**Social Innovation (SI-DRIVE)**

The Australian Centre for Innovation is a member of the international consortium recently awarded a 4.8 million Euros EC grant to conduct a four-year study of social innovation. The consortium includes 15 partners from 12 EU member states and 11 from Russia, China, India, Canada, Australia South Africa and South America.

The theory and practice of innovation has largely been dominated by economic and technological perspectives. Recently however, the concept of social innovation has become increasingly evident in policy, scientific and public debates. There is a growing consensus among practitioners, policy makers, the research community and others that widespread social innovation is required to cope with the significant challenges that societies are facing now and into the future.

Social innovation has many different, sometimes conflicting meanings in a variety of areas such as innovation within the management and organisational research, the field of workplace and quality of working life, as part of social economy, in sustainable development, or as an aspect of territorial development.

Social innovations encompass new practices – concepts, policy instruments, new forms of cooperation and organisation – methods, processes and regulations that are developed and adopted by citizens, customers, and politicians in order to meet social demands and to resolve societal challenges in a better way than existing practices. In the case of SI, social groups and actors take the role that the market plays for technological innovations - the 'social acceptance' of an innovation leads to its spread and institutionalisation

SI-DRIVE has adopted a definition of social innovation as; “a new combination of practices in areas of social action, with the goal of better coping with needs and problems than is possible by use of existing practices. An innovation is therefore social to the extent that it varies social action, and is socially accepted and diffused in society.”

The project will involve:

* integration of theories and research methodologies to develop a comprehensive understanding and model of social innovation;
* mapping of social innovation practices in Europe and in seven other major world regions in terms of social, economic, cultural, historical and religious contexts; and
* detailed case studies in seven major policy fields – education, employment, environment, energy supply, transport and mobility, health and social care, and poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The Australian Centre for Innovation has been tasked in particular to contribute to:

* developing a typology of social innovations and a theory of social innovation and its role in transformative societal change;
* mapping of major social innovations and their characteristics in Australia;
* case studies on the environment, health and social care, and poverty reduction and sustainable development.

As industrialised countries like Australia are unable to access EU funds, we will be seeking to engage Australian commercial and government bodies, with the promise of access to the extensive knowledge on social innovation generated throughout the project, and potential application to key fields and issues in Australia.