THESIS PROJECT FILE

Registration year: 2016

1. Topic:
Title in English:
“Approaches and tools to support social innovation”

Keywords in English:
social incubator – social entrepreneurship – social innovation – support tools – support approaches – agriculture – agri-food

2. Supervision

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3. Presentation of thesis project (1 to 2 pages max.)
The proposed topic must be explicitly linked to one of the activities at Labex Entreprendre.

The concept of social entrepreneurship has come to the fore over the last decade and has even been described as a “social, economic and cultural phenomenon” (Pless, 2012). Yet setting up an organisation nowadays is difficult to envisage without adequate support (formal or informal), seen as one of the cornerstones of entrepreneurial success (Rice, 2002, Messeghem and Sammut, 2011). Despite this, few research studies have focused on the support given to social entrepreneurs, who
must be “socially” innovative (Friedman and Desivilya, 2010; Perrini et al., 2010). According to Defourny and Nyssens (2013), social innovation constitutes the very basis for the definition of social entrepreneurship. In the same vein, Maclean et al. (2013) argue that the two concepts are intrinsically linked.

In France, legislation passed on 31 July 2014 in relation to the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is designed to favour the development of this type of activity through various measures, in particular by recognising the SSE as “a specific mode of entrepreneurship”. The legislation thereby formally recognises the need to renew such activities in France, as has happened internationally (Ghezali and Pellegrin, 2007), both in terms of practice and research. New structures had previously been put in place to support the creation of social businesses. Like technological companies, these must demonstrate their innovative nature in order to benefit from certain forms of assistance. Various bodies have therefore made substantial efforts to characterise what is understood by “social” innovation (Avise, 2011; Chochoy, 2013; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). Alongside other criteria, this makes it possible to select projects to receive support from the Alter’incub incubator in Montpellier, for example, as well as from its spin-off structures.

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the support practices offered to social innovation projects in incubators, taking into account the specific features of social entrepreneurship, in particular the social innovation requirement, and all of the contextual aspects of the support with which social innovation is rewarded, described by Theodoraki and Meseghem (2014) as the “ecosystem of entrepreneurial support”. This research will address several questions:

- Does the support given to socially innovative projects have specific features compared to that offered to other forms of innovation? Social innovation and social entrepreneurship display certain characteristics that distinguish them from other forms of innovation and entrepreneurship (Maâlaoui et al., 2012; Austin et al., 2006). Researchers are currently focusing on the issue of standardised support versus support that is adapted to the “singularity” of each project (Chabaud et al., 2010; Levy-Tadjine, 2008).
- Given the specific features of social entrepreneurship, is there a “generic” way to adapt the support provided, i.e. a type of support specific to social entrepreneurship, and if so, what are its characteristics. And how is this reflected in support procedures, tools and practices?
- What are the advantages and shortcomings of support for social entrepreneurship? This research will produce recommendations for those involved in offering such support.

There will be a particular focus on support for socially innovative organizations working in
agriculture and agri-food, which may themselves display specific characteristics.

The organizations studied in the field of social entrepreneurship place less value on the notion of profit and focus more on including a social objective as part of their mission (Austin et al., 2006). Existing research on social entrepreneurship generally departs from the models traditionally developed in “classic” entrepreneurship theory, offering a new and more humanised approach in an area that is serving to check the excesses of capitalism (Santos, 2012). This thesis will therefore require the construction of an adapted theoretical framework to take into account the diversity of theoretical approaches adopted by the social and solidarity economy, and also to reflect the fact that there is not yet any unified theoretical approach to entrepreneurial support itself. Although a significant amount of bibliographical research will have to be conducted in the early stages, the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) should make an effective contribution to the construction of this theoretical framework. It will be essential to engage in fieldwork at an early stage. The former administrative region known as Languedoc-Roussillon offers many mechanisms at the cutting edge of entrepreneurial support, although comparisons with other locations will also be carried out.

This research topic clearly falls within the scope of Axe 2 Programme 1 at Labex Entreprendre: Management and evaluation of entrepreneurial support.

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (mandatory):**


### 4. Thesis financing

The anticipated source of financing for the 3 years required to complete the thesis must be indicated (type of action and percentage of co-financing).

This research topic clearly falls within the scope of Axe 2 Programme 1 at Labex Entreprendre: Management and evaluation of entrepreneurial support.