

Session theme – Forum Innovation 2025

Open Social Innovation in the Context of Grand Challenges

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Presentation of the theme

In today's world, society faces unprecedented social and environmental challenges, often referred to as grand challenges (George et al., 2016; Gümüşay et al., 2022). These complex societal issues require innovative solutions that transcend traditional national, sectoral, organizational, and disciplinary boundaries (George et al., 2016). In this context, emerging academic attention positions Open Social Innovation (OSI) as a promising approach to tackling grand challenges (Mair et al., 2023; Fayard, 2023; Gegenhuber et al., 2023). This approach draws its theoretical roots from the concepts of open innovation and social innovation (Chesbrough, 2012; Chalmers, 2013; Chesbrough and Di Minin, 2014).

According to Mair and Gegenhuber (2021), OSI is defined as a collective and open innovation process based on concerted efforts and the mobilization of diverse resources from multiple stakeholders and sectors to address societal challenges. These efforts, resources, and actors are engaged throughout the entire social process, from diagnosing social challenges to generating impact, including the design and development of solutions, their implementation, and scaling (Gegenhuber and Mair, 2023). The uniqueness of this approach lies in the scope of the call to action and the social change it brings through collective actions and cross-and multi-stakeholder collaborations.

OSI has recently evolved, with research proposing a renewal of this approach and highlighting its relevance in addressing societal challenges (Kherrazi, 2025; Mair and Gegenhuber, 2021). Recent examples illustrate OSI, including the #WirVsVirus initiative in Germany (Mair and Gegenhuber, 2021) and YesWeBreathe in Tunisia (Abbassi et al., 2021) in the context of the

COVID-19 health crisis. In France, the Citizens' Convention for Climate and the MyHumanKit initiative, dedicated to innovation in the field of disability, also reflect this approach to tackling societal challenges (Kherrazi, 2025). Thus, the focus is on broader openness and inclusion, going beyond traditional approaches to innovation as well as existing organizational forms and mechanisms, making OSI an approach worthy of study in the context of grand challenges.

Despite the growing interest in OSI, several gaps remain in our understanding of this emerging approach. One fundamental question relates to the effective organization of multi- and cross-sectoral collaborations. This raises yet unexplored about networks, organizational forms, and instruments for orchestrating and structuring OSI ecosystems. The aforementioned research highlights, for instance, the contribution of technological innovations and digital platforms in orchestrating OSI initiatives (Mair and Gegenhuber, 2021). In this regard, this session aims to gather theoretical, empirical, and/or methodological research that seeks to understand and explain how OSI can be effectively organized and implemented to address grand challenges.

At the heart of this issue are also mechanisms, processes, and actors that this thematic session aims to examine. Furthermore, OSI involves public and institutional actors such as local authorities, universities, institutions, and open labs, which can act as catalysts for multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaborations. Consequently, it is essential to question their role and influence on the processes and modalities of collective organization.

In this framework, we aim to welcome research contributions that explore various topics, including (but not limited to):

- The foundations and manifestations of OSI in theory and practice;
- The characteristics of OSI through its actors, processes, and the challenges it addresses;
- The orchestration and dissemination mechanisms of OSI initiatives;
- The dynamics of stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and mobilization around grand challenges;
- The processes of multi-actor and cross-sector collaborations;
- The emerging forms and modalities of OSI organization;
- The role of ecosystems, institutions, and public actors in organizing and/or promoting OSI initiatives;

- The role of technological innovation and digital platforms;
- The impact of OSI on individuals, organizations, and communities;
- The implications of OSI for research, practice, and society;
- The methodologies associated with studying OSI actors and collective organizational processes.

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