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Mapping the various meanings of social innovation:
Towards a differentiated understanding of an
emerging concept

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Mapping the various meanings of social innovation: Towards a differentiated understanding of an emerging concept*

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Abstract

With a growing and especially fragmented body of literature on social innovations, the demand for categorizing the field increases. This study analyzes the current use of the concept social innovation. Following a systematic conceptual literature review methodology, the authors reviewed articles and books. The elements were then grouped in coherent categories. The authors found seven categories of social innovation that are linked to a distinct understanding of the concept. After presenting the categories and major themes which are discussed within each category, the different categories are set in context with each other. Subsequently, the authors discuss how the most prominent conceptualizations meet the criteria of concept clarity. Finally, the authors point to some aspects that are necessary in the future in order to strengthen the clarity of the social innovation concept.

Keywords: social innovation, conceptual literature review, concept clarity

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1. Introduction

Discussions on social innovation have been on the rise both in academia and public discourse. Although literature dates back for decades, discussions and publications on social innovation have increased in recent years. Universities have established research centres on social innovation (e.g. INSEAD, Stanford), foundations and private centers are focusing on the topic of social innovation (e.g. Young Foundation, Centre for Social Innovation Toronto, Center for Social Innovation Vienna), and governments are also engaged in establishing activities in the field (e.g. US Social Innovation Fund, Social Innovation within the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative "The Innovation Union").

Nevertheless, a common understanding of the term social innovation itself has not yet emerged. Some define social innovations as “new ideas that work to meet pressing unmet needs and improve peoples’ lives” (Mulgan et al., 2007: 7), others define them as "changes in [human] structure and organization" (Simms, 2006: 388). Contributions on social innovations are rooted in different disciplines such as sociology, business administration and economics, social work and political science. The meaning of the term ‘social innovation’ varies across these different research fields. According to Pol and Ville (2009) “It is an open secret that the term ‘social innovation’ is used in various and overlapping ways in different disciplines” (879). In addition, literature on social innovations can be found in a wide variety of sources ranging from applied practice-oriented works to theoretical academic contributions.

These factors lead to an incoherent body of knowledge on social innovations with the consequence that there is a lack of clarity of the concept of social innovation. Hence, problems arise when different understandings are mixed together without an awareness of the differences implied and transported in the specific understandings of social innovation. Therefore, the concept of social innovation faces the risk of having its validity challenged and may sooner or later be demised (Hirsch and Levin, 1999). Thus, as long as there is no clarity on what social innovation means, it will be difficult to attract resources for research, implicating that the advancement of knowledge in this research field will be hindered (Pfeffer, 1993).

Several attempts to structure the field of social innovation have been made, for example by Dedijer (1984), Zapf (1987, 1991), Moulaert et al. (2005), and Pol and Ville (2009), but there remains inconsistency among them about how to categorize the different meanings. In addition, these categorizations often lack a systematically grounded methodology that covers the social innovation concept in various disciplines at the same time.

Therefore, we address these ambiguities on social innovation by giving a detailed overview of the different understandings of social innovation used in current literature. Hence, the research question is “Which social innovation conceptualizations exist and what do they mean?”. Subsequently, we examine the most prominently used social innovation conceptualizations and evaluate how well they meet the criteria of concept clarity (Suddaby, 2010). We proceed as follows:

First, we review existing conceptualizations of social innovations. We then propose a methodology comprising a search for literature resulting in 318 papers, books, and book chapters on social innovations. In a next step we aim to identify patterns of distinct social innovation conceptualizations in these 318 contributions, which are used homogeneously within a community. These conceptualizations will then be described on the basis of key elements and essential characteristics resulting in a discussion of the different categories. Following this, we argue that there is a need to strengthen the clarity of the social innovation concept, before examining how well this is already applied. We then conclude with suggestions for future research.

2. Existing categorizations of social innovation

Several perspectives on how to categorize different understandings and meanings of the concept of social innovation exist. Within a development work context and based on National papers submitted to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD), Dedijer (1984) differentiated three types of definitions for social innovation:

- 1) "What it is" definition (e.g. something new, such as a law, an organization, a social network, a profession or training for it, a value, a norm and a code of conduct, a role, a pattern of behaviour, an intelligence system, patterns of incentives, types of entrepreneurships and a combination thereof).
- 2) "Who can make it" definition (e.g. law makers, administrators, policy makers, entrepreneurs, managers, planners, educators, engineers, leaders of associations, scientists).
- 3) "How to make it" definition (e.g. imported vs. created, trial and error vs. systematic search).

Focusing less on the style of a definition and more on the content of social innovations, Zapf (1987, 1991) found seven different (in part overlapping) approaches to social innovations: Social innovation as...:

- 1) ... restructuring organizations or relationships
- 2) ... new services offered (compared to new goods)
- 3) ... technologies used to solve social problems
- 4) ... the inclusion of the people involved with the innovation process
- 5) ... larger political innovations (compared to regular political decision and reforms)
- 6) ... changing patterns of goods and services structure in an economy
- 7) ... new lifestyles expressing one's values and status aspirations, observable through changes in one's spending of resources.

A more recent classification by Moulaert et al. (2005) differentiates four strands of social innovation. The first strand belongs to the field of management science concerned with improvements in social capital that lead to more effective or efficient work organization. The second strand is multidisciplinary and concerned with bringing commercial success in line with social and environmental progress. The third strand based on arts and creativity is concerned with intellectual and social creativity, addressing how people should interact among each other. Finally, the fourth strand is concerned with local development in territorial and regional studies.

Although not all-encompassing, Pol and Ville (2009) exemplarily list four conceptualizations of social innovations to illustrate the various and overlapping patterns rooted in different disciplines. The first one conceptualizes social innovation as synonymous with institutional change. Institutional change in this sense means the change in the regulative, normative or cultural structure of a society. The second one conceptualizes social innovations as aiming for a social purpose connected to improving either the quality or quantity of life. The third one is connected to the idea of the public good, and the fourth one describes social innovations as concerned with needs that are not addressed by the market through non-business innovations.

Another categorization differentiates a managerial perspective focusing on implementation issues within an organization and a social consequence perspective focusing on human needs satisfaction and changes in social relations (Butkevičienė, 2009).

Some categorizations are primarily concerned with the meaning of the term “social” in social innovation. An example is Bestuzhev-Lada (1991) who conceptualizes “social” as “societal” or as “sociological”. The first definition (social as societal) is counterposed to technological innovations and includes economic and political novelties. The latter definition (social as sociological) is connected to changes in social relations.

Another example is Franz (2010) who differentiates “social” both as “societal” and as the opposite of “asocial”. The first definition is the subject of social sciences research concerned with changes in social relations and structure. The latter definition is normative and aims to satisfy the needs of underprivileged groups in society.

In sum, these different categorizations show that there are diverse understandings of a) what a social innovation is and b) which criteria should be used to categorize these understandings. Existing categorizations (see above) face several constraints. First, they differ in what the differentiating criteria in categorization should be (e.g. Dedijer (1984) uses only one specific criterion – either who, what, or how – whereas Moulaert et. al (2005) use entire disciplines as the criterion). Second, categories themselves are neither mutually exclusive nor sufficiently distinct from each other (e.g. the categories “social purpose”, “public good”, “non-market need satisfaction” from Pol and Ville, 2009). Third, single categories themselves are too vague (e.g. the consequence-category with human needs satisfaction AND change in social relations from Butkevičienė, 2009). Furthermore, most of the conceptualizations are biased towards the authors' particular research field. A systematic review of research independent of disciplines is still lacking. We therefore set out to systematically review literature on social innovations before categorizing these contributions based on the different meanings they reflect.

3. Methodology

Although the concept of social innovation has existed for quite a while, comprehensive research on social innovations is either at an early stage or is experiencing a revival. Together with the fact that social innovation is used in a broad range of disciplines, this has led to a vagueness in the use of the social innovation concept as can be seen above. Therefore, the methodological choice in order to build a comprehensive social innovation conceptualization was a systematic conceptual literature review analyzed with a narrative approach (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006).

3.1. Data collection

As part of a project funded by the Federal German Ministry of Education and Research, literature search was undertaken on several bibliographic databases beginning in September 2011. Articles were searched through EBSCO (including Business Source Complete, Regional Business news, EconLit, SocIndex, LISTA). The terms used for the search included “soci* innovation*”, “sozi* Innovation*”, or “gesellschaft* innovation*” in Abstract or Title respectively. No other restrictions such as year, publication, or document type were used.

Books were searched through the Library of Congress, the British Library and the German National Library. In the case of the Library of Congress, the guided search with “soci? innovation?” “as a phrase” “in Keyword Anywhere” was used. For the British Library the advanced search with “Description” “contains” “Soci* Innovation*” in “Material Type = Books” was used. For the German National Library, the advanced search with “soci* innovation*”, “sozi* Innovation*”, or “gesellschaft* innovation*” in “Title” was used.

In addition, a web search was carried out in order to include grey or unpublished work. Google search was undertaken using the terms “soci* innovation*” and “sozi* Innovation*”.

3.2. Data inclusion

After collecting the results of the databases and search engines, each element was checked for suitability. Concerning the language, all elements written in the English or German language were included. Elements that were obviously off-topic were excluded. Examples of these were elements included due to “sozi* Innovation*” in the name of the publisher or phrases such as “society. Innovation” in the abstract. Initially, the authors intended to include with the search term “soci* innovation*” concepts such as “socio-technical innovation”. Overall, such concepts appeared only very occasionally. Therefore, the authors decided to include only terms possessing “soci” as the single root of the concept, which led to the exclusion of concepts such as “socio-technical innovation”.

Articles were either electronically downloaded or ordered in print version. Books were either purchased or ordered through the library. Unfortunately, a few publications were inaccessible and could not even be accessed through interlibrary loan. Google search was stopped after retrieving the top10 PDF documents for each search term.

Depending on the book, either the book in its entirety or its single contributions were analyzed. Each element was reviewed by one of the authors using several dimensions. Most attention was paid to a) the provided definition of social innovation and b) examples thereof. Furthermore, content related to c) the understanding of partial aspects, specifically what is meant by social or by innovation was included. In addition, statements about d) what social innovation is not and e) examples thereof were included. Finally, the dimensions f) “x leads to social innovation”, respectively g) “social innovation leads to x” were created. These dimensions were filled with explicit statements and where possible supplemented by implicit meanings if these could be extracted from the text. In the event that none of the dimensions mentioned above could be applied, the element was excluded from further analysis.

Overall, 318 elements consisting of articles, reports, books, and contributions in books were included.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of several steps. First, elements that shared a common understanding of social innovation were grouped together. To this end, one author went through the database and tried to describe a first element with a very broad meaning of “social innovation understood as...”. The following elements were then evaluated as to whether a) they fit into a previously established category, b) a previously established category needs to be modified in order to represent all previously included elements and the new one, or c) the element represents a new category “social innovation understood as...”. Indicators were, therefore, mainly the use of similar definitions of social innovation, references to the same articles, and publication in related scientific outlets.

This approach led to the preliminary categories “social innovation understood as...”:

- “...to do something good in/for society”
- “...to change social practices and/or structure”
- “...to contribute to urban and community development”
- “...to reorganize work processes”
- “...to imbue technological innovations with cultural meaning and relevance”
- “...to make changes in the area of social work”
- “...to innovate by means of digital connectivity”

Second, these seven categories themselves were analyzed as to whether they were horizontally distinct in their meaning or vertically nested in each other. The most disputed discussion concerned the question whether "...to reorganize work processes" is a subcategory of "...to change social practices and/or structure". A reason in favour of a hierarchical relationship was that "... to reorganize work processes" implies a change in the social structure and practices at work. A reason against a hierarchical relationship was that there are major differences concerning which actors are involved (business organization, functional departments and practices within vs. groups living together, society at large) and in which scientific community (applied HR experts vs. general sociologists) the discourse is rooted. For the latter reasons, it was decided to view these two categories rather as distinct categories.

Third, each element in each category was examined again for two reasons: to double-check the appropriate category and to identify specific standpoints. The first reason was intended to ensure that elements grouped in a category at an early stage were still in the category that fit best. The second reason was intended to distil different understandings, conflicting aspects, and supplementing perceptions within each category. In this process the criteria for differentiation within a category were dependent on an overall understanding of the single category (compared to criteria that would have applied to all categories in the same manner).

Fourth, elements were selected that were used as a guiding question to present the general meaning of the category. Indicators of this were when elements gave an overview of other work within the category or when elements were cited by other authors. In addition, a quality indicator was whether elements were published in well-known scientific outlets. Other articles were then selected to add specific aspects or to discuss further aspects in greater detail within the category.

Fifth, coming back to the analysis between categories, the different approaches were set in relation to each other in order to elaborate on findings across categories (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview Categorization

Name of category	To do something good in/for society	To change social practices and/or structure	To contribute to urban and community development	To reorganize work processes	To imbue technological innovations with cultural meaning and relevance	To make changes in the are of social work	To innovate by means of digital connectivity
Typical guiding question	Which innovations are needed for a better society?	What can we say about changes in how people interact among each other?	How can we approach development at a community level when we put human needs and not business needs first?	What else can we say about innovations within organizations if we leave out technological innovations?	What else is needed for a technological to become a successful innovation?	How can we improve the professional social work provision in order to better reach the goals of social work?	What possibilities to innovate do we have in a world where people are digitally connected in social networks?
Central literature	Mulgan et al. (2007) Phills et al. (2008) Dawson and Daniel (2010) Social Innovation eXchange (SIX) and Young Foundation (2010)	Howaldt and Schwartz (2010) Zapf (1991) Simms (2006)	Moulaert et al. (2005) Moulaert (2010)	Holt (1971) Pot and Vaas (2008)	Cova and Svanfeldt (1993)	Maelicke (1987)	Shih (2009) Azua (2010)
Sample definition	Social innovation is “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (Phills et al., 2008: 36).	“A social innovation is new combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices.” (Howaldt and Schwartz, 2010: 16)	“Social innovation is about the satisfaction of basic needs and changes in social relations within empowering social processes; it is about people and organisations who are affected by deprivation or lack of quality in daily life and services, who are disempowered by lack of rights or authoritative decision-making, and who are involved in agencies and movements favouring social innovation” (Moulaert, 2010: 10).	“Social Innovation in the Dutch definition is a broader concept than organisational innovation. It includes such things as dynamic management, flexible organisation, working smarter, development of skills and competences, networking between organisations. [...] it includes also the modernisation of industrial relations and human resource management” (Pot and Vaas, 2008: 468).	“A societal innovation should be understood as the process by which new meanings are introduced into the social system” (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1993).	Social innovation is “the guided change process, preferably supported by all involved and affected human beings that creates significant change in existing action structures and conditions in the social system based on ethical value judgements, contents and programs” (Maelicke, 1987: 12).	no explicit definition provided
Example	microcredits	non-married living community	participatory budgeting	project organization	adapting a technological invention to cultural context	street worker	crowdsourcing
Major focus	human well-being in societies	social practices	human-centered community development	work organization	non-technological aspects of innovation	social work provision	innovations in a digital world setting
Practical relevance for	Actors interested in promoting social well-being	Sociologists	urban developer (public representative, local civil society)	Human Ressource Management	persons in charge of business innovations	social work professionals	persons involving the social digital world in their business innovation process
Number of articles in this category*	127	53	39	28	11	8	2
Normative understanding of "social"?	yes	under discussion / disputed	yes	depending on perspective	no	yes	no
Is a change of the power structure in society intended?	empowerment as often inherent	neutral	empowerment as essential part	depending (restricted to work environment)	not relevant	not relevant	not relevant
Relation to profit-seeking innovations	possible, but not focus	can be cause or consequence	none	efficiency goals as one driver of innovations	normally yes	efficiency goals as one driver	normally yes
Relation to technological innovation	possible	can be cause or consequence	none	possible	connected	possible	connected

*: The number mainly consists of scientific journals, books, and book chapters. In addition, 50 contributions could neither explicitly nor implicitly be assigned to a single category.

4. Results

4.1. Category 1: To do something good in/for society

One of the shared assumptions of this category is that innovations can be used to address challenges in society, to benefit groups that are struggling in society, and to improve the well-being of individuals. A guiding question in this category would be: “Which innovations are needed for a better life?”

Exemplary for this stream of literature are the following definitions:

Social innovations as “new ideas that work to meet pressing unmet needs and improve peoples’ lives” (Mulgan et al., 2007: 7) or a narrower definition with social innovations as “innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social.” (Mulgan et al., 2007: 9)

A social innovation is “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals. (...) A social innovation can be a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them” (Phills et al., 2008: 36, 39).

“Social innovation can be broadly described as the development of new concepts, strategies and tools that support groups in achieving the objective of improved well-being” (Dawson and Daniel, 2010: 10).

“Social innovation describes the processes of invention, diffusion and adoption of new services or organisational models, whether in the non-profit, public or private sector. (...) Social innovations are innovations that are social both in their ends and in their means. Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.” (Social Innovation eXchange (SIX) and Young Foundation, 2010: 16, 17-18).

There are different conceptualizations about what the “social” in social innovation is. It is often emphasized that the term “social” has both a process and an outcome dimension (OECD, 2010; Phills et al, 2008), respectively social innovations are social in their ends and

their means (BEPA, 2011, Mulgan et al, 2010). Regarding the process dimension, it is stressed that not only the solutions but also the process to arrive at these solutions matters. This process should be, for example, collaborative and participative (BEPA, 2011). A stage model including similar phases such as in conventional innovation stage models (e.g. diagnosis, ideation, prototyping, sustaining, scaling, systemic change) can also be used (Murray et al., 2010).

Concerning the outcome dimension, BEPA (2011) distinguish three different approaches. The first approach centres around social demands of vulnerable groups that are currently unmet. The second approach is broader and targets challenges of society as a whole. The third approach is about systemic reforms of societal configurations, which lead to an increase in overall well-being.

The general aim within this category is to contribute to a better human life. Pol and Ville (2009) distinguish micro and macro aspects of the quality of life. A micro aspect would be for example to have a worthwhile job, whereas environmental issues and political stability would be examples for macro aspects (Pol and Ville, 2009).

Similarly, the operationalization of “a better human life” is done either through referring to needs or values. Individual needs comprise for example sufficient food, adequate health, and physical shelter, whereas a value formulation articulates equality or justice as important parts of a good human life.

The literature found in category one varies to a large extent based on the ‘social’ challenge that is being addressed as well as on the solution that is offered. Social innovations can be directed at “social ills such as hunger, poverty, disease, lack of education, human rights abuses, armed conflicts, and environmental degradation (...) conflict, political imprisonment, pollution, illiteracy, economic oppression, racism, classism, and sexism” (Cooperrider, 1991: 1037, 1038), at “issues such as social exclusion, homelessness, addictions, illiteracy and unemployment” (BEPA, 2011: 59), or at “climate change, the worldwide epidemic of chronic disease, and widening inequality.” (Murray et al, 2010: 3). Also, ageing populations, affluence, including obesity, and a lack of community cohesion are mentioned as challenges in the European context (Social Innovation eXchange (SIX) and Young Foundation, 2010).

As we find a variation in the scope of the challenges (e.g. climate change as global challenge vs. obesity as occurring only in specific regions), it becomes clear that challenges can differ across local contexts (Westley and Antadze, 2010). Solutions to challenges can

originate in every sector of society or emerge out of collaborations between representatives of different sectors in society.

Examples of social innovations originating in the public sector include laws such as the “Minimum Age for Children Working in Factories and Stores” (McVoy, 1940). Also laws that strengthen the position and rights of groups that have not previously had these rights, for example, women voting rights and the possibility of gay marriages, are considered social innovations (Mulgan et al., 2007). Beyond laws, also collective insurances against sickness and poverty, provision of clean water and sewers, and the creation of public parks are further examples of social innovations (Mulgan et al., 2007). Another example would be the change in focus of police work from crime fighter and enforcer to community leader and coordinator (Ogle, 1991).

In addition to social innovations within the public sector, policies can be also used to promote social innovations in other sectors such as the economic sector (Stewart, 1981). Here, the concept of social innovation is often related to that of a social entrepreneur, who establishes a mission-oriented venture focusing on solving social problems with business skills and methods (Bessant and Tidd, 2011). Often social entrepreneurs develop innovative solutions to overcome market failures (Kacou, 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Saul, 2011). For example, fair trade products and microcredits created or ensured access to markets to solve social problems (Phills et al., 2008). Entrepreneurial solutions are also found in care services (children and the elderly) or in the provision of alternative means of transportation (Bala, 2006). Contrary to social entrepreneurship, where research focuses to a large extent on the individual entrepreneur and start-up formation, social innovation as a holistic concept also includes established companies as pointed out by Kanther (1999). Challenges that were formerly seen as social sector issues are seen here as community needs that provide an opportunity for business solutions (see also Saul, 2011). In the context of developmental cooperation, social innovations in non-western countries are part of “base of the pyramid” approaches, which involve an inclusive economic-oriented approach to address the needs and capacities of low-income populations (Borger et al., 2010; Kacou, 2011).

In the context of civil society as the third sector, social innovations have different origins such as social movements, non-profit organizations (e.g. foundations), and citizen-based approaches of organizing life on a local level. Generally speaking, social movements aiming for social change foster social innovations (Levitas, 1977). Examples include the environmental movement that raises awareness of the limited resources on earth and aims for

change (Zald, 2004), the feminist movement (Lundstrom and Zhou, 2011), or the folk high school movement (Ellis, 2010). Organizations regarded as social innovations include Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BEPA, 2011), and Teach for America (Economist, 2010). Finally, examples also include cooperatives as an organizational form (Novkovic, 2008; Wekerle et al, 1988) as well as Local Exchange Trading Systems that introduce local currencies or trade labour time (Murray et al., 2010).

Beside these examples stemming from different sectors, social innovations might be also created through collaborations between representatives of different sectors. Nambisan (2009) and Goldsmith et al. (2010) are authors emphasizing the overall importance of these cross-sector collaborations for the creation of social innovations. Budinich et al. (2007) mention a partnership between social entrepreneurs and a company aiming to build irrigation systems. Hoss and Schrick (2001) describe the connection of voluntary work with companies to build an infrastructure for leisure time and tourism. O'Connor (2007) portrays social partnerships in Ireland amongst employers, trade unions, farmers, and governments as an important social innovation. Phipps and Shapson (2009) refer to universities and their connections to the community in order to strengthen the impact of non-commercial research through knowledge mobilization as a social innovation.

Although a social innovation can be both commercial and non-commercial (Ellis, 2010), the main goal is often seen in the pursuit of well-being, solidarity, or quality of life instead of in profit-seeking (BEPA, 2011), meaning that the balance should be towards public value creation rather than private value creation (Phills et al., 2008). In this sense social innovation is also concerned with the relationship of the individual and society, respectively the balance between individualisation and a sense of community in society (Broberg and Krull, 2010).

4.2. Category 2: To change social practices and/or structure

The main characteristic of this approach is that a social innovation is regarded as a change in social practices. A guiding question in this category would be: “What can we say about changes in how people interact among each other?”

Exemplary for this stream of literature are the following definitions:

“A social innovation is [a] new combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices.” (Howaldt and Schwartz, 2010: 16)

Social innovations “are new ways of doing things, especially new organizational devices, new regulations, new living arrangements, that change the direction of social change, attain goals better than older practices, become institutionalized and prove to be worth imitating” (Zapf, 1991: 91).

"Changes in [human] structure and organization are social innovations" (Simms, 2006: 388)

A central aspect is that social is understood as how people interact among each other (Aderhold, 2010) and organize their life in relation to each other. The social sciences, and specifically sociology, is therefore the primary discipline of this approach (Howaldt and Schwartz, 2010). William F. Ogburn is often named as the first sociologist concerned with social innovation. He distinguished material innovations from social innovations and claimed that through the changes in material innovations a cultural lag emerges that causes social problems, which need to be addressed with social innovations (Gillwald, 2000; Rammert, 2010; Zapf, 1989).

Another definition specifying the kind of structure that is changed through social innovations was introduced by Heiskala (2007). Based on the institutional pillars formulated by Scott (2001), social innovations are defined as:

“changes in the cultural, normative or regulative structures of the society which enhance its collective power resources and improve its economic and social performance.” (Heiskala, 2007: 74).

Due to its conceptualization as a change in social practices, examples of social innovations in this category stem from diverse backgrounds. These can be the change from a rural to an urban lifestyle (Lewis, 1954), the introduction of a democratic political system (Simms, 2006), environmental movements, non-married living communities, assembly lines, fast-food chains, social insurance systems, or local government reforms (Gillwald, 2000). Also, the invention of money, the granting of property rights, the nation state, and the Humboldtian university are social innovations according to this approach (Dobrescu, 2009). Other very broad and diverse examples are laws such as constitutions, civil rights legislation,

and traffic laws; organizations such as service clubs, YMCA, and Alcoholics Anonymous; products such as credit cards; and practices such as vacations, and voluntary blood donations (Conger, 1984).

The causal relationship between social and technological innovations is bidirectional, i.e. a social innovation can be both a condition for a technological innovation or a result of a technological innovation (Gillwald, 2000; Gerber, 2006). The first modern scientific research lab is such an example, portraying the close connection between technological and social innovations (Drucker, 1987). The research lab as a specialized kind of organized work made a lot of technological progress possible (Fortune International, 2003). For example, although Thomas Alva Edison is mostly credited for the technological invention of the light bulb, his greatest invention might have been the modern research and development laboratory, as for Henry Ford it was not Model T but the assembly line, or for Walt Disney not Disneyland but the Disney creative department (Collins, 1997).

Regardless of the causality of social vs. technological innovations, social and technological innovations may occur independently of each other. Taking the example of hospitals, social innovations are childbirth preparation classes, nurse-midwifery services, postpartum contraceptive counselling, adolescent pregnancy clinics, family planning nurse practitioners, fathers in the delivery room, rooming-in, prenatal contraceptive counselling, abortion services, whereas technological innovations would be external fetal monitoring, internal fetal monitoring, ultrasonic scanning, alpha-fetoprotein test, fetal scalp pH test, oxytocin challenge test, estriol determination, laparoscopy for diagnosis, laparoscopy for sterilization, and amniocentesis (Nathanson and Morlock, 1980).

Another possible relationship between technological and social innovations is the overall innovation process as consisting of both parts, e.g. the technical part is product-related and the social part are distributional practices (Gardner et al, 2007).

One of the major controversies in the conceptualizations of social innovation in this sociological category is what the notion of “better” in the two definitions mentioned above means and whether some kind of normative notion in terms of “something good” and “socially desirable” is implied. Three different possible answers to this question have been found. The first sees a normative notion as essential, the second denies a normative notion, and the third takes a middle road by referring to other concepts and theories which should specify the “better”.

Examples for the first stream are Heinze and Naegele (2010), who mention the values-oriented aspect of social innovation. Heiskala (2007) also describes the “positive meaning” (55) of social innovations through the improvement effects of social innovation in the definition mentioned above. It is ethically neutral in the sense that it does not favour something specific, but it is an ethical question concerning what social performance could be. A less obvious aspect, but in the end also implying a normative dimension, can be found in Gerber’s (2006) conceptualization. Here, social innovations – as changes in social practices – contribute to solving major challenges in a society, which somehow implies the need to determine these challenges by having an idea of what a better life involves.

In the second stream, Aderhold (2010) argues for the value-neutrality of the term “social” by emphasizing that “social” only means being related to another human. Also, Howaldt and Schwarz (2010) point out that social innovations only serve specific actor groups and not a broader conception of the socially desirable. Quoting Lindhult (2008) with “there is no inherent goodness in social innovation” (43-44), they argue for not mixing normative aspects of the goodness with the concept of social innovation. This stream would therefore deny a positive value-judging aspect of social innovation (Stiftung für Kommunikationsforschung, 1986).

The last stream is aware of the confusion between social innovation and normativity and leaves the final decision up to the reader. An example is Gillwald (2000). Using the Ku Klux Klan already mentioned by Ogburn as a social innovation, Gillwald demonstrates that depending on the theory one uses the Ku Klux Klan can either be called a social innovation or not. It is a social innovation if one uses “social change” as the criterion, but it is not if one uses “modernization theories” as the criterion.¹

4.3. Category 3: To contribute to urban and community development

Research done in this category was initiated through SINGOCOM (Social Innovation, Governance and Community Building), a project funded by the European Commission between 2001 and 2004 to propose an Alternative Model of Local Innovation (ALMOLIN). A

¹ Gillwald (2000) uses “modernization theories“ because she connects the discussion on social innovations with the discussion of modernization through increased rationality. Based on Weber’s typology of rationalization she uses five types of rationalities (economic, ecologic, political, social and cultural) illustrated with specific examples. Examples are the ecological movement (addresses ecological rationality through their goal attainment), the idea of unmarried people living in shared apartments (addresses the cultural dimension), or fast-food chains (addressing economic rationality through efficient food provision).

characteristic guiding question in this category would be: “How can we approach development at a community level when we put human needs and not business needs first?”

Exemplary for this stream of literature are the following definitions:

“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 in various spheres of society at various spatial scales.

Social innovation is very strongly a matter of process innovation – i.e. changes in the dynamics of social relations, including power relations.

As social innovation is very much about social inclusion, it is also about countering or overcoming 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 subject to a variety of interpretations and will in practice often be the outcome of social construction” (Moulaert et al., 2005: 1978).

“Social innovation is about the satisfaction of basic needs and changes in social relations within empowering social processes; it is about people and organisations who are affected by deprivation or lack of quality in daily life and services, who are disempowered by lack of rights or authoritative decision-making, and who are involved in agencies and movements favouring social innovation” (Moulaert, 2010: 10).

This approach consists of three dimensions: First, satisfaction of human needs (content/product dimension), second, changes in social relations and governance (process dimension), and third, an increase in socio-political capability (empowerment dimension). The social aspect of the approach is to strengthen inclusion into and participation in social life. The political aspect is to give voice to people and groups who are traditionally unheard. Therefore, a social innovation is not necessarily new – which is what is usually meant by innovation – but could also be a return to an old institutional constellation (Moulaert, 2005).

The rise of this approach can be seen as an answer to the negative side effects of neo-liberalism, deregulation, and privatization as a development paradigm, being based instead on values such as solidarity and reciprocity (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2008). Therefore, with its community development orientation this approach is an alternative to a market-led territorial development (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005), including large-scale physical renovations (Moulaert et al., 2007). It is also a distinctive feature of the discourse on sustainable community development, which balances economic, environmental, and social

aspects (Healey, 2009). Here, research often focuses on the urban context (see e.g. Gerometta et al., 2005).

Due to the empowerment dimension and the focus on change in social relations and governance, this approach is often in favour of bottom-up initiatives (see e.g. Andersen et al., 2009). To mobilize citizens and to promote social cohesion at the local level is seen as central to this approach (Klein, 2009; Novy and Hammer, 2007). Examples for social innovation in urban development include a local mediating organization that has been successful in integrating German settlers from the former Soviet Union in neighbourhood participation in Berlin, a workers' co-operative and a housing association supporting local economic development in Sunderland, a psychiatric hospital focusing its policies on better integration into local space and life in Milan, and a collaborative arts-based project strengthening awareness of a neighbourhood's history in Wales (Moulaert et al., 2005). Other examples include an organization aiming to re-integrate the most deprived people into economic life in Antwerp (Christiaens et al., 2007), an initiative for participatory urban planning in Naples (Muro et al., 2007), and a participatory budgeting policy in Porto Alegre (Novy and Leubolt, 2005).

4.4. Category 4: To reorganize work processes

As previously mentioned, this approach is closely connected to the sociological category of change in social practices but it is still a distinct approach. Its main characteristic is that it is concerned with the organization of work. A guiding question in this category would be: "What else can we say about innovations within organizations if we leave out technological innovations?"

Exemplary for this stream of literature are the following definitions:

"Social innovation deals with the application of new social patterns of human interaction", which means in the organizational context "finding new ways for cooperation between people who work and interact in organizations for common objectives" (Holt, 1971: 235-236).

"Social Innovation in the Dutch definition is a broader concept than organisational innovation. It includes such things as dynamic management, flexible organisation, working smarter, development of skills and competences, networking between

organisations. [...] it includes also the modernisation of industrial relations and human resource management” (Pot and Vaas, 2008: 468).

In the recent literature this type of social innovation is also called workplace innovation:

“Workplace innovation is defined as the implementation of new and combined interventions in the fields of work organisation, human resource management and supportive technologies. Workplace innovation is considered to be complementary to technological innovation. Some people use the broader concept of non-technological innovation, in which also dynamic management, new marketing practices and external collaboration are included” (Pot, 2011: 404-405).

The main argument of literature belonging to this category is that besides technological innovations at the workplace one also has to consider social innovations, because social innovations contribute to a large extent to the overall innovation success within an organization (Pot and Vaas, 2008).

Examples of this stream are a more organic management system, project organization, concentration of innovative functions and employee participation (Holt, 1971). The introduction of a new work arrangement (autonomous teams and an operation expert), mobile working, short meetings of department staff standing in a circle, and connecting communities of employees, partners, customers, and others are also mentioned (Pot, 2011).

Another terminology for social innovation in this category is administrative innovation. Whereas technological innovations involve products, services, or production technology, administrative innovations are either related to the structure or the processes of an organization. Examples for the two types are a change in organizational structure away from a functional to a product-oriented structure or a change in the rewarding process away from an individually-based to a group-based incentive system (Svyantek, 2007).

Some scholars specify their understanding of social innovations within the organizational context and consider social innovations to be connected to the function of human resource management (Thom, 2001), such as the introduction of coaching practices (Gessner, 2000) or motivation and involvement practices within corporations (Barraud-Didier and Guerrero, 2002; Martens, 2010; Tallard, 1991). Here, the understanding of social and technological innovations is that an innovation cannot be both at the same time.

According to Svyantek (2009), the relationship between social and technological innovations (which is the cause and which is the effect) is similar to the hen-egg discussion. Both kinds of innovations can be the cause and effect of each other, depending on time, environment and leadership aspects. Furthermore, Posthuma (1995) shows that both kinds of innovation can also reinforce each other.

With regard to the motivation for introducing social innovations and the question who profits from social innovations, two different primary perspectives can be distinguished. The first perspective emphasizes positive economic effects, the second one emphasizes the increase in the quality of work from a humanitarian perspective. Examples for the former are Allee and Taug (2006) who portray economic value-creating business rationale as the motivating factor for social innovations; Pot (2008) who relates the importance of social innovation to an increase in labour productivity, workforce capabilities, and organizational capacities; Barraud-Didier and Guerrero (2002) who find a positive relationship between social innovations and financial performance; and Alasoini (2004) who finds that social innovations lead amongst others to productivity growths.

The second perspective emphasizes the benefits for employees through social innovations. These can be better social integration at work, a lower risk potential or increased willingness to take risks in future (Adler and Vieweg, 1986). Also according to Martens (2010), the increase in employee participation at the workplace is not only a means to increase efficiency, but is also the manifestation of democratic values.

4.5. Category 5: To imbue technological innovations with cultural meaning and relevance

This category assumes that technology invention is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful innovations. In addition to pure technological invention, making the invention meaningful to its cultural context is seen as an important attribute in order to label the innovation a successful innovation. A characteristic guiding question in this category would be: “What else is needed for a technological invention to become a successful innovation?”.

Exemplary for this stream of literature is the following definition:

“A societal innovation should be understood as the process by which new meanings are introduced into the social system” (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1993).

From this point of view, societal innovation is the process that changes the aesthetic and cultural understanding of a product. Other scholars not only emphasize the outcome (change in meaning) but also the process of meaning-making as a social innovation. As an example, Menzel et al. (2007) portray a social innovation process as parallel to technical innovation aimed at making the technical innovation meaningful. This is accomplished by interrelating the technical innovation with the cultural meaning, i.e. the world of meanings.

Also Cavalli (2007) emphasizes the importance of symbolic and communicative aspects for innovations. Generally speaking, only technological innovations that are accepted by society are social innovations. The process towards this acceptance is achieved through discourse.

This meaning-making characteristic of social innovation can also be found in Wiener (1984) who states that social innovations are modifications of the symbolic environment in contrast to changes in the physical world or the world of subjective experiences.

4.6. Category 6: To make changes in the area of social work

Social work is based on an understanding of the state as a social state. This implies a conceptualization of the state as having goals such as the provision of social security and social justice. This conceptualization rests on ethical premises and also implies for the state a duty to act in order to reach these goals. The content and programmes depend on the respective societal consensus (Maelicke, 1987). A characteristic guiding question in this category would be: “How can we improve the professional social work provision in order to better reach the goals of social work?”.

Exemplary for this stream of literature is the following definition:

“the guided change process, preferably supported by all involved and affected human beings, that creates significant change in existing action structures and conditions in the social system based on ethical value judgements, contents and programs” (Maelicke, 1987: 12).

Social innovations here are often said to be a reform that implies progress, but this automatism is misleading and evaluation is needed before the reform fits into this conceptualization of social innovation (Pabon, 1978).

Important is the orientation towards goals related to social development, such as the goal to improve autonomy, emancipation, justice, or solidarity. A mere improvement in the

efficient functioning of existing practices would not be enough (Maelicke, 1987). Related terms of social innovation in social work are social work intervention and human service innovations (Bailey-Dempsey and Reid, 1996).

Depending on the scope of social work, examples also differ. In the narrow sense scope may relate only to social work, whereas in the broader sense it may also include social policy. Examples of the narrower sense include the situational approach in the kindergarten, social work at school, street workers, social training courses, youths' flat-sharing community, assisted living, home-based family support, contact points for offenders, women's shelters, and victim-offender mediation (Maelicke, 2000). In the broader sense an example would be the shift in public policy away from income maintenance for the poor towards assistance in asset creation for the poor as a way out of poverty (Khinduka, 2007).

4.7. Category 7: To innovate by means of digital connectivity

This most recent understanding of social innovation is closely connected to the digital world, particularly that part of the digital world where social connectivity matters. A characteristic guiding question in this category would be: "What possibilities to innovate do we have in a world where people are digitally connected in social networks?"

While there are no explicit definitions available in the literature, the meaning of social innovations attributed to this category can be derived from Shih (2009) and Azua (2010). Using Facebook as an example for social networks, Shih (2009) illustrates why social networks matter for businesses and more specifically how social networks can be integrated into the generation of business innovations. This is illustrated along a typical innovation process with the four steps concept generation, prototyping, commercial implementation, and continual iteration. The social processes supporting the innovation process include crowd sourcing, collaborating prototyping, possibility for feedback, and persuasion of users in the social network to adopt the innovation (Shih, 2009).

Similar to Shih (2009), Azua (2010) illustrates, besides the general importance of wikis, blogs, cloud computing, and social media, the importance of using social software in the innovation process. Socially networked innovation programmes enhance collaboration among people. To increase the efficiency of such programmes one should remove roadblocks to enable innovation, connect innovators and early adopters, and get people excited about innovations (Azua, 2010).

5. Discussion

5.1. Categories in perspective to each other

In order to illuminate their specifics and differences and highlight the complexity of different concepts of social innovation, this section is dedicated to comparing the different categories. Special attention is paid to the main research domain, where the discourse of each approach is primarily discussed, and the specific understanding of the term “social” in social innovation with an emphasis on whether it includes normative value judgments. Furthermore, the relationship between social innovation and profit-seeking and technological innovations is discussed.

Although overlapping, each category represents a distinct research domain. Category 1 (...to do something good in/for society), for example, is primarily discussed among people interested in the promotion of social well-being. Due to the nature of this topic, the discussion takes place in very diverse communities, for example in public policy, civil engagement, non-profit organizations, and social entrepreneurship. In contrast, the discussions in category 2 (...to change social practices and/or structure) mostly take place within the sociological scientific community. Similarly category 4 (...to reorganize work processes) is found in organizational studies or business administration, category 3 (...to contribute to urban and community development) is about urban development, category 6 (...to make changes in the area of social work) is about social work and social policy, while categories 5 (...to imbue technological innovations with cultural meaning and relevance) and 7 (...to innovate by means of digitally connectivity) are mainly discussed within innovation literature.

As previously mentioned, Bestuzhev-Lada (1991) and Franz (2010) already pointed out that the “social” in social innovation might itself imply diverse understandings. Category 1 represents primarily a “socially desired” understanding of social, whereas category 2 stands for a sociological understanding, highlighting new ways of how human beings organize their social interactions. Category 4 also emphasizes the organizing aspect, but applies it only in a more narrow sense to the work environment. Category 3 can be seen as a mix of categories 1 and 2, because in category 3 the “socially desired” understanding is combined with the change in social interactions in favour of the disadvantaged and socially excluded members of society. The understanding of “social” in category 6 is rooted in the overall theme of social work, whereas category 5 explicitly uses non-technological as “social” and category 7 transports a digitally connected understanding of “social”.

Another interesting point is the relationship of social innovations with profit-seeking innovations. Category 1 allows social innovations to be profit-seeking innovations, although as previously mentioned the balance should be towards the social – and not the private – benefit. Representatives of category 2 would deny that social innovations can be profit-seeking innovations but would rather underline that profit-seeking innovations might be the cause or consequence of social innovations that change social practices. In category 4 efficiency concerns function as the main driver of social innovations, which means that social innovations are expected to pay off. Category 3 is comparatively sceptical about profit-seeking innovations and more opposed to than in favour of them due to the underlying assumption that profit motives undermine community building and development. Category 6 is also sceptical about the profit motive but sees efficiency goals as one driver in the need to pay attention to social innovations. Due to the overall commercial orientation in categories 5 and 7, social innovations within these categories are part of the overall (largely) profit-oriented innovation process.

Finally, the question arises concerning the relationship between social and technological innovations. Social innovations where technology contributes to human betterment are definitely possible in category 1, while in category 2 – as with profit-seeking innovations – social innovations can only be the cause or consequence of technological innovations. Technological innovations related to the organization of work are possible in category 4, but are not conventional for urban development in category 3. Category 6 on the other hand would regard technological innovations that contribute to better social work provision as social innovations. In category 5 technological and social aspects are distinct but both contribute to the overall innovation process. Due to the digital context, technological and social innovations overlap in category 7.

5.2. Clarity of the social innovation concept

So far, we have identified seven different meanings of social innovation. In this section we concentrate on the four meanings of social innovation that are most cited according to our study, namely categories 1 to 4. First, we express our motivation to further clarify the concept of social innovation. We follow Suddaby (2010) in his understanding of concept clarity² as distinct from concept validity that is closer to empirical questions of

² We use the term concept consistently and interchangeably with the term construct (see also Suddaby, 2010: 353f). The term construct is only used as an established expression such as “umbrella construct”.

variable measurement and operationalization. Second, we elaborate how these different aspects relating to concept clarity are addressed in the four categories. We use the definitions discussed above as the best proxy to represent the overall category.

Out of the understanding of a theory as “a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints”, Bacharach (1989: 496) derives the importance of concept clarification for theory-building purposes. Concept clarification facilitates communication among academics, allows better empirical research and enhances opportunities for creativity and innovation in research (Suddaby, 2010). Without having distinct meanings of concepts that are explicitly expressed, it is difficult to build a cumulative body of knowledge that also allows measurement and prediction. This is especially important in emergent research fields and particularly difficult in multi-disciplinary fields (Shenhav et al, 1994), both are conditions that apply to research on social innovation. Although there may be different perspectives among different research communities, what is necessary to build concepts, the need for clarity and precision, applies to all of them (Suddaby, 2010).

In terms of the scope of a concept definition, Hirsch and Levin (1999) distinguish researchers who favour broad conceptualizations (umbrella advocates) and researchers who favour narrower conceptualizations (validity police). Underlying this differentiation are different preferences for relevance and integration (umbrella advocates) and preferences for rigour and focus (validity police). An umbrella construct is defined as “a broad concept or idea used loosely to encompass and account for a set of diverse phenomena” (Hirsch and Levin, 1999: 210). A challenge to umbrella constructs is that consensus is hardly achieved on how to operationalize the concept, while simultaneously entailing the risk that the umbrella constructs include too many elements and mean “all things for all people” (210). By introducing a life-cycle perspective on concepts, Hirsch and Levin (1999) proclaim that in the final stage of a concept's life-cycle a research community either a) agrees on a concept's coherence, b) agrees that the community disagrees, or c) agrees that the concept needs to be demised. We especially see these challenges to umbrella constructs as existent within research on social innovation and will therefore now elaborate on the concept clarity of the social innovation concept within these categories. Through this we aim to contribute to a coherent understanding of social innovation or an agreed understanding of the different understandings of social innovations in order to avoid arguments in favour of a demise of the social innovation concept.

Suddaby (2010) argues that concept clarity consists of four basic elements. First, the definition should be precise and parsimonious. Second, the scope conditions and contextual characteristics should be clear in terms of when and where the concept applies. Third, semantic relationships to related concepts should be stated. Fourth, coherence and logical consistency should be existent so that all aspects make sense and fit together.

In terms of a precise and parsimonious definition, Osigweh (1989) differentiates between the breadth and depth of a concept. Whereas breadth “refers to the class of things to which it applies, or the totality of objects which it identifies” (584), depth “refers to the sum total of characteristics or collection of properties that anything must possess to be denoted by that term” (584). Suddaby (2010) states that all essentials must be effectively and concisely captured and the definition should not carry any circularity. These criteria are now applied to categories 1-4 (see Table 2).

Concerning the breadth of category 1, we challenge that “a novel solution” is precise enough in terms of the class of things to which it applies. A novel solution could be anything from a product to an idea, a movement or a law. Concerning the depth of the concept it is not precise enough as to which characteristics must be covered or how to treat “novel solutions” that on the one hand create an improvement in one of the dimensions “effective, efficient, sustainable, or just”, while at the same time compromise on a different dimension. A limitation in scope originates from primarily public value creation rather than private value creation. This means that innovations which create huge individual profits and have a smaller positive public value will not be considered as social innovations. Semantic relationships exist between concepts such as social entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The concepts are more restrictive than social innovation by encompassing either individuals (social entrepreneurship) or organizations (social enterprise).

The breadth of category 2 is limited to immaterial and intangible “social practices” and often defined in contrast to technological innovations. However, confusion exists because not only are the social practices called social innovations but, as described above, organizations that cause these changes in social practices are also called social innovations. With regard to depth (i.e. the characteristics these social practices need to incorporate) it is unclear what are seen as needs and problems and how to determine what a “better” solution is. This also leads to unclear scope conditions in terms of underlying value assumptions. Without having an explicit underlying world view, it becomes arbitrary to the researcher's choice which criteria to use in order to determine whether something has changed for the “better”.

Besides the previously mentioned polarity towards technological innovation, other semantic relationships are built regarding social change (social innovations are intended, social change not) and reform (reforms are made by governments, social innovations are not restricted to be introduced only by specific actors). The theoretical origin of the concepts lies in the research on socio-technological innovation and can be traced back to Ogburns' cultural lag due to material innovations.

Table 2: Overview Concept Clarity

Name of category	To do something good in/for society	To change social practices and/or structure	To contribute to urban and community development	To reorganize work processes
Sample definition	social innovation is "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals" (Phills et al., 2008: 36).	"A social innovation is new combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices." (Howaldt and Schwartz, 2010: 16)	"Social innovation is about the satisfaction of basic needs and changes in social relations within empowering social processes; it is about people and organisations who are affected by deprivation or lack of quality in daily life and services, who are disempowered by lack of rights or authoritative decision-making, and who are involved in agencies and movements favouring social innovation" (Moulaert, 2010: 10).	"Social Innovation in the Dutch definition is a broader concept than organisational innovation. It includes such things as dynamic management, flexible organisation, working smarter, development of skills and competences, networking between organisations. [...] it includes also the modernisation of industrial relations and human resource management" (Pot and Vaas, 2008: 468).
Definition (precise and parsimonious concerning breadth and depth)	"a novel solution" as unit of analysis is very broad; not precise as to how conflicts amongst "effective, efficient, sustainable, or just" are treated;	not precise a) how to determine needs and problems that need to be addressed and b) how to determine what is better (new vs. established practice) independent of individual judgments	unclear breadth due to uncertainty what the unit of analysis is; requires simultaneous fulfilment of "satisfaction of basic needs" + "changes in social relations" + "empowering"; circularity within "social innovation [...]" and movements favouring social innovation"	essential properties and characteristics are not mentioned, instead collection of phenomena that are supposed to contain these characteristics
Scope conditions (space, time, values)	concerning space: no limitations; concerning time: no limitations; concerning values: value creation for communities is preferred over value creation for individuals	concerning space: no limitations; concerning time: no limitations; concerning values: unclear	concerning space: preference for bounded locality compared to unbounded global approach; concerning time: no limitations; concerning values: preference for subsidiarity and self-determination	concerning space: confined to organizational context; concerning time: no limitations; concerning values: depending, i.e. improvement of efficiency and quality of work at the same time
Semantic relationships (connection to other concepts)	social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, social value, innovation, social, social change, market failure	social change, business / socio-technical / technical / technological innovation, reform, social change, societal modernization, social invention, social fact, innovation	urban / community development, neighbourhoods, social movements, social change, (local / community) governance	(product / process / organizational / technological/ non-technological / administrative) innovation
Coherence (of the above mentioned aspects and in relation to theoretical arguments)	inconsistent: often product categories such as microcredits are called social innovations implying that microcredits are per se social innovation regardless of whether they create social value; need of integration into specific theories	social innovation as part of a theory of socio-technological innovation; having the "goal of better satisfying" does not mean that the new social practices can keep up with and realize this intention	builds on philosophical theories such as Sens capability approach and contributes to urban development theories such as spatialized Regulation Theory and Urban Regime Theory (see also Moulaert et al., 2007)	concept social innovation potentially replaced by the concept workplace innovation (see Pot, 2011)

The depth of social innovations within category 3 is articulated through three dimensions. By combining an outcome dimension (satisfaction of basic needs) with a process dimension (changes in social relations) and an empowerment dimension ("increasing the

socio-political capability and access to resources” in Moulaert et al., 2005: 1976), this understanding of social innovation demands the simultaneous fulfilment of these criteria. This conceptualization is broad (abstract rather than operationalized dimensions) and narrow (simultaneous fulfilment) at the same time. Within this category exists uncertainty concerning the breadth of the concept. One possibility would be to define the “things” that cause the change, e.g. “participatory budgeting”, as the social innovation. Another possibility would be to define the changes (in social relations that fulfil basic needs and empower) themselves as the social innovation. Due to the spatial nature of the concept and the underlying value preferences for subsidiarity and self-determination, the concept is limited insofar as unbounded global approaches would conflict with the locally bounded empowerment dimension. Semantic relationships are primarily found among ideas of urban and community development as well as social movements as forms of self-governed collective action. The theoretical foundations of these approaches are rooted in urban and regional development theories and include an understanding of political science and philosophical considerations.

So far, specifications concerning the depth and breadth of the social innovation concept are lacking in category 4. Instead of capturing the essential properties of the concept, a listing of different social innovations is provided. One scope condition is that social innovations occur in an organizational context. As we have seen above, in respect of underlying value preferences it is still unclear whether economic efficiency concerns or quality of work issues are the prime basis of social innovations. Semantic relationships exist for example regarding organizational innovation. Overall, coherence is not given and this may also be one of the reasons why there are efforts to use “workplace innovation” rather than “social innovation” (see Pot, 2011).

6. Conclusion

So far, we identified seven different conceptualizations of social innovation, presented their main characteristics, compared them with each other, and evaluated their suitability in terms of concept clarity. In this final section we elaborate on the implications derived from our research, the limitations this study is facing, and present recommendations for future research.

Our findings are important for several reasons. First, as current literature on social innovation is lacking a systematic review of the concept, we attempted to structure the field,

mapping the various conceptualizations of social innovations grounded in a literature review and independent of a specific research discipline.

Second, our results show that there are different discourses on the social innovation concept, which are rooted in different disciplines' audiences. Therefore, similar to Nicholls's (2010) findings in the field of social entrepreneurship, we found the concept of social innovation to be a concept with no clear epistemology and where a paradigmatic consensus (Kuhn, 1962) has yet to be achieved. Due to this plurality of understandings our recommendation would be to adopt caution when citing and referencing social innovation literature without paying attention to a potentially different understanding of social innovation in the context of the original source. Looking at the different elements analyzed in this study, this confusion becomes especially relevant in distinguishing the socially desirable political and normative understanding of social innovation as found in category 1 from the sociological understanding of social innovation in category 2.

Third, our study reveals insights on how well the existing and most prominently used conceptualizations meet the criteria for concept clarity. Overall, we see social innovation as an umbrella construct that after a phase of excitement now faces validity challenges by being at risk of having too many and various meanings for different people. We show that the need for more precision concerning the breadth and depth of definition as well as the scope conditions is a common theme running through the definitions we focused on.

The limitations of the study mainly comprise the quantity and quality of the data sample we analyzed. First, by including only publicly available material we did not include work in progress or unpublished work, which might have been included by, for instance, requesting material through academic networks. Second, we did not review each article to also include material cited in the article, but included only material that we found in our data base searches. Overall, we faced challenges of distilling the implicit meaning of social innovation where an explicit definition was not provided.

Recommendations for future research concern the general call for more specific statements about the breadth, depth, scope conditions, semantic relationships, and logical consistency of the concept. In this regard there should also be an awareness of which elements are core to the concept (part of definition, necessary to be fulfilled) and which elements are in the context of the concept (not part of the definition, associated empirical regularities).

Furthermore, in particular an explicit positioning towards normative aspects and power issues is needed. Power issues are related to the discussion on normativity because

there is the power to specify how the “better” can be determined (e.g. what are basic needs/what is just?). Moreover, the different conceptualizations of social innovation also differ in terms of their ambition to change existing power structures. Whereas category 1 uses an empower analogy (“fighting marginalization”) and category 4 even articulates serving the disempowered and confronting elitist approaches, the other categories remain either silent or neutral concerning their perspective on the existing power structure.

Finally, although we are not in favour of specific definitions, we suggest reaching agreement on two different conceptualizations of social innovation, which are distinct from each other and carry the potential to be of use for further scientific inquiries. Hirsch and Levin (1999) presented three different possibilities for the final stage in a concepts life cycle: coherent consensus, consensus to disagree, and demise. Following this logic we suggest a “consensus to disagree” and argue in favour of two different conceptualizations, namely a normative and a sociological conceptualization. The normative conceptualization can be built on existing work out of categories 1 and 3, the sociological conceptualization is rooted in category 2. In terms of the normative conceptualization, we see the capability approach by Sen (which is already used in category 3) as one of the best-suited philosophical anchorings (see also Yujico (2008) and Ziegler (2010) for conceptualizing social entrepreneurship in this direction). In terms of the sociological conceptualization, we recommend to concentrate on “changes in social practices” regardless of their normative evaluation by avoiding any links to a notion of the “better”.

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