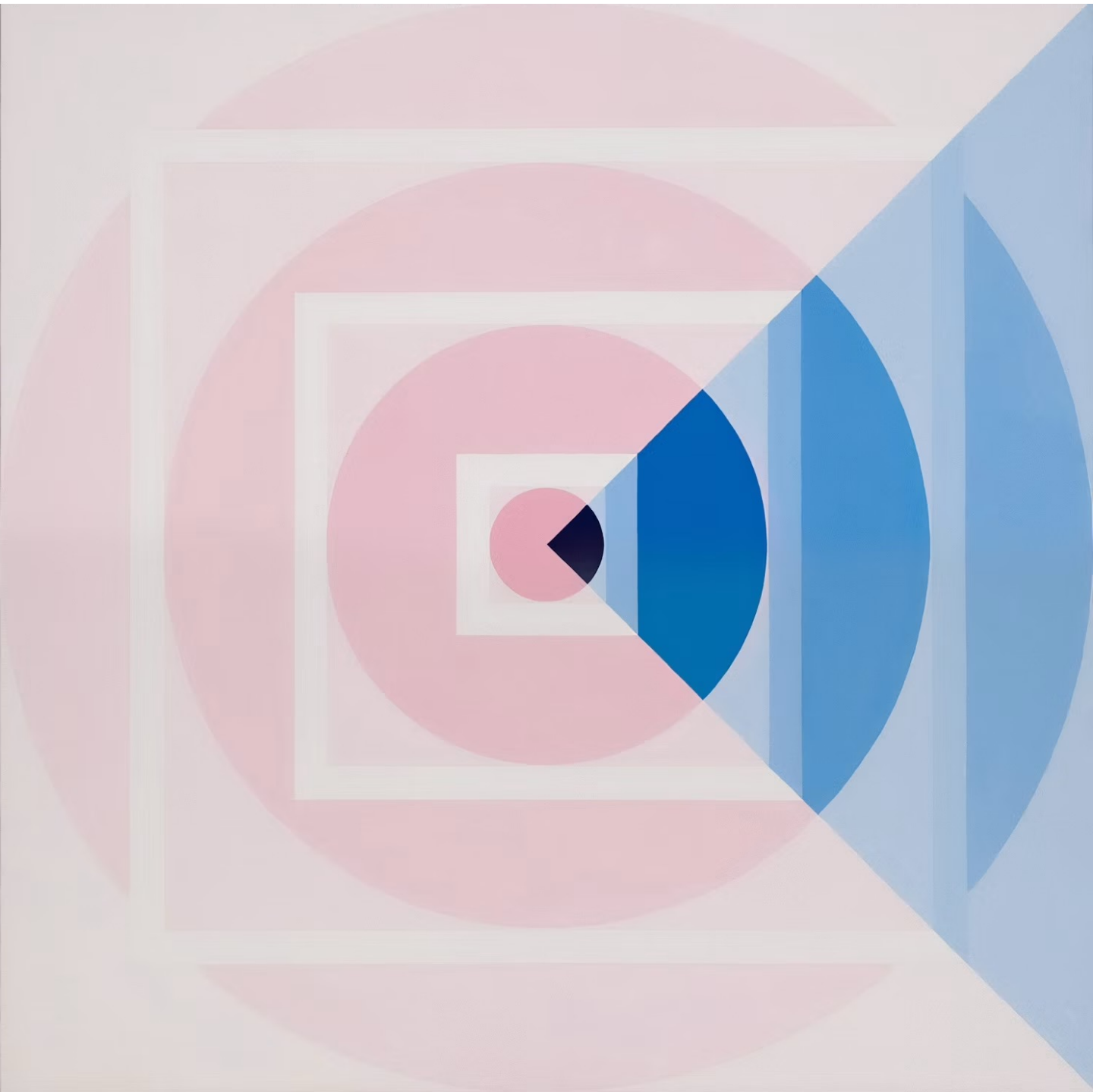


The ERA Chair in **Social Innovation** 5-year report



This report

is an executive summary designed to encapsulate and showcase the work and achievements that have been produced and delivered by the ERA Chair team since September 2021. For further details on specific activities, individual annual reports are available.

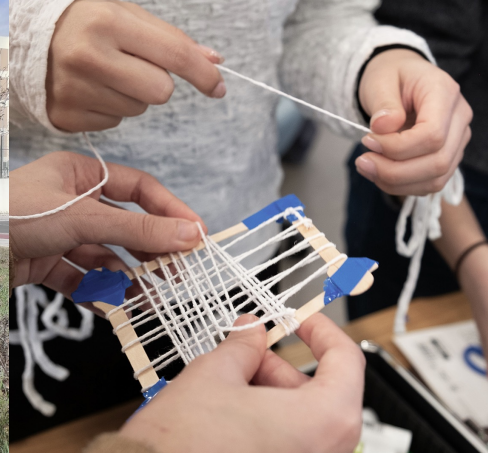
Content

- 1 The ERA Chair in Social Innovation
- 2 Spotlights
- 3 Content, Media & Impact
- 4 The Team
- 5 Acknowledgments



Collaborate to better **innovate**







NOVA SCHOOL OF
BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Nova SBE is the most prestigious business school in Portugal and one of the leading business schools in Europe.

Nova SBE has been a member of CEMS since December 2007 and is one of 77 business schools with the Triple Crown attribution worldwide, which implies accreditation by EQUIS, AMBA and AACSB. It was the first Portuguese business school to acquire international accreditations and world-renowned recognition in higher education.



Nova SBE's programs are highly ranked internationally*:

#8

**International Master's
in Finance**

#4

**International Master's
in Management**

#2

**Executive Education
(Open Programs)**

The ERA Chair in **Social Innovation** and its 3 pillars

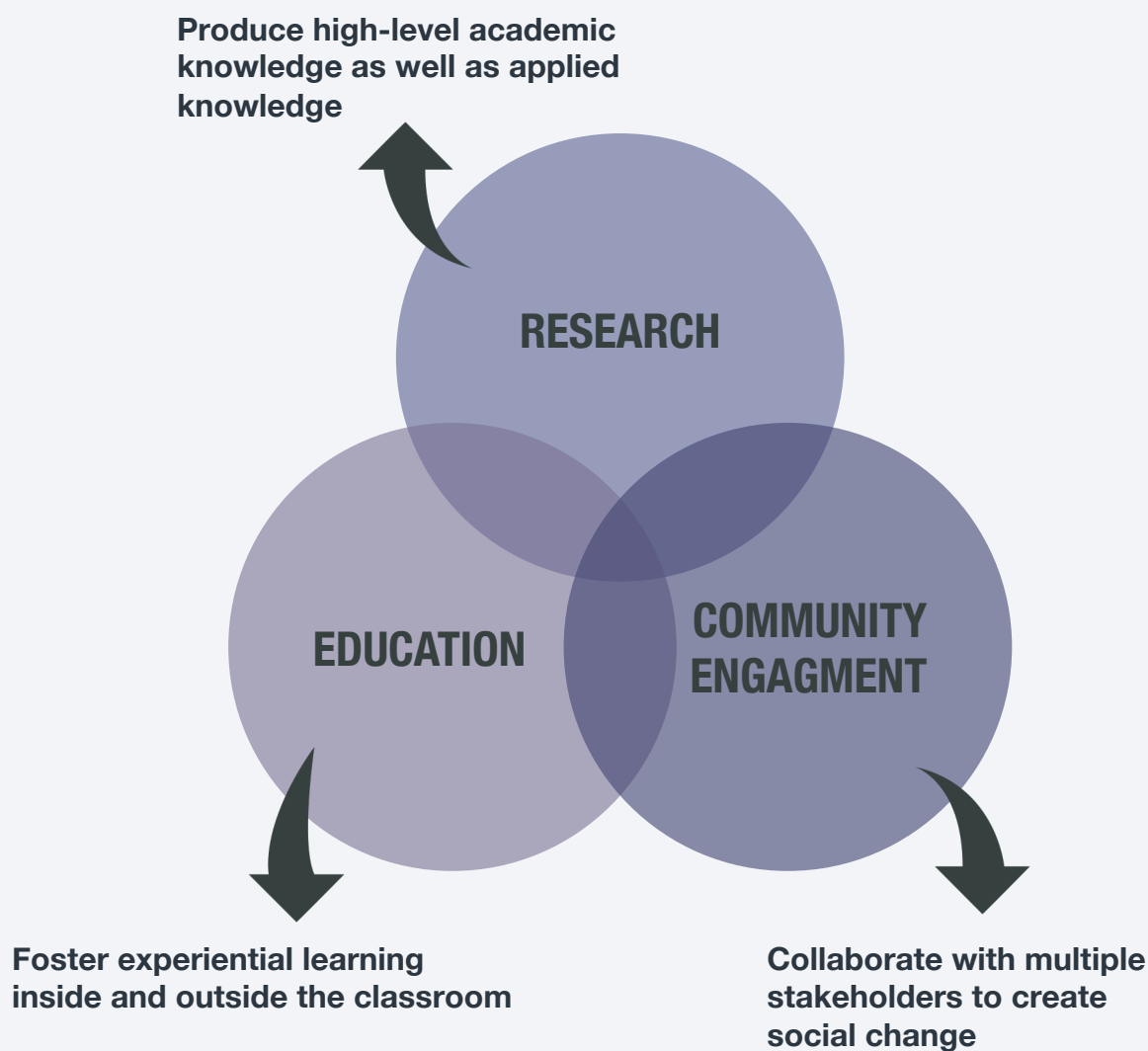
ERA (European Research Area) Chairs aim to produce institutional changes and increase of research capacity.

The ERA Chair in Social Innovation at NOVA SBE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 951735.

The ERA Chair in Social Innovation aims to strengthen the European research area by focusing on three main areas: **Research, Education and Community Engagement**



3 pillars that intersect and coexist





RESEARCH

Our work builds upon our expertise in qualitative methods.

Our goal is to develop strong theoretical contributions and investigate different forms of collaborations to trigger and nurture solutions to tackle complex social and environmental issues.

Three Foci

1. Cross-sector Collaboration
2. Open Social Innovation
3. Co-creation and Design

We also aim to develop a community of passionate and engaged qualitative researchers at Nova SBE and beyond.



ACTIVITIES

Publications

Academic Papers, Book Chapters, Case Studies

Seminar, Conference & Research visits

Participation to events / Invited talks

Academic engagement / ROSI

EDUCATION

We aim to leverage **experiential and project-based learning** to provide NOVA SBE students with opportunities to explore further their aspirations for social change and impact.

At the core of our education philosophy is the belief that experimenting, collaborating and reflecting are at the core of the learning process.

It starts in the classroom, but it continues beyond. Our understanding of the classroom's boundaries is fluid – inviting professionals, local communities, and other stakeholders to join the conversations and support students' projects.



CLASSES

**Design Thinking For Social Innovation
Impact Makers**

Becoming a Change Maker

Open Innovation

Organizing for Good

Responsibility & Ethics of Business

Power and Social Change

Qualitative Methods (PHD seminar)

Philosophy of Science (PHD Seminar)

Qualitative Research Methods Workshop



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The DESIS Lab @Nova SBE is the programming and community engagement arm of the ERA Chair in Social Innovation and members of the DESIS Network, an international network of 68 labs across the world.

We offer students, and the larger community, a platform to explore and tackle social and environmental issues. Through design, we aim to provide opportunities and tools to develop sustainable and meaningful solutions.

*Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability



ACTIVITIES

Design Thinking Roundtable Podcast

Social Innovators in Residence

C3 (Community, Collab, Creativity) w/ KPMG

Community Garden

Prototyping Funds

Design Jam for Impact

Workshops / Nova Vista

The ERA Chair *in numbers*

20

**Academic
Publications**

10

**Academic Events
Organized**

34

**Podcast Episodes
Produced & Published**

70+

Desis Lab Initiatives

28

Guests at Nova

1,300+

Participants to Events

1,603

Followers on LinkedIn

The ERA Chair *overtime*

Beyond the evergreen teaching and research activities, the ERA Chair team has developed and grown a number of initiatives over the last 5 years. The table below showcases how these grew and evolved overtime

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
PODCAST						
SOCIAL INNOVATOR IN RESIDENCE						
PROTOTYPING FUNDS						
DESIGN JAM FOR IMPACT						
COMMUNITY GARDEN						
QUALITATIVE METHODS WORKSHOP						
CUSTOM WORKSHOPS						

A graphic featuring a large circle at the top with radiating lines, resembling a sun or a spotlight. Below the circle, the word "Spotlights" is written in a large, bold, italicized serif font. Underneath the title, there is a line of text in a bold sans-serif font. Below that, the letters "R", "E", and "CE" are each inside a dark blue circle, arranged horizontally. At the bottom of the graphic is a large, light brown cube with a circle on its front face. The entire graphic is set against a light beige background with faint geometric lines.

Spotlights

In this section, we showcase six achievements
that live across Research, Education and Community Engagement

R

E

CE

#1 The Design Thinking Roundtable Podcast

#2 The Community Garden

#3 Social Innovators in Residence

#4 Design Jam for Impact

#5 Qualitative Methods Workshop

#6 Key Publications and Articles

Spotlight #1

The Design Thinking Roundtable Podcast

THE DESIGN THINKING ROUNDTABLE



ERA Chair in
Social Innovation

designlab
NYU MakerSpace

A collaboration between the DESIS Lab @ Nova SBE and the Design Lab @ NYU MakerSpace, the Design Thinking podcast was launched in Fall 2019 at NYU.

Anne-Laure Fayard brought it to the ERA Chair in Social Innovation to help the chair's mission of knowledge production, dissemination and community engagement. Through conversations with passionate and mindful designers, The Design Thinking Podcast Roundtable, explores various aspects of design and how it can create change and social impact. It is available on [Apple Podcast](#) and [Spotify](#).

Spotlight #1

A 3-series podcast program



A series of conversations with designers, exploring various aspects of design and how it can create change and social impact

22 episodes



Another conversation with passionate and inspiring social innovators who have visited the ERA Chair and the DESIS Lab at Nova SBE.

9 episodes



Tales of the Field is a podcast series which gives voice to social activists and social innovators who work in and with their communities to create social impact and sustainable change. They share with us their work in the field - where they tackle complex social issues and aim to create sustainable change and social impact. At its core, their work is human-centered, systemic and always informed by a deep understanding of the context and people's lives.

7 episodes

These podcasts are truly at the intersection of research and community engagement and serve as education material in classes.



The Design Thinking Roundtable Podcast was shortlisted in [The 15 best social innovation podcasts](#) in 2025 by Feedpost. It was also recognized in the [Top 100 Design Podcasts](#) in 2025 and in the [Top 43 Social Innovation Podcasts](#) in 2026 by Million Podcasts.

Spotlight #1



Pushpa Joshi was featured in both an episode of Tales of the Field and a Social Innovators in Residence podcast*

*Pushpa was also the Fall 2025 Social Innovator in Residence



Pushpa is a young activist from Nepal with over a decade of experience advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), adolescent sexuality, and gender equality at national and international levels. She co-founded YoSHAN (Youth-led SRHR Advocacy Nepal), where she leads youth-centered, feminist initiatives.

An experienced educator, Pushpa has trained healthcare providers, supported teachers in delivering human rights-based sexuality education, and empowered thousands of young people in advocacy and movement building. Her work emphasizes structural reform, intersectionality, and creating inclusive spaces, especially for marginalized communities. Beyond her activism, Pushpa also uses photography and filmmaking to amplify gender justice and lived experiences.



Tales of the Field: Pushpa Joshi, a Nepalese social activist

Tales of the Field is a podcast series which gives voice to social activists and social innovators who work in and with their communities to create social impact and...



Social Innovator in Residence: Pushpa Joshi

Pushpa Joshi is a young activist from Nepal with over a decade of experience advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), adolescent...

Spotlight #2

The Community Garden

The community garden is a place where different groups of people – students, faculty, staff and residents – can meet, organize and participate to a wide range of activities (from yoga to art, language club or reading groups); and of course, plant some flowers and herbs.



A group of participants to a plant and neuroscience workshop (April 2026) on the ramp which was built in December 2023 by Cascais municipality to facilitate the access to the garden.

Spotlight #2

Creating space for nature, community and different kinds of growth

The Community Garden at Nova SBE was born in 2023 under the lead of the DESIS Lab, within the ERA Chair in Social Innovation, chaired by Professor Anne-Laure Fayard, in partnership with Cascais municipality. Its location on Rua da Holanda, the street connecting the campus to the neighborhood, makes it a perfect connection between the university and the local community.

What began as a master's thesis from Johanna Pfeffer evolved into a full participatory design process, through workshops, open consultations, and community forms. Today it is an active living hub: hosting workshops, well-being sessions, planting activities open to students and the wider community, and a Guardian program in which community members adopt and steward trees and planting areas.



Activities

Herbarium workshop, initial cleaning and seeding, workshops on sustainable gardening and permaculture, storytelling workshops, kids workshops, yoga classes and more to come...

Spotlight #2

The Community Garden is rooted in the ERA Chair's mission

The Community Garden is not a standalone project. It is a tangible expression of the ERA Chair in Social Innovation, which since 2021 (thanks to EU funding) has participated to Nova SBE's social innovation mission. **Putting together the chair's 3 pillars – research, education, and community engagement**, the garden brings these dimensions together in a single space where they are experienced simultaneously and inseparably. In the last year, we have intentionally been framing the garden as a living lab: a real-world, collaborative experimentation space where students, researchers, practitioners, residents, and public institutions (and potentially companies in the future) work together to imagine and enact pathways toward a regenerative transition. Here, knowledge is collaboratively produced through practice and reflection.



Education

The garden is a classroom without walls. Students engage with biomimicry, permaculture, and participatory design in a real-world context, learning by doing, not just by reading. Courses, student clubs, and interdisciplinary collaborations come alive here in ways a lecture hall cannot replicate.

4 student clubs · 3 SBE departments · course integration

E



Research

As a living lab, the garden is a site for research in social innovation, participatory design, cross-sector collaboration, and ecological transition. It has already produced published work, conference presentations, and grant applications, and its richest research potential is still ahead.

R



Community

The garden creates connections between the university and its neighborhood. Guardians, local schools, residents, and the municipality all actively participate. It is a space where the school demonstrates that social innovation is not just studied at Nova SBE, it is also practiced.

CE

Spotlight #2

Impact overview

Since launching, the garden has built a consistent track record of community activation and growing institutional engagement.

46

Activities

430+

Participants

20

Active Partnerships

8

Guardians of the Garden*

*A dedicated group including staff members and local neighbours who have taken on leadership roles in maintaining and developing the garden.

Beyond the numbers, impact takes many forms:

- **Social connections:** Students interact with local residents and outside interested public, connections that rarely occurred before. And residents report feeling more connected to both the university and the neighbourhood.
- **Experiential learning and skill development:** All participants gain hands-on experience on permaculture knowledge and practices.
- **Ecological awareness and stewardship:** All participants develop deeper connections with nature through direct engagement—planting guilds, observing plant growth, understanding seasonal rhythms.
- **Sense of ownership and belonging:** By inviting community members to be involved in the whole process, and lately in the governance, the garden becomes 'theirs' rather than an institutional amenity. They are the ones who are there all year long and take care of the garden.
- **Space for experimentation and emergence:** An unused, overlooked plot of land has turned into a living and evolving ecosystem, a canvas where new ideas and relationships emerge organically. Unexpected possibilities have emerged: from a student from another university proposing urban beekeeping research to spontaneous picnics and informal gatherings.

Spotlight #3

Social Innovators in Residence



Every semester, the ERA Chair in Social Innovation invites a social innovator to spend a week at Nova SBE. They share their experience and enthusiasm for social impact with our students, staff and faculty, partners and the general public.

During their visit, they engage with various audiences through one-on-one meetings, small group events, workshops or larger discussions.

Additionally, they are invited to be guest speakers on the Design Thinking Roundtable Podcast.

Through this program, the ERA Chair in Social Innovation aims to share knowledge, trigger meaningful interactions and conversations with and across different members of the community.



Spotlight #3



Meena Kadri - Social Innovator in Residence #7 April 7-11, 2025

Meena is a social innovator dedicated to tackling complex social challenges through human-centered design and community engagement. With a background in social anthropology and design, she has worked across diverse settings, from urban slums to corporate boardrooms. Meena spent eight years at IDEO, where she led community engagement for OpenIDEO and advised IDEO U's initiatives. Her expertise lies in fostering collaboration, equity, and innovation to drive meaningful change. Born in Aotearoa New Zealand with Indian ancestry, she brings a global perspective to her work in social impact.



Residency Activities

- One-on-one conversations with NovaSBE community members
- “Power Play: Exploring Power Dynamics in Public Space” Workshop
- “Power, Place & Craft: A Conversation with Meena Kadri + Homelore Exhibition” at Live Content (Santos)
- Podcast recording at the Fidelidade Creative Studio at Nova SBE



Spotlight #4

Design Jam for Impact



The Design Jam for Impact is a one-day event, open to all people interested in co-creating for social impact. It is designed to help social innovators and entrepreneurs refine and iterate their projects to address social and environmental issues.



Spotlight #4

Design Jam for Impact



In partnership with the DESIS Lab at Faculty of Architecture University of Lisbon (FAUL), we have been exploring a different approach to design jams and hackathons that tend to focus on speed and idea generation.

Leveraging some of our research, we asked What if, rather than generating new ideas, a design jam could give existing ideas the time, attention and diverse perspectives they need to develop? How might we leverage the design process and the temporal pace of design jams to support teams trying to tackle social and environmental issues?



The Design Jam for Impact creates a safe and collaborative environment where project teams could pause, explore their initiatives from new angles and engage with diverse perspectives.



<https://socialinnova-chair.com/design-jams/>

Spotlight #4

8 Design Jams in 5 years

All of them tackling various issues including some with specific themes like sustainability for cities, fashion and oceans.



"The feedback we got is very valuable to the project. In particular, the point about building a story is really interesting and something we never really thought about, as we have previously focused on describing the business model and the product when presenting, rather than building up a story around the problem and our solution."

(NOVA SBE student)

"I did not expect to get so many new ways of thinking about our project in just a day. We have been working head down for the last months on building a working prototype. It was nice to take the time to step out and hear new ideas."

(A project owner)

Spotlight #5

Qualitative Methods Workshops

We ran 3 QMWs, which are intensive 4-day experiential workshops. The goal of this workshop, open to doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows and early-career faculty, is to provide project-based, interactive training in qualitative research methods and build community and networks across qualitative researchers.



Qualitative research methods bring us closer to the organizations and the social action that we study. Using these methods, scholars can develop rich, relevant and interesting contributions to organizational theory.



Spotlight #5

The Objective

The goal of this workshop, open to doctoral students, post doctoral fellows and early-career faculty, is to provide project based, interactive training in qualitative research methods and build community and networks across qualitative researchers.

Over the 3 workshops organized, we hosted about 90 participants (from top international schools such as Harvard, MIT, McGill, UCLA, NYU, Oxford, Cambridge, ESSEC, VU, etc.).



Spotlight #5

Workshop Description



The workshop is structured as a mix of interactive instruction and hands-on work. Faculty experts take the lead on a part of the research process (i.e. data collection, analysis, etc.).

Our aim is to create an intensive experience of the early stage work involved in qualitative projects, in particular ethnography. Participants also have the opportunity to receive feedback on their own research. Last, lots of space is left for exchange, conversations and community building.



“The focused, intensive nature of this workshop enhanced my grasp of the purpose and philosophy of inductive research, clarified some fuzzy distinctions I held between different methodological schools of thought, and drastically increased my ability to perform each step of the qualitative research process.”

Participant, QMW 2022

Spotlight #6

A Sample of Publications and Articles

In this 6th Spotlight, we have shortlisted a few of the many articles the ERA Chair team published over the last 5 years in prestigious academic journals and leading practice-oriented publications.



Articles and publications are core research achievements. Yet, they are often used to inform projects and teaching.



1. Design Thinking Misses the Mark

Fayard, AL., Fathallah, S. (2024)
Stanford Social Innovation Review,
Winter 2024 Print Issue (cover
story).

Selected as one of the 10 most downloaded articles of 2023

This article argues that design thinking has failed to live up to its promise as a transformative tool for social change. It asserts that many projects fail because they underestimate structural and political realities, overlook existing power dynamics and prioritise rapid ideation over long-term implementation and accountability. Rather than rejecting design altogether, they call for a more thoughtful and self-aware approach that recognises how every project is shaped by values, assumptions and power relations. The article closes with a set of critical provocations for designers and practitioners, encouraging them to reflect more deeply on participation, accountability, impact and the assumptions embedded in their own practice.

StanfordSOCIAL
INNOVATIONReview
Informing and inspiring leaders of social change

SOCIAL ISSUESSECTORSOLUTIONSMAGAZINEGLOBAL EDITIONS

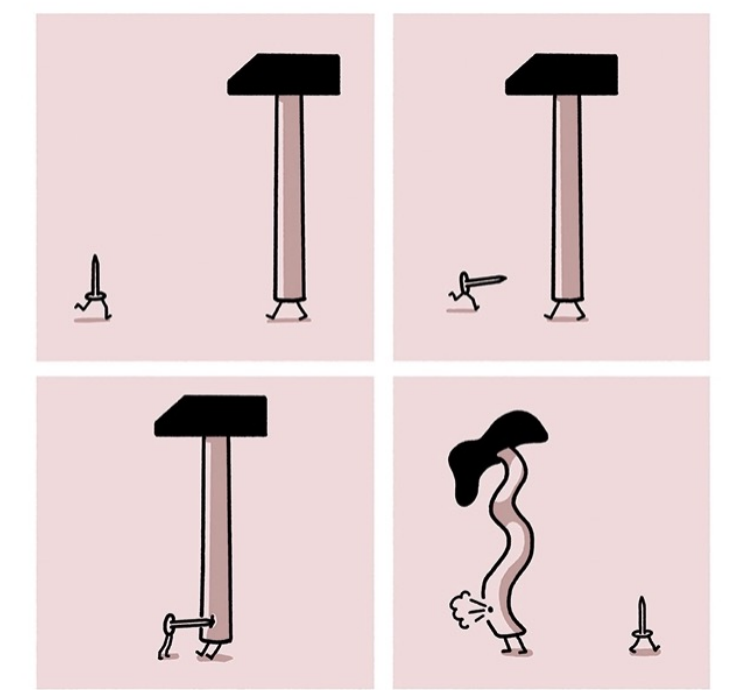
Design Thinking

Design Thinking Misses the Mark

Design thinking has failed to deliver on its promise to solve the world's thorniest social challenges. Adopting a critical design stance can help designers serve communities, rather than their own methodology.

CITESHARECOMMENTPRINTORDER REPRINTS

By Anne-Laure Fayard & Sarah Fathallah | Winter 2024



(Illustration by Christoph Niemann)

Nonprofits, governments, and international agencies often turn to design thinking to tackle complex social challenges and develop innovative solutions *with*—rather than *for*—people. Design thinking was conceptualized by designer Nigel Cross more than four decades ago, notably in the 1982 *Design Studies* article “*Designerly Ways of Knowing*.” The approach was later packaged for popular consumption by global design and innovation consultancy IDEO. Design thinking quickly became the go-to innovation tool kit in the for-profit world—and, soon after, in the international development and social sectors—because of its commitment to center communities in the collaborative design process.

Spotlight #6

2. Collaborating” with AI: Taking a System View to Explore the Future of Work

Anthony, C., Bechky B., Fayard, AL. (2023), Organization Science

This highly-cited article examines traditional theories of technology in organizations to frame new directions for the study of what it means to work “with” artificial intelligence (AI). As AI continues to permeate society, many organizations have struggled to effectively develop and implement new technologies into their existing ecosystems. Acknowledging the unique nature of AI compared to technologies studied in the past, the authors conclude that a better understanding of AI, work, and collaboration they propose conceptualizing AI as an active counterpart in a system of interactions to unpack and understand its role in organizational processes, as well as the unintended consequences that might emerge from all stakeholders working with AI.



JOURNALS ▾ MAGAZINES ▾ PUBLICATIONS ▾ PRICING & SUBSCRIPTIONS

ORGANIZATION SCIENCE

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Abstract

Home > Organization Science > Vol. 34, No. 5 >

“Collaborating” with AI: Taking a System View to Explore the Future of Work

Callen Anthony , Beth A. Bechky , Anne-Laure Fayard

Published Online: 9 Jan 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1651>

Abstract

In the wake of media hype about artificial intelligence (AI)/human collaboration, organizations are investing considerable resources into developing and using AI. In this paper, we draw on theories of technology in organizations to frame new directions for the study of what it means to work “with” AI. Drawing on prior literature, we consider how interactions between users and AI might unfold through theoretical lenses which cast technology as a tool and as a medium. Reflecting on how AI technologies diverge from technologies studied in the past, we propose a new perspective, which considers technology as a counterpart in a system of work that includes its design, implementation, and use. This perspective encourages developing a grounded understanding of how AI intersects with work, and therefore ethnography, building on thick descriptions, is an apt approach. We argue that relational ethnographic approaches can assist organization theorists in navigating the methodological challenges of taking a counterpart perspective and propose several strategies for future research.

Funding: The research was partially funded from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 951735.

3. Making Time for Social Innovation

How to Interweave Clock Time and Event Time in Open Social Innovation to Nurture Idea Generation and Social Impact

Fayard, AL. (2024), Organization Science

This paper investigates the increased interest in hackathons and open innovation challenges in addressing complex societal issues. Building on the ethnography of OpenIDEO, an open social innovation platform, hosting global online challenges and bringing together communities to co-create solutions on pressing topics like revitalising cities, healthcare and food systems. The study unveiled, innovation doesn't always fit neatly into a schedule and how to balance structure with creativity, OpenIDEO experimented with two distinct approaches to time (clock time and event time). This blending of clock and event time acknowledged a critical truth: meaningful innovation takes time. It's not just about generating ideas — it's about nurturing them and allowing real-world impact to unfold.



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Making Time for Social Innovation: How to Interweave Clock Time and Event Time in Open Social Innovation to Nurture Idea Generation and Social Impact

Anne-Laure Fayard
Published Online: 28 Sep 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2020.0832>

Go to Section

Abstract

Abstract

With the growing complexity of social and environmental issues, there has been a blossoming of hackathons and open innovation challenges. This push to accelerate innovation embraces a perspective of time as clock time—conceived as objective, linear, measurable, and therefore, rather easy to compress. Such a view of time conflicts with the emergent nature of idea generation and the indeterminate process that leads to social impact, which both rely on event time. Drawing on a 40-month ethnographic study of OpenIDEO, an open social innovation platform, I examine how, in designing open innovation challenges, the OpenIDEO team interwove clock time and event time in order to foster idea generation and support social impact. Through inductive analysis, I identify three practices—mapping, stretching, and squeezing time—enacted by the OpenIDEO team to “make time” and thus, continuously engage participants and sponsors in the challenges as well as to allow participants to implement their ideas. My findings demonstrate how organizations can intentionally use time to nurture collaborative innovation and yield sustainable social impact. My study questions the traditional interpretation of clock time as the foundation of all temporalities as it shows how temporal work can be grounded within event time.

Spotlight #6

4. Nurturing Innovation

Fayard, AL., Majekodunmi, J., Mendola, M., Kenny, R. (2024). Harvard Business Review, March-April.

In this Harvard Business Review paper, the authors argue that Innovation is about more than an idea. Instead, it is a long, collaborative journey. They describe the crucial roles that intermediaries can play in curating an intentional process and show how they can support collaboration throughout the innovation journey. This is a critical gap which limits the potential of cross-sector collaborations to address complex social issues.



Innovation

Nurturing Innovation

A great idea isn't enough. Leaders must create an environment that allows teams to collaborate successfully over time. by Anne-Laure Fayard, Jess Majekodunmi, Martina Mendola and Rachel Kenny

From the Magazine (March–April 2024)



Felicity McCabe

Content, Media & Impact



In this section, we present the **thought leadership** content produced throughout the years and **published on various channels** to promote the thinking and work delivered.

We are also assessing the **overall impact** generated by the different actions and activities led by the ERA Chair.

Content & Media

Thought leadership content has been developed to promote the values of the ERA Chair as well as the work produced. And to push it, the team has created and activated a number of social platforms, including **YouTube, LinkedIn and Substack.**

In addition, a few articles were written and published in **Observador, Publico and Expresso**, 3 respected Portuguese newspapers.

Content & Media

Videos

The Community Garden at Nova SBE: A shared space where people, nature and ideas grow together



When migration is discussed, solutions often arrive before the problem is fully understood.

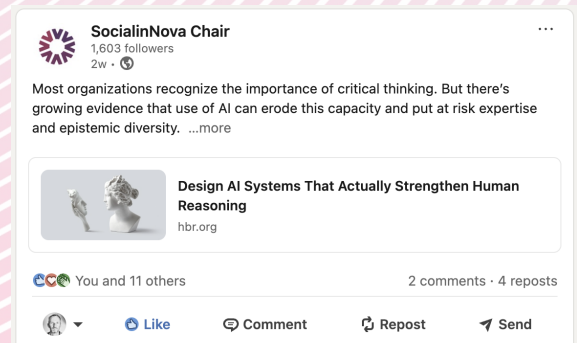
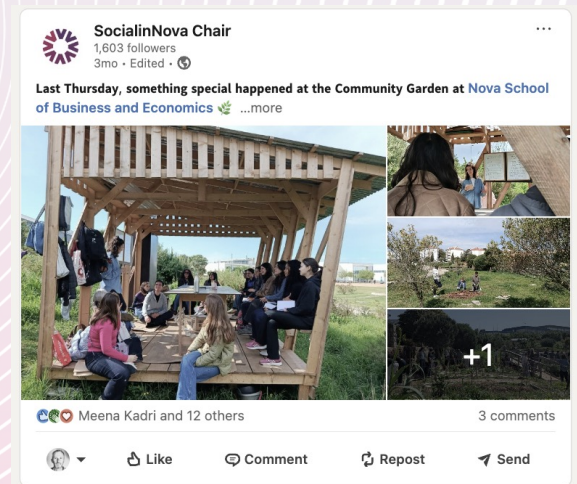
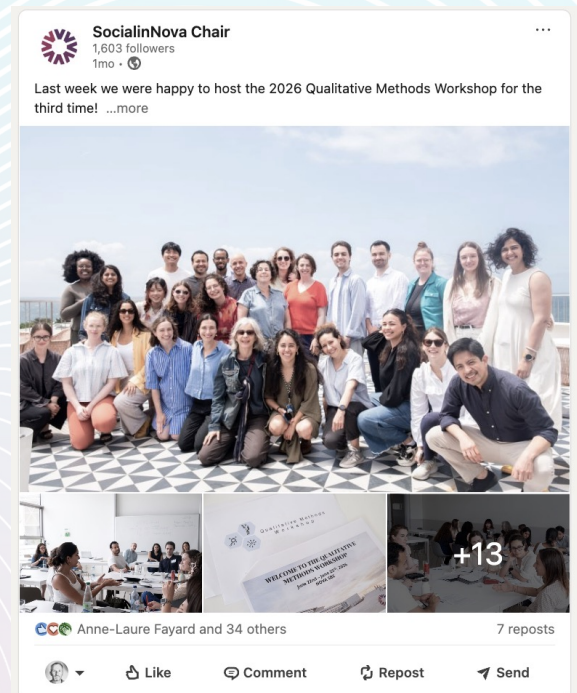
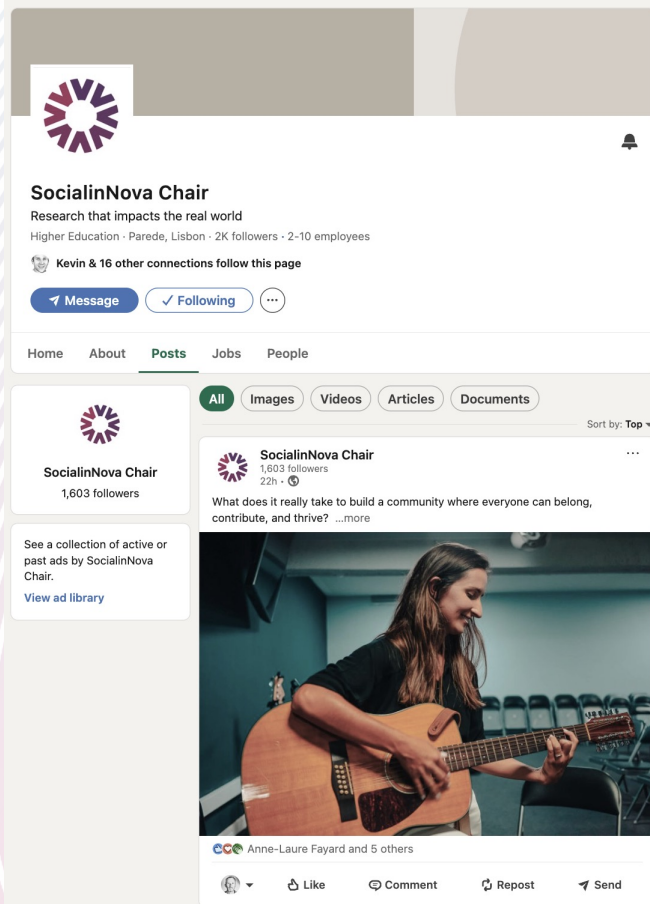
That's why the Lisbon Project and the ERA Chair in Social Innovation decided to do things differently. In Professor Anne-Laure Fayard's Design Thinking for Social Innovation Master's course (Spring 2025), 30 students from over 10 nationalities worked alongside 4 migrant women – not as subjects of study, but as paid consultants bringing invaluable expertise. Together migrants and students co-design change and show how innovation through inclusion might look like.

Content & Media

LinkedIn

The LinkedIn page of the **SocialinNova Chair** is the main platform used to share updates, thought leadership and promote activities.

At the beginning of August 2026, the channel counted more than 1,600 followers.



Content & Media

Substack

Welcome to our chronicles of collaboration, impact and unfolding futures.

Launched in July 2025, **Social Innovation: Chasing Change** shares stories and insights from the ERA Chair in Social Innovation and its DESIS Lab (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) at Nova School of Business and Economics in Portugal. We explore how to effectively organize collaborations for social innovation across education, community engagement and research.

Social Innovation: Chasing Change

[Home](#) [Archive](#) [About](#)



Building Belonging: The Lisbon Project's Journey of Change

Lessons in creating communities where people can contribute, connect and thrive

AUG 5 • CHASING CHANGE

Latest Top Discussions

Experts by experience: migrant consultants co-design with students

Three women share their journeys, insights and reflections from working alongside students to imagine new approach...

JUL 29 • CHASING CHANGE



The humility of designing for social impact

Why lasting change depends on who gets to shape the decisions

JUL 22 • CHASING CHANGE



Experiential learning thrives in a living lab

What happens when a university campus becomes a place for growing food, ideas and stronger communities?

JUL 8 • CHASING CHANGE



Designing belonging

DESIS Social Innovator Fellow discusses migration, mentorship and creating spaces where families can learn,...

JUL 1 • CHASING CHANGE





Social Innovation: Chasing Change

Chronicles of collaboration, impact and unfolding futures

Recommendations

**Regenerative Insights**
Christopher Marquis

**La Combi Rosa**
Eva Sander

**Impact Fellows**
Impact Fellows

The ERA Chair in **Social Innovation** - 5-year report

39

Content & Media

Guides

As part of our research and engagement with organizations and communities, we developed various resources such as the Companion to Co-creation to inspire social change and support social innovation projects.

Are you co-creating? **A critical companion to more inclusive collaboration**

This companion document challenges the hidden assumptions in popular co-creation methods. Unlike traditional toolkits that provide step-by-step instructions, it acts as a critical lens, helping facilitators recognize power dynamics, cultural differences, and knowledge hierarchies that standard approaches often ignore.



Content & Media

Articles

In Praise of Nuance (article written and published in April 2024)

Original version in Portuguese below. English version [here](#)

Rádio

OBSERVADOR

Assinar o Observador

Opinião Rádio Podcasts Newsletters Últimas Jogos Secções

Informação que cabe no bolso: 40€ de desconto Assinar

1206,8 kWh poupados com a X P E N S



Anne-Laure Fayard

Ativar alertas

Professora Catedrática na NovaSBE

Um elogio da nuance

Elogiar a nuance pode parecer contraproducente pois frequentemente é considerada uma fraqueza. Mas eu diria que abraçar as nuances requer a coragem de reconhecer que as coisas são complexas e ambíguas

02 abr. 2024, 00:12

5

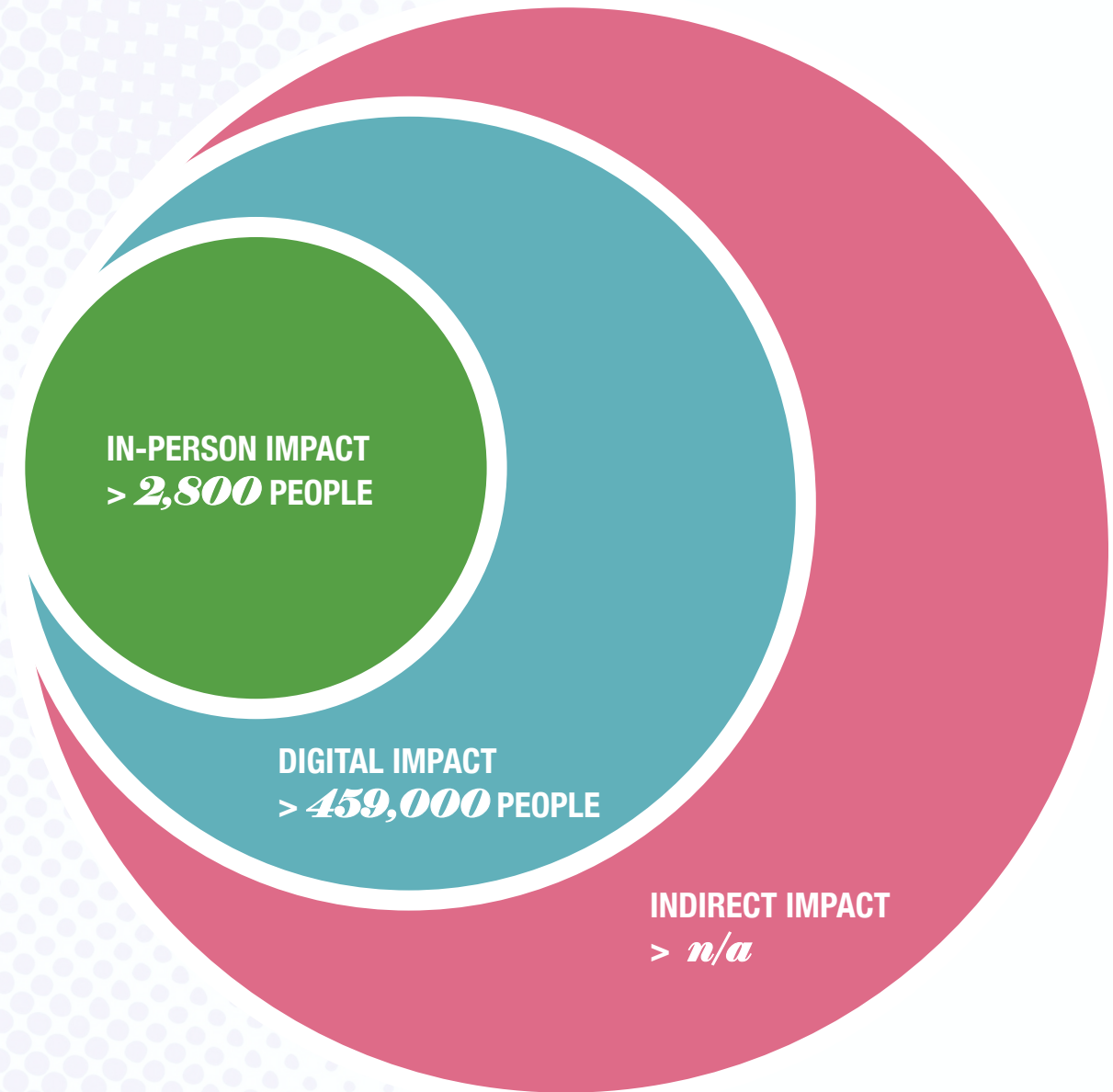
Os antropólogos que estudam as diferentes línguas Inuit e Yupik descobriram que estas utilizam muitas palavras para descrever a neve. Por exemplo, os inuits que vivem na região canadiana de Nunavik têm pelo menos 53 palavras no seu dialeto para descrever a neve, incluindo palavras como “matsaaruti”, para “neve molhada que pode ser usada para gelar os corredores de um trenó” ou “pukak”, para “a neve em pó cristalina que parece sal”. Do mesmo modo, o povo Sami, que vive no norte da Escandinávia e da Rússia, utiliza mais de 180 palavras para descrever a neve e o gelo e cerca de 1000 palavras para designar as renas. Esta profusão de palavras realça a complexidade e a riqueza da realidade, bem como as nossas várias experiências da mesma. De facto, a neve não é apenas uma realidade objetiva única, mas é um conjunto complexo de experiências situadas que variam consoante os indivíduos e os contextos. É por esta razão que o antropólogo Clifford Geertz nos convidou a desenvolver “descrições espessas”, ou seja, descrições que incluem pormenores extensos e reconhecem que as acções humanas são sempre situadas e podem significar muitas coisas diferentes.

Desenvolver descrições densas pode parecer uma tarefa laboriosa e aborrecida, e definitivamente contrária aos costumes e normas de comunicação actuais: número de caracteres cada vez mais curto, optimização de conteúdos, notícias rápidas, etc. Como consequência, assistimos a uma polarização crescente de opiniões sobre vários tópicos, desde questões ambientais e sociais até à saúde e à política. Em qualquer assunto, só podemos ser a favor ou contra, certos ou errados, não deixando assim espaço para a ambiguidade, a incerteza e a interpretação. Está bem provado que esta polarização reduz, e até destrói, a tolerância, o diálogo e a possibilidade de deliberação, que são fundamentais para o processo democrático.

Do meu ponto de vista que há formas de ultrapassar as polarizações dos extremos e de nos envolvermos no diálogo, e isso passa pela adoção de nuances. Escrever e falar com nuances convida-nos a fazer distinções e a reconhecer variações, mesmo subtis. Mais profundamente, a nuance está no cerne do pensamento crítico. Assim, precisamos de nuances para dar sentido às questões sociais e ambientais cada vez mais prementes que o nosso mundo enfrenta. O desenvolvimento de uma análise multifacetada é necessário para desvendar as relações complexas entre os diferentes elementos envolvidos e para envolver várias partes interessadas, com interesses e conhecimentos diferentes, no desenvolvimento de soluções para os nossos problemas sociais complexos.

Impact

3 different layers of human impact*



Over the last 5 years, more than 450,000 people have been exposed to and/or engaged in at least one activity generated by the ERA Chair.

*Individuals may belong to more than one layer

Impact



In-Person Impact: > 2,800

In-person impact includes on-site individuals who have physically been exposed to or engaged with the ERA Chair activities.

These are:

- **Students registered in courses**
- **Events or workshops participants (Design Jam, Prototyping Fund, Activities in the Community Garden, Qualitative Method Workshops...)**



Digital Impact: > 459,000

Digital impact include followers, subscribers, listeners or readers of thought leadership content that has been produced by the ERA Chair:

These are:

- **Podcast listeners (across Apple and Spotify) - 6,352**
- **Substack subscribers - 251**
- **LinkedIn followers - 1,589**
- **Readers of the publications in which ERA Chair members have published an article - estimated 451K**

Impact



Indirect Impact: n/a

Indirect Impact is the impact experienced by beneficiaries of projects supported through the DESIS Lab's activities.

These are for example end-users or customers of prototyping funds and design jam projects.

Example: Take CEBRA Talent is a learning and development organisation for companies seeking to attract, retain, and grow purpose-driven talent. One of the co-founders started the project during her Master's at Nova. She participated in spring 2023 to the Design Jam for Impact and prototyped some of the content through workshops supported by the DESIS Lab. As of April 2025, CEBRA had impacted about 300 young talents.

Indirect Impact is a mid-term to long-term impact and is hard to quantify overall.

“The ERA Chair and its DESIS Lab had an all-encompassing and overarching impact on us. The intangible learnings we gathered are immense.”

Student who participated to the Prototyping Fund Spring 2024 & Fall 2025

Deep impact

It refers to the overall change in attitudes and mindsets experienced by participants through the Lab's activities. It is a very long-term impact shaped by the different activities of the ERA Chair and their resonance.

This impact is central to the mission of the program but here again, it is not quantifiable.

The Team

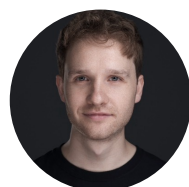


The Team



Anne-Laure Fayard

Chaired Professor (since September 2021)



Paolo Leone

Assistant Professor (since September 2022)



Samantha Ortiz Casillas

Assistant Professor (since January 2025)



Beatriz Bento

DESI Lab Community manager, Spring 2022-Dec 2025;
Since Jan 2026, DESI Lab Fellow, Project Lead for the
Community Garden



Rita Nascimento

Project Manager (on leave since October 2025)



Natalia da Luz

Project Manager (joined in November 2025)



Alison Holm

Assistant Professor (September 2022 - August 2023)

The Advisory Board

Donzelina Barroso

Director at Global Philanthropy

Julie Battilana

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João Rafael Brites

Director of Growth and Innovation at HowGood

Maria Emília Correa

Co-founder at B Corps

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Wendy Smith

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ERA Chair in
Social Innovation



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