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University of  
Applied Sciences

**INTERACTION**  
**SUSTAINABILITY**  
**INNOVATION**



# **Why Do Universities Have Little Systemic Impact with Social Innovation?**

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# Overview of the Presentation

- Introduction
  - Conceptual and Theoretical Framework
  - Methods and Contextual Background
  - Results
  - Discussion
  - Conclusion
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# Introduction (1)

## Background

- Emergence of grand challenges – climate change, income inequality etc.
- The need for new collaborative approaches, organizational forms and perspectives towards resource use (Ackoff, 1999; Kuhlman & Rip, 2018)
- Solutions lying in structural changes at societal systems – organizational level and regulatory frameworks.
- The rise of social innovation as an instrument that has the potential to trigger structural change (Avelino et al. 2017).





## Introduction (2)

### Background

- Growing emphasis and demands on universities to be involved in social innovation processes.
- Universities are comprised of diverse knowledge communities.
- Universities have invested in and are accustomed to creating new technologies and focusing on technological innovation (Cinar, 2019; Göransson, 2017).

#### Research question:

To what extent can we characterize universities' responses to external demands to support social innovation using existing frameworks developed for technological innovation systems?

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# Conceptual and Theoretical Framework (1)

## Social innovation

- ”Social innovations are innovative activities and services.....motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and.... predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social” (Mulgan, 2007, p. 11).

Types	Examples
New products	Assistive technologies developed for people with disabilities
New services	Mobile banking
New processes	Peer-to-peer collaboration and crowdsourcing
New markets	Fair trade or time banking
New platforms	New legal or regulatory frameworks or platforms for care
New organisational forms	Community interest companies
New business models	Social franchising, or just in-time models applied to social challenges

Source: Caulier-Grice et al. (2012)



## Conceptual and Theoretical Framework (2)

### Institutional logics

Institutional logics are;

“socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality”

(Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804).

- Either a dominant institutional logic (Scott, 2008) or coexistence of multiple logics for a long time (Reay & Hinings, 2009)
- In the case of multiple logics in a field, actors guided by different logics may maintain strong separate identities.



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# Methods and Contextual Background (1)

## Methods

- Qualitative multiple case study
- University of Twente (the Netherlands) and University of Aveiro (Portugal)
- Technical/technical oriented universities
- Members of ECIU (European Consortium of Innovative Universities)
- 36 semi-structured interviews with key university actors
- Other key documents as secondary source (e.g., strategic plan)

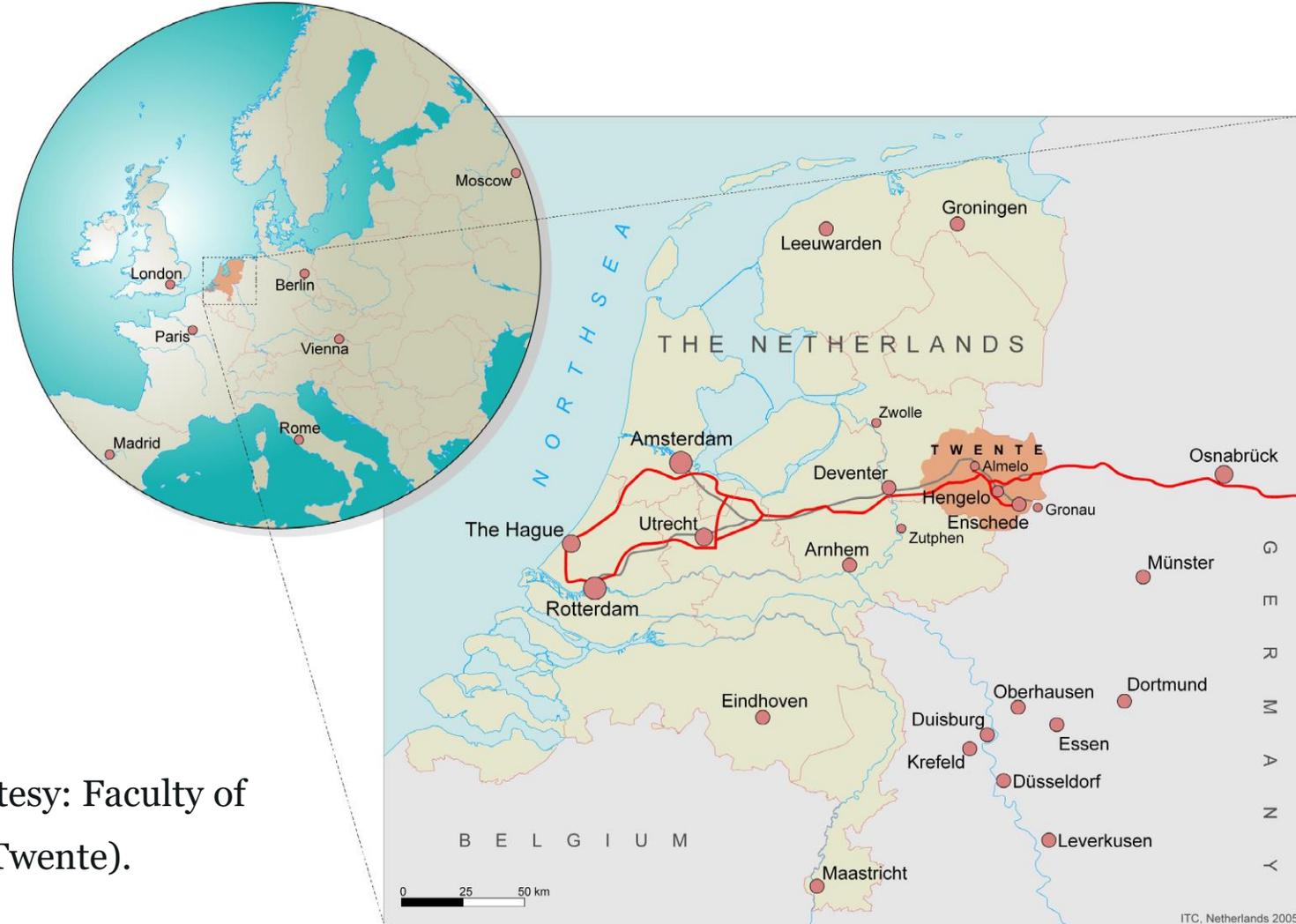


## Methods and Contextual Background (2)

### Regional Context (1)

#### Twente, the Netherlands

- Peripheral within Dutch context.
- ICT, services, agriculture including related machinery, construction and tourism.



Source: ITC (2005). (courtesy: Faculty of  
ITC, University of Twente).



## Methods and Contextual Background (3)

### Regional Context (2)

#### Aveiro, Portugal

- Peripheral/less-developed by EU indicators. Non-core within Portuguese context.
- Agro-food, forestry, metallurgy, chemical, tourism and ICT.

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Source: Fonseca (2019)





## Results (1)

### Dominant institutional logics of University of Twente (1)

- Technical profile since 1962
- Focusing on high-tech research and commercialization activities since early 1980s
- University motto in 2010: High Tech Human Touch
- Strong desire and support by the regional actors to promote region and the university as high tech



***"HIGH TECHNOLOGY"***  
***LOGIC***





## Results (2)

### Dominant institutional logics of University of Twente (2)

- Focus on scientific excellence
- The rise of rankings since early 2000
- Increasing pressure on excellence in research funding regimes
- Large and costly research centers (e.g., nanotech laboratory)
- Strong international outlook
- Strong desire for global orientation



***"GLOBAL EXCELLENCE"***  
***LOGIC***





## Results (3)

### Competing logics in University of Aveiro (1)

- Engineering disciplines assumed critical roles since its creation
- 9 out of 16 departments offer engineering degrees
- Rectory Team – 5 out of 12 come from engineering disciplines
- Socialization into a certain type of societal contribution-  
contract research, industrial collaboration, student internships  
etc.



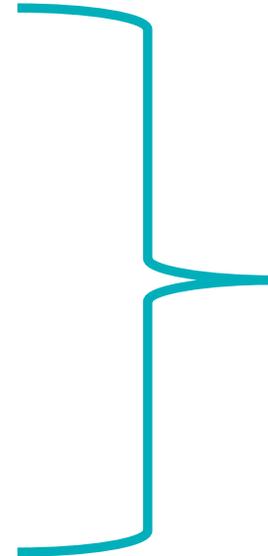
***"ENGINEERING"***  
***LOGIC***



## Results (4)

### Competing logics in University of Aveiro (2)

- 2008 economic crisis and following austerity measures
  - Increasing pressure on universities to address societal challenges
  - A focus on design thinking to address wicked problems
  - Growing popularity of design as a source for creativity and change
  - Strong support for social innovation
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***"DESIGN"***  
***LOGIC***



## Results (5)

### Characteristics of the four logics

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE		UNIVERSITY OF AVEIRO	
High Technology	Global Excellence	Engineering	Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technological innovation</li> <li>• Strong focus on commercialization</li> <li>• Regional engagement; start-ups, spin-offs, technology transfer</li> <li>• No institutional support for social innovation</li> <li>• Very strong logic in org. field</li> <li>• Complementary with GE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications in top journals</li> <li>• Attracting research funding</li> <li>• Strong support for international collaboration</li> <li>• Very limited support for social innovation</li> <li>• Very strong logic in org. field</li> <li>• Complementary with HT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing societal challenges through contract research, industry collab.</li> <li>• Limited support for social innovation</li> <li>• Stronger logic in org. field</li> <li>• In competition with design logic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design thinking perspective</li> <li>• Potential of design in driving structural change</li> <li>• Support for social innovation</li> <li>• Weaker logic in org. field</li> <li>• In competition with engineering logic</li> </ul>



## Results (6)

### Institutional space for social innovation in University of Twente

“  
“We were working with farmers in rural areas and their business ideas were about agribusiness... There was another one [idea] to establish something like a consultancy firm but for local community organizations... For the university perspective, this is not very interesting. Because, well... nothing is high tech at all.”

“If technological faculties here even consider working with us, they do so in a very very instrumental fashion by saying we got new technologies and we all the time discover there is societal resistance. Can you come up with the tools to persuade these people? That is very much the dominant type of thing whereas our impact on society would be far greater if we did not start with technological knowledge but we start with societal challenges in this region”

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“It is not really like a rule or regulation. When you start working here, you slowly realise this [developing social innovation initiatives] is not a culture here and other things like external funding, publications and start-ups are more important.”



## Results (7)

### Institutional space for social innovation in University of Aveiro

“  
“If we want to create a course like engineering and design, they do not allow us to use the word engineering. Why? Because apparently we are not engineers. But if you want to create this course or another course like design and engineering in an engineering department, they will let you do that. They will not consider that they are not designers.”

“I completely understand and accept it (academics' contribution to tackling grand challenges). I just do not understand why we have to do this with social innovation”

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“We should stop stretching of our professions. We are engineers and we do engineering, not social innovators. Everyone should do what they are good at”

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“We knew that they (the management) always wanted to appoint an engineer for the Design Factory. We invited designers from very prestigious universities in Europe for a very important meeting here....They (rectory team) realized it would be very awkward to assign an engineer instead of a designer.”



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## Results (8)

### Other barriers to social innovation

- Diminishing value and volume of social sciences – University of Twente
- Academic staff output evaluation apparatus;  
PADUA (Plataforma de Avaliação dos Docentes de Universidade de Aveiro)

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## Discussion (1)

### Institutional barriers stemming from institutional space

- *Identity effect* - Institutional logics either blocking (in UT) or decelerating the advancement of stable identity around social innovation
- *Institutional belief in the value of a particular activity* – (lack thereof) engaging with wider societal partners, a prerequisite for social innovation
- *Urgency* - Internal allocative model economy; social innovation characterized as uneconomic



## Conclusion (1)

- The need for stable academic identities supporting social innovation; channeling resources for non-technoeconomic innovation activities
- The need for increased perceived legitimacy of social innovation; governments, ministries and HE actors can further legitimize social innovation. The normative and over-optimistic of technological progress by technology disciplines should be unpacked.
- Fixing price/cost imbalances for social innovation in university setting- it takes time to produce social innovation outcomes



Thank you!

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