MANIFESTO
INVEST IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

'Social innovation' refers to the new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that strive to provide solutions for serious social challenges – from job opportunities and education to health care, social engagement, and environmental problems. The urgency of today's social innovation is being kindled by a network-driven paradigm of innovation and creativity, and mobilized by the innovation capacities of everyone in society, whatever their social role or function. The aim is to bring together people working in business, knowledge institutes, government and civil society – both within and between these domains. 'Horizontal' innovation, in other words, with a myriad of actors. At the same time, social innovation is founded on a fundamentally different value system than was the innovation agenda of the 20th century: it can best be described as striving towards a society that is sustainable and socially conscious in every way.

The concept of social innovation is absent, however, in current Dutch national innovation policy. We therefore urge that a central role be given to social innovation in the next period of government, and we call on all political parties to include the following points in their election programmes:

1. Take social issues as the basis for innovation policy

Choose urgent issues and deploy smart, creative solutions to bring about social renewal and a sustainable economy. Address the EU's 'Grand Societal Challenges' (an ageing population; climate change; food, water and energy supplies; creativity & education; active citizenship; translocal solidarity; balancing security and privacy). Break with sector-based thinking and use the creativity that exists within society. Harness the power of cross-disciplinary collaboration and unexpected combinations. Invest in new ways of cooperating, organizing, and developing open, sustainable, and distributed technologies.

• Set up a National Innovation and Transition Programme to meet the social challenges listed above. Devote a substantial part of the Netherlands' natural gas revenues to this 'transition' fund. Look for innovation off the beaten track. Choose new models, approaches and instruments, and place this fund under the management of the Ministry of General Affairs.

2. Towards a circular economy

The focus on economic growth has not automatically led to solutions to today's most pressing social issues (see e.g. the BEPA 2011 report Empowering people, driving change - Social Innovation in the EU). Social innovation offers a new perspective on values and a correspondingly new vision of the economy. The Netherlands should accelerate towards a 'circular economy' in which the entire production and consumption chain, from extraction to use and waste, is included in the determination of costs and benefits.

The yardstick of macro-economic thinking and the growth economy are not the answer to today's societal challenges. To prove its usefulness, innovation policy should therefore be directed towards rooting out endemic system faults and making room for new models.

- Invest in an Open Plan Bureau that develops models for social innovation, circular economy, translocal value development, and new forms of ownership. Innovate outside the institutions, and set up a new deregularized zone to make this possible: the Orange Free State.

- Develop new instruments, such as Social Impact Bonds, which allow future savings to be incorporated into the assessment of the impact of social innovations.

- Turn the Netherlands into the place where the free availability and accessibility of intellectual rights-free information and knowledge are safeguarded, and turn the country into a leading market and location for intellectual property in open innovation.

3. Exploit the innovative and creative potential of society and social entrepreneurship

Innovations are not the sole preserve of large companies and knowledge institutes. 'Horizontal' innovation is driven by locally and internationally networked labs, bureaus and individuals for whom invention, valorization and application is a short-cycle business. They are close to end users, and can employ new combinations and cross-fertilizations (taking principles from one domain and applying them in another) to rapidly generate innovations. Employ instruments that enable cooperation and collaboration between developers, end users and entrepreneurs. Challenge unconventional parties and consortia to come up with intelligent design processes.

- (Re)introduce the innovation vouchers that allow SMBs and freelancers to be hired during innovation projects. Experiment further with the tried and tested Digital Pioneers model: place responsibility for allocation with a number of actors, and make them publicly accountable for spending and results.

- Place responsibility for the instruments with the innovators themselves. Devise rules that ensure serious peer-to-peer assessment. Create space to experiment with crowd-funding and crowd-sourcing platforms.

- Invest in translocal innovation networks: give local communities the opportunity to set up 'living labs' and build networks that exchange information. Organize funding for the scaling up of successful applications.

4. Government assignments should be more creative and more socially aware

Multidisciplinary collaborations and partnerships will be essential in rising to the challenge of solving today's complex social issues, for which any single discipline never has the whole answer. This will demand a new role from government, that of 'process architect', and new forms of trust between institutions, businesses and civilians. It will create new freedoms, unshackled by procedures or efficiency norms. It will demand the active involvement of policy makers and a genuine willingness to work with others.

- Set up a government policy design lab. Ensure that all systems in which civilians are obliged to take part (DigiD, the electronic patient dossier system, the public transport chip card system, etc) are developed and tested in this lab from the user perspective. Ensure that this design process is public and that it makes use of the 'wisdom of crowds' principle and new forms of participation. Appoint government liaison officers and give them the (policy) freedom to take part in this experiment. Set this up as an interdepartmental, horizontal lab that crosses all ministerial boundaries.

- Ensure that all government-funded organizations and institutions (government bodies, but also schools, for instance) give high priority to social innovation in their strategic policy agendas, and that they make the best possible use of the potential of the professionals who work in them and the networks of which they are a part.

5. The future is agile

The innovation cycle is speeding up all the time. Innovation takes place in a continuously iterative process whose core is the process of co-creation and the exploitation of new discoveries. Innovation programmes therefore need to make use of this short-cycle dynamic. Education, too, should acknowledge this iterative creative capacity. We need self-assured, passionate, modern, creative people to shape the future. Their adaptability, flexibility, and ability to think outside the box will be crucial. Education will play an important role in this, but is still poorly prepared for the task. Make links between creative and technical subjects, to ensure that more young people enter the sciences.

- Introduce an 'art & technology' curriculum in primary and secondary schools that focuses on design, programming, and digital tinkering. Give children the opportunity to hone their computer knowledge and skills. Let them work on real-world problems. Make them part of the innovative ecosystem.

- Besides PhD programmes, we need space for PhDO programmes which focus on real-world practice. Open this PhDO programme for practice-based and user-driven research as an accelerated course for higher vocational training students and craftspeople.

- Ensure that all public professionals, but also students and school pupils, are given training in co-creation and iterative work processes.

Waag Society
Marleen Stikker
stikker@waag.org
+31653623855

Kennisland
Chris Sigaloff
cs@kl.nl
+31624991699