

# Social Innovation in Mexico

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## How Do We Understand Social Innovation?

As a global society, we can agree on the fact that we need to find new and better solutions for social problems. Some of those problems have never existed before, and some other issues have been around for an extended period of time, and are in constant evolution.

We might also agree that the available resources to design and implement needed solutions will always be limited, and therefore, we need to guarantee that the way we invest talent, time, and resources, in general, is the most effective and transparent.

Because of the need for solutions, the concept of “innovation” is widely present at the public agenda, within academic articles, and in policies, programs, and projects aimed at promoting a more inclusive and fair social system.

*Social Innovations Journal* (SIJ)<sup>1</sup> understands social innovation as a process of individuals and organizations focused on products and services improvement to achieve a higher social impact. According to SIJ, innovations could be defined as “disruptive” when they generate new markets with low impact or specific

leverage points. While other innovations are sustainable and represent considerable advances or high impact progress.

At the Center for High Impact Social Innovation (CISAI) we have adopted the Phillips and Deiglmeier<sup>2</sup> definition of innovation proposed by the Stanford Business School. This definition conceives innovation as a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.

CISAI aims to promote those innovations with high impact mentioned by SIJ, characterized according to Buckland and Murillo, as innovations with evidence of social impact, that are economically sustainable, that require inter-sectoral collaboration, or collective impact, and with scalability and replicability potential.<sup>3,4</sup>

## **How SIJ and CISAI contribute to Social Innovation**

Starting from the definition mentioned above, Social Innovations Partners launches the *Social Innovations Journal* platform as a mechanism and a space to share ideas and good practices, to promote innovative and disruptive ideas. SIJ seeks to incubate social innovations and encourage the leadership of thought -- by sharing with leaders "how" to think and not "what" to think -- to

inspire and strengthen the innovation culture. SIJ contributes to the global innovation ecosystem as a facilitator platform to receive ideas, with emphasis on regional dynamics and business to share and promote best ideas and practices at the national and global level.

On the other side of this collaboration, CISAI is the result of the synergy of an academic institution, research centers, and public agencies joining forces. CISAI has its head office at ITESO, Jesuit University in Guadalajara, and seeks to contribute to social justice through social innovation and the social innovation ecosystem consolidation, with Jalisco as its starting point but with a national, regional, and global perspective.

CISAI takes the advantages of applied research and technology development as instruments to create compelling and sustainable solutions to complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. CISAI methodology is based on systems' dynamic transformations, intersectoral collective action, community-based participatory approach, and technology as an enabler and not the final purpose, all orientated towards replicable and scalable innovations. Our main action lines are knowledge generation, capacity building, stakeholders' networks, and concrete projects to create and implement solutions.

**México, Land of Possibilities for Social Innovation**

According to *Mapping the World of Social Innovation*<sup>5</sup> there are some conditions and factors that enable a social innovation ecosystem. First, active civil society, entrepreneurs, and inspired individuals, proper funding options for every stage of the innovation cycle; new technologies, networks, and platforms to facilitate cooperation among the stakeholders; supporting legal framework; the sense of urgency, and political changes going on<sup>6</sup>.

In Mexico, we can find those conditions -- with different levels of challenges for each -- that are enabling social innovation within the country. The Inter-American Development Bank<sup>7</sup> recognized that in Latin America, Mexico has one of the most robust support systems for innovation intermediation and financing, and an active interaction among crucial stakeholders with good international connections. Additionally, Mexico has a large enough population -- more than 125 million people -- that represent an excellent opportunity to promote social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

From the public sector, the Mexican government has created specific agencies and policies to support social entrepreneurship and social innovation. According to Foro Consultivo Científico y Tecnológico<sup>8</sup> the main efforts have been through the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL, Secretariat of Social Development), precisely through the Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social (INDESOL, National Institute for Social Development), and

the Secretaría de Economía (SE, Secretariat of Economy) through the Instituto Nacional de Economía Social (INAES, National Institute of Social Economy). Other efforts by decentralized autonomous public agencies are those from the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI, National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Populations).

Local governments are also vital contributors to this efforts with examples like the Laboratorio de la Ciudad de México (Mexico City Lab) which is the experimental area of the Mexico City government, as well as the projects promoted by the Secretariat of Innovation, Science, and Technology in the State of Jalisco and the similar Secretariat in Mexico City.

The academic and research sector is increasingly becoming an essential motor for innovation. There are several examples in the country. The Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT, National Council for Science and Technology) hosts INFOTEC, a Research and Innovation Center for Communications and Information Technologies that is creating technologies with high potential to generate social value.

The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, National Autonomous University of Mexico) is contributing to innovation through the Instituto de Energías Renovables (Institute for Renewable Energies). Also the Social and Political Sciences Faculty (FCPyS) and the Escuela

Nacional de Trabajo Social (ENTS, National School of Social Work) together with the Coordination of Innovation and Development, developed the curricula for the social innovation course, while the Administration and Accountancy Faculty (FCA) created the Social Entrepreneurship School.

The Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey (ITESM) has on different campuses the Institute for Sustainable Social Development (IDeSS), the Center for Development and Entrepreneurship for Migrants in Puebla, the Social Innovation Program at the Mexico City campus, and the Guadalajara campus that is recognized as the Changemaker Campus by Ashoka.

Some other universities involved in the ecosystem are the University of Monterrey (UdeM) that is also a Changemaker Campus, and the Anáhuac Sur University with a master's degree in social innovation and citizen participation.

The Sistema Universitario Jesuita (SUJ, Jesuit University System) in México has also made a relevant contribution in the field. Some examples come from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Puebla (IBERO Puebla) with the first University innovation ecosystem from the Laboratorio de Innovación Económica y Social (LAINES, Economic, and Social Innovation Lab). The Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City (IBERO Ciudad de México) has the Centro de Emprendimiento y Desarrollo Empresarial (Entrepreneurial

and Business Development Center), and there is a project to create an innovation lab for citizenship security. Also, ITESO, the Jesuit University in Guadalajara has been working for several years on innovation issues through the Centro para la Gestión de la Innovación y la Tecnología (CEGINT, Innovation, and Technology Management Center), the Business School, and now through CISAI, to make relevant contributions at the local and national level.

The private sector and the ecosystem of social impact investment are currently providing resources to different social innovation initiatives. This sector is now in an active phase of configuration and growth. Mexico hosts annually in Mérida, the Foro Latinoamericano de Inversión de Impacto (FLII, Latin American Forum for Impact Investment), the most significant event of its kind in the region. Mexico is also the only Spanish-language member of the Global Social Impact Investment Steering Group and recently launched the Alianza para la Inversión de Impacto (Impact Investment Alliance).

Among the key actors in this sector are investment consultancy firms, foundations, investment portfolios, capital funds, and programs. Some of them are New Ventures México, AMEXCAP, ANDE, Coca Cola FEMSA, Compromiso Social Banamex, Ignia, Impact Hub, Nacional Monte de Piedad, New Ventures, Promotora Social Mexico, SVX México, CSR and Inclusive Business, FOMIN / ECODES, and the Asociación de Fondos de Capital, plus

several private individual donors. All of these actors have had to compromise with the new ways to find a match between investment and social impact.

Private foundations like Ashoka, Fundación Carlos Slim, Nacional Monte de Piedad, among others, as well as initiatives like Enactus Mexico and Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN), are working as bridges to connect the business world with social entrepreneurs and organizations for knowledge generation.

Of course, at the hearth of the ecosystem, we have the social innovators, those individuals, groups, collectives, start-ups, small and large companies, innovation communities, non-profit organizations, co-working spaces, and community centers that generate, try, fail with, adapt, or share ideas and new ways of doing and thinking. They are the primary force driving innovation in Mexico. This segment of the ecosystem is fortunately so large now that any try to mention critical actors will be insufficient. It is plausible to affirm that almost in every area of social life in the country there is at least one Mexican initiative investing talent and passion for creating an innovative solutions. The invitation to the reader is to search for those efforts through the work of all the actors mentioned before to have a broader perspective of the contributions currently going on in the country.

## **On This Edition**

In this edition dedicated to Mexico, SIJ seeks to recognize those social innovators at the heart of the ecosystem. These articles show their shared experiences, achievements, challenges, and frustrations. The ultimate intention is to promote the sharing and hearing of the voices of others to lead us all to recognize the opportunity that exists to imagine new possibilities.

The reader will find initiatives promoted by civil society organizations, social enterprises, start-ups, public agencies, and universities with a great diversity of topics. Below is a brief description of what you will find in each article of this edition on the rich ecosystem of Mexico:

### [Sustainability-oriented Entrepreneurship: ITESO Ecosystem](#)

Claudia Ibarra Baidón – Juan José Solórzano Zepeda

In its educational model, the ITESO system, the Jesuit University of Guadalajara (Jalisco, Mexico) has defined certain common skills for all undergraduate students of the University and key among them are innovation and entrepreneurship. To develop these skills, the students gather around a system of innovation that is designed from an immersive perspective as a system of innovation turned towards sustainability. This ecosystem includes the participation of off-campus businesses that set challenges of social and/or entrepreneurial innovation for which a specific solution has not yet been designed. One of these areas of opportunity is the measurement of

impact related to the evolution of the entrepreneurial intention -- sustainability -- of the students.

## [Festival of Epicentro Innovation](#)

Carmina Haro Ramírez

With the objective of promoting and strengthening the culture of innovation and the high-impact entrepreneurial ecosystem in Jalisco, the Festival of Epicentro Innovation was born from efforts led by Carmina Haro within the Department of Innovation, Science, and Technology. The main reason behind the development of the Festival of Epicentro Innovation was to be able to take the themes of innovation and technology to other spaces, to generate greater digital aptitude of the citizens, and to expand this type of knowledge to a greater number of people to democratize innovation.

## [Implementation of Innovating Strategies to Fight Food Poverty in Jalisco, Mexico](#)

José de Anda, Francisco Urrutia-de la Torre, Morris Schwarzblat y Katz, David Foust Rodríguez, and Ana Teresa Ortega-Minakata

In this article, the principal strategies identified by the government, food banks, and the academic sector are presented to address the challenges that the state of Jalisco faces in regards to food security. Those strategies are being set in motion through a project of social innovation financed by the Mixed Funds CONACYT - State

of Jalisco Government.

## [The Colmena Community Uncovering the Talent of Social Entrepreneurs](#)

María Elena Valencia González and Ana Magdalena Rodríguez Romero

Colmena is looking to increase the profitability of their products or services through the development of pairing new opportunities with cost-effective businesses with a focus on social economic benefits. The line of social businesses Colmena Relax is focusing on includes microentrepreneurs who specialize in massage therapy and are highly trained in several massage techniques due to a high level of sensitivity related to their being visually impaired. The necessity of this partnership of business and the visually impaired masseurs is successful through innovative incentives used to contribute to the integral/general wellbeing of the public while leveraging the talents, potential, and willingness to grow of the entrepreneurs.

## [The Projects of Professional Application: A Modality to Learn and Contribute with and for Society](#)

Martha Gabriela Muñoz Padilla

In 2004, ITESO brought together the renovation process of its academic programs at the undergraduate level, the Projects of Professional Appliance (PAP), that are "oriented to the intervention or transformation of specific

social issues through disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary works. These projects capitalize on the accumulated institutional experiences around social compromise generated by the diverse authorities and institutions of ITESO. They are, before everything, projects that are organized in the curriculum structure and oriented towards creating synergies across academia in a more complex and integral solutions-demanding social horizon.

### [Building Together the Foundations/Base? Building Block of Early Childhood](#)

Irene Velasco Rocha

HelKi's mission is to improve the culture and practices of early childhood development in Mexico by supporting a network for parents and early childhood caregivers. HelKi is working to make preparation for optimal development through reliable attachment and effective links with the goal of creating humane, innovative, and inclusive high-quality solutions that can be tools of development for social building as well as prosperity and sustainability.

### [Mexican Art as a Creator? Driving Force/Instigator of Social Impact](#)

Janette Casas

Mexi-HA is a social business, responsible for the inclusion of Native/First Nation communities, the commercialization of products decorated with popular art, and promoting

events (both voluntary and festivals). This organization has generated job opportunities for isolated native and indigenous communities and has contributed to the preservation of the environment by encouraging the use of products other than plastics.

## [Social Innovation and Familial Agriculture, An Experience in Process](#)

Pablo Fregoso

The MIAF system is an agroforestry system of interspersed crop, composed of three species in intense agronomic interaction and whose purposes are production of corn and beans as strategic elements for rural families' food security, significant augmentation of the net familial income, increasing organic matter, controlling hydric erosion of the soils, and with this, achieving more efficient use of rainwater in the short, medium, and long term.

## [Share Instead of Compete](#)

Angela Meraz

In January 2017, the Corporative of Foundations of Jalisco, Mexico, decided to launch a closed call, among a group of associations called, "What would you do with a Ferrari?". The goal was to see which organization could best reply to: "How would you make the most out of a Ferrari if it were gifted to your Association?" by explaining the reasons their association should be selected and what

the funds would go towards supporting. The most innovative answer would determine the winner. Once the winner was identified, an endeavor to band the winner with other participating associations started, in order to maximize the Ferrari's worth. 10 additional associations were gathered as part of QUIRIVA, a network of 11 civil associations of Guadalajara, united by the objective of sharing more than competing.

## **Final Thoughts**

Mexico is a country full of contrasts: the national market attracts investments that support economic growth, and at the same time, there are millions of people with low-quality employment or part of the informal economy. On one side, there are public agencies promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, on the other hand, there are government agencies trapped in corruptive practices and the improper use of public resources. The country has great diversity and richness of its natural resources, yet there are inadequate mechanisms to protect and restore those resources leading to exploitation and degradation. There is a lot of talent and creativity in the new generations, but, there is also an education system that, often, blocks their potential.

The social innovation ecosystem in Mexico still has challenges to face: there is a need for better mechanisms for cooperation and communication, better access to resources that promote innovation, a coherent and

facilitative regulatory framework, and tools to combat corruption at all levels of government.<sup>9</sup>

These challenges are not an impediment but rather motivators for social innovators to move forward. Social innovators put their energy into thinking and demonstrating how it is possible to combine technology, imagination, business, science, and social commitment to breakdown these barriers and take the country into a better direction.

We do hope the organizations and reflections presented in this edition can contribute to cultivating those possibilities for Mexico today, tomorrow, and generations to come.

## **Works Cited**

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