Social Innovation in Ireland
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A brief history of social innovation in Ireland: Although the <u>Young Social Innovators Ireland</u> programme - aimed at unlocking the power of young people to effect change - first piloted back in 2001, it has not been until more recently that social innovation has gained mainstream popularity as a concept in Ireland. In part, this heightened awareness is linked to the financial and economic crisis which has underscored the need for and value of social innovation in Ireland. Accordingly, an interesting development is that earlier references to social innovation (such as in the Social Enterprise Task Force report 2010), described it as something 'carried out by social entrepreneurs and social enterprises,'[1] whereas more recent references acknowledge that social innovations can be championed not only <u>by social enterprises, but by the third sector, people or communities</u>.

Government-led social innovation: Responding to the lack of a not-for-profit capital market in Ireland in 2011, the Irish government established a Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising. Inspired by other countries with national social innovation funds (e.g. Scotland's "Inspiring Scotland" and the many social innovation funds set up by the Obama Administration in America), a key recommendation of the Forum was that a national social innovation fund be set up – which was approved by the Irish Cabinet. Founded in 2013, the Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) leverages match funding of its initial €10 million fund to foster the development of social innovations with a potential for 'transformative impact on critical social issues facing Ireland.' [2]

Challenges being addressed:

Homelessness: In the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis, issues related to homelessness, housing and related services have all been adversely affected. There have been increases in evictions and repossessions,[3] growth in waiting lists for social housing and increased indebtedness in relation to key utilities such as heat and water.[4] To address these challenges various homeless service providers and local authorities have applied social innovation principles to better meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Ireland. Examples include a cross-organisation partnership between Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), the Central Statistics Office and a number of homeless service providers to work in a more joined up manner. The multi-agency collaboration has resulted in a number of concrete outcomes: the 2011 Census included rough sleepers for the first time; CSO published a thematic report on homelessness - which aimed to inform homeless policy in a more data and evidence-driven way; and the DRHE developed a 'real-time' database which tracks user service journeys and bed occupancy across the

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[1] Report of the Social Enterprise Task Force (2010) Adding Value, Delivering Change: The Role of Social Enterprise in National Recovery. Available online: http://www.clanncredo.ie/gfx/uploads/textbox/SETFBrochureSml_07_06.pdf
[2] http://www.socialinnovation.ie/about-us/our-story-so-far/
[3] Source – Central Bank Data. This does not include buy-to-let properties.
[4] http://www.energyaction.ie/news/920-weekly-cost-of-running-average-home-bought-in-boom.php

Dublin region, and flags if someone has been in homeless emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months.[5]

Social innovation incubation: While the establishment of the Social Innovation Fund demonstrates greater support for social innovation in Ireland, there is still a need to deepen understanding of the tools and methods needed to help social innovations scale and increase their impact. To this end, WestBIC, a scaling centre and business incubator covering the Border, Midlands and Western regions joined the EC-funded project, TRANSITION - Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubation. As a 30 month project, TRANSITION aims to practically support over 300 social innovators to scale whilst formalising learning around the different approaches and methods of social innovation incubation.

Promotion of social innovation in Ireland: A number of organisations have been set up with the explicit aim of supporting and funding social innovation and social entrepreneurship in Ireland. They include:
- Social Innovation Fund Ireland - provides growth capital and support to help the most promising social innovations in Ireland scale and increase their impact;
- Social Entrepreneurs Ireland - runs Awards Programmes that provide funding, mentoring and support to high potential social entrepreneurs and their projects;
- Irish Social Enterprise Network - the largest network for social enterprises, social entrepreneurs and social innovators in Ireland;
- Clann Credo - supports the development of social enterprise, community business, social impact investment (SII) and other innovative solutions to social problems;
- Arthur Guinness Fund - an innovative investment vehicle that helps social entrepreneurs deliver measurable, transformational change to communities in Ireland and worldwide.

Applied social innovation research projects in Ireland: Consensus - is an applied research project that explores trends and solutions for sustainable household consumption in Ireland (North & South), with involvement of researchers from Trinity College Dublin and the National University of Ireland, Galway. Led by Trinity College Dublin, SHARECITY is the first global study of emergent and burgeoning food sharing in cities – from redistributing surplus food from retailers to charities and community kitchens, to web-based platforms identifying surplus crops as potentially transformative means to shift urban food systems onto more sustainable pathways.

Other examples of Irish social innovations:

Voidstarter, an Irish project, was the overall winner of the European Social Innovation Prize 2014, sponsored by the European Commission. Voidstarter aims to put empty urban property to good use by using them as spaces for training and learning, refurbishing them, and turning them back into homes. The project will provide unemployed people with learning opportunities alongside skilled tradespeople in the refurbishing of the empty houses.

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[5] Feansta (2012) Social Innovation to Combat Homelessness: A Guide. Available online: http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document&arg=1089&cle=4c55e7e607b8f534b178a2b1aad3b682ea665e23&file=pdf%2F2012_06_12_social_innovation_guide_final_en-2.pdf

[The Freebird Club](#) - is an Irish peer-to-peer social travel and homestay platform specifically designed for the over 50s. The idea applies 'collaborative economy' principles to address practical issues such as loneliness and financial sustainability for older people. The Freebird Club offers a new world of social travelling for older adults, with a membership-based model. It marks yet another Irish innovation that has done exceptionally well at the [2015 European Social Innovation Competition](#), after it was selected as one of the three winners to represent this year's theme, 'New Ways to Grow' out of 1,400 applications from over 40 countries.

[Cloughjordan Eco-village](#) - located at Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary, the eco-village is an innovative community that won the National Green Community Award in 2012 and was voted runner up in an 'Irish Times' contest looking for the 'Best Place to Live in Ireland'. In 2013 it was nominated for an Irish Pride of Place award and a UN award for liveable communities.[6]

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[6] http://www.cultivate.ie/community-resilience/1227-the-rise-of-the-sharing-economy-in-my-community