innovation is often advocated as a panacea for new forms of social risk during times of austerity and uncertainty. The foundation for the current political turn towards social innovation in the UK was set out by David Cameron in June 2008 in a speech on the ‘power of social innovation’ (since reframed as ‘social investment’) in which he reflected upon how social change cannot be achieved by governments alone. Cameron talked of fostering a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy and social action under the banner of the Big Society, which echoed New Labour’s language on the societal benefits of volunteering as ‘acts of community, that touch people’s lives’. The new paradigm of ‘social co-operation’ in which individuals are connected into local and national networks, is a political philosophy predicated on empowering individuals to co-produce social change.

The University of Exeter currently contributes to social innovation in the following ways:

- through **research** on the voluntary sector and community sector and social enterprise;
- through **teaching** in a variety of modules across the colleges on the Cornwall campuses;
- through **student-led initiatives** such as students-as-change-agents and FXU’s promotion of volunteering.

Social innovation is a key strategic and policy interest for the European Union. Across its policy frameworks, social innovation is repeatedly cited as a means to meet social needs within the context of resource scarcity. However, the term social innovation is often used interchangeably to refer to a very broad range of activities, processes and outcomes.

Social innovation is considered relevant to environmental, social, and economic challenges. This makes it the ideal object of interdisciplinary research at the Cornwall campus. It is also of enormous importance to current and potential partners in local and regional government, the NHS, the business community, and the environment sector, and the third sector. The potential for achieving significant impact from research with these project partners should not be underestimated.

## Definitions and Clarifications

The term social innovation suffers from a degree of ambiguity, and has been used in a variety of contexts to refer to a multiplicity of activities, features, processes and outcomes (Edmiston, 2015). Social innovation is sometimes used synonymously with social enterprise or social inclusion, but it is different to both of these in fundamental ways. Perhaps the easiest way to conceptualise the relationship between social innovation and social enterprise is by thinking of social innovation as an *approach* to problem solving, whilst social enterprise provides one of the *vehicles* through which social innovation can be realized. Social inclusion is the outcome of successful social innovation, however it is achieved. Social innovation focuses attention on the ideas and solutions that create social value — as well as the processes through which they are generated – not just on individuals and organizations. The Stanford Graduate School of Business defines social innovation as “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions. The value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals” (<https://goo.gl/MtJA4f>). As an approach to problem solving, social innovation invites cross-sector working, the open exchange of ideas and values, and the blurring or shifting of traditional roles and relationships. In so doing, social innovation as an approach resists silo-working, reliance on ‘business as usual’, and all varieties of path dependency. It is seen as relevant to tackling economic, social, and environmental problems (World Economic Forum Policy Guide, 2013).

## The Challenge

A common explanation for the rising popularity of and interest in social innovation is the financial crisis of 2007-08. Constraints on public expenditure have challenged the state's capacity to respond to and address social problems. Within this context, social innovation has regularly been cited as a means ‘to do and achieve more with less’ (TEPSIE, 2014). However, it would be misguided to assume that the conditions for social innovation were simply created by a recent recession. Twenty-five years ago, Jennifer Wolch observed how processes of socio-spatial restructuring such as the increased privatisation of public services and wider shifts in central government spending was beginning to transform the third sector and give rise to the emergence of a ‘shadow state’ (Wolch, 1990). Although researchers of the third sector and voluntarism have now moved beyond and ‘out of the shadows’ towards more relational theorisations of voluntarism, this metaphor of the ‘shadow state’ still provides a provocative and useful starting point in conceptualising relations between the state and civil society. The importance of the shadow state, and in particular public service

commissioning, should not be underestimated. A study by Oxford Economics (2012) estimates that it employs 1.2 million people, and creates or supports a further 2.3 million jobs. According to the research, the current outsourced market for public services has an annual turnover of £82bn, representing around 24 per cent spend on public services in the UK.

Investing in social innovation is not only important in terms of producing social resilience, but is going to define – politically and financially – new forms of social contracts across a range of services in the future. Now more than ever, social innovations being positioned as a panacea for austere times. The political will to develop social innovation is a key feature of the Europe 2020 strategy is to facilitate and embed social innovation across [Europe](#) to ‘deliver the kind of inclusive and sustainable social market economy we all want to live in’ (BEPA, 2010a: 16) and achieve the goal of social cohesion.

Social Innovation comprises new processes for better outcomes through the development of novel forms of organisation and interactions to respond to social issues. For example, through the development of a national ‘culture of volunteering’, individuals, charities and third sector agencies are being explicitly encouraged to participate in, and find local solutions to healthcare, education, policing and other spaces of social care. Social innovation therefore aims at addressing:

1. Social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society.
2. Societal challenges in which the boundary between ‘social’ and ‘economic’ blurs, and which are directed towards society as a whole.
3. The need to reform society in the direction of a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are sources and outcomes of well-being (BEPA 2010).

### **The Role of the University in Supporting Social Innovation in Cornwall**

The EU recognizes that higher education and its links with research and innovation plays a crucial role in individual and societal development. The HE sector has the capacity to provide highly skilled human capital and articulate citizens that Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth, and prosperity. As such HE institutions are crucial partners in delivering the European Union's 2020 strategy to drive forward social investment and maintain growth. However, as David Cameron stated in June 2013, “it is not enough just to incentivise social investments. We need a robust way of measuring their value and in doing so connecting

businesses that deliver social and environmental value with investors seeking both a social and a financial return". This provocation presents both a significant challenge and opportunity for Cornwall. Producing the conditions in which social innovation can stimulate the economy, wellbeing and the environment will require a change in thinking and practice across the public, private and third sectors away from 'silo-working' to one of genuine co-production of knowledges and services. The University of Exeter is well positioned to be a world leader in this area by advancing not only academic conceptualisations of social innovation but also further developing existing relationships with practitioners and service providers in the sector. Although there are currently only a small number of staff at the Cornwall Campus working on themes directly related to social innovation, their work could be expanded through drawing together staff from across all University campuses who are working in related fields, alongside drawing together agencies and service providers in the sector. The theme of social innovation could provide a focus for a centre of excellence and a direction of travel for future pioneering and impactful research on the Cornwall campus. Creating a Centre for Social Innovation at the Cornwall campus would help to fulfil several strategic priorities for the University, Cornwall Council, and other regional partners. First, it would help to fulfil the long term objectives of Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) through which Cornwall Council and its partners in the VCSE sector are working to improve how services are commissioned, managed and delivered. The TCA seeks in part to establish a new VCSE sector model which will help the sector to adapt, thrive and grow. A strong VCSE sector is one of the mechanisms through which social innovation can be enabled. A Centre for Social Innovation would also help to fulfil aspects of the University's Cornwall Strategy, specifically the aims to improve regional impact and internationalisation. It is in the nature of social innovation that it is emergent at a local scale. Enabling Cornwall to realise the potential of social innovation will enhance significantly the University's regional impact. Meanwhile, social innovation is embedded in Europe 2020 and has already been the object of a number of measures and actions, including *inter alia* the establishment of a Social Innovation Europe virtual hub (SIE) for social entrepreneurs, policymakers and the third sector; a European Public Sector Innovation Scoreboard to measure but also champion the extent of innovation in the design and delivery of public services within member states; and key funding instruments such as the European Social Fund, the Progress Programme (2007-13) and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (2014-20). The opportunities for building the University's international profile is not limited to Europe, however. Social innovation is part of the approach to contemporary problems in a range of developed economies from [America](#) to [Australia](#).

The next round of EU structural and investment funds, from 2014 to 2020, provides a unique opportunity to build research and innovation partnerships for the benefit of Cornwall's economy and society. These funds will enable the university to build critical mass in the specialist area of social innovation, and to maximise research impact by integrating elements of our research with current strategic and policy developments in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. A Centre for Social Innovation would focus our existing strengths, build research collaborations, maximise the benefit of our existing research partnerships, and extend the range and number of these partnerships in Cornwall and the South West, with clear implications for impact on national policy and greater international research collaborations. The Centre would bring together and enhance existing capacity in colleges at the Cornwall campus and deliver innovations in teaching and research:

*CLES: Centre for Geography, Environment and Society* – Michael Leyshon and Catherine Leyshon have more than five years experience working on aspects of social innovation in the VCSE with Volunteer Cornwall. This work was the focus of the first KTP in the UK with a social outcome. Their research explores the spatialities of social innovation in relation to voluntary action and spaces of care. Their work focuses on community-led and place-based approaches to understanding social and environmental problems and proposing solutions through co-producing knowledges with individuals and agencies. One area where Leyshon and Leyshon have made a significant impact developing and deploying social innovation is in their research on the [Living Well initiative in Cornwall](#). Living Well is a philosophy of care; an approach which offers a new way for the statutory and voluntary sector to support, commission, contract and deliver services. Rather than creating new layers of governance the approach focuses on supporting existing groups, connecting people, and encouraging local leadership. Fundamental to Living Well's success is enabling active and self-mobilised communities of volunteers. The social care sector has witnessed the increased use of partnerships between private, voluntary and community organisations in delivering programmes. Leyshon and Leyshon's current research focuses on the shift in responsibility from state provision to more collective responses to social care. This transition can be conceptualised as a neoliberal re-alignment of personal time, resources and spaces that calls for a reconfiguration of social care that utilises both paid and unpaid (voluntary) labour to 'sustain' activities. The emphasis on the need for volunteers is partly a response to the widely publicised crisis in the care system, and indicative of the new rationalities and spatialities that are emerging in the delivery of health and social care. Leyshon and Leyshon's research is co-produced alongside a range of statutory and charitable agencies.



They are helping to identify and shape new geographies of care and raising important questions about the state *vis a vis* the individual, the challenges of caring for an aging population, the costs of care, the co-production of care, and the role of volunteers in providing some aspects of social care formerly supplied by the state or the NHS. Their research is setting the agenda in the social geography of elderly care delivered through (non)statutory and voluntary services, activities and action.

Leyshon and Leyshon's social innovation research findings are embedded in their teaching, primarily in two 15 credit modules Geo2445 Rural Social Issues and Geo3437B Climate Change and Society. Other Colleges at Penryn also offer courses on social innovation include:

*The Business School* – in teaching, social innovation is taught in Business Practice and Analysis (BEP1020). Students are required to accumulate between 60-80 hours of work experience in/with/for a third sector organisation. Business School undergraduates also work with 3DKernow and the Falmouth Business Improvement District (BID).

*CSSIS: Politics* – POC 2062/3062 involves the students doing a consultancy work placement in the community, researching specific questions that the community have identified. In POC2021: Research Inquiry, community organisations benefit from students writing a 4000 word report. Organisations involved with this module of late include: Hands Up Penryn; 38 Degrees; Penryn Town Council; Cornwall Council; FXU; Falmouth and Truro Labour Party; Fashion Revolution; Shelter Box

### **Discussions Points**

1. How is social innovation working in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly at present, and what more is needed?
2. Where does this activity overlap with the University mission and how best should the University support positive change through social innovation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and beyond?
3. How can we measure social innovation?
4. How do we draw on the expertise across the Duchy to help shape our approach?

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