1. Social innovation: intuition, precept, concept, theory and practice

Frank Moulaert, Diana MacCallum and Jean Hillier

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading and talking about social innovation, as the authors of this chapter have done for many years, do not necessarily make its scientific meaning unambiguously clear. In our opinion, the lack of clarity about the term 'social innovation' can be attributed not only to its evolving analytical status but also to its over-simplistic use as a buzzword in a multiplicity of policy practices associated, for example, with the rationalization of the welfare state and the commodification of sociocultural wellbeing. The appropriation of the term by 'caring liberalism', in one of its new incarnations, has added to a Babel-like terminological confusion. For example, several of the roll-out neoliberalization strategies, like 'new governance' and 'experimental reregulation', if not critically examined, could be considered as forms of social innovation (Peck 2012).

Social innovation (SI), appropriately utilized, is a driver of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity[1] in scientific research whose epistemological and methodological stances are in continuous development. It is used as a label to indicate significant changes in the way society evolves, how its structures are modified, its ethical norms revisited, etc. Such changes are, in the first place, the concern of collective action, public policy, socio-political movements, public uprising, spontaneous organization, etc. But they are also important issues in philosophical and ethical debates, in social theory and in the search for new social science methodologies capable of addressing emerging SI questions. Cooperrider and Pasmore predicted in 1991 that 'the 1990s will be known as the decade of global social innovation' (1991, p. 1037). This may be an overstatement, granting too much honour to the 1990s as a turning-point decade; but these authors nevertheless point to a changing dynamic in efforts to improve the quality of life throughout the world.

Innovative forms of organizing across traditional boundaries of geography, cultures, and politics are springing to life to address long-standing global problems such as hunger, poverty, conflict, political imprisonment, pollution, illiteracy, economic oppression, racism, classism, sexism, and environmental degradation. These innovative forms of organization represent an emerging type of social behaviour that has no historical precedent (Cooperrider and Pasmore 1991, p. 1038).

What Cooperrider and Pasmore refer to here is the new organizational form of 'Global Social Change Organizations' (GSCO) operating internationally in the above problem areas. Of course, there have been historical precedents in social transformation and collective action. Before the GSCO there were the labour unions, human rights organizations, socio-political movements for independence: a great variety of organizations that in different socio-political contexts and epochs addressed social problems and desires and

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strived for a 'better world'; an improvement of the 'human condition' etc.

The confused status of the term 'social innovation' in both collective action and research is expressed in the summative title of this chapter, which articulates a growing degree of rational reflection about, as well as rationally organized mobilization inspired by, the concept. But in choosing this title, we reflect the way John Commons – one of the main US economists working in the old institutionalist tradition and also considered both a holist and a pragmatist (see Moulaert and Mehmood, Chapter 33) – developed his holistic definitions and theories (Moulaert and Nussbaumer 2005).[2] Commons' intellectual constructions were not linear but interactive. 'Precept' refers to ethical principles inspiring human behaviour. It thus evokes the ethics not only of collective action, but also of the process of pragmatist-holistic scientific inquiry, which, according to its epistemological premises, should be to the benefit of humans and humanity. But 'precept' also refers to 'pre'-concept, the intuitive maturation of what may become a 'concept' or a 'theme' later on in the research and/or collective action. Concepts or themes then, through their relations with other themes and within a diversity of comparative contexts, are potential building blocks of theories. Thus themes and theories are built through collective or shared intuitions, concerns about human progress and how collective action to achieve such progress should be organized and materialized as a going concern. This 'old' institutionalist reading of scientific practice resonates with the concerns we are trying to address in inter- and transdisciplinary research in social science today. As such, SI, as one of the most frequently discussed topics in social analysis, collective action and policy, is a lever for 'post' disciplinary research, because it forces us to bypass the delimitations between problems and fields of knowledge or practice in the methodologies to be used (Moulaert et al. 2011). This book demonstrates that SI research is never 'purely scientific', but is always about human development ambitions as represented by a diversity of social actors and individuals. It also clearly shows that research cannot be the responsibility of a single social science discipline, nor entrusted to theoretical and empirical analysis only, but that it has, instead, a strong action orientation (see in particular Parts I and IV).

'Social Innovation' as the new dimension of management science (Drucker 1987), has defended collective action and new global social change organizations as key modes of coordination for the contemporary provision of social services (Young Foundation 2010; BEPA 2010), as suspect reformist 'solutions' for the scarcity of resources in the welfare state (see Martinelli, Chapter 26). This diversity of often contradictory meanings has even caused some scholars to drop it as a scientific concept, because they believe that its chameleonic character would not serve any progress in the analysis of social change. We do not share this sceptical viewpoint. Instead we want to show how SI has been a driver of social science analysis and that the various entry points to the use of the term reflect well the societal challenges of our and previous times.

In the next section we recount the history of definitions of SI, their theoretical underpinnings and their connections with other concepts of social change and invention. Next, we briefly address the ideological-political significance of SI as a reformist approach to solve social problems – an expression of 'soft or caring neoliberalism', but more pertinently as an ideological reaction against an economistic and technologist view of socioeconomic and

socio-political development. In the subsequent section we explain how our work on SI, especially addressing its socially and spatially embedded nature, has contributed to progress in SI analysis. The final section suggests some important (new) methodological avenues in SI analysis and theory building, including granting new roles for theory, such as meta-theoretical frameworks and holistic theory building.

1.2 WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

It is not clear who first used the term 'social innovation'. Some argue it was James Taylor in 1970 in his analysis of community development dynamics in Topeka, Kansas. We believe that the term was coined on the European continent, amidst the social revolts of the late 1960s. The 'competing' term 'social invention' was in use much earlier, launched by Max Weber (1947[1920]) in the early 1900s. James Coleman (1970) uses the term 'social invention' to describe new forms of social relationship and social organization, while Stuart Conger (1973) makes three distinctions in social invention: organizational social inventions; social inventions in the form of laws; and procedural social inventions. Affiliated concepts, such as social change and transformation, and innovations with a social meaning, were introduced and reintroduced at different points in time. Important also are the authors who interpret social changes in terms of SI, as Peter Drucker (1987) does for management and mass movements; or Michael Mumford (2002) for the innovations which Benjamin Franklin introduced in 19th-century Philadelphia.

What is important for our analysis is that 'social innovation' has been launched as a term for many different reasons and in a diversity of contexts. For example, in the 1960s and early 1970s with the student and workers movements in Paris, Berlin, and other European and American cities, SI was used as a kind of common denominator for the different types of collective actions and social transformations that would lead us from a top down economy and society into a more bottom up, creative and participative society that would also recognize, almost in a progressive-liberal way, the different individual rights of people in all segments of the population (Chambon et al. 1982). It was a time when discussions about students' and workers' democracy, gender and emancipation issues were taken on board in public debate. Chambon, David and Devevey (1982) build on most of the issues highlighted in this debate. Their 128-page book remains the most complete 'open' synthesis on the subject of SI to this day. In brief, the authors examine the relationship between SI and the pressures brought by societal changes, and show how the mechanisms of crisis and recovery both provoke and accelerate SI. Much of the debate was echoed in the columns of the journal *Autrement* in the 1970s with contributions from such prominent figures as Pierre Rosanvallon, Jacques Fournier and Jacques Attali.

Peter Drucker (1987) uses 'social innovation' as a hinge term to refer to the need for organizational slimness and human synergies within management. In this context, he also refers to a grand societal challenge, namely to overcome the unwieldiness of large bureaucracies in business and government – a discourse which in more recent times has been unfortunately misused in defence of New Public Management styles and models (see Lévesque, Chapter 2). Drucker also refers to other SIs in business and public life, such as mass movements, the farm agent and management – historical examples which

should continue to play a role within the academic debate. Another use of the term SI is due to Jonathan Gershuny in his article on 'Technology, Social Innovation and the Informal Economy' (1987). Gershuny, one of the main authorities in the study of the service economy, refers to the substitution of domestic appliances for domestic labour time as a major SI as in this way people can liberate housework time in favour of leisure activities – a large number of which, again thanks to technological progress, can be enjoyed at home (home video, TV, . . .). Obviously this is a significant social transformation. But is it also a social innovation?

As noted above, several authors have addressed dimensions of SI without using the term. Among the most important we consider the following. As far back as the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin evoked SI in proposing minor modifications within the social organization of communities (Mumford 2002) and in 1893 Émile Durkheim highlighted the importance of social regulation in the development of the division of labour which accompanies technical change. Indeed, technical change itself can only be understood within the framework of an innovation or renovation of the social order to which it is relevant. At the start of the 20th century, Max Weber (1947[1920]) demonstrated the power of rationalization in his work on the capitalist system. He examined the relationship between social order and innovation, a theme which was revisited by philosophers in the 1960s. Among other things, he affirmed that changes in living conditions are not the only determinants of social change. Individuals who introduce behavioural variants, often initially considered deviant, can exert a decisive influence; if the new behaviour spreads and develops, it can become established social usage. In the 1930s, Joseph Schumpeter considered innovation as including structural change in the organization of society, or within the network of organizational forms of enterprise or business. 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 – a Sociology of Knowledge – that would allow the analysis of both development and innovation (Schumpeter 2005[1932]).

Today, and certainly in this book, when we talk about SI we refer to finding acceptable progressive solutions for a whole range of problems of exclusion, deprivation, alienation, lack of wellbeing, and also to those actions that contribute positively to significant human progress and development. SI means fostering inclusion and wellbeing through improving social relations and empowerment processes: imagining and pursuing a world, a nation, a region, a locality, a community that would grant universal rights and be more socially inclusive. Socially innovative change means the improvement of social relations – micro relations between individuals and people, but also macro relations between classes and other social groups. It also means a focus on the different skills by which collective actors and groups play their roles in society.

If SI is about addressing problems, improving the human condition, satisfying the needs of humans, setting agendas for a better future, and so on, then as a scientific concept it should include the search for improvement or fulfilment of human existence, a better equilibrium in living together, together with the evolution of relations between human beings and the initiation of actions to improve the human condition. Several more contemporary definitions cover all or part of these

concerns, as in the SINGOCOM project (explained in Section 1.4).

SI is considered as path dependent and contextual. It refers to the changes and agendas, agency and institutions that lead to a better inclusion of excluded groups and individuals into various fields of societies at various spatial scales. SI is very strongly a matter of process innovation of changes and the dynamics of social relations including power relations. Therefore, SI is about social inclusion and about countering or overcoming conservative forces that are eager to strengthen or preserve social exclusion situations. SI, 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 (Moulaert et al. 2010).

Other definitions stress the role of SI in building workable 'utopias'. For Gilles Deleuze, for example, SI takes place through windows of opportunity for social creativity along lines of life, lines of imagination, lines of bringing in assets for a better future. All these are windows of opportunity for social creativity which may emerge from challenges to institutional practices. Innovation often emerges from conflict: opportunity spaces at micro scales may make creative strategies possible at macro scales. Here, we already see the announcement of the very important relationship between the initiatives of individuals and groups in small communities, and its logic of continuation in the construction and facilitation of institutions that could enable socially creative strategies at macro/micro scales.

We can see in these definitions, as we pointed out before, that there is always concern about the human condition: to overcome social exclusion, to improve the quality of service provision, to improve the quality of human life and of wellbeing. This means of course that SI cannot be separated either from its social-cultural, or from its social-political context. But at the same time it implies a commitment to engage with SI research itself in a democratic way, by involving all actors concerned with improving the human condition and by building transdisciplinary action research models to allow this.

1.3 THE POLITICO-IDEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

SI has a very strong politico-ideological significance. We have already noted the contribution of the students' and workers' revolts of the 1960s and the different types of collective action that work against social exclusion in contemporary times. In the 1990s, this especially meant addressing social exclusion not only in deprived urban neighbourhoods, but also in rural localities where decline due to socioeconomic problems had gone almost unnoticed for decades (Moulaert and Nussbaumer 2007).

Today, the social problematic addressed through SI has become much more complex, due to the deepening of mutually-reinforcing socioeconomic, socio-political and socio-ecological crises (Swyngedouw 2009). Today's use of the term has become quite ambiguous, as we have noted (see also Jessop et al., Chapter 8). On the one hand it remains a powerful guide for social and political movements pursuing human development. But on the other hand SI is increasingly embraced as a 'new' approach to solving the crisis of the welfare state, by creating new jobs in the 'cheap' social economy and reorganizing the welfare system through commodification and privatization of some of its services and the more efficient restructure of others. Jamie

Peck (2012) demonstrates the Janus face of many strategies of 'rolling out' neoliberalism. Many of these strategies are realized in the form of 'fast policy' programs, spreading rapidly across the globe; a phenomenon that brings a risk that SI can become packaged as part of the pervasive language of 'best practice' that can be applied anywhere in the world. The problem of this fast policy approach is that it follows a micro-logic of a 'silver bullet', ubiquitously applicable, while in reality all conditions are different, context matters and institutional embedding – including 'taking to scale' – are essential if socially innovative policies and collective strategies are to succeed (Peck 2012, pp. 18–19).

This is why it so important to focus on the role of SI in developing alternative socio-political discourses and on its potential for social change in particular contexts. In any case, SI as a principle, as a slogan, as a *mot d'ordre* as Deleuze would say, has a clear mobilizing power in reaction to economic and technologist interpretations and applications of innovation. From a scientific point of view, particularly in the light of our ambition to develop a more action-oriented research methodology, this means that we must analyse the relationship between the system to which many of the SI actors are reacting and the political significance of their SI initiatives. What are the exclusionary and alienating dynamics of the economic system against which SI is reacting? What dynamics feed into the improvement of the human condition? What social or political movements are of relevance for social change? What socio-political dynamics and institutional transformations are needed in order to make SI a success in the streets, the local communities, the enterprises?

There are many possible answers to these questions, and thus many dimensions to SI as a politico-ideological alternative. It has been deliberately mobilized in reaction to privatization discourse and practice (Moulaert and Nussbaumer 2005): it offers an antithesis to the thesis of privatization, and inspires a counter-ideology of solidarity. But SI has also frequently been a matter of spontaneous mobilization of people against their exclusion, their alienation, the deprivation of resources caused by capitalism, by personal isolation, by difficult social circumstances, by environmental and economic changes, and so on. Reacting against often oppressive mainstream institutionalization and legitimatization which confirm the power of already-empowered agents and organizations – think for example of the world food crisis through which food multinationals have reinforced their positions in the world market – is a very important aspect of SI. Mobilization matters. Mobilization, throughout this book, also means collectively fostering a better understanding of the role of different actors and stakeholders in SI analysis and practice. In this respect, SI also concerns collaboratively imagining, mapping, designing, constructing views of the future and strategies to achieve those views. Putting in place an *équipement* (infrastructure), as Deleuze would suggest, is very important in SI processes. What might an *équipement* of SI look like? It could be tangible policies or support in terms of resources – especially finance and information, but also intangibles such as open-mindedness, flexibility and a willingness to take risks.

1.4 SOCIO-SPATIALLY EMBEDDED AND TIME-BOUND SOCIAL INNOVATION

A key task of SI theory in this context, as we see it, is to help define the types of col-

lective action and social transformation which we believe are needed to respond in an appropriate way to situations of exclusion, to situations of need, to situations of desire for improvement of the human condition. There is today a host of theories that address, for example, empowerment, improvement of governance structures, creation of human development agencies, modes of participation and shared decision-making, ... (MacCallum et al. 2009). In addition there is a whole range of theories that deal with relationships between agency, structure, institutions, culture and discourse (Moulaert and Jessop 2012) and between globalization and SI processes and strategies (Cooperrider and Passmore 1991; Klein and Roy 2012). These theories connect path dependence and the shape of development to the role of agency and organization. They link such 'big-picture' issues with situated strategies for imagining new futures, design scenarios, political participation and mobilization. They point to the interaction between globalization and SI, for example, by analysing the socially innovative dynamics of new global NGOs and how, through their innovative agendas and modes of organization, these address 'new' global challenges such as climate change or economic crisis. In sum, they identify key concepts for the analysis and building of SI, both connecting these, on the one hand, to problematic features of the world and, on the other hand, to the necessary institutional transformations at different spatial scales to make SI possible.

Our politico-ideological ambition, as part of a growing network of SI researchers, is to mobilize such theories to offer an alternative to the technology-based and business-oriented discourses which have long dominated innovation and development policy – particularly in the context of the 'knowledge-based economy' – and to develop an analytical framework which connects precepts, concepts, theories and strategies of SI. This work has been ongoing since 1989, in particular through four projects on the role of SI in community development and societal transformation, in which almost half of the authors in this Handbook have been involved (see www.socialpolis.eu).

The first of these projects explored Integrated Area Development (IAD) as a mode of needs satisfaction for populations in defined local areas (Moulaert 2000). IAD responds to particular challenges and opportunities faced by neighbourhoods within a framework of participatory democracy, and it provides an alternative to the more prevalent forms of market-led economic development. Drawing explicitly on the three dimensions which have been systematically attributed to SI in these four projects (needs satisfaction, social relations and empowerment; see General Introduction), IAD adds a spatial dimension to SI, showing how empowerment, or socio-political mobilization, is effected at 'higher' scales than the neighbourhood (such as the city or state) and drawing attention to the trans-scalar and multifaceted nature of relations that affect conditions of existence in particular places. In addition, the IAD project conceptualized the relationship between SI and social exclusion, noting that SI can emerge from the actions that communities take to alleviate social, political and/or material problems. A sort of dialectic is at work, which lends form to the dynamics of innovation.

The second project which played a significant role in the development of an analytical framework capable of dealing with complexity of SI was SINGOCOM (Social Innovation, Governance and Community Building) (Moulaert et al. 2010). SINGOCOM extended the gaze of the IAD project to the social relations and strategic agencies of territorial

development dynamics more broadly, bringing together theoretical perspectives from various disciplines to analyse 32 local development case studies, with a particular focus on institutional and governance dynamics. This research project confirmed that needs satisfaction involves a number of different dimensions – not only in the material and economic realms, but also in relation to culture, social connection and (individual and collective) identity. As such, SINGOCOM reaffirmed the importance of cultural and political activities in local and regional development, and provided a powerful counterpoint to the science- and technology-driven approaches to innovation that had traditionally dominated development policy. In addition, SINGOCOM dynamized the IAD model in both its spatial and temporal aspects: spatially, by paying explicit attention to how institutional and social networks and interactions between levels of governance can work to enable or constrain local innovation; temporally, by introducing the notion of path dependence – not as a form of 'institutional determinism' but as a recognition of the conditions of possibility that are shaped by an area's own history. Both multi-level governance and path dependence, then, may be either limiting or empowering – they are the foundations or assets which can often be creatively recombined into new opportunities for the future.

The third project, KATARSIS, further extended SI analysis by placing local initiatives in a broader spatial and conceptual ambit. Rather than focussing on territory or place as a basis for innovation, it explored the nature of the relationship between social exclusion and agency in SI across various fields of experience – health, education, employment, environment and so on. It drew upon a large number of what it termed 'socially creative strategies' – initiatives which responded to inequality or exclusion in novel ways – which operated at a range of scales (local to global) and were initiated by different sectors of society (government, non-government, private). Key themes guiding this work were the role of culture, the nature of 'innovative' governance, and implications for research methodology. As such, the project raised some new challenges for SI analysis: questions about path dependence and the relationship between existing cultures and governance systems and 'desirable' systems which create spaces for SI; questions about what socially creative strategies can teach us, not only in relation to their substance, but in relation to the conduct of research into social exclusion.

The fourth project is Social Polis – not in itself a research project, but a 'social platform' built to enable dialogue across disciplines, sectors and countries about priorities for future research on urban social cohesion, and to build a transdisciplinary research methodology for SI analysis (see also Novy et al., Chapter 32). Social Polis has established methods to facilitate cooperation between social scientists, community organizations, political activists, policy makers, service delivery agencies and businesses, at the same time developing SI research as a response to the complexity of social phenomena (such as social exclusion/cohesion) by bringing diverse forms of knowledge (both academic and non-academic) into mutual interaction.

In sum, these four projects, which span a period from 1989 to 2011, represent not only a rich collection of stories reflecting their changing socio-political contexts, but also an evolution in theory building and methodology. Throughout this period, the interdisciplinarity of the network has allowed its participants to exchange understandings of the situated dynamics of exclusion, grass-roots action, governance

and SI. At the same time, the extraordinary depth and variety of the case studies examined has facilitated a degree of comparative and holistic analysis through which these understandings have been further developed, taking into account the multi-scalar, multi-dimensional interactions that shape the 'local' as well as the tensions – both constraining and productive – between path dependence and radical change agendas. Most recently, this work has begun to shift towards more transdisciplinary approaches in which the analysis, design and practice of socially innovative strategies have strengthened their links, not only at the level of particular actions/institutions but also between countries and sectors across Europe and, to a lesser extent, other continents. With this commitment, there has also been a stronger focus on the meta-theoretical and ontological frameworks that shape these relationships and knowledge-building practices, as the following section will elaborate.

1.5 POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FOR SI ANALYSIS

If the core of SI research is to respond in both an analytical and an activist way to poor or improvable conditions of human development, this poses a particular epistemological challenge. That is, our processes for knowledge making have not only to interrogate critically the relationships between the politico-ideological system, oppressive institutionalization and collective behaviour, but also, in themselves, to identify and sustain opportunities for alternative strategies and development processes. To do this, we need to ask not only what to analyse and how to analyse it, but also how our knowledge production system should be organized and legitimized. This means unveiling and substituting those aspects of the dominant paradigm of academic research that are incoherent with the emancipatory intent of SI. To this end, we propose several possible directions for SI methodology and theory; directions to which we believe this book makes a significant contribution.

First, we propose a theoretical engagement with complexity: the uncertainty and complexity of the social world; and the complexity of our approaches to understanding and changing it. Complexity, as currently theorized, focuses on the dynamic properties and structural transformation of discontinuous and unpredictable systems in flux (Martin and Sunley 2007, p. 575). It recognizes the idea of holistic, emergent order; qualities as much as quantities, and asserts the primacy of processes over events, of relationships over entities and of development over structure (Thrift 1999, cited in Hillier 2012, p. 38). In SI research, such an understanding can help in recognizing the potentialities in historically constituted relations, to tease out paths between the world as it is and the emerging world as we would like it to be (from 'ontology' to 'ontogenesis', in the terms of Gilbert Simondon, who directly influenced Deleuze (1994[19684])). In relation to the research process, complexity also highlights the relationships between researchers-as-actors and the social world in which they are acting; the ways in which these and other relations can be changed (in iterative, non-linear fashion) by the analytical events which draw attention to them. The following points elaborate this potential.

Second, action research should be reaffirmed as a methodology, both within particular case-studies and also by reconstructing its history and returning to its roots (see Arthur, Chapter 25). It should go beyond this ambition, however. Action

research can build a trajectory of shared research activities, including the formulation of relevant research questions – which problems to address; which theories and methods to be used; the role of SI analysis (see Novy et al., Chapter 32). This trajectory should be developed collaboratively between all actors, in a process of 'transdisciplinary problematization' (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012).

Third, the problematization approach needs the inclusive, collaborative development of a theoretical framework which includes both a meta-framework capable of showing the complexity of the world and also theories enlightening particular aspects of the SI challenges. Such a meta-theoretical framework would perform several functions, such as representing the major ontological features of the world to be potentially changed, but also highlighting the dynamics and cracks in the system from which SI may emerge. Such analysis can take advantage of a holistic methodology (as in pragmatism) which allows theoretical perspectives to engage in dialogue with empirical observations from an ethical position (see Moulaert and Mehmood, Chapter 33).

Finally, SI analysis should be reflexive and, to this end, coherent with its own ontological premises. It should give a place to the role of critically thinking participating actors in the research and action process – not only in the meta-theoretical framework, but especially by submitting any scientific methodology to reflexive, sociological assessment – that is, through a Sociology of Knowledge (SoK) approach (see Moulaert and Van Dyck, Chapter 35). We believe that this step, of assessing theories and methods in relation to the context of their development, is central to ensuring the continued relevance of SI analysis in constantly evolving, ever-complex socio-political and academic worlds.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The current appeal of SI is, in part, a function of its wide applicability to a range of strategies responding to conditions of rapid economic and social change, and to the inequities and exclusion but also opportunities that such change brings. We believe that the concept is best understood and mobilized in the context of a sociological heritage that challenges conventional economic approaches to development, and that has at its heart a desire for emancipatory macro-social change. New directions in SI analysis, a field of expanding diversity, are set within this general framing, which we see as the basis for building a more comprehensive meta-theoretical framework that can host the many partial theories, methodologies and practices that characterize and enrich SI. In making this proposal, we emphasize the importance of attention to context, both of the practical actions that ground research and of the theoretical orientations that research itself takes. Any 'grand' meta-theory must speak across social-cultural-economic differences and spatial-temporal scales to realize its socially innovative potential.

1.7 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Can you think of an example of a socially innovative practice being 'copied' from one socio-political context to another? What were some of the benefits and problems associated with this translation?
- How important is it for actors engaged in SI strategies to understand social theory?
- Can scientists and actors from different disciplinary backgrounds

hope to agree on a meta-theoretical framework for their work?

NOTES

1. *Interdisciplinarity* describes research which uses methodologies transferred between several established disciplines. For instance, substandard housing may be examined in one project from the methodologies of construction, public health, spatial planning, politics, geography, sociology, community development etc. *Transdisciplinary* research takes place between, across and beyond disciplinary boundaries and involves both scientists and practitioners in non scientific fields. Its goal is the holistic understanding of the world through the connections and unity of knowledge (Nicolescu 2002). In other words, researchers *modify* or *adapt* their approaches so that they are more appropriate to the practical issues studied.
2. Commons (1961[1934]), p. 55 for an example of a holistic definition, i.e. the definition of transactions.

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