



THE TANDEM APPROACH TO SOCIAL INNOVATION

THE SYSTEM IS BROKEN AND RATHER THAN FIXING IT, WE PROPOSE CHANGING IT.

TANDEM

“ Culture is not an object but an act. It is in doing that we express our values and use them to make the society to which we aspire. European culture is not an accomplished fact but a commitment requiring constant renewal. Tandem does not see culture as a universal – if curiously Eurocentric – ideal. Rather, it imagines culture as a way of conducting human relations that values imagination, creativity and artistic expression because they are necessary to a tolerant and democratic public space. Culture is universal because these values and behaviours exist everywhere, even if their expression varies from place to place. ”

François Matarasso
in Mirror Images, 2016

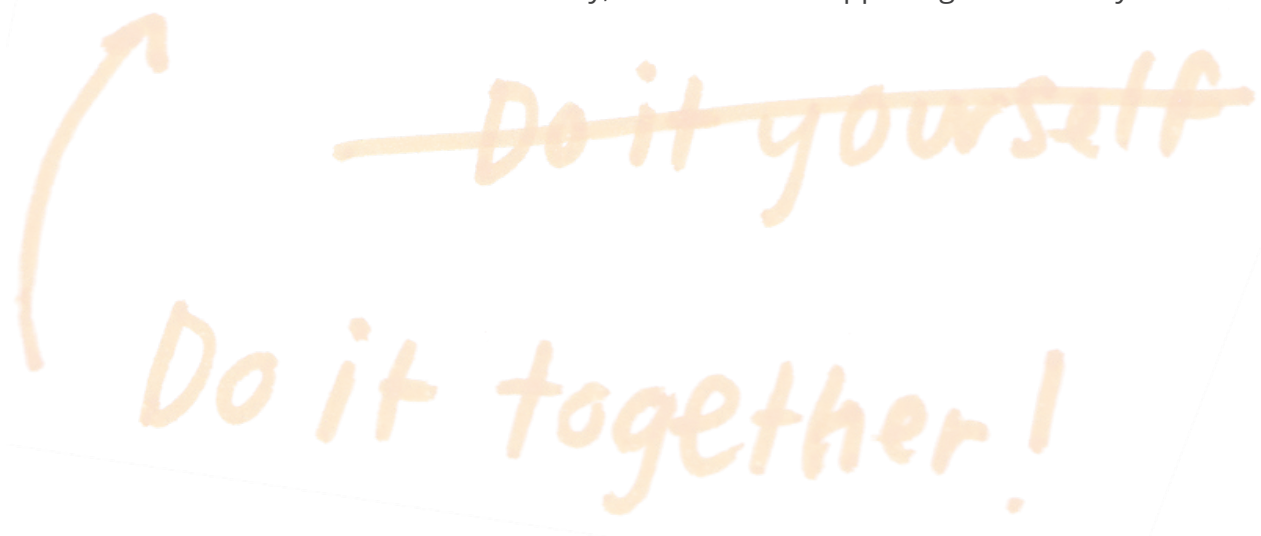
We observe that our societies in Europe and beyond become more and more fragmented, alienated, radicalised and unjust. Symptoms include the rise of populist and fascist leaders, elites accumulating more power and wealth while many do not benefit from increasing welfare levels, climate change reaching one point-of-no-return after another, scientific facts are labelled 'fake news', and meanwhile the arts and cultural practice receive less and less public funding.

The system is broken and rather than fixing it, we propose changing it.



HOW?

What if we look at the glass not only half empty, but also half full? We live in a very complex world, where any action has intended and unintended consequences. Most solutions depend on so many variables, that there is not one magic formula that will cure everything. Leaders that come with simple answers and quick fixes can lead us in very wrong directions. **What we need, are many solutions, many people, many actions. Culture, and artistic practice, play a pivotal role.** Not only by being a safe space for critical voices to be developed and heard. Or by being a maybe relatively innocent vehicle for activistic messaging. **But also in their formative power by constantly renewing our values and behaviour. Cultural products and actions can bring back awareness and foster solidarity in our societies. They can put social justice and inclusion on the political agenda. By activating citizens and their communities both in cities and rural areas, reclaiming the commons and advocating for a new way of governing by using positive, participatory approaches and co-creative, resourceful methods, we believe we have a good chance at making real change. This is what we call social innovation.** And it's not new or crazy, this is what is happening now already!



WHAT IS HAPPENING ALREADY?

Faced by various crises, unorthodox solutions have started to emerge all over Europe.

Creative initiatives – especially those from the financially and socially most affected regions in Europe and beyond- have started to experiment with new social designs and alternative economic strategies for addressing burning issues in their local working fields. They show the imaginative power we need for finding new answers and fresh approaches to the current challenges in our societies. These exceptional cultural initiatives often provide substantial meaning to people's lives. **They put forward the pioneering ideas, new social alliances and alternative economic and collaborative working models that we need in order to be really capable of changing the system.**

WHAT DOES TANDEM HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

We believe that these new initiatives are important creators of social good. By connecting them across European borders we support meaningful change. We believe that in order to answer their needs we can inspire further cross-pollination and mutual engagement with colleagues from many different locations all over Europe. **We make change happen by investing in people, making their organisations more resilient, innovating their creative practice and supporting their communities through engaging them in new transnational collaboration practices.**

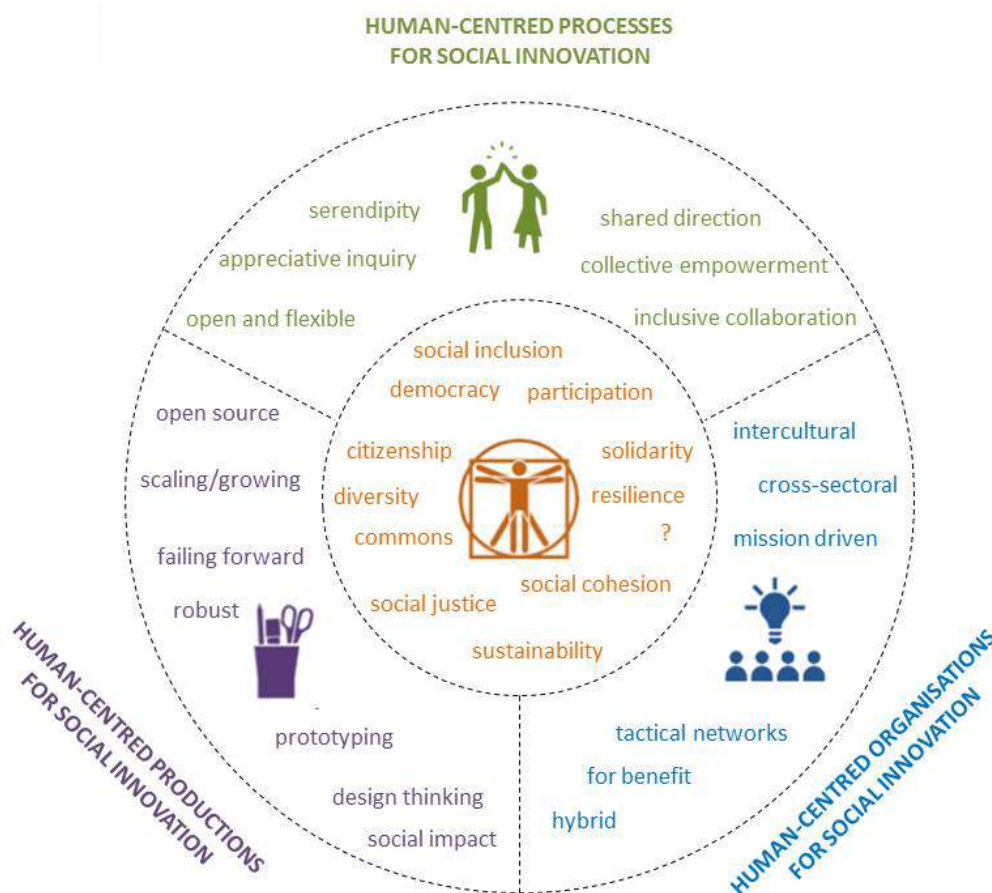


Tandem supports cultural pioneers and their organisations to step up their strategic game on an international level. Our programme assists those organisations to build new tactical collaboration channels together with creative minds from abroad and accumulate pathways of change that could be later mainstreamed or scaled. The cultural organisations and initiatives team up in Tandems and think, act and reflect together for 1,5 years on how their practice can further contribute to more just, participative and human Europe that builds on the potential of cultural work across borders.

HOW DOES IT WORK, TANDEM AND SOCIAL INNOVATION?

But how can we create a Europe and a world of greater possibilities in that context? Why do our attempts to deal with the challenges of our time so often fail? Why are we stuck in so many swamps and jungles today? In Tandem we use Theory U, a methodology developed by Otto Scharmer and his Presencing Institute at MIT. We connect culture and presencing – the “deeper dimension of transformational change”. **As change has the characteristic of emerging rather than being “made”, it is complex, not planned or scheduled but rather a spontaneous expression of a multi-dimensional accumulation of a diversity of factors. This understanding leads us to a new approach to social change and systemic change where we do not pretend to have full control over the changes we would like to see, but understand the need for the quality of human relations, presencing, sensing (as Otto Scharmer puts it) and the ability for co-envision and co-creation.**

Therefore at Tandem we distinguish between three interconnected spheres, that can all support social innovative practice, leading to meaningful social values and behaviour. **The spheres are: process, actors/organisation and production.**



PROCESS

1

Create an open and flexible process, don't plan every step of the way or come with a blue print. Each solution needs to be contextualised in time and space. And unexpected things will happen, so you need to be ready to change from plan A, to B, to Z. Note that **serendipity** is a core principle of Tandem: not coincidence, as serendipity is often misused, but to have the capacities and openness to jump on an opportunity when something unexpected happens, and make use of it in the best way possible. Allowing space for serendipity is one of the key elements of a well-designed process.

2

Be appreciative and build on what is there, rather than on what is missing. If you can look at the glass not only half-empty but also half-full and see opportunities, you're more likely to be successful than if you focus on what's missing or approach every challenge as a threat. This goes especially for working with people: everyone is an expert of their own life and eye-to-eye exchange is only possible when there's real, deep interest in stories and backgrounds of those you're working with.

3

Aim for a shared direction, so not one point on the horizon where everyone should get to, but a band-with where more people are comfortable. This will help getting more actors on board as well as spending endless hours and energy of getting everyone signing up for the exact same mission across languages and many other barriers.

4

Empower as many people as manageable by including them in your collaboration, make them co-owner of the process, sharing decision making power and responsibilities – this will help the people you work with grow and help you using your limited capacities to focus elsewhere; for example on the process itself and on the irritations that will happen between the people that you have included on your social innovation journey.

HOW

PROCESS

This brings us to the who; the people, the organisations, the actors of social innovation. As mentioned, **irritation** is an important factor in bringing the right group together: discoveries and learning mostly happen when there is a change of perspective, followed by a new insight or recognition of an opportunity. The group of people/organisations working together on 'social innovation' should therefore be intercultural; as changing perspectives and **intercultural** irritation helps discovery and opens new ways of thinking. Note that intercultural here means diverse in the broadest sense: mixing all sexes, ages, cultural backgrounds, social classes etc.

Organising your work **cross-sectoral** is another ingredient, for the same reason (irritation and perspectives) but also because reaching across sectors with different stakeholders will help with coming closer to the desired outcome or impact. Working together with business, public administration and media will bring on board more diverse civic assets in the process that could have more effect on society, rather than when you're only working with civil society and cultural organisations.

Intercultural and cross-sectoral actors together form a 'bigger collective brain' that can come up with more 'out-of-the-box' solutions. In order to keep these different groups together, new forms of governance (transparency) and hybrid organisational models can be helpful. E.g. working 'for benefit', rather than profit or non-profit.

WHO

PRODUCTION

When it comes to translating your ideas into a concrete production Tandem emphasises on the value of **failing forward**. This means that it's good to make mistakes, usually, you learn more from failing than from succeeding. Key is to reflect on your failure and improve what you do during the next step you take. You can do this for example by creating a quick and dirty **prototype** of your product, including the different stakeholders (partners and users or target groups). This way you can immediately see the potential and do not waste a lot of energy on making the full production plan and endless testing of a more or less finished product. Our prototyping exercises during the Tandem meetings therefore focus on translating the Tandem experience in a pilot project. Our conviction is that if we start small, and the pilot works, we can scale or grow by improving the product, testing it in another context with other partners, developing it open source and making it replicable.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

Finally, how do these spheres connect?

First and foremost: there is no linear process, no 12-step-plan to follow. Working in social innovation is a constant moving of taking big leaps forward, standing still for what feels like ages, re-iteration and backtracking. That also means there is no starting or ending point: social innovation can start with a failed experiment, a great idea or an accidental meeting of the right people in the right place. Furthermore, of course we are discussing very complex systems here. That means that specific intended and unintended effects are difficult to attribute to certain inputs or actions. It might be that just by putting the right people together in the room, 'change' happens, as there might be an increase in creativity. Or that the product fails completely, but the inclusive collaboration process has empowered various actors to continue working on social solutions elsewhere.

Finally, within the Tandem framework, we don't assess the success of a Tandem collaboration or project based on whether or not it's 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" (Stanford Social Innovation Review). What we assess is the drive and direction of participants to embrace complexity and constant change in the way they approach new projects. Our assumption is that by supporting them in designing better processes, including diverse actors, which together lead to more robust products – social innovation happens. Not tomorrow, not next week, but over the course of months and years to come.





Tandem I, final meeting, in Athens & Eleusina, 2017

WANT TO TRY SOCIAL INNOVATION TANDEM-STYLE?

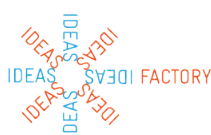
Apply for Tandem Europe !

*applications are open till Friday 20 June 2017

This document has been put together by the four implementing partners of Tandem Europe:



MitOst



We see it as an invitation to apply to Tandem, to discuss with you the power of culture and social innovation, and we will use it as a starting point for our programme meetings.