

HOW TO IMPLEMENT COOPERATION FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION?

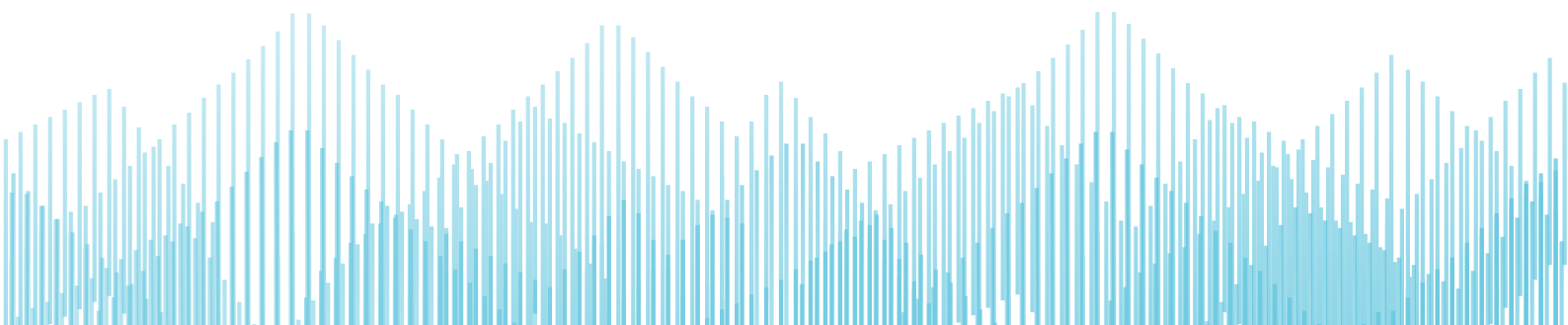


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1. About this guideline

This guideline is one of the deliverables of the project ASIS – Alpine Social Innovation strategy and is supported by the European Interreg Alpine Space program.

Its main objective is to promote a new vision of social innovation, by increasing knowledge, changing behaviour and influencing attitude, in the Alpine space regions. It aims to develop a new approach of innovation that answers specific economic and societal challenges met by each Alpine area, and to increase cooperation between territories and social innovation actors. Finally, the ASIS project intends to define what strategy could be implemented in the Alpine space area to better support and promote social innovation.

Who is it for?

This guideline is primarily written for public authorities which are starting to work with Social Innovation and do not have much experience with SI projects yet.

Main purpose of the guideline

The objective of the guideline is to help public authorities prepare and apply a Social Innovation project in cooperation with partners from other Alpine regions.

2. What is Social Innovation?

We hear a lot about social innovation. But what does this actually mean?

Social Innovation is an **innovation**, which is to say that it involves new ideas, new practices, and new products “that are socially momentous regulations of activities and procedures that deviate from the previously familiar scheme” (Gillward, 2000).

Therefore, if they are of a necessarily marginal and deviant nature, these innovations should be institutionalized and diffused across society as a whole.

An innovation is considered social because **its subject and its purpose are social**. The purpose of social innovation is to address social problems that have not been resolved within the commercial or public sphere, and to improve existing responses.

An innovation is considered social because it generates **new collaborations between actors** and even participation by new actors, such as citizens.

As a result, **social innovation is in line with a new action framework for public authorities** (at all regional levels) and market stakeholders. In this sense, for the public stakeholder, it constitutes new methods of action based on public-private partnerships in which the private part is considered to be all non-public actors, whether traditional companies or social enterprises and non-profit organizations.

Instead of “Social Innovation” we should really be talking about **“Societal Innovation”**, because SI does not deal only with social challenges but with all challenges in society.

You can learn more about what Social Innovation is in another training provided by the ASIS project:

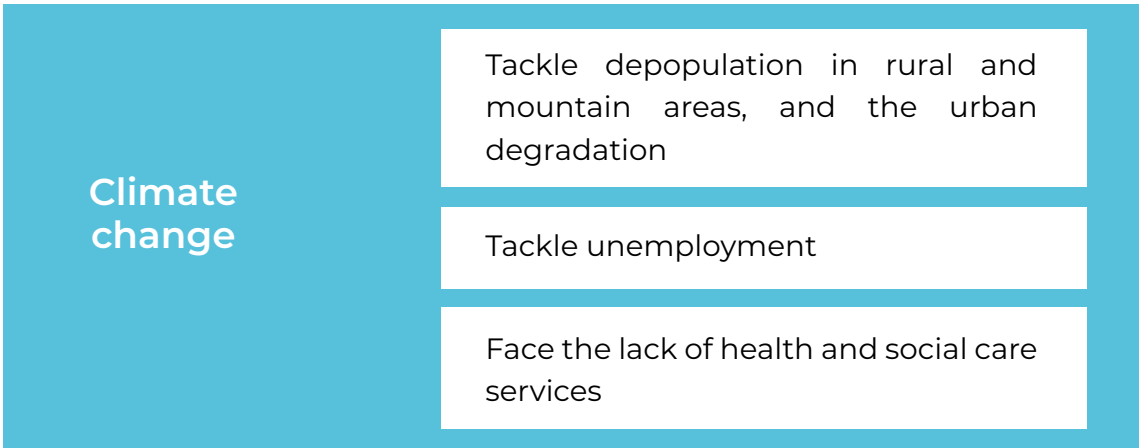
<https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/training-1-a-common-vision-of-social-innovation-in-the-alpine-space/>

3. Key challenges

Based on research work in the ASIS project the project partners have identified three main challenges in the Alpine Space.

- 1. Tackle depopulation in rural and mountain areas, and the urban degradation,
- 2. Tackle unemployment,
- 3. Face the lack of health and social care services.

And there is another key topic which impacts all of the above, climate change. The climate change effects are having a significant impact on the urban, rural and mountain environment. Many economic sectors depend directly on climatic conditions. Agriculture, forestry, winter tourism, health care must already cope with negative impacts. The main utilities, such as energy and water suppliers, are also affected. **Climate change** will have consequences in terms of availability of basic natural resources (water, land), with a strong impact on agriculture and industrial production in some areas, a widespread and accelerated decline in biodiversity with a reduced capacity of the same ecosystems to absorb extreme natural events.



4. How to recognize Social Innovation in your area?

It can be difficult to know whether something is a social innovation or not. To sum up the above definitions, social innovation:

- is a **new answer to social needs or societal challenges in your area**, regardless of the nature of innovation (technology, services, new uses etc.),
- uses a **collaborative approach** that involves beneficiaries, users and affected stakeholders,
- has a **positive, sustainable and measurable impact**.

The following image can be used to determine whether the idea, project, product, service, initiative or something else is a social innovation or not.

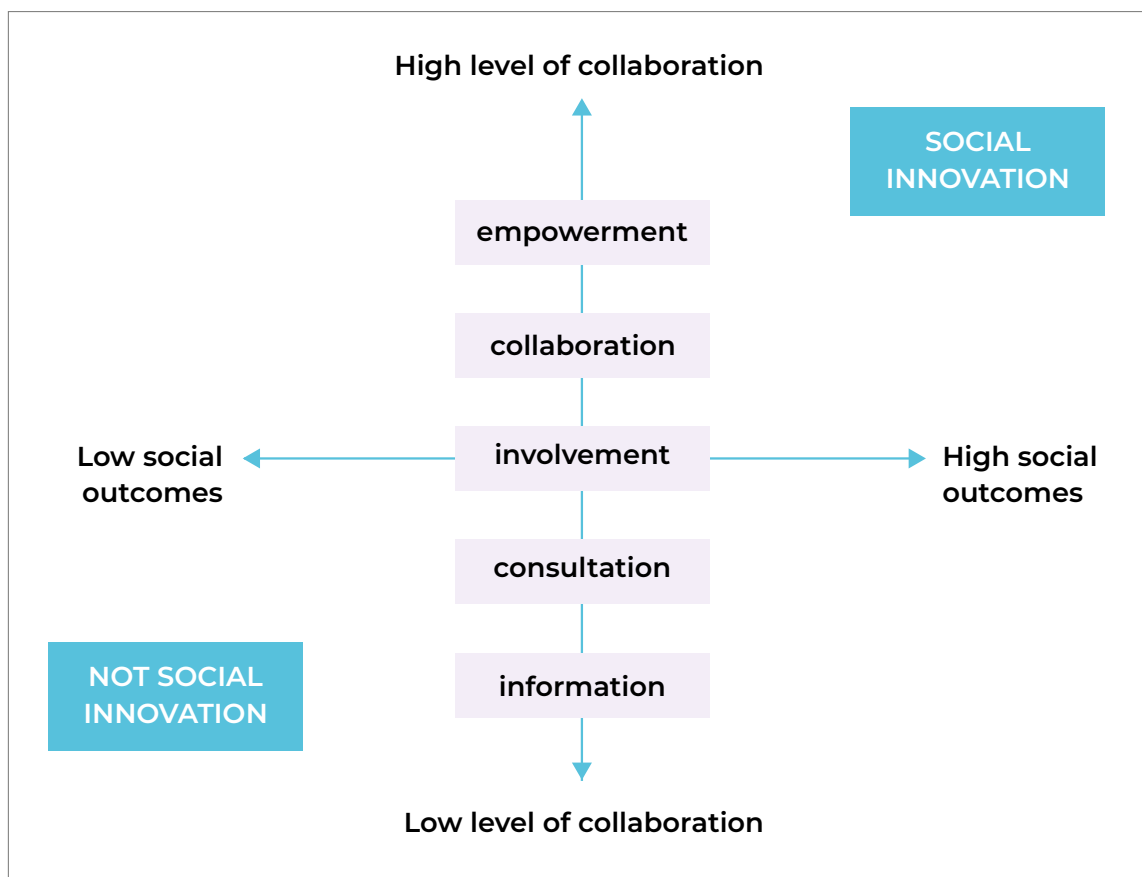


Image source: ASIS – Report on new Alpine Space Program Social Innovation Vision: <https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/SIDefinition>



5. How to implement cooperation between Alpine regions to answer the challenges linked to Social Innovation?

Is cooperation even needed?

Some projects do not need cooperation to be implemented. As the first step you should identify particular challenges of your region. Analyse whether the neighbouring regions or the regions you want to cooperate with, have similar challenges. If they do, you can do one of two things with cooperation:

- solve the challenges together, thus saving resources or
- transfer best practice examples if they already successfully solved the challenge.

Benefits of cooperation

The complexity that our societies are facing today, due to the very nature of the economic, societal, environmental and now health issues, but also to their degree of urgency and their strong interrelationship, requires almost undeniably the coordination of all forces to find and implement adapted solutions. This systemic and complex situation, which we have never been confronted with before, calls for different responses than those we have used until now. This is indeed the meaning of Albert Einstein's quote: «You cannot solve a problem with the same way of thinking that generated the problem».

If public actors are historically recognised as the guarantors of the general interest, many «private» actors also participate actively and effectively in the social utility and transition of societies, whether they are organised in associations, cooperatives, companies or just citizen.

Today, the time has come to bring these two poles closer together, to establish a relationship of trust and to weave pragmatic collaborations, to serve the territories and the responses of challenges. This is a real challenge for these two worlds, which have long been distant and distrustful of each other.

If the obstacles are coming from all sides, the public actors have in their hands, thanks to their legal competences and means, the power to accelerate this rapprochement. Although many have already initiated a real internal transformation of their practices (public innovation), the territorial dimension of the transformation still has a long way to go before this internal transformation of the public service brings the change at the very heart of actors' territorial ecosystems.

Not only because of this need to work differently, in a more pragmatic and collective way, but also in order to respond to a growing mistrust of citizens towards public institutions, public actors - and actors in general - are on the way to undertake a real change of paradigm, value system and posture. The “old world” values are gradually moving on more «CO» principles: collective, cohesion, cooperation, co-construction and co-responsibility.

The “old world” values	The “new” values...
IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND ECOSYSTEM OF ACTORS...	
Silo and specialisation	Transversality and systemic vision
Habits and procedures	Adaptability and agility
Only start when you are sure and ready	Right to experiment
Usual policy-making and implementation of measure from the top	Service design, policy-making based on public service users' needs, uses and expectations
Top-down	Bottom-up
High posture/ authority	Humility and accessibility
Power of decision from the authorities and elected representative	Concerted and shared decisions - deliberative decisions
Responsibility from the public institutions	Empowerment of users and citizens and co-responsibility
The public service is the only guarantor of the general interest	The response to the complexity of territorial and societal realities requires collective action and cooperation between multiple actors.
Competition	Cooperation
Funders- Financers relationships	Collaboration and reciprocity
Competition/opposition	Complementarity

What do you need to start a cooperation?

1. A well-thought-out idea of a project for cooperation

Just a draft of an idea is ok for a start but if you want your potential partner to understand what your challenge is, how you want to tackle it and what can be their role in it, you have to present them with a clear project proposal. Ideally you have your project idea detailed out to the extent where you could make a project proposal out of it, while at the same time keeping it open for partners' input and modifications.

One of the most important things is defining what kind of partner with what know-how, skills or experiences you need.

2. Defining the programme or funding scheme

You should choose the right programme or funding scheme for your project. Every programme has its own specifics and rules also regarding the partners that can participate in the project. After selecting the programme or funding scheme that is in compliance with your project idea and its goals and results, you must adjust the project idea to the programme.

3. A budget draft

You need to know (for yourself and for potential partners) the scope of budget you are considering and what costs it will include. To plan a project you need to estimate the budget. It takes some work to make it right – get quotes for services or goods you plan to include in the project, estimate the amount of working hours or days needed and other potential costs and make a budget. It does not have to be anything elaborate – a simple Excel sheet with all the expenses listed.

4. A timeframe

Estimate how long your project/cooperation will take – 6 months, a year, three years? Timeframe is important to fit in it all the tasks you want to do and to plan the budget accordingly. A more complicated project will probably take longer and may require more funds.

5. Finding partners

After all the above steps are made you begin to search the partners and you can be much more confident when you go searching for a partner. You are now prepared to start discussing collaboration and writing a project proposal for your project.

TIP

You can test your Social Innovation idea or project with the ASIS evaluation tool available here for free: <https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/evaluation-tool/>



How to find partners for cooperation?

At the very core of social innovation is a collaboration between various types of groups and stakeholders. Without cooperation and involvement of people, it is not considered a social innovation.

You are looking for partners who share a common ground with you. Maybe you share a similar challenge you both want to tackle or they have already made progress with it and you want to transfer their experience to your region. Maybe you want to develop a new approach and need a partner with specific skills set to make it happen. Whatever be the case you need to think about who can be your potential partner.

Alpine space is especially suited for setting up cooperation. Countries that are a part of Alpine space are:

- Austria,
- Liechtenstein,
- Switzerland,
- Slovenia,
- France (part of country),
- Germany (part of country),
- Italy (part of country).

One of the best ways to find future project partners is to start networking at transregional meetings and events that often take place in border regions. Regardless of the programme you can find suitable partners and discuss possible cooperation ideas – quite possibly also other participants are looking for partners for their project ideas.

Which types of partners are most suitable for cooperation?

LEGAL FORM

Basically you can choose entities of any legal form for as partners (enterprises, SMEs, research institutions, non-governmental organisations or public authorities, in some cases even natural persons) depending on the programme you are applying the project.

CAPABILITY AND REFERENCES OF PARTNERS

Capability, know-how, skills and references of the partners are more important than their legal form. Based on the project idea you must select partners which will contribute to the goals and the results of the project and that they will compensate those skills and know-how you are lacking or have experience in similar actions in their regions.



Tools for finding partners

You can find a partner yourself – maybe you are aware of a good practice or initiative and would like to connect with it. The first and most useful tool for the partner search is your own network of partners from previous international and cross-region projects.

If that is not sufficient there are also many tools available to find partners for Social Innovation projects in the Alpine space for example:

1. Social Innovation in the Alpine Space platform:

socialinnovationstrategy.eu

2. Alpine Space programme and project events:

www.alpine-space.eu

3. Cordis partner service is one of the largest databases of partner profiles for research and innovation.

cordis.europa.eu

4. Enterprise Europe Network Cooperation Opportunities Database includes innovation and technology profiles from international companies and research organisations - helps identify suitable partners for bilateral business, innovation and technology cooperation.

een.ec.europa.eu/tools/services/SearchCenter/Search/ProfileSimpleSearch

5. Keep.eu, a database of projects and beneficiaries of European Union cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes from 2000 to 2020.

keep.eu

6. Social platforms, especially LinkedIn

linkedin.com

7. International events you attend and network at, regardless of the programme.

How to finance cooperation?

Public authorities have various means of financing a cooperation. Depending on the level of public authority (national, regional, local) there is a different amount of funds available for financing cooperation projects. A municipality, for example, can finance small scale projects with its own resources while larger projects will probably require co-financing from national or EU funds. A ministry, on the other hand, may have funds available for just such purpose.

EU funds

We will focus on acquiring EU funds for your social innovation project/idea. There is a number of programs to which you can apply, we'll list some of them.

IMPORTANT NOTE

There are separate calls just for social innovation. However, do not limit yourself to those. Your social innovation idea can be applied to any call related to the topic of that call.

- **Interreg programs** – there is a number of Interreg programs to which you can apply. Check the list of all of them here and see which are available in your region: interreg.eu
Every Interreg program also has a contact point in each country, which can offer guidance when starting up a project and finding project partners. A list of countries and their national contact points: interreg.eu/country
- **Erasmus+** offers a wide variety of funding opportunities, from small scale to large scale projects: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus>
- **LEADER/CLLD** – for small to medium projects contact your Local Action Group (LAG) about possibilities of co-financing a social innovation project, whether with partners in your own LAG, in your region, country or internationally: enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en
- Check other available funds from EU funds in your country/region/municipality. Some of them are:
 - **European Social Fund:** ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp
 - **European Regional Development Fund:** ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/
 - **Horizon 2020:** ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en
 - **Horizon 2020 INNOSUP:** <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/innosup>
- Check the European Commission webpage where all the funding opportunities are collected:
ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/find-calls-funding-topic_en

Examples of cooperation

Here are a few examples of cooperation projects which deal with social innovation and tackle very different challenges. Also the budget, funding program and number of partners can vary a lot.

You can find more best practice examples of Social Innovation at ASIS platform:

<https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/training-6-best-practice-examples-of-social-innovation-in-alpine-space/>

If you would like to share your experience, please visit ASIS forum:

<https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/forums/>

Please also take a look at the SI initiatives at the ASIS website:

<https://socialinnovationstrategy.eu/category/initiatives/>

Plus3 Reward

● Challenge

The challenge that needed to be tackled is lack of involvement of young people in local community. The cause for this is lack of attractive and stimulating ways of working with young people by the organizations that address youth. Young people do not get involved and they don't get the opportunity to grow personally and career-wise.

● Proposed solution

The idea was to develop a new tool, a new program which will stimulate young people to become active and take advantage of opportunities offered in their local environment. Based on previous experience this can be done by offering rewards for various types of tasks: be active citizen, do volunteer work for various causes, implement their own ideas, training and education (personal growth), collaboration with other young people, promote the project among peers.

Formal framework of these activities is an online (mobile) application where participants record the tasks they perform, chose the rewards they earned and analyse their personal, career and skill growth.

● Cooperation level

Cross-border cooperation. 2 organizations from 2 countries: Croatia, Slovenia. Both organizations have cooperated in the past on other projects so they were familiar with each other which helped speed things along as there was no need for getting to know each other and their way of work. Small number of partners offers flexibility.



- **Funding scheme**

Erasmus+

- **Budget**

Small project, 58.840 eur.

- **Timeframe**

Duration 20 months

mladi-sentjur.si/3plus-nagrada

IBH-Lab Living Lab Active and Assisted Living

- **Challenge**

Being able to lead an independent life and stay in your own home for as long as possible is particularly valuable for disabled people and the elderly. Everyday tasks can quickly become a challenge despite the help of a professional caretaker or a family member.

Another challenge is holidays or trips where a disabled person is faced with a number of obstacles that need to be overcome to enjoy the vacation.

- **Proposed solution**

Develop an assistance system for an independent life. During the project people with disabilities and elderly people will be given various active and assisted living (AAL) products to use at home or in the nursing home. In return they will report on their experiences with the products. The developers will use this real-life feedback to further develop their products.

Another aim of the project is to make a Lake Constance area barrier-free. Project partners aim to minimize as many barriers as possible for holiday guests and travellers with assistance needs and to maximize the satisfaction of these guests and their caregivers in Lake Constance. As part of the project, hotel rooms will be equipped with the necessary assistance technologies and expanded to become Hotel Living Labs (HLLs).

- **Cooperation level**

Cross-border cooperation. 12 organizations from 2 countries: Germany, Switzerland. Large number of partners, but no language barrier which is a plus.

- **Funding scheme**

Interreg Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein

- **Budget**

Medium project, 439.004 eur.

- **Timeframe**

Duration 40 months

interreg.org/projekte/P1/SZ2/abh068

- **Challenge**

Social economy and entrepreneurship is growing in the EU, however social entrepreneurship policies are still under-developed and fragmented in most EU Member states. One of the missing pieces is the ability to rank and benchmark regional and local SEs according to policy metrics in order to improve the competitiveness of social enterprises.

- **Proposed solution**

Provide policymakers with an evidence-based diagnostic tool that will increase the effectiveness of local and regional action to stimulate growth and employment (especially for marginalized social groups) in social enterprises, and improve their ecosystems in European cities and regions. Therefore, a public measuring and labelling system will be developed specifically for social enterprises.

Policy makers can then use this system when choosing policy measures, effectively contributing to the development of the SE sector. In addition, all project partners will develop regional action plans to serve as a basis for further activities and to support policy tools for SEs.

- **Cooperation level**

International cooperation on the EU level. 8 partners from 7 countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Poland. Medium-sized partnership requires more coordination in the project application and implementation phase.

- **Funding scheme**

Interreg Europe

- **Budget**

Big project, 1.388.065 eur.

- **Timeframe**

Duration 60 months

interreurope.eu/socialseeds



- **Challenge**

The Alpine Space is among the most innovative EU regions. Yet, in spite of good ICT structures and high innovating SMEs, the territory displays unequal service and funding opportunities between urban and mountain areas, where limited innovation services and inadequate investment restrain SMEs growth. Also, at transnational level, collaboration across Alpine Space countries on innovation is limited.

- **Proposed solution**

Improve the framework condition for innovation in the Alpine Space improving intermediaries' and policy makers' knowledge and competence on Design Thinking to assist entrepreneurs with dedicated strategy and structure: a Virtual Training Centre. Innovation and local Design Thinking Labs will boost SMEs innovation processes and growth yet preserving the connection with the territory.

The project will define new strategies and tools to improve the framework conditions for innovation in the Alpine Space through Design Thinking diffusion, focus on increasing knowledge and know-how exchanging at a transnational level. DesAlps will also implement a durable transnational cooperation network thanks to Design Thinking hotspots that will act as permanent cross-fertilization actors, boosting the potential for business innovation and consensus building for Design Thinking inclusion and policies.

- **Cooperation level**

International cooperation on the Alpine region level. 10 partners from 5 countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia. Large number of partners requires more coordination in the project application and implementation phase.

- **Funding scheme**

Interreg Alpine Space

- **Budget**

Big project, 1.921.900 eur.

- **Timeframe**

Duration 40 months

alpine-space.eu/projects/desalps/en/home