SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS
WHAT THE CONCEPT MEANS,
HOW IT HAS BEEN APPLIED ELSEWHERE
AND A PROPOSAL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
ABOUT THE BUILDING CHANGE TRUST

The Building Change Trust was established in 2008 by the Big Lottery Fund with a National Lottery grant of £10million as an investment for community capacity building and promotion of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Northern Ireland.

The Trust supports the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland through the development, delivery of, and learning from a range of programmes including commissioned work, awards programmes and other interventions.

Between now and 2018, our resources will be used to support the VCSE to achieve more and better collaboration, increased sustainability and to be a learning sector which identifies, shares and acts on lessons of others’ actions. This work will be carried out across 5 overarching thematic areas: Collaboration, Social Finance, Social Innovation, Inspiring Impact, and Creative Space for Civic Thinking.

To date, the Trust have been involved in the commissioning of a number of successful programmes and organisations including Collaboration NI and Inspiring Impact NI.

In the realm of Social Finance, the Trust has also made a £1million investment in Charity Bank and has commissioned Cooperative Alternatives to bring a community shares programme to Northern Ireland.

As part of their work in Creative Space for Civic Thinking, the Trust has been instrumental in the setting up of the Northern Ireland Open Government Network and has stimulated and resourced innovation in civic engagement at local level through its Civic Activism Toolkit and Awards Programme.

In Social Innovation the Trust has made grants for socially innovative projects, undertaken research in key areas such as Digital Social Innovation and has commissioned a number of social innovation processes to experiment with new ways of designing solutions to social problems. To date these have included the Young Foundation’s Amplify NI programme, SI Camp, and most recently the Techies in Residence programme which matches tech experts with social problems identified by VCSE organisations.

The Trust has also commissioned Ulster University to research the independence of the Northern Ireland Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector.

This report was researched and authored by Paul Braithwaite, Building Change Trust.
1 INTRODUCTION
This review has been undertaken for the purpose of informing a dialogue amongst cross-sectoral stakeholders in Northern Ireland, with a view to stimulating the emergence of a collaborative approach to supporting social innovation right across the innovation life-cycle and in multiple domains.

The review has been undertaken through desk research and individual interviews and is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather the intention is simply to give a flavour of the thinking and models that inform the Building Change Trust’s stated objective of promoting the emergence of a social innovation ecosystem in Northern Ireland.

In terms of case studies, more detail has been provided on the Social Innovation Generation (SiG) example as it has the closest resonance with the local context and the initial thinking of Trust staff and Directors about how a collaborative multi-stakeholder ecosystem might work in NI.

The paper concludes with an outline concept for ‘Social Innovation NI’ – a collaborative one stop shop for social innovation support – as a starting point for dialogue.

2 SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS: A FLAVOUR OF LATEST THINKING

The term ecosystem is drawn from ecological thinking and has been applied to social innovation in recent years to describe the enabling environment that needs to be put in place if social innovations are to achieve their ultimate ambition of systemic change.

Systems change itself has become an increasingly integral approach within the social innovation field as practitioners and enablers have moved on from supporting individual innovations to recognising that to have impact at scale within complex systems requires simultaneous support to multiple and inter-connected innovations.

An ecosystems approach provides a framework for both understanding all the interactions and resources relating to actors involved in social innovation work at a given time, and for identifying what changes need to happen in order to build a field that is ‘more than the sum of its parts’.

1 Full report available here: https://sg.app.box.com/s/5m999k9f5zawm30b0bwed

Above: Centralised, decentralised and distributed systems

Paul Baron (1964)
Social Innovation Generation have advanced two broad categories of ecosystem, both of which are deemed essential to systems change:

1 Vertical
Vertical partnership grows around the lifecycle of a social innovation from idea to research to theory of change to prototyping to iterating to testing to scaling to mainstreaming. Failure to link actors working at different stages results in key gaps in vertical partnerships, specifically in gathering evidence and a lack of funding for accelerating innovations that have the possibility of success.

2 Horizontal
A horizontal partnership is a collaborative, holistic ecosystem around a complex problem. More often than not, social interventions are ‘service-rich and system-poor’. People are bombarded by interventions from different providers, all of which add up to less than the sum of their parts, because it is the system itself that pushes people into difficult situations or prevents them from getting out.

In relation to the current state of social innovation ecosystems and the factors that underpin their successful evolution, participants at the Building Ecosystems for System Change event identified six key patterns:

Pattern 1
Ecosystems are born of necessity

Pattern 2
Importance of cross-sectoral collaboration - see www.collaboratei.com

Pattern 3
Awareness of power dynamics - there is a time for collaboration and a time for conflict

Pattern 4
Passion and anger are crucial: “all great truths are initially ridiculed, then violently opposed, then accepted as obvious and received as wisdom.” Arthur Schopenhauer.

If there is no aggressive opposition, then we are likely just talking to ourselves.

Pattern 5
Diversity is crucial: two frequent absences from social innovation conversations that are crucial to systems change are:
- Community
- Mainstream ‘intrapreneurs’ from large established institutions and organisations

Pattern 6
Language is a key barrier - need common understanding of terms

Put simply, a key aim of applying an ecosystem framework is to understand:

“How do we turn ‘luck’ into something predictable? How do we reduce the accidental nature of the connections we make?”

PHILIPP VON DER WIPPEL
ProjectTogether, Munich, Germany

Is it an art or is it a science?
We started with: why has the concept of ecosystems become such a fad recently? The response – perhaps it’s just a new abbreviation? Is ‘ecosystem’ just a new term to describe what we knew before as an enabling environment where innovators have access to what they need throughout their lifecycle? Are we trying to create new language for a new discipline? If so, how useful is this emerging language, and to who?

Serendipity vs System
Connecting to the right people/organisations can be key to success, but do we need to rely on random connections, or can we design encounters? To what extent can we facilitate serendipity? To what extent should we focus on creating and communicating an enabling environment for innovation and if we do, what are the right components?

Trust vs control
Whilst we talked about the role of many different actors, the most interesting for me was the role of governments in an ecosystem which supports innovation. To be effective supporters of social innovation, to what extent must governments relinquish some control? How can we encourage the spenders of public money to support innovation, when there is no proof that a project or initiative will work? How can governments help create ecosystems which allow for experimentation?

There is a time for collaboration, and a time for competition
What can we learn from other sectors, like business, or from ecological metaphors about ecosystems, which will assist social innovation? One of the features that business and ecological ecosystems have in common is that not everything survives – not often the case in our sector. Too often organisations don’t close or get replaced by others, even if they are no longer effective (and when it does happen, we don’t like it). Not all innovations succeed. We need to examine how competition between organizations can drive successful innovation.
3 PRINCIPAL CASE STUDY: SOCIAL INNOVATION GENERATION (CANADA)

Source drawn from www.sigionline.ca, the various partner websites and interview with Geraldine Cahill.

3.1 Overview and Purpose

Social Innovation Generation (SiG) is a collaborative partnership in Canada which aims to “normalise the notion of innovation in addressing social problems”. The SiG partners are:

SiG

The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation (founders) – a private philanthropic foundation whose purpose is to enhance Canada’s ability to address complex social, environmental and economic challenges. The Foundation engages Canadians in building a more innovative, inclusive and resilient society.

MaRS Discovery District one of the world’s largest innovation hubs, a 1.5-million-square-foot complex located in the heart of Canada’s largest research cluster in downtown Toronto. Opening in 2005 it is dedicated to “driving economic and social prosperity by harnessing the full potential of innovation”.

MaRS

The University of Waterloo via the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) which was set up through the SiG process as a joint venture between the Faculty of Environment and Faculty of Arts. WISIR seeks to mobilise knowledge through a range of new curriculum offerings and training opportunities – both within and outside of a university setting.

WISIR

The Plan Institute for Caring Citizenship (for caring citizenship) The Plan Institute for Caring Citizenship is a not-for-profit that works to “reduce the isolation of people at the margins of society, and to enable the contributions of all members of our community. Global leaders in social enterprise, we connect people, germinate ideas, and incite action. We advocate for policy reform, train leaders, support organizations, create social innovations, facilitate networks, and initiate dialogues.”
SiG’s mission is to:
“address Canada’s social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation. Our focus is on social innovation that has the potential for impact, durability and scale.”

By working collaboratively with a common coordination structure (SiG National) the partners’ intention is to “add up to more than the sum of their parts”.

The partners produced a shared theory of change in 2008 to guide all of SiG’s work with the following objectives:

• To achieve transformative change within one or two domains in SiG’s 5 year timeframe.
• To create a range of supports (knowledge, consulting, workshops, networks, grants) for social innovators to make their work more efficient and impactful, and by means of these non-granting tools to make the Foundation more effective.
• To build and disseminate a body of knowledge around processes of social innovation in Canada.
• To model innovative practice in its own methodology and ways of collaborating.

Each partner has a specific function and runs its own programmes and activities on behalf of the platform. The main focus of each partner is as follows:

1 SiG @ MaRS: Capacity building for social innovation through direct support by means of trainings, workshops, direct customized consultations and lectures and resources.
2 SiG @ McConnell: Connect, convene and link innovators, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and funders to build effective partnerships and networks around a living laboratory for social innovation.
3 SiG @ PLAN Institute: Transforming systems by embedding social innovation in political, economic and cultural institutions and structures: the convergence of social justice and sustainable development for Canadians who have been excluded, labelled or marginalized. Current priorities are generating social, legal and financial innovations for people with disabilities and family caregivers.
4 SiG @ Waterloo: Knowledge generation, dissemination and facilitation: goal is to generate new knowledge about social innovations and the social innovation process in Canada, in particular the dynamics of learning, adaptation and innovation in the arena of sustainable development and in the mental health domain.

3 Timeframe subsequently extended to 8 and then 10 years.

3.2 Programmes and Activities

The following are examples of some of the main programmes and activities implemented to date:

Social Innovation Fund: a three-part fund to support early-stage innovations, scaling up successful social innovations and mature organizations that are diversifying programme and business models and multi-sectoral collaborations (e.g. change labs)
Innoweave: a collection of workshops, grants and coaching supports in nine different areas (e.g. developmental evaluation, strategic clarity, social finance)
SiG Knowledge Hub: a website designed to provide learning resources about creating conditions for social innovation and to highlight examples in Canada and around the world
Knowledge Development: generating and disseminating new knowledge about social innovation and resilience (e.g. adaptive cycle, pathways to scaling up)
Curriculum Development: designing and delivering curriculum on social innovation and resilience in particular through the Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation at the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience
MaRS Solutions Lab: a public and social innovation lab that tackles complex challenges that require systems change in order to get deep and durable results. This has resulted in the development of ‘change Lab’ models across Canada, creating an environment for experimentation across sectors for solutions seeking, including the Waterloo Social Innovation Lab
Direct Support to Social Innovators (e.g. Entrepreneurship 101, Entrepreneurs Toolkit, Advisory Support) in a way that embeds social innovation into the mainstream at MaRS
Centre for Impact Investing: a social finance hub and project incubator that acts as a neutral collaboration space for all sectors - government, community and private – to strengthen collective ability to mobilize private capital for public good
The Canadian Task Force on Social Finance: the establishment, operations and research of the Task Force in 2010
Diving Deeper on Disability Agenda: application of whole systems change concepts to disability sector e.g. creation of the Registered Disability Savings Plan, its adoption in BC and replication in over 40 countries worldwide.
Thought Leadership (IASI): a national speakers’ series composed of a mix of in-person and online public talks by international thought leaders, applied learning workshops and dialogue on practical strategies for social innovation in Canada
Sustainable Food Systems: initiative aims at systemic change to increase local and regional sustainable food production capacity while ensuring that nutritious food is accessible to all. The initiative is composed of national grants across food systems, two granting programs (Regional Value Chain Program and Institutional Food Program) and related initiatives (e.g. impact investing, capacity building, Food Business Boot Camp, Food Secure Canada partnership)
Cities for People: an early-stage initiative designed to encourage social innovation and systems change to create resilience
BC Partners for Social Impact: a diverse network that leads social innovation work in British Columbia. The partnership includes leaders in government, non-profit organizations, businesses, universities and community groups, all working collaboratively to improve social outcomes for British Columbians. Led by a Social Innovation Council and the world’s only Minister for Social Innovation.
3.3 Development Process & Financing

Social Innovation Generation was established in 2007 with a £5m, 5 year grant from the McConnell Foundation and a further £3m from the Province of Ontario (also for 5 years).

This was the culmination of a process of dialogue instigated by the McConnell Foundation in 2006 aimed at setting up a multi-stakeholder social innovation platform. However the roots of the initiative stretch back a further 10 or more years during which period the McConnell foundation explored and experimented with social innovation approaches in its grant-making and in the convening of cross-sectoral dialogue.

The perceived need for the platform arose from the observation of the McConnell Foundation and other social innovation actors that simply supporting individual innovations wasn’t resulting in impact on a transformational scale and that a whole systems change approach needed to be adopted.

Consequently the McConnell Foundation, lead by CEO Tim Brodhead, convened a group of Canada’s foremost thinkers in the social innovation and entrepreneurship support space – these included:

- Al Etmanski of the PLAN Institute
- Frances Westley, University of Waterloo
- Ilse Treurnicht, MaRS Discovery District

However whilst there was broad consensus amongst partners about the mission of SiG, the first 2 years of the initiative revealed key differences of opinion in the right approach to be adopted and the respective roles of the partners. Some of the main points of contention included:

- Alternate approaches: linking academic theory with practice, embedding social innovation practice in grant-making and supporting ‘invention’ of new approaches via social entrepreneurship were the main stances from partners in relation to what should be the main focus of SiG’s work
- Confusion around the ‘double-role’ of the McConnell Foundation as both partner and funder
- Time pressure and the need for respective partners to secure the ‘buy-in’ of their institutions

As a consequence of the tension arising from this phase, the partners decided to adapt the model to a looser approach of ‘coupling’ between the various nodes of activity, rather than the tighter partnership that had been originally envisaged.

Whilst this reduced the degree of joint action for a time, it enabled each of the partners to develop its own particular approach to social innovation, embed it in their organisation and launch some key programmes, including:

- MaRS developed Advisory Services incorporating education and training for social entrepreneurs
- The University of Waterloo established WISIR ultimately leading to the launch of the graduate diploma in social innovation
- The McConnell Foundation developed Innoweave as a learning and support platform to enable their grantees to adopt social innovation approaches
- Plan focused on supporting the emergence of a provincial social innovation ecosystem in British Columbia eventually leading to the Council for Social Innovation, the world’s first Minister for Social Innovation and the BC Partners for Social Impact

However efforts continued to stimulate greater synergy amongst partners – in 2008 a theory of change was agreed and in 2009 SiG’s first coordinator was hired, leading to the establishment of SiG National as a Secretariat for the platform.

It was through these latter actions that the SiG partners identified and implemented their first truly joint action: convening of a national roundtable on social finance. This led to the establishment of the Canadian Task Force on Social Finance which included a former Prime Minister amongst its members and by the end of 2010 had published a report with seven recommendations around mobilizing private capital to address social issues, several of which were adopted by Federal and Provincial governments, including the establishment by MaRS of the Centre for Impact Investing with support from the Government of Ontario.

This joint work on social finance had a galvanising effect on the partnership and drove an increased focus on cross-sectoral collaboration, as compared to the previous mostly non-profit driven approach.

These successes resulted in the partnership being renewed under the label SiG 2.0 for a shorter, three year period in 2012, subsequently extended for a further two years with the partnership projected to wind-up in 2017. This phase aimed at consolidating the gains and momentum of previous years and placing greater emphasis on systems change. Most of the key initiatives are noted in section 3.2 above.

There is consensus amongst the partners that a 10 year sunset clause for SiG is important in order to avoid institutionalising the initiative. It is assessed rather that by 2017 SiG will have largely achieved its mission of dramatically changing the social innovation landscape in Canada, embedding it within key public and private institutions who will carry on the work in future years.
3.4 Successes & Strengths

The impacts of SiG’s work have been identified in three areas:

1. Social Innovation Infrastructure:
   - SiG has strengthened the infrastructure for social innovation in Canada in the following domains:
     - Cross-Sectoral Platforms (e.g. social finance, change labs, knowledge hub, advisory services, education) - Canadian Task Force on Social Finance and embedding in provincial and national budgets; MaRS Centre for Impact Investing; MaRS Solutions Lab; concrete set of services to support social entrepreneurs
     - Non-Profit Sector Capacity Building (e.g. Innoweave - 5 types of support to experiment with new approaches in 11 domains)
     - Philanthropic Sector Practices (e.g. joint funding arrangements - Mental Health Funders Group; Circle on Philanthropy)
     - Academic Sector Practices (e.g. teaching curriculum, research on social innovation and systems change - Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation)
     - Public Sector Practices (e.g. Ministerial structures, specific policy measures) - BC Minister for Social Innovation and a Social Innovation Council; Community Contribution Company created; Province of Alberta creation of a C$1 billion Social Innovation Endowment Fund (repealed 9 months later when government changed)
     - Private Sector Practices (e.g. pathways for corporate social innovation) - Social Venture ConneXion (SVX) platform in Toronto; Vancity commit to invest C$20bn in social purpose investments

2. Boosting awareness of social innovation beyond expectations

3. Transformative Change within Specific Domains
   - Disability - Registered Disability Savings Plan - adopted by government and involves 70,000 families and over C$1bn savings (matched by Federal Government). Credited with changing attitudes to disability. Has also been replicated in over 40 countries. Credited with a move away from “deficit-based approaches” to disability.
   - Causeway - fast-track social finance initiative - led to establishment of Canadian Task Force on Social Finance, including former Canadian Prime Minister - made recommendations for mobilisation of private capital for social causes several of which were adopted by government. Led to establishment of MaRS Centre for Impact Investing. Also catalysed SiG’s engagement with public and private sectors
   - Also supporting early stage innovation in food systems, urban resilience, ecological resilience, aboriginal communities, early childhood development and health
   - Overall, impact in this area has been less than originally hoped for by some of the partners - this is mainly due to disagreements over whether the primary focus was on promoting and supporting other groups to tackle social issues or whether it should also seek to take on issues itself directly.

The following factors have been identified as key to SiG’s success:
- Catalytic leadership of McConnell Foundation
- Prior trusting relationships between SiG principals (leaders)
- Diversity of partners
- Emphasis on international networking
- Balance between concrete supports and catalytic organising
- A coordinating mechanism
- SiG Brand
- Value of physical space (MaRS)

3.5 Challenges

In addition to the challenges encountered within the partnership development process, SiG has identified the following as inhibitors or weak points in SiG’s work:

- Small size of leadership team
- Foundation’s balancing act - funding and participating
- Not enough focus on tangible issues
- M&E - needed longer term developmental evaluation of whole initiative
- Disappointing progress on Corporate Social Innovation
4 OTHER CASE STUDIES

4.1 Collaborative Social Innovation Platforms

The following platforms involve a collaborative partnership between more than one organisation, aiming to collectively promote and stimulate social innovation.

The Oksigen Ecosystem (Belgium)

The Oksigen Ecosystem consists of 4 independent organisations, focused on a common goal: to stimulate social entrepreneurship and social innovation and to maximize social impact.

The below diagram gives an overview of the respective roles of the constituent organisations:


The Oksigen Ecosystem has its origins in i-propeller (i = innovation), a private company set up in 2006 by four entrepreneurs principally to offer consultancy support to private business in social innovation. i-propeller sourced their knowledge by carrying out academic research on the topic of social innovation and social entrepreneurship at international level. Since the start of i-propeller, the Catholic University in Leuven has been a partner and shareholder.

Over subsequent years the company began to diversify its service portfolio and won a major contract to map social entrepreneurship in the EU - Selusi.

One distinctive aspect of the Oksigen Ecosystem over the other collaborative platforms researched is that it is, or at least aspires to be, entirely self-financing. I-Propeller is a private company and all its services are provided on a commercial basis. Okisgen Lab is a social enterprise and charges for most of its services, using commercial rates for clients with the means to pay to cross-subsidise those provided to others with less means. The SI2 Fund is a cooperative company owned by a group of investors and provides:

“Risk capital financing for enterprises that value their actual and potential social impact alongside their ability to provide a fair financial return. We bridge a gap between charity and philanthropy financing and venture capital”

Investments range from EUR200k to 1m. The Oksigen Accelerator is similar in being owned by a group of investors but provides financial support on a ‘repayment-by-results’ basis, described as follows:

“The Oksigen Accelerator is a rolling fund of 400K euro that allows coaching to be delivered at low out-of-pocket cost to the social entrepreneur initially. This nominal fee is not enough to cover the full expense of the coaching – should the social entrepreneur be successful in receiving funding within a reasonable timeframe, the full cost of the coaching must be paid. This replenishes the fund and ensures that more entrepreneurs are able to take advantage of this support. However, if the entrepreneur does not receive external investment within a reasonable timeframe or the coaching is not successful, no additional payments are required and the Accelerator covers the gap.”

The Oksigen Lab component is probably the main component of the ecosystem which is driving the move to a broader focus on social innovation. It is part of the EU wide Benisi project to scale more than 300 social innovations. It has also recently been experimenting with more stimulative, rather than demand-led approaches, such as:

- Pitch Your Challenge. This new event format is designed as a networking event with co-solving workshops for challenges faced by social entrepreneurs. Pitch Your Challenge is the perfect occasion to meet social entrepreneurs, investors and coaches of the Oksigen community!
- Oksigen Crowd is a crowdfunding platform connecting people with innovative enterprises tackling social and environmental issues. Their common goal: to have a positive impact on society. https://www.oksigencrowd.com/oksigen
The core work of the lab however remains its coaching to social entrepreneurs and social enterprises. The model consists of four phases, the speed and scope of which can be adapted to specific experience and needs. An average process usually lasts two to four months, and includes eight to fifteen coaching days and several work sessions. The below diagram gives an overview of the conceptual framework used:

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**Example of Initiative Supported by Oksigen Lab:**

Boobs-'n-Burps, founded in 2010, has taken up the mission to increase breastfeeding rates and bring as much breastfeeding as possible to a long-lasting success. The stores specialise in items such as nursing bras and clothes that take all the stuffiness and old-fashioned image out of breastfeeding. Shoppers can browse through state-of-the-art breast pumps and other lactation supplies, removed from the negative perceptions of agony and torture – all combined with expert advice. Courses and personal “SOS Boob” guidance are also a fixture with Boobs-'n-Burps with an eye to achieving easy, long-term breastfeeding.

At the present time, Boobs-'n-Burps has two retail outlets, one close to Brussels (Dilbeek) and the other in Antwerp, plus an international webshop.

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**Example of Learning Event Organised by FSIS:**

The Aalto Camp for Societal Innovation took place in 2013 and was a gathering of academics, civil servants and private sector companies aimed at generating new ideas for sustainable urban development. It was a 1 week long event oriented around a set of specific challenges, each presented by a ‘Challenge owner’. At the end of the week, each team presented a prototype of their idea. The ACSI model originates in Finland and was developed by Aalto University.

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**Forum for Social Innovation Sweden**

The Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (MSI) is a platform for academia, industry, government and non-profit organisations in Sweden who want to take part in the development of the fields of social innovation and social entrepreneurship.

It originated in 2008 with a social entrepreneurship research and capacity building programme of KK-Stiftelsen (a research foundation). This evolved into the Forum for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation from 2009 onwards through the addition of a ‘meeting place’ component to stimulate co-production around specific themes. A range of other partners - some universities around Sweden as well as local government, organisations, NGOs and private initiatives - have also joined the Forum and deliver or support aspects of its programme.

Their 2011 publication ‘The ABC of Social Innovation’ cites the following thematic foci:

- sustainable urban development
- sustainable sparse rural structures
- leadership
- financing
- corporate social responsibility

The Forum is currently hosted by Malmö University, with part-funding from the Swedish Government and Region Skåne. It is fully grant-funded though does charge for some events. It has its own independent board of Directors with representatives from across public, private and third sectors.

The Forum also has individual members, who benefit through participation in an online learning community and various physical events such as breakfast meetings, workshops and conferences. The annual Social Innovation Summit is a key moment in the event calendar.

The Forum undertakes and publishes research with a focus on over-arching themes such as the role of design thinking, co-production and aspects of social entrepreneurship. For example this report on ‘How Social Entrepreneurship Can be Part of Local Policy’.
Social+ (Denmark)
Social+ is an independent part of the non-profit organisation Social Development Centre (SUS). It’s purpose is to:
• “incubate ideas, co-create, experiment, build partnerships and manage social investment relations."
It was established in 2011 and grew out of a process initiated by a philanthropic foundation, concerned with a lack of sustainability and scale in the non-profit sector. Lots of people were talking about social innovation but nothing radical was happening. There was a political consensus on the need to focus more on impact and impact measurement, supporting what works. This led to concern that nothing new would emerge. Through research, it was highlighted that the social sector was skipping the invention phase - design, prototype, re-design, etc. - and focusing on what they know works, covering up failure, etc. Consequently, Social+ was founded with two aims:
1. 1 supporting those things that should continue but with more sustainable business models
2. 2 give more time to the invention phase and to creating prototypes
Social+ was deliberately founded to benefit the social sector - both non-profit and public institutions – as well as philanthropic foundations. For most of their programmes, Social+ require individuals to be attached to an organisation (an incubator) due to the difficulties of attracting funding as an entrepreneur. A number of philanthropic foundations regularly use Social+ services as part of their grant-making process - for example asking applicants to use Social+ support to improve their proposals, work together collaboratively, etc.
The main components of Social+ work are:
• Creating social experiments to improve conditions for people in difficult life situations
• Advice and co-creation with social inventors, organisations, philanthropies, end-users and public agencies
• Collect and produce knowledge about social inventions and social innovation
• Bring innovative people together across sectors
• Interact with decision makers, social investors and media
• Speak out in the social innovation debate
Social+ is the coordinator of the SIX Nordic hub and also a partner of Social Innovation Europe

The organisation has grant-funding for its early stage ideas work; other aspects are paid for (e.g. Social+ Aha!) either by participant organisations or by foundations. For the most part their work is demand led, however they also do some demand stimulation through networks of Social+ staff and sometimes also create ideas themselves through knowledge of social innovations elsewhere.

Social+ Programmes:
Social+ Ideation is an idea development program and consultancy for organisations, municipalities and individuals where we co-develop your idea and contribute with creative input, constructive criticism, network, partnerships and funding strategies. If you find your idea original with potential of realization, we offer a sponsored Ideation program.
Social+ Co-creation is a program for organizations and municipalities. In Social+ Co-creation we challenge and develop your early stage idea or problem by giving creative input, constructive criticism, building a network of partners and alliances and facilitating co-creation in the group of partners. If we find that your idea is original and has great potential to create systemic change, we offer you a sponsored Cocreation program.
Social+ Scale is a counseling and feedback program aiming to scale and spread innovative social initiatives or help them become more financially and organizationally sustainable. We contribute with strategic input and ideas for funding. In Social+ Scale we improve, rethink or redefine existing social initiatives to make them more financially and organizationally sustainable - or to increase their social impact through scaling or spreading. It is important that we evaluate your initiative, before we decide if we can offer you Social+ Scale. First, we insist that your initiative differs significantly from other initiatives in the field. If we find your initiative original, we offer a sponsored program.
Social+ Aha! is a program, where managers and employees from four organizations attend seven workshops over approximately three months. The goal is to give the attendees new tools to facilitate social invention and innovation processes in their respective organisations. In Social+ Aha! you get the opportunity to develop and work with an idea that might become the next new groundbreaking initiative for your organization. Social+ Aha is a paid for service.
Social+ Focus is a customized innovation course for a group of employees in an organisation or a municipality. The course blends theory and practice and aims to train the participants’ toolbox for social creativity and innovation. The course can vary from one to three days with 6 to 25 employees. Social+ Focus is an intensive and customized course with many of the elements from Social+ Aha!.
Through the course the participants will gain new tools for idea development, social invention and innovation processes in their organisation.
The Australian Centre for Social Innovation

TACSI was established in 2009 on the recommendation of Geoff Mulgan, now Nesta CEO, who had been a ‘Thinker in Residence’ in South Australia at the time. Its mission is: “to develop, test and spread innovations that change lives for the people who need it most”

Core to TACSI’s approach is a belief that breakthrough innovation comes from the application of new thinking to long-standing problems. This requires teams that can draw from a wide set of references and are capable of recombining their knowledge to develop new solutions. Consequently TACSI’s team represents a blend of thinking from design, business and social science.

They work both to support other organisations to design innovations, as well as developing their own. They have a strong emphasis on ethnography and putting the people affected by problems at the centre of the innovation process.

Their priorities for 2015-16 are ageing, child protection and disability – these are derived from a mixture of TACSI’s own skillset and experience, as well as the particular need for innovation around addressing these issues in Australia.

TACSI’s work in supporting third party innovations orientates around the following:

- **find opportunities** - rapid ethnography, semi-structured interviews, storytelling and strategy workshops
- **design solutions** - co-design that reduces the risk of failure through prototyping, TACSI helps design user experience, staff experience, supporting systems and business models
- **trial solutions** - help organisations run trials of promising solutions to generate evidence of social and financial benefit
- **spread solutions** - designing implementation support and strategy

The following is an overview of the services TACSI provides with links to specific examples:

- Embedding co-design approaches within organisations (ACH group)
- Problem identification through ethnography (Northern Connections & Aboriginal communities)
- Developing a social business model (ACCP)
- Public service re-design using ethnography and systems analysis (Commonwealth Attorney General’s Department)
- Radical Redesign team - look at whole issue (ageing) collaboratively with public and social sector agencies - ‘Great Living in Late Adulthood’ report
- Innovation in Ageing Challenge Prize - funded by S Australian Government, run by TACSI

The following are examples of TACSI’s own in-house start-ups:

**Family by family**
- Commissioned by Australian Government
- 12 month co-design and prototyping process with 100 ‘in-crisis’ families aiming to reduce rate of children needing support from child protection services
- Peer-to-peer support and coaching process whereby one family that has been through the process helps another
- Reduces dependence on professional workers and therefore costs
- One family trainer supports 15 families who then support 40 other families, reaching a total of 100 children

**Weavers. Support along the caring journey**
- Peer-to-peer support for carers
- Connects carers with other experienced carers in their community to improve outcomes for the carers themselves
- Uses professional ‘Local Connector’ to make connections, provide training and monitor outcomes

The following are examples of TACSI’s own in-house start-ups:
5 SOCIAL INNOVATION NI
- AN OUTLINE CONCEPT

5.1 Building Change Trust’s Purpose

The Building Change Trust’s social innovation strategy and action plan, approved in February 2014 sets out three outcomes for the Trust to achieve by the end of 2018:

Outcome 1: Ecosystem
An established and active ‘ecosystem’ of social innovation practitioners and enablers from the public, private and VCSE sectors, ensuring a continual stream of social innovations at multiple stages of the ‘social innovation spiral’

Outcome 2: Financing
Sources of ongoing financial support for Social Innovation within or by the VCSE sector are identified and brought on-stream

Outcome 3: Practice
Examples of successful Social Innovations involving the VCSE sector are enabled to emerge (i.e. those achieving social impact, or those that create relationships or capabilities that make social impact in future more likely)

The Trust’s work to date has focused primarily on the achievement of outcome 3 and to that end we have commissioned or grant-funded three social innovation design processes, namely:

1 Social Innovation Camp
2 Amplify NI (Young Foundation)
3 Techies in Residence

Additionally the Trust has provided grant-funding to two specific social innovation projects, namely:

1 Holywell Trust’s ‘City of Culture Social Enterprise’ Initiative
2 Fermanagh Trust’s ‘Communities, Community Energy and Benefits’ Project

These have each been worthwhile in their own right and are modelling more innovative approaches to developing solutions to social problems.

However, in keeping with the Trust’s social innovation strategy, an approach focused solely on commissioning and grant-funding individual programmes is unlikely on its own to result in significant change to the broader culture of developing solutions to social problems and of collaboration across sectors.

Impact at this level would require commitment from a range of institutions and organisations across public, private and VCSE sectors, both in order to embed social innovation approaches in the way they work, as well as to collaborate in a way that makes them ‘more than the sum of their parts’.

Consequently the Trust is prepared to channel the majority of its remaining social innovation resources into the design, development and implementation of ‘Social Innovation NI’ - a collaborative partnership for the purpose of delivering a ‘one stop shop’ for social innovation support in Northern Ireland.

Examples – purely for indicative purposes - of the types of services that could be provided under the ‘Social Innovation NI’ umbrella include:

- Ideas generation and early stage support processes – including current and future Trust programmes - Si Camp, Techies in Residence, etc.
- Access to an accelerator programme
- An Innovation Lab or Labs
- Direct funding instruments such as Challenge Prizes, Seed Funding, Social Innovation Vouchers and ultimately possibly equity-type or social finance investments
- A social investment brokerage service
- Support for specific thematic learning initiatives - events, online resources and exchange visits
- A physical innovation hub
- Collaboration support for cross-sectoral initiatives
- Linkages to other SI Learning Platforms in the UK, Ireland and internationally

Some of the above supports already exist in Northern Ireland, but could benefit from the closer coordination and synergy that the Social Innovation NI collaboration arrangement would bring.

Other supports may partially exist in NI - for example within the economic or business innovation domain - but with some design modification may be broadened or re-oriented to include social innovation.

Yet other supports may exist in other parts of the UK or Ireland – for example seed funds, accelerators and social investment instruments - and proactive efforts could be made to ensure greater coverage and uptake in NI.
Finally there will be some gaps – supports that do not exist in NI and cannot be realistically expanded to NI from elsewhere – in such instances, partners would work together to design and deliver new programmes or services.

Clearly the Trust’s resources would be insufficient to deliver all of the above categories of services, however the intention would be that a significant investment from the Trust be used to unlock additional investment from other sources. All partners in the collaboration would need to work together to secure the necessary resources.

The case studies provided in this paper provide various models of social innovation support platforms elsewhere, however it is suggested that the Canadian example – Social Innovation Generation – where the partners each retain control over their own programmes with some central coordination and a shared brand, is particularly appropriate for the NI context.

It is proposed that the following principles should underpin any collaborative partnership:

- Genuine cross-sectoral collaboration
- Provision of practical benefit to practitioners, (with priority given to the VCSE sector in relation to the Trust’s investment)
- Outcomes-focused
- An integrated and holistic portfolio of services
- A governance and financial model that enshrines sustainability

The diagram below sets out a basic operational model which could be adopted. In terms of the central coordination function the Trust may, if other partners agree, be well placed to play this role in the initial stages, transitioning to an alternative arrangement by mid-2018, prior to the Trust’s winding down by the end of 2018.

The key stakeholder categories could include:

- Government Departments and public agencies – those with a remit in relation to a key area of social need, or in stimulating innovation or collaborative models of working
- VCSE Networks – those already active in social innovation or with a focus on cross-sectoral relationships
- Academia – faculties or institutes with an expressed interest in innovation and/or a key area of social need
- Private Sector – companies with a strong innovation or corporate philanthropy focus
- Funders – those with a large network of grantees (i.e. a market for the services) and an interest in integrating social innovation within their grant-making approach
- Key practitioners – those already working in providing an enabling environment for social innovation using particular models or within specific sub-sectors
- Outside enablers – key organisations from outside NI with expertise in social innovation and programmes or resources that could deliver greater benefits to NI practitioners

5.3 Initial Steps

In the immediate term the Trust would propose leading a facilitated process of dialogue and collaboration design (leading to collaborative delivery) with all of the key stakeholders with a current, or potential, role in supporting, enabling or funding social innovation in Northern Ireland.

The key stakeholder categories could include:

- Government Departments and public agencies – those with a remit in relation to a key area of social need, or in stimulating innovation or collaborative models of working
- VCSE Networks – those already active in social innovation or with a focus on cross-sectoral relationships
- Academia – faculties or institutes with an expressed interest in innovation and/or a key area of social need
- Private Sector – companies with a strong innovation or corporate philanthropy focus
- Funders – those with a large network of grantees (i.e. a market for the services) and an interest in integrating social innovation within their grant-making approach
- Key practitioners – those already working in providing an enabling environment for social innovation using particular models or within specific sub-sectors
- Outside enablers – key organisations from outside NI with expertise in social innovation and programmes or resources that could deliver greater benefits to NI practitioners
The Trust will procure the necessary expertise to facilitate this process. It is envisaged that the collaboration design would have three broad phases over a period of approximately six months:

**Phase One**
Open dialogue, non-committal
A series of public events, complemented by individual stakeholder interviews to ascertain need/demand; explore potential partnerships, programmes and services and; set high level principles and vision.

**Phase Two**
Commitment in principle
In depth dialogue with a provisional group of partners who have obtained the necessary internal approval for their participation. During this phase the group will refine their vision, develop a theory of change, explore possible service configuration, set out a preferred governance model and assess the budgetary situation and resource requirements.

**Phase Three**
Formal Partnership
Partners formally commit to the collaboration, including confirmation of any resource commitments. A collective fundraising drive will be undertaken to cover any budgetary shortfall. The final service configuration and governance model will be agreed and individual implementation plans set out.

The above outline concept for Social Innovation NI is not intended to be prescriptive but rather is offered as a starting point for and a catalyst to dialogue.