

**X Accelerating  
X Amsterdam's  
X Assets**



# / Prologue

This is a plea for Amsterdam to expand the concept of innovation, to include the generative, 'problem-solving' capacity of the urban society (also known as 'social innovation').

Amsterdam has a chance to become leading in this field: it has the perfect ecosystem for bottom-up innovation and grassroots initiatives. Its size, its population and its liberal roots form the perfect breeding ground for social innovation. In order to fully utilize this potential, the soil needs some fertilisation – Amsterdam needs to promote and stimulate social innovation. Not by a heavy top-down structure, but by carefully nudging the creative and activist power within society into a fruitful direction. Here is where the local government has its role to play – not by determining the direction, but by facilitating this bottom-up process. This requires a) that the innovative potential within society will be recognised as an important asset in the innovation field and will be integrated in the current innovation policies and strategies; b) the creation of a well-developed infrastructure for social innovators; and c) physical, intellectual and budgetary space for new experiments.

Although the potential is there, the current state of innovation is rather humbling, compared to our national and European *umfeld*<sup>1</sup>. Amsterdam's current ranking on the international innovation benchmarks is not what you would expect, taking the city's conditions and history into account. In hardly any of the generally accepted innovation

parameters does Amsterdam reach a top 10 or even a top 20 position. The city is not keeping pace with its neighbours in terms of numbers of patents and R&D expenditure, to name a few. This document does not pretend to give the answer to this observation – but what it does seek to do, is provide guidance in harnessing the city's wealth of ideas and generative power, to create room for new patterns of innovation.

This document contains three parts. The first, *Amsterdam's promising potential*, zeroes in on the innovative capacity of the city and its historical roots. Next, *The growing field of social innovation*, further investigates the concept of social innovation, and its presence in Europe and in the Netherlands. The third and concluding chapter sets out guidelines and possible measures for the future. These three chapters are not the result of an elaborate process of research and debate – instead they are meant to be a starting point for discussion within the municipality and outside. This will hopefully lead to a renewed dialogue on Amsterdam's innovation agenda, to the development of new policies which support social innovation, to creating the necessary infrastructure and, perhaps most importantly, room for new, promising experiments.

<sup>1</sup> [Facts on innovation in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area \(PDF\)](#)

# / Amsterdam's promising potential

## → Not just an ordinary phone

In 2013, a “seriously cool smartphone that puts social value first” was launched:

[Fairphone](#). Not just an ordinary phone, but also the first *ethically sourced* smartphone in the world. Fairphone was not developed in the R&D departments of Samsung or Apple, but within [Waag Society](#), the Amsterdam-based institute for art, science and technology for social innovation. Fairphone started in 2010 as a campaign to create awareness of abuses in electronics supply chains. In the end, the campaigners decided not to wait for the industry to take up the idea, but to build the sustainable phone themselves. The co-operation between different partners, the way of financing and its co-creation working method make this a unique innovation. On the other hand, a crucial episode in the story of Fairphone did not take place in Amsterdam – but in London. It was there, and with support from incubator [Bethnal Green Ventures](#), that Fairphone made its first steps towards creating a marketable version of the Fairphone.

Although Fairphone didn't come to maturity in Amsterdam only, the city has been a fertile breeding ground for these types of innovation:

often with very social characteristics, often using technology in new ways to harness the power of cross-disciplinary collaboration and to make unexpected combinations between civil society, knowledge institutions, business and government. Think, for example, of the new breed of co-working spaces and hubs that are all about cross-disciplinarity and new collaborations. Initiatives within this social innovation domain enhance the generative capacity among citizens and civil society organisations. The people and organisations populating this domain are primarily guided by the idea that they themselves can create positive change – representing a great variety of ideas of what constitutes the common good. And while they're at it, they often build their businesses around it, too.

## Innovation ecosystem

Within the pursuit of creating change for *the good* – which connects all the players in the landscape – efforts are also being made to strengthen *the commons*. It is recognised that cross-fertilisation between all the actors is cru-

<sup>2</sup> With bottom-up innovations we do not only refer to start-ups but also to the full spectrum of social innovation, such as citizen initiatives, grassroots movements, peer-to-peer networks etc.

cial since, more than ever, the power, creativity and energy of the people is needed to tackle the pressing issues of our time. It is here that we see the beginning of an innovation ecosystem that connects and reinforces the new wave of innovations through new, emerging grassroots platforms, stakeholders and projects that are creating crucial social and economic value for the city. Often by making use of the existing digital technologies and the growing availability of real-time, open data.

An example of such an initiative is the [Amsterdam Urban Innovation Week](#) first held in September 2013. Many bottom-up initiatives gathered to align their ideas about 'common good' and to look for alternatives for the relentless

quest for (economic) growth. From citizens who have set up their own neighbourhood initiatives, to locally owned energy companies, to successful social start-ups and citizen-driven service providers. It seems a transition is at hand, facilitated by today's revolution of new technologies and design methods – sometimes referred to as 'Social DIY'<sup>3</sup>. Amsterdam even has its own, new quarterly magazine to showcase the multitude of positive change initiatives among its citizens, businesses and public organisations: [Nieuw Amsterdam](#).

Organisations such as [Pakhuis de Zwijger](#), [Waag Society](#), [Impact Hub](#), [Kennisland](#) and more, play

<sup>3</sup> Pieter Hilhorst & Jos van der Lans (2013): Sociaal doe-het-zelven. Amsterdam.



## FAIRPHONE

Fairphone is a social enterprise based in Amsterdam. By making a phone that puts social values first, it aims to spark a movement of people and organisations that together work towards an economy based on fairer principles. Fairphone started as a campaign, a non-profit organisation with a mission to raise awareness on the relationship between conflict minerals and their electronic goods. Nonetheless, to really understand these processes, they needed to actually produce a phone.

This is how the social enterprise started. It opened up a subscribers' list where people could register for a phone. In very little time 25,000 people pre-ordered a phone. However, the goal is not only to sell phones, but to change the industry: from the consumer to the mineworker, for whom the current economy and business models are not working anymore. People are looking for disruptive models and, in the end, that is what Fairphone is: a movement for change. (Edited from article in the Guardian).

[www.fairphone.com](http://www.fairphone.com)



a crucial role in enabling and stimulating this kind of innovation. These organisations can be seen as 'scaffolding organisations' – or incubators – that function as a bridge between the formal institutions and the informal civil society and act as a support system for bottom-up innovation. These are the types of organisations that are needed to prevent the likes of Fairphone to move out of town to bring their ideas to the next level.

Throughout the text a variety of these organisations – and many other initiatives – are presented in the yellow boxes.

### Mayors Challenge 2014: a city full of ideas

The local government is quite aware of Amsterdam's promising potential. During the last years several ambitious projects have been initiated by, or with the support of the city: [Amsterdam Smart City](#), for instance, brings together business, the public sector and the people of Amsterdam in online innovation projects that aim to tackle all types of societal issues (like renewable energy and mobility challenges).

The most recent example is the Amsterdam approach to generate ideas for the [Bloomberg's](#)

[European Mayors Challenge competition](#). The challenge: to come up with the most brilliant and innovative idea which will create significant impact on an urgent urban issue - at least, that was the call of mayor Eberhard van der Laan to the creative minds, new thinkers and bridge builders of Amsterdam. Over 300 participants gathered in Pakhuis de Zwijger on Thursday, January 9th, 2014, and spent an afternoon and an evening working in 25 different groups, working around five themes that Van der Laan provided as guidance: balance between growth and quality of life, balance between tourism and residents, balance between rich and poor, balance between the city and its environment and that between rough fringes and raked urban planning.

The Mayors Challenge has shown that there is an abundance of individuals and civil society groups with an arsenal of ideas and ambitions – looking for ways to contribute to addressing the city's and region's social challenges. But there is more. The challenge also surfaced the need and urgency to connect to existing ideas, knowledge, (process)expertise and means, in order to take the ideas to the level where they can be



#### PAKHUIS DE ZWIJGER

The leading platform in Amsterdam on creativity and innovation in Amsterdam. Every evening of the week professionals, amateurs, creatives and policy makers come to one of the events held at Pakhuis de Zwijger. In 2013, Pakhuis de Zwijger initiated a new platform, 'Nieuw Amsterdam', with special attention for the city in transition. It has become a movement of local urban changemakers.  
[www.dezwijger.nl](http://www.dezwijger.nl)



#### WAAG SOCIETY

Waag Society is an institute for art, science and technology and develops creative technology for social innovation. The foundation researches, develops concepts, pilots and prototypes and acts as an intermediary between the arts, science and the media. It has a strong focus towards letting user groups participate in internet, new media and technology that otherwise have limited access.  
[www.waag.org](http://www.waag.org)



#### STADSDORP ZUID

StadsdorpZuid is an initiative of residents in Amsterdam south to ensure senior citizens can live as long as possible in their own home. Stadsdorp Zuid offers all sorts of services to its members, such as transportation, cooking, etc. A peer-to-peer caring platform for neighbours.  
[www.stadsdorpzuid.nl](http://www.stadsdorpzuid.nl)

developed (in co-creation with end-users), tested and used in order to create better outcomes. It is here where the local government can do more.

Arguments of the same scope come from Willemijn Verloop, founder of [Social Enterprise NL](#), the Dutch platform for social enterprises. Verloop argues how many social start-ups lack support from the local government and are even hindered by it through regulations, lack of information and lack of capital<sup>4</sup>. Thus, a better fit is needed between the city and its people, between policy and practice, and between problems and solutions. By helping to create a narrative, a stage and a process to do so, Amsterdam can do a better job in harnessing the city's wealth of ambitions, knowledge, ideas and innovative power.

This is where social innovation enters the spotlight.

So, concluding this chapter: a great deal is already happening, Amsterdam is buzzing with people who want to take action and be part of the solution – but much more is possible!

Amsterdam could take a leading role in promoting and stimulating bottom-up innovation by making it an important priority of the city's innovation policy. Maintaining good relationships with its citizens and exploiting the potential of the ideas of its citizens is not something that the government should outsource, especially now that citizen involvement is on the rise and the intricate interplay between the formal and the informal sphere is crucial to tackle the social challenges we as a city face today. Moreover, it is the task of the local governments to ensure that citizen involvement is not only for the happy few (the social entrepreneurs, the creative professionals) but includes all. Only by fully tapping into the innovative potential of all its inhabitants can Amsterdam create a flourishing society for all.

<sup>4</sup>Verloop, Willemijn & McKinsey (2011) Opportunities for the Dutch social enterprise sector. Amsterdam.



### IMPACT HUB

Impact Hub Amsterdam is a launchpad and business incubator for impactmakers. It offers resources, inspiration, and collaboration opportunities. It is a co workspace, a business incubator and they set out to create meaningful encounters, exchanges and inspiration. Impact Hub Amsterdam is connected to the global Hub network which have more than 60 Hubs around the globe.

[www.impacthub.nl](http://www.impacthub.nl)



### VOORJEBUURT

Voor je buurt is the crowdfunding and crowdsourcing platform for neighbourhood initiatives. Citizens, local governments, not for profit organisations and private companies work together to realise local initiatives. More than 30 initiatives have already been financed through the support of Voor je buurt.

[www.voorjebuurt.nl](http://www.voorjebuurt.nl)



### OPEN COÖP/ TOLHUISTUIN

Open Coöp is a creative hub and a coöperative enterprise based in Amsterdam that is led by architects, artists, designers, entrepreneurs, makers and social engineers. Open Coöp was founded in 2011 to research and establish the cooperative model for small companies in the knowledge and creative industry. Apart from working individually in their field the members combine their diverse expertise and capabilities in collaborative projects around urban and societal renewal.

[www.opencoop.nl](http://www.opencoop.nl)



# AMSTERDAM: CITY AND IDEA

*“Baruch Spinoza’s revolutionary philosophy, still influencing today’s politics, ethics and theology, could arise only in the Amsterdam of the 17th century, after the city had forged its principles of tolerance, of the placement of secular powers over church powers, and of the first truly modern free-trading culture. Spinoza was fascinated by public anatomical demonstrations, by the sight of the bending lines of fluyts and yachts beating sail from the harbor toward all points of the globe, by the idea of popular representation. All of this was boiled, condensed and distilled into his philosophy. And from there made its way into the wider world.”*

Russel Shorto: *Amsterdam* (2013)

In his 2013 book *Amsterdam*, the American author and historian Russell Shorto convincingly claims that Amsterdam’s history is not only that of a city, but also of an *idea*. Amsterdam has been a breeding ground for innovation and liberal thinking. Shorto coins Amsterdam as a *laboratory of new ideas* – from gay rights to gay marriage, from free love to free bicycles, but also as the breeding ground for more institutional advancements, such as the first multinational corporation in the world (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC), investment funds and insurance chamber (‘assurantiekamer’). These are the innovations that turned Amsterdam into an international city of entrepreneurs, a city of innovators, and a social and sustainable city, which attracts people from all over the world.

An important explanation for Amsterdam becoming so successful lies in its geographical location, which led to an effective cooperation between the people of the city and its governance. Throughout its history, the continuous struggle against the water made it essential for the Amsterdam people to manage things collectively – one cannot stop the water on his own. The water, the perils, the bravery, the absurdity of the geographical position, and the development of complex communal organisations to cope with the situation explains much of Amsterdam’s history. This gave birth to the particular Amsterdam spirit: a strong desire for freedom, tempered by a tendency to cooperate and act collectively. The local government has always been embraced as a key factor to enable the people’s freedom, while adding structure to the collective endeavours. This characterises Amsterdam’s innovative climate making it possible to take a leading position in the world.

## **CITY GOVERNMENT: LONG TRADITION OF UNUSUALNESS**

The governors of Amsterdam during the Golden Age were not the professional managers and public leaders you find today. The city’s government mirrored the powerful class of the time: they were established merchants. As a consequence, far less of a bureaucratic and authoritarian hand steered city life and economy – but those in power *did* have sensible ideas about growth. They ensured the accessibility of Amsterdam. There were fewer restrictions for immigrants than usual elsewhere. You could trade in Amsterdam without having obtained formal citizenship. There were publicly financed facilities in favor of the trade, such as the stock market and the exchange bank. There was a poverty relief fund and there were provisions for the unemployed – not a luxury for many seasonal workers who were employed in shipyards and warehouses. These conditions attracted so many newcomers, that the government was urged to expand the city with the creation of canals and, later, the Jordaan area.

## **CREATING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS**

So, although the Amsterdam administration has a long tradition of guided urban planning, it has always been sensitive to the limits of its own influence in creating conditions for creativity and innovation. In his elaborate *Cities in Civilization* in 1998, sir Peter Hall paid close attention to the importance of context and historically grown conditions for sparking creativity and innovation in particular cities, in particular periods. He denounces the idea that innovative milieux can be easily planned and maintained (p.7): “I want to argue that no one kind of city, nor any one size of city, has a monopoly on creativity or the good life; but that the biggest and most cosmopolitan cities, for all their evident disadvantages and obvious problems, have throughout history been the places that ignited the sacred flame of the human intelligence and the human imagination.” It is little wonder that Hall’s ideas rapidly gained traction – in fact Hall paved the way for the enormously popular ideas about the creative class and economy of Richard Florida.

Amsterdam clearly has a long standing tradition of bottom-up innovation, making it a vibrant, resilient and great place to visit, live and work. Its historic roots and geographic location form the fertile soil from which it can further develop into an integral and effective innovation ecosystem. An ecosystem that is strongly based on the innovative capacity and entrepreneurship of its citizens.

<sup>5</sup> Russel Shorto (2013): *Amsterdam*. Doubleday

<sup>6</sup> Peter Hall (1998): *Cities in Civilization*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson



# / The growing field of social innovation

→ **Not only in Amsterdam** but all over Europe, people are creating new and more effective answers to the biggest challenges of our times: how to cut our carbon footprint? How to keep people healthy? How to end poverty? These new and practical approaches to such challenges mark the rise of a peculiar member of the innovation family: social innovation.

Ten years ago, the term 'social innovation' was hardly known. Five years ago, European Commission President Barroso put social innovation on the Commission's policy agenda as a new, promising way to secure Europe's future. Social innovation, it is claimed, can empower citizens and strengthen the economic and social fabric to cope with the national, European and global challenges that lie ahead.

Social innovation stems from the growing conviction that neither the market, nor the state will solely resolve the social challenges that need to be addressed in our society. The market is too much focused on technological innovation and economic growth. The government is organised

too hierarchically and therefore cannot react promptly to problems occurring. Furthermore, the budget of the state is decreasing rapidly, the top-down innovation strategy of governments is proven to be far from effective, technology is becoming ever more democratised and the shout for a different, more equal relationship between government and citizens is loud and clear. Obviously, the market and the state play a vital part in the transformation process if such a reorganisation wants to be achieved, but the leadership in designing and initiating solutions to these challenges also has to be provided bottom-up. It is only together with citizens that a new, effective innovation strategy can be realised.



# DEFINITION OF SOCIAL INNOVATION (TEPSIE, 2012)

Social innovations are new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act.

The five core features that are essential if we are to describe social innovation are:

- **Novelty:** social innovations are new to the field, sector, region, market or user, or to be applied in a new way.
- **From ideas to implementation:** social innovation describes the implementation and application as new ideas, rather than just the development of new ideas (invention).
- **Meets a social need:** social innovations are explicitly designed to meet a recognised social need.
- **Effectiveness:** social innovations are more effective than existing solutions – they create a measurable improvement in terms of outcomes.
- **Enhances society's capacity to act:** social innovations empower beneficiaries by creating new roles and relationships, developing assets and capabilities and/or better use of assets and resources.

<sup>7</sup> Caulier-Grice, J. Davies, A. Patrick, R. Norman, W. (2012) [Defining Social Innovation](#). A deliverable of the project: "The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe" (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research



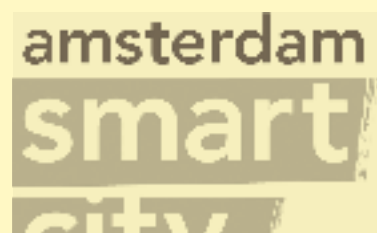
## IFABRICA

iFabrica is an open workplace where entrepreneurs, creatives, hobbyists and students can make use of equipment and materials to create their own products. It's all about craftwork, so there is a focus on both the final product and the development process. iFabrica gives people the opportunity to use professional equipment like 3D printers and CNC machines. [www.ifabrica.nl](http://www.ifabrica.nl)



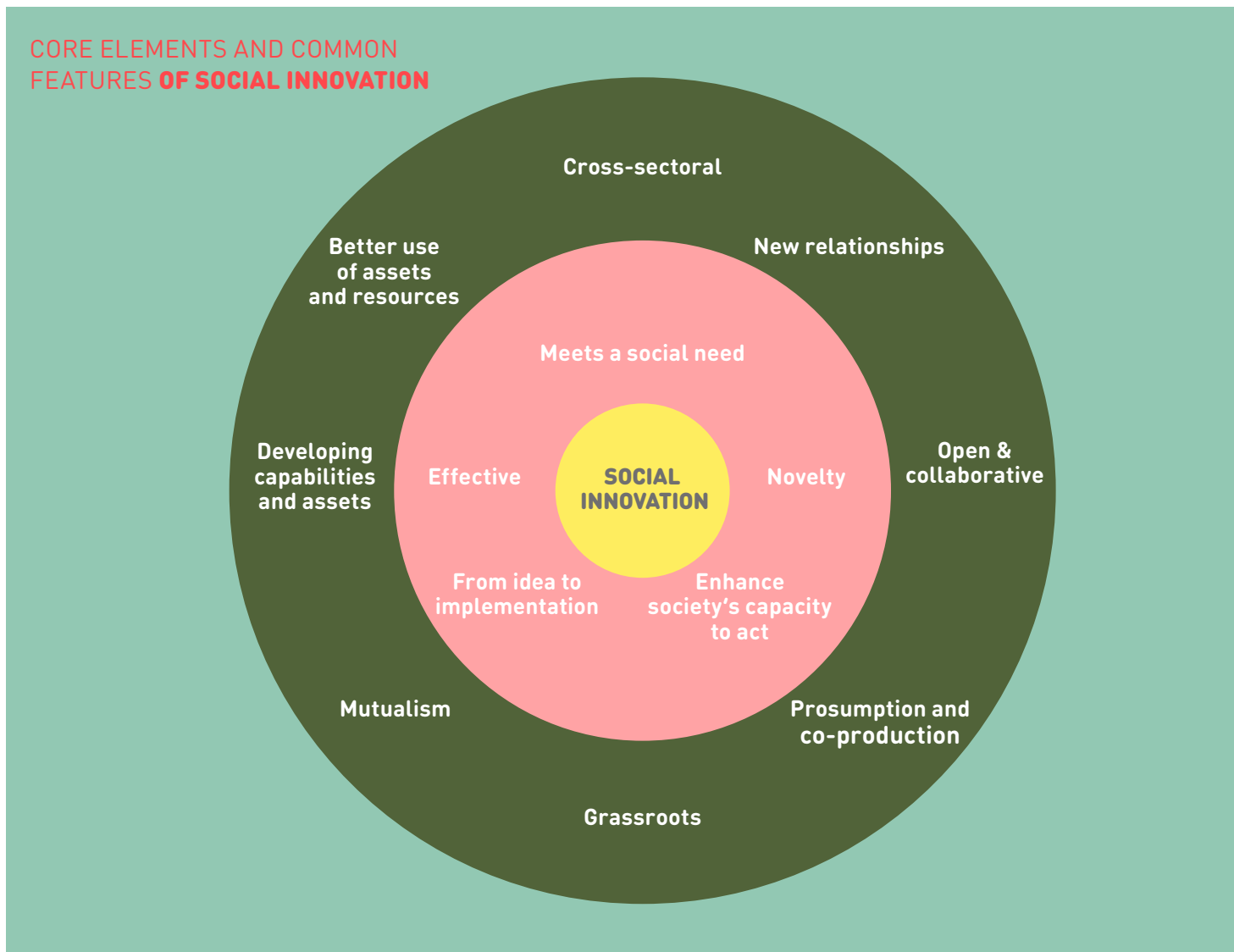
## WOW AMSTERDAM

WOW Amsterdam is a new cultural residence which offers housing for young creatives who have graduated at one of the art schools in Amsterdam. The former schoolbuilding will also be a hotel for tourists who want to discover cultural Amsterdam. There will be a restaurant, a lobby, workplaces, a garden and a marketplace, where residents and visitors can meet each other. [bit.ly/1dEyxrV](http://bit.ly/1dEyxrV)



## AMSTERDAM SMART CITY

Amsterdam Smart City (ASC) is a partnership between businesses, local authorities, research institutions and the people of Amsterdam. The goal is to develop the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area into a smart city. Using a collective approach by bringing partners together and setting up local projects, ASC makes it possible to test new initiatives. The most effective initiatives can then be implemented on a larger scale. All the acquired knowledge and experience is shared via the ASC platform. [www.amsterdamsmartcity.com](http://www.amsterdamsmartcity.com)



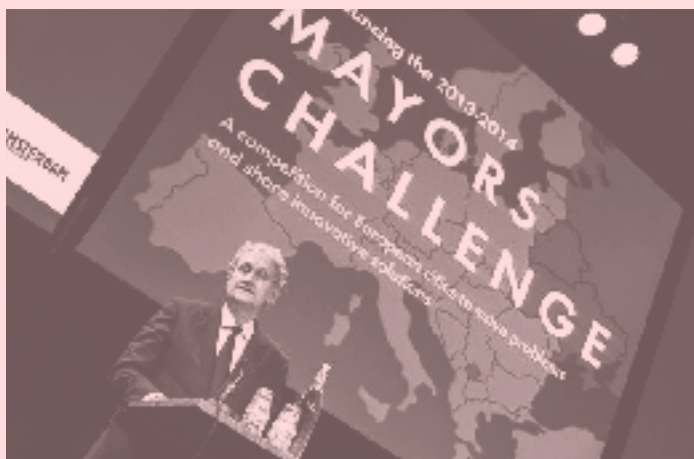
source: Caulier-Grice, J. et al. (2012) [Defining Social Innovation](#) (TEPSIE, p.18)

Lately, social innovation has become a bandwagon, attracting attention from national and local governments, inspiring many people to explore opportunities that combine entrepreneurialism with the desire for social relevance, challenging traditional patterns of social engagement. Books, articles and reports on social innovation are published by the dozen. There are numerous networks such as the [Social Innovation Exchange](#) and [Euclid](#). New journals, entirely devoted to social innovation, have appeared (e.g. the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)). Research groups and non-profit organisations have been established, dedicated solely to the study of social innovation (e.g. [TEPSIE](#)). And of course, there is considerable

experience and competence in this growing field on the ground and many socially innovative initiatives have already taken place; some in the form of social businesses initiated by actors with an entrepreneurial approach. Social innovation is not a mature field, nor does it provide a coherent vision or strategy. It is a heterogeneous movement, consisting of individual innovators, organisations and projects geared towards creating systems change. Both at the European level and at the level of the local governments, numerous initiatives have taken place to investigate, promote and stimulate social innovation.



# MAYORS CHALLENGE



In september 2013 Bloomberg Philantropies launched a new competition calling for European cities to come up with "bold ideas to solve common challenges". On January 31st, 2014, mayor of Amsterdam Eberhart van der Laan announced submitted *Play2Work Europe* to represent Amsterdam in the Challenge. *Play2Work Europe* is a concept that aims to increase employment opportunities for vocational school (the Dutch 'MBO') graduates that cannot find work. The winners will be presented in October.

[bit.ly/1cceEh3](http://bit.ly/1cceEh3)

## European Commission and social innovation

The European Commission has made social innovation an important part of its innovation and research agenda. [Horizon 2020](#) is the European Union's research framework for 2014-2020. It will make around 80 billion euros available to strengthen innovation and research excellence all over Europe. For the first time, social innovation plays a big part and is streamlined throughout Horizon 2020. Besides focusing on research, the European Commission actively promotes social innovation by the [European Social Innovation Competition](#), by the platform Social Innovation Exchange, by actively promoting social enterprises, and by investing in a social fund and in developing new methods, instruments and tools. For an overview of what the European Commission is currently up to see the box on the next page. →



### VLLA

An abandoned funeral home has been renovated into a creative space where all the spaces, and many materials, have been remodelled and given a new destination. The rooms previously used to allow families to mourn in private have been refashioned into working spaces where several artists and other creative entrepreneurs now have their own working environment.

[www.vlla.nl](http://www.vlla.nl)



### CITYPLOT

Cityplot is a non-profit making entity that promotes the spread of organic food production in cities via workshops, trainings and the provision of companion seed packages. It is made up out of a collective of volunteers working for the benefit of local communities by providing a variety of straightforward information about urban farming.

[www.nederlands.cityplot.org](http://www.nederlands.cityplot.org)



### KENNISLAND

Kennisland is an independent think tank with a public mission. Kennisland aspires to strengthen the knowledge society by designing innovative programmes and realising interventions to address the grand challenges of today's society. Kennisland is one of the frontrunners of social innovation in the Netherlands.

[www.kennisland.nl](http://www.kennisland.nl)

<b>NETWORKING</b>	The EC helps organisations across Europe to connect, learn from each other and share experiences – <a href="#">Social Innovation Europe</a> was launched in March 2011. It is a collaborative hub up for that purpose, anyone is welcome to <a href="#">register and contribute</a> .
<b>COMPETITION</b>	The EC organizes the European Social Innovation Competition every year to directly support new solutions and raise awareness about social innovation – see <a href="#">Competition webpages</a> . Social innovation is also covered by other EU awards such as the <a href="#">RegioStars awards</a> . The EC also partner with competitions outside, such as the <a href="#">Naples 2.0 – International Social Innovation Competition</a> or the <a href="#">Social Innovation Tournament</a> organised by the European Investment Bank Institute.
<b>EU FUNDING POSSIBILITIES</b>	The EC offers direct funding to support social innovation – <a href="#">Progress Programme</a> or the <a href="#">Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI)</a> and from 2014 is funded structurally through <a href="#">Horizon 2020 programme</a> – see <a href="#">Guide to Social Innovation (2013)</a> .
<b>FINANCE</b>	The EC shares information about available financial support, which can be mobilised from public sector organisations, foundations or private investors; main ones are presented in the report <a href="#">Financing social impact. Funding social innovation in Europe - mapping the way forward</a> issued in February 2012.
<b>FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS</b>	The EC improves the conditions for social innovation and social enterprises in Europe – see the <a href="#">Social Business Initiative</a> and the <a href="#">Strasbourg event on 16-17 January 2014</a> .
<b>RESULTS</b>	The EC gathers and disseminate evidence about the benefits of social innovation and methodologies – see the report <a href="#">Strengthening social innovation in Europe –Journey to effective assessment and metrics</a> issued in November 2012.
<b>INCUBATION</b>	The EC supports incubation structures for social innovation in Europe – read the <a href="#">conclusions of the workshop</a> organised in March 2012 and supports two EU-wide networks of incubators put in place in October 2013, <a href="#">Transition</a> and <a href="#">Benisi</a> .
<b>SCALING UP</b>	The EC encourages innovators to think big from the beginning and to aim for systemic change in Europe – see <a href="#">Systemic Innovation</a> of December 2012.

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/social-innovation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/social-innovation/index_en.htm)

## Policy responses around Europe

In many countries around the world, there is a growing interest in social innovation to help address societal challenges. Many governments are supporting the field through innovation funds (like the Social Impact Fund in the UK), dedicated teams (such as [Mindlab](#) in Denmark), investment tools such as Social Impact Bonds, support for social enterprises, and so on<sup>8</sup>. Some countries and cities have made it an integral part of their strategy (such as the Basque country and Sweden). Others have set up innovation units and labs (for an overview see box with an overview of social innovation labs) as a means to stimulate social innovation. New government departments supporting social innovation, the third sector and social enterprises are also appearing. Examples include [the Office for Civil Society in the UK](#) (previously the Office of the Third Sector) and the [Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation in the USA](#). Also, there has been a growing attention for creating favourable conditions for innovation – namely, supporting a strong skills base, establishing innovation clusters and creating the right fiscal and regulatory conditions for innovation, together with strong legal protection for new innovations. One of the most important sources of finance for social innovation has often been a dedicated public fund for early stage ideas, investment, R&D, and incubation. More specific, there has been an explosion in approaches and mechanisms (processes, techniques, instruments) for enabling citizen engagement. They include deliberative polling techniques, ideas banks, citizens petitions, parliamentary structures to develop citizen ideas, challenges and competitions, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, mutual ownership, personalised budgets, co-production and rights for communities to design and run their own services. Despite this proliferation of methods

and tools for engagement and the different ways governments can foster social innovation, there remains considerable uncertainty about what works and what not. Rigorous analysis is needed to identify the most effective policy responses.

Most of the attention for social innovation is happening at a local (the municipal) level. This is where new approaches are needed for costly social challenges. Many cities across Europe are creating space for alternative solutions to emerge. City governments and municipal authorities across the continent are taking initiative, redefining their roles, striking new deals with citizens and forging the next generation of public services. They use design thinking and methods to understand their users, mobilising digital technologies and data in smart ways, applying insights from behavioural sciences and more consciously adopting strategies of iteration and experimentation to understand what works and to stop what does not.

## Social innovation in the Netherlands

Even though Amsterdam has high potential for social innovation, the concept itself, as used in Europe, is more or less absent in current Dutch national innovation policy. Social innovation in the Netherlands is generally limited to the context of workplace innovation and labour productivity. Often, it is seen as a methodological approach of human resource management. The 'social' refers to the focus on human capital instead of technology. 'Social' goals (beyond the

<sup>8</sup>TEPSIE, SE EUROPE, open book of social innovation [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_open\\_book\\_of\\_social\\_innovation.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_open_book_of_social_innovation.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>used source: [http://www.tepsie.eu/images/documents/TEPSIE\\_D1.1.Report.DefiningSocialInnovation.Part%20-%20context%20and%20responses.pdf](http://www.tepsie.eu/images/documents/TEPSIE_D1.1.Report.DefiningSocialInnovation.Part%20-%20context%20and%20responses.pdf)

organisational context) are not very dominant on the national innovation agenda. Nonetheless, plenty of initiatives, organisations and social entrepreneurs are active in the social field. There is a growing active citizen movement advocating and experimentation. There is a Dutch network for Social Innovation ([SINN](#)), a network for citizen driven innovation ([EigenKracht NL](#)), plenty of bottom-up initiatives and there is growing attention for social enterprises advocated by [Social Enterprise NL](#) and [Society Impact](#). These endeavours have led to a number of new impulses for the social enterprise domain, such as the first Social Impact Bond (see box below) in the Netherlands. Moreover, from within the government there are several initiatives to innovate the role and ways of working of the public institutions, such as '[Slimmernetwerk](#)'. However, the main conclusion of the recently published Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) advice titled 'The Power of Social Innovation' ('[De Kracht van Sociale Innovatie](#)', in Dutch), is that the Netherlands is lagging behind many of our European partners. The innovation policies are still particularly geared towards technological innovation in the private and knowledge sector, both at the national and at the local level. Unfortunately, since the Netherlands – and Amsterdam in particular – has all the right conditions to take the lead.

But the solid *business case* for social innovation, needed to influence policy, is lacking. As of today, there is little 'hard' evidence of both the social and economic benefits, simply because the research is lacking or contradicting. Some forms of social innovation have positive (but not yet quantifiable) effects on employment, like the rise of social enterprises. Other innovations are more

geared towards creating benefits for the local economy, like [thuisafgehaald.nl](#), where a local (informal) economy is created based on bringing together local supply and demand for hot, home made meals. Or think of the small and local cooperatives, such as [Open Coop](#). But systematic knowledge of the potential outputs and outcomes of these innovations is lacking on the local, national and European level.

The challenge arises how we organise the processes of social innovation. How can we recruit networks of civil society actors that can initiate solutions to challenges in our society? How can a structure be created through which civil society actors can become an important player, collaborating with the market and the government? The traditional Triple Helix model, now used by

#### **ROTTERDAM HAS THE SCOOP: THE FIRST DUTCH SOCIAL IMPACT BOND**

SIBs (Social Impact Bonds) originate from the United States and United Kingdom. They are a new funding mechanism that offers an innovative means of harnessing private capital to achieve measurable impact on some of the most persistent social ills, such as unemployment. If the initiative achieves its objectives, the government repays the funders, with returns based on the savings the government accrues as a result of the program's success.

[Society Impact](#), the Dutch platform of cooperating parties that aims to increase and strengthen the market for social entrepreneurship, takes the role of promoting this form of financing with banks, philanthropists, governments and social entrepreneurs nationally. Society Impact acted as the trailblazer for SIBs in the Netherlands.

However, the honour of the first application of an SIB in the Netherlands goes to Rotterdam with an initiative called the '[Buzinezzclub](#)'. ABN AMRO and social investor Start Foundation together invested 680,000 euros in this Rotterdam company. Every year, Buzinezzclub helps 80 Rotterdam unemployed young people without basic qualifications to work or education, decreasing the amount of time they are entitlement to benefits. The Rotterdam municipality repays the investors, based on the effective savings this initiative achieves.



## DE CEUVEL

De Ceuvel is a planned workplace for creative and social enterprises in Amsterdam North. The land was secured for a 10-year lease from the city of Amsterdam after a group of initiators won a tender to turn the site into a regenerative urban oasis. The site, which is now heavily polluted, will feature houseboats surrounded by an undulating landscape of soil-cleaning plants. Each of the upgraded boats will house offices, ateliers, or workshops for creative and social enterprises, and the plan also includes a public teahouse and bed & breakfast.

[www.deceugel.nl](http://www.deceugel.nl)



## PLATFORM EDIBLE AMSTERDAM

A platform for urbangardening initiatives in Amsterdam and surroundings. Initiatives where citizens are in the lead: do it yourself, learn together. The goal is to enhance knowledge about foodproduction, urbangardening and communitywork. The platform gives workshops, develops urban gardens and has set up an education program for schools.

[eetbaaramsterdam.wordpress.com](http://eetbaaramsterdam.wordpress.com)

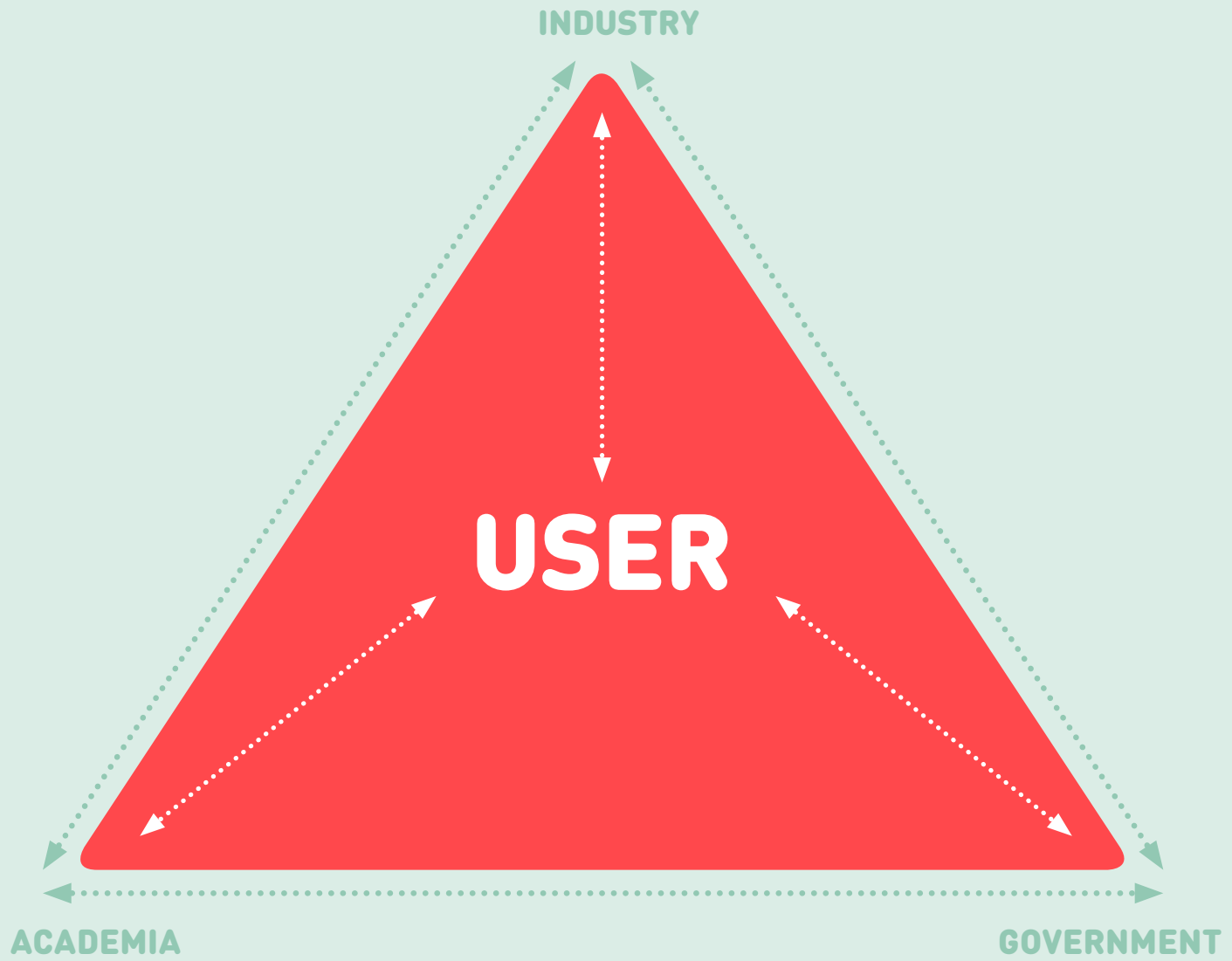
the Amsterdam Economic Board<sup>10</sup>, has proven its particular strengths in bringing all kinds of *professional* actors together. However, it is missing the strong ties with its citizens: the end-users, individuals, people from all walks of life.

A new governing approach is needed to connect the civil society, which comprises a dispersed, network myriad of actors, the private sector, the academia and the government. More precisely: a government that allows for a less technocratic approach to innovation creating room to collaboratively reinvent our city. Through its nature (not being organised top-down, but working in a distributed way) the organisation of civil society is exceedingly complex, which lies at the core of its power in addressing social challenges. This requires expanding to the quadruple helix putting the end-users centre stage. These new forms of partnership would help Amsterdam benefit even more from its innovation ecosystem, making it the perfect 'urban laboratory' for new approaches for a thriving, flourishing and socially sustainable society. Creating an inclusive innovation ecosystem, which makes use of civil society is the pathway for a social and sustainable future. This is the real challenge for Amsterdam: *to accelerate its assets within the context of the quadruple helix.*

<sup>10</sup>Three subsystems of society (government - industry - university) have traditionally performed different functions, with possible overlap. The triple helix approach implies that parties within the three subsystems of their traditional roles shift to a common course. (Etzkowitz H. & Leydesdorff, L. The dynamics of innovation: from National Systems and 'Mode 2' to a Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations. Research Policy, vol. 29, 2000.). Today, in the context of public sector and service innovation, it is common to include a fourth helix: the user.



TOWARDS A QUADRUPLE HELIX:  
**END USERS CENTRE STAGE**



**BOSTON / PHILLY US  
NEW URBAN MECHANICS**

New Urban Mechanics is a civic R&D Lab that develops and implements innovative services within the city.

**NEW YORK CITY US  
I ZONE**

iZone is an office situated in the city's Department of Education that designs, tests, and diffuses innovative personalized learning models.

**SAN FRANCISCO US  
INNOVATE SF**

Innovate SF looks at how innovation can drive economic growth and make government more efficient, transparent and responsive.

**WASHINGTON DC US  
OPM INNOVATION LAB**

The Office for Personnel Management's Innovation Lab helps federal employees learn and apply a design-led approach to developing and implementing better policy, programs, and government services.

**MEXICO CITY MEXICO  
LABORATORIO PARA LA CIUDAD**

Laboratorio para la ciudad works as a civic innovation and urban creativity incubator of the Federal District Government created to ideate and implement pilots for the city.

**DUBLIN  
THE STUDIOS**

The Studios Dublin City Council to innovate services.

**PARIS FRANCE  
LA 27E RÉGION**

La 27e Région lab supported governments in the city.

# SOME OF THE WORLD'S SOCIAL INNOVATION LABS



**IRELAND  
DUDDO**  
.....  
is a team working to grow  
y Council's capacity  
e and improve the quality of

**COPENHAGEN DENMARK  
MINDLAB**  
.....  
MindLab is a lab within the Danish  
government that generates innovative  
solutions for the public sector.

**LONDON UNITED KINGDOM  
NESTA PUBLIC SERVICE LAB**  
.....  
Nesta Public Service Lab supports  
innovators who are developing ideas to  
solve big social challenges.

**SINGAPORE  
HUMAN EXPERIENCE LAB**  
.....  
Human Experience Lab is a unit inside  
the Public Service Division that helps  
public agencies develop more citizen-  
centered public policy and services.

**ANCE  
ION**  
.....  
is a non-profit innovation  
by the 26 French regional  
implement pilots for the

**CANBERRA AUSTRALIA  
DESIGN GOV**  
.....  
DesignGov is an 18-month pilot pro-  
gram of the Australian Public Service  
that looks to bring an innovative  
design culture to Australia's public  
sector.

**ADELAIDE AUSTRALIA  
NESTA PUBLIC SERVICE LAB**  
.....  
The Australian Centre for Social Inno-  
vation is a "do-tank" that accelerates  
positive social change.

# / Accelerating Amsterdam's assets

→ **Amsterdam's innovative capacity** can be strengthened by a governing structure that includes bottom-up innovation. Currently, the Amsterdam Economic Board, which has formulated a Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam<sup>11</sup>, has not yet fully recognized the role, potential and importance of social innovation. There is a gap between the board and the citizens. In order to fully tap into the innovative capacity of Amsterdam's civil society bridges need to be built between the private sector, the public, the academia and the citizens. The current triple helix thus needs to be transformed into a quadruple helix. There is much to gain by strengthening the interplay between bottom-up and top-down innovation. It is namely through this effective interplay, that Amsterdam can tackle the biggest challenges of our time and become the leading example for social innovation in Europe.

Here is how we propose to make better use of the strong community of bottom-up innovators across Amsterdam: through developing policies

that support social innovation, by creating an infrastructure and by creating room for research and development.

## **Social innovation policy**

1 → **At the level of strategic policy making**, the city should incorporate social innovation in its innovation agenda. AWT stated in its recent report '[De kracht van sociale innovatie](#)' (The power of social innovation) that social innovation belongs as a theme in innovation policy, since there are situations in which innovation may generate public value, but where it doesn't (yet) through the marketplace – that's where government support is needed. The city's innovation agenda should – besides the present approach based on (technological) innovation within economic clusters – be stronger positioned around urgent challenges in the city such as youth unemployment, healthy aging, sus-

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.amsterdameconomicboard.com/data/sitemanagement/media/kia\\_nov\\_11.pdf](http://www.amsterdameconomicboard.com/data/sitemanagement/media/kia_nov_11.pdf)

tainable mobility, sustainable energy, social isolation and educational disengagement. This implies a more pull-driven way of working which can be characterised by a decentralised, local and co-creative innovation approach. This aligns with the new [2014-2020](#) program<sup>12</sup> of the Amsterdam Economic Board, which gives room to incorporate social innovation as a logical theme and objective in all the current clusters.

### Infrastructure

2 → On a more practical level, there is a need to create strong networks that facilitate sharing, learning and knowledge creation. Many innovators and innovative initiatives currently lack skills and competencies and are operating in isolation from each other, often resulting in marginalised results. Or, in case of Fairphone, in resorting to another city to make things happen (see chapter 1). By learning from one another's experiences, links among social innovators can be established so to build new fruitful relationships and to mediate between bottom-up, the public sector, as well as the corporate world. By creating an infrastructure that facilitates and supports bottom-up innovation, knowledge sharing and knowledge generation, systemic change becomes possible. Current examples include the Social Innovation Network Netherlands ([SINN](#)), [Digital Social Innovation](#) (Waag Society) and more. The crucial role of the scaffolding organisations (such as [Kennisland](#)) as

incubators for social innovation should be recognised and promoted.

### Room for research and development

3 → Innovation is never easy, especially social innovation. Only by trying, failing and improving new solutions can be developed. This requires room for experimenting and learning: a coherent (action)research agenda. A space where in a systematic way new concepts and practices are developed. The city should set up a space for research and development of new emerging technologies and design-led methodologies which facilitate empowerment of citizens and the creation of self-organising collectives in order to find new solutions for great urban challenges. Amsterdam can lead by example by setting up a special, dedicated experimentation space for the evolving playing field of social innovation. One may call it a Social Innovation Lab, a House of Ideas or a testbed for Social R&D. The fundamental assumption in a social innovation process is that solutions can only be constructed through a systematic process of making, revising, rejecting, and remaking. The recent experience in other countries show that most of the innovation centres or labs need some form of structural co-operation with local governments.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.amsterdameconomicboard.com/data/sitemanagement/media/Boardplan\\_2014-2020.pdf](http://www.amsterdameconomicboard.com/data/sitemanagement/media/Boardplan_2014-2020.pdf)

Other measures that would be beneficial are:

- 4 → In order to help the growing, but heterogeneous and fragmented, field into maturity, there is a strong need for new ways of funding and commissioning. Currently, the field suffers from a lot of bold ideas, but lacking means to realise real-life projects. Examples from other countries include Social Impact Bonds and outcome (versus *output*) based commissioning – which may provide a degree of freedom in *what* is done and *how* it's done to best create better outcomes<sup>13</sup>. Further, new procurement strategies should be explored such as challenges, competitions, experiments etc., versus overly thorough bid specifications.
  
- 5 → In order to get public sector professionals acquainted with the new innovation approach and the bottom-up innovations in Amsterdam, development and learning programs are needed.
  
- 6 → Strengthening the field of social innovation, by acknowledging its importance to the city's innovation ecosystem, by setting up a research and learning program and including it in a master program.

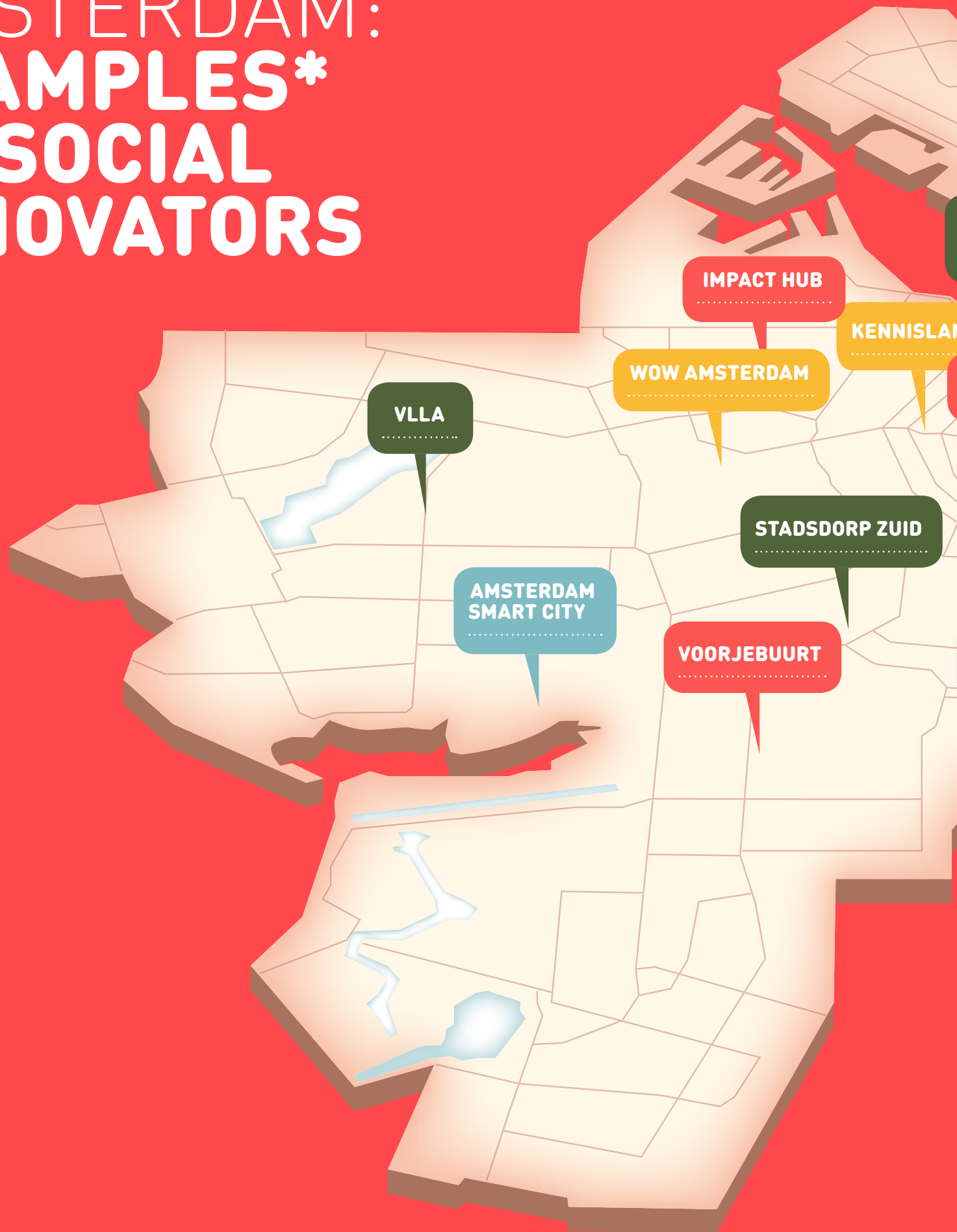
<sup>13</sup> see for example [http://siresearch.eu/sites/default/files/1.1%20Part%203%20-%20context%20and%20responses\\_0.pdf](http://siresearch.eu/sites/default/files/1.1%20Part%203%20-%20context%20and%20responses_0.pdf) (p. 19 and further)

## /Big ambition, small first steps...

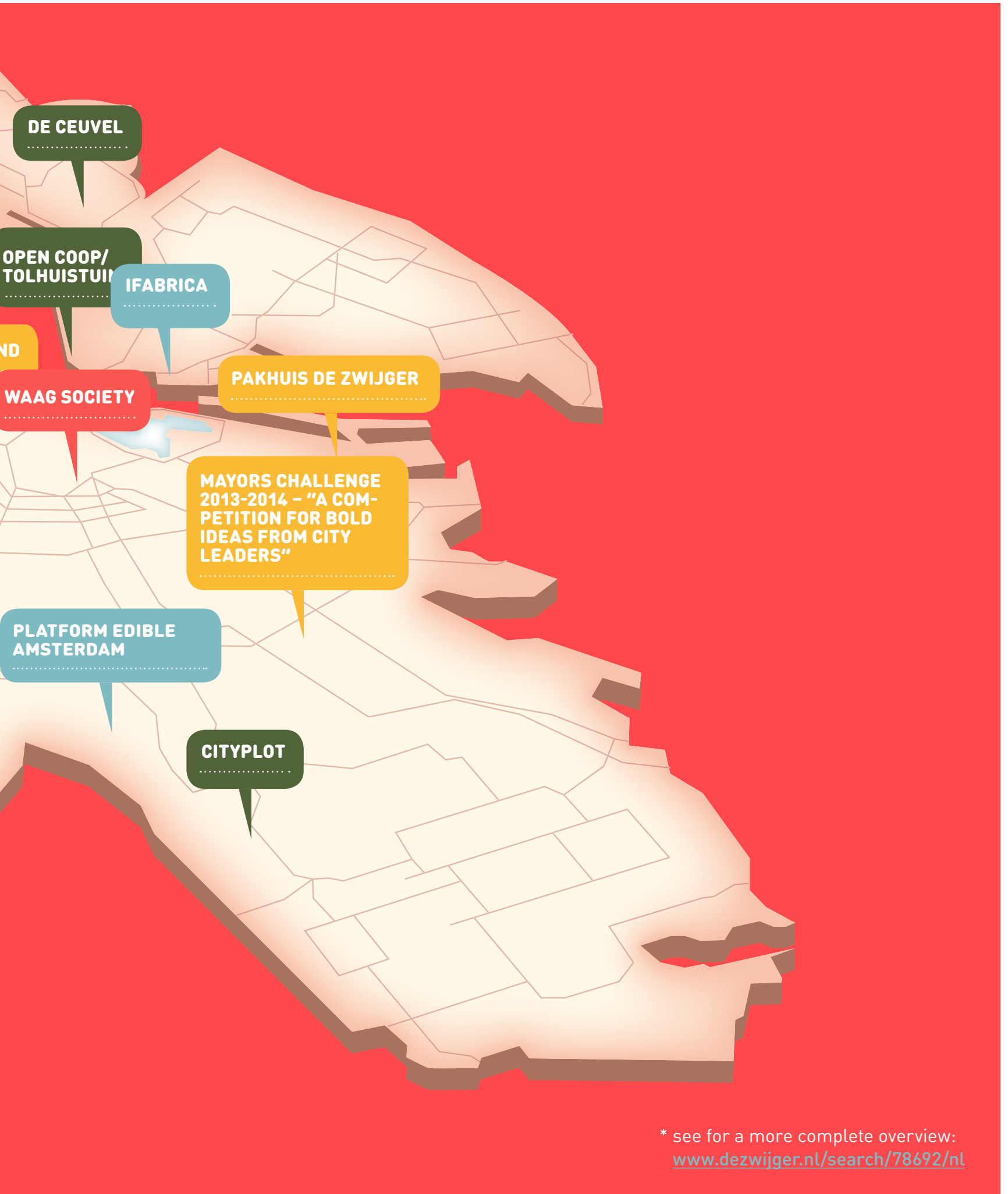
→ We believe that Amsterdam has the right innovation ecosystem in place to create new solutions for some of our biggest challenges such as educational disengagement, long-term unemployment, family breakdown, and social isolation. These challenges are deeply entrenched and exacerbated by our traditional institutional responses. How do we renew our old institutional responses and redesign new versions of social and economic welfare? In other words, how do we create an innovative process of research and development in our social domain? We know we cannot keep using the same old processes and expect to get new solutions for our problems.

A first step in the right direction would be to organise a series of discussions between policy makers, members of the Amsterdam Economic Board and with different stakeholders in the field. These discussions could lead to an agenda for strategic, concrete, and tangible actions. This way, we can prototype the policy for the future. This document hopefully provides the necessary inspiration.

# AMSTERDAM: EXAMPLES\* OF SOCIAL INNOVATORS







\* see for a more complete overview:  
[www.dezwijger.nl/search/78692/nl](http://www.dezwijger.nl/search/78692/nl)

## COLOPHON

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amsterdam economic board



