**Social innovation as an outcome and valuation category of public research funding?**

**Rationale and research questions**

Both the scientific and research policy debate on social innovation has gained in importance over the past 15 years. This goes so far that some authors see social innovation as an unused equivalent of technical-economic innovation that could help SSHs in particular to free themselves from their defensive stance towards discourses revolving around valuation and impact of science and research. On the other hand, there are also some findings that indicate that (social science and humanities) research has so far paid quite little attention to the development of social innovation, particularly in terms of empirical productive interactions. However, a recent study that examined the work of leading Austrian social scientists on the topic of social innovation and their research contribution to the development of social innovations contradicts the last statement.

Social innovation as a transversal topic seems to have increasingly moved from the margins of social science and humanities research to the centre of it, although research funding still seems to lag a little behind this development. However, the findings are still inconclusive and, above all, there is a lack of larger empirical studies. Moreover, the topic has not yet been given much attention in science and research policy considerations and policies. Conceptual and epistemological uncertainties appear to be too great and, in addition, too little is known about the relationship between the research communities and the topic of social innovation.

This is where the project proposed by us comes in.

Our research objective is

First, to identify scope and scale of SNSF funded projects that deal explicitly and/or implicitly with social innovation research or the development of social innovation

Secondly, to assess the extent of contribution of funded SNSF projects to the development of social innovation, their productive interactions with non-academic stakeholders and/or beneficiaries and the operational or epistemological limits, and

Third, to critical reflect and structure the value of social innovation as potential outcome and valuation category, in particular for SSH.

With this project, we aim to pursue the following research questions:

1. How often is social innovation an explicit or implicit research topic in SNSF-funded projects and how is the topic approached?
2. What does research funded by SNSF contribute to the development of social innovation, how far does it go or can it go and where are the limits?
3. Is social innovation a suitable starting point for the valorisation of, in particular, but not only SSH research?

**Methods and Approaches**

In the following we give a short summative outline of the methods we would like to apply before describing our approach in detail.

Tab. 1: Overview on the methods

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| **Methods** | **Activity** | **Source** | **Expected results** |
| Text mining | Screening of proposals and identifying those which are explicitly or implicitly dealing with social innovation research and/or development of social innovation | All funded SNSF projects 2015-2018 (details to be discussed with SNF) and final reports of these projects (maybe limitation to SSH projects – tbd with SNSF) | Number of projects (also put in relation to all funded projects, e.g. in SSH) that explicitly or implicitly deal with social innovation;  Establishment of a population of projects, from which a sample is then drawn for further work. |
| Social Network Analysis | Investigation of the productive interactions between the research team and non-academic stakeholders/ beneficiaries. | All funded SNSF projects with explicit or implicit social innovation relation identified by text mining | A categorisation of productive interactions of the SNSF funded projects dealing implicitly or explicitly with social innovation along a number of stakeholder categories |
| Survey | Survey on the perception and importance of social innovation for own research work, and its epistemological and operational limits in SNSF research projects | All funded SNSF projects with explicit or implicit social innovation relation identified by text mining | Better understanding of how social innovation   * is perceived or used as research topic and/or approach; * is assessed or already used for valuation of own research for accountability purposes; * reaches its epistemological and/or operational limits in SNSF projects |
| Interviews / qualitative cases | Interviews with principal investigators from 30 SNSF projects dealing explicitly with social innovation | Sample (n= 30) of all funded SNSF projects with explicit social innovation relation identified by text mining | Gaining detailed knowledge about   * scope of social innovation research * contribution of research to the development of social innovation * limits of contribution (in operational and epistemological terms) * use of social innovation as an outcome and valuation category for accountability purposes |
| Presentation of findings | Presentation of the findings to SNSF | Experts invited by SNSF | Transfer and discussion of the gained insights |
| Workshop | Workshop with SNSF to discuss and structure the value of social innovation as potential outcome and valuation category, in particular for SSH | Management of SNSF and experts invited by SNSF | Assessment whether or not (and if so with which particular features) contributions of SNSF research to social innovations can be meaningfully classified and structured for the purpose of valuation of research (in particular of SSH) |