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Social Innovation

**A scientific reflection on the
role of theory**

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Purpose of the paper

- Understanding the roles of SI theory...
- ... in SI analysis and practice...
- ... by taking on board a SOK perspective...
- ... to arrive at some conclusions about the future status of theory and meta-theoretical structures in SI analysis and action

Challenges for social innovation: and: what is expected from (meta) theory?

- Combating exclusion / fostering inclusion through socially creative strategies and processes...
- In which polis? Universe, world, nation, region, locality, community
- Social relations: micro-, macro-, concrete? Abstract? (cf. debate in relational geography)
- Path dependency and structure
- Role of agency and organization
- Role of leadership
- Role of images, designs, scenario's, strategies

WHAT DOES THEORY
HAVE TO SAY?

What is social innovation?

A few definitions...

- SINGOCOM (ALMOLIN, 2005: Moulaert et al. 1990):
 - Social innovation is path dependent and contextual. It refers to those changes in agendas, agency and institutions that lead to a better inclusion of excluded groups and individuals into various spheres of society at various spatial scales. Social innovation is very strongly a matter of process innovation, i.e. changes in the dynamics of social relations, including power relations.
 - ... as social innovation is about social inclusion, it is also about countering or overcoming conservative forces that are eager to strengthen or preserve social exclusion situations.
 - social innovation therefore explicitly refers to an ethical position of social justice. The latter is of course susceptible to a variety of interpretations and will in practice often be the outcome of social construction.

A few definitions (2)

- For Deleuze (JH synthesis), social innovation takes place through windows of opportunity for social creativity (ie along lines of flight) which emerge as challenges to institutional legitimacy. Innovation often emerges from conflict. Opportunity spaces often are at micro-levels which make possible creative strategies at macro-levels.
- Michael Mumford: “... the generation and implementation of new ideas about social relationships and social organization.” (2002, p. 253)
- Chambon, David et Devevey: “des innovations sociales”... “des pratiques visant plus ou moins directement à permettre à un individu - ou à un groupe d’individus - de prendre en charge un besoin social - ou un ensemble de besoins - n’ayant pas trouvé de réponses satisfaisantes par ailleurs” (198, p. 8)

SI: its politico-ideological significance (1)

- A clear mobilising power in reaction to economic and technologist interpretations and applications of innovation...**analysis matters! Meta-theoretical structure matters?**
- ... and in reaction to privatization discourse and practice - **ideology/ counter ideology matter!**
- Spontaneous mobilization, uprising, etc. against factors or forces of immediate alienation and exploitation (e.g. food riots, squatting, ...) - **needs matter!**

Its politico-ideological significance (2)

- Reacting against (oppressive) mainstream institutionalization and legitimization that confirm the power of already empowered agents and organizations (relate to world food crisis) - **mobilization matters!**
- Imagineering, mapping, designing, constructing (the views of) the future, the alternative - **designing socially creative futures and strategies, their agents and delivery systems (“équipements”?) matters!**

An epistemological challenge

- “What to analyse and how to analyse it?”
Legimitising our knowledge production system?
- Unveiling and substituting the undesirable dominating paradigm (incoherent with emancipatory social innovation) - The need for an alternative metatheoretical structure. P.M.
- The complexity of social innovation analysis.
- A sociology of knowledge approach: three main issues
- Can a metatheoretical structure guide the differences in ontology and epistemological stances between emancipatory theories? Can it make the bridge with SOK?

The complexity of/in social innovation analysis

- ❑ Social innovation is about changing the world: Which world? Change what in that world? How to change it?
- ❑ Ontology and ontogenesis - The world as it is, the world to be, the desired world, or to be made ...
“Maakbaarheid” or “Make-ability”: the role of path dependency, combining new assets and relations, ...?
- ❑ Relational complexity: past, present, future
- ❑ Transdisciplinarity: “desired” complexity?
- ❑ Can an ‘open’ meta-theoretical structure ‘help’ to place complexity? (‘too complex’ often heard as one of the main orthodox criticisms of heterodox analysis)

A sociology of knowledge (SOK) approach: three main issues

1. Sociology of knowledge approach would allow to reconstruct the socio-political context, the discourse, etc. in which social innovation initiatives, processes, reflections (philosophy, theory, analysis) have developed.
2. Such an approach allows to reconstruct the views of the world of the scientists and scientific communities supporting the social innovation concepts and theories.
3. It studies the roles of the scientists and of science in social innovation within particular sociopolitical structures and conjunctures:
 - as scientists analysing, designing and recommending social innovation
 - in other, non-scientific roles

Bringing a SOK perspective to theory: role of metatheoretical structure

- ❑ Avoid the 'never ending story trap'
- ❑ Avoid unnecessary 'conflicts' between emancipatory social innovation theories
- ❑ An open system architecture to host theories?
- ❑ A structural realist cum cultural realist perspective?

The role of theory in social innovation analysis and strategy-making

- Already during the IAD and SINGOCOM projects, and from the beginning of KATARSIS, we have looked at a variety of theories analysing and designing social innovation processes, strategies, agendas.
- We have addressed these theories as to their 'finalité': to what purpose were they developed? And according to which organizational and procedural dynamics?

The role of theory in social innovation analysis 2

- Insufficient attention was given to:
 - the theoretical and philosophical traditions to which they belonged - if any!
 - Or/and: the “problématique” they were addressing
 - ... socio-political dynamics in which the scientific debate/contribution takes place
 - ... and, more precisely, the links with collective action within society, communities

The role of theory 3

- Solution: embed existing theory in its own societal dynamics (an “open” SOK approach)
- Solution: connect ‘new’ theory/theorising to contemporary challenges, philosophical debates, change movements, while keeping an open eye on similar theory building process in the past

What should we look at when “hosting” social innovation theory?

- Combining SOK dimensions with theoretical dimensions (Tableau 6.2 of my virtual Lisbon paper)
- Building in SOK “windows” into dimensions of social innovation table
- We did this for two theories:
IAD/ALMOLIN and Deleuzean social innovation theory

Dimensions of social innovation ...

SOK aspects IAD

Dimensions of social innovation

<i>Process aspects</i>	<i>Finalité de l'initiative</i>	<i>Organizational change linked to the initiative</i>	<i>Role of design of social innovation</i>	<i>Role of path-dependency and structural constraints</i>	<i>How to overcome tensions between Normativity-Reality</i>
Dialectics of exclusion, alienation and SIS/SCS	Satisfaction of human needs	Transformation of the relations of governance Role of collective management (self management, etc)	Collective action involves public debate, scenario building	Significant impact of the historical reproduction of social, economic and institutional capital	Empowerment includes dialogue between analysis and imagining the future Through multi-scale governance and the creation of cooperative networks between agents of the community

SOK dimensions

<i>Metastructure/ Metatheory</i>	<i>Sociocultural epochs: dominant philosophies, political regimes (with foci on particular scientific themes)</i>	<i>Links to Dominants in scientific epistemology & Addressed problematic</i>	<i>Scientific communities to which researchers belong</i>	<i>Links with collective action</i>	<i>Role of scientific antecedents (continuity, antitheses, syntheses)</i>
Structural realism: structures are objects and agents in analysis (along with institutions and agents)	Eighties: rise of administrative decentralisation, local social movements focused on quality of living, sustainable development, improvement of neighbourhoods in decline	Disavowal of theories (and ideologies) arguing the beneficial impact of globalization, deregulation of the economy and flexibilisation of the labour market. Reinventing local development in deprived areas from a SI perspective	Reflection groups in urban sociology, social economy/economics, political science, urban and rural anthropology. Important role reserved to participative and action research	Scientists involved in social movements, project groups. Experts for or participants in local partnerships	Continuity: some links with the theories of social innovation in 1960s. Antithetic to unilateral local development/growth theories Synthesis: combining elements from endogenous development and social innovation theory

Dimensions of social innovation ...

SOK aspects Deleuzean-based theory

Dimensions of social innovation

<i>Process aspects</i>	<i>Finality of initiative</i>	<i>Organizational change linked to the initiative</i>	<i>Role of design of social innovation</i>	<i>Role of path-dependency and structural constraints</i>	<i>How to overcome tensions between normativity-reality</i>
Relational approach Š collaborative, contingent, complex connectivities (and disconnectivities). Speculation and experimentation.	Justice, freedom, pragmatism	Transformation of relations of governance. Collective, associational management, recognising conflict. (see Hardt and Negri Š <i>Multitude</i>)	Tracing and mapping. Participatory inclusion, appreciative enquiry, ABDC, foresighting. Experimentation.	The past and structural constraints are important, but not primordial. Bifurcations Š trajectories possible; lines of flight.	Governance agencies facilitate redistribution of public resources via open-ended fluid networks; smooth space, deregulated space. Creative experimentation.

SOK dimensions

<i>Metatheoretical structure</i>	<i>Socio cultural epochs: dominant philosophies, political regimes (with foci on particular scientific themes)</i>	<i>Links to Dominants in scientific epistemology Š Addressed problematic</i>	<i>Scientific communities to which researchers belong</i>	<i>Links with collective action</i>	<i>Role of scientific antecedents (continuity, antitheses, syntheses)</i>
Poststructuralism: a tension between structure and lack of structure. Importance of relative strength of force relations between elements in complex, strategic situations.	Early 20 th Century Š Bergson, James, Dewey Š pragmatist philosophy; Einstein, Poincar Š relativity + non-linearity. Now! Social movements. Complexity.	Ontological monism essentialising either structure or agency. Ontological dualism separating structure + agency. Deleuze offers radical contingency of structures and agents. Social relations are structurally incomplete and agents internally lacking (Glynos and Howarth, 2008) possibilising creative experimentation.	Political science, philosophy, geography, anthropology, sociology, education, cultural studies.	Authors were and are often activists Š Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, Rortledge et al.	Early 20 th Century pragmatism. Antithesis Š highly structuralist theories and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis. Synthesis Š combining elements of pragmatism, physics, psychoanalysis.

Building the bridges between SOK and theory: conclusions from 'cross-tabling'

■ Theory reflects the features of megatheoretical structures, but only implicitly. Mega theoretical framework can explicitate some features

- SOK contextualises:
- scientific communities
 - Scientists
 - Problematics and their factors
 - Theories (or their absence)
 - SOK cum theory building ==> new methodological avenues

Consequences for the (future) role of theory in social innovation research

- ▣ Embedded theory
- ▣ Theory of the past, theory of the future
- ▣ SOK

Consequences for the future role of SOK in social innovation analysis

- Providing a manual for reading the making of theory in its past context, but for checking its feasibility today
- Providing a metatheoretical structure used to feature ASID of society, capable of hosting new theories ...
- ... thus speaking to the various “grand” challenges of society which SI theory and practice should address

Illustration: ALMOLIN

Figure 2 Dynamics of social exclusion/inclusion and social innovation

