Video Transcript

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NONPROFITS

Academic insight: Prof. Dr. Jürgen Howaldt

[Georg von Schnurbein] In a nutshell, how would you define social innovation?

[Jürgen Howaldt] We think that you can define social innovation as a new social practice that diffused into society and that helps us to solve new, or also old, problems in different fields of societal action, be it in the field of evaluation of poverty, be it in the field of climate change, mobility, and transport. So it's a very broad concept.
For us, it's very important to see also that social innovation is not a normative concept in our sense. We would say that social innovation can also be ambivalent. They have consequences that we cannot see. Even if the social innovator has a lot of good intention, it may come to things that are not really accepted in society and also produce conflicts, and also problems. So it's like any innovation, any social innovation, has the potential of creative destruction.

[Georg von Schnurbein] What is the stage of research on social innovation today?

[Jürgen Howaldt] Yeah, I think there is a really increasing importance of social innovation in different fields of research. Until, I would say, 2000-2010, there was a lot of discussion about social innovation, but there was not really a systemic and sustained concept of social innovation that was accepted in the research community.
But since 2010, a lot of efforts have been undertaken to really have a theoretical full understanding of innovation to understand how social innovation diffuse in society, which are the basic conditions to help to develop social innovation, and how social innovation also at least lead to social change.
So I think that we are just witnessing the emergence of a research community that is focused with and on the concept of social innovation.

[Georg von Schnurbein] When we look at social innovation, what are global differences and similarities?

[Jürgen Howaldt] That's really a very difficult question, I would say, because you have to say that social innovation is really a ubiquitous concept. You find it in all the world regions, be it in Latin America, North America, and Europe, in Australia and Asia.
We have a lot of social innovation initiatives, but those social innovation initiatives, they vary in their forms and in their understanding of social innovation. And they also have different objectives.
For example, Latin America, it's much about fighting against poverty, or about the field of education, while in Europe, it's also in the field of ecological transformation and the field of climate change, transport and so on. And there are different actors active in the different world regions. So it's very difficult to say what are the differences. But there are still some similarities. So I would say that there is a high importance of civil society, as an actor in the field of social innovation.
But at the same time, we see that we need ecosystems, where different parts of society work together, like civil society together with policy, and also with companies that play a very important role in the field of social innovation.
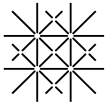
And universities and research institutes, they could be a very important partner, but until now, they are not so much involved in those activities as, for example, in technological innovation. We also have to say that in many countries, we see that there are infrastructures for social innovation emerging.

So in Europe, we have strong infrastructures for technology innovation, science centers, technology parks, but not so much for social innovation. But within the last 30 years, a lot of centers for social innovation have been founded, on the one hand, from academic institutions, on the other hand, from social entrepreneurs.

And so I think these are similarities in different world regions, infrastructures, ecosystems, and a broad range of actors who are engaged in those initiatives.

[Georg von Schnurbein] Thank you for your time. It was a pleasure talking to you.