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Making social innovation thrive: Insights from the SIX Istanbul Wayfinder 2018



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Introduction

The SIX Wayfinder is a global event on the future of social innovation. Curated by the Social Innovation Exchange (SIX) and hosted in partnership with local and international partners, it explores how social innovators can create large-scale, deep and systemic change over the next ten years.

To wayfind is to orient oneself; seafaring communities have long found their way using the stars, the current and the winds. At each SIX Wayfinder, practitioners use each other to find ways forward that are new, renewed or adapted. The Wayfinder is about the future and finding our roles within it.

The first Wayfinder took place in London in 2017, convened by SIX, hosted by Nesta, in collaboration with TACSI, SiG, the McConnell Foundation and UNDP.

We examined the successes of social innovation over the past decade, uncovered key challenges and tensions, and explored where to focus our efforts for the future. Collectively, we developed calls to action that describe the more radical, transformative and human-centred approaches that the global social innovation community needs to advance in the next 10 years.

In May 2018, the second Wayfinder took place in Istanbul, Turkey, convened by SIX, hosted by Zorlu Holding, powered by imece, in knowledge partnership with ATÖLYE and S360, and supported by the UNDP Regional Hub Istanbul and the Brookings Doha Centre.

One year on, the Wayfinder aimed to catalyse the social innovation ecosystems in Turkey and push the broader social innovation field by building on existing activity and diving deeper into two of the calls for action from London:

- Creating enabling platforms to enrich social innovation ecosystems
- Getting truly multi-sector in social innovation — with an emphasis on integrating corporate, government and philanthropic social innovation;

The event brought people together from around the world to share learning on how social innovations succeed, explore ways to overcome barriers and challenges with this work and to prepare for the pressing challenges of the future. We hosted a public meeting with 500+ participants in person and 1000+ who joined virtually and we embarked on a shared global learning experience for two days with 350+ people from 30 countries.



This short report summarises our discussions and insights from the Wayfinder. We left Istanbul Wayfinder with a renewed sense of purpose, built around action to:

- Embrace an environment of disruption and change;
- Adapt how we work: the same issues remain, so how we work on them must change;
- Further develop the narrative of change to engage more audiences;
- Move fast, working from both top-down and bottom-up;
- Think like a movement and collaborate across sectors and communities;
- Inspire corporates to engage with social innovation;
- Welcome more 'unusual suspects' into our discussions - so we need to change the way we communicate;
- Raise awareness of what we do with both the public and policy-makers to mainstream social innovation;
- Energise the next generation of social innovation practitioners, especially students and young people.

What did we learn?

The Istanbul Wayfinder explored in more detail two calls for action from the 2017 London event:

What does social innovation need to thrive?

Creating enabling platforms to enrich social innovation ecosystems

How can we work better across sectors?

Getting truly multi-sector in social innovation – with an emphasis on integrating corporate, government and philanthropic social innovation;

It also explored opportunities to nurture the social innovation ecosystem in Turkey specifically (see box on pg 15, *Spotlight on Turkey*). These ideas fed into our discussions on the global picture and were relevant to ecosystems around the world.

What does social innovation have to offer?

Keynote speakers from around the world highlighted rising inequality as the single biggest issue we have in common. But, as Alya Göksel of AÇEV in Turkey noted: "The issues many of us work in haven't really changed or gone away. So the way we work on these issues has to change."

The need to move fast in response to change came up time and again a challenge. "Change is the new normal and it's coming at us at a speed that has never been seen before," warned Kriss Deiglmeier, CEO of Tides. Agility needs to be coupled with longer-term thinking and funders and investors who are more prepared to invest over time.

We must never forget that, when we talk about systems change, we are talking about people. Many solutions already lie within communities. But too often practice is based on theory and handed down from the top, when the answer is there on the ground – in lived experience and exchange. We must get better at understanding what communities need. "Expert analysis does not tell us what people want," warned Gorka Espiau of CRM-McGill University. Carolyn Curtis of The Australian Centre for Social Innovation encouraged the audience to think beyond their bubbles: "How do we unlock community, family, and households as an asset and include them in our movement for social innovation? Those who never would attend a social innovation conference?"

If we are to unlock solutions with communities, we must work across sectors, with business, civil society and government, all finding new ways to work in true partnership. Kriss Deiglmeier reminds us, "we need to move from operating in silos to operating in collaboration."

Storytelling emerged as one of the most powerful tools we have for unlocking change. We need to learn how to tell stories and build up the narrative of change. "Narrative can be a technology," said Ella Saltmarshe of The Comms Lab, "stories can change goals and give others hope that they can create change." Hand-in-hand with taking control of the narrative comes the importance of raising the visibility of what we do as a movement to build more public awareness. "When you increase someone's feeling about their power to change their own life, you increase their feeling about how to change other lives," said Filiz Bikmen of Esas Sosyal.

Looking further ahead, we pinpointed a need to support the rising generation of social innovation leaders. Young people are enthusiastic about social innovation but in many places lack the means or support to pursue their passion. Empowering this generation will be an essential focal point for the social innovation movement; how can we become truly intergenerational to creatively co-own the future?

Change is the new normal and it's coming at us at a speed that has never existed before.

Kriss Deiglmeier,
Tides

What makes a social innovation ecosystem thrive?

An immediate objective of the Istanbul Wayfinder was to contribute to support the growth and development of the social innovation ecosystem in Turkey and the region (see box on pg 15 on spotlight on Turkey). These regional discussions helped us crystallise general features of successful ecosystems, informed by the experience of others in Canada, Australia, Europe and MENA. These included:

- A **collective aspiration** for social innovation, justice and transformation that recognises complexity, community and collective action and challenges the myth of the individual entrepreneur.
- A **shared narrative** that embraces social innovation in all its diverse aspects and emphasises how these lead to social transformation. Experience in Europe shows the value of investing in this.
- A **common terminology** to run alongside shared narratives so that what we do is clear, both to each other and to those outside the movement. Different interpretation of key words and phrases can create misunderstanding.
- **Strong innovation support systems** that can test and then transform ideas into fully operating services, including alternative resource flows of funding and financing to work with communities and innovate solutions before scaling. In the social space, we don't have the right to be wrong.
- Real pathways to **scale** — We need to ground our work in reality for our movement to be successful and to create impact at scale, taking both **top-down and bottom-up approaches** to unlock latent assets from deep within communities in combination with public sector assets and support. We need to focus more on how we achieve this.
- A **platform for networking** and dialogue that engages all parties and helps orchestrate concerted efforts. A 'civic incubator', which mediates between citizen (ideas) and private sector (funding), has worked well in Canada.
- **Spaces for people** to come together with open minds to try out new ideas. These need to be physical as well as virtual. Importantly, they must seek out, be accessible to and welcome the 'unusual suspects,' those who may not already be involved or invited into our networks and spaces.
- **Increased visibility and public awareness** of social innovation. Social media and mainstream TV are channels through which the concept of social innovation could feed into everyday life. Showing government officials the social impact of social enterprises and innovations could also promote greater state engagement.

“*Social change happens through the mainstream. Don't think of it as separate.*”

Geoff Mulgan,
Nesta

Getting to systems change

If all this feels overwhelming, Tim Draimin from the McConnell Foundation stressed that it is a lifetime activity to foster ecosystems that spur systems changes. And yet the seeds of the systems we want to see in the world are already planted — as Deiglmeier emphasised, “There are ideas in communities that are the solutions we are seeking... We can all act on this – move quickly and bet on people you believe in.” Big shifts can start with small, ordinary steps. Göksel urged us not to be afraid of system change — just get started: “You do not have to solve a new problem, just solve a problem” she said.

Our discussions drew out 'dos and dont's' of systemic change, producing a poignant set of insights reminiscent of pioneering systems thinker, Donella Meadows*. As Meadows wrote, “We can't control systems or figure them out. But we can dance with them!”** Here is a version of the dance that emerged from the Wayfinder:**

* :Meadows, Donella. “Dancing With Systems.” Archives. The Academy for Systems Change. donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/

** :ibid

*** :Read Meadows “Dancing With Systems:” <http://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>

Do:

- Commit to the long haul: building and supporting an ecosystem is 'a lifetime activity'.
- Think like a movement: the whole is more than the sum of its parts.
- Embrace working within an environment of change and disruption. It's the 'new normal'.
- Recognise that innovation is complex: it's about much more than technology and can be about new combinations of existing ideas.
- Harness the power of storytelling, especially when working with the public and communities. Learn how to tell stories and curate them into a powerful overall narrative.
- Draw strength from your community, but be sure to reach out beyond the 'faithful'.
- Be a 'movement for', not a 'movement against'.
- Experiment. Experimentation is a powerful tool. It can keep people engaged, reduce risk and save resources, but funders often focus on achieving safer results.

Don't:

- Be afraid to start small.
- Lose sight of the 'human' – people, family, communities – in social justice. Social innovation is about values.

“*We need to ground our work in reality for our movement to be successful.*”

Tarik Yousef
Brookings Center Doha

Massive systemic changes over time have often sprung from the passion of ordinary people. Writer Charlie Leadbeater gave us the examples of how successful movements **with a mission** can change social norms, make markets and flip systems – like veganism and the gay community’s fightback against the HIV/AIDS crisis. But, he advised that to be successful “small [actions] needs to encompass the big [picture]”. He advocated thinking like a movement and gave us eight rules for doing this (see box below).

8 rules for a social innovation movement

Movements with a mission can change social norms, make markets and flip systems.

1. Frame the narrative in a way that moves people – don’t let others do it for you, and be prepared to adapt
2. Find ‘prophets in wilderness’ – the people who live the ideas that go against the mainstream
3. Build places for the faithful to gather
4. Give people tools to enact change
5. Share ownership through a fluid hierarchy that distributes leadership
6. Engage the enemy so as to win them over
7. Shift from opposition to proposition
8. Know your routes to impact: change social norms, make markets, and shift systems

Based on the presentation by Charlie Leadbeater.

Think like a movement. Movements with a mission can change social norms, make markets and flip systems.

Charlie Leadbeater

How do we get truly multi-sector?

System change can only happen if we collaborate across sectors. “You can’t solve any problem without this” warned Markus Lux, of Robert Bosch Stiftung, “even if your silo is beautiful and big, you will still lose.”

“Social innovation touches every community, at least in Turkey in one way or another. We need to ensure that we are speaking the same language.”

Ayla Göksel, AÇEV

Business for social good

Complex and rapid changes in society are driving demand for a **new role for business**. “We’re living and operating in a global society, and the companies that will have longevity are those with corporate social innovation embedded into their DNA” said Kriss Deiglmeier. Emre Zorlu, of Zorlu Holding, emphasized this point, noting that “If you want a long-term healthy company, first you have to have a healthy society.” Companies need to change their paradigm to ‘business for social good,’ he advocated.

As business leaders recognise this paradigm shift for success, where business for social good is good business, the social innovation movement as a whole also needs to embrace this shift in order to work at the same scale of the challenges we want to solve. We must work with different types of partners, especially corporations. “Corporations play a significant opportunity in 2018 and the next decade to be part of the solutions for both social and environmental problems today. They have the resources and operate at a scale that most other entities don’t have to come up with real solutions for the problems ” said Kriss Deiglmeier.

We must collectively become a cross-sector movement, which may require many of us moving from "opposition to proposition," as Charlie Leadbeater called on us to do. A common insight amongst corporate speakers and participants was that this new role for business involves a **commitment to a social mission** that runs right through a company and has the support of senior management. As globalisation highlights for consumers the realities of supply-chain practises and resource scarcity, the rapidly changing societal norms and customer values, bolstered by social media, demand greater accountability and contribution from companies. It is risky to ignore these changes and an opportunity to embrace social innovation. As Kriss Deiglmeier put it, "Businesses, just do something – the opportunity is there, clients and customers are demanding it, the world is demanding it, the environment is demanding it." What's good for people and planet is good for business.

Businesses already have a number of robust tools at their disposal to move from corporate social responsibility to corporate social innovation. Speakers highlighted examples such as:

- Donating 1% of their staff time, product, profit, and/or equity to ANY charity of their choosing so that social good is "baked into the company's DNA." 5,000 companies have pledged to do this already around the world;
- Including at least one objective in the business strategy that targets social change;
- Switching employee incentives so these align with social purpose;
- Leveraging marketing assets, skills and resource for public service campaigns and impactful behaviour change;
- Bringing 'externalities' internal, accounting for both negative and positive social and environmental impacts in financial reports;
- Turning the business into a vehicle to solve social and environmental problems.

Funding social good

For social innovation to progress, funders — corporate, public and philanthropic — should also reassess their approach. We need investors in social finance who are prepared to be adaptive, take risks and to fund 'upstream'. We need investment in future challenges, not just small, short term solutions of today's problems. **More inventive funding is** needed. In Europe, the European Commission invested in developing a shared narrative across social innovation actors and institutions, whilst in Canada, philanthropy has played a key role in developing a social innovation ecosystem.

"Philanthropists often love to fund front-end service delivery, where the beneficiaries are well known, the outcome predictable," said Paul Steele of the Donkey Wheel Foundation, "In fact, where they should fund is in the riskier spaces where there is opportunity for real change. This is where the outcome is less known." Whether it's investing in upstream capacity or root cause interventions, a shift in finance flows to upstream innovation remains a fringe effort.

Accounting measures across the board need to rebalance social and financial objectives to encompass social value; this applies to corporate and nonprofit accounting. Such new ways of measuring social impact would be likely, in turn, to have a positive effect on policymakers, demonstrating the kind of practical regulatory shifts that could substantively enable social innovation.

Policy for social good

Several workshops noted prime opportunities for regulatory or legislative change to further enable social innovations to thrive. The following were identified as vital policy steps:

- A flexible and inclusive **legal framework** for social enterprises. Developing **dedicated cross-departmental units** for social innovation to fostering these practices within the public sector.
- Greater **government support** to help social innovations develop, from tax incentives and breaks, to championing stories social innovation, to promoting public innovation and cross-sector engagement to improve the conditions for social innovation;
- Increased **visibility** that shows government officials the social value and impact created by social enterprises, so as to promote greater state engagement.

However, we must remember that valuable policy tools already exist in some social innovation ecosystems. In the European case, there has been more than 10 years of work, within and outside the European Commission, to get social included in innovation policy: "We have fought for these," Philippe Martin, of the European Commission, reminded us, "our risk is that we don't use them."

Unlocking the potential in universities

Universities do a lot of valuable work on social innovation, but they can be hierarchical and restrictive; for example, artificially separating research from practice and teaching from experiential learning. Valuable evidence on what works exists, cultivated by student researchers, PhDs and academics, but can be hard to find, behind firewalls or divided up across databases and platforms. Wayfinding through research, articles, cases and reports for valuable knowhow remains a challenging and frustrating experience for practitioners.

Universities are facing the pressures of disruption around the ways they have always worked and for greater accountability, in particular from students. There are broader questions to consider on the future of learning and how universities can create social value to the communities and people around them.

“Bringing the different types of stakeholders from NGOs to private sector together to find ways to collaborate is a prerequisite for system change.”

Buğra Çelik,
imece

Spotlight on Turkey

Social innovation' remains a relatively new term in Turkey. However, İtir Erhart, co-founder of two social enterprises (Adım Adım and Açık Açık), says much has changed over the past ten years: "In 2006, we didn't know that we were doing social innovation. My goal was just to resolve a problem. Now I'm giving speeches on social innovation every week."

The Wayfinder heard about and from pioneering social enterprises and innovations already operating in Turkey.

Breakout workshops brainstormed 'big ideas' to overcome obstacles blocking the broader development of social innovation in Turkey. These included:

- An inclusive **legal framework for social enterprises and social innovation projects**, run by an independent body and properly monitored;
- Greater state championing, tax reductions and supportive **regulation**;
- Increased **visibility** for the work of social entrepreneurs and innovators;
- A **leadership programme** to encourage new social innovators. This could include placements abroad for experience with established social innovation projects;
- A **collaborative regional platform** to bring different stakeholders together in a shared purpose;
- **Blended sources of funds** for projects at different stages;
- A change in mindset that believes **in working with youth, not just for youth**;
- Greater belief in and uptake of **corporate social innovation**;
- Using **media communications and branding** to make social innovation platforms and initiatives more visible.

What is next?

Looking forward, our discussions drew out priorities for the next ten years:

- Invest in the next generation of social innovations and innovators, which is currently under-resourced;
- Work beyond our organisations, sectors and silos. This includes unlocking the assets in communities, families and households;
- Better understand what communities want and need; this needs to be centred in our work as a continuous and ongoing process of community and collaborative innovation;
- Reach out to those who would never attend a social innovation conference;
- Produce more evidence and amplify the stories of what is working into mainstream storytelling — curricula, journalism, media, social media, pop culture;
- Increase the flow of funding into social innovation and foster more corporate social innovation;
- Question how we learn and, in particular, what role our universities can play;
- Create more collective and combined impact by building regional social innovation ecosystems.

More immediately, we can:

- Take control of our greatest technology — narrative — to grow the movement and to both understand and amplify innovations developing from top-down and bottom up;
- Get truly multisector by preparing to propose rather than oppose successful cross-sector ways of working at the scale of the challenges we seek to resolve;
- Focus on creating the enabling conditions for social innovations to thrive, captured in this report;
- Allocate funding upstream; be open to funding in ways that are creative, inventive and take more risks;

- Look for opportunities to work with prototypes, informal groupings and experimentation;
- Learn our “dance,” finding a collective and shared way of working that generates a movement and shifts markets, norms and systems;
- Embrace more dissent and disagreement that challenge vested interests;
- Continue to connect diverse audiences to learn, share and exchange;
- Leverage the policies already in place to enable social innovation;
- Stay grounded in reality — accelerated change and complexity are the new norm. We can focus on staying deeply attuned to that change at different scales, especially for communities, families and households at different scales.

SIX and the Wayfinder partners are now looking at ways to take these discussions forward.

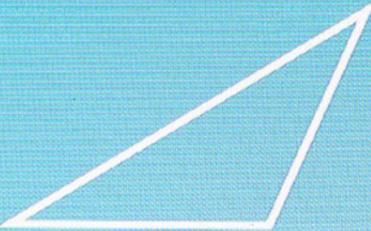
Conclusion

Two words kept cropping up throughout the Wayfinder. The first was **change**: we must accept that we are working in an environment where disruption is ‘the new normal’ and adapt our own ways of working if we want to make social change happen.

The other was **hope**. This was the word most often used by participants on their feedback postcards. The Wayfinder event was truly multi-sector, multicultural and diverse. There was a renewed sense of possibility – a belief in the power and agency of people who, together, can change systems.

Find out more

Our dedicated website, www.sixwayfinder.com, includes background material and outputs from both events.



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