USIS
UFRJ Social Innovation Support Unit

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
UFRJ DESIS Lab
Brazil
Carla Cipolla, Rita Afonso, et al.
Promoters.

Partners.

Funder.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
Context.

There are many social innovation initiatives in the city of Rio de Janeiro that needs support. Universities have a lot of human resources, particularly students that are ready to engage and support these initiatives and teachers and technitians, with knowledge and skills to support social innovation processes.
The project.
The USIS - Social Innovation Support Unit at UFRJ aims to strengthen the links between university and the broader society by fostering a mutual learning process between university members and social innovators.
The design process.

Co-design processes
Capacity building activities and mutual-learning processes
Mentoring (for students and for social innovators)
Networking (connect social innovators to resources inside and outside the university)

The USIS operates in a decentralized way: teams are composed by professors and its students that work together with each social innovator.

The USIS operates in one semester or year cycles on which a specific deliverable is defined and co-produced with each social innovator.
The USIS is a social innovation itself, because it is connecting professors and students from different departments, institutes and disciplinary areas in the university, which is not usual. It creates an interdisciplinary area, that is being developed in interaction with social innovators. For the DESIS Lab it was important, because the USIS performs the DESIS mission, but in an interdisciplinary way.
Participation in the USIS provide credits for students (they need these credits to fulfill the requirements to finish their undergraduate studies) and workload for professors (this allow progression in their academic ranks).
Design for social innovation theories and practices are developed jointly in the university (with other departments and institutes, and also international partners) and social innovators, it is empowering the DESIS Lab knowledge and diffusing its approach to other groups in the university and vice-versa.
Storytelling and visualization skills are being one of the key contributions to the USIS interdisciplinary team. The design for social innovation tools and experiences brought by the DESIS Lab either. But not only: the UFRJ DESIS lab coordinates the project and brought the design approach to social innovation to partners.