

**WP4: Social Innovation**  
**Friday, 1 February 2008**  
**University of Lisbon**

**Present:** Serena Vicari (Chair), Frank Moulaert, Jean Hillier, Diana MacCallum, Dimitra Siatitsa, Molly Scott-Cato, Dan Strevens, Laurent Fraise, Maria Mantouvalou, Dina Vaiou, Juan-Luis Klein, Denis Harisson, John Andersen, Flavia Martinelli, Pasquale De Muro, Montserrat Pareja Eastaway, Andy Pike, Maria José Aurindo, Isabel André, Abdelillah Hamdouch, Felicitas Hillman, Andreia Lemaître, John Pløger, Patricia Rego, Helga Leitner, Thomas Mirbach, Karin Schmalriede, Jim Segers, Haris Konstantatos, Andreas Novy, Andrea Binder-Zehetner, Bas Tierolf, Joachim Becker, Jiří Winkler, Julie Graham, Katherine Gibson, Chiara Tornaghi, Marianna d'Ovidio, Steen Larsen, Helle Storm, Marisol Garcia, Luis André Carmo, Alexandre Abreu, Ana Estevens, Dimistris Leoudis, Pere Picorelli, Marc Pradel, Santiago Eizaguirre

**Purpose:**

The purpose of WP4 is to come to grips with different scientific approaches to social innovation, past and present. How did scientists – especially in social science – come to use the concept of social innovation and related concepts? Are their approaches epistemologically underpinned? Were they interested in offering solutions to practical human problems? Can we identify a diversity of routes leading to – and from! – social innovation research? How can we place the approaches used to social innovation within the society and the community in which they have worked (this raises questions about the interaction between culture, ideology, science practice and social innovation research)?

In order to answer these questions, we start from the wide array of socially creative strategies analysed in previous and current research projects, but also from the theories and philosophies that underpinned or accompanied these practices. We try to discover the relations between different factors and dynamics of social innovation, with particular focus on how dynamics of social exclusion are linked with innovative responses to exclusionary processes, and to identify a diversity of types of social innovation which could be helpful to design and analyse social innovation in the future.

WP4 will be the basis of continued work on WP5, Methodology, which will be the theme of the workshop in Greece in June 2008.

**Program:**

- 930    Introductory remarks to a discourse on social innovation (Serena Vicari)  
      See presentation [here](#) and accompanying notes [here](#).
- 1000    Sociology of knowledge approaches to social innovation analysis (Frank Moulaert) [Frank is not making his text available in its present form]
- 1030    Socially creative thinking: how experimental thinking creates other worlds (Julie Katherine Gibson-Graham)  
      See presentation [here](#).

1100 *Coffee break*

- 1130 Notes for a Deleuzean-based theory of social innovation (towards a new sociology of knowledge?) (Jean Hillier)  
See presentation [here](#).

1200 *Discussants:*

- [A geographical perspective](#) (Felicitas Hillman)
- A political economy perspective on the state (Joachim Becker)
- [City Mine\(d\)](#) (Jim Segers) See illustrations [here](#).
- [Social innovation, education and training](#) (John Andersen)
- [The relationship between sustainability and social innovation](#) (Dan Strevens)

1250 General Discussion

The main points developed in the general discussion were:

- Specific problematic concepts
  - o ‘Sustainability’ – Molly claimed that the term has been corrupted from its original good intentions, now used to support economic development.
  - o ‘Informal’ – in response to Serena’s paper, Dina suggested that the informal economy should not be seen as not recognising individual rights but as characteristic of a different regime of accumulation. It is a crucial element of societies/economies across the EU, and perhaps we need a different way of talking about it, one that doesn’t separate it from the formal.
  - o ‘Social inclusion/exclusion’ – Andreas suggested social innovation theory could provide an exciting way forward from the tension inherent in these terms, that is, being part of vs. going beyond consumer society.
- How useful are these concepts? How can they be applied in practical situations?
  - o Theory should help us to understand the world better, and hopefully lead to improved research methods, grounded policy recommendations and better practices.
  - o Jean promoted the idea that theory should begin with practice and with practical concerns – common sense written down?
  - o However, to be widely useful it needs to be presented in accessible language and forms!
- The value of presenting different (meta)theories
  - o We need strong theory in order to understand new phenomena, but a universal theory of everything is not possible.
  - o This, however, is not what meta-theory is about, it is about the scientific validity of theories, or about the ‘hosting’ of partial theories and scientific explanations within a broader theoretical structure – usually based on a shared ontology, a number of key concepts and explanatory categories. Depending on the epistemological stances, this validity or structure will vary.
  - o Important to understand theoretical traditions, but also to leave room for creative reworking of theories.

- Must focus on institutions and the constraints they create (NB varieties of capitalism framework → varieties of welfare regimes → variety of social innovation models...)
  - Need to focus on the role and constitution of agents – who is the ‘we’ who intervenes. The involvement of practitioners is important to make sure that theoretical argument is not distanced from the actual behaviour of social actors and the institutional context in which they act.
  - How to transfer discourses and concepts across different contexts?
  - Is the purpose of the KATARSIS project to refine traditional theories, or to develop new directions?
- Integration of different theories: can these different perspectives be brought together? Or will they need to agree to disagree?
- It’s fascinating to listen to different perspectives, but should it end there? Are these perspectives incompatible, or can they complement each other? There needs to be more time devoted to conversation between the different perspectives.
  - Helga’s suggestion: Structural realism is strong on institutions, but could be complemented by other approaches which develop new imaginaries on economy and organisation (such as JKGG’s work). John P: theoretical diversity/conflict should be an inspiration to new imaginaries and ways of working.
  - Joachim: But new imaginaries come from political action, not just academic debate.
  - Integrating different perspectives requires us as scientists to be open minded about our roles and assumptions.
- Methodological questions and the value of different kinds of knowledge – academic and practice-based
- We need to value more different ways of knowing, such as intuition, desire, affect and trust. We also need to find better ways to share these ways of knowing, and have the courage to stand by our convictions.
  - The crucial importance of experience – how do we get at what people *live* with respect to governance etc? How do we create a real dialogue between experience-based and observation-based knowledge?
  - There is also a difficult question about how to decide whether theory should be privileged over other perspectives. (NB Deleuze sees problems as creative opportunities – might this amount to playing down real problems?)
  - Ethical and practical tensions around theory and its use in social engineering.
  - The term ‘users’ is unhelpful – we are all users of knowledge, and we are all actors in the world.
  - ‘Innovation’ should apply to the way we do our scientific work, as well. The challenge is to recognise path dependency in theory, to draw on the ‘good’ historical theory, but also to be creative.
  - High value placed on appreciative inquiry and participatory action research.
  - Agreement on the need for new approaches to communication across disciplinary, transdisciplinary and institutional boundaries.