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**Recycling, collective
self-management and
social inclusion:
Movimento Nacional dos
Catadores de Materiais
Recicláveis São Paulo**

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& Andreas Novy*

**Case Study N°20
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1 The initiative and its organizers

The *Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis* (MNCR; engl. National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material) was created in 2001, uniting social movements which have been founded from 1989 onwards. It represents a considerable group of workers in the informal sector. The Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA 2013, p. 7) reports a total of 387,910 people working as Collectors of Recyclable Material (hitherto referred to as collectors).

As working in the informal sector is a prime survival strategy of the unemployed in Brazil, the engagement in the collection of recyclable materials can be seen as a form of private survival strategy. As the collectors tended to be particularly vulnerable persons working under difficult working and payment conditions, strategies to improve their conditions date back to the late 1980s. By organizing collectively, the collectors were able to receive higher prices for the recyclable products. At the same time, NGOs and religious as well as political foundations engaged in the training and legal and managerial consulting of the informal workers, enabling them to establish and manage cooperatives. From 2003 onwards, the political efforts were strengthened via the implementation of national policies: *Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos* (PNRS; engl.: National Policy for Solid Waste) and *Programa Pró-Catador* (engl.: Programme Pro-Collector).

The case study will focus on governance processes of waste collection, involving the collectors' movement, municipal and national levels of government and NGOs as political intermediaries. The regional focus will be on the municipal branch of the National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material in the city of São Paulo, located in the Southeast of Brazil.

2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems

Even though the situation of marginalized and excluded people in Brazil has improved considerably – the Gini index declined from 0.60 in 2001 to 0.53 in 2012 (cf. www.ipeadata.gov.br) – profound social inequalities persist. It is important to consider the historical dimension of inequality, dating back to Brazil's origin as a slave-holder society. Social exclusion has been a multiple process resulting not only from socio-economic exclusion, but also from racism and sexism. Souza (2003) captures the results of the profound processes of social exclusion with his notion of 'sub-citizenship', referring to how the poor have for long been treated and viewed as 'second class citizens'.

Despite this heritage of 'sub-citizenship', Brazil can also be seen as a very interesting case considering social innovation. This is mainly due to the transformations occurring around the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1980s). The gradual transformation and democratization during the 1980s has been actively promoted by a wide range of social movements. These movements were very critical of state activities and therefore fashioned strategies of autonomy vis-à-vis the state and political parties (Sader 1988). Nevertheless, the movements were also geared towards the state, as they were demanding equal rights of citizenship with special emphasis on the poor (Dagnino 1994). Since the 1980s, the social movements promoted a discourse of 'social citizenship', which has been linked to both the promotion of political and social rights (ibid.; cf. also Carvalho 2001, Leubolt 2013). The most important landmark of the success of the social movements has been the democratic constitution of 1988, introducing many participatory institutions (for further information cf. the country profile of Brazil).

The 1990s and 2000s have been marked by the proliferation and further development of participatory institutions (Romão 2014). Differing from other examples, the deepening of participatory democracy has been linked to the promotion of social justice via redistributive policies (Dagnino 2002), albeit being thwarted by a 'perverse confluence' (ibid., p. 288) with neoliberal reforms during the 1990s, limiting the fiscal room for maneuver for the extension of social policies. Many of the participatory institutions have been promoted on the local and regional levels, where councils have been introduced to promote participation in areas such as education, social assistance, or employment creation. On the national level, the councils have also been implemented during the 1990s, but have been effectively strengthened mainly during the 2000s (Romão 2014). These developments have been important for the promotion of social innovation initiatives promoted by social movements, such as the MNCR. Given the social needs of the country, such efforts can be seen as a vital necessity.

Given the focus on the labor market policies, the following paragraphs will describe the Brazilian labor market as of a dual nature, comparable to many other developing countries. While most of the better paid jobs are to be found in the formal sector, the informal sector hosts mostly the marginalized sections of society. Both wages and working conditions are considerably lower in the informal sector, which absorbs large groups of people who are unable to find work in the formal labor market. The informal sector can be seen as a structural feature of the Brazilian labor market (Oliveira 1972; Theodoro 2005), albeit with changing characteristics (Pochmann 2008). Depending on the definition, data for 2012 reports between 44.8% and 47.0% of the Brazilian workforce as informally employed. This figure has improved considerably, as in 1992 between 59.0% and 53.5% and in 2002 between 54.9% and 58.3% of the workforce were reported as working in the informal sector (www.ipeadata.gov.br). This considerable decline in the percentage of informal workers has been characterized as a major improvement in recent years (ILO 2009; Baltar et al. 2010). Despite recent substantial improvements, informal workers are still the group of workers which is working under the most difficult conditions considering both payment and working conditions. However, their fate was much more severe during the late 1980s and 1990s.

The collectors of recyclable material can historically be seen as a particularly disadvantaged and excluded group of workers: Since the 1950s, there are reports of men, women and children surviving in and through waste. The group of people involved in waste collecting grew particularly during the 'lost decade' of economic growth in the 1980s and the neoliberal decade of the 1990s. Formal jobs were lost and people had to find work in the informal sector. While the composition of waste changed to include a rising percentage of recyclable material, recycling was also facilitated by the growing numbers of temporarily unemployed people desperately looking for employment opportunities (Bosi 2008; Wirth 2013) who were willing to accept to work with trash under precarious and unpleasant conditions (Medeiros and Macêdo 2006; Couto 2010). From the 1990s onwards, awareness of the need to recycle waste has grown, especially after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. In the aftermath of the conference, the public opinion in Brazil also recognized the need to promote social and environmental sustainability. Thereby, groups such as the collectors have begun to be seen in a more positive context.

The number of people employed in the sector of collecting recyclable materials constantly grew to reach 387,910 workers in 2010 (IPEA 2013: p. 8). In 2010, 31.1% of the collectors were female and 66.1% belonged to the socially disadvantaged group of 'black people' (port.: *pretos e pardos*). 20,5%

of the Brazilian collectors were illiterate (*ibid.*), which is clearly above the National average.¹ The collectors are therefore clearly an educationally disadvantaged group, which is also reflected in income terms. The medium income of the collectors was 571.56 R\$ (approx. 250 €), being slightly higher than the minimum wage (510 R\$ in 2010) and less than half of Brazil's average wage.² Besides the comparably low income, working conditions are also considered to be dangerous, as the dealing with waste can also be hazardous to the collectors themselves (Castilhos Jr. et al 2013), especially if they are not sufficiently equipped with security clothing.

The extreme form of social exclusion in Brazil has negative impacts on issues related to dignity and 'recognition' (Fraser 1995). In the case of the collectors, the problem is further aggravated by the working conditions, as dealing with waste is regarded as a particularly unsavoury and dirty activity (Couto 2010). Social justice issues of 'recognition' therefore have to tackle a two-fold process of improving societal views on the collectors while also further promoting self-respect among the workers to promote social inclusion and the improvement of dignity.

The geographical focus of the case study will be on São Paulo, one of the richest regions in Brazil, with a strong tradition of social movements (Sader 1988). In São Paulo, COOPAMARE, the first social movement of collectors, was registered in 1989 (www.coopamare.org.br). Due to the different socio-economic situation in the Southeast region, some of the statistics indicated above are to be modified slightly. With 161,417, the Southeast hosts the biggest number of collectors, of which 30.9% are female, 63.0% are 'black' and 13.4% are illiterate. The average salary of collectors has been reported at 629.89 R\$ for 2010 (about 250 Euros in 2010; cf. IPEA 2013, p. 8), which is higher than the national average. These statistics reflect the generally higher salaries of workers in the Southeast region. Considering the commonly higher wage levels in the region, the social positioning of the collectors is comparable to their counterparts in the country as a whole. Due to the long tradition of collectors' movements and their efforts to establish governance relations with the local government, São Paulo is an especially interesting case.

3 Genesis of the initiative

The 1980s and 1990s, as times of low growth and high unemployment, were the beginning of the movement of solidarity-based economy (Singer and Souza 2000; cf. Santos 2006). Reacting to the crisis of unemployment and employment conditions, workers began to organize themselves in cooperatives. A broad variety of initiatives from different ideological backgrounds, ranging from philanthropic and religious to socialist or anarchist inspired initiatives, began to invent socially innovative labour market experiments. Despite mixed success of these experiments considering the improvement of working conditions (Leite 2009), they have been largely seen as innovative solutions to deal with the problem of unemployment (Singer and Souza 2000).

¹ The illiteracy rates for Brazil are available for 2009 (9.7%) and 2011 (8.58%) (ipeadata.gov.br).

² All data except for the minimum and average wages is taken from IPEA 2013, p. 8. Minimum and average wage data stems from www.ipeadata.gov.br. For 2010, the average wage was not reported. In 2009, it was 1,220.79 R\$ and rose to 1,374.45 R\$ in 2011.

The data presented here is for Brasil, the Southeast region reports higher salaries in general. The average salary for collectors in the Southeast is 629,89 R\$ (IPEA 2013). The interviewed collectors in São Paulo reported much higher salaries around 1,500 R\$. The Gini coefficient for the collectors has been reported at 0.42 for Brazil and 0.39 for the Southeast (IPEA 2013), which can explain these differences.

The guiding principle of the Brazilian solidarity-based economy has been the collective self-organization of workers with the explicit requirement of democratic decision making. All involved workers have an equal vote in the decision making process and salaries ought to be less stratified than in conventional capitalist enterprises. The main difference of solidarity-based enterprises, compared to their conventional counterparts, is that they are owned by their workers. Therefore, the differentiation between workers and owners ceases to exist, as the workers collectively own their company (Singer 2002). The Brazilian State Secretary for Solidarity-Based Economy Paul Singer (2002), who has an academic background, mainly focuses his academic analysis on the positive and socially innovative aspects of promoting employment opportunities and the coupling with considerable potential for social emancipation. Others (e.g. Lima 2007; Georges and Leite 2012) have also pointed to the often still precarious conditions of payment and working conditions in the solidarity-based economy. The diffusion of solidarity-based economy can therefore also lead to a deterioration of working conditions, especially when cooperatives are run as normal businesses, while workers' rights are not applicable as in conventional firms.³

Another important reason for problems of self-organized cooperative enterprises is the lack of education of the associated workers. As managing a company requires considerable knowledge about legal aspects and the specific sectoral market structure, the lack of education results in difficulties to survive the competition with conventional firms. From the late 1990s onwards, Brazilian universities began to engage in capacity building for cooperatives. So-called 'Technological Incubators of Popular Cooperatives' (*Incubadoras Tecnológicas de Cooperativas Populares – ITCPs*) were founded as university centres where research and teaching staff together with students began to engage in this form of 'social consulting' (Dubeux 2013; Fernandes et al. 2013). Other organizations have also been active in such 'social consulting' activities. Religious entities and NGOs have been engaged for a long time in empowerment programs for civil society organizations (Simões 2008). Working as 'intermediaries', they assist in the political education and in dealing with public entities, especially when it comes to legal claims, which are difficult to handle for social movements of the poor.⁴ From the beginning of these activities until today, the collectors of recyclable material have been important partners in the activities related to the solidarity-based economy (Grimberg 2007; Zanin and Gutierrez 2009), despite having originated much earlier.

The movement of collectors of recyclable material began to be formed by the end of the 1980s. Philanthropic entities linked to the Catholic Church were campaigning for social programmes for people living on the streets who were suffering most from hardships induced by the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. The philanthropic organizations soon began to incentivize the poor to begin to organize themselves to struggle for a more decent living and to obtain social rights. The first cooperative of collectors of recyclable material – COOPAMARE – was founded in 1989 in São Paulo while the city was administered by Luiza Erundina, a mayor of the Workers' Party (PT). Soon, other

³ The research of Georges and Leite (2012) points out the existence of 'cooperatives on paper', which are officially run as cooperatives, but rather autocratically managed. Whereas all workers are officially owners of the company – and as 'entrepreneurs' not subject to labour laws – they are not capable of influencing the decision making process of the company. This process has been much more present in the sector of companies taken over by the workers than in the sector of collection of recyclable material. The latter sector – focused on in this paper – has been described by Leite as the most democratically managed sector by Leite in a personal interview.

⁴ In the city of São Paulo, the 'Instituto Polis' is a particularly active organization in this regard since its foundation in 1987 (cf. <http://polis.org.br>).

comparable initiatives were founded such as the first association of collectors of paper and cardboards (ASMARE) in 1990 in Belo Horizonte. The growth of the movement further profited from UN efforts to promote international environmental conferences, such as the Rio conference in 1992, which emphasized the social dimension of sustainability (Gonçalves 2006). In 1998, UNICEF incentivized the first national encounter of the collectors as part of a campaign against child labor connected to garbage. These efforts gave birth to the 'National Forum of Waste and Citizenship' (*Fórum Nacional de Lixo e Cidadania*), which can be seen as a vital institutional step towards the collective organization of the collectors (Grimberg 2007, p.15). One year later, in 1999, the 'First National Encounter of Paper Collectors' (*I Encontro Nacional dos Catadores de Papel*) took place in Belo Horizonte. There, the participants decided to realize the 'First National Congress of Collectors of Recyclable Material' (*I Congresso Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Reciclável*) in 2001 in Brazil's capital city Brasília. At this congress, the participants decided to found the National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material (*Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Material Reciclável – MNCR*; cf. MNCR 2009, p.10). Therefore, the foundation of the movement occurred at a moment when many participatory institutions were already established in Brazil (Wirth 2013). The constitution of the national movement can be seen as strongly interlinked with the rise of popular social movements in Brazil during democratization (cf. chapter 2) and their consolidation and inclusion into policy making during the 1990s.

Compared to other social movements⁵, the formation of a movement of collectors of recyclable material occurred considerably later, and it has developed closely connected to supportive governments. The first cooperative Coopamare has been founded in São Paulo when the city was governed by a mayor pertaining the Workers' Party (PT), who was supportive to the collectors – especially by providing a space to work in a middle class district (generating a considerably large volume of waste and thus, also of recyclable material). As it has always been more difficult for marginalized people to organize, the efforts of local governments and NGOs have been regarded as vital by the interviewed experts and involved agents. Besides the provision of space, other efforts involved financial aid to buy machinery (e.g. waste press, garbage collection trucks) as well as financial grants for collectors who join registered cooperatives.

The regional branch of the MNCR in São Paulo has been an integral part of this movement from the beginning. From the late 1980s onwards, social movements of collectors were active. They did not only succeed in founding the first collectors' cooperative, but also established first efforts towards cooperating with the local government during the early 1990s. Despite drawbacks in the cooperation with the city administration, the collectors' movement of São Paulo gathered strength and was further fortified by the participation in the regional campaign in the 'Forum of Waste and Citizenship' in the late 1990s. The political climate in the city turned to be more favorable during the administration by Marta Suplicy (2001-2004) of the PT, who began to engage in a process of 'co-administration' of garbage management with the collectors, who voiced demands for 'bottom-linked' political initiatives via the forum. Thereby, they did not only demand better equipment by public authorities, but also participation in the political decision making process. Albeit not without conflicts, first efforts towards establishing structures of 'co-administration' evolved (Grimberg 2007). The current mayor Fernando Haddad (2013-2016) has further incentivized efforts to work with social movements, including the

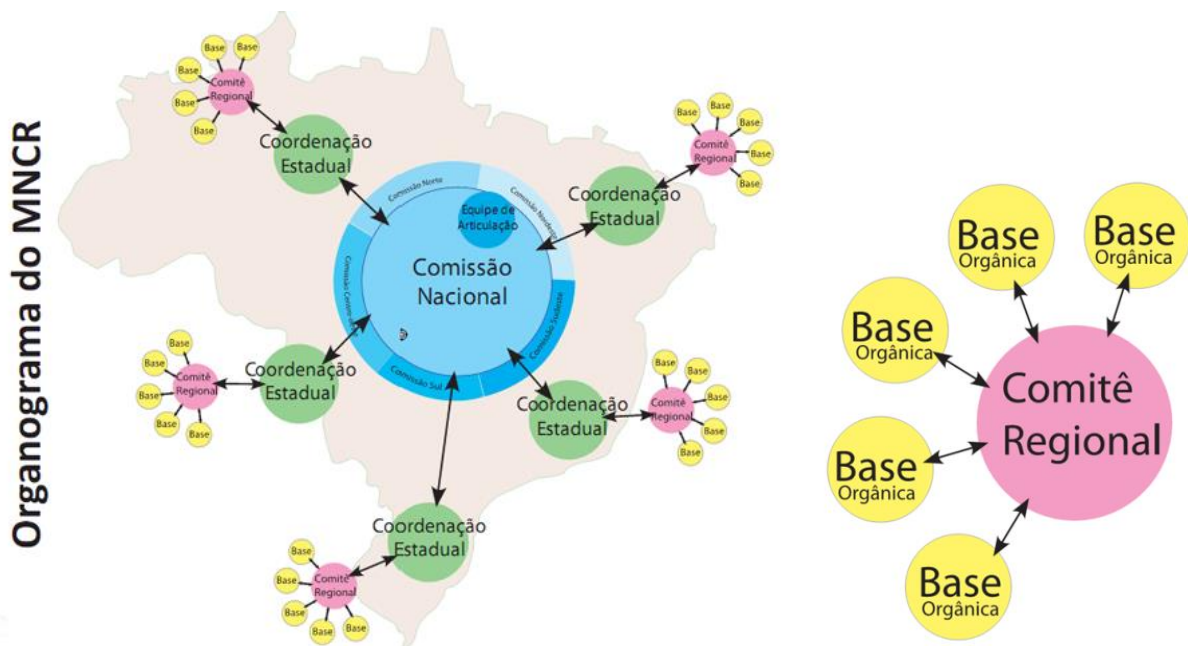
⁵ As shown in the respective ImPRovE case study, the national housing movement (UNMP) has already been formed by the late 1980s.

regional branch of the National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material. The activities and their innovative dimensions will be described in the following chapters.

4 The activities and organization

The MNCR is acting as an ‘umbrella organization’ for a diversity of social movements being active in the sector of waste recycling, representing the workers working on the ‘lower end’ of the value chain, i.e. people and organizations working in sectors of (a) collecting recyclable materials and (b) compiling materials to be able to sell them in bulk. The latter activity is important, as it secures better payment for the collectors who otherwise have much less bargaining power. Additionally, it is easier to search for alternative purchasers, if price pressure is exercised on the collectors. Important in the activities of the MNCR is its self-recognition as representing a particular group of workers (MNCR 2009, 2013), instead of being a representative body of the poor.

As the graphs below show, the MNCR is a national movement, being composed of five regional commissions (*Comissões Regionais*), which themselves are compounded by state coordinations (*Coordenações Estaduais*). The latter are composed of regional committees (*Comitês Regionais*) which are elected by the ‘organic bases’ (*Bases Orgânicas*), representing the local social movements of collectors.



Source: www.mncc.org.br

The MNCR represents the organized sectors of collectors, which adhere to basic principles of the solidarity-based economy⁶ described before, namely the principles of:

⁶ The principles are not laid down in law, but are rather organizational principles for organizations that claim to be part of the solidarity-based economy. The collectors of recyclable material do not declare themselves explicitly as solidarity-based in their mission statement, but rather adhere to the same principles and take part in the activities (including networking) of the movement of solidarity-based economy.

- (a) self-management and direct democracy,
- (b) direct popular action by the collectors themselves,
- (c) 'class independence' from political parties, 'dominant classes, governments and the rich' (MNCR 2015), but
- (d) practicing 'mutual support' both among collectors and a broader variety of social movements and trade unions in Brazil and internationally who share the objectives of the MNCR of struggling for the 'right to the city' (cf. eg. Harvey 2003) – especially regarding decent conditions of 'work, education, health, nutrition, transport and leisure' (MNCR 2015) and more decent working conditions for the collectors of recyclable material (ibid.).

Members in the movements and initiatives represented by the MNCR should not be organized as conventional firms. In general, the two most important forms of collective organization are associations and cooperatives. The latter can be seen as the more sophisticated form with higher legal requirements than associations. While the latter are primarily geared towards the goal of social assistance, cooperatives are additionally led by business objectives (Pinel 2013: p. 20). Despite its commercial ambitions, the principles of solidarity-based economy have to be applied by law to cooperatives, which obliges them to adhere to principles of workplace democracy (Singer 2002). Interviewed collectors did not see much of a difference in the two forms of organization, apart from the legal requirements. Despite constantly growing numbers of collectors being organized in one of the two forms, the majority is still working independently and informally. Statistics for the year 2008 suggest, that only 43% of Brazilian collectors were organized (own calculation, based on statistical data by IPEA, cited in Pinhel 2013: p. 18). The principles of the MNCR require all members to be organized collectively and to adhere to workplace democracy. Within the organizations, there are rules for workplace safety standards (especially concerning security clothing) and general labor regulations (e.g. against the use of drugs and alcohol or child labor) which not all collectors want to obey.

Another issue concerns inclusion into the labor market. In general, the very process of the engagement in paid work for hitherto excluded people promotes 'recognition' (Fraser 1995). Furthermore, the collectors of recyclable materials are engaged in a vital activity to improve socio-ecological wellbeing among the population.: The question of how to deal with garbage is not only connected with sustainability but also with sanitary and health issues. Even though environmental issues tend to be of a socially transversal nature, i.e. affecting all social groups in society, the environmental justice movement has pointed out that the poor tend to be more vulnerable (Martinez-Allier 2002). Environmentally degraded areas are more likely to be inhabited by the poor who tend to lack the financial resources to afford to live in clean areas. Therefore, the reduction of waste through recycling benefits society in general, with special focus on the poor.

In addition, people who participate in cooperatives and associations need a basic level of training and adaptation to regular work to be able to collaborate in collectively self-managed entities. Important parts of the most excluded sectors of society are – at least initially – not able to meet the requirements. Apart from knowledge of professional procedures and of prices for different recyclable materials, this also concerns problems related to drug addiction, which is an important reason for people having to live on the streets. These people need social assistance, as they would otherwise not be able to survive in the market. In order to start the process of social inclusion, there are centers – co-financed by the local state and charitable entities – to prepare the most vulnerable to be able to take part in cooperatives and associations after a period of about two months of training. At the beginning of 2015,

there were two such centers in the city of São Paulo. Receiving separated garbage materials by the municipal government, these centers engage in on-the-job training of the people sent by public social assistance institutions. After about two months of training, the people are conveyed to cooperatives or associations, as Talita Tecedor, the coordinator of one of these centers – Recifran (*Serviço Franciscano de Apoio à Reciclagem*) – reported in an interview.

Despite some initial efforts, in which social workers provided support to build capacity, the MNCR is a movement of self-managed workers, guided by the educational principles of Paulo Freire (1968). Therefore, professional and political education has to be linked and constantly connected to practical experiences to avoid a dichotomy of theory and praxis. This ‘integral instruction’ (MNCR 2013, p. 113) is reflected in the efforts of the MNCR in promoting on-the-job education for the collectors (‘from collector to collector’), emphasizing the material benefits of collective organization and decision making being intertwined with individual and collective empowerment (MNCR 2009, 2013), which will be further described in the following chapter.

In the role of political representation and advocacy, the MNCR was also successful in ‘upscaling’ their demands from the municipal to the national level. This ‘upscaling of demands’ was facilitated by the national government under president Lula (from 2003 onwards), who gave a lot of emphasis to the social inclusion of the collectors. Already in 2003, they were included in the national program to eradicate hunger (*Programa Fome Zero*). In the same year, the national government also created an interministerial committee for social inclusion of collectors (CIISC). This committee has been coordinated by the general secretariat of the presidency and included representatives of the Ministries of Social Development, of Work and Employment, of the Environment and of Cities, as well as the most important state-owned companies (the National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES), the public banks *Caixa Econômica Federal* and *Banco do Brasil* and the semi-public oil company Petrobrás). Besides the government actors, the MNCR has also been represented in the committee (CIISC 2013).

These efforts reached a peak by the end of the 2000s, when the national government decided to focus nation-wide participation on the question of waste management. The MNCR was the most important participant on all three levels of governance (municipal, regional and national), being highly active in constructing new national policies for waste management (*Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos – PNRS*), as the national coordinator of the Fourth National Conference for the Environment, Ana Carla de Almeida, stated in an interview. The law emanating out of the participatory process in 2010 did not only include the collectors in its drafting, but also considered the collectors in the execution of policies. The PNRS was incentivized by a national law (no. 12,305, Aug. 2nd 2010) and deals with the principles, objectives, instruments and directives of integrated waste management, including the responsibilities of waste creators and public entities. It is a national law affecting private and public entities on national, regional and municipal levels. In relation to the collectors, the PNRS follows the explicit objective of the ‘integration of collectors of reusable and recyclable materials in the actions involving shared responsibility for the life-cycle of products’ (article 7, item XII) and explicitly states the ‘incentive for creation and development of cooperatives or other forms of association of collectors of reusable and recyclable materials’ (article 8, item IV) among the political instruments. Shortly afterwards, the CIISC also set up a new program to better benefit the collectors, as also in 2010, the program *Pró-Catador* was put in place to further promote the interests of the collectors. As with the drafting of the PNRS, the people represented by the MNCR were not only beneficiaries of the program, but the MNCR also actively participated in its drafting (CIISC 2013).

The national law was the starting point of a participatory political process to construct the PNRS to put the abstract law into concrete action framework with aims and targets for the involved private and public actors on federal, regional and municipal levels. This process has been gradually realized, leading to the Forth National Conference on the Environment in 2013. The conference was organized as a multi-level participatory process with municipal and regional conferences preparing the national conference. To secure the participation of relevant actors in the process, quotas for participation were set up: 50% of participants came from civil society, 20% were representatives of business and 30% of the public sector. The MNCR was the most important collective actor, mobilizing vast numbers of collectors to participate in the process of policy making. This did not only concern national policies, but also the other levels of governance, such as the municipalities, where Integrated Plans of Solid Waste Management (*Planos de Gestão Integrada de Resíduos Sólidos – PGIRS*) were drafted.

In the city of São Paulo the PGIRS was revised in 2013 through a participatory process to better implement the directives of the national law. The logic of quotas described above was also followed. More than 7,000 persons participated and collectors – especially the regional branch of the MNCR in São Paulo – were heavily involved. The new politics of waste management approved included the central claim of the collectors to be supplied with necessary facilities and paid for their activities by the city administration. Until 2016, four fully mechanized recycling centrals for dry waste shall be created to be able to raise the percentage of recycled waste from 2% to 10% of the total waste. Each of the new centrals shall be run by cooperatives of 70 collectors each (PMCS 2014). This activity is managed by a council with three representatives of the city administration, three representatives of civil society (including business) and three representatives of the collectors. The council will also decide upon the use of the financial resources obtained by the sales of recycled products (www.sprecipla.com.br). Thereby the collectors are directly included as political protagonists of the process.

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

To account for the innovative dimension of the initiative, social innovation will be analysed, based on the three dimensions identified by Frank Moulaert et al. (2005; cf. also Gerometta et al. 2005; Oosterlynck et al. 2013a). In addition to the points mentioned below, ecological and social improvements are being promoted at the same time. This socio-ecological dimension can be seen as a further social innovation.

5.1 Content dimension

The most important aspect of ‘redistribution’ promoted by the activities of the MNCR is the above-mentioned economies of scale, achieved through the collective organization of the collectors, who are thereby enabled to sell for higher prices. As the MNCR was formed to politically represent a hitherto marginalized group, the content dimension is interlinked with the process dimension. Political mobilization achieved by the MNCR resulted in the promotion of rights and benefits for the collectors. Already in 2002, one year after the foundation of the MNCR, the collectors of recyclable material were recognized as a professional category in the Brazilian law code (MNCR 2009). Thereby, workers’ rights can be applied which led to material benefits, besides the effects on the process dimension, as ‘recognition’ is promoted by being recognized as workers rather than as poor people.

Important changes in the satisfaction of basic needs can be registered, as collectors have gained increasing support from public institutions: ranging from the rent of their workplace and facilities, such as garbage collection trucks or security clothing, electricity costs and the delivery of recyclable materials by the public institutions, the support for the collectors has improved considerably. In the city of São Paulo, new schemes have begun to be implemented in 2014. Two big recycling centers, financed and organized by the municipal administration, have been opened, to be run in a partnership with two cooperatives of collectors under new conditions, including direct payment of the collectors, leading to a fixed income of 1,500 R\$ per person (about 500 Euros) (Brito 2014). Despite the logic of fixed income, the municipal government signs the contracts with the cooperatives, respecting their collective workplace-organization. Thereby, one of the central claims of the MNCR, of payment for their environmental services, has been fulfilled, albeit not without problems which will be further described in chapter 7. In a nutshell, the changes promoted by the MNCR were socially innovative in the content dimension, as basic human needs were much better satisfied. These improvements are even more notable, as they were intertwined with the process and empowerment dimensions of social innovation.

5.2 Process dimension

Even though the dealing with waste has not been recognized as desirable by large parts of the Brazilian population, the MNCR was able to transform social relations. This is mainly reflected in their efforts to be recognized as workers in a field of considerable relevance to the society at large. A first important step in this direction was the inclusion of collectors of recyclable material as a professional category in the body of Brazilian law by 2002 (MNCR 2009). The constant lobbying of the MNCR also led to a continuous inclusion into public politics, which will be described in further detail in the following chapter. Interviewed collectors confirmed this, stating that they are earning 'good money' and that they are earning more than most of the people with comparable levels of education. Apart from the salary, which is seen as the most vital component of 'recognition' by the interviewed collectors, they also mentioned the service they are providing for society. The conviction that they are contributing to sustainability and the environmental education of larger parts of the population also contributes to a more positive sense of 'recognition' by the collectors.

The positive sense of themselves as workers is vital with respect to the process dimension of social innovation. It goes beyond the individual sphere and also includes collective dimensions, both within and beyond the group of collectors of recyclable material. The principles of self-management and direct democracy are vital in this regard. Decisions have to be taken and their fulfilment monitored collectively within the cooperatives (MNCR 2013). The code of conduct of the MNCR (2009) stresses both the solidarity and openness towards non-aligned workers of their own category as they also stress solidarity and mutual support among a broader variety of social movements and trade unions in Brazil and internationally. Internal training efforts stress this belonging to a larger collective of workers and the general public, being also reflected in efforts to promote socio-ecological education (MNCR 2013).

The Brazilian context has shown to be very conducive to social innovations from the 1980s onwards (Fernandes 2013). Social movements already emerged during the military dictatorship and mobilized for social improvements for the hitherto excluded sections of society (Dagnino 1994). After finishing re-democratization during the end of the 1980s, social movements have increasingly been included in new settings of participatory governance (Dagnino 2002; Romão 2014). In line with the literature on social innovation (Moulaert 2010), the respective change in the mode of including social movements

can be interpreted as a gradual move from ‘bottom-up’ towards ‘bottom-linked’ strategies (Oosterlynck et al. 2013a; for the case of collectors of recyclable materials in São Paulo cf. Grimberg 2007, pp.32ff.).

5.3 Empowerment dimension

The governance of the collection of recyclable material involves processes of individual and collective empowerment, as vulnerable groups are assisted in the generation of income, while being provided with financial and technical aid to organize collectively as well as to participate in the policy making process. The focus on the collection of recyclable material can also be seen as innovative, as it involves socio-ecological questions.

Empowerment is here first and foremost seen as a collective empowerment and can generally be traced back to the efforts of social movements during the Brazilian process of democratization in the 1980s, when they were linking demands for democracy to demands of social reforms (Dagnino 1994). This also concerned the collectors of recyclable material, who began to be included in governance processes from the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s onwards. After the creation of the MNCR in 2001, these processes gained momentum, both on the municipal scale in São Paulo and on the national scale.

The MNCR (2009) itself stresses the question of democracy not only with regard to the management of its members, forming the ‘organizational bases’, but also regarding the participation in public policies. They claim their right to be present in the formulation, execution and monitoring of policies. The formal inclusion into governance settings has been described as ‘co-management’ (Grimberg 2007) or as a move from ‘bottom-up’ to ‘bottom linked’ governance processes (Oosterlynck et al. 2013a). In São Paulo, the collectors began to be involved in ‘bottom linked’ governance settings from 2001 onwards. Participatory governance bodies were set up, where representatives of the movement were enabled to take part in decision making bodies concerning garbage management (Grimberg 2007). Another important field of political inclusion concerned socio-ecological education, as collectors began to be included in municipal programs to educate the population on how to separate garbage.

Due to this link of the empowerment dimension with the content dimension of social innovation, this form of promoting ‘representation’ of the collectors can be seen as a particularly strong form of collective empowerment.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

Concerning governance relations, it is important to note the interplay between the movements of collectors, the public sector and intermediary actors. The latter are consisting of NGOs and university centers with various functions. In the field of social assistance they have been engaged in the training and mobilization of the poor to be able to work in the sector and to organize collectively. In the field of ‘social consulting’ they assisted the collectors’ organizations both in their dealing with legal matters and commercially. The intermediary actors were also important in the initial steps of political organization and articulation of the collectors’ movements. This was conducive to the MNCR to constitute itself as a social movement as a first step to mobilize for its inclusion in public policy making. While the first steps were taken on the municipal level, as indicated above, recent steps have heavily involved the national level. The up-scaling of political decision-making processes has resulted in

positive influences for the MNCR in municipal and regional institutions. Recent involvement in national policies will be described in further detail below.

As described above, the MNCR began to be heavily included in coordinated efforts of the national government from 2003 onwards. The CIISC, which was set up in 2003, integrated four ministries, four big state owned or semi-state owned companies and the MNCR, coordinated by the general secretariat of the presidency. In 2010, the program Pró-Catador was created to put further political weight to the efforts of integrating policies geared towards the collectors (CIISC 2013). The coordination of actions made it easier for the MNCR to access and influence the political decision making process. The policy outputs were public investments into infrastructure, such as recycling centers and garbage vehicles, investments in education and training of the collectors, state-subsidized credit lines, but also innovative programs such as the production of biodiesel by recycling deep-frying oil. The National Sub Ministry of Solidarity-Based Economy is a division of the Ministry of Work and Employment. It has been engaged in a process of mapping the cooperatives to support better networking of collectors' initiatives and to promote workers' laws (including the eradication of child labor) among the informal collectors, in addition to efforts in the collective education in workplace democracy (CIISC 2013).

Other government programs have also started to focus on the collectors of recyclable material: The big housing program '*Minha Casa, Minha Vida*' (described in further detail in a separate ImPROvE case study), alphabetization and basic education programs and the national funds geared towards ITCPs in the universities also focused on the social inclusion of collectors (CIISC 2013, pp.24f.). In São Paulo, the municipal government has recently set up a participatory management fund for recycling (*Fundo Paulistano de Reciclagem*). This fund is administered via a council, co-directed by representatives for the public sector ($\frac{1}{3}$ of total participants), civil society⁷ ($\frac{1}{3}$) and the MNCR ($\frac{1}{3}$). But the most important changes were promoted by multi-scalar improvements through the National Politics of Solid Waste (*Política Nacional dos Resíduos Sólidos – PNRS*).

Summing up, the governance of waste collection and recycling began to include cooperatives of collectors of recyclable material in the early 1990s. The comparably late consolidation of the MNCR can be explained by the rather marginalized role of the collectors of recyclable material. Therefore, their connection to governments and the respective support by the latter has always been vital for MNCR. The initial steps towards empowerment have been strongly supported by NGOs and local government actors. Nevertheless, the collectors were empowered up to a point when they were able to form a social movement on the national scale by the early 2000s. Given the marginalization and exclusion of the collectors, together with the enormous size of Brazil, the difficulty as well as the importance of this step cannot be underestimated. From 2003 onwards, specific national policies have been set up for the collectors of recyclable material, also involving them actively in policy making through participation. Joint efforts of the ministries of employment and income (especially by the national secretariat for solidarity-based economy, a branch of the ministry of employment and income), environment, and social affairs, state-owned enterprises (banks and the petrol company), coordinated by the presidency, pushed the political importance of the collectors to unprecedented levels.

⁷ In this context, civil society refers to business representatives, NGOs and researchers.

7 Governance challenges

7.1 *Mainstreaming social innovation*

The MNCR represents an interesting example of multi-scalar social innovation. Collective organization has systematically linked political mobilization to the improvement of the living conditions of a particularly vulnerable and excluded group of the population. Despite many factors being linked to the specific Brazilian institutional framework and political landscape, important lessons for mainstreaming social innovation can be drawn. The first step of social innovation occurred locally, when the collectors began to organize collectively and founded the first cooperative in São Paulo in 1989. During the 1990s they were able to consolidate and expand their actions, which was important to form a national movement at the beginning of the 2000s. From 2003 onwards, political commitment has been sustained and an inter-ministerial committee was formed nationally. With growing environmental consciousness and systematic efforts by different public bodies to promote participation and social inclusion, the socio-economic situation of the collectors could even improve more.

Despite the material improvements, the focus of the MNCR has always gone beyond monetary issues. Issues of recognition as a group of workers, engaged in the socio-ecological wellbeing of society, were always strong, as the long-term leading personality of the MNCR, Eduardo de Paula, reported in the interview. This focus has also been institutionalized – in the form of organizing the cooperatives and associations, as well as the regional and national organizations of the collectors, as in the internal organization of education processes, which are mainly organized within the cooperatives and include consciousness building for self-respect and solidarity within and beyond their group of workers (MNCR 2013). Thereby, individual and collective forms of empowerment are intertwined.

Additionally, the actions of the MNCR have been carried out in a rights-oriented perspective, claiming the right to the city and beyond. The empowerment dimension of social innovation was fostered by the constant lobbying (via fora including other civil society actors and/or via demonstrations) for taking part in the political decision making process. The presence of self-conscious activists of the MNCR was vital in political settings involving the media, as the long-standing scientist and activist Elisabeth Grimberg reported in the interview. Thereby, the collectors were best able to convince the public that they deserve public support – much better than professional advocacy groups would have been able to.⁸ By exercising publicly visible pressure for social, cultural and political inclusion, the MNCR succeeded in being included in this thorough sense. For mainstreaming this means that lobbying in the wider public sphere is important to improve the process and empowerment dimensions of social innovation. Policy actors can thereby be pressed to find ways to actively include beneficiaries in policy making. Public recognition and learning processes in participatory settings can then foster empowerment.

⁸ This refers to the situation when public awareness has already been raised by advocacy groups. At that stage, the collectors themselves were fully able to participate successfully in the campaign.

7.2 Governing welfare mix – avoiding fragmentation

Considering the national political institutions, the channeling of resources through coordinated programs contributed to avoid the fragmentation of welfare policies. With the creation of the inter-ministerial committee on the national scale and its deepening by the introduction of the program Pró-Catador, the national government provided a framework, which was coordinated by the presidency and thus received considerable political attention. This allowed the MNCR to gather further political support for their actions.

The same applied to the PNRS, which also created a unified national framework for the inclusion of collectors of recyclable material in the context of an ample framework of policies for solid waste. The political mobilization by the MNCR was decisive to gather coordinated support for their actions. Nevertheless, most actions taken nationally and locally in São Paulo worked against the logic of fragmentation into ‘tiny projects’, but envisioned a welfare mix with special emphasis on a particularly vulnerable group. Nevertheless, locally, issues of fragmentation also occurred: In São Paulo, the issue was linked with the piecemeal introduction of mechanized recycling centrals and will be further highlighted in challenge # 5.

7.3 Governing welfare mix – developing a participatory governance style

National conferences were heavily promoted from 2003 onwards to create a more participatory governance framework, which was improved both in quality and quantity of participatory settings. At the national level, conferences on a wide array of traditional fields of public policies (health, education, social assistance) as well as more recent policy fields (environment, culture, public security) and focalized debates of special interest (workers’ health, basic education, pharmaceutical assistance). Special emphasis was given to policies for special-interest groups (racial equality, gender policies, youth, children, LGBT). The conferences followed a logic of incorporating different segments of society based on a quota system, with reserved seats for relevant categories for the respective policy field for government actors, civil society representatives, trade and industrial unions (Romão 2014). Thereby, it linked participation to concerns for diversity as well as equality (cf. Challenge #4). This was also the case for the collectors participating in the construction of the national policy framework for solid waste (PNRS) and its local implementation – in this case in the construction of the policy framework for São Paulo. Being the most important group among the 50% civil society actors in the construction of the respective policies, the collectors represented by the MNRS were able to significantly influence policy making to obtain social rights.

7.4 Equality and diversity

The handling of equality and diversity is a problem that is of special significance within the different movements of collectors, which are composed of diverse members with similar social needs. Age and health condition are important factors leading to differential needs and capacities of the collectors. Many older people no longer have the physical strength to carry out the harder tasks. For these people, the organizations seek for tasks, which do not require as much physical strength. Addictions to different drugs (alcohol or chemical drugs) are important reasons for people to be excluded and to seek for opportunities as collectors. While in an initial phase in social assistance projects, this problem

can be tackled by sending the people to detox therapies, it turns out to be a more severe problem within cooperatives and associations. As the internal rules normally do not allow the use of drugs or alcohol, drug users can easily be expelled from their organization. For reasons related to the need for economic success and – even more – for legal requirements, the problem of drug abuse poses an unsolved challenge.

As a social worker explained in an interview, “exclusionary tendencies present in the Brazilian society tend to occur in a more barbaric form among the most excluded parts of the population. Therefore it is a constant challenge to deal with that”. Sexual orientation can also be problematic in the case of transsexuals, who are another group of people which tends to be discriminated among other marginalized people. Therefore, social assistance institutions try to include potentially excluded people (e.g. transsexuals) as trainers, in order to raise awareness and work against prejudice. Within the self-organized cooperatives and associations, the issue is much more difficult to handle, so that there are different practices to be found within the movements. Therefore, it remains a challenge to reconcile collective empowerment and respect for diversity.

7.5 Uneven access

As self-organized entities need a basic preparation and training for the labor market, the most excluded sectors of society cannot instantly join self-managed organizations such as cooperatives and associations. To deal with this problem, special institutions of social assistance were created to prepare the most excluded to participate in the labor market. In the city of São Paulo, financial contributions of the city government were vital, paying a diverse range of social workers and providing for locations for on-the-job-training. In the countryside, such efforts were linked to the national government program ‘Brazil without misery’ (*Brasil sem miséria*) and the national secretariat for solidarity-based economy, which coordinated efforts and channeled resources of social assistance.

But also within the cities, there are inequalities between the different cooperatives. Coopamare, the pioneer cooperative in São Paulo, does not have a formal partnership with the city government going beyond the provision of the space for its facilities. Being situated in an area producing a high amount of recyclable waste, the collectors are better able to collect useful recyclable materials by themselves than they would be able to use the waste being provided by the municipal government, which contains less usable material. They are able to use this locational advantage, while others – being situated further in the urban peripheries – are better off to use the materials provided by the city administration.

Another issue has occurred in São Paulo after the introduction of the first two recycling centrals working together with the cooperatives, while providing a fixed monthly payment for the collectors. On the one hand, this presented an improvement for the collectors, for which the MNCR has been fighting for a considerable time. On the other hand, this created tensions linked to uneven access, as there is a limited number of cooperative members to be employed in the centers and many collectors trying to enter the two contracted cooperatives.

7.6 *Avoiding responsibility*

As the treatment of garbage is seen as a vital form of public policy, the interplay of state institutions with the collectors of recyclable material is of particular importance. There are differences in the degree of cooperation between the collectors' organizations and the local state in São Paulo. One of the interviewed collectors was working in a cooperative without a formal agreement with the city government, which led to difficulties, as they had more difficulties to acquire recyclable material and to finance the space where they are operating. Different forms of cooperations were in place. In some cases, the municipal government was only providing the space, while in other cases the government also sent recyclable material to the collectors who could then engage in waste separation. Due to the possible support, some interviewed collectors viewed it as very positive to be collaborating with the city government, while others saw it as unnecessary, as they were able to obtain better materials without a formal agreement. The above-mentioned issue of the recycling centers run in a partnership between the municipal government and the cooperatives also points out interesting contradictions. While the government took over responsibility for the income of the collectors, the responsibility for hiring has been passed over to the contracted cooperatives, leading to new tensions.

7.7 *Managing intra-organizational tensions*

Within the cooperatives and associations, a code of conduct is regulating a set of norms and rules, trying to minimize possible intra-organizational tensions and conflicts. As the collectors come from the excluded parts of the population, problems related to alcohol and drug abuse exist. Within the confines of the organizations, the use of such substances is strictly prohibited. Another rule has been reported as controversially discussed is the use of security clothing, which is mandatory for the associated collectors. While these rules help to mediate internal tensions, they can also lead to exclusion, as noticed in #4.

Another potential source of conflict is evolving out of the main strength of collective organization. Payment of the work and the bills are both organized collectively to realize economies of scale. Interviewed collectors reported delays in the weekly payment to the individual associates, which in their case led to the responsible directorate being voted out of office and a new directorate being elected to take better care of the management of the bills. The tensions arising from the creation of mechanized recycling centers in a partnership between the municipal government and cooperatives are another interesting issue to consider. Finally, the successful organization of the collectors as a national movement also led to tensions between the leading figures of the movement, as one of them reported in the interview.

7.8 *Enabling legal framework*

From its beginnings in the early 2000s, the actions of the MNCR have envisioned a rights-based approach towards redistribution, recognition and representation. The legal recognition of the collectors of recyclable material as a professional category in the Brazilian law code in 2002 can be seen as a first and important victory in this regard. The further inclusion in municipal, regional and national policy making did not only result in better living conditions for a particularly vulnerable group of people, but also triggered processes of societal and political recognition and representation.

The drafting of the national policy framework, as it occurred in the recent years, was incentivized by social activism. Now the local implementation of the national policy framework is a difficult challenge. On the local level, the consequences of a more thorough inclusion of the collectors are clearly visible for the established commercial actors, who are developing much more fierce opposition on the local than on the national level.

Also on the national level, there are still many issues to be solved, such as the right to non-contributory retirement for the collectors of recyclable materials, but political mobilization resulted in the deepening of social citizenship, which can be seen as a major social innovation promoted by the MNRS within a dense framework of different governance agents.

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Appendix

The information for this ImPRovE case study was gathered in January-February 2015 and May-October 2015. It consisted of:

- Analysis of documents (e.g. project evaluations, web sites of the actors involved) concerning the innovative experience and aimed to individuate useful information about its working and development. Analysis of institutional documents, data and researches to describe the local policies and poverty conditions in the framework where the experience is realized (e.g. laws, housing plans, social plans, implementation programs, reports, agreements).
- Personal in-depth interviews with the following stakeholders

Ana Carla Leite de Almeida, Brazilian Ministry of the Environment, Secretary for Institutional Articulation and Environmental Citizenship, coordinator of the National Conference for the Environment; Brasília, 26 November 2014.

Fabio Sanchez, professor and researcher of the Federal University of São Carlos, former coordinator and still activist at the Technological Incubator for Popular Cooperatives of the University of São Paulo and the Technological Incubator for Popular Cooperatives of the University of São Carlos, former head of the cabinet and vice-director of the National Sub-Ministry for Solidarity-Based Economy (Secretaria Nacional da Economia Solidária – SENAES); 20 August 2015.

Eduardo Ferreira de Paula, Representative of the MNCR for São Paulo, present in many political negotiations on all scales of government; São Paulo, 4 February 2015.

Maria Elisabeth Grimberg, Instituto Pólis, Coordinator of the Area 'Solid Waste'; São Paulo, 26 January 2015.

Julia Moreno Lara, São Paulo City Administration Director of Planning, Municipal Authority of Urban Cleaning; São Paulo, 27 January 2015.

Marcia de Paula Leite, Professor of Sociology, University of Campinas, coordinator of a research project concerning the conditions of work in the solidarity-based economy; Campinas, 20 August 2015.

Maria, collector of recyclable materials working in a cooperative in Liberdade, São Paulo; São Paulo, 16 January 2015.

Valmor Schiochet, director of the department of documentation and education in the Brazilian Sub-Ministry for Solidarity-Based Economy (SENAES); Brasília, 29 April 2014.

Talita Tecedor, social worker and coordinator of the social assistance center 'Serviço Franciscano de Apoio a Reciclagem' for the capacity-building of collectors; São Paulo, 16 January 2015.

ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe. Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7th Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

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