

# SOCIAL INNOVATION

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES



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*Routledge Studies in Social Enterprise & Social Innovation*

# **SOCIAL INNOVATION**

## **COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

Edited by  
Helmut K. Anheier, Gorgi Krlev, and  
Georg Mildemberger



## Social Innovation

*Social Innovation: Comparative Perspectives* investigates socioeconomic impact. Since it is hard to establish causality and to measure social properties when investigating impact, especially at the level of society, the book narrows down impact to one priority aspect: social innovation—understood as organisations’ capacity to generate novel ideas, ways and means of doing things, and of addressing public and social problems of many kinds.

This volume’s primary assertion is that the third sector, specifically through stimulating civic involvement, is best placed to produce social innovation, outperforming business firms and state agencies in this regard. By investigating actor contributions to social innovation across seven fields of activity, *Social Innovation: Comparative Perspectives* develops our understanding of why and how the third sector is central to functioning, cohesive and viable societies.

This volume is based on contributions of the project “ITSSOIN—Impact of the Third Sector as Social Innovation” funded by the European Commission under the 7th framework programme. It will be of insight across disciplines, in particular to the growing social innovation community, innovation researchers more generally and to non-profit scholars. The practical relevance of the book will be of interest to European and national policy makers and practitioners across different sectors.

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## **Routledge Studies in Social Enterprise & Social Innovation**

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A Social Enterprise seeks to achieve social, cultural, community, economic or environmental outcomes whilst remaining a revenue generating business. A Social Innovation is said to be a new idea or initiative to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than the current process and which sees the society it is operating in receive the primary value created rather than a private organization or firm.

Routledge Studies in Social Enterprise & Social Innovation looks to examine these increasingly important academic research themes as a central concept for social theories and policies. It looks to examine and explore the activities of social participation among civil society organisations, SMEs, governments and research institutions, publishing the breakthrough books of the new frontiers of the field as well as the state-of-the-nation-defining books that help advance the field.

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## Preface

The third or non-profit sector has received growing policy recognition as well as academic attention in recent years. Researchers have analysed non-profit organisations from different angles, usually emphasising specific roles the sector is hypothesised to perform (Anheier, 2014). The most prominent among them are: (1) service providing role: in the wake of government failure non-profits are seen as either complement or substitute for public service systems (Ben-Ner & van Hoomissen, 1991; Hansmann, 1980, 2006; Weisbrod, 1975, 1998; Young & Steinberg, 1995); and (2) role as advocates and value guardians: research has also focussed on the extent to which non-profits engage in advocacy and either protect or advance the position and welfare of those who would otherwise find little or no attention and “give voice” to those otherwise unheard. This function was found to vary by the civic culture and civic-mindedness of local populations (Almond & Verba, 1963; Halman & Nevitte, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993).

In addition to the identification of the sector’s functions, it has been mapped both conceptually and empirically, most notably in the The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector project (Anheier & Salamon, 1997) and the United Nation’s Handbook on “Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts”(United Nations Statistical Division, 2003). While these efforts have contributed to a better understanding of the sector in its economic and social foundations, a major gap remains, which the book will address: the sector’s impact and the longer-term outcomes achieved or involved. Evidence on impact is rare because of methodological difficulties to evaluate non-profit programmes (i.e., the attribution problem in matching cause and effect in complex social settings) and a long-standing emphasis on simple cost and revenue accounting that stressed input measures (thus efficiency) rather than effectiveness or contributions to policy or programme outcomes (Drummond, Stoddart, Torrance, & George, 1998; Kendall & Knapp, 2000; McCrone & Knapp, 2007). In the past many efforts to gauge the impact of the sector as a whole, in particular fields, or of single organisations have led to rather inconclusive results, focussing on the same areas of measurement contained in the statistical accounts referred to previously,

such as employment, contributions to the economic value added, etc. (see, e.g., Flynn & Hodgkinson, 2001).

This points to a certain degree of intractability: the existence of non-profits is linked to conditions where it is easier to monitor cost behaviour and distributional aspects than actual performance. We take non-profit status as an indicator of trustworthiness (Hansmann, 1980) because measured and accounted performance is difficult to establish, if not nearly absent. Yet the inconclusive record of previous research on empirical non-profit performance does not suggest the questions about impact are impossible to answer or irrelevant. We suggest to the contrary that research has emphasised conventional, steady-state or standard performance compared to other forms of performance which are both conceptually as well as policy relevant and more feasible: one such aspect is social innovation, understood as the capacity of organisations to generate novel ideas, ways and means of doing things, and of addressing public and social problems of many kinds (Crepaldi, Rosa, & Pesce, 2012; The Young Foundation, 2012). The basic claim of the book is that non-profits are “better” at social innovations than governments and markets due to a variety of organisational properties. Thus, “Impact of the Third Sector as Social Innovation” (ITSSOIN) is the name of the project this book is based on.

The book examines the claim as follows. It draws on two strands of research: (1) performance measurement in non-profit organisations (Davies & Knapp, 1994; Kaplan, 2001; Kendall & Knapp, 2000; Rosenbaum et al., 2011); and (2) technological innovation theories (Abernathy & Clark, 1985, pp. 22–23; Archibugi & Iammarino, 2002; Henderson & Clark, 1990) and the emergent theory on social innovation (Nicholls & Murdock, 2012; Zapf, 1989). These two anchors are used to derive a focus on the stimulation of social innovation by non-profit organisations as a measure of their ultimate performance, that is their social impact. In the empirical testing of this claim, the book relies on cross-national and multi-field case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989) of recognised social innovation streams (SI streams) across Europe. ‘SI stream’ refers to new approaches, principles of action, governance forms or modes of organisation that have fundamentally affected a field of activity, and already for a certain period of time (at least for five years back from 2015, when the empirical work was initiated) and across national borders, so that they are not geographically restricted. The transformative effects of the SI streams, which have been identified by means of expert consultation, range from gradual to ‘disruptive’ (Christensen, 2000).

The innovation streams are analysed by means of a retrospective ‘process tracing’ (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005) to find out which (types) of organisations have contributed to their emergence and how they have done so. The research approach is open to spotting innovation actors from the third sector as well as the state and the market. The actors involved in promoting these innovations are studied in the context of the ‘strategic action fields’ (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) they inhabit, with a view to their

power positions, functions and mission. Results are synthesised across fields of activity with the aim of distilling which (types of) actors have played a role in making the social innovation happen, and which traits have enabled them to act in that role. This yields a set of conditions which are likely causal for the emergence of social innovations.

The empirical research of the book covers nine European countries: the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. And it relates to seven fields of activity: Arts & Culture, Social Services, Health Care, Environmental Sustainability, Consumer Protection, Work Integration, and Community Development. One social innovation stream per field is compared across three to four countries. The field-country combinations have been chosen by (1) the rationale of representing European diversity, (2) the relevance of the respective SI stream and the field as a whole within the respective countries and (3) variations in national institutional context conditions.

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## Chapter Summaries

Part I (Chapters 1–3) provides the theoretical conception of the book and develops its main claim and hypothesis. It lays out the methods by which the claim and hypothesis are tested.

Chapter 1 reviews recent developments in assessing third sector impact and the challenges they face. As a result of the latter, it proposes a focus on social innovation as one of the main impacts, in particular when regarding the sector as a whole. It discusses how the traditional research on technological innovation relates to the emergent interest in social innovation and how the third sector is connected to it.

Chapter 2 builds on the previous chapter and develops a systems based approach to the study of social innovation. It outlines an open research approach that aims to investigate social innovation neutral to sector affiliation, departing from the innovation as the unit of analysis to then identify involved actors and their properties. Field theory is introduced as the analytic lens to narrow down fields of activity and to study actor constellations and interplay.

Chapter 3 outlines the method used in the empirical work to test the main claim that social innovation is one of the key impacts of third sector organisations: process tracing. Process tracing is a method from political science, which is used to analyse policy making, be it political programmes and agendas, or legislation. In retrospect investigators try to follow a process backwards to uncover milestones and pivotal actors in its development. This very same approach is applied to several SI streams, one in each of seven fields of activity the book will analyse. Each SI stream is studied across three to four European countries. It also provides the rationale for choosing specific fields of activity and field-country combinations. By the cross-national setup the book helps condense (1) the actors most strongly promoting the respective social innovation stream and (2) the traits that have enabled them (or not) to do so. This effort is performed in the empirical Chapters 4–10 in Part II.

Part II (Chapters 4–10) contains the empirical evidence of the book. Each chapter refers to one specific field of activity and traces an SI stream within

the respective field and across three to four countries. All chapters are connected by the common structure and methodology, outlined in Chapter 3, but all of them are thematically distinct.

Chapter 4 is located in the field of Arts & Culture and examines the SI stream ‘urban spatial regeneration for higher social cohesion by means of cultural initiatives.’ The stream is investigated across Italy, Spain, France and the Netherlands.

Chapter 5 is located in the field of Social Services and examines the SI stream ‘collaborative efforts in governing social service provision for vulnerable segments of the population.’ This includes processes of citizen empowerment. The stream is investigated across Spain, Italy, Sweden and the UK.

Chapter 6 is located in the field of Health Care, more specifically in that of mental health care, and examines the SI stream of ‘the recovery approach’ as a manifestation of the social model of disability. The stream is investigated across the UK, the Czech Republic, Denmark and France.

Chapter 7 is located in the field of Environmental Sustainability and examines the SI stream ‘sharing public spaces for the promotion of bicycle use.’ The stream is investigated across Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy and Germany. The scope of the research is geographically restricted to one major city in the countries to enable a greater depth in the investigation. The selected cities are Copenhagen, Brno, Milan and Frankfurt.

Chapter 8 is located in the field of Consumer Protection in finance, more specifically alternative financial services outside the traditional banking system, and examines the SI stream of ‘consumer protection by means of online financial education.’ The stream is investigated across the Czech Republic, Spain and Denmark.

Chapter 9 is located in the field of Work Integration and examines the SI stream of ‘cross-sector partnerships for (re)integrating vulnerable citizen groups into the labour market.’ The stream is investigated across France, Germany, Spain and the Czech Republic.

Chapter 10 is located in the field of Community Development with an explicit link to refugees and examines the SI stream of ‘self-organisation as a means for community integration.’ The stream is investigated across the Netherlands, Italy, the UK and the Czech Republic.

Part III (Chapters 11–12) provides a synthesis of insights derived across Chapters 4–10 and gives conclusions about the overall learnings achieved through the book on the role third sector organisations play for social innovation relative to others and the enabling organisational properties necessary for driving social innovation. The synthesis itself is performed in Chapter 11, while Chapter 12 illustrates how the book has advanced our knowledge with regard to third sector impact, (social) innovation theory and organisational capabilities for the promotion of social innovation. It summarises what researchers, practitioners and policy makers can learn from it and how the issues examined can be explored in future research.



**Part I**

## **The Question**

Who Are the Innovators and How to  
Find Them? (Conceptual Foundations)



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# 1 Introduction

## Social Innovation—What Is It and Who Makes It?

*Gorgi Krlev, Helmut K. Anheier, and Georg Mildenberger<sup>1</sup>*

### Impact of the Third Sector as Social Innovation

The third sector or non-profit sector<sup>2</sup> has increasingly gained, in recent years, policy recognition and attracted academic attention. Researchers have analysed non-profit organisations from different perspectives, usually emphasising specific roles this set of institutions is assumed to perform (Anheier, 2014). The most prominent among them are:

1. **Service-providing role:** In the wake of government failure, non-profit organisations are seen as complementary or substitutional elements in the public service systems. As governments with limited resources seek to serve the average voter under conditions of demand heterogeneity for public and quasi-public goods and services, non-profit organisations meet a broad range of minority preferences (Ben-Ner & van Hoomissen, 1991; Weisbrod, 1975, 1998). In response to market failures, non-profits signal trustworthiness in terms of service delivery under conditions of information asymmetries that make profiteering likely and monitoring expensive (Hansmann, 1980, 2006; Young & Steinberg, 1995).  
Comparative research has shown that tendencies towards government and market failure depend on the type of welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the variant of capitalism involved (Amable, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Schneider & Paunescu, 2012), and correspond to different non-profit regimes (Anheier, 2014; Anheier & Salamon, 1997; Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Such patterns and tendencies also vary over time, especially in terms of state capacity in respect of an effective regulation (Anheier, 2014; Hansmann, 1996; Hertie School of Governance, 2013).
2. **Advocates and value guardians:** Apart from investigating the non-profit organisations' service-providing role, research has focussed on the issue of to what extent non-profits engage in advocacy activities to protect or advance the position in society and welfare of people needing help, e.g., disabled or poor persons or members of neglected communities. Non-profit organisations are hypothesised to be an important element

of social self-organisation, to ‘give voice’ to those otherwise unheard, and to support those who would otherwise find little or no attention.

The research on the topic has explored cross-national differences as to the advocacy and the values-related role of the non-profit sector, and observed that—just as the service-providing role mentioned previously—they not only vary by the kind of welfare regime but also by the kind of democratic and administrative system and, more generally, the civic culture and civic-mindedness of local populations (see, e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Halman & Nevitte, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993).

By implication, third sector service provision and advocacy are often linked in ways that go beyond combining the economic with the social, as it has traditionally been the case in social economy organisations such as cooperatives, mutual and employee-owned enterprises (Borzaga & Spear, 2004; Pestoff, 2012). By contrast, non-profits are co-producers and engage in product bundling as they combine service provision and values (Anheier, 2014; James, 1989), which are social values, of course, but frequently also religious, political or humanitarian values in a profound sense. They are “likely to seek out and include the target population for purposes of value formation, and long-term commitment and loyalty” (Anheier, 2005, p. 213). Thus, non-profits deliver services with a ‘plus’ (Salamon, Hems, & Chinnock, 2000, p. 23).

In addition to the identification of the sector’s functions it has been mapped, both conceptually and empirically: The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector project (CNP) has made a seminal contribution to mapping the sector in an international perspective with a special emphasis on its scale, scope, structure and financing (Salamon & Anheier, 1999). This effort has been followed up by the United Nations’ *Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*, developed by Anheier, Tice and Salamon with the UN Statistics Division, which resulted in a satellite account on non-profit organisations (SNA) that has since then been adopted by a growing number of countries.

While all these efforts have contributed to a better understanding of the sector in its economic and social foundations, a major gap remains: the sector’s impact and the longer-term outcomes achieved or involved. This book has evolved against the background of a call for proposals issued by the European Commission targeting these very results of third sector activity.

In this book, we seek to explore this issue and propose a novel way to approach the capturing of the third sector’s impact. We start with reviewing the tradition of performance measurement in relation to the third sector, specifically from an economic and management perspective. Performance in the wider sense (including, for instance, the reliability or quality of service provision) can thereby be regarded as a proxy for impact. In the more narrow sense (effectuated targeted change as well as externalities for a range

of beneficiaries), it can be seen as a synonym for impact. Social impact is denoted in the standard way of the 'logic model' of programme evaluation (Weiss, 1998) as the change caused within a 'social system' (outcomes that result from outputs delivered by an intervention) minus the change that would have happened anyway ('deadweight') (Clark, Rosenzweig, Long, & Olsen, 2004; see also Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014 or Nicholls, 2009 for the underlying connections).

In the second step we will outline the challenges that evolve in assessment of performance. Against these methodological and conceptual challenges and despite the major advances that have been made in promoting performance measures in the third sector, we will propose another, more timely, policy relevant, and feasible way of assessing third sector impact: a focus on social innovations and the question as to how the third sector is likely to play a key role in their emergence, nurturing and spreading.

To establish this link, it will be necessary to review a variety of traditions that exist in innovation research and to posit how social innovations take a particular position therein, specifically in view of today's societies' challenges. Subsequently, we will establish a tight link to the third sector and provide some key rationales for its socially innovative capacity giving the project which this book is based on its name: Impact of the Third Sector as Social Innovation (ITSSOIN). While an explicit definition of social innovation will follow, we can forestall that social innovations come in different outfits and there are recent as well as historical examples of what they are. Contemporary examples range from new employment models built on a *special* ability image of *disability*, to (decentralised) renewable energy production. Historical examples comprise social housing, public fresh water supply, or mutual and co-operative movements.

In the chapters following the introduction we will systematically gauge the socially innovative capacity of the third sector by introducing a research design on social innovation that examines the actors involved from a neutral position, that is targets non-profits, public agencies and firms alike to study their relative contributions.

### **Performance, Impact and the Third Sector**

The growing role of performance measurement and impact assessments in the third sector is linked to both, its enhanced position in taking on state-funded service provision and its critical role as an advocate for many causes. The third sector is arguably likely to be able to achieve social welfare benefit in certain areas but also less likely to be able (and sometimes willing) to demonstrate it. In a context of rapidly escalating health and social care demands alongside public expenditure restraints, performance measurement becomes ever more important. There is an extensive literature in economics concerned with valuing the quality of life, the fulfilment of needs and related matters. Economics has contributed to the theoretical and policy

debate about the different alternatives for measuring social welfare and also to the discussion of strategies for enhancing social wellbeing. Economists have been providing foundations for normative theorising and developing different methodologies or approaches to meet the challenges of analysis in a complex and continuously changing environment.

To get a better understanding of welfare in the context of long-term care needs and services, Davies and Knapp (1981) pioneered a simple organising framework known as 'The Production of Welfare Framework' which "seeks to make explicit the interrelationships between key elements [in the system], and then exploits the parallels with, for example, parts of the economics literature to enter hypotheses, structure empirical investigations and interpret findings" (Davies & Knapp, 1994, p. 264). The framework provides a useful conceptual foundation for performance evaluation which stems from economics but is also influenced by other disciplines (Davies & Knapp, 1981; Knapp, 1984). The framework encourages various theoretical concepts, approaches, objectives and stakeholders' goals. Its main features rely on the description of elements and relations under an economic approach; the relevance of the purposes and processes within a specific context, and finally on its explanatory and predictive capacity (Kendall & Knapp, 2000). The framework has found to be useful in helping identify relevant evaluative criteria based on economy, effectiveness, efficiency and equity.

Economy refers to cost minimisation pursued to lever action capacity in view of scarce resources. Effectiveness refers to the relationship between service provision (or prevention and other policy strategies) and enhanced final outcomes relevant to the overarching aim of increasing welfare. Because measuring the comparative effect on final outcomes is often difficult, intermediate outputs are often used which are simpler but more short-sighted. Despite being insufficient to provide an estimation of their impact on the welfare of individuals and communities, intermediate outputs may offer information about performance in the shape of rough estimation about recipient-related consequences. Efficiency, in a broad sense, refers to the combination of resource inputs and effectiveness of service provision, aiming to maximise ends from given means or to minimise the means needed to achieve given ends (Knapp, 1984, pp. 10–11). It can be improved when reducing the cost of producing a certain level of service or good, or improving the level of effectiveness given a certain cost. Equity in economic research has been used as a concept of fairness or justice, which is a subjective matter and requires value judgement. Although the terms equity and equality are often used interchangeably, they are not the same: equity is concerned with ensuring that everyone has a fair share whilst equality tries to give everyone the same share. Assessing whether an organisation, community or individual is 'meeting needs' in an equitable manner is to assess how far the agents are (more) capable of living a better or good life (capability approach; Sen, 1985).

This trend has been complemented by broader performance ratings and incentives relating to quality of life, wellbeing and happiness. The most prominent among them could be the increasing spread of quality-adjusted-life year (QALY) analysis, in particular in Anglo-Saxon health care contexts (going back to Fanshel & Bush, 1970; Torrance, Thomas, & Sackett, 1972; Weinstein & Stason, 1977). It combines the additional number of years granted to a person by a medical treatment with the quality of life that person will enjoy during these years. Some of the tools used to measure QALYs have been criticised for their inability to measure all aspects of life that matter to people, and for being insensitive to changes in broader wellbeing (Tsuchiya & Dolan, 2005). Partly in response to this, new measures have been developed to capture different aspects of quality of life: A happiness measure has been developed which encompasses experiences of mood and evaluations of life satisfaction and is now employed in population surveys in Europe (Dolan, 2011).

### **The Remaining Gaps**

It is probably impossible to develop one outcome tool that is able to capture all aspects of life that matter to different people in different situations. The attractiveness of employing the small range of generic measures presented earlier is that resource allocation decisions can be made within department budgets (such as departments responsible for health and social care). In the following we outline how performance measurement is used in third sector practice and which particular challenges are caused by third sector characteristics in such kinds of measurement. This will mark the point of transition from performance measures to other ways of assessing impact, one of which—and the most effective, as ITSSOIN argues—is a focus on the third sector's contribution to social innovation.

### *The Limits of Economic (E)valuation Practices*

Economic evaluation is a comparative analysis of costs and outcomes associated with the goals of increasing social welfare and making best use of limited resources. Although the method could be too resource-intensive to be repeated frequently as part of regular performance management processes, economic evaluations present a theoretical foundation of performance measurement and set the context in which performance measurement takes place. The contribution of involved analysts refers to

all stages of the evaluation process including: helping to clarify objectives and convert these into outcomes that are measurable; drawing a clear distinction between processes, inputs, outputs and outcomes; encouraging a more systematic and rigorous assessment of costs and outcomes, with a particular emphasis on generating statistically valid

results; highlighting the need to consider what would have happened in the absence of the intervention being evaluated; adopting a societal perspective or multiple perspectives, thus ensuring a more comprehensive assessment of a programme's impact.

(Byfold & Sefton, 2003)

Whilst these authors refer in their report to the application of economic evaluation in social welfare—and to social care in particular—these principles apply to all sectors, including those where the third sector may play an important role.

There are different methods to value costs and outcomes depending on the nature of the research question asked. Cost-minimisation analysis is used where outcomes are certain and similar across the alternatives to be evaluated, which is rare. All other approaches to economic evaluation incorporate outcomes explicitly in the analysis, but they do it in different ways. In areas where there is an accepted generic measure that is thought to capture all relevant effects, one can employ cost-effectiveness analysis. If this measure is a preference-weighted measure of utility (such as the QALY), the evaluation is often called (in health care contexts, at least) a cost-utility analysis. Recommendations about investments are then based on lowest cost per unit of outcome gained. Finally, the so-called cost-benefit analysis requires both costs and benefits to be measured in monetary units, and findings are presented in form of a net benefit or return on investment; it is particularly useful when making an economic case to donors or commissioners.

There are methodological challenges, however, when trying to assign a monetary value to some outcomes, and although there are methodological innovations, in practice most cost-benefit analyses have focussed on those consequences that translate directly into savings (e.g., reductions in hospital admissions). A particular form of cost-benefit analyses has evolved from third sector practice and received much political attention, namely the Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, which has an explicit focus on involving stakeholders and using monetary proxy-indicators with the specific aims to value all benefits, including intangible ones. However, the SROI method lacks sufficiently rigorous theoretical foundations so that the way values are derived can appear rather arbitrary and subject to (unwanted and not disinterested) manipulation. Besides, the study of more genuine social effects (which are hardest or impossible to monetise) is found to be unsatisfactory to date (Krlev, Münscher, & Mülbart, 2013). These deficits and the challenges lying behind are partly of methodological nature, and partly grounded in the nature of third sector activity (see Krlev, 2018 for more on this).

### *Third Sector Properties and Performance Challenges*

Economic theory can be used to explain third sector activity through the existence of market failure. Although based on many assumptions, it

contributes to a useful understanding of many challenges of performance measurement in the third sector, four of which are cardinal:

First, externality characteristics leave many third sector activities unpriced or with market-generated prices that do not reflect true social value (for example, volunteering or unpaid care); information asymmetries and some transaction costs would usually be high for these goods or services, which are often provided remotely from the donor over long time periods and which are difficult to assess or monitor, mainly due to the limited ability of the user or donor to assess their quality in advance or sometimes even afterwards ('experience goods'). They explain why users and donors may rely more on non-profit organisations in whom they have greater trust. It is argued that for these reasons third sector organisations find it easier to enter the market and even develop monopoly power over time. For example, Kendall et al. (2006, pp. 423–425) argue that the proportionately large role of the third sector in social care (compared with many other areas of public investment/activity) is explained by relatively low start-up and entry costs (help with shopping, advice, befriending can be provided by individuals without formal qualification), lack of economies of scale (because services are highly individualised), lack of opportunities to sustain large profits and a greater ability to recruit a greater supply of volunteer labour. All of these conditions have made it less likely for the public or private sectors to enter these fields.

Second, governments at the same time rely (arguably increasingly) heavily on third sector provision and in most countries the third sector receives large amounts of public money through a number of different channels, including service contracts and grants. One could argue that with that also comes accountability, the need for transparency of third sector activities and a responsibility to demonstrate that money is well spent. Third sector organisations are different from the public sector in that they are constitutionally independent from the state and are different from the private sector in that they do not distribute profits. Their governance arrangements are much more complicated and their accountability is towards multiple stakeholders, including funding bodies. The latter may change frequently and incorporate different forms of accountability through, for example, contracts, service level agreements and grant agreements as well as less formalised forms of accountability to donors and regulators. Perhaps unsurprisingly, performance measurement in third sector organisations has been patchy and inconsistent, with different third sector organisations employing different tools (Harlock, 2013).

Insecure, short-term funding often also means short-term reporting and many individuals employed or volunteering in third sector programmes have lacked enthusiasm for performance measurement, which is perceived as a time consuming burden imposed by governments (or donors):

In terms of measuring voluntary sector performance, there is a belief that there is still a great deal of paternalism, with the UK Government

believing it can demand information from the voluntary sector and have control over how money is spent.

(Little, 2005, p. 833)

Data collection capacity of most of the small projects is very limited and the informal nature of their activities also means that it is more difficult to get reliable data for users; for example Moxham and Boaden (2007, p. 837) reported that “all case organisations offered confidential activities [. . .] where the beneficiaries are not known”.

Third, any narrow interpretation of performance measurement is likely to be unhelpful and could even have adverse effects on the sector if it changes the way that third sector organisations operate and disincentivises organisations to innovate. Also, the ability of third sector organisations to advocate and criticise could be influenced by the role that is placed on them and may be reduced if government bodies have too much control over the activities of third sector organisations. Knapp (2013, p. 5) writes, “professional rivalry, narrowly framed performance measures and simply the slow churn of bureaucracy” can constrain an organisation’s freedom to innovate and thereby remove one of the earliest and strongest arguments for a third sector, and for individuals involved—the benefits of organising one’s own cause. This has been recognised by some government departments and donors, who in turn have developed broad frameworks and simple tools such as the so called ‘logic model approach’ that give a stronger priority to learning and development of third sector organisations rather than on monitoring them (Harlock, 2013; Whitman, 2008). The aim of those approaches is to support the organisation in reflecting on their own purpose, what they set out to achieve and identify mechanisms to bring the organisation back in line where it deviates from its original purpose and vision.

Fourth, as in the case of volunteering and informal or unpaid care, there may be a risk that some third sector activities remain invisible and at risk of not being well supported because their value is not measured or appreciated. Even for organisations which themselves do not have the capacity to apply their own performance measures, evaluations may be carried out by researchers who would understand the potential value of small third sector organisations (Knapp, Bauer, Perkins, & Snell, 2013). Larger organisations which are contracted to provide publicly funded services are likely to have the capacity and obligation for more extensive performance measurement, and which might—by virtue of the contracts underpinning their work—need to evidence costs and outcomes.

### *Extended Performance Frameworks*

The preceding challenges seem to be better catered by broader performance concepts for third sector activities. A performance measurement framework was developed by Kendall and Knapp (2000). It represents an extended

version of the Production of Welfare Framework introduced earlier and specifically addresses some of the third sector particularities. Kendall and Knapp incorporate meso-level (stakeholder networks) and macro-level (policy processes at an institutional level) perspectives. Performance is no longer limited to the organisation (and no longer assumes everything else being constant) but is embedded in the environment of the organisation with interdependent relationships with its context. In addition to efficiency, effectiveness and equity, Kendall and Knapp introduce three domains of third sector activity: advocacy, participation and innovation. These concepts are arguably both a means to an end and ends themselves, and should each be measured. For example, an increase in participation or volunteering has immediate benefits to the altruistically motivated individual (Le Grand, 2003), a direct impact on resources and can be linked (as shown in longitudinal studies) to intermediate and final outcomes for the volunteer such as self-confidence, skills and employability, health and wellbeing.

The amount of volunteering resources available also strongly depends on contextual factors such as labour market conditions, welfare entitlements and the ways in which government encourages and supports volunteering, which is only one example of relevant advocacy. The impact of advocacy is particularly difficult to measure because of the strong interdependencies with contextual factors: some advocacy (such as campaigning or lobbying) might have as their primary goal changes to the contextual factors themselves so that iterative loops need to be taken into account.

In addition to the choice of type of evaluation and indicators, other methodological complications arise in the analysis of third sector activities. The particular characteristics of the third sector suggest certain requirements for evaluation (many of which are similar to the ones for complex interventions in the statutory sector social welfare and prevention field). Typically in third sector programmes there are different groups of beneficiaries including volunteers, users, their family members (including unpaid carers) and other participants. It is also likely that a third sector programme will achieve multiple and diverse outcomes for some of these groups and one single tool is unlikely to capture all of them. In addition, outcomes will not always be known in advance (because of the complex and personalised pathways often leading from resource inputs to outputs, intermediate and final outcomes) so that a process needs to be incorporated into the evaluation design which first establishes the objectives of the third sector programme and then leads to selecting some important outcomes and choosing tools how those can be best measured.

Finally, following the principle of opportunity costs, economic evaluations are comparative in nature and costs and outcomes are compared against what is likely to have happened in the absence of the programme ('the counterfactual'). As argued before, third sector activity is more likely to occur in areas where there is no alternative public or private sector provision and the alternative might be to 'do nothing', leaving it to individuals

and the community to provide this kind of support or to simply not have this type of support available. Having a comparison group could in some situations be seen as unethical and there are many other reasons why it might be difficult to recruit individuals into a study. Techniques are available to make up for this deficiency, one of which is called decision modeling. It helps “tracing pathways through care for individuals with particular characteristics or needs” (Knapp et al., 2013, p. 6). The method can also be used to extrapolate outcomes beyond the time horizon of the study. This benefits interpreting the long-term impact and helps in meeting the problem that “the time horizon constraint on government contrasts with the ability of some voluntary bodies to specialise in activities which confer benefits only over many years” (Knapp, Robertson, & Thomason, 1990).

While there have been significant advances recently on how some of these issues can be dealt with in view of a single organisation, even better a single intervention (see Krlev, 2018), we remain at a loss for ways of dealing with the problems when we think about broader organisational populations.

### **Focus on Innovation as a Way Out**

The preceding reasoning illustrated the leaps performance measurement has made forward in a third sector context. We have learnt that a number of promising approaches—addressing neglected dimensions more or less comprehensively—exist that pay tribute to the complexity of impacts involved and the inherent particularities of the sector. This has resulted in a significantly improved capability of assessing third sector outcomes and impacts, at least in specific fields or for certain stakeholders.

Despite this advancement, it has also become evident that a thorough capturing of third sector impact is only about to emerge and that methodological challenges impede an encompassing assessment. Some of the discussed tools for capturing impact (at least partly) conflict with the very essence of third sector organisations. Although being subject to limited resources and thus to a cost savings rationale, the organisations’ inherent value consists in providing services and exerting advocacy where simple input-output models under the rationale of output maximisation per unit of input are not easily applied. In principle, one of the central concerns of third sector organisations is optimal effectiveness as defined previously, which is yet usually superordinated by the efficiency principle (also described previously) that determines public economics and is thereby transformed into a policy directive. The resulting inherent tension between the organisations’ purpose and mission on the one hand, and policy principles of economical provision on the other, is partly mediated by the emergent focus on equity and related concepts.

A case at hand illustrating the extension of the measurement perspective is the study of service provision under the angle of its ‘transformative power’, including the effects on the wellbeing of recipients and their wider

surroundings (Rosenbaum et al., 2011). Generally, a significant extension of the range of approaches that are available to third sector organisations with respect to performance and impact assessments can be observed. We can thereby detect a tendency moving from standard performance tools such as the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan, 2001) to (quasi-experimental) outcome and impact assessments that include a focus on mission-related impact, which is central to the existence of third sector organisations (Liket, Rey-Garcia, & Maas, 2014; see also Rey-Garcia, Álvarez González, & Bello Acebrón, 2013). Yet, even if measurement frameworks incorporate a broader perspective on impacts, they remain more suitable for service-providing organisations, rather than for ‘advocates and value guardians’. In addition to welfare and quality of life as final outcomes, it is characteristic of third sector organisations that they strive for symbolic outcomes or abstract ideals such as equality, freedom of speech and expression, or preservation of nature and culture. These outcomes do not translate directly into welfare units.

There is another issue concerning economic approaches to impact, specifically where they involve ‘pricing’. For instance, there is a critical counter-argument against assessing the monetary value of volunteering involved in third sector service provision: the negative consequence for volunteer motivation arising from attaching a monetary value to volunteer work. There is a lot of (yet inconclusive) research on crowding-out of intrinsic motivation (Frey, 2017 finding evidence for it and Fiorillo, 2011 against it). It remains that it is difficult to find a balance between valuing volunteering as a ‘good beyond prices’ and its economic counterpart, which we arrive at if we simply assume services otherwise provided by people working for free would have to be provided by paid staff. Thus, in economic valuation there is a struggle between leaving the virtue of altruistic action untouched and making volunteer labour more visible in accounts of productivity.

These issues affect insights into impact generated by specific interventions or organisations—they become exponential when we try to understand the contribution of the third sector at the regional or national level more broadly. Thus, classical economic rationales can serve as a point of departure but have to be complemented so as to include the contextual environment comprising opinions, attitudes and ideologies as well as field specifics and outcomes pinpointed at beneficiaries. As Kendall and Knapp conclude in relation to their extended third sector performance framework “performance measurement may have to rely on indirect measures of actual effects, or subjective impressions of impact, or even simply (but uninformatively) measures of resources allocated to this activity” (Kendall & Knapp, 2000, p. 112). There is “no single criterion of performance upon which to rely, particularly in the view of the multiple-stakeholder context”, and no “simple or uncontroversial way to aggregate indicators across domains” (Mook, Richmond, & Quarter, 2003, p. 129).

We suggest that all issues combined indicate a critical degree of intractability: the existence of non-profits is linked to conditions where it is easier to monitor cost behaviour and distributional aspects as determinants of performance than outcomes and impact. We regard the non-profit status as an indicator of trustworthiness because measured and accounted performance is extremely difficult to establish. Yet, does the inconclusive record of previous research on empirical non-profit performance suggest that questions about impact are impossible to answer, even irrelevant? We suggest to the contrary that research may have emphasised the conventional, steady-state or standard performance compared to other forms of performance, which are conceptually and policy relevant, and more feasible—in particular at this very point in time. One such aspect is innovation, understood as the capacity of non-profits 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.

The basic underlying idea of ITSSOIN was that non-profits are ‘better’ at social innovations than governments and markets. To judge this claim we first define what social innovation is and then why there is reason to think socially innovative capacity to be more profound in non-profit organisations than in public agencies or firms, before we go on to test the claim.

### **What is Social Innovation? Characteristics of an Emergent Concept**

The concept of social innovation can be traced back to Max Weber, who reflected on the impact of ‘abnormalities’ in social behaviour that lead to social change, affecting the general social order (compare to Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), 2011). It can also be related to the discussion about the piecemeal strategy of ‘social engineering’ that had challenged the grand designs of social reforms (Popper, 1966). First targeted research on the topic, however, only emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see, for instance, Zapf, 1989). Since 2000 it has attracted the attention of institutional and organisational research and contributed to a growing body of literature. It has also gained attention of policy makers, since social innovations are seen as an option to find solutions for problems emerging in the wake of the financial crisis, especially societal problems concerning the welfare state (Borzaga & Bordini, 2012, p. 3).

In view of this broad interest in and the extensive hopes that are connected with social innovations, clear definitions that grasp the essence of this concept are difficult to find. Most definitions include a multitude of aspects that are relevant for social innovations. The European Commission, for instance, describes social innovation in its *Guide to Social Innovation* as follows:

Social innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs

and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, which affect the process of social interactions. It is aimed at improving human well-being. 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.

(European Commission, 2013a, p. 6)

Researchers proposed to treat social innovation as a 'quasi-concept', just as is the case with 'social cohesion', for example. A quasi-concept is characterised by its approximating character and inherent definitional looseness, which is beneficial for a phenomenon's use in a research and a policy context (Hollanders & Es-Sadki, 2014; Jenson, 2010, both as referred to in European Commission, 2013b). We are generally supportive of the idea, since it tries to remove ambiguity while taking seriously the complexity of the subject and rejecting a too narrow focus. However, a quasi-concept of social innovation is not useful, if it is not built on empirical and conceptual accounts of what constitutes and differentiates distinct kinds of innovations so as to derive a more detailed understanding. Only by doing so can we move on to assess actor contributions to social innovation. In order to arrive at an improved understanding of social innovation, it is useful to embed it within established innovation theory, with a particular focus on how innovation is supposed to affect social outcomes.

In the following, we will disregard more fine-grained types of innovation, which are field-specific or 'theme'-specific, such as 'green-innovation' (Cuerva, Triguero-Cano, & Córcoles, 2014, p. 105). Although helpful in studying specific fields or themes, such differentiation would lead to unnecessary conceptual confusion. Although 'eco-innovation' generally refers to contributions that reduce environmental harm, its function can differ from social innovation. It may refer to a technological innovation that reduces employment or resources in order to improve production efficiency and primarily serves a commercial function, but has social side effects. In contrast, successful advocacy in favour of renewable energy production by mobilising a diverse community of actors would qualify as social innovation.

The long-standing differentiation by Schumpeter of what we refer to as 'innovation objects', which is what definitional category the innovation occurs in, has been restructured and complemented over time. A non-exclusive list of innovation objects includes: ideas, products, services, processes, structures, behaviours and practices (Cuerva et al., 2014, p. 105). From the viewpoint of technological innovations some of these can be illustrated by innovation in industrial production: the car (product), assembly line production (processes), lean manufacturing (structure) and outsourcing (practice). Notwithstanding variations in intensity, innovation objects can occur in every innovation type. That is why despite their relevance to the

subsequent empirical investigations presented in this book, we refrain from addressing them explicitly herein.

### *Technological or Business Innovation*

New technologies shaped the last century more strongly than any other time before. Some of the most salient examples of innovation are information and communication technologies, biotechnology or new materials (Archibugi & Iammarino, 2002). Though technologies are often relevant in their transformed shape of an ‘end-product’, opening up new opportunities for customers by using new gadgets, technological innovation in its fundamental outfit can be understood as a significant shift in production techniques that triggers economic productivity. Salter (1969) and other scholars have shown how these shifts have increased productivity by decreasing the costs of production processes or increasing output. The introduction of such technologies has typically led to organisational, institutional and infrastructural change (Archibugi & Iammarino, 2002, p. 99, in relation to Freeman, 1994) and even to ‘revolutions’ (Perez, 2010, employing a techno-economic paradigm in recourse to Schumpeter).

Spencer et al. (2008, p. 9), for instance, examined how high-tech start-ups in micro and nano technologies have “redefined the electronics industry, deconstructed the mainframe computer industry and are redefining the pharmaceutical industry today”. The idea has also been taken up in more popular writing claiming that certain technological innovations have contributed to “flatten the world” (Friedman, 2005). Traditionally, research and development have been central to both, studying and promoting innovation. While the two aspects of research and development used to be treated as a homogeneous couple affecting organisations’ innovative capacity in one and the same way, meanwhile more fine-grained investigations have emerged (Barge-Gil & Lopez, 2014). Independent of their specific function research and development department(s) ascribe to, they point at a certain tractability and manageability of technological innovation, despite the general acknowledgement of the increasingly complex nature of innovation (Rothwell, 1994).

In this, some firms are the spearhead of innovation, whereas others are regarded as ‘followers’. These particularities translate into the regional and national level. Mate-Sanchez-Val and Harris (2014) compared innovation in Spain and the UK and found the UK in the former position, Spain in the latter position. Innovation is seen as an important source of improved overall economic performance and as a key variable to the prosperity of a country. Technology, as Ramstad (2009, p. 533) pointed out, is a central element in this “innovation-driven growth approach” (see also Furman, 2002). While in the case of these two countries differences in innovation in fact translate into differences in economic prosperity, it is less clear where the innovation imperative originates from at the organisational level. One of

the most prominent factors, also mentioned earlier, is the struggle for organisational survival against competition (Salaman & Storey, 2002).

To summarise, we can say that technological innovations are characterised according to three fundamental perspectives: First, their motivational character is grounded in competitiveness. Second, their underlying image of innovation is of a dynamic nature, yet innovation is seen as manageable and specific structures are built to enable it. Third, their primary impact consists in increasing overall economic productivity, but even more so in transforming organisational fields.

### *Social Innovation*

First it has to be mentioned that there is yet no general consensus as to what social innovation is (see, for instance, Klein et al., 2014). Nonetheless, a variety of unifying elements across studies and definitional propositions can be identified. Based on the experience of several major research projects on social innovation, our summary helps to further refine the ‘quasi-concept’ of social innovation.

The intensified practical and policy discussion on social innovation mainly arose from the dissatisfaction with the technological emphasis in economic innovation literature and innovation policy (The Young Foundation, 2012, p. 5). Secondly, social innovations are seen as a solution for growing social, environmental and demographic challenges and as a result of the failure of conventional market capitalism, resource scarcity, climate change, ageing population and the associated care and health costs, globalisation and mass urbanisation. Consequently, a number of authors (see, for instance, Nicholls & Murdock, 2012) stated that social innovation differs in many ways from core characteristics of technological innovations and the systems they are generated by.

First of all and most importantly, social innovation is per definition ‘socially oriented’ and thus person-related, although it can involve non-human actors (for instance, the natural environment). As a consequence of this person-centeredness, social innovation is fundamentally geared to serving social needs in unprecedented ways—this is a definitional criterion that appears not only in the definition of the European Commission cited in the introduction (see also Borzaga & Bodini, 2012, p. 5; Crepaldi, Rosa, & Pesce, 2012; European Commission, 2013a; Pol & Ville, 2009; The Young Foundation, 2012). According to Phills et al. (2008, p. 39), social innovation “becomes important as a way to fill needs that would not otherwise be met and to create value that would not otherwise be created”. This points at the fact that social innovations (more) often relate to immaterial aspects whereas technological innovation mostly involves some material aspects (Borzaga & Bodini, 2012, p. 5; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010).

In relation to the serving of needs we can take on a functionalist and a transformationalist perspective (Crepaldi et al., 2012, p. 23): From the

functionalist perspective social innovations literally serve demands which neither the state nor markets would or can meet. By contrast, the transformationalist approach understands social innovation as a process that provokes an institutionalisation of new practices, standards and rules, founded on values inherent to solidarity. The functionalist perspective is close to the one of technological innovation, while the transformationalist perspective is of increasing yet still minor significance, as discussed earlier. In any case, social innovation is obviously not (primarily) driven by the profit motive. Thus, financial support may help socially innovative ideas to stand on their own feet but is unlikely to serve as the primary prompt (Pol & Ville, 2009).

Furthermore, social innovation is more preoccupied both with the actions of involved actors and the effects on them. This has two general consequences:

First, social innovation is of an open, collaborative character where people engage without normal market structures and mechanisms. This involvement and the social needs orientation give social innovation a strong influence on social relationships and capabilities (The Young Foundation, 2012, p. 23). This is further related to the circumstance that social innovation involves a higher degree of grass roots and bottom-up involvement than other innovation types. Actors and initiative are often dispersed to the periphery (The Young Foundation, 2012, p. 23). In consequence, participatory elements and civil society as well as cultural and social movements as sources for the revitalisation of self-organisation and new social solidarities should receive careful consideration, but are currently neglected in innovation studies (Evers, Ewert, & Brandsen, 2014).

Second, this circumstance makes social innovation vulnerable. Unlike technological innovation that can lead to disruptive change by generating demand on the market which guarantees a stable financial inflow, in the case of (pure) social innovation the beneficiaries often differ from its funders. Therefore, financial stability has to be created artificially. If a system is not prepared to do so, viability gaps emerge that threaten the survival of the social innovation concerned (compare to the argument on the viability of social entrepreneurial organisations in Krlev, 2013). In view of this situation, social innovation is often dependent on the assertive engagement of its proponents and because it typically lacks high political power it is likely to need more time to evolve and sustain.

When interrelated, both aspects of the grounding of social innovation point at the critical importance of legitimacy as a core determinant of the success of social innovation, and thus of performance and ultimately impact. Unlike technological innovations, social innovations cannot compensate for legitimacy deficits by creating demand on markets. Thus, legitimacy as a licence to operate has not only proven essential to a successful diffusion of innovations in general (Rogers, 2003, pp. 223–229), but social innovation is more prone of the danger of self-inflicted presuppositions that block its

natural evolution and development (compare to Nicholls, 2010, on the legitimacy of social entrepreneurship).

To conclude we can describe social innovation in relation to the definitional elements used for technological innovation.

Social innovations are characterised by: first, their motivational character consists in meeting neglected social needs; second, their underlying image of innovation combines functionalist and transformationalist aspects; third, their primary impact is on the well-being of the beneficiaries as well as the actors involved, the borders between them being reshuffled and blurred by the underlying mechanisms of social innovation.

In addition to this, we formulate the traits of social innovation as follows:

Social innovations involve a higher degree of bottom-up and grass-roots involvement than technological innovation. This can make their impact broader and more sustainable, but social innovations will typically take longer to evolve and sustain than other types of innovation. The most critical moderator (beyond the very survival of the innovation) will be their ability to gain legitimacy in a socially grounded negotiation process.

### *Relating the Types of Innovation*

Technological innovation is mainly preoccupied with economic productivity by being linked to commercial performance. Social innovation relates more strongly to social problems and challenges and is thus a moderator of social productivity or performance. It is worth mentioning that types of innovation do not occur in an isolated way and are intertwined. It might well be that a social innovation is technology-based, for instance in the case of assistive technologies for people with disabilities. Technological innovations in turn can be based on social interactions as is the case with online communication platforms.

For reasons of completeness it is also worth mentioning that there are other types of innovation which are discussed in the literature and that contain further potential overlaps. Governance innovations for instance refer to shifts in the relative actor constellations involved in practices, to the involvement of new parties or the application of new tools utilised to achieve specific policy goals (compare to Anheier & Korreck, 2013). An example is the emergence of modern accounting that is actively promoted by the state as a means of regulation and self-control across fields and sectors (Burchell, Clubb, Hopwood, Hughes, & Nahapiet, 1980, in relation to Hopwood, 1978; Gandhi, 1976)—which, however, remains vulnerable to malpractice.

Pestoff relates governance innovations more directly to public benefit activities and understands it as “innovations in public services [that] are not just new ideas, techniques or methods, but also new practices, and they do not only involve physical artifacts, but can also include changes in the relationships between the service providers” (Pestoff, 2012, p. 1104). Wise et al. (2014, 106f.) point out that the two main reasons behind the increased interest in governance innovations is the “decline of the capacity of the state in regulation and the emergence of new public problems and governance challenges”. Instead of having a pronounced interest in the constituent players of a system and the roles these players assume, governance innovations take a specific look at the mechanisms employed, i.e., the interface of innovation. In consequence, governance innovation also refers, for instance, to new forms of citizen engagement or the expansion of democratic involvement in public services (Pestoff, 2012, p. 1104).

Compared to social and technological innovations, governance innovations have a different focus: First, their motivational character is related to policy directives and modes of political steering. Second, their underlying image of innovation is focussed on principles and interfaces rather than actors and roles. Third, their primary impact is on regulatory performance but it is not restricted to public administration. For the fact that the study of governance innovations is even more recent than that of social innovations and because of ambiguities that might arise through potential overlaps between the concepts, we will not focus on governance innovations as a separate category in the following.

### **The Link Between Social Innovation and the Third Sector**

We can see the potential role of the third sector in social innovation not only in the cases of revolutions and radical social movements such as the feminist, green or peace movements (Kelly, 1994), but also in less contentious and less disruptive civil society activities and grass-roots associations that advocate and realise actions in the interests of various social groups. For instance, we can discern the innovative capacity of the third sector when observing non-governmental organisations that significantly influence multinational corporations to be more environmentally or socially responsible, thus contributing to the evolution of new standards and practices (de Bakker, den Hond, King, & Weber, 2013). We can also observe social innovation in connection with social entrepreneurs’ activities (Seelos & Mair, 2017), foundations supporting medical research, and international development organisations seeking to improve the standards of living of the poor (Chowdhury & Bhuiya, 2004). All these examples outline third sector activities as highly driven by the objective to establish social innovation. Therefore social innovation is seen as an impact that can be attributed to a great extent to the third sector.

This, however, does not mean that we disregard the role of contentious politics in advancing social innovations. There is, for instance, a global movement (promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) focussing on justice and ‘good governance’ and aiming at changing the way multinationals and international institutions around the world act (Mkandawire, 2007). Another example is the ‘global compact’ initiated by the United Nations and driven by the commitment of ‘responsible-minded’ businesses (Brinkmann & Pies, 2003; Cetindamar, 2007; McIntosh, Waddock, & Kell, 2017). Our investigation aims exactly at analysing all actors involved in relevant social innovation processes, with a focus on countries within the European Union. Our initial examples only serve to showcase why the idea of a pronounced role of third sector activities in social innovation has emerged. In relation to the further examples given, one might argue that pressure from civil society to promote the ‘good governance’ agenda or social responsibility was the element to spark innovation and businesses’ engagement and that the political agenda was just the result—another prompt for the underlying claim that this book intends to discuss and challenge.

If, indeed, the desired impact of social innovations by third sector organisations consists in better meeting social needs by means of creative solutions, it is only natural to ask whether these innovations actually have this impact, and in which conditions the impact is larger or smaller. ‘Impact’ is used here in a loose sense, referring to changes in social innovation. Kendall and Knapp (2000) warn that while innovation is often regarded as a part of third sector organisations’ performance, it is almost impossible to determine the impact of the third sector on innovation, because, in the first place, it is impossible to measure innovation. We do not use the term ‘impact’ in a causal sense. It does not refer to the causal influence of the existence or activities of third sector organisations or its determinants. An adequate counterfactual is lacking because it is impossible to observe what would happen to society if third sector organisations were non-existent. Therefore, the question as to whether third sector organisations actually spur social innovation—in the scientific sense of cause and effect—is almost impossible to answer.

We can, however, examine what seems to make third sector organisations particularly suitable to contribute to social innovations in a major way, especially with regard to other players. This is a comprehensive effort that tries to combine and move beyond more fine-grained investigations on specific capabilities, such as professionalism, or the use of information and communication technology, which can enhance social innovativeness in third sector organisations (see Sanzo Pérez, Álvarez González, Rey-García, & García Rodríguez, 2014, as one of the rare studies that link organisational properties and practices to social innovation). Because of the (current) lack of tractability, ITSSOIN did not apply a quasi-experimental research design

but we studied the underlying mechanisms and enabling factors on the basis of in-depth cases studies of social innovations and associated actor involvement by means of ‘process-tracing’ (Ford, Schmitt, Schechtman, Hults, & Doherty, 1989; Tansey, 2007) to be laid out in the following chapters. Before we do that we want to briefly review the evidence that could lead us to support or deny the claim that third sector organisations will be particularly important for social innovations.

### *Supportive Evidence*

As an organisational manifestation of the commitment to change, the third sector is often viewed as an important force in social innovation. Judith Maxwell of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (in Goldenberg, 2004, p. iii) claimed: “In communities, the non-profit sector plays a vital role in social innovation”. This is particularly evident in post-communist societies. Although citizens were engaging in voluntary action and social innovation even before 1989, after the collapse of communism third sector organisations emerged in a much more visible way (Juknevičius & Savicka, 2003). Poole (2003, p. 1) argues:

Through innovation nonprofit organisations find ways to use scarce resources more wisely, capture new resources, and enhance the quality of their services. Effective innovation is one key to the nonprofit sector’s ability to improve our quality of life and the health of the polity.

Beckmann (2012, pp. 250–251) describes the promise of social enterprises, which are typically regarded as part of the third sector, as follows:

the public sector has preference for the status quo—solutions already known and tested. Social entrepreneurs, in contrast, are able to test much riskier and innovative approaches. Once these solutions demonstrate their effectiveness and deliver the ‘proof of concept’, other actors, including the public sector, can adopt them.

Picciotto (2013) for instance looks at social entrepreneurs transforming confiscated mafia properties in Italy in their projects. This is one of the examples where an unusual organisational mission coincides with such organisations’ increased ability to draw on uncommon and otherwise inaccessible resources (mafia properties).

So there is a lot of praise for the capacities of third sector actors. But why exactly are third sector organisations likely to have an effect on social innovation? We suggest that there are structural as well as values-based properties of third sector organisations that make them very likely to play a key role in social innovation.

The first characteristic social innovation and third sector organisations have in common is their social needs orientation, which is, in fact, an indispensable prerequisite for their work (Nock, Krlev, & Mildenerger, 2013). The fact that third sector organisations give voice to minority groups and point out societal problems (Osburg, 2013) is constantly emphasised. This is not only bound to their advocacy function, which plays a critical role in communicating and lobbying needs, third sector organisations are also well positioned for detecting these needs: “The change potential of civil society stems from its structural location: close to the grassroots and the local level, civil society actors are usually the first to become aware of social problems of many kinds” (Anheier & Korreck, 2013, p. 85). It is the proximity to target groups that sensitises the sector, not only for problems but potential solutions (Neumayr et al., 2007). What is more, existing research stresses that persistent multi-stakeholder setups, which third sector organisations possess, allow a multiplicity of signals to reach the sector and to disseminate innovative pilots (The Young Foundation, 2012). The sector thus exhibits a ‘receiving’ as well as a ‘sending function’, both of which together can be seen as characteristic of organisational openness, which has been identified as a critical moderator of innovation in a broad range of innovation studies (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

The positioning of the third sector within society is not only relevant as a detecting device, but also important in terms of stakeholder mobilisation. It is supposed that the reason why third sector organisations can accomplish tasks the state and the market cannot (in particular with regard to social innovation), is that they are accepted as the organisational embodiment of civil society: “NPOs encourage social interaction and help to create trust and reciprocity, which leads to the generation of a sense of community” (Donoghue, 2003, p. 8). They build connections “between groups of individuals and the larger society” and integrate those “groups into that society”, thereby contributing to the “initiation of change, and the distribution of power” (see Kramer, 1981, p. 194; also Prewitt, 1999). Studies have shown that third sector organisations contain a high degree of social capital as a result of civic engagement and the positioning described previously (Evers et al., 2014; Ranci, Costa, Sabatinelli, & Brandsen, 2012). Third sector organisations are, indeed, described as “facilitators of social learning” (Valentinov, Hielscher, & Pies, 2013, p. 372). This in turn increases acceptance of innovations and thus serves as a significant variable in building and maintaining the legitimacy, which as discussed previously is crucial for any innovation’s viability, sustainability and ultimately impact (Rogers, 2003).

Furthermore, the service and advocacy function of third sector organisations introduced at the beginning are regarded as compatible, even mutually reinforcing in third sector analysis (Valentinov et al., 2013, p. 367). Due to this reinforcing relationship between the two functions, third sector organisations are likely to be able to cater to both the functionalist

and the transformationalist aspects of social innovation. Valentinov et al. (2013, p. 368) see the third sector's "main mechanism of societal problem-solving in implementing institutional and ideational innovations that help to overcome dysfunctional discrepancies". With respect to the functional perspective concerning innovation, the fact that third sector organisations are not subject to the same pressure as commercial organisations is interpreted as beneficial: "[N]ot beholden to the ballot box and market expectations, civil society actors enjoy a degree of independence neither public agencies nor corporations may have" (Anheier & Korreck, 2013, p. 85). This comes along with the (relative) freedom to test new approaches or advocate new issues. The non-distribution constraint (Hansmann, 1980) is a critical moderator in this. It encourages longer-term approaches and enhances third sector organisations' ability to 'endure', a trait which is crucial with regard to the longer time needed for establishing sustained social innovation in comparison to technological innovation, where market pull can accelerate the process—a mechanism that third sector organisations largely lack. A lack of pressure also promotes 'tinkering', which has a stimulating function on innovation, as outlined by Saxenian (1994) in relation to Silicon Valley. However, how and to what extent this reflects third sector reality remains open. More economically orientated research approaches to innovation in non-profit organisations, for instance, don't see any integration of the functionalist and the transformationalist perspective. They argue that market orientation and competition are the driving forces of innovation and regard innovation as an important means for organisational survival (Choi, 2012; Fonseca & Baptista, 2013). Market orientation and competition are present in third sector organisations but certainly less so than in firms. Which of these aspects will matter (more) for social innovation will have to be examined.

Moving from the system and organisational level to the individual one, we can expect that third sector organisations are likely to necessitate skills of a more versatile and therefore more complex nature than competencies that can simply be defined as 'high-tech skills' (see, for instance, Bornstein, 2007 on the variety of skills involved in social entrepreneurship). Against the background of this requisite, we suppose that the work done by volunteers, their ideas, motivation, and variety of expertise, may represent a useful resource in fostering social innovation. Examining innovation conditions at the organisational level, we identified that access to a large set of knowledge inputs is beneficial for the emergence of innovation (see Rogers, 2003; Vedres & Stark, 2010). Moreover, in addition to providing knowledge, volunteers establish a link between non-profits and other communities and sectors, and therefore contribute to the previously mentioned organisational openness. However, this will have to be specified, and the question as to who will act as 'knowledge and exchange broker', which has proved to be a significant variable in transforming knowledge into innovation (Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007; Obstfeld, 2017) is still unanswered. Innovation

research finally suggests that executives may play a significant role therein. ‘Transformational leadership’ has been pronounced as a driving force of innovation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003; Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008). Although organisational variations will exist, the often ‘utopian’ agendas of third sector organisations (Crossley, 1999) qualify for nurturing such transformational leadership. This and the pronounced presence of values (Scheuerle, Schmitz, & Hoelz, 2013) could have a strong effect on organisational culture and the commitment of involved actors.

### *Counterevidence*

There is some evidence on relations between the third sector and social innovation that contrast or relativise our reasoning as presented earlier. For instance, the crossing of borders as an important part of innovation can also be seen in research on innovation compiled by third sector organisations. Some findings, however, may make some of our assumptions appear doubtful. In a study on third sector organisations in the United Kingdom, Osborne (1998) found that their innovative capacity was not a function of their organisational characteristics, but rather a result of the interaction with local and central government. Despite changes in the following ten years after Osborne’s study, a new wave of research essentially brought the same result (Osborne, Chew, & McLaughlin, 2008a, 2008b). The study “emphasises the need to understand the innovative capacity of VCOs [voluntary and community organisations] as a variable organisational capacity, with its key contingencies in the institutional environment rather than an inherent element of these organisations ‘per se’”. In the discussion of their results, Osborne et al. (2008a) issue “a warning to VCO managers and staff not to attach too great a significance to the sectoral rhetoric of innovative capacity”.

In a study on innovations including 17 local authorities in the UK, Dam-anpour, Walker and Avellaneda (2009) found that a strong focus on innovation is actually detrimental to performance. Sirianni and Friedland (2001) argue that civic innovation—defined as the “mobilisation of social capital to build the civic capacities of communities and institutions to solve problems [. . .] through policy designs that foster self-government” is an extended learning process for engaged citizens, community organisers, and professional practitioners. They mention congregation-based community organising, community development corporations, and neighbourhood associations as three types of organisational forms that spurred social innovation in the United States of America in the 1980s and 1990s. The study is consistent with the findings of Osborne for the UK in the sense that local and state government institutions and funding are described as key factors that shape the scope and nature of civic innovation. These studies provide important insights. We will have to carefully consider the conclusions of this research in our subsequent investigations.

However, these studies also have some quite distinct properties, which we have to take into account when assessing their findings. First, in the studies by Osborne et al., innovation is examined in a quite technocratic sense, using new or old client groups and new or old services as definitional variables for types of innovation. The discussion on social innovation has shown that the properties we would have to take into account when assessing the third sector's capacity to promote social innovation would have to be significantly broader.

Second, the primary mode of investigation applied by Osborne et al. was a survey-based quantitative one. Case studies were used as a complementary research strategy with the aim of triangulation. Moreover, the research was executed with a focus on organisations. The following chapter, however, will show that a systems-based perspective of innovation processes (see Nicholls, 2013), rather than an analysis of single actors, will likely be more fruitful for developing our understanding of social innovation. Such an approach necessitates detailed in-depth case work that allows for tracing processes rather than a clear-cut quantitative approach. The results of Osborne et. al. indicating that the innovation process depends on the interactions between VCOs and their institutional environment supports this argument. However, the observation alone that interaction is more crucial than organisational properties or culture does not tell us much about who set specific innovative impulses in this interaction, who exactly the actors involved were, or who was not participating in this interactive process at all.

Third and finally, the previous investigations have studied innovation in the third sector, without taking particular account of differences between fields of activity. In consequence, there may exist a levelling out of effects across these fields. Certainly, some fields will generally be more innovative than others. We have outlined previously that innovation is to be expected where organisations typically have a strong motivational vocation in performing advocacy (values-driven field such as disability rights; Dahl et al., 2014) and/or where there is a strong service component to their activity (quasi-market-driven field such as renewable energy). But the third sector also comprises other fields, of course. Recreational associations, for instance, could be suspected to display less innovative behaviour.

## Conclusions

The preceding sections have illustrated why there is good reason to relate social innovation to the third sector as its core contribution to socio-economic impact and why we presume that the third sector is better positioned to stimulate, create and develop social innovation than the market or the state. However, we have also seen that this reasoning is faced with critique and that insights on this particular issue are still quite ambiguous. Generally, we will move from these presumptions to an empirical design based on in-depth case studies across seven organisational fields: Arts &

Culture, Social Services, Health Care, Environmental Sustainability, Consumer Protection, Work Integration, and Community Development. The rationale for selecting these particular fields will be elaborated on later.

The question we will address is: How much and what kind of social innovation happens through the activities of the three sectors? In other words, as part of a multi-pronged approach, the project and this book aim to show the mechanisms and processes that are at work in social innovation.

## Notes

1. We would like to acknowledge substantial inputs by Annette Bauer, Martin Knapp, Gerald Wistow, A. Hernandez and Bajo Adelaja to the sections on performance.
2. Here used as a generic description for the various national and international usages to refer to the set of organisations operating at the intersection of the market and the state.

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## Conclusions and Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

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