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Social Innovation: The Next 10 Years Insights from the SIX Wayfinder

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THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Social innovation: The next ten years. An introduction	Page 1
Where are we starting from?	Page 3
Where do we want to go?	Page 4
What kind of world do we want to live in 2027?	Page 5
What can help us move forward?	Page 7
What's in our way?	Page 9
How will we find our destination?	Page 11
So what are we going to do?	Page 13
What's next?	Page 15
About the Wayfinder and SIX	Page 16

**“In these troubling political times,
How can we unleash the power of ordinary people?”**

KRISS DEIGLMEIER, Tides, US

SOCIAL INNOVATION: THE NEXT TEN YEARS

Seen through one lens, social innovation has achieved a huge amount over the last decade. The increase in funds, knowledge, people and policies has contributed to the growth of this diverse field. However, compared to the scale of social challenges facing the world, this success looks marginal. We don't have enough examples of social innovation creating large-scale, deep and systemic change. Only tiny fractions of commercial investment and public spending contribute to social innovation and the scale of social innovation institutions pales in comparison to their equivalents in technology, the military or medicine.

Alongside other shifts and challenges, the future can seem uncertain. The political ground has shifted. Right-wing populism is on the rise and pushing back the progress of social justice and liberal concerns. New technologies continue to shake up how we live and work. The global environment and the world economy are both in fragile balance.

In February 2017, SIX brought together social innovation leaders and changemakers from across the world to discuss how we should be addressing these challenges, and in particular, how social innovation can contribute over the next ten years.

“We need to have the courage for deep listening.”

CATHY GLOVER, Suncor Energy, Canada

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND AS SOCIAL INNOVATORS?

The **SIX Wayfinder** was convened by SIX, hosted by Nesta and supported by the UNDP, Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), and the JW McConnell Family Foundation.

160 leaders from over 34 countries attended the SIX Wayfinder from diverse backgrounds, both private and public, including government, design, international development, entrepreneurship and more.

The Wayfinder was about looking back to look forward, asking attendees:

- **What is the state of social innovation and its current global context?**
- **How do we become more than the sum of our parts?**
- **What should we, as a community, aim to achieve by 2027?**

This paper, prepared by SIX, summarises the discussions, insights and opportunities surfaced at the Wayfinder. We set out to align around a set of actions for the next ten years. But, by providing a safe space for discussion and debate, we tuned into a strong undercurrent pulling us to speak plainly about very core of what we do, why we do it and why it matters.

In the end, we did not develop any kind of shared manifesto nor did we collectively sign off on a short list of common commitments for the next ten years. Rather, we focused our energy on our process and purpose. We developed calls to action that describe the more radical, transformative and human approaches that we need to advance between now and 2027. Critical self-reflection, truly understanding what we are each about, and reinvesting in trust and truth must drive us through the next 10 years.

We grounded ourselves in a shared solidarity for people, planet and each other to build collective momentum for the future.

One of the overriding message from the Wayfinder event, was 'don't despair. You don't have to face this alone.'

We've started the conversation: now let's keep it going.



**“We must generate ideas to feed the conversation —
visions, political statements that can be understood
by others.”**

EZIO MANZINI, DESIS, Italy

WHERE ARE WE STARTING FROM?

Social innovation has come a long way over the past ten years. It's on national and local agendas, with comprehensive policies in countries as varied as Malaysia and Canada and commitments from pioneering mayors from Seoul to Athens. New investments are opening up with an expansion in social investment funds. International NGOs and development agencies are taking social innovation much more seriously. Large global companies are starting to take an interest and move beyond Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Learning has spread through social innovation centres and labs, backed by formal academic study. Resources for developing relevant skills are becoming more accessible. Digital action has taken off, with new campaigning tools spurring new kinds of social movements.

But a big gap still remains between these responses and the urgency and scale of demand. Investment from business and the public sector is still tiny. There aren't enough examples of large-scale, deep and systemic change. We are still seeking quick wins and hitting the stagnation chasm between pilot/prototype and diffusion/scale.

(Keynote speaker Geoff Mulgan of Nesta prepared a short overview of these developments for the event. You can read this and other resources on the Wayfinder website, www.sixwayfinder.com.)

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

From the start, our discussions suggested that, given the current climate, we have come to a fork in the road. There are two pulls for social innovation: towards process and towards purpose. While interdependent, identifying the leading pull was a source of tension amongst participants. And in that tension, there was a lack of certainty about whether this is a 'progressive' innovation movement or a human social conservation movement. Should we be doubling-down on modernity, liberalism, innovation or humanity? Are we dedicated to transforming existing systems or to safeguarding a space for humanity? Or both: some form of radical conservation?

We took this opportunity to stop, reflect and consider our destination.

In the next ten years, will social innovation be...?

- a movement and/or
- a sustainable business model and/or
- a way of working with shared values and culture and/or
- broadened in scope throughout society and/or
- a backend operating system and/or
- an enabling structure that encourages resilient leadership

“We’re forgetting the real language – the people, humanity, love – that actually guides this. The personal journey.”

CHARLIE LEADBEATER, UK

What kind of world do we want to live in 2027?

THE LANDSCAPE

- **A revolution in active citizenship will make social innovation mainstream:** empowered by a renewed social contract and reformed educational systems, people will be prepared for a life of purpose. They will understand how we depend upon each other at both the local and global level. They will be able to see problems and be committed to engaging in solving them.
- **All political debates will be informed by people's lives,** with decision-making representing broader values and drawing on new forms of local democracy, especially in the cities where increasingly so many of us live. Greater participation and equality will be the norm.
- **Our economies will be more inclusive and based on values,** with a reassessment of what we regard as assets and businesses moving towards profit-making that is grounded in social bottom lines and responsibility. We will see more alternative forms of finance, such as shared ownership and peer-to-peer lending. There will be a commitment to a basic and fulfilling standard of living for all. This will include food and income security as technology, especially automation, changes the face of employment.

OUR PRACTICE

- **We will work in more and broader partnerships,** with global bodies like the UN, and with journalists and other communicators who are seeking to document and amplify solutions, not just problems. We will use transformative data and digital technology to co-design open and accessible ecosystems for social innovation.
- **We will understand how systems change happens,** which gets to the roots of complex, global problems.
- **We will use a common language to measure impact,** with funders no longer solely defining what is good or different, and the public, private and social sectors talking fluently to each other.

OUR PRACTICE (cont.)

- **We will connect globally and locally through open platforms and civic spaces.** These will be more inclusive, **bridging the North-South divide**, bringing together the public, private and social sectors. We will make sure to talk to those we disagree with and engage in dialogue outside of our social media bubbles.

Like any vision, this is – and should be – ambitious. How might we drive this through? How do we bring more people along with us?

“We will focus on innovations which are transformative and generative; which change the rules of the game, create new relationships and create, with that, new flows and resources through society.”

CHARLIE LEADBEATER, UK

What can help us move forward?

The current global climate may feel like a push back against social justice. But many underlying trends can give us the momentum to drive forward.

THE LANDSCAPE

- The UN has set Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, with specific targets for 2030. These provide a solid and supportive framework for social innovation; however, the field has relatively little engagement with them. The SDGs also draw in considerable capital that, in turn, will attract further funding. Can we better align to and engage with the SDGs?
- Current political shifts emphasise the unmooring of dominant social assumptions and structures. The democratic process and mission are misaligned and under threat. Regardless of political affiliations and objectives, there is snap-back against the systems and structures of the neoliberal era; it is a defining moment to engage in the political arena, bringing the principles, values and approach of social innovation to bear on renewing democratic engagement, representation and inclusion. Any movement to renew the core values of a society requires political expression.
- In contrast, a sense of urgency and social awakening is re-energising the system. People are questioning the operating premises of social, economic and political life. Millennials in particular, are eager to change the systems they find themselves inheriting. This drive towards 'do it yourself' (or 'DIY') activism offers people purpose and meaning – with the opportunity and ambition to challenge the status quo and the momentum of fear.

OUR PRACTICE

- New technology has revolutionised how we campaign, communicate and connect. Digital technologies – such as open hardware, software, and open data – are broadening participation and providing the tools to work and make decisions at different scales.

OUR PRACTICE (cont.)

- Greater sharing of tools and learning has increased multidisciplinary skills, as well as evidence, giving social innovation a deeper pool of talent and solutions to draw from.
- The resolution of communities to tackle inequality from the ground up is leading to a growth in participatory ventures at community and city level.
- The relationship with funders is changing. Increasingly funders are becoming more humble, thinking about 'contribution not attribution': who they work with, what they support and why. Some are also collaborating with each other, pooling resources with a drive towards collective impact.
- Crowdfunding approaches are not only opening up investment, but also building community, participation and ownership. Technological developments like devcoin could transform and democratise the practical exchange of finance.

“If you want to be successful, you can’t just focus on needs. You also need a political strategy.”

MARK MOORE, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, US

**“Too often there are like-minded tribes of self-serving belief systems.
We need to break through silos and bubbles, to work differently.”**

ALEX RYAN, Alberta CoLab, Canada

What's in our way?

There are still many roadblocks to get round, go over or break through: cumbersome administration regimes, our reluctance to embrace – and learn from – failure, and the lack of a common language and diversity of frameworks for social innovation. Without explicit shared values or principles, this creates ongoing tension around the integrity and usefulness of social innovation research and action.

Moreover, we are at great risk of talking only to each other and not listening to those who disagree with us and – most importantly – to those who live with the problems we seek to solve.

There are a number of common barriers to be aware of. Some are the flip side of the positive trends we identified:

THE LANDSCAPE

- Greater inequality may spur action, but inequality itself can be debilitating.
- The breakdown of political processes and assumptions erodes the political legitimacy of the nation state, post-war institutions and how we think about fundamental concepts like work. Although this opens the door for change, in the short term, it is destabilising and disorientating. Are we ready to engage in shaping what emerges from the unrest?
- The perception of ‘the co-operative’ has grown weary, despite being a long-standing evidence-backed alternative for community agency. The concept risks feeling stale rather than energising.

THE LANDSCAPE (cont.)

- There is a gap between education policy, curriculum and, crucially, the skills we will need in future.
- Sustainable or values-driven work is often overlooked by investment or capital.

OUR PRACTICE

- Too often, we are led by the ‘supply side’ rather than the ‘demand side’: that is, by the people and organisations who ‘do’ social innovation not the people and communities who are demanding or need social innovation.
- We often forget the need for a political strategy or understanding who will pay for innovation.
- There are too many small-scale, disconnected, individual projects. We need more, and larger, interventions that will lead to systemic change.
- At the same time, we often attempt to scale projects too fast or at the wrong stage.
- People can become preoccupied and obsessed with scaling innovations, as opposed to the impact they create.
- We tend to work in silos, without connecting across sectors, methods, political perspective boundaries.
- Donors too often set the agenda and priorities in isolation from each other, and crucially, from the social priorities.

**“We’ve had to retrain how we act and how we think.
It’s not an end, it’s a process, a way of thinking.”**

ALICE EVANS, Lankelly Chase, UK

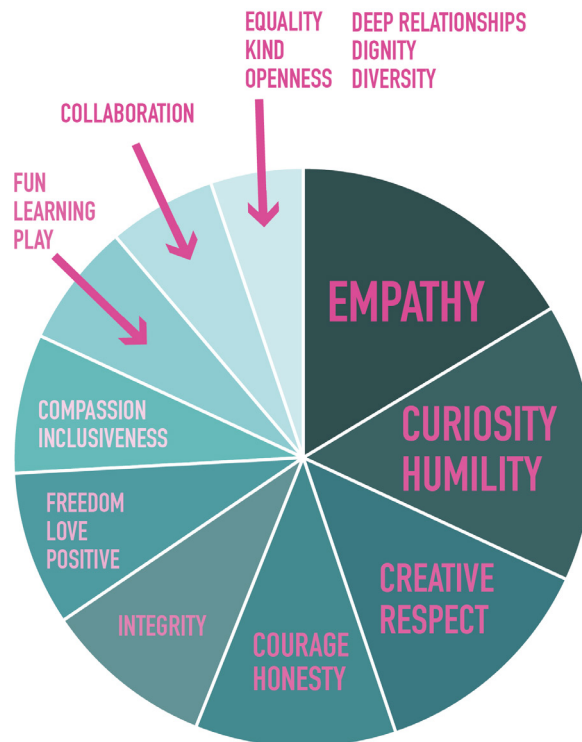
How will we find our way to our destination?

Do we get our direction from who we are or what we do? A running question throughout the two days was: What should determine our purpose and direction? Knowing this will help us set our priorities for action.

THROUGH A SHARED SET OF VALUES?

Danish MP, Uffe Elbæk, asked us each to consider what values guide our work... why we do what we do? What keeps us individually and collectively on our path?

The ten most cited values were, in order of frequency:



These speak to what energizes us to respect our commitment to social innovation.

Do these values, in themselves, constitute our message? Are they evidence that we should attach social innovation specifically to the big missions that align with our values? Or should we focus on embedding our values in the process of social innovation, no matter what problem we are trying to solve?

THROUGH A SHARED SET OF PRINCIPLES?

Another way of defining ourselves is through how we work, not just why. The Wayfinder provoked participants to consider if we have a shared set of principles that define a social innovation approach.

The list below represents the full range, rather than the full consensus, of principles raised at the Wayfinder. Which resonate for you? Will you share them with others and make them explicit in your practice?

- **People-powered**
- **Challenge-focused**
- **Values-based**
- **Dialectic- focused on exchange**
- **Social in means and ends**
- **Asset-based**
- **Critically self-reflective**
- **An emergent and shared learning journey**
- **Informed by complexity lens**
- **Informed by a systems change frame**
- **About integrity (walk the walk)**
- **Inherently cross-sectoral**
- **Focused on the root of problems**
- **Committed to inclusion, equality and fairness**
- **Agile and rigorous**
- **Diverse in approach and method**
- **Biased to action and experimentation**
- **Driven by passion for cause and a good purpose**
- **Humble**
- **Better together (collaborative)**
- **Persistent and curious**

THROUGH A SHARED LANGUAGE?

Some suggested that we risk fetishising both the notion of a social innovation movement and the language we use to describe it. Do you need to know that you're in a process called 'social innovation' to benefit from it? Keynote speaker, Charlie Leadbeater, referred to the 'paraphernalia language' of post-it notes, labs and rapid prototyping obscuring the language that really matters – that of heart, soul and spirit.

Our values and activities work together. Who we are becomes the backbone strengthening what we do; our actions become the muscles that get things moving.

All of our discussions came back to reinforcing that people are at the heart of all our work. "The heart is just as important as the data and the evidence," said Charlie Leadbeater, in his closing remarks. "What we are doing is creating this possibility of being human..."

"We must ensure that those in the South are empowered to innovate."

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI, LEAP Africa, Nigeria

So what are we going to do?

We're excited by the enthusiasm that came from the Wayfinder. The space we created enabled people to rethink their work, reframe debates and assumptions and inspire new strategies. Each participant has come away with their own individual learning and call to action. You can catch up with some of these thoughts on the SIX Wayfinder blog and provocations.

This includes an open call to action within the design community led by Ezio Manzini and Victor Margolin to resist attacks to democracy by conceiving, developing and connecting new possibilities for democracy and wellbeing. We know that the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation is interested in exploring how best to support solutions journalism around the world.

The event did not produce a joint set of commitments that we all signed up to. But there were a number of commitments offered to the community from smaller groups to move us forward and to name our paths forward, so others can find us and join the journey. These are ways in which we can all start to move our practice forward, now.

- **Learn** from evidence-based experimentation and rigorous evaluation.
- **Examine** ourselves to understand how much we're part of the problem.
- **Promote** the movement by mapping the sector, collaborating on communications strategies, going to where people are, bringing together diverse voices.
- **Democratise** innovation by opening up access, making participation affordable, convenient and sustainable, and using a common language.
- **Encompass** the emotional implications of our work, through telling stories: the heart is as important as data in shifting power.
- **Create** a world of problem-solvers, by sharing proven innovations with teachers of all kinds, reframing education, and working with journalists and other communicators focused on finding solutions.
- **Experiment** more, learning from unfinished projects and failures, trialling different kinds of funding support, prototyping new distribution channels, and forming new alliances.

“The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, quoted by CHARLIE LEADBEATER, UK

What's next?

When we were planning the Wayfinder at SIX, we envisaged coming away with a clear roadmap for the next ten years. In the event, however, attendees talked more fundamentally about what social innovation is for, for whom, by whom, and to what end. It was necessary to regroup around what actually matters in this work and why we are doing it. Many left energized to deepen their social innovation practice. Others were primed to apply social innovation to specific problems. Others left still frustrated that we continue to talk in circles about what social innovation is, rather than getting the job done, all the while the world is turning. Others felt that the conversation was the best evidence that NOW is the time for social innovation to flourish, bringing to bear values, purpose and innovation to achieve social justice and shared humanity.

Perhaps this conversation is itself where the ‘movement’ lies. There is no formal club: it is our values, aspirations and common belief that things must fundamentally change that draw us together.

We are by no means done... A journey starts with a single step, and the 2017 Wayfinder event set us off down our track.

We need to ensure that this is a global conversation, and SIX plans to take the Wayfinder to more countries around the world. We need to ensure that this vision of the future is shared by more than just 150 individuals. And more importantly, we need to understand how we’re going to achieve these visions. How do we align existing efforts? How do we converge for greater impact?

ABOUT THE WAYFINDER EVENT

The event was hosted by the Social Innovation Exchange (SIX) in partnership with Nesta, and was supported by the United Nations Development Programme, Social Innovation Generation (SiG), The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

TAKE ACTION

Work with SIX to host more Wayfinders around the world.

Encourage others to action by writing an open letter to your community.

Anchor and apply social innovation to specific missions.

Learn from and contribute to the resources, reflections and calls to action being posted to www.sixwayfinder.com

If you are interested in working with SIX to host a Wayfinder in your country or region - or want to contribute resources or a call to action to the SIX Wayfinder site - please get in touch with us at: info@socialinnovationexchange.org

ABOUT SIX

SIX is the world's primary network for social innovation. Its mission is to inspire a shift in structure and mindsets globally and to learn and provide meaning to create more innovative societies. Since 2006, SIX has developed a unique network building approach and works by facilitating deep relationships and connecting people as peers, providing strategic guidance and foresight to the field and developing capacity, growth and skills for social innovation.

www.socialinnovationexchange.org