PRESENTAZIONE

Literature and policy referring to Social Innovation continuous to proliferate in the post-2008 crisis setting. The diversity of approaches creates misconceptions, confusion and often inappropriate use of the concept reducing its broader societal, historical and cultural meaning. However, this plurality even if problematic demonstrates the value of the concept especially regarding its use on re-defining and resolving social problems on the urban scale. The concept of Social Innovation (SI) besides its centuries-old uses and understanding acquired profound attention in the policy and scholarly world the last decade. This proliferation of interest goes hand in hand with a variety of interpretation and theorization regarding SI which is leading to and deriving from an amalgam of working definitions and practices. The scientific literature that embraces the concept of SI provides several perspectives depending on the field of study – sociological, entrepreneurial, spatial, etc.[1]. While social policy across scales (local, national, international) approaches SI depending on the kind of discourses that the dominant political regimes of each institution try to mobilise as well as its transformative power.

The recent abundance in the use of SI notion is being perceived either as a policy trend or consensus built between the scientific and political arenas recognising the significance of this particular type of innovation[2]. Besides the various definitions that the concept of SI acquires, a common understanding is that the term describes a process leading to satisfaction of human needs and increasing the welfare for the total population or particular social groups when established institutions (e.g. state, market) fail to deliver. Therefore, it is conceptually largely accepted that necessities become driving forces of alternative action. An early theorization of the concept can be traced back to the 18th century; Schumpeter that shaped the concept of innovation itself in the 20th century describes the innovation process as driven by and leading to structural changes in the organization of a society. Thus behind the recent revival of SI research and practice, there are structural roots connected to an accumulated dissatisfaction or inability of technological innovation and the economic system to deliver benefits to larger parts of the society. Inequalities, poverty, and deprivation persist even in economically advanced societies where the market and state institutions fail to

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[1] Majumdar, S., Guha, S. and Marakkath N. Eds. *Technology and Innovation for Social Change*. New Delhi: Springer India; Moulaert, F., MacCallum, D., Mehmood, A. and Hamdouch A. Eds. *The International Handbook on Social Innovation Collective Action, Social Learning and transdisciplinary Research*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publisher.
[2] Pol, E. and Ville, S. 2009. Social innovation: Buzz word or enduring term? *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38 (6), pp. 878-885.

provide universal welfare. The multi-level socio-economic crisis that started in 2008 triggered an intensification of those social problems creating a favourable environment for SI to unfold while shaped the dynamics of the nexus between SI policy and research[3]. The crisis caused the deterioration of living standards for many social groups and created the need both for innovative top-down socioeconomic policies to tackle them as well as bottom-up responses[4].

The debate today occurs on multiple levels and fields since major institutions and organizations from the local to the international scale adopted the concept of SI. In the US, Obama's administration set up in 2009 the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation. The European Commission since 2010 funds numerous SI research projects while allocates parts of the structural funds to the implementation of SI policy investments. International Non-Governmental Organizations (e.g. Young Foundation) actively promote and further mainstream the SI messages. Local governments and cities embrace the concept promoting and supporting a variety of programs, projects and initiatives given that in urban areas segregation and marginalization makes social problems much more visible and demand immediate action.

SI policy is both driven and the driver of SI research providing funding tools and justification while looking for further theorization and specific policy solutions and actions. Those, however, are context-depended, thus, the semantics of the notion of social innovation is being debatable given the different scientific points of view, political agendas and understandings deriving from field experience. The concept evolves while the various definitions compete for discursive space while historical analysis warns of a possible co-optation, restructuring and narrowing of the term to reflect particular neoliberal entrepreneurial views (cf. Moulaert *et al.*, this issue). The institutions adopting SI contribute to this with their ideological, political or purely functional positioning and understanding of innovation from its strict entrepreneurial side while focusing on large-scale top-down solutions. However, SI is linked with forms of economic organization usually rooted in a particular locality. Those diverse forms of socio-economic activity create particular community economies that are observable in the socio-economic literature[5] but their value and potential need to come to the fore and be acknowledged in the higher levels of policymaking. At the very end, those economies operating in those marginalized areas and/or social groups trigger the social innovation dynamics. Socio-economic practices of emancipation observed in local communities can be perceived as civic traditions rooted in the locality rather than innovations per se

[3] Moulaert, F. 2009. Social Innovation: Institutionally Embedded, Territorialy (Re)Produced. In D. MacCallum, S. Vicari Haddock, F. Moulaert, J. Hillier eds. *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*, pp. 11-24. Ashgate.

[4] Grimm, R., Fox, C., Baines, S., and Albertson, K. 2013. Social innovation, an answer to contemporary societal challenges? Locating the concept in theory and practice. *Innovation*, 26(4), pp. 436-455.

[5] Gibson-Graham, J. K., and Roelvink, G. 2009. Social Innovation for Community Economies. In D. MacCallum, F. Moulaert, J. Hillier, S. Vicari-Haddock, eds. *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*, pp. 25-38. Ashgate.

and there science and policy can only assist on the reinforcement of their impacts. However, they are valuable sources of knowledge and inspiration for SI policies and practices in other socio-spatial environments. What SI science/policy nexus can contribute is creating frameworks of cooperation and empowerment where there are not, or reinforcing the existent in areas that the lack of strong social ties make civic traditions to disappear or hard to be created. That is why the undesirable socio-psychological qualities of urbanity, makes cities ideal environments for SI dynamics to emerge through policy/practice experimentation; while this kind of initiatives need carefully designed and developed governing structures so to be effective.

As Moulaert *et al.* (this issue) report, the development of the Canadian approach has an important role in defining the indivisible link between SI and governance. The Canadian stream indeed focuses on local territorial development and supports the political mobilization of marginalized communities. Within its perspective, SI cannot be divided anymore by the concept of empowerment and by the idea that actors, who did not have any power so far, gain part of it in order to contribute to their social, political and economic wellbeing. Empowerment implies definitely changes in governance settings. The ties between SI and governance seem to be so strong due to the configuration of innovative processes, in which governance is both the frame and the field of innovation. Indeed, when developing socially innovative practices, actors are framed in a particular governance context; at the same time, these processes of innovation can produce changes in that framework, generating more openness in decision-making. Any type of social innovation concerns at some point transformations in the governance at various levels. Transformations can pertain to the national or the metropolitan governance, the neighbourhood one, or the governance of private/third sector services. By definition, initiatives of SI have a question about governance: independently by the actor – local institution, third sector, private companies, citizens – that triggers the innovation; independently by the degree of change in the governance – an episode or a long-term sustainable transformation.

Contemporary cases like the ones hosted in this issue shed light on the different patterns that the SI-governance link takes on. Ganugi shows how innovative solutions related to the city's management have the possibility to affect institutionalised practices. In Ghent and Antwerp, the boost of this process is the engagement of citizens, who have common problems concerning their urban daily life. The opportunity to express their necessities, to find alternative solutions and to take care of common resources demonstrate both to citizens and local government that the citizens have capabilities in the decision-making and that bottom-up innovative strategy to plan the urban environment exist. Bernardi makes the link of SI, governance and sharing economy, demonstrating mechanisms introduced by the local government in Seoul as a tool to foster development and sustainable innovation. Nevertheless, for this to be effective, the role of intermediary organizations and the strong commitment of citizens is necessary. Only with a collaboration of all actors, the model becomes holistic and allows to generate forms of multilevel governance. Eventually, Balenzano and Moro presents a work-

life balance innovative social programme, whose effectiveness appears considerable when compared to the trends of Regional welfare that up to the first half of the 2000s occupied a position of substantial residuality. Again, the necessity to answer to social needs traditionally unmet and the co-responsibility between families, private services, third sector and public institutions emerge as essential elements to improve the familiar wellbeing along the whole life cycle. Despite the described realities differ markedly on the actor triggering new processes and the level on which the innovations develop, two aspects are constantly present: I) the engagement/empowerment of citizens; II) the support of local institutions. The former always concerns an issue that is perceived as problematic by a specific collectivity. The latter is crucial to foster sustainable solutions, whereas contrary the innovation risks to remain only an occasional episode of governance.

The hosting papers of this issue can help shed light on the way social innovation policy, practise and research evolve and operates in various contexts. The first paper by Moulaert *et al.* offers an overview of European Union funded projects on Social Innovation in Social Sciences and Humanities. The work is based on the recent European Commission policy paper titled "Social Innovation as a Trigger for Transformations - The Role of Research". It reflects on the history of the use of social innovation in political, philosophical and scientific discourse and practice while describes the variety of uses of social innovation research today. The analysis suggests that the focus of many of those research projects seems to reveal the dynamics of collective action, decision making and empowering vis a vis the state or local governments in SI initiatives. Finally, the paper points out the need for a more integrated social innovation research through transdisciplinary and offers proposals for future research topics. The links between natural and human-constructed commons and governmentality, citizens' empowerment and commoning culture became the object of study that gained attention in social sciences and especially in the field of urban studies in the last years.

The paper of Ganugi using the concept of SI allows considering the innovative potential of urban social initiatives, and their sustainability. It analyses the projects of Living Street in Ghent and Future Street in Antwerp exploring the conditions that favour or hinder changes in urban governmental practices regarding the management of public spaces. SI is expressed through the emergence practices of commoning and bottom-linked governance dynamics facilitating citizenship empowerment. As a result, a collaborative culture emerges: local governance listens more to their citizens, while them further understand their power and potential to influence the management of public space.

The third paper looks at the practice of sharing economy, often associated with SI given that the entrepreneurial activities operating under the umbrella of the term aim to transform and/or promote positive societal impacts. Bernardi documents the emergence of an advanced urban governance system of SI/sharing economy with Seoul city in South Korea on the epicentre. The paper reviews the approaches of SI in East Asia providing the relative context and reflect upon Seoul that is building its type of innovation ecosystem under the Park Won-Soon administration. Through the analysis of fieldwork data, it presents Seoul's innovative forms of

urban governance that embraces aspects of SI and is worth to a greater attention to academic and political audiences of the west.

The governance and implementation of integrated work-family policies to increase welfare and promote socio-economic development are often central to SI debates. In the last paper of this issue, Balenzano and Moro reflect on the relation between SI and the approach of Social Investment. Given that SI policies often arise unwittingly in local and regional contexts in order to address social needs, the authors examine the impacts of a work-life balance voucher programme in the Apulia Region in Italy. The results suggest that the programme produced various direct and indirect improvements in quality of life, which indicate its innovative elements and potentials.

The ambition of this Special Issue is to enrich the theoretical and empirical literature on SI. It explores up to date bottom-up policies and community-based initiatives utilizing SI discourses, practices in various scales and contexts. For knowledge creation and diffusion purposes, case study research becomes a valuable analytical tool since socio-economic and spatial particularities of different cases generate distinct scopes and understanding of SI dynamics.

<div align="right">Giulia Ganugi and Giorgos Koukoufikis</div>