Shaping Futures: South East Asian Social Innovation Network
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Social Innovation in the framework of higher education:
how to teach to transform society
1. Introduction

A reference to social innovation in recent years is essential when discussing the strategies that respond to the economic, political and social challenges that societies must address as the result of the most relevant changes that affect their structures.

As explained by Alonso and Echeverría (2016), this term appears in the late 20th century and beginning of the 21st century with the aim of highlighting social and human sciences as drivers of innovation processes. We must remember that its traditional acceptance prioritises technological innovations as a product of scientific research, linked to companies, the creators of wealth. It was introduced by Vannevar Bush in 1945 and was systematised and operationalised with the publication of the first edition of the Oslo Manual in 1992 (Echeverría, 2008).

If we look at the pragmatic aspects, social innovation consists of a set of practices that take place in a particular social, economic, cultural and political context. It also defines the process as the set of social agents that take part in it, namely the public administration, and the organisations, human groups and individuals involved, in their role as citizens, consumers or users. The output resulting from the interaction between the actors and the environment is no other than the products, services, action models and public policies that respond to needs defined by society itself. Along these lines, according to the European Commission (2013), social innovation would involve both the development and the execution of new ideas with the aim of creating new collaborations and social relations.

An example of these practices, their relevance and their objectives is reflected in the regulation developed by the European Union. Regulation No. 1296/2013 on the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation points out that it is a powerful tool for dealing with major social challenges such as ageing populations, poverty, unemployment, changes in work and personal practices, and the public's expectations regarding social justice, education and health care, among many others.

It cannot be ignored that innovation is a process that must be developed in an orderly manner and with methodological rigor. Innovation must respond to a specific demand from society, and to do so, we must first identify which new
social needs have not yet been addressed or have been unsatisfactorily resolved. Starting from this diagnosis, we must determine and develop new solutions that respond adequately to the challenge in question, so that the design contemplates its evaluation according to criteria of effectiveness and the impact on society.

Some notable specific features of social innovation are: (1) design that is raised from open practices, where knowledge can be shared; (2) the formation of work teams that take a transdisciplinary configuration into account; (3) problem-solving carried out in an integrated manner, rather than delegating responsibility to specialised departments or professionals; and, (4) the involvement and empowerment of citizens, consumers and users; that is, the implementation of strategies driven from the bottom up and with processes and results adapted to regional needs.

It is also important to highlight the relevance of the context in which social innovation occurs and the factors that determine its emergence, development, implementation and consolidation. Following this line of reasoning, there is one key idea to consider: the social innovation ecosystem. This can be defined as the set of relationships and flows of resources and knowledge around social innovation, which facilitate its cultural, political and technological assimilation (Vernis and Navarro, 2011).

Buckland and Murillo (2014) discuss the importance of the so-called antennas for social innovation, which are organizations that support these practices through funding, research or the creation of platforms for the generation and dissemination of social innovation. These entities establish action networks based on the collaboration and strategic alliance between the different actors to offer direct services, ranging from the availability of incubation spaces to training programmes.

In view of this, the existence of experts who can direct, coordinate or lead social innovation in organisations, of a public or private nature, is considered a priority. This framework gives rise to and promotes some of the training actions in Higher Education, such as the Master's Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change offered by the University of Alicante (Spain). This Master's Degree is committed to providing graduates and professionals with solid theoretical
training that allows them to perform complex, accurate and effective analyses of today’s society; by providing mastery of social research techniques that give them the ability to plan, execute and evaluate innovative actions; and train students in the correct management of multidisciplinary teams.

This educational approach relies on the favourable ecosystem created by the “Sociology of Innovation and Social Change” (SOC-Innova) research group at the University of Alicante whose lines of research include, among others, the study of innovation processes and their management, the culture of innovation, social change, customer/user-centred innovation, and innovation for the creation of products, services or teams.

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**Figure 1.** Social innovation in complex societies.
Source: authors’ own elaboration
2. Master in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change of the University of Alicante: transdisciplinarity as a strategy

In the current context, Social Sciences, Law and Humanities graduates need to adjust their graduate training to the social needs and demands of the job market. In recent years in the professional field, there has been an increasing demand for experts with the ability to, not only manage projects aimed at the creation of social value, but who are also capable of assessing their impact on the economic and community development of the contexts in which they are implemented.

Therefore, these professionals must be capable of, on the one hand, knowing and analysing the main processes of change that affect social institutions and companies from a sociological perspective and, on the other hand, they must dominate specific methodologies that enable the management and leadership of the innovation projects that are at the heart of these processes.

The Master’s Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change aims to train students to become specialists with the perspective, training and scientific and interdisciplinary criteria to act in the resolution of community and business problems, combining entrepreneurial and creative perspective with social responsibility.

In this way, the specialisation process creates employment opportunities in the public, private and third sectors. The new degree prepares students to act as innovation directors for services and public entities and trains them, in turn, as company innovation managers, by incorporating the organisational and project management perspective aimed toward creating new concepts, products and value propositions.

The training proposal designed promotes the use of existing scientific evidence in professional work, while facilitating students' production of new and rigorous knowledge to diagnose, anticipate and direct the dynamics of change through creative and systematic processes that encourage efficient and responsible decision-making.

The Master’s Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change aims to provide specific training to effectively develop activities in different areas related to social change and innovation, both in the professional field and in research.
Social change and innovation are the fundamental hallmarks of contemporary societies. Different theoretical and methodological perspectives are incorporated in the study of emerging social processes and social transformation. Sociology, as a discipline specialising in these dynamics, offers professionals the tools needed for the analysis of the processes of social change and the social structures in which it occurs.

The Master's Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change provides the training required to launch real innovation projects, applicable to business and commercial reality in the industrial field, as well as bring about improvement and change to the public administration and third sector institutions and services.

Students will acquire a deep understanding of the use of the theories, methodologies and techniques that constitute the operational core of these types of processes, graduating with the ability to meet the growing demand of companies, institutions and public services, in relation to their innovation teams. It also provides the necessary technical and strategic resources for the evaluation of the scalability and sustainability of social and business innovation projects or products. The general objectives are listed below:

- Provide the specialised training necessary to develop an expert professional activity in the different fields of public administration, business and the third sector, which require specialists in innovation and social change.

- Know and analyse, from a sociological perspective, the main processes of change that affect social institutions and companies; including social evolution, modernisation, development and globalisation, the processes of rationalisation and civilisation and social revolutions or transformations.

- Analyse the key players of an organisation and social dynamics in their historical and prospective evolution, using European society and, in particular, Spanish society as an empirical reference.

- Train professionals that can be integrated into interdisciplinary teams and manage, from start to finish, new projects, programmes and innovation strategies, as well as apply technological resources to the management of the dynamics of change and creation of new products.
• Train for information management in innovation and creative processes, properly designing systems for the acquisition and treatment of data.

• Learn to form and coordinate interdisciplinary teams for the execution of innovation projects in the public administration sector, private enterprise and the third sector.

• Learn how to create an Innovation Plan applicable to the professional activity and a creation scheme and apply innovation within an organization.

• Provide students with technical and strategic resources for the evaluation of the scalability and sustainability of social and business innovation projects or products.

• Promote rigorous training for the development of critical skills in the application of the Scientific Method.

• Train to work in a globalised and multilingual world, thus contributing to the knowledge society whose key to competitiveness is innovation.

2.1. Social Demand

Social change and innovation are the fundamental hallmarks of contemporary societies. It is an extremely complex area whose analysis involves different theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Sociology, as a discipline specialised in these dynamics, offers professionals the necessary tools for the historical analysis of the processes of change and the social structures in which they occur. It also provides us with knowledge of the technical tools necessary to implement real innovation projects, applicable to the business and commercial reality in the industrial field, as well as improve and change public institutions and services.

However, despite the prevailing need for professionals capable of diagnosing, guiding and directing processes of change through innovation, there are no graduate programmes aimed at training experts in this field. The Master's Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change specifically aims to cover these educational needs, expanding the potential for professionalisation for Social Science, Law and Humanities graduates.

The Sociology Department of the University of Alicante works in collaboration with different types of entities that insist on the need for this profile to
improve the training of their work teams. The objective of the Master's Degree is therefore to offer the necessary training to do so, promoting the management of the sociological methodologies and techniques that constitute the operational core of these types of processes and, ultimately, converting graduates into professionals capable of fulfilling this growing demand of companies, institutions and public services.

2.2. Content

The Master's Degree includes a total of 60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits, 48 of the ECTS credits belonging to a common core block that consists of eight courses and 12 ECTS credits that correspond to the Master's Thesis for each student. The common core courses are divided into three blocks: theoretical, practical and applied knowledge (See Figure 2).

**M A S T E R ' S  O N  S O C I A L  I N N O V A T I O N  A N D  D Y N A M I C S  O F  C H A N G E  C O N T E N T S**

![Diagram](image-url)

- Theoretical contents
- Methodological contents
- Applied knowledge

*Figure 2. Content of the Master's Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change of the University of Alicante (Spain).*

*Source: authors' own elaboration*
Block I. Theoretical content

Social Innovation: Definition and Evolution
Social innovation, as such, has existed for more than 50 years. However, the essential principles that define it are a part of human essence with a long history, but with different names and characteristics. Its development, usually linked to times of crisis or difficult situations, has changed over time. In 1984, P. Drucker referred to the social responsibility of private companies and their duty to serve society, adding the concept of social entrepreneurship and extending the scope of application to social innovation of the business world. Social innovation is, therefore, a term used to refer to a broad spectrum of innovative solutions to social and/or environmental problems, prompting a growing discussion about the definition and scope of the term. This course will offer students a historical view of the concept and its evolution over time. The sociological basis of the concept of creativity will be addressed and studied in detail, and accompanied by practical examples, different interpretations and methodological approaches which have accompanied social innovation and entrepreneurship since their inception.

Processes, Dynamics of Change and Social Action in Advanced Societies
A discussion about social innovation means paying special attention to the dynamics of change. Sociology provides tools that allow us to know and analyse the main processes of change that affect social institutions and companies. This course introduces a historical tour of the processes of social change of advanced societies, analysing their future in different areas, such as education, health, political systems and social structures and institutions.

The course also proposes the study of the economic dimension of social trust and its relationship with new emerging socio-economic dynamics. These new dynamics of change, on the one hand, lead to the emergence of new markets and new forms of economic activity based on the knowledge and use of technological platforms for the exchange of goods and services. On the other hand, they show the ability to develop collaborative and sustainable economic practices and resilience in the face of the challenges of economic crisis and the state's withdrawal from social protection.
The course will also address the knowledge of specific techniques for shaping these processes of change, as well as the social and economic impact of these changes and trends.

Inclusion, Participation and Intervention in Social Innovation Processes
The design processes of policies and intervention in complex societies, on a macro and micro level, are increasingly characterised by the inclusion of elements of community governance, considered to be desirable means for addressing problems, as well as an ideal methodological path to achieve strategic purposes in the resolution of these problems. In this sense, the shaping of innovative public and private management models in the social sphere incorporates the principles of inclusion and participation of all of the actors involved as essential premises in their conception and development. This requires professionals in the framework of the development of social innovation processes with reliable conceptual and technical skills for the incorporation of inclusive and participatory logics in the different phases and actions of the designing and implementation of actions.

Block II. Methodological Content

Social Research Methods and Techniques for Innovation I
Knowledge of social research methods and techniques is essential for placing the recipients of innovative programmes and products at the heart of the research process, ensuring that the proposals are adapted to the real needs of each context. Graduates’ technical prowess will determine the strength of their projects in a business and industrial reality and in public institutions and services.

Thus, this subject will offer students a complete understanding of the research process and its different stages, analysing the specific problems of social research applied to innovation and its epistemological foundations.

To this end, students will be taught to take advantage of sources of information on lifestyles and living conditions, public opinion and consumption patterns in the current context of expansion of communication and information technologies. The available data will provide detailed information on the closest or most distant social context, quickly and cost-effectively. Decision-making based on
available empirical evidence requires the efficient management of such data sources (source selection, access and preparation of microdata files), their analysis and the ability to interpret and report the results. A critical analysis of data quality and potential biases and the correct interpretation and dissemination of the results are basic decision-making skills. The course includes, in addition to the study of the tools for the diagnosis and identification of opportunities, the preparation, analysis, interpretation and transfer of data from existing surveys and databases and the systematisation of unorganized data sources.

**Social Research Methods and Techniques for Innovation II**

The second part of the Social Research Methods and Techniques for Innovation course will give students a more in-depth look at the procedures for the design and application of fundamental social research techniques, on a quantitative and qualitative level, applied to innovative environments.

The subject will not only focus on the management of classic sociology techniques and instruments but will place special emphasis on the adaptation of these tools for use in innovation projects, putting the recipients of new products and programmes at the centre of the research to ensure its adaptation to real needs, such as: specific User-Centred Design tools, Lean UX techniques for creating innovative products and projects, and transdisciplinary Design Thinking processes. The course will also examine Social Media Analytics (SMA), offering students information on the sources of information and the metric tools currently in use to analyse social media messages.

This way, the job market's demand is met, on a public and private level, providing experts who are capable of managing projects aimed at creating social value and assessing the impact of these projects on the economic and community development within the contexts in which they are implemented. It is therefore essential for these professional figures to be capable, on the one hand, of knowing and analysing the main processes of change that affect social institutions and companies from a sociological perspective and, on the other hand, be capable of mastering specific methodologies that enable the management and leadership of the innovation projects at the heart of these processes.
Tools for Team Management in Innovation Processes
In addition to technical skills for the sociological analysis of changing contexts and their emerging needs, social innovation processes require transdisciplinary and united work teams that can complete all of the stages of the process in a satisfactory manner. Innovation teams have special features that ensure their success and specific operating modes that affect the projects' results. Self-management, horizontalism and training for information management are essential aspects that must be understood and managed. Organizational Sociology has addressed these issues and provides the necessary tools for the coordination of people in this field of work. This course will provide students with the knowledge and strategies they need to implement social innovation projects in competent and robust human teams, making the most of their teamwork.

Block III. Applied Knowledge

Strategic Planning, Execution and Evaluation of Social Innovation Projects
The proper planning of innovation projects is the basis of their success. Despite being a creative process, innovation requires precise organisation that limits risks during the development of its different phases.

The first objective of this course is to offer students the information and tools needed to control an innovation process from the start, addressing the mechanisms that enable: a) the generation of ideas and identification of opportunities, b) the structuring of a work plan and its different phases, c) the recruitment of partners to combine skills and increase synergies and d) obtain the financing that allows ideas to be converted into viable projects. All of the above will provide graduates with the ability to manage the strengths and contingencies of their projects, guaranteeing control during their development and anticipating solutions for any difficulties that may arise during their execution.

Secondly, and based on a circular concept of social innovation projects - in which these programmes can feed off each other and be modified using the information collected from the evaluation of their different phases (design, implementation and effects/impact). The objective is the acquisition of basic
instrumental skills to create and develop evaluative research proposals, linked to the private and public sectors (policies, plans, programmes and projects). Emphasis will be placed on the development of quantitative and qualitative evaluation indicators, as well as participatory evaluation. Gender perspective will not only be a cross-cutting issue with respect to the content of the course, the course will also include specific content for the assessment of gender impact.

**Participatory Foresight for Social Innovation**
The new socio-technological paradigm based on global access, constant change, immediacy and social media is forcing organizations to be more empathetic and adopt a human-centred approach.

This change implies the need to search for new ways to make more flexible, creative and participatory foresight.

The concept of social innovation becomes particularly relevant in this context, since it involves addressing innovation as a “culture” (instead of “management”): an essential part of the code of values and collective identity that support and shape every society and/or human organization. This requires the concurrence of holist thinking, creativity and democratic processes in the identification of alternatives when using participatory foresight.

This course is proposed as a Practicum: a learning experience based on the resolution of specific problems, raised by different types of organisations (NGOs, public administration, private companies) as a case study.

### 2.3. Career opportunities

In the current context, Social Science, Law and Humanities degrees need to adjust their postgraduate training to society’s needs and the demands of the job market.

In recent years, the demand for experts, capable of not only managing projects aimed at creating social value, but who are also able to assess the impact of these projects on the economic and community development of the contexts in which they are implemented.
The prevailing need to incorporate professionals capable of diagnosing, guiding and directing processes of change through innovation into the market justifies the implementation of this postgraduate degree, aimed at training experts in this specific subject matter.

The Master's Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change provides this training space, expanding the options for professionalisation of studies in Social Sciences, Law and Humanities.

To this end, these professional figures must be able, on the one hand, to know and analyse the main processes of change that affect social institutions and companies from a rigorous empirical perspective; and, on the other hand, be able to master specific methodologies for the management and leadership of the innovation projects that are at the heart of these processes.

This Master's Degree trains students to become specialists with vision and training, who use scientific criteria and an interdisciplinary approach to solve community and business problems, combining entrepreneurial and creative perspective with social responsibility.

This specialisation is aimed at creating job placement opportunities in the public sector, private sector and the third sector prepares students to act as innovation directors of services and public entities, and trains them, in turn, for innovation management in companies, incorporating an organisational perspective and project management geared toward to the creation of new concepts, products and value proposals.
3. Innovation as a methodology: sequencing of the teaching-learning process for skill acquisition

The Master’s Degree on Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change originates from a context of increasing social complexity as the result of social, economic, environmental and political processes, such as globalisation, economic crisis or the need to improve our democracies.

Companies, entities and institutions, and organisations in general, need to effectively answer new demands and innovation is the way to achieve this. However, it is believed that many organisations repeat exploitation, management or commercialisation process models to ultimately resist this change. We are confronted with a big problem when we consider that we have fully entered an era of permanent innovation.

Studies frequently show that the people responsible for these organisations seem to be aware of the need to introduce change in the decision-making and management processes, and in their product and service portfolios, to improve their life expectancy. The problem is that they do not know where to start. They know that they want to be innovative but do not know how to do so.

Many people think that innovation is reserved for the most creative, and that a successful idea is a stroke of genius at the most unexpected moment. Innovation is the result of a process, the application of a method; however the ingredients are different from those conventionally used.

**INNOVATION IS A METHODOLOGY**

| Strategic planning | Techniques | Goals |

IMPLEMENTED IN A RIGOROUS MANNER

*Figure 3.* Innovation as a methodology. 
Source: authors’ own elaboration
Innovation is achieved with methodology. It consists of rigorously applying a set of techniques that will help organisations achieve their goals. Innovation is a part of the DNA of strategic planning and has become the philosophy of the production process. Therefore, qualified people are needed to manage these processes. For this reason, the Master’s Degree in Social Innovation and Dynamics of Change was created, to train professionals who will join teams created to innovate.

The content of the Master’s degree is sequentially structured to facilitate student learning. The programme is designed to focus on three types of subject matter: theoretical, methodological and technical and applied knowledge.

The first set of courses introduces students to the basic aspects of social innovation in a theoretical manner. It includes a short but necessary historical journey of the idea of social innovation before addressing the sociological bases that define the concepts of creativity and social enterprise.

In the same way, the idea of social change will be addressed as well as the processes that promote and drive it. Sociology is equipped with the tools to identify and analyse these processes in diverse spheres such as education, health, political organisation of society and new institutional structures. Special attention will be paid to the economical dimension of social trust and its relationship with the appearance of new markets. Interest will also focus on new sustainable and collaborative economic activities based on knowledge and the use of technological platforms for the exchange of goods and services.

To end the introduction of this first content block, the course will delve into the leading role of society in the design of public policies. Society’s inclusion in these processes means an indisputable advance towards the modernisation of public administration management. The theoretical content that comprises this subject will be supplemented by the teaching of the methodology needed for community intervention and its application in technical and political actions.

Social innovation professionals should have a solid theoretical base for critical analysis in relation to the context of their activity but they must also be rigorous in their application of the instruments for the analysis of the reality that allow strategies to be designed for the organisation in which they work.
The students will be taught the phases of social research, the search for useful and necessary information for univariable and multivariable analysis in a research setting.

The content relevant to research methods and techniques will study activities in relation to the process of social innovation. The phases of the innovation process, defining elements and their orientation towards the creation of valuable proposals will be detailed throughout the course. Main innovation techniques such as Design Thinking will be presented as well as methodologies focused on User-Centred Design. Furthermore, students will complement their training in techniques with some of the most advanced and distinctive innovative environments such as Social Media Analysis.

The innovation agents are organisations, specifically, professional transdisciplinary teams. In this stage of the course, students will be provided with knowledge on innovation management, human resources, and innovation teams and procedures. For this, Organisational Sociology offers the essential tools for the start-up of social innovation projects.

The last content block will also emphasise the concept of praxis for social innovation professionals. To do this, tools such as Wild Cards, Weak Signals or Tipping Points, amongst others, will be used.

The quality of the programme is guaranteed with the preparation of an original syllabus adapted to organisations’ needs to be more competitive and sustainable and to provide answers to the changeable demands of today’s society. A proposal that includes professors with extensive professional experience in innovation projects in an organisational setting and within the SOC-Innova research team at the University of Alicante with the aim of uncovering all of the innovation techniques within organisations while they contribute to the knowledge transfer of this subject in the sphere of public and private entities. This team has participated in the design of the axiological profile of the international customers of a holiday resort to create innovative touristic products, as well as the diagnosis of territorial employment for the planning of public policies within the Smart Specialisation Strategy for the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research programme.
Bibliography


