

Frank and Serena, when you asked me to contribute here about the “geographical perspective”, I first thought that all I might say here, is that “place matters”. I changed three times my comment: first after reading the papers, then after being with you to the field trip and then yesterday after the morning session. My comment is divided into compliments, the geographical thought within research on S. I. and challenges.

### Compliments

The concept of “social innovation” is exiting and **highly stimulating**. And I like that the research **community looks for examples all over the world trying to find the best examples** for initiatives that are bottom up and that introduce social change – as Gibson Graham and Roelvink show in their paper. The **concept results to be highly normative** – which **we could read in a way as the opposite of theoretical approach**. Moulaert is totally right when he states that there must be somewhat **more than beautification and large-scale events** in order to create a “**democratic city**”. But what? A democratic city should be a place that should enable social change through social innovation. **Culture**, a traditional stronghold of creativity, might be seen as one such catalysator. Especially when lived as a **bottom-up strategy**, rooted in practise and when it aims at inclusion. I appreciate that you look on initiative in terms of new governance relationship. Otherwise we would not see that. It is worth **bringing together this knowledge** – practice is often much more illustrative then talking about a scientific text body none of us completely masters.

### The Geographical impact

When reading all the **reflexive work on social innovation** I had the feeling that the approach to understand social change through innovation is exactly **in between geographical and sociological thinking**. If we reduce that two perspectives to a) the geographical perspective that generally spoken is interested in the **spatial distribution, geographical reach**, and in the **physical shape of processes** and b) **sociological thinking** that seeks to identify invisible mechanism on how societies work and to construct a **collective social imaginatory** – we need a combination of the two approaches to understand Social innovation. Maybe in these days the **practice, the presentation of the praxis took over the role of geography** – bringing back reflexions and words back to some form of reality. Many speakers addressed multi-levelled and multiscaled analysis, without naming this “geographical”. I argue that multi-level analysis is only helpful when bounded to a spatial dimension. A case study could condense a multi-level analysis, making visible social structure. Moulaert already put **Integrated Area Development** as one concept generated out of such a normative approach. Governance is as another **transversal field of creativity**. It needs place in order to be more than a blub of words – who is interpreted by the audience in a manifold way. Here starts criticism; it is mainly on being precise while speculating and “inventing” social innovation through action. It is on bringing in spatially reproduced structure and on the embodiment of power (as capability to link transversal fields of resources and to make use of opportunities (=Deleuzes line of flight? /windows of opportunities).

### Critique

Two days ago at the **field trip we saw two different examples** for Social innovation in practice: one was aiming at integrating mentally ill persons, the other gave space to marginalized persons (if we want to see artists as marginalized within a given mainstream society). In both cases the idea for the initiative **came from “the bottom”**, but then the project lived on because it became funded by state

or EU-agencies. In both cases an **extraordinary person, a personality**, was needed to set up the whole process and who was able **to deal with those “top-down” mechanisms** that allowed the continuity of the project. Some institution or persons has to be able to make use of the various resources. Taking away the **superstructure** the initiatives would collapse at this point of time. Taking away the “state” projects would collapse – private investors did avoid to invest into the “social”.

Graham Gibson and Roelvink are **totally right when they state that the economy will take diverse forms depending on the historical and geographical context**. The creation of “ethical practices of community” as they put it, a **certain pattern of solidarity**– that we have seen in both examples in *Montemor o novo*.

But – and this is a big question mark - isn't that a **very idealistic, maybe naïve way** to focus on governance – **to concentrate on the actors**? We heard not so much about the structural embeddedness / as **Joachim Becker named power relations**. Novy pointed at the **false dualism of bottom up and Top down analysis**. I would like to see much more research on the **question which local people are involved in this sort of democratization process** . An interesting attempt to structure the interplay of the various levels has been the time/action frame presented by **Andrea Binder showing how the process went on**. Further the question of **legimization** remains. As long as S.I projects remain a **nicely woven outsourcing of public decision making** (see Montemor) we should be careful about our interpretations . So I miss a lot of real geographically bounded in depth studies of Social Innovation – exploring on which **geographical levels which actors become relevant** and who got an interest in the **sustainability of projects**. The analysis of multi-level governance – that is where we have to look for answers on the question what allows territorially bounded social innovation. But then we would need a **shared methodology** in order to compare different places. Or may we compare the Philippines with Berlin? So, this is why I think a geographical perspective is helpful for the concept. **Place matters because it links the** various elements of multi-level governance.

Last point: We do not need evaluations of NGOs or other Socially innovative strategies – we need scientific, more systematic research. Evaluation mostly focus on the results, less on processes. We need **to know about the power play between** different levels macro and micro, individual and collective. We got to **analyze the grounds** on which Social Innovation could be delivered – to use Franks words, constructing a **meta-theoretical framework**. The focus **should be on practices**, on the spatial reproduction of social organization and innovation.