

Introductory remarks to a discourse on social innovation SLIDE 2

What are we doing in Katarisis ? We are looking at initiatives which are innovative and creative

in terms of new governance relationships and
in terms of response to otherwise unsatisfied and/or
unrecognised/unrevealed needs, at the individual and collective level.

The link with exclusion is evident: these initiatives are responses to exclusionary dynamics of the contemporary economy and polity.

As we take an epistemological approach in order to develop a “shared language” on social innovation, it is essential to revisit some theoretical to clarify our conceptual background. In other words we need to make a few steps backwards in order to move forward.

SLIDE 3 To develop a discourse on social innovation it is necessary to revisit/analyse the role of these initiatives and their statute vis a vis meta-concepts or discourse about the economy, polity and society.

SLIDE 4 In my discourse about the economy the concept of social innovation is tied with the rediscovery of principles of solidarity and reciprocity. In this framework it is taken as a point of departure a substantive definition of the economy, following Polanyi and Mauss, in contrast with the hegemonic reading of the economy which has reduced it to the market economy.

In the substantive definition of the economy a plurality of principles are at work in the production system, i.e. market, redistribution and reciprocity principles. Not only do we take the market as a social construction (markets are not simply embedded in social relations, they *are* social relations), but we assume that redistribution and reciprocity principles have been always present, and that they are able to maintain their function, even though their relative weight and forms vary. Up to the last few decades these principles were considered residual and made almost invisible. We contribute now to making them more visible by analysing local initiatives in which a mix of these principles are at work.

We assume that the economy is plural, that it is made up through the working of these different principles. It is precisely the mix, the combination of these principles in these initiatives that constitutes the innovative features which are of interest here.

SLIDE 5 This view contrasts with a neo-classical economic view of such initiatives, which sees them as a residual category, constituted by responses providing individual services that the market fails to deliver and collective services that the State fails to provide. This view posits three different and separate entities: the market and the state are the pillars of society and the non-profit organizations are a complement. Following this approach, market and state constitute the normal way for the circulation of goods and services, and the Third sector is called to intervene when the State fails (or is called to function as a hybrid of the two)

It should be remembered that this approach is first of all contradicted by history, at least in Europe, where social economy initiatives pre-existed the welfare State; associations were the first line of defence of society, long before the State intervention.

By taking a pluralist view of the economy, as the locus where these three principles are at work we should be able to see the innovative character of the socially creative initiative at the intersection of these three principles, i.e. a project, a programme is socially innovative insofar as it combines these three principles. **SLIDE 6**

For example, we consider the Olinda initiative a socially innovative project because it combines the three principles: i.e. sell services in the market (restaurant and bar, hostel, cultural activities), gets grants from the state, and is able to mobilize volunteers.

But in order to understand what brings about social innovation we have to call upon a meta-concept of polity and the discourse of citizenship. **SLIDE 7**

Let us go back to the idea that social economy initiatives have a long tradition before State intervention. Social economy initiatives have been and still are essentially activities based on the opposition to the diffusion of the market principle in all spheres of life. The market principle as asocial.

This brings us to pay attention to the historical role of representative democracy in defining rules of redistribution and the progressive recognition of citizenship rights. In turn, this progressive recognition of individual rights made possible the development of solidarity and reciprocity among citizens who are at least formally equal and free.

This accounts for the persistence and redefinition of principles of redistribution and reciprocity in the integration mechanisms of European societies.

This accounts also for the necessary link of these principles with the political dimension, at the individual and collective levels. **SLIDE 8**

At the individual level, the recognition of individual rights brings the idea of citizens who are not subjects but active participants in society. The participation in the public sphere implies at the individual level issues of empowerment and recognition.

In this context we are bound to inscribe social innovation in a larger vision of development, human and local. This vision of development is in sharp contrast with the one based on economic growth and technological innovation and see a specific role of artistic expression and culture, both as way of individual expression and empowerment (self-esteem, trust, identity, ect.) and as communicative tools for collective representation and local identity. “To be a person is to be creative”. “Access to culture as a citizens right”

SLIDE 9 At the collective level, citizens associate among themselves in order to mobilize resources, to produce shared visions and make these visions public and visible. When their action is recognized the association participates in the definition of policies, thus legitimizing the political and administrative sphere. In this case we speak of institutionalisation of these practises or participation in governance structures.

SLIDE 10 *Within this discourse* social innovation is essentially foreign to the practices of the informal economy insofar as individual rights are not fully recognized there.

Within this discourse I will argue that social innovation is also not necessarily present in the non-profit sector where is often at work a principle of reciprocity which is paternalist as it assumes a asimmetric, hierarchic relationship among actors. In many ways the “charity” principle implies subjects not citizens and presents a democratic deficit.

We consider socially creative initiatives those in which citizens are

1. recognized as bearers of citizens rights and thus participating in a process of empowerment which is intended to make them able participate on an equal position,
2. involved in the management of the initiative, at least to a certain extent, and

3. through their associative forms –associations, cooperatives, foundations -- they construct their needs as visible and legitimate, and negotiate with the government norms and rules of their action.

Olinda is concerned with the empowerment of its associates, they participate in the definition of projects, and there is a constant negotiation with the government at various level.

Within this discourse Social innovation may be implicated in processes of reciprocal strengthening of civic society and State democratization.

- On one hand, society is civilized by the association of citizens in the pursuit of equal rights for all. The civilising effect of associations is potentially guaranteed only in the framework of citizenship rights. Often we see that citizens associate to define claims against others and not to promote rights for all. The dark side of civic society.
- On the other hand, the State is made more democratic by recognizing and responding to a plurality of demands.

SLIDES 11 Finally, the meta discourse of society and the role of social innovation in it. Here we take as a point of departure the progressive process of individualisation, autonomisation and reflexivity which brings about what has been called the society of individuals [Elias]. Different from ms Thatcher's view.

Within this discourse social innovation comes from the ever increasing need of individuals to find ways to define their individual and collective identity, even if these identities are always fragile and temporary and need to be constantly renegotiated in competing and differentiated systems of values, symbols and representations.

In this meta-concept of society conflicts are a matters of identities and values. We talk of “politics of recognition” when we look at conflicts over the definition of who should be recognized as a legitimate member of society and thus bearer of rights. We talk of “politics of care” when the definition of what is worth of our care, of what is our responsibility is the matters of conflict.

We face societies characterized by high levels of forces undermining social cohesion and environmental sustainability. In social terms this posits questions such as “how much inequality and exclusion can a society tolerate?”, while we know already that our model of development is unsustainable for the environment.

How can society be kept together ?

Durkheim's concept of solidarity is not applicable anymore.

In this framework it is possible to envisage two different models of society which refer to two different concepts of solidarity:

- a model of society in which self-regulatory mechanisms emerge within the market economy. Private companies, which increase their legitimation as the only creators of wealth, take responsibility for social and ecological issues. Private companies internalize their own externalities:
 - they create poverty, they give money to foundations which take care of it. Social responsibility of companies
 - they pollute, they create pollution rights which are sold and bought
 - State and associative forms are confined to the area of social assistance and take a residual role.
 - Ethics defined in the economic sphere
 - **A new version of philanthropic solidarity**
- a model of society derived from a plural approach to the economy. An economy where market, redistribution and reciprocity function as coordinating mechanisms. In this model of society the economy is a means to achieve objectives defined and agreed upon in the political sphere, or in other words where the market is socialized by rules and regulations which are democratically decided.
 - Ethics defined in the political sphere
 - **A democratic version of solidarity**

In this remarks I have tried to present a common ground for our analysis of social innovation and socially creative strategies. I do not mean that we, as social scientists within KATARSIS, pursue the creation of a paradigmatic community of 'social innovation'. As pointed out before, it is our goal to develop a shared language for addressing social innovation and to examine different roles scientists (can) have in different visions of what are socially innovative dynamics and strategies. In doing this we welcome all different scientific discourses and theoretical approaches.