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IA4SI – Impact assessment for Social Innovation

IA4SI is a support action project developing a socio-economic and environmental impact self-assessment methodology for evaluating projects in the field of social innovation. The project is a collaboration between iMinds (project coordinator), T6 Ecosystems, Eurokleis and ATC and runs from 2013 to 2016.

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Acronyms

Acronym/Term	Definition
CAPS	Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation
DSI	Digital Social Innovation
EEA	European Environmental Agency
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
TRL	Technological Readiness Level
CSA	Coordination Support Action

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This deliverable presents the policy recommendations and the future research roadmap for the digital social innovation domain, developed by the IA4SI project after the finalisation of the impact assessment methodology, the assessment of the first generation of Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation (CAPS) and the implementation of the tools directed to CAPS users and to European Citizens in general. This process allowed IA4SI researchers to gather a detailed picture of the CAPS domain and of the emerging features of the overall Digital Social Innovation (DSI) field.

The document reports firstly of all how the implementation of the impact assessment tasks allowed CAPS projects to gain a different perspective about their activities and goals though the self-assessment of their impacts. This task encouraged the projects to gather qualitative and quantitative data about their performances, actually offering them the opportunity to monitor and evaluate their progress. The gathered data are the foundation for the recommendations and research questions presented in this deliverable.

In the light of the main observations emerged from the CAPS impact assessment results, this document presents a list of recommendations aiming at preventing the emergence of the main constraints identified by IA4SI while analysing the data provided by the projects. These constraints concern mainly the appropriate valorisation of the project most relevant leverage, which are the thematic communities and their needs; the development of business plan oriented to guarantee the projects economic sustainability beyond the funding period, also pursuing channels that are consistent with their goals and values; the importance of keeping a constant focus on users' engagement and on their preferences; and finally the necessity to stimulate and reinforce projects' efforts towards the assessment tasks, thought an appropriate planning.

The research roadmap outlined in the final chapter reflects the same topics and encourages future research activities to support the next generation of projects, investigating unresolved or outstanding issues. First of all the economic sustainability one, which should addressed by the projects funding their choices on complete and documented knowledge basis; then, the nature and the behaviours of DSI users' should be further investigated, and the same role of DSI projects with respect to their users should be discussed; finally, an in-depth analysis should focus on the balance between the influence of the local contexts and the possibility to transfer DSI models.

INTRODUCTION

The conclusions illustrated in this deliverable are the result of two years and half spent by IA4SI working with the CAPS community, studying its performances, its outputs, outcomes and impacts, and encouraging the involvement of the project users and the general public at large.

IA4SI pursued a participatory approach: on the one hand, it involved the CAPS projects in the development of the impact assessment methodology from the early stages of the project, validating the identified indicators with them, supporting the data entry and further refining the overall framework after the first round of assessments. On the other hand, CAPS users and European citizens were also involved through two ad hoc tools: the User Data Gathering Interface (UDGI) for the first ones, and the Impact4you platform for the second ones .They were encouraged to provide feedbacks about the services offered by the projects and their knowledge about the overall DSI field improved. Citizens' and users' involvement (especially the last one) proved to be the most challenging task to fulfil, and it was also a significant source of experience for policy recommendations and of inspiration for further investigation in this field of research.

The evidences gathered during the implementation of IA4SI and the conclusions reached by the impact assessment of the projects allowed identifying the relevance of this activity for the CAPS. This had to provide qualitative and quantitative data concerning their activities in a systematic and regular way, in order to implement the two rounds of assessment promoted by IA4SI. Moreover, the task highlighted strengths and weaknesses of the assessment process itself, of the projects and to some extent of the DSI domain. From these observations it has been possible to develop policy recommendations aiming at strengthening the domain and at providing useful indications for the implementation of the future CAPS. Moreover, some relevant areas of investigation emerged, and the deliverable also presents some open or outstanding issues that should be addressed in future research activities.

The structure of the deliverable is therefore the following:

- Chapter 1 illustrates the value of the implementation of the impact assessment and of the self-assessment, focusing on evidences emerged applying the process to the CAPS;
- Chapter 2 presents opportunities and risks concerning the DSI domain and the CAPS in particular, developing consistent policy recommendations for future projects;
- Chapter 3 suggest questions for the future research roadmap and highlight some areas of investigation, which can be crucial for the full understanding and effectiveness of upcoming activities.

CHAPTER 1. THE VALUE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Snapshot: The Value of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment

CAPS are developing new social and business models. In order to assess their impact we need:
- a quali-quantitative methodology based on standard approaches, such as Cost Benefit Analysis, Multi Criteria Analysis and Social Return of Investment (SROI), but also integrated with *ad hoc* metrics that are not necessarily market based but that, nevertheless, can assure social innovation platform sustainability in the long run;
- to allow CAPS projects to continuously monitor the impact through a self-assessment approach;
- to involve users and citizens in the assessment exercise exploring new sustainabilty paths.

1.1 Background

The IA4SI project worked with the aim to assess the impact of Collective Awareness Platforms for sustainability and Social innovation actions (CAPS) for a broad uptake on communities and, as a consequence, to support projects in engaging citizens and society at large. Social innovation is a novel approach to societal challenges that recognises the instrumental role that ICT can have in improving European citizens' everyday life by providing information, knowledge, organisational models, services and social-entrepreneurial models able to tackle societal challenges such as unemployment, aging, social exclusion and social and environmental sustainability. The IA4SI consortium has developed a quali-quantitative methodology based on standard approaches, such as Cost Benefit Analysis, Multi Criteria Analysis and Social Return of Investment (SROI), integrated with *ad hoc* metrics that enabled the IA4SI team to map the concrete added value of social innovation initiatives, especially from the point of view of European citizens. In addition, the project has identified and mapped the characteristics that make a social innovation initiative scalable and sustainable, and which allows it to move from a local, grass-root initiative into a wider social practices. The IA4SI methodology was used for supporting projects funded under the Call 10 Objective ICT-2013.5.5 "Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation". By applying the IA4SI methodology and by actively supporting its development through the participation in *ad-hoc* organised workshops, each project (also known as CAPS project) was able to understand to what extent the impacts defined by the ICT Programme Call were achieved and eventually to re-organise the activities in order to improve the chance of producing a real impact on communities, the natural environment and Europe as a whole.

Projects were enabled to use the methodology following a self-assessment approach, through three different online tools:
1) the Self Assessment Toolkit (SAT) for enabling CAPS to self-assess their impacts
2) Citizens Engagement Platform – Impact4you platform for engaging citizen and CAPS stakeholders
3) The User Data Gathering Interface for capturing the user's perspective about CAPS services.

Best practices were identified and events organised in order to increase the visibility of the projects within and outside the research community, fostering the creation of synergies among them and improving their impact on communities and the chances to become new models for socio-economic and environmental sustainability. Finally, based on data gathering through the self-assessment of the projects and the identification of best practices, IA4SI drafted the following recommendations and a research roadmap.

1.2 The need of a socio-economic assessment of CAPS

As stated by Mulgan and others[1] (2007) social innovation is about "old and new methods for mobilising the ubiquitous intelligence that exists within any society". In this sense, the concept of social innovation is rooted in the ability of societies to change and in embedding the results that bottom-up initiatives can produce in this context. Following this thinking path we can say that social innovation is a special kind of innovation that sees as protagonists social movements, grassroots initiatives, individuals and groups perceived as being distant from political and economic power. From the definition we started from, we can also add that social innovation is not a totally new phenomenon, because also in the past there have been innovation that –following a bottom up approach – provided benefit to the society as a whole. In fact, many of the social services we take now for granted and see as "institutional" have been, once, considered to be great social innovations. In this scenario, new and emerging technologies, especially the ones that more than others involve users in the creation of their contents (web2.0, web3.0), create new spaces for collaboration and self-organisation and propose new production, consumer and lifestyle models. Technology becomes an instrument for new initiatives that address urgent social needs by promoting a multi-stakeholder approach in which users and citizens can play a central

In this framework socio-economic impact assessment becomes a not easy task: social innovation is using and developing new business and sustainability models, therefore economic impact assessment variables need to be adapted accordingly. There is a need for the analysis of economic and financial impacts of projects by using metrics that are not necessarily market based but that, nevertheless, can assure social innovation platform sustainability in the long run. Morevover, CAPS projects are different from each other in terms of platform development, target users and general aims. They impact very different sectors, focusing of different themes varying from environmental sustainability, to mobility, lifestyles, political participation, health, social inclusion, etc. but, nevertheless, they need to have a common framework for the assessment of their socio-economic impact. On the other hand, there is also a growing need to verify how the public investment in innovation can guarantee the best value for money and maximise the impact on European economy and society.

IA4SI approach was developed in a participative way avoiding to add another level of control (beside the one of the European Commission) on CAPS projects. For this reason the CAPS projects were enabled to use a self-assessment approach and the information collected through the various tools was used by the IA4SI team only at the aggregated level and for developing the final recommendations.

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[1] Mulgan, G. Tucker,S., Ali, R. and Sanders, B., 2007, Social Innovation What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerate, University of Oxford, Skoll centre for social entrepreneurship, working paper available here: http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/centres/skoll/research/Pages/socialinnovationpaper.aspx.

CHAPTER 2. POLICY RECOMMENDATION: ENHANCING THE DIGITAL SOCIAL INNOVATION DOMAIN

Snapshot: Policy Recommendations

The impact assessment of the first generation of CAPS projects allowed identifying relevant opportunities and constraints of this emerging field of activity and research. Mirroring the complex EU context in which they emerged, the recommendations developed by the IA4SI project revolve around three main topics:

1. The importance of keeping the focus on the needs of the communities to which such projects are addressed, and to appropriately value the relevance of this approach;
2. The need to strengthen the projects' financial sustainability after the end of the EU funding;
3. The attention towards users' characteristics, preferences and involvement;
4. The importance of the evaluation and impact assessment task for the projects.

2.1 Digital social innovation: opportunities and constraints

During the last decade (including the economic crisis in Europe beginning in 2008) it has been possible to observe an in-depth change of economic behaviours and processes, especially at the grassroots level. The pressure of uncertainty and the emergence of new and unanswered needs encouraged communities and citizens to develop innovative solutions and to look for new channels to fulfil their necessities. New ICT technologies and especially the possibility to share knowledge and information in a quick and (apparently) unlimited way have been crucial for the emergence of solutions that were deeply new and developed through grassroots, participatory processes: stakeholders' involvement, co-creation, perceived values and business models based on engagement became key words upon which groups of citizens started building new ways to manage common goods, economic needs, urban management. The CAPS programme emerged from the opportunity to encourage and deepen the understanding of these realities, which are taking advantage of the new possibilities offered by digital social innovation processes.

The activities implemented by IA4SI involving projects, users and citizens confirmed that these processes revolve first of all around the needs of the thematic communities of citizens. This means that from one side the project ability to involve interested citizens is a key factor for the effective development of the tools, on the other side the pre-existing characteristics of such communities and often of the local environments are equally relevant for the kind of activity to be implemented. In this perspective, CAPS projects positively reflect the diversity of communities active within the European Union and represent the opportunity to explore how to adapt social innovation practices from one context to the other, with the support of ICT technologies.

On the other side, the actual capacity of these projects to enlarge the communities of their users is hindered by factors such as the digital divide and the fragmentation of local dynamics and regulations. The assessment, though, highlighted a limited attention towards these barriers, and no attention towards the digital divide issue. Moreover, the sustainability of most of the platforms beyond the EU funding period is yet to be determined and currently not guaranteed. CAPS projects should address the issue of their financial sustainability from the very beginning, exploring new channels for funding, while accordingly to the assessment results few project focused on developing feasible business plan to guide their development. Finally, the projects need to be encouraged to pursue overall assessment and evaluation tasks in a regular and planned way, in order to guarantee an appropriate data gathering and reporting process.

The recommendations below reflect those constraints emerged from the IA4SI experience, with the aim to prevent them and ease the implementation of future CAPS and DSI projects in general.

2.2 Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations have the purpose to reinforce and value CAPS strengths and to address their gaps, as emerged from the impact assessment process:

1. In the light of the central role played by grassroots participation for an effective implementation of a collective awareness platform:
    a. CAPS projects should be encouraged to avoid technological determinism, since the tools they develop are not the final purpose of their activities. On the contrary, the focus should remain on the needs of the target communities, which have to be clearly identified from the very beginning. In addition to this, the technology to support the activities should be defined. The projects generally managed to keep the balance and maintain the centrality of the targeted communities, and for the future this effort should be more explicitly required and supported.
    b. More emphasis could be given to process or organisational innovation in the future. In fact, while some projects have an impact on product innovation, the assessment process clearly highlighted that they are most effective when addressing and producing changes in societal dynamics, working processes, actors' relationships. CAPS should be able to appropriately value this kind of impacts they generate.
    c. In order to support the dissemination of good practices and new models proposed by the CAPS community, it is desirable that the EU proceeds towards the harmonisation of legislations that regulate topics such as data management and services and products markets.

2. To address the issue of financial sustainability, three main recommendations emerged from IA4SI observations:
    a. Consistently with the point above, CAPS projects should be encouraged to put more attention on drafting business plans and on developing clear trajectories for their activities also from a business point of view, clearly identifying new market opportunities for partners, increasing the number of business collaborations, creating new businesses through the project outputs, valuing their research results and stimulating the creation of new services.
    b. The access to alternative financial channels should be encouraged and facilitated. Crowdfunding, equity funds, impact investing are new and appropriate solutions for projects such as CAPS. The awareness about these channels, which are looking for new areas of engagement, should be raised and their identification should be strongly supported, possibly even implementing a specific support action for the task.
    c. Not-for-profit approaches of economic sustainability should also be considered and planned in due time. Corresponding to the nature of several CAPS projects, willingness can be detected to pursue alternative-to-the market sustainability models; evenso, as above, organisational and fundraising plans will need to be developed before the end of the project.

3. Some relevant recommendations emerged also with respect to the role and the involvement of the users:
    a. CAPS case histories proved that, for a successful involvement of the users, transparent data management rules and practices should be encouraged, and tools for the users' direct control of the privacy of their data should be provided. In fact the assessment showed how, while highly supportive of information accessibility and dissemination, users appreciated the many projects taking into account privacy preservation and transparency.

b. Regardless of the topic of the project, citizens' engagement is one of the most challenging activities for CAPS and for digital social innovation in general: to this respect, the most successful projects were those that built their entire strategy around this task. Future projects should be encouraged to clearly plan channels to involve and activate a community and to identify concrete goals in this regard.

4. Evaluation tasks and impact assessment should be mandatory in all CAPS projects and in the Digital Social Innovation domain as a whole: they support projects and users full comprehension and exploitation of the projects' outputs and impacts. Therefore, IA4SI recommends the EC to:
   a. define a minimum set of impact assessment indicators (already in the calls) for which all the projects should gather data in a constant way during their activities;
   b. require from the project to explicit define a budget for impact assessment activities and, more generally, for collaboration activities with the support actions.

CHAPTER 3. IA4SI RESEARCH ROADMAP

Snapshot: Research Roadmap

CAPS projects offered a privileged perspective to understand in which direction the future research concerning Digital Social Innovation should move forward, also in order to prevent that some unexplored factors could become uncontrolled risks:
1. Economic sustainability: a concrete support should come from research to enhance the economic and financial sustainability of DSI projects. The research should investigate sustainability factors and actively propose feasible models.
2. Projects' users: since users' engagement is the key for successful DSI projects, future research should more thoroughly analyse their profiles and should answer some questions about the role of DSI with respect to the community at large.
3. Local context: a future analysis should focus on the role of the local environment in the implementation of similar DSI models.

3.1 Digital Social Innovation: next challenges

The reflections about the impact assessment process and results allowed also identifying some areas of research worth of further investigations. Those areas emerged directly from the same knots that generated the policy recommendations, and are therefore complementary to the previous chapter. IA4SI developed research questions which scope goes beyond the CAPS domain and aims to look at the entire DSI field.

As anticipated, the main challenges concerning future CAPS and DSI projects in general revolve around their financial sustainability, the role and characteristics of their users and the embeddedness of DSI models in grassroots dynamics.

Drafting the outline of a future research roadmap about CAPS and DSI has two main goals: first, to recognise the areas in which the DSI paradigm can be reinforced by research, and research can be enriched by dedicating more space to this field. Second, it allows identifying potential risks for DSI in Europe and addressing the questions with the purpose to contain those risks.

3.2 Future Areas of investigation

IA4SI identified three main areas of investigation, each of them articulated in some specific questions:

1. Economic sustainability: with respect to the partially unresolved topic of the projects' sustainability beyond the EU funding, a dedicated research should deal with constraints and opportunities concerning this specific aspect. In particular:
    a. Which are the characteristics that make some DSI projects more sustainable than other DSI projects? How can they be spread in European countries?
    b. Which, among the new financial and sustainable models emerging in recent years, are most suitable for DSI projects?
    c. How much does economic sustainability impact on the transferability and replicability of DSI models?

2. Projects' users: projects' users behaviours and preferences are key for a successful implementation and dissemination of practices and services proposed by CAPS, yet users' themselves are often difficult to clearly identify and analyse:
   a. Who are DSI users? Which are their profiles and what makes them suitable targets for the projects? How diverse or homogeneous are they?
   b. How can users communities be expanded and, in particular, how can DSI projects overcome the digital divide and engage groups at risk of social exclusion, that still represents one of the main constraints for projects such CAPS?
   c. In the light of the divides mentioned above, in order to be really inclusive and to tackle the whole society, which technologies should be preferred? Which engagement models?
   d. How does engagement lead to potential behavioural change? Which kinds of models are needed? Are there social limits to adaptation?

3. Local context: EU citizens involved in DSI look at it as an effective channel to take advantage of services otherwise non-provided or to participate to the public life of their countries/regions (i.e. eGovernance is one of the field of application where DSI is proving to have the higher potential):
   a. How strong is the link with the local context and the development of DSI or the implementation of emerging practices of DSI? To what extent does the same model is transferable from context to context? Can we talk of DSI in general or are we already able to observe substantial differences in different EU country in the way DSI is understood, supported and implemented?
   b. Even in presence of similar needs, are some models implementable only in context where local communities are to some extent ready to fully exploit the opportunities offered by DSI? What does "ready" mean?

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the IA4SI activities concerning CAPS impact assessment produced a significant amount of data about the projects and the DSI field in general. The projects effectiveness in tackling key societal issues emerged, together with some factors that hinder their full exploitation. The recommendations and the research roadmap presented in this deliverable aim at addressing those factors, from the one hand through concrete suggestions about priority issues to be approached in future calls, on the other end through the identification of areas of investigation that could support a better understanding of this field and the implementation of future projects.

The points illustrated in the previous chapters highlight a clear need to better value the role of the grassroots foundations of these projects and the importance of adapting case histories developed by specific communities to other contexts. Moreover, CAPS projects need to establish better 'continuity strategies' from the funded phase and the EU should consider the possibility to develop policies to help support the sustainability of their research outputs. This document aim to support the fulfilment of both this goals.