

SEPTEMBER 2019

SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Professor Richard Hazenberg, University of Northampton

Dr Norah Wang & Dr Yanto Chandra, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Professor Alex Nicholls, University of Oxford

1. SOCIAL INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

1. SOCIAL INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

Surveying the landscape of social innovation and higher education in Hong Kong is a key report commissioned as part of the British Council's Building Research Innovation for Community Knowledge and Sustainability (BRICKS) project.

Research Aim: To understand the knowledge, capacity and future ambitions of the Hong Kong academic community in relation to SI. How is this shaped by barriers and enablers at the below three levels?

1. SOCIAL INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

- **Systemic Level:** Cultural norms, traditions and incentive structures that mediate inter-HEI collaboration.
- **Institutional Level:** Behaviours and attitudes of faculty and staff at HEIs towards collaboration.
- **Practice Level:** Frontline knowledge of how to collaborate in the delivery of SI initiatives.

1. SOCIAL INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

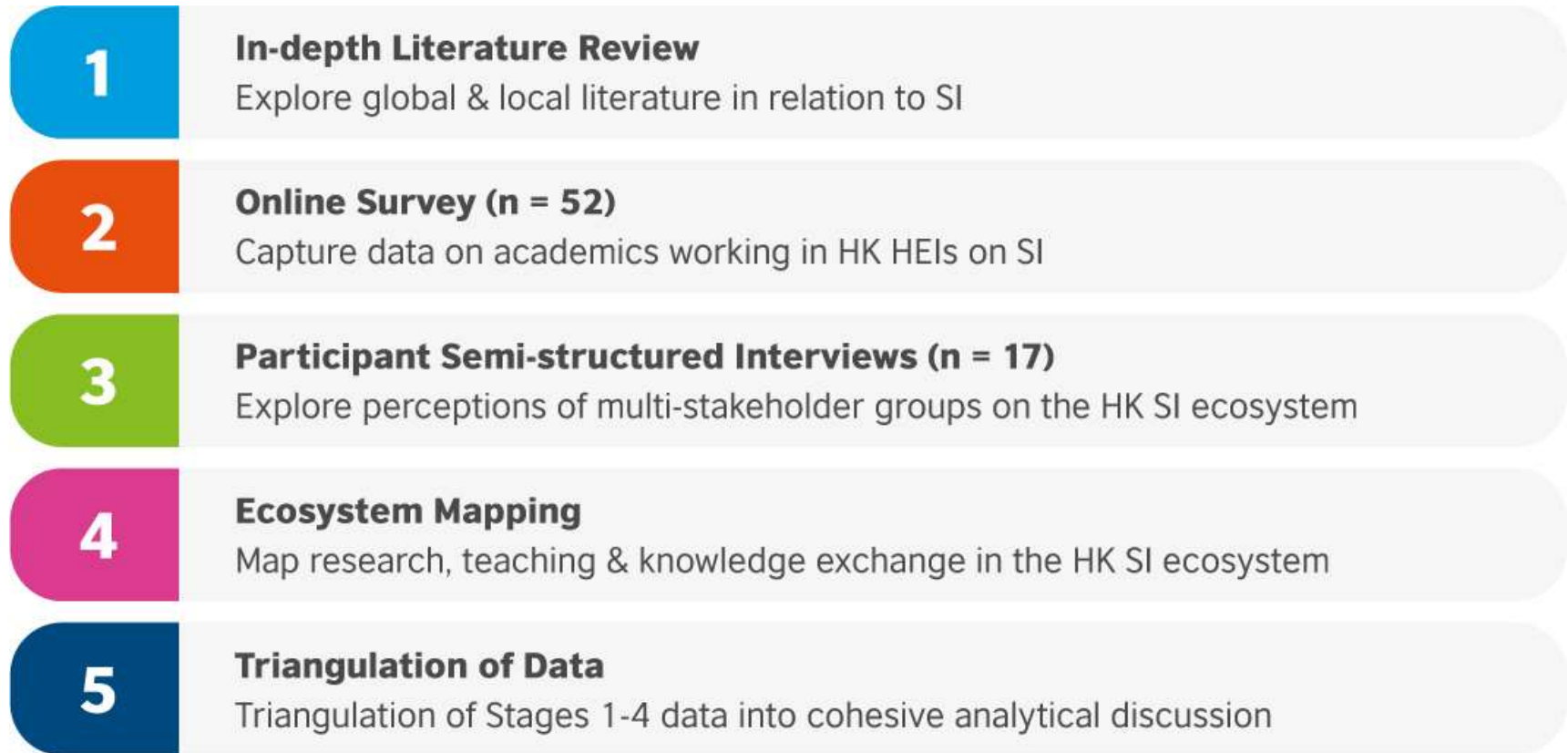


Figure 1 – BRICKS Research Design

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

RESEARCH

RESEARCH



PRACTICE

There is clearly a growing research base in Hong Kong centred on SI, with 42 academic publications (journals, book/book chapters, conference papers and reports) identified⁵. Much of this 'social innovation' research is focused on social enterprise/entrepreneurship specifically, and is primarily qualitative and case-study focused (62%). The studies currently being conducted are considered to be often theoretical in nature and that there is a need for more applied research⁶ to complement this. The factors behind this are complex and heterogeneous and are related to current research funding, publishing and career progression systems (see more below).



INSTITUTIONAL

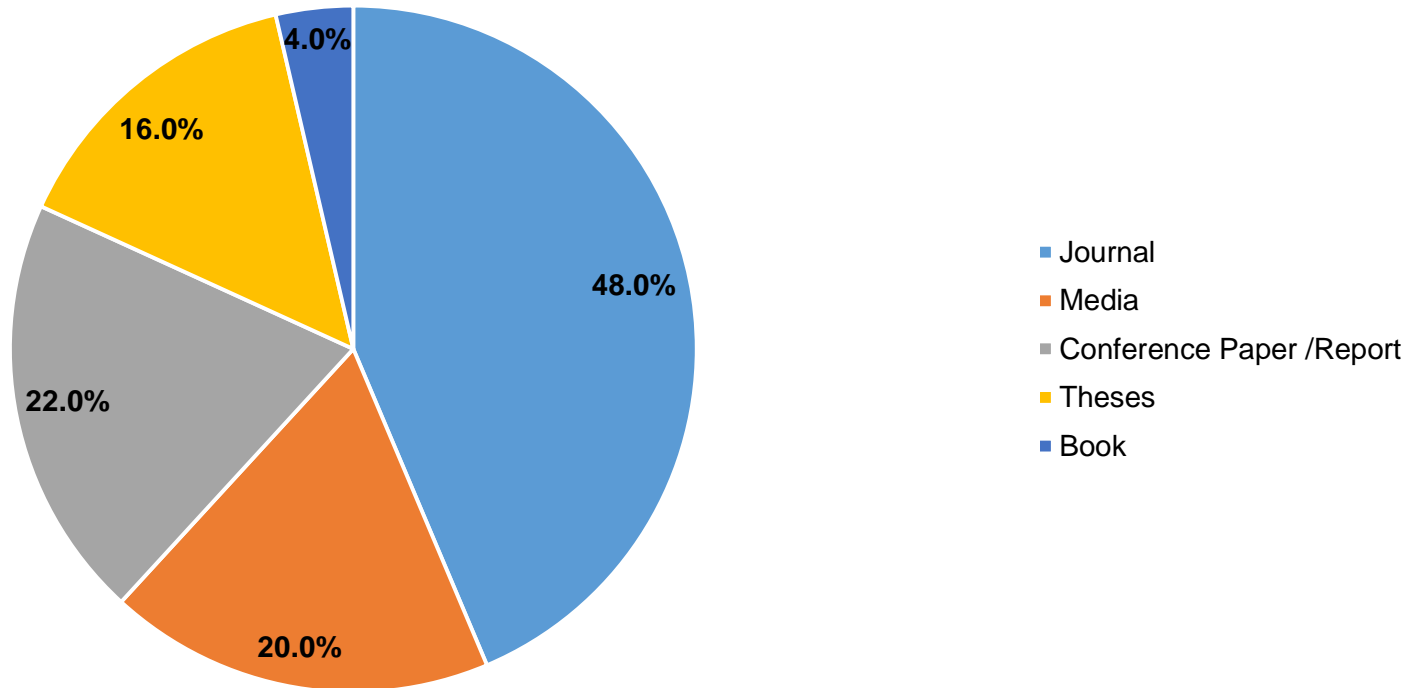
Only 28% of the research projects identified were collaborative (inter-HEI) and the research that has been conducted is often replicative of what is occurring elsewhere. Collaboration is a key component of SI approaches and therefore it is important that we build an ecosystem that encourages closer working between stakeholders. As the majority of research funding is coming from HEIs and research grant funders (53%) and universities looking for publications in high-ranking academic journals, it is easy to see why so much research remains theoretical. The barriers to collaborative research include a lack of SI/SE champions in universities (and a lack of top-down support for impact research). Much could be learned from HEIs from around the globe that already have specific research focuses on SI.



SYSTEMIC

Wider support for impactful, socially innovative research is required at a systemic level from government and academic funding bodies. This is already occurring through the 15% impact score being allocated to universities' overall scores in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)⁷. In addition, the Hong Kong government's commitment to double its R&D budget in the coming years may also help, especially if SI research funding streams are created that can mitigate some of the practice and institutional level research barriers identified above.

PUBLICATIONS BY TYPE



EMERGING SI RESEARCH THEMES

- **SI and Social Work** - Social Innovation as an emerging area of research in social work
- **SI and Policy** – Social Innovation in the way that policy is developed and the role of government in driving “policy innovation”
- **SI and social change strategy** to achieve social change/impact
- **SI and research methodology** – e.g. big data and its influence on research approaches
- **SI and new business models** e.g social enterprise/co-operatives/B-Corps

2. TEACHING

TEACHING



PRACTICE

At present, there are 49 live courses on social entrepreneurship or SI in Hong Kong, with a further seven due to start in September 2019. However, the majority (66%) of these offerings are elective undergraduate modules, built into existing degree programmes, whilst only four HEIs accounted for 63% of these courses⁸.



INSTITUTIONAL

Only one of the programmes (Nurturing Social Minds) was collaborative, and the need for greater collaboration and embedded teaching (i.e. with real-life engagement with SI) was identified by numerous research participants. There is also a long-term need for cross-institutional programmes that span HEI boundaries (cross-accreditation).



SYSTEMIC

There is a short- to medium-term need for additional training programmes for academics and practitioners on teaching social innovation, which can raise the skill-levels of teachers, and also increase the population of individuals that can teach social innovation. Wider and deeper networks in the ecosystem were identified as lacking, which hinders embedded and place-based learning from occurring.

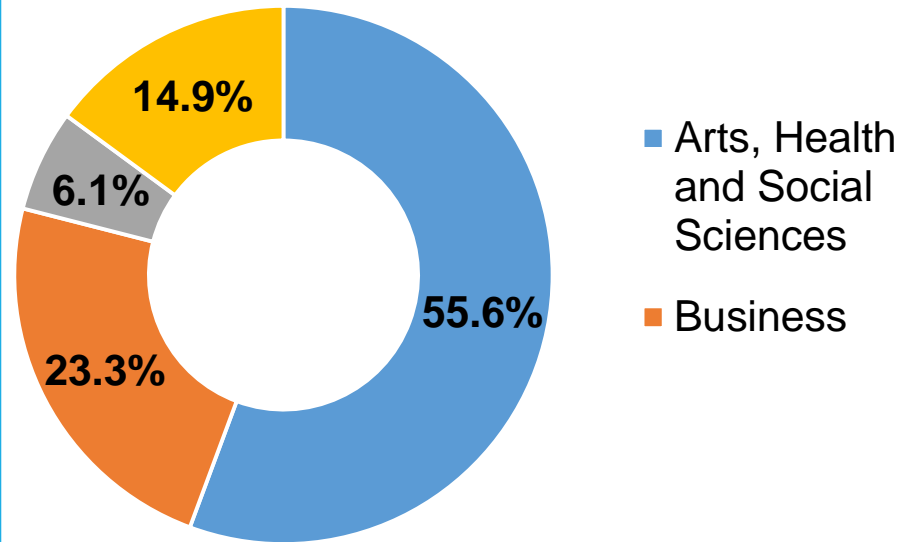
Few teaching collaborations
(e.g. Nurturing Social Minds)

19 On Social Innovation

26 On Social
Entrepreneurship/Enterprise

81% Undergraduate courses

65% elective courses



EMERGING TEACHING TRENDS

- Business Schools prioritise the **business of social innovation** marginalizing the social impact
- Public Policy/Social Work prioritise the **social impact of social innovation**

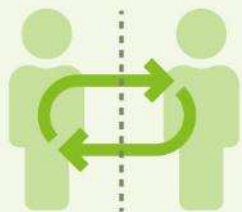
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



PRACTICE

A total of 24 KE projects were identified in the research, with 48% of these being partnerships with NGOs and the funding coming mainly from government, foundations or a respondent's own HEI (67%). In addition, 79% of all academic CE work took the form of board/honorary roles or panel/committee membership, rather than active research-led engagement⁹.



INSTITUTIONAL

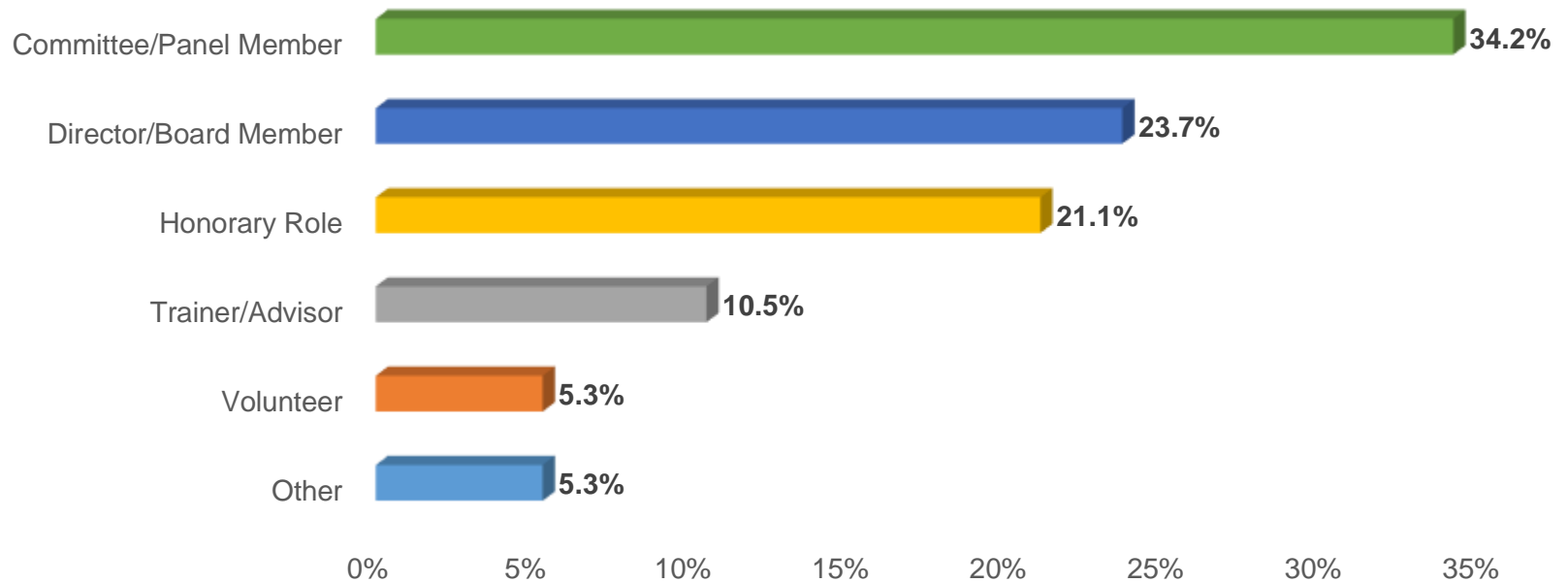
There remains a paucity of collaboration between HEIs and the wider SI ecosystem, with competition often stifling coproduction and both HEIs and NGOs being too protective over intellectual property (IP).



SYSTEMIC

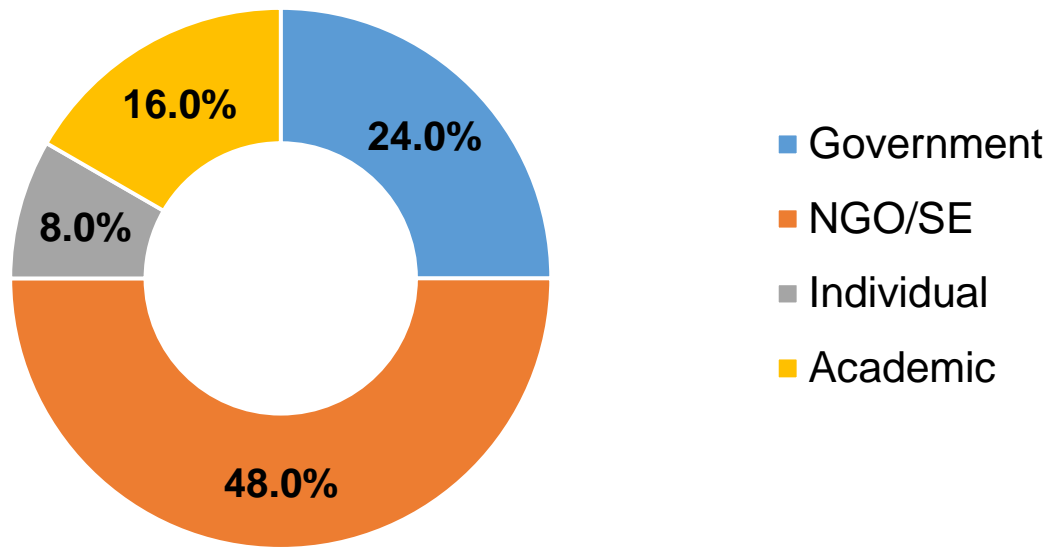
There is also a need for global KE through international institutional collaborations with other HEIs and NGOs. Whilst some HEIs were found to be engaging in these, and the work of the British Council on SI demonstrates the efforts of international organisations, there remains a lack of incoming knowledge transfer. Perhaps more importantly, Hong Kong could also be exporting some of its own innovative SI IP to other ecosystems around the world.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIETY



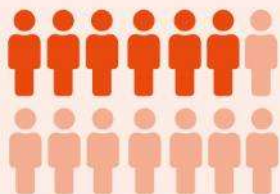
PARTNERSHIPS WITH NGOS OR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES (48%)

BENEFICIARY GROUPS: YOUTH(40%)



ECOSYSTEMS

INDIVIDUALS AND ECOSYSTEMS



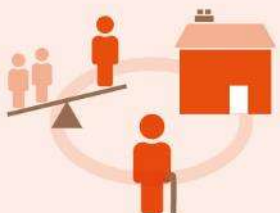
PRACTICE

The role that individuals play in driving institutional change is key in Hong Kong's HE sector. Indeed, just six academics accounted for nearly half of the lead authorship on all 50 publications identified in this report. There is therefore a need to recognise the importance of key individuals in driving SI, and empowering them to further expand (and more importantly to facilitate others to expand) their SI activities in Hong Kong's HEIs¹⁰.



INSTITUTIONAL

There remains a lack of institutional support within HEIs for SI and leading staff are not supported to deliver SI research and curricula. If universities supported staff and students to establish social innovative organisations, to engage in volunteering/work placements both within degrees and as extra-curricular activity, it would better align Hong Kong's HEIs with the needs and wants of the more socially aspirational younger generations (i.e. their customers).



SYSTEMIC

The key social problems facing Hong Kong identified in the research through participant survey responses include social inequality, elderly/ageing issues and housing, accounting for 59% of all respondent-identified social problems in Hong Kong. Health was also identified in the interviews as a key determinant of all these other issues, showing the interrelated nature of social problems in Hong Kong and reinforcing the need for a collaborative, multi-agency approach to solve them. Finally, there remains a lack of clarity around the concept and definition of SI, which makes it difficult for strategic leaders to understand and implement socially innovative research and curricula.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Definitional clarity around SI (Systemic)**
- 2. Research funding (Systemic/Institutional)**
- 3. Impact-led tenure track (Institutional)**
- 4. Empower individuals (Institutional/Practice)**
- 5. Embedded curriculum and training (Institutional)**
- 6. Social innovation funding (Institutional)**
- 7. Knowledge sharing (Systemic)**
- 8. Facilitate community engagement (Practice)**

4. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

4. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Research Impact: The [impact delivered by SI-related research in Hong Kong](#) still remains [unclear](#), and the research data presented in this report suggests anecdotally that it may not be high, with a need for more impactful research moving forwards. The introduction of research impact into the RAE 2020 framework can help to demonstrate impact more clearly. [Therefore, future research that seeks to ascertain the impact of research projects/publications](#) both qualitatively through interviews with academics, but also quantitatively through analysis of RAE submissions, can help to identify what real-world impact HEI research is having around SI.

Teaching: Whilst this report has mapped out the SI teaching that currently exists in Hong Kong, what the research does not show is [what students think about the quality of the teaching](#) on these courses, their relevance to the subject matter and careers, as well as the impact that they deliver.

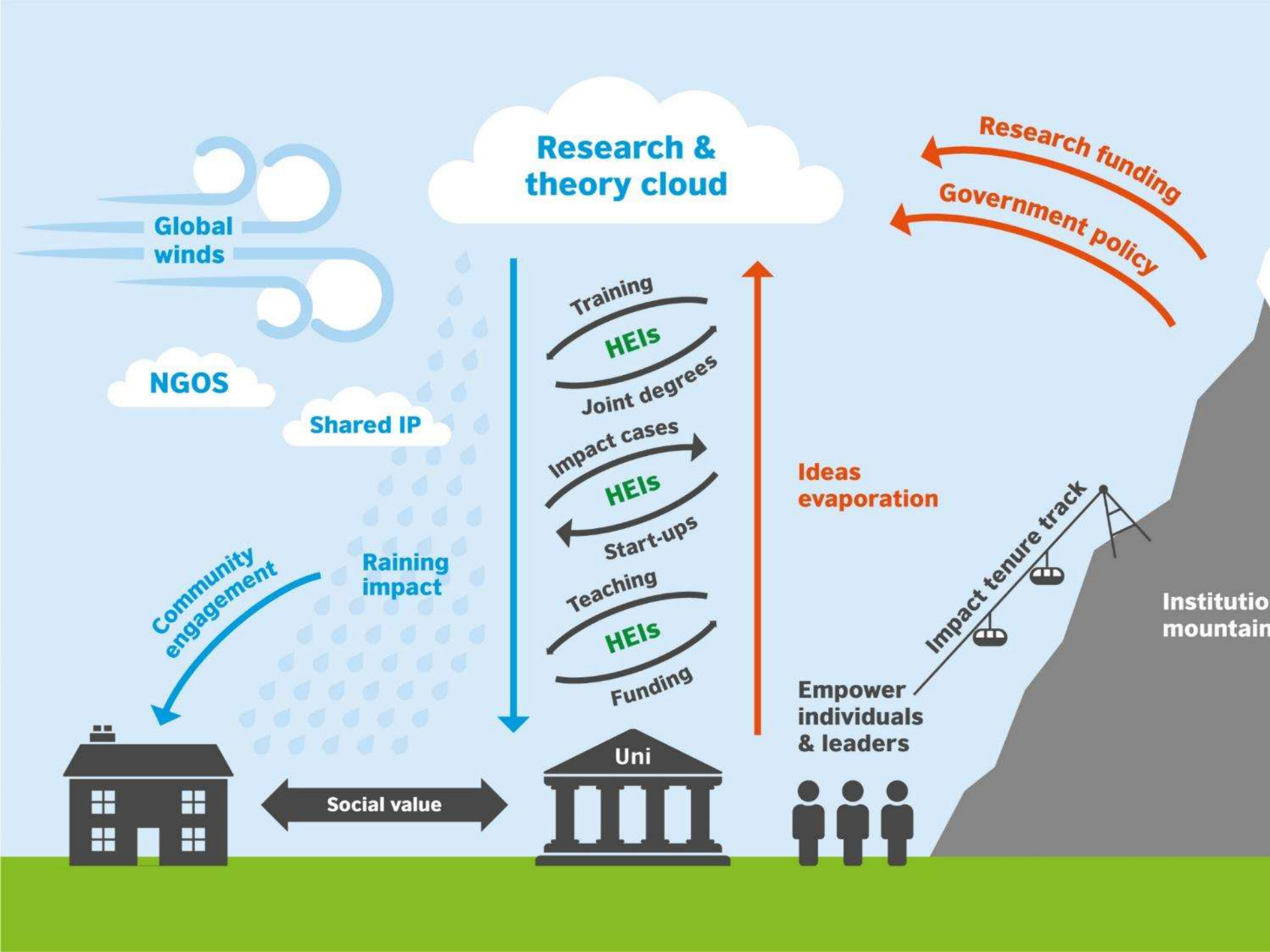
4. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Training: Where training does exist (current or future) for SI practitioners and those teaching SI, research should be undertaken that [seeks to understand the efficacy of this training](#) and the impact that it has on the quality of training/teaching delivered (related to the student survey above).

Global benchmarking: Whilst this report has sought to make comparisons between Hong Kong and the rest of the world (notably the UK), a comprehensive mapping of SI research and

teaching globally was outside the remit of the project. [Future research should identify comparable HE ecosystems in other countries and then comprehensively map the research and teaching that exists.](#) This is important, as it provides context as to Hong Kong's global position and provides insights as to where Hong Kong is a global leader and where it may need additional capacity.

5. IDEALISED ECOSYSTEM FOR SI IN HONG KONG'S HE SECTOR



Research & theory cloud

Global winds

NGOS

Shared IP

Research funding
Government policy

- Training
- HEIs
- Joint degrees
- Impact cases
- HEIs
- Start-ups
- Teaching
- HEIs
- Funding

Ideas evaporation

Community engagement

Raining impact

Impact tenure track

Institution mountain

Social value

Uni

Empower individuals & leaders

