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Spaces of social innovation

Frank Moulaert and Abid Mehmood

Introduction

The concept of ‘social innovation’ has gained prominence in scientific research, public debate, collective action and public policy (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2007). In the scientific world, the concept has been used for a long time, but it regained momentum over the last twenty years. Its contemporary applications range from the nature and functions of social innovation in countering mainstream perceptions of technological and organizational innovation, to the innovative behaviour of social, economic and political agents in socially innovative initiatives (Klein and Harrisson, 2007). Thus, it broadens the explanations of human progress and development from economic and technological only to social and socio-cultural ones (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2008).

This chapter provides an overview of different approaches to social innovation that have been developed in a diversity of disciplines in social science for the last twenty years approximately, with a particular focus on the quite recent discussions on the spatiality of social innovation. It dwells on the question if the introduction of social innovation principles in different sectors of economy and society leads to a wider acceptance of the working modalities of the capitalist economy or, instead, opens new opportunities for human development. The next section looks at the dangers of social innovation becoming a fashion or decorum for local, regional and international development to conceal (un) social practice, thus stripping it from its core policy and scientific message. Section III then highlights various definitions and perspectives on social innovation especially in terms of social transformation, social economy and exclusion. Subsequently, the analytical dimensions of social innovation concepts and theories that are relevant for the study of the spatiality of social innovation initiatives and processes are presented. In the penultimate section, two types of ‘spaces of social innovation’ are presented and analysed: places that pursue local development through integrated area development (IAD) and spatial networks of social innovation initiatives. The conclusion points at possible directions for future research on spaces of social innovation.

Social innovation, fad or robust analytical concept?

Since the end of the revolutionary 1960s in the US and Europe, the term social innovation
has received growing interest from academic and policy circles, with a proliferation of varying interpretations as a consequence. The very loose usage of the term generates a risk that it would begin to lead a life as a fashion and no longer reflect its scientific contents and its relationships with political reality and ideological debates. What happens when scientific themes become fashionable is that the various social and economic sectors use them in different meanings, thus spreading substantial ambiguity. One such example is its use in business administration through Corporate Social Responsibility (Moulaert, 2009: 11) which often turns up as an attempt at improving the image of capitalism instead of an ethically concerned initiative to humanize business activities. Similar examples can be observed in the cases of more environmentally concerned actions such as green economy, green banking and green New Deals as forms of green Keynesianism, as in the United Nation's Environmental Program's drive for a global green new deal (UNEP, 2009). Although this programme is in essence ethically honourable, without a clear understanding of its socially innovative content, a bias towards the logic of the global market economy remains tempting. In addition, there is a danger that social innovation is used as a cheap active welfare policy, fitting the World Bank’s poverty relief agenda, which in some cases ends up in paying half a decent welfare income to those unemployed who have become active (Mestrum, 2005, ch. 2) instead of capacitating and empowering people to take their destiny in their own hands, as capability theorists (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum, 2001) and social innovation advocates (Kunnen, 2010; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Moulaert et al., 2000) argue. Similar directions of fashionable word use can be observed in the European Union’s views of future territorial cohesion policy, for example (Faludi, 2007). As Servillo (2007) argues the diversity of views of territorial cohesion objectives across policy agendas and levels is so wide that the term itself is completely hollowed out to a near slogan status.

But at the same time there is relevant optimism that offers arguments in favour of scientific work built on the concept of social innovation, or socio-political movements pursuing social innovation initiatives. Social innovation has shown its power as a challenger to one-sided interpretations of the role of technological innovation in business and economics (Hamdouch and Moulaert, 2006). Social innovation as a socio-political mobilizing theme has become apparent from the studies carried out under the banner of the European Commission’s Framework Programmes in the SINGOCOM and KATARSIS projects for various neighbourhoods and cities in Europe and North America (MacCallum et al., 2009). Elsewhere, the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) at Stanford University and Centre de recherche sur l’innovation sociale (CRISES) in Montreal are engaged in interesting work on social innovation research (Powell and Steinberg, 2006; Klein and Harrisson, 2007). The variety of perceptions and applications of the term in both of these research centres is striking but interesting. CSI remains more concerned with mainstream acceptance of the term connecting it with productivity and how workers within a corporation can be made to collaborate by promoting different types of social innovation in corporate business culture, social interaction and work organization. But at the same time CSI also contributes to put sustainability on the corporate agenda, to improve the working of the social economy, in collaboration with social economy agents and providing instruments to improve the management of NGOs to work towards social efficiency, etc. In this way CSI has certainly contributed to a deeper ethical foundation to business practice and networking. CRISES in Montreal, then, provides a more socially innovative focus on the concept of economy, society and urban revitalization. It puts a particular stress on the networks of public-private agents as a regional system of social innovation (Klein and Harrisson, 2007; Lévesque and Mendell, 1999). CRISES’ approach is genuinely concerned about the
development of the local and regional communities which it analyses and works with especially in Canada and Latin-America. We could indeed argue that its researchers have given a more tangible content to the ‘humane’ dimension of spatial development by stressing the role of participation, governance and multi-partnerships in setting and implementing development agendas (MacCallum, 2008; Agger and Löfgren, 2008; Mandarano, 2009).

The fulfillment of the market dream which many neoliberal ideologists, but also market-economy practitioners pamper ultimately involves universal commodification, i.e. allocation of all use-values through the market’s price mechanisms. But from the analyses we have looked at, we have learned that the further removed from the logic of the capitalist market, the better the nature of social innovation is analysed and implemented in authentic terms of human development in which original human values of solidarity and shared creativity form the base-source. This is, for example, the case in ‘Spaces of Social Economy’ (Amin et al., 1999) or the Alternative Economic Strategy Network (Cumbers and Whittam, 2007). Indeed the tendency towards ‘a commodified world’ puts a heavy burden on social relations geared towards solidarity, reciprocity and cooperation, and leads to an uncertain future for a plural economy (Williams, 2005).

This does not mean however that more mainstream research or management learning centres (such as CSI) and networks are just there to cover up the evils of the corporate world by veiling them with an image of CSR. In fact CSI has significantly contributed to make sustainability and social innovation tangible in business development plans and tractable in actual corporate practice, thus contributing in their own way to economic plurality through ongoing research and regular publications.

**Defining social innovation**

With the growing research and literature on social innovation in various languages and within different perspectives it is increasingly complex to arrive at a fixed contemporary definition of the term. The SINGOCOM project (2001–2004) funded by European Commission FP-5 programme, developed an Alternative Model of Local Innovation (ALMOLIN) that embraced the following definition of social innovation:

> 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.

It further added that:

> 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.

According to this definition social innovation cannot be considered as an *ad hoc* and overnight problem-solution approach to community issues. For it requires connecting to ongoing social relations within the concerned communities and the carefully negotiated and co-produced socially creative strategies to overcome crisis situations. Social innovation to be effective to the development of a community should therefore be path-dependent, spatially embedded and socially re(produced). We will return to this in sections iv and v.

Looking at earlier works on social innovation we find that as far back as the eighteenth
century, Benjamin Franklin evoked social innovation in proposing minor modifications within the social organization of communities in Philadelphia (as analysed by Mumford, 2002); and in 1893, Emile Durkheim highlighted the importance of social regulation in the development of the division of labour which accompanies technical change (Durkheim, 1893). Technical change itself can only be understood within the framework of an innovation or renovation of the social order to which it is relevant (Weber, 1968 [1921]). At the start of the twentieth century, Max Weber examined the relationship between social order and innovation, a theme which was revisited by French philosophers and social scientists in the 1960s (Chambon et al., 1982). Among other things, Weber affirmed that changes in living conditions are not the only determinants of social change. Individuals who introduce a behaviour variant, often initially considered deviant, can exert a decisive influence; if the new behaviour spreads and develops, it can become established social usage (Weber, 1968 [1921]). In the 1930s, Joseph Schumpeter considered social innovation as structural change in the organization of society, or within the organizational forms of enterprise or business (1947). Schumpeter’s theory of innovation went far beyond the usual economic logic, and appealed to an ensemble of sociologies (cultural, artistic, economic, political, and so on), which he sought to integrate into a comprehensive social theory that would allow the analysis of both development and innovation (Schumpeter, 1932; Becker and Knudsen, 2005).

Finally, in the 1970s, the French intellectuals of the ‘Temps des Cerises’ organized a debate of wide social and political significance on the transformation of society, and on the role of the revolts by students, intellectuals and workers. A major part of the debate was echoed in the columns of the journal Autrement, with contributions from such prominent figures as Pierre Rosanvallon, Jacques Fournier and Jacques Attali. In their book on social innovation, Chambon, David and Devevey (1982) built on most of the issues highlighted in this debate. According to these authors:

Socially innovative [...] practices are more or less directly aimed at allowing an individual – or a group of individuals – to deal with a social need – or a set of needs – that could not be satisfied from other means.

(Chambon et al., 1982: p 8, our translation from the original text)

This definition is very general and does not really stress on the process dynamics of the problem. However, this short book in the series Que sais-je? remains the most complete ‘open’ synthesis on the subject of social innovation to this day. In brief, the authors examine the relationship between social innovation and the pressures bound up within societal changes, and show how the mechanisms of crisis and recovery both provoke and accelerate social innovation. Another link established by Chambon et al. concerns social needs and the needs of the individual, individually or collectively revealed. In practice, social innovation signifies satisfaction of specific needs thanks to collective initiative, which is not synonymous with state intervention. According to Chambon et al., in effect the state can act, at one and the same time, as a barrier to social innovation and as an arena of social interaction provoking social innovation from within the spheres of state or market. Finally, these authors stress that social innovation can occur in different communities and at various spatial scales, but is conditional on processes of consciousness raising, mobilization and learning. Many other definitions of social innovation are available in the literature. It is not our concern to provide an exhaustive overview, but to reveal those analytical dimensions that will allow us to understand the agency and structure-process dimensions of social innovation as well as their spatiality. This is what we will do in the next section.
Social innovation: intrinsically social

The key to understanding social innovation is its intrinsically social nature. In the same way as technological innovation cannot be understood outside the logic of techniques (e.g. technology can be defined in different ways, ranging from ‘socially neutral’ to socially embedded explanations), social innovation cannot be apprehended outside the dynamics of society and its different components. Broadly speaking we can address this societal character of social innovation from two perspectives: its politico-ideological significance as a driving force in society; and the way different social sciences have addressed this societal character. Later in this section we will draw some analytical lessons from these societal dynamics, on how to combine ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ perspectives and what they mean for the analysis of the spatiality of social innovation. We will do so while trying to avoid the maelstrom of debates on the spatiality of social reproduction (scalar geography, politics of scale, relational geography, political ecology) which are all relevant to the discussion on the spatial character of SI as agency and process but bypass the ambition of this short chapter.

Politico-ideological significance

We experience the politico-ideological significance of social innovation by being citizens, members of movements or just by being conscious and reflective. A clear mobilizing power that social innovation offers as a concept and as an issue for public debate is in its reaction to the economistic and technologist interpretations of innovation. Similarly, it offers an intellectual, ideological and political reaction to privatization discourse and practice. It also holds the potential to fill the gap between ‘fall of public man’ (Sennett, 1977) on the one hand, and the rise of the communities of interest on the other hand, especially those under the nationalist and self-interest agendas. The latter view of public life has been severely criticized by several progressive authors (e.g. Raes, 1997). Filling this gap then means the building of communities from the social innovation point of view which can be instrumental to rebuild both the public sphere and the neutral state that entitles all members of the different communities to the same basic rights. The conception of community as the enabler of citizenship rights (Silverman, 2004) advocates a broadening of the notion of citizenship by the inclusion of further rights, while at the same time recognizing the responsibilities of citizens within their communities and society (Moulaert, 2010). In this vein, social innovation can also be considered as guaranteeing basic rights to avoid or overcome social and economic alienation, exclusion, deprivation, and poverty both in the material and ethical sense. MacCallum et al. (2009) provide a number of examples of how people can join hands in very extreme situations of deprivation to work their way out collectively. In today’s policy arena, the global institutions do refer to many such experiences but they do not draw the conclusions that they would be expected to draw from such cases. They prefer to stick to the ‘micocosmos’ the ‘good practice communities’, in this way not recognizing the general demands for the basic rights that are voiced in and across most communities. They do not in fact recognize the hopes, fears and clashes of communities as working grounds for general citizenship rights building under the auspices of a neutral state.

Finally, there is the politico-ideological significance in terms of ‘micro’ ethics which very often have a community basis. The Slow-food movement is a good example. It grew from discontent about fast-food production and provision, as a threat to the high-quality food provided by local agriculture, food stores and restaurants, especially but not exclusively in smaller cities (Knox and Mayer, 2008). From a political point of view, ‘micro
ethics’ which are in support of friendly com-
munication and tangible expression of soli-
darity are at the heart of debates, practices, shari-
ing experiences and feelings in the work-
place, the community house, the public
squares and bars; from the outside they may ap-
pear unimportant, but in fact they are vital for
social interaction and know-how build-
ing. People in their very small microcosm
react to ‘fast society’ in all its aspects such as
the new management practices (bureaucratic
taylorism, work organization codes), hyper-
mobility, and commodifi cation of political
life (markets for votes). These reactions pro-
vide grounds for new social movements or
reinvigorate existing ones.

Social innovation in contemporary social science
But social innovation has also been con-
structed through social science practice. Dif-
f erent social science disciplines have
recently delivered new or revised concepts
(sometimes just ‘notions’) and related theo-
ries of social innovation, corresponding to
their problematics and problem-solving
codes. Table 18.1 looks particularly at how
the concept of social innovation has been
used from the point of view of different dis-
ciplines. Five fields with specific contempo-
rary approaches have been identifi ed: man-
agement science and organization theory;
approaches covering the links between eco-

omy, society and environment (e.g. social
economy, environmental economics, eco-
nomic sociology … ); fi ne arts and creativity;
spatial development analysis (urban sociology,
social geography); public administration and
governance. In the literature covering these
dif erent fi elds fi ve dimensions of social innovation
have been striking: purpose or as the French
say more explicitly fi nalité of a SI initia-
tive; organizational changes linked to the initia-
tive; the role of special agents: leaders, charis-
matic individuals and (artistic) creators; the
role of path-dependency and structural con-
straints; and the tension between normative
viewpoints on social innovation and what
‘path-dependency’ allows (Moulaert and
Nussbaumer, 2008, ch. 3). We will illustrate
the relationship between these dimensions in
section fi ve, when we talk about ‘place-linked’
social innovation, by presenting the dynamics
of integrated area development, but also by
explaining the wider spatial dynamics of SI
observed in social movements, city-networks,
wide-area social learning and communities
of SI practice.

We notice from Table 18.1, and the litera-
ture that backs it up, that compared to the
‘older’ ones, the recent scientifi c approaches
to social innovation put more stress on the
‘micro’ perspective of social innovation ini-
tiatives and governance – except maybe in
the fi fth strand on ‘Governance and public
administration’ (Moulaert and Nussbaumer,
2008: 52–66). The guidelines for SI analysis
in contemporary social science indeed stress
agency, micro initiatives, and bottom-linked
governance. Table 18.2 then brings to the
front and combines what we believe to be
the main concepts and explanatory catego-
ries that should play a role in SI analysis, bor-
row ing from both ‘old’ and ‘new’ literature.
On the one hand, Weber and Durkheim
stress the transformation of social relations
within economy and society, or the social
organization within economic and political
 communities. Schumpeter can be considered
as a bridge figure between the ‘macro’ and
‘micro’ approaches. Not only does he address
the relationships between development and
innovation, he particularly highlights the role
of the entrepreneur as a leader who, facing
many contradictions, introduces innovations
in the organizational modes of society. He
stresses the multidimensional character of
development and entrepreneurship, the role
of different types of innovation in human
agency and the relationship between organi-
zational change and innovative behaviour.
His approach thus links in with the ‘micro’
foci presented in Table 18.1, but places them
within their societal dynamics (for the latter
see especially Schumpeter, 1947).
Table 18.1 Dimensions of social innovation (SI) in five scientific disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of social innovation Discipline</th>
<th>Purpose (or finalité) of the SI initiative</th>
<th>Transformation of social relations – organizational aspects</th>
<th>Role of special agencies (leadership, creative individuals)</th>
<th>Place and space – path-dependence and spatial embeddedness</th>
<th>How to bypass the tension between norms and reality?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management sciences and organization theory</td>
<td>Improve coherence of the organization in achieving its objectives (work ethics, profitability, ecological impacts)</td>
<td>Create a climate for the exchange of information and ideas. ‘Horizontalize’ the decision and communication systems</td>
<td>The innovative individual ‘Agents’ are nurtured by the organization</td>
<td>Recognition of ‘path-dependence’ through the enterprise and organizational culture</td>
<td>Tangible objectives. Normalize relationships between the work and executive staff. Dynamic learning processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches covering links between economy, society and environment</td>
<td>Integrate social and ecological objectives to the corporate agenda</td>
<td>Human relations on the work place. Quality of work and social relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tension between mainstream and ethical entrepreneurship (represented by the tensions between professional associations)</td>
<td>‘Societalization’ of a firm’s relationships with its environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine and creative arts</td>
<td>Social innovation (in a broader sense) – processes of creative communication – sociocultural emancipation</td>
<td>Open cognitive processes. Communication between individuals. Role of interpersonal activities and relations</td>
<td>Special attention towards initiatives of individual creativity</td>
<td>Historical inspiration of the contemporary social innovation (prominent examples and experiences)</td>
<td>Role of information and its reception by the creative community. Discovery of solutions and constraints. Interactive revision and refinement of suggested solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial development approaches (Integrated Area Development)</td>
<td>Satisfaction of human needs…</td>
<td>… in agreement with changes in the governance relationships</td>
<td>More focus on the role of the community and its social agents</td>
<td>Important influence of the historical reproduction of institutional capital</td>
<td>… through multi-level governance and creation of networks of cooperation between agents of the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and public administration</td>
<td>Effective, transparent (even democratic) administration</td>
<td>Dehierarchization – network communication</td>
<td>Civil society movements. Ombudspersons</td>
<td>Bypass bureaucratic rigidities</td>
<td>Simplification of the structures – regular evaluation of reorganizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research
## Table 18.2 The intrinsically social character of social innovation – spatiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of social innovation … (or: shedding light on) … in relation to “Dimensions of social innovation”</th>
<th>“Finalité de l’initiative” – Purpose of the “initiative”</th>
<th>Transformation of social relations</th>
<th>Role of special agencies</th>
<th>Place and space</th>
<th>Path-dependency and spatial embeddedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Finalité de l’initiative” – Purpose of the “initiative”</td>
<td>The social economy pillar of social innovation: satisfy unmet or unsatisfactorily unmet needs (social economy, Franklin, Mumford, CSR, sustainable dev. agendas)</td>
<td>The potential innovation in social relations (governance, empowerment, networks of cooperation and their spatialities) has an impact on the content and reach of the initiative</td>
<td>… individuals as initiative leaders, creators, artists, network coordinators; lobbyist, gurus … groups as ensembles of the previous (Schumpeter, Mumford, social enterprise, sociology as an art …)</td>
<td>Initiatives can be place-bound, confined to local spaces, or related to a wider spatiality – or a combination of several of these</td>
<td>History of the initiative, the relationship between its resource and place base and its ambitions – includes the social reproduction of ethics in ‘place’ and ‘space’ (local development models and analysis, institutional sociology and economics, IAD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of social relations</td>
<td>Role of ‘scale’ (size) of initiative determines aspects of social relations that matter (corporate organization, community governance, global network)</td>
<td>The sociology pillar of social innovation: transformation of social relations to make them more cooperative and communicative [referring to a purpose or ‘finalité’]</td>
<td>Individual and collective mobilizers, platform builders and manifesto designers (analysis of social movements, socio-political mobilization)</td>
<td>Consolidation and transformation of social relations can be place-bound, confined to local spaces, or related to a wider spatiality – or a combination of several of these. Governance systems (state, civil society …) and their spatially articulated interactions (relational geography)</td>
<td>Spatially articulated path-dependency of governance systems, community development networks, etc. (political history, devolution and regionalization analysis, geographical scale theory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of special agencies</td>
<td>Identification of spontaneous and functional leaderships ‘fitting’ the initiative. Potential tensions between both (mobilizing versus collective management)</td>
<td>According to the relevant social relations and their dynamics, particular types of agencies can be catalysed</td>
<td>Special leaderships (individual, collective) have been empirically observed as key factors in social innovation initiatives and processes</td>
<td>Spatial dynamics, place reproduction foster or discourage particular leaderships (community development, networking dynamics in spatial relationships)</td>
<td>Leadership is socially reproduced versus leadership fits community needs (collaborative planning, stakeholder involvement …)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
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<th>Table 18.2 (Cont'd)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place and space</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| **Path-dependency and spatial embeddedness** | Strong and lasting SI initiatives can affect the direction of the development paths of places and their wider social relations. They lead to innovation in change culture, institutions … (institutional sociology) |
|                                             | Transformations in society (e.g. regime changes), socio-political movements for institutional change, ‘open’ governance with public arenas for discussing development change (social transformations) |
|                                             | Significant leadership can affect the course of history, if the ‘historical and political conjuncture’ allows for it (political science, regime theory) |
|                                             | Places with a strong path-dependency and spatial embeddedness will have a strong tendency to ‘persist’; whereas socially and culturally more fragmented and less robust places may leave less opening for change dynamics |
|                                             | Path-dependency and spatial embeddedness are key to understanding the societal roots and the resources (or lack) of SI initiatives, processes and their sustainability as well as reception by society and its communities |

Source: Authors’ research
Spaces and places of social innovation

Many of the types of social innovation mentioned in the previous section as collective action (politico-ideological perspective) or analytical categories (scientific perspective) are about ‘(re)moving boundaries’: overcoming social and political boundaries, reconfiguring identities, reconstructing social relationships, (re)building community identity, re-appropriating (public) space through social mobilization and social political action. But the removal of boundaries can also be taken literally, i.e. the elimination or displacement of spatial confines. Examples can be observed in business administration of cooperative firms that have gone international, and in corporate social responsibility that has become a worldwide cultural discourse and has affected the practice in local, regional and global business networks. The alter-economies such as cooperative, solidarity and sustainable economy take place at different spatial scales, for example, through networking, building local institutions, multi-scalar empowerment of governance, etc. The story of the pipelines in Nigeria, for instance, is about the struggle to overcome exclusion. The highly volatile and accident-prone infrastructure of oil and gas distribution cuts through hundreds of communities particularly in the Niger Delta, and has been causing social, economic and environmental degradation in the region. After a long period of suffering, the communities actively began to establish gender- and environment-based alliances and developed networks with local, national and international NGOs for the enforcement of proper environmental standards, improvement of regulatory frameworks, ensure public participation, and invoke social, economic and political will at all spatial scales (Ogwu, 2009). The Niger Delta experience provides a good illustration of how spatial scales are interconnected. Resistance from local populations feeds solidarity movements built up at higher spatial scales and is in turn empowered by them.

To analyse the relationship between space and SI we use the conceptual and theoretical anchor points set out in Table 18.2. The categories in the table are sufficiently suggestive as to spatial outcomes of SI: space (spatial forms, scales and scalar articulations such as boundaries, reconfigurations, networks ...), place (local identity rebuilding, defragmentation of urban space ...) and space–place interactions. But space–place strategies and dynamics often belong to the heart of the social innovation strategies and processes themselves. Let us look at two types of spatial social innovation or social innovation that are intrinsically (but not exclusively) space-based.

**Integrated area development**

Social innovation opens new perspectives for local and regional development (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005), by stressing the use and organization of space as a new opportunity-set for change initiatives, by democratizing territorial governance dynamics and by linking local and regional bottom-up development agendas to the multi-scalar social relations that should enhance them. In terms of neighbourhood cooperation, inhabitants, organizations, movements, diverse public and private agents, etc. come together and create opportunities to communicate with each other to build up a neighbourhood development strategy. This often happens spontaneously through actions initiated to overcome severe problems of deprivation. Thus, neighbourhood development agencies with an area-based development agenda should learn interactively how they can build in the spatial dimensions, for example, by integrating housing functions with public space, reorganizing space in order to accommodate a diversity of social relations, establishing a park hosting different functions and actively involving people coming from inside and outside the neighbourhood in socio-political networking.

The spatial perspective of social innovation particularly allows explaining the relationships
between the satisfaction of human needs on the one hand and social empowerment on the other hand through the reproduction of community social relations, in the form of ‘Integrated Area Development’ (IAD) (Moulaert et al., 2000; Moulaert et al., 2010). The IAD framework seeks to create opportunities to socially redress ‘disintegrated areas’ (Moulaert and Leontidou, 1995) by bringing together different types of actors and their aspirations, solutions for the threats to sustainable development (economic, ecological, socio-cultural and political), restoring links with other areas in the city and rebuilding a neighbourhood and community identity. To this purpose it helps to valorize the diversity of historical social, institutional, artistic cultures and traditions as resources for community-based development. And it is essential to transform governance relations from a local or bottom-up to a bottom-linked architecture, in which different governance scales (e.g. neighbourhood, city, region, national and international) empower each other.

Spatial networking as SI

Different types of spatial social innovation fall under this label: networking of social innovation agents operating in different places; establishing communication and governance modes allowing for democratic decision-making within multi-site and multi-place networks; up-scaling of governance of locally initiated initiatives with the purpose of empowering them and improving their politico-institutional leverage. The latter is, for example, what happened through the networking of Micro Finance Institutions (MFI) in the ProsperA network that was created “to promote the culture and practice of social performance by reinforcing the capacities of MFIs and local networks” (Antohi, 2009: 44). In Europe the European Microfinance Platform (e-MFP) formalized in 2006 comprises about a hundred organizations and individuals active in microfinance and its main objective is to promote cooperation among European MF bodies active in developing countries, by enabling communication, exchange knowledge, advance good practice and enhance policy issues with European institutions and governments (http://www.e-mfp.eu/about-e-mfp). Part of the strategy of the federations such as ProsperA and e-MFP is to have social performance recognized in the microfinance mainstream. As for social innovation in general, there may be a price to be paid to the Quantum Mammon here, namely concerning the nature of the objective criteria by which social performance should be measured (op. cit: 44–45).

Alternative supply chains are another spatialized social innovation, e.g. the geography of the value-added chains as applied in regional and international fair trade. As to the regional, we refer to the direct delivery of agricultural products from farm to consumer (e.g. farmer markets and cooperatives), which reduces the share of the distribution sector (often big supermarket chains) in the value-added buildup between crop and consumption, with a fairer share going to local farmers and a better control on the health content of the produce (Knox and Mayer, 2008). Internationally speaking then, the recalibration of value-added chains to the benefit of the income of producers is probably even more crucial in countries of the global South. As in the Northern regional sustainability and fair-trade perspective, the agricultural sector is again the main focus both in the analysis of and recommendations for policy change in international trade. Here a confrontation with existing WTO regulations and ongoing liberalization of markets is unavoidable. These (de)regulatory dynamics continue to diffuse industrialization of the global South despite the fact that, in the last two decades the growth of manufacturing as percentage of GDP in developing countries has not helped in reducing their income gap with the developed world (Arrighi et al., 2003). Even within the agriculture sector,
extreme trade protection strategies result in mutual dependency between the elements of the value-added chains (Stevens, 2001). An interesting case of how the financial instability can be countered by means of social economy is found in the example of business incubation initiatives in Brazil. After large-scale job losses in the wake of the 1980s’ economic crisis, the solidarity economy practices were gradually articulated with public policy and supported by different types of institutions, including universities, by the establishment of incubators. Not only has this led to a new theory and practice strand but also to the formation of social technologies acquired through the sociology of knowledge of historical experiences (Dubeux, 2011).

**Conclusion**

Over the last twenty years research on the meaning of SI has advanced significantly. Several scientific disciplines have taken the concept on board, because it helps to understand the social dimensions of innovation, and to detail the content of human development in terms of needs satisfaction, coalition building, resources deployment, empowerment and bottom-up governance, community dynamics and path-dependency. Its multidimensional and practice-oriented nature has also given a major impetus to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research methodology (Social Polis: http://www.socialpolis.eu/; Novy et al., 2012; Moulaert, 2010).

As to the spatiality of social innovation, more research is needed. Social innovation as and through community development has been studied in a quite detailed way since the Neighbourhood in Crisis and EU Urban I programmes (Moulaert et al., 2010). More work on scalar dynamics, multi-level governance and place–scale relations in social innovation is needed however. Referring to the examples in the previous sections, for instance, the role of different places in the reproduction of fairer value-added chains should be related to the modes by which the networks that connect and reproduce them are formed and governed. Are they bottom-up organizational initiatives? Have they grown from the convergence of initiatives in different places suffering comparable conditions of alienation and exploitation? What has been the role of critiques of international organizations – also from inside, in designing alternatives for international trade and bottom-linked transnational governance? Far from suggesting that social innovation analysis should overrule methodology in the fields already addressing these issues, the message is that SI, in its different complementary meanings and theoretical orientations, can help to analyse in a sociologically coherent way spatially embedded agencies of social change with multi-scalar processes that either determine or steer them (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2008, ch. 6). In this way SI research, relational geography and scalar politics analysis could engage into a methodological enriching interaction.

**References**


Further reading


www.socialpolis.eu <http://www.socialpolis.eu> (A number of papers and reports produced under different fields and themes for the Social Platform for Cities and Social Cohesion, funded by EC SSH programme.)