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NOVATION

Critical Studies of Innovation

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Critical perspectives in social innovation, social enterprise and/or the social solidarity economy

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About Us

The international journal *NOvation: Critical Studies of Innovation* was launched to contribute to the rethinking and debunking of innovation narratives in STS (Science, Technology and Society) and STI (Science, Technology, and Innovation). There is a need to critically examine studies of innovation and obtain a clearer portrait of innovation than the depiction this field has been accustomed to. The journal questions the current narratives of innovation and offers a forum for discussion of some different interpretations of innovation, not only its virtues, but also its implications. In this sense, NO refers to non-innovative behaviors, which are as important to our societies as innovation is. Failures, imitation and negative effects of innovation, to take just some examples of non-innovation or *NOvation*, are scarcely considered and rarely form part of theories of innovation.

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Editorial Presentation Critical perspectives in social innovation, social enterprise and/or the social solidarity economy

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This Thematic Issue seeks to explore critical perspectives of an international nature on social innovation (SI), social enterprise (SE) and/or social solidarity economy (SSE). The aim is to examine the grand narrative, explore the ontological assumptions of the field, challenge the normative and present alternatives that draw attention to political economy, critical theory and critical management studies.

Critical perspectives emerged in social innovation (SI) literature as a concerted effort sometime in 2008. A few voices sounded from the edges of the field much earlier. Ash Amin, Professor of Geography at Durham University, inspected the new favourite of public policy way back in 2002, discarded it as a "a poor substitute for a welfare state" and never returned to the subject. There were heated debates that challenged the grand narrative of SI at the International Social Innovation Research Conferences (ISIRC) (once called the Social Enterprise Research Conference before becoming ISIRC with the involvement of the social innovation theme from Skoll Centre). The Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) conferences picked away at the promise of unlimited performance and achievement of the upstart SE in a mature voluntary and charity network (Aiken, 2002, 2006, 2007; Grenier, 2009; Pharaoh, Scott & Fisher, 2004). Still, on the whole, the literature in the last twenty years has been overwhelmingly interested in promoting social enterprise (SE) and SI as (a) an inherently good thing, (b) a solution to all problems and (c) a politically neutral complement to neo-liberal economics globally.

Through 2005-2008, a handful of academics were beginning to make concerted inroads from within the SE field that challenged the superpowers gifted to the SE/SI

rhetoric. First through conference presentations, in particular in 2006, a 1-day seminar at Manchester Metropolitan University, 'Critical Perspectives on Social Enterprise', followed by a Special Issue in *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* (Bull, 2008). Later individual publications developed the critical themes in different directions (Seanor *et al.*, 2013; Curtis, 2008; Curtis *et al.*, 2010; Grant, 2008; Scott-Cato *et al.*, 2008; Scott & Hillier, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2008a, Betta *et al.*, 2010; Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2019; Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2021), each skirting around the issue of critical theory and focussing on finding the 'social' in SE, but not addressing critical theory head-on.

Then at the 2010 Skoll Centre Research Colloquium on Social Entrepreneurship at the Said Business School, Oxford, Pascal Dey of University Applied Science, Northwestern, Switzerland burst on to the scene, wowing the gathered crowd with the lucidity of his paper (Dey, 2010), on the symbolic violence in social entrepreneurship discourse. Critical theory had come of age, moving away from the functional critiques (SEs don't do what they claim) and territorial debates (SEs are businesses in disguise or charities do this anyway) to a more theoretically informed investigation, deliberately working from and with critical theory. Steyaert and Dey (2010) followed this up, in the first edition of the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, with a mature call to keep social enterprise research 'dangerous'.

Since then, critical perspectives on SI have widened and diversified with critical perspectives tracks in EMES International Research Network, ISIRC and other SI related conferences as well as an increasing number of PhD and early career researchers adopting a critical lens in studying SI'. Whilst 'ordinary' critical thinking might be described as an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences (Glaser, 1941). However, the critical perspectives we are seeking to develop in this Thematic Issue are best described by Horkheimer (1982), whereby we question the facts which our senses present to us as socially performed approaches to understanding in the social sciences. We should start with an understanding of a "social" experience itself as always fashioned by ideas that are in the researchers themselves. The project of a critical perspective is also "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer 1982, p244), not merely to describe the functions of those circumstances.

Until the late nineteenth century, SI was understood to be subversive of the social order (Sargant, 1858), but in the French milieu was a 'happy innovation' of social progress (Comte, 1841). What seems to have occurred in the research and publications in critical perspectives on social innovation over the last decade is as threefold engagement with epistemological issues, a drawing on theoretical insights from

popular critical theory thinkers and challenges to normative methodological strategies in research. However, there seems to be a dearth of challenges to ontological assumptions (Hu, 2018, Hu *et al.*, 2019). By epistemological questions, we mean the question 'what is the 'social' in social enterprise?', considering (as the rest of this journal does) social is not just a modifier of innovation, but innovation and enterprise as a modifier of the social (Arthur *et al.*, 2006, Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2019). In terms of engagement with critical theorists and challenges to normative research, there is research, for example, on Bourdieu (Teasdale *et al.*, 2012); Giddens (Nicholls & Cho, 2006); Foucault (Curtis, 2007); Polanyi (Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2019; Roy & Grant, 2020; Thompson *et al.*, 2020) and Ostrom (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2021; Peredo *et al.*, 2020) that offers avenues for development. Likewise, a convergence on the notion of SI as social bricolage (Di Domenico *et al.*, 2010) represents a post-modern turn rather than a critical turn that could offer new avenues of exploration. In methodological terms, more social constructivist/revisionist work is needed too, for example, Froggett and Chamberlayne (2004). There are other critical perspectives that have a few researchers labouring in small groups. In political economy, there are Marxist, green and communitarian perspectives (Yıldırım & Tuncalp, 2016; Scott-Cato, 2008; Scott & Hillier, 2010; Ridley-Duff, 2007). There is a small feminist literature exploring immaterial and affective labour (Jones *et al.*, 2008b; Teasdale *et al.*, 2011), and some in queer theory- exploring transgressions and deviance, such as Grenier (2010) and Dey and Teasdale (2013). There are even fewer working in the post-colonialist space, including Green Nyoni (2016) and Watkins (2017).

This Thematic Issue seeks to revisit, review and revivify the emancipatory and critical project proposed by the founder of this journal, Benoît Godin. To this end, this Thematic Issue of *NOvation* invited submissions with a particular focus on the critical perspectives on social innovation, social enterprise and the social solidarity economy (SSE), to promote new and emerging perspectives.

The five articles presented in this Thematic Issue explore critical perspectives on SI, SE & SSE. The first paper by the Guest Editors themselves, Curtis, Bull and Nowak, outlines the rising tide of criticality in SI research. They present three waves of research in the field to date. The first wave of criticality in SI/SE research they present outlines critiques of the 'social' in social enterprise research, that sought to challenge the pro-business and celebrity-like status given to SE. The second wave highlights a post structuralist shift where research challenged the theoretical underpinnings of SI/SE research. The third wave they suggest constitutes a dangerous threat to the left's political appreciation of this movement. Where wave two sought to open and welcome opinions that challenged the ontology and epistemological foundations of thought, the third wave has the potential for right-wing co-option. They therefore call for a more forensic conceptualisation on what is 'good', 'ethical' and

'social' about SI/SE, with this threat to the cultural hegemony, subverting and changing intellectual emancipation of the field.

The second paper by **Pel, Wittmayer, Avelino and Bauler** picks up on critical issues by detailing the intrinsic and pervasive paradoxes of transformative SI (TSI) and offering researchers concrete strategies to account for them. The authors identify three core paradoxes of social innovation: system reproduction, temporality and reality construction. System reproduction is encountered where SI both challenges and reproduces the existing social order. The paradox of time draws attention to how the same SI can be considered new and old – varying across different points in time and contexts. Reality construction paradoxes occur as SI exists both as concrete activity and as a projection/interpretation, with researchers engaged in shaping and co-producing SI phenomena. Blending their extensive research experience and empirical examples from the literature the authors demonstrate how these paradoxes are integral to TSI phenomena and point to how methodological clarity is necessary to properly understand them. This leads to suggestions of clear research strategies that will support SI researchers in navigating each of these paradoxes.

The third paper from **Sardo, Callegari and Misganaw** examines the 'social' in current social innovation and entrepreneurship studies and how it has been appropriated. Following their literature review of 18 leading innovation and entrepreneurship journals, they identify four categories: the disciplinary and integrationist approaches are where the social is integrated in existing dominant framework and discourse; the separationist approach is a critique of self-interest and provides ideas of altruism, lifestyle and democracy dimensions considering the context specific nature of the 'social'; finally, the essentialist approach they discuss as arguments for the social nature of innovation and entrepreneurship to be integrated into the mainstream, bringing ecosystems and the socially constructed nature of innovation and entrepreneurship to the fore. They call for a more substantial integration of the social dimension in critical studies yet warn that tensions on extending into separationist and essentialist avenues cannot be reconciled with existing linear developments.

The fourth paper from **Curtis** presents a critical realist and systems analysis approach, using Checkland's soft systems methodology to empirical research. The paper uses evidence from a research study of community policing and the adoption of a specifically designed handbook to assist social innovators to implement locally identified solutions and practices (context mechanism outcome chains) that makes the case that SI is more than social bricolage and not a mysterious craft of innovation, but instead a systematic and replicable process.

The final and fifth paper from **Ergun and Begum** explores the nexus between SI and the environment. Their paper challenges the narrative of United Nations Development Programmes through an eco-critical discourse analysis (ECDA) lens of fourteen UN publications. They suggest the dominance of an anthropocentric perspective, where neoliberalism resides is commonplace in these publications. They state it is not until we change to an ecocentric discourse that we will align at one with nature and redress the socio-economic problems of the world.

We hope this Thematic Issue raises some interest and some thought-provoking conversations in the future. Many thanks to the reviewers, the authors and above all the editors of *NOvation*, for trusting us with this Thematic Issue! We hope scholars enjoy the edition as much as we have in bringing this together.

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The rising tide of criticality in social entrepreneurship and social innovation

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we trace a rising tide of criticality to highlight three waves in a sea of social entrepreneurship/social innovation (SE/SI) research. Our aim is to draw attention to counter, alternative and critical perspectives in the field and how 'dangerous' their co-option by right wing narratives is. We review what we believe to be three waves in the development of a critical research agenda undertaken by a cohort of academics who, in their loyalty to the field, have sought to unpick the underlying assumptions in the practice of, and academic reflection on, social innovation. We set out the early instrumentalist critique, in which the success and social utility of SE/SI is questioned. We secondly highlight a post-structuralist shift, in which hidden and unheard voices and perspectives are welcomed and celebrated. The third wave, for us, constitutes a dangerous threat to the SE/SI project, threatening to undermine and co-opt the first two waves, as has happened in other related fields of intellectual endeavour. We position this paper to not only engage with scholars who challenge the normative assumptions behind social innovation research, but also to draw attention to the entry of right-wing politics in post-modernist critical theory. It is not that everything in this third wave is bad, but that everything becomes unexpectedly dangerous, especially if we uncritically adopt reflexivity, naturalization and performativity as politically and morally neutral positions. Contra to Foucault, in adopting a critical realist stance, we begin to propose that 'the social', posed as an inherently 'good' thing, is an ontological reality that is knowable, albeit given that our knowledge of what is 'good' is nonetheless limited and partial. In the first Skoll World Forum (2004) some activists put up posters in the toilets of Said Business School warning delegates, 'beware social entrepreneurship: a wolf in sheep's clothes!' (Nicholls & Young, 2008, p. 272). We conclude our paper warning that SE/SI is not the only wolf to be concerned about!

Keywords: Critical Theory; Social Innovation; Social Enterprise; Reflexivity; Naturalization; Performativity.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Len Arthur took to the lectern at the UK Social Enterprise Conference and denounced the unquestioned positivity around the concept of social enterprise, expressing his revulsion toward those in the audience that had unashamedly amalgamated the terms without challenge. "*Ten or so years ago it would have seemed like an oxymoron to amalgamate the terms social and enterprise. Since that time the concept has rapidly passed from obscurity to the status of orthodoxy*" (Arthur *et al.*, 2006, p. 1). A small group of academics in the audience similarly puzzled by the lack of criticality began talking. On the whole, the social innovation (SI) and social entrepreneurship (SE) literature (hereafter SE/SI) in the last twenty years has been overwhelmingly interested in promoting SE/SI as (a) an inherently good thing, (b) a solution to all problems and (c) a politically neutral complement to neo-liberalism globally. As Arthur's point highlights, critical perspectives in the field emerged as a concerted effort sometime in 2006, in the heated debates of the Social Enterprise Conference, which continued once it became the International Social Innovation Research Conference (ISIRC). This first wave of criticality in SE/SI challenged the unparalleled performance and achievements of the 'new' social enterprise sector. Later publications developed critical themes in different directions, each skirting around the issue of critical theory and focusing on finding the 'social' in SE/SI, but not addressing critical theory head-on.

The second wave broke, from Switzerland, with Dey's (2010) paper that highlighted the symbolic violence at play in social entrepreneurship discourses, signalling a move towards a more theoretically informed debate. This was followed up by Steyaert and Dey's (2010) call for social enterprise research to remain 'dangerous', deliberately mirroring Foucault recognising the performative potential of research in creating reality and positioning the field as a source of social transformation. Their critical theoretical research agenda underlined a need to identify and challenge assumptions through denaturalizing, performativity and reflexivity; to link SE/SI to cultural, social and historical contexts; and to imagine and explore alternatives that actively disrupt established social orders (Steyaert & Dey, 2010).

Critical perspectives on SE/SI have broadened and deepened through literature engaging with critical theorists. Challenges to normative research have drawn on Bourdieu (Teasdale, *et al.*, 2012); Giddens (Nicholls & Cho, 2006); Foucault (Curtis, 2007); Polanyi (Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2018; Roy & Grant, 2020; Thompson *et al.*, 2020) and Ostrom (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2021; Peredo *et al.*, 2020). In political economy there are Marxist, green and communitarian perspectives (Yıldırım & Tuncalp, 2016, Scott-Cato *et al.*, 2008; Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010; Ridley-Duff, 2007). Feminist geographer J. K. Gibson-Graham's diverse economies approach questions the

dominance of capitalist forms of economy and has developed into a collective research network that seeks to demonstrate that 'another world is possible' (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013).

A third wave may now be upon us. What seems to have occurred in the research and publications in critical perspectives on SE/SI over the last decade is a threefold engagement with epistemological issues, a drawing on theoretical insights from popular critical theory thinkers and challenges to normative methodological strategies in research and, with this wave, there is an emergence in challenges to ontological assumptions (Hu, 2018, Hu *et al.*, 2019). This third wave is marked by a potential crisis of relativism, and subversion of the primary categories of thought by the 'new right', thereby questioning the progressive credentials of the ideas, theories and theorists that critical theorists hold dear.

We seek to consider how future critical SE/SI research can continue to deepen our theorising and add to the SE/SI field. Our paper, therefore, explores the ways in which critical scholars in social entrepreneurship and social innovation began to explore aspects of the field that are concealed, edited out and pushed to the boundaries. We draw attention to those that challenged the grand narrative, to those that drew attention to reflexivity, naturalization and critical performativity, against the headlines that mythologise and romanticise the field, whilst downplaying the partial, incomplete and ideologically driven doctrine – or, in Arthur's words, orthodoxy.

THE FIRST WAVE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISE/SOCIAL INNOVATION

In this first wave, hybridity of social enterprises has largely been the focus of critical research in challenging the grand narrative. We draw attention to examining the 'wolf in sheep's clothes' by dividing our arguments in to three core themes of the literature: (i) cooperative tradition, (ii) voluntary and community perspectives and (iii) the emergence of a strong 'business focus'. These three streams are examined in turn, but neither would be sufficient without first summarising the emergence of SE in the UK (as a leader country in the field of SE) from a political perspective.

Re-emergence of social innovation: New Labour's Third Way

The first wave of SI/SE critical research coincided with the emergence of 'social enterprise' (SE) on the UK political landscape in the late 1990s. Under a 'pro-market' 'New Labour' Government, elected in 1997, the faith in the 'Third Way' doctrine was set in motion against a backdrop of state and market failure, and the injustices of globalisation and neoliberalism. The voluntary sector, social economy or third sector – for brevity we use these terms interchangeably – received heightened attention,

where previously the sector was not expected to contribute significantly to job creation, market and wealth formation. Amin (2002) rapidly identified aspects of the social economy as residual activities, marginal and at best temporal solutions to the damage caused by market and state, where now these organisations were being asked to play a greater role, cautioning against these replicating or replacing the welfare state through privatization or neglect (Amin, 2009). Tony Blair's Labour Government continued the previous administration's pursuit of individualism and market commodification and 'hollowing out the state' (see Rhodes, 1994) albeit, under a slightly different name of 'contracting out the state' (see Baekkeskov, 2011), creating the space for third sector organisations to deliver public services as complementary partners in public service delivery (Aiken *et al.*, 2021; Alcock, 2010; Macmillan, 2010; Nicholls & Teasdale, 2017; Teasdale, 2010). As Haugh and Kitson (2007, p. 983) stated, "*The Third Way was a political philosophy that sought to resolve the ideological differences between liberalism and socialism; it combined neoliberalism with the renewal of civil society and viewed the state as an enabler, promoted civic activism and endorsed engagement with the voluntary and community sector to address society's needs*". A new narrative gained traction with the first government adoption of the SE concept in the 1999 National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Policy Action Team (PAT) 3 report in relation to the creation of social capital that SEs provided in communities (HM Treasury, 1999; Sepulveda, 2015). This was followed by a positioning of (social) entrepreneurship as the way out of poverty for deprived communities in the Phoenix Development Fund initiative in the same year. The concepts were gaining followers in Government policy; firstly, through the Social Enterprise Unit in the Department of Trade and Industry in 2001 and the launch of the first UK policy in 2002 espousing social enterprise as a '*strategy for success*', and secondly Department in the Office of the Third Sector in 2006, and their second policy push that announced a further action plan that proclaimed SE was '*scaling new heights*'. The euphoria of SE was not shared by those at the coalface.

Reappropriation and de-socialisation of Cooperative traditions: Where's the 'participative democracy' in social enterprise?

The conversations Ridley-Duff (see Ridley-Duff *et al.*, 2008; Ridley-Duff & Southcombe, 2012) was privy to in 1997, highlights the backdrop of a battleground for the identity and legitimacy of SE with respect to the longer history and tradition of the cooperative movement. Ridley-Duff talked of discussions between worker cooperatives and Cooperative Development Agencies (CDAs) around a sector support

agency (Social Enterprise London[1]) that in 1998 explicitly stated the promotion of '*cooperatives and common ownership*' and other organisations that practice the '*principles of participative democracy*' in their Memorandum of Association (Ridley-Duff & Southcombe, 2012, p. 185), quite different from the dominant narrative at the time, claiming that social enterprises were an entirely new phenomenon (Curtis, 2011). Indeed, the language was in use from the early 80s in cooperative development, and formally adopted by a national network (the Social Enterprise Partnership) in 1994. Arthur *et al.* (2006) bemoaned that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2002) definition of SE excluded cooperatives from the party, and their principles of ownership and control. These early champions of the concept of SE were now being squeezed out, Arthur *et al.* (2006) stating, their '*work has hardly featured in recent social enterprise discussions and is almost hermeneutically sealed from related academic debates*', adding that, the rhetoric and narrative around the terms social economy and SE were appropriated and adopted by government, supported by think tanks and passed down through the regional administrations as all part of a mainstreaming agenda to push an enterprise culture.

As Ridley-Duff and Southcombe (2012) argued, in early defining characteristics of SE from the 1970s and up until around 1998 when SEL formed, 'socialisation' and 'social purpose' were given equal weighting. However, by 2002 when the Social Enterprise Coalition was formed, closely followed by the Community Interest Company legal structure in 2005, a greater influence from the US around social purpose (social entrepreneurship) began to influence policy where individualism (and a not-for-profit clause) was given precedence over socialisation and communitarianism (and the removal of mutualism) (see Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2011). Arthur *et al.*'s (2006) frustration at the absurdity of this shift is clear to see in his reference to SE as an oxymoron (as cited above). His point is that SE discourse attacks the alternative habitus of democratic spaces. Huckfield (2022) also adds, SE had morphed into a political project, attached to a North American discourse of independent social entrepreneurs and the promotion of market-led business models was given precedence over the principles of participative democracy and community democratically owned organisations.

Blurred boundaries, managerialist co-option and marketisation of Voluntary traditions: Where's the 'mission' in social enterprise?

A second source of critique of the emerging notion of SE/SI was from a voluntary and community sector perspective. Dart (2004) outlined these as voluntaristic, prosocial,

[1] SEL was formed by co-op development agencies and the worker co-ops they supported into existence during the first Greater London Council period under Ken Livingston (late 70s/early 80s).

civic organizations that were traditionally funded through a mixture of member fees, government funds, grants, and user fees. However, due to neoliberalism there have been changes in government funding mechanisms, specifically the move from grant-giving to contract/competitive tendering with the devolution, deregulation and privatisation of welfare states happening globally over the past 40 years (Pearce, 2003; Goerke, 2003). Borzaga and Solari (2004) state 'like it or not' – sector funding streams were changing to a 'contract culture'. Grenier (2008) added that in order to drive this transition, benefit recipients were relabelled 'customers' or 'consumers' rather than 'beneficiaries' or 'service-users' – so that the perception shifted to one where they had choice and control as to what services they received. Thus, a market orientation and 'enterprise culture' rhetoric, as opposed to a 'dependency culture' on the purse strings of the 'nanny' state. Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) raised concerns about the 'methods and values of the market' being applied in the not-for-profit sector. Indeed, Aiken (2006) highlighted that they are incompatible, suggesting the move leaves the sector challenging 'mission drift', in the drive to remain financially viable. As Cornforth (2014) added, SEs may experience tensions in meeting competing institutional logics within the organisation, i.e., the competing market logic, or the competing funder logic (where an over-reliance on one [public sector] funder dominates the services delivered) against the altruistic logic.

The shift was also logistically challenging, as Spear (2001) talked about the insertion of private sector 'managerial competencies' trending in the sector. Relatedly, Bull (2008) identifies the heightened focus from funding providers that required more from organisations in terms of management systems, quality standards and marketing – none of which were funded appropriately through [public sector] contracts for services. Furthermore, the more business-like the sector becomes, the more volunteers are excluded, as contracts and legal liabilities limits the use of volunteers (Spear, 2001). Allan (2005), Macmillan (2010), and later Hazenberg *et al.* (2014), claimed a contract instrumentalist agenda was being promoted in public sector service delivery, driven by hard outcome targets, employability agendas and getting people back into work, as opposed to soft outcomes, such as self-worth and confidence. Grenier (2008) warned that the sector was following the culture of the private sector, where only 'enterprising individuals' are considered responsible and worthy citizens, based purely on a set of values around free-market competition and individual self-interest. For Pharoah, Scott and Fisher (2004) public sector funding decisions excluded beneficiaries of projects, where the funder had little knowledge of what interventions worked, or don't work, in any given context. That knowledge ultimately resides within community and voluntary organisations (something picked up again by Curtis in this Thematic Issue). Amin *et al.* (2003) also state that a worrying trend in the late 1990s was a professionalisation of the social economy through social

enterprise, where there is now a class of social economy professionals who move from place to place 'fixing' local problems, having no connection to the communities they serve.

The influence of neoliberal thinking in the UK forced the sector to comply through political instrumentation that rubs against civic identities. Aiken *et al.* (2021) identified resistance, suggesting that, despite the charitable form being the most numerically prominent SE model in the UK, these organisations did not tend to self-identify as SEs, and that its business-oriented definition failed to represent the value of the voluntary sector. Terry (1998) adds that the 'market' places no value on democratic ideologies such as fairness and justice, compromising the sector's role as 'value guardians'. Many voluntary and community organisations therefore rejected SE as a business model and preferred to see it as a financial activity (seeking contracts, pursuing trading, as an activity alongside grant income (Cox, 2007; Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2011). Pharoah, Scott and Fisher (2004) asked, '*Could more entrepreneurial approaches to income generation provide these sectors* [voluntary and community] *with a strong, more reliable and independent funding base?*' – to which their research identified that the jury is still out! The fear of dirigisme and pluralism in an instrumental use of the voluntary sector in becoming efficient and effective partners for public service delivery agents of the state, challenged the independence of the sector (Lewis, 2005). Likewise, Reid and Griffith (2006) warned of isomorphic pressures towards mainstreaming and business models, which is summarised well by Amin *et al.* (2003), stating that it is unfortunate that, rather than provide an alternative, SEs in the fashion of the moment have been co-opted into a policy discourse that is more concerned about efficiency (cost effective) welfare than the radical alternatives many organisations want to be. Consequently, we can't call it alternative, radical or even entrepreneurial if it is all about delivering government objectives! – can we?

Neo-liberal instrumentalist legitimation of the 'business case': Where's the 'social' in social enterprise?

A third and most recent theme in the first wave of critical consideration of the field of SE/SI was the 'business case' legitimation of SE research. Len Arthur's 2006 conference paper caught the imagination of those writing in the field. Bull (2008) puts that the global appeal of neoliberalism across many parts of the world in the 80s was reaching out tentacles throughout sectors and with commodification and privatisation came a culture that emphasised individual self-reliance, personal responsibility and entrepreneurship more generally in society as individualism took hold (Scase & Goffee, 1980; Kuratko, 2005). Hulgård (2014) outlines that, on the one hand, organisations in the social economy were seen as part of, and supporting of, a capitalist market economy within key political strategy mechanisms (see Dees, 1998;

Drayton, 2002; Emerson, 2006; Leadbeater, 1997), arguing the social entrepreneurship paradigm offered a panacea for addressing social market failures, promoted by institutions in the US, such as Ashoka, Schwab and Skoll Foundation, whereas on the other, they can be seen as a rejection of the values of neoliberalism and a counter-movement building an alternative economy – a social solidarity economy (see Scott-Cato & Raffaelli, 2017).

Grenier (2008) suggested the business case frames a convenient discourse that emphasises specific policy priorities, furthering a market orientation, thereby extending an 'enterprise culture' that Arthur *et al.*. refer to as becoming the orthodoxy. Grenier also attributed the swathe of institutions promoting this agenda to organisations like Ashoka, who were mindful of presenting themselves not as a 'foundation' making 'grants' to 'beneficiaries', instead they presented themselves as making 'awards' or 'stipends' to its 'fellows', therefore adopting the language of the corporate world – aligning themselves with the private sector. Arthur *et al.* (2006) supported this, by stating that the discourse that surrounds social enterprise had predominantly become enterprise-focused, and Bull and Crompton (2006) add that there was, without doubt, a political 'push' for the sector to become more 'business-like' and 'entrepreneurial'. Huckfield (2022) pinpointed the case that, as social entrepreneurship grew out of North American universities, the main focus of business and management scholars has been on logistical issues, such as performance; finance; innovation; impact; growth and markets. (Young, 2006; Dees & Anderson, 2006; Dees, 2008; Mair & Marti, 2006; Austin, 2006), legitimising the business case as the primary concern. Dart (2004) argued that *moral legitimacy not only connects the overall emergence of social enterprise with neoconservative, pro-business, and promarket political and ideological values that have become central… but also explains the observation that social enterprise is being more frequently understood and practiced in more narrow commercial and revenue-generation terms.* He also points to scholars such as Boschee (2001) and Emerson and Twersky (1996), in warning that institutional theory suggested that social enterprise was likely to continue a narrow, and operational, focus on market-based solutions, business like models and in revenue-generation terms because of the broader validity of pro-market ideological notions in the wider social environment. This brought to the fore the use of commercial entrepreneurship and corporate planning and business design tools and concepts aimed at an increased focus on bottom-line, earned revenue, return on investment and managerialism (Turnbull, 1994; Terry, 1998; Hulgard & Spear, 2006).

Returning to Arthur *et al.* (2006), they continued to outline the hazards of legitimising the business case, where there is tension, suggesting the narrative in the literature has moved toward one that "*if the business activities are a success in the market, it will follow that the social aims will in essence take care of themselves*" (2006,

p. 2). As Young (2006) added where most commentators concentrate on the 'entrepreneurial' in social entrepreneurship, there is a leap of faith with respect to the social process and outcomes of the enterprise and the neglection of the social. As Bull (2008) put it, this leap of faith is problematic as it characterises social enterprise as a way of 'doing' business much the same as private businesses. Doing business also had an unquestionable authority to it, that 'this way' is the 'one best way' (yet a further case of isomorphism!). Arthur *et al.* (2006, p. 2) identified a fundamental issue: *"…a 'business case' narrative and discourse is being privileged in the practice of social enterprise research to the detriment of providing conceptual and theoretical recognition of the social."* Bull (2008) suggests that the competitive environment and race for profits can be destructive, particularly if service delivery is about being more efficient and making profits at the expense of meeting community needs. As Pearce (2003) warns, social enterprises would be compromised to adopt the values and principles of private or state sectors.

Summary

The first wave of critical perspectives on SE/SI culminated in deconstructing SE, in particular critiquing the 'enterprise' as problematic but less about 'the social' being problematic. Wave one assumes that SE/SI is fundamentally a 'good thing', and that the social prefix to the words 'enterprise', 'economy' and 'innovation' are inherently ethically positive stances.

Studies within this emerging field challenged the ideology of the market, critiqued trading as a focal point, questioned organisational legal structures, problematised definitional identities and challenged the political agenda, but were, in turn, co-opted through a blurring of boundaries within the hegemony of the enterprise orthodoxy. The debate centred primarily around who 'owns it', with definitional battles and boundary-blurring, highlighting the contestation of the concepts between state, charity and capitalist hegemonies.

THE SECOND WAVE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISE/SOCIAL INNOVATION

Following the first wave, there has been a steady increase in research that seeks to understand SE/SI from a critical theoretical position, questioning the epistemologies of the field. When examining the critical turn in SE/SI research, it is not just about the application of critical theory, but the approach to and rationale for research (Fournier & Grey, 2000). Following Curtis's (2008) outline of the objectives of critical research: *"…to identify and challenge assumptions, to recognise the influence of culture, history and social position and to imagine and explore extraordinary alternatives, disrupt*

routines and established orders" (2008, p. 277), exploration of critical perspectives may include revealing hidden ideas or ideologies, examining institutional arrangements and challenging power relations, and identifying potential for alternative or transformative relations (Godin, 2019). Chris Steyaert and Pascal Dey's work has been instrumental in setting and sustaining a shift to the use of critical theory for framing thinking about SE/SI research. Their nine verbs for enacting research practice to keep SE 'dangerous' suggests that the practicalities of SE become more real in the way that they are communicated through research (Steyaert & Dey, 2010). In doing so, they signalled a shift to drawing more clearly on wider critical theory, mostly but not entirely, associated with the Frankfurt School. Critiquing research through denaturalization, critical performativity and reflexivity is central to this second wave of identifying and challenging underlying assumptions. Accounting for the cultural, historical and social environment has influenced the shaping and development of SE/SI research. Critical research takes place through contextualising, historicizing and connecting, to understand how practices take place through context. In doing so researchers are able to intervene, to envision change and transformation (Curtis, 2008; Steyaert & Dey, 2010). This framing helps us to get a sense of the extent to which SE/SI research has enacted a critical perspective of SE.

Identifying and challenging normative assumptions

This critical turn within SE research sought to challenge the normative assumptions behind SE research, that present SE/SI as inherently 'good things' (Chell *et al.*, 2016; Dey & Steyaert, 2016). Denaturalization involves questioning what is taken as given or natural, by deconstructing the perceived 'reality' or 'truth' of knowledge, by revealing its 'un-naturalness' and revealing the unequal power relations that are at play (Fournier & Grey, 2000). Language has an important role in inscribing meaning attached to phenomena. Language can be persuasive, powerful and constructed in a way to prioritise particular views (Steyaert & Dey, 2010), or essentialised (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Parkinson and Howorth (2008) were early pioneers of applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) to the language of SE to highlight how the dominant ideology imposed on social entrepreneurs conflicted with their lived experience as practitioners who felt closer to activists than entrepreneurs. Their research revealed issues of identity, power and ideology in relation to social enterprises.

Pascal Dey also drew on CDA to demonstrate how the dominant ideology of SE becomes imbued with meanings held by mainstream entrepreneurs and is at odds with real-world SE practices, thereby highlighting the political and politicising narrative associated with aspects of SE/SI research (Dey, 2006, 2010). This draws attention to how heroic narratives of SE/SI emphasise the benefits of innovativeness, creativity, excitement and collectiveness to construct an SE/SI narrative as an 'ideal

subject' that nascent entrepreneurs and community activists should emulate. The concealment of reality hides any discussion of struggle, obstacles and risks, weakness or failure, and takes attention away from the problems social entrepreneurs are seeking to address (Dey & Lehner, 2017). Discourse analysis has revealed how SE policy narratives promote a neoliberal ideology of marketisation and competition, rather than social welfare models associated with state, and non-profit provision (Mason *et al.*, 2019; Nicholls & Teasdale, 2017). Dey's work also showed how social entrepreneurs resist and subvert these dominant modes, by appropriating and using them for their own ends, mimicking the ideal of the SE/SI, in order to secure resources (Dey & Teasdale, 2016). The underlying message in SE/SI discourse is that it is people that need to change rather than institutions.

Another concept in critical research in this wave was performativity, which is related to denaturalisation in that it refers to the idea that reality is actively enacted by our words and actions (Law, 2004), not merely constructed or bound by it, and this helps explain how ideology becomes embedded across different social and geographical contexts. Critical performativity identified how policy narratives, such as the competitive view of SE, were taken up in policy and media communications – to influence everyday interactions and create the reality *for* social entrepreneurs (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Steyaert & Dey, 2010). This drew attention to how dominant economistic ideals of SE were continually re-inscribed, affecting the identity formation of potential entrepreneurs who modelled themselves in a performative act of 'becoming' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012). In considering the processes of denaturalisation, Critical SE/SI research has shed light on those practices that inscribe market ideals through the lens of performativity (Petitgand, 2018). Anti-performativity or critical performativity actively resists the dominant economistic position, to prioritise the 'social' of SE/SI. This can take place both through research that sheds light on alternative practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013).

Continuing the work started in the first wave, there has been a push to directly theorise the normative assumptions underpinning SE/SI. Critical researchers explored the ambiguity surrounding the term 'social', that masks the values accompanying the term (Bruder, 2021; Ranville & Barros, 2021). Bruder (2021) questioned assumptions of social missions that he suggested inevitably lead to social and ethical practices within SEs. He pointed to how a drive towards maximisation, inherent in market ideology, creates a focus on meeting a defined social mission rather than broader duties and responsibilities of the organisation. This narrows the social outcomes of the organisation towards achieving an often narrowly defined social goal, sometimes leading to other negative social and environmental outcomes. This economistic drive to maximise social impact can lead to the exploitation of social entrepreneurs, their

employees and the environment (see also Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Bruder called for a definition of SE that incorporates both social mission and social practices, suggesting integrative ethics as a potential route to bring together the social intent of SE alongside practices, grounded in empirics.

Defining the 'social' in SE/SI in wave two relates to judgements over what is in the interests of society, it therefore becomes a political rather than technocratic investigation (Cho 2006). SE/SI has been positioned as a private response to public problems, whereby citizens become customers and market efficiency replaces democratic decision making (Ganz et al. 2018). This has been articulated in relation to the role of SE in the neoliberalisation of economies in the UK and Europe, outlined in the first wave. It is evident in SE/SI mainstreaming that politicisation continues and that SEs and their supernatural powers are to be held as the solution to grand societal challenges (Ganz *et al.*, 2018). Building on earlier work, researchers have recognised a need to repoliticise SE/SI through clarity over underpinning ideological and political principle (Dey & Steyaert, 2012). This has relevance to the political ideology underpinning SE's motivations (Jarrodi *et al.*, 2019), but arguably more so as researchers. As Ranville and Barros's (2022) point out in their analysis of 100 key SE papers, identified contradictory political philosophies within the field and individual papers, suggesting that the field is still either open and multi-vocal or inconsistent and incoherent.

Recognise the importance of context

Critical theory is concerned with understanding and explaining phenomena as shaped by (and shaping) context, rather than theoretical abstraction. SE/SI does not operate in a vacuum, it influences and is influenced by local conditions (Steyaert & Dey, 2010). To uncover the reasoning behind actions and events, it is important to understand how different contexts, aspects and conditions of phenomena influence others (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). SE/SI can be viewed as a contextualization of entrepreneurship and innovation – a move away from the standard entrepreneurship models that focus on entrepreneurship motivated by profit and wealth creation. Reflecting standard entrepreneurship context studies, which were evident in earlier first-wave approaches, research considered how context was important for understanding 'when, how and why' social entrepreneurship happens, and also who becomes a social entrepreneur (Welter *et al.*, 2020, Welter, 2011). As outlined above, early studies focused on the context of social mission, differentiating social enterprise from for-profit business, and how the conflict between social and profit motives and pressures can lead to mission drift (as outlined in the first wave, citing Aiken, 2006, and Cornforth, 2014). There has been significant expansion in the number and nature of contextual studies of SE/SI in the last ten years, with research examining the

development in different geographical settings, incorporating gender, ethnic and indigenous cultural perspectives. Contextualised explanations can shed light on why certain similarly resourced ideas can have a different outcome in alternative political or community settings, or in the same place (or same organisation) at a different time. These individual cases are crucial in building critical mass that can influence a shift in the dominant assumptions and theories. This body of knowledge can help challenge assumptions of what constitutes SE/SI and can shed light on types of social enterprise and innovation that have been marginalised. However, many of these studies take their contribution as empirical and tend not to adopt a critical theoretical lens (de Bruin & Teasdale, 2019). Moreover, a focus on the micro/individual social entrepreneurs or organisations tends towards presenting a positive analysis of SE.

Parkinson and Howorth (2008) link the social and economic history of a place to how SE is conceived and perceived within a locale. They highlight how meaning making is contested in SE, by linking fine-grained local detail to broad national themes to demonstrate how context and local experience differs. Institutional theory has provided one way of critically understanding SE/SI within its contexts (van Wijk *et al.*, 2019; Stephan *et al.*, 2015). Institutional approaches have been drawn on to identify barriers and enablers for SE/SI activity through consideration of institutional voids and institutional supports (e.g., Stephan *et al.*, 2015). The EMES adopted definition of SE drawing on Karl Polanyi's institutional approach points to the fit of institutional theory for understanding competing logics: SE is conceptualised as operating between market, government and society spheres, the EMES scholars ICSEM project sought to link types of SE to configurations of institutional factors across different countries (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017).

The tensions in transformational change

The idea of transformation is central to definitions of SE/SI, and potentially the distinguishing feature between social innovation and social enterprise (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2018). Whilst SE is frequently positioned as the solution to inequality and deprivation, critical research has increasingly identified it as palliative (used as a salve for structural problems), rather than succeeding in altering or replacing dominant institutions, to address the core of a problem (Scott-Cato & Raffaelli, 2017). When considering the transformative potential of SE/SI, recent work has identified interacting levels and processes of change, that include micro-level changes in social relations, systems innovation that takes place within societal institutions and structures, changing the rules of the game at the macro level and narratives of change that seeks to challenge the existing order through counter-narrative (Avelino *et al.*, 2019; Pel *et al.*, 2020). Micro-level changes form the basis of J. K. Gibson-Graham's community economies approach, that draws attention to alternatives that have been

marginalised by dominant practices or ideologies. The many case studies, and contextual examples, can be seen here as building up to demonstrate to participants, wider society and government that 'another way is possible'. By defining SI as a process of social transformation there is a move away from a focus on the social benefits to recognise a potential dark side to change, that can serve vested and dominant interests (Pel *et al.,* 2020). This is evident in Teasdale *et al.*'s (2021) analysis that identified how Ashoka's discourse was guided by individual rather than structural transformation – thereby individualising responsibility for SI. Further studies have drawn attention to power relations, identifying how one group's empowerment can disempower others, highlighting the need to maintain a critical stance that recognises all parties (Avelino, 2021). This reinforces the drive to expose the assumptions underpinning research, and points towards a normative theory that involves a judgement on what SE/SI 'ought' to be (Avelino, 2021; Flyvberg, 2001).

Reflexivity and critical research

Second-wave studies have integrated reflexivity and started to consider the values of what is assumed to be socially beneficial. Examining practices from the perspective of the social in a way that can reveal how dominant assumptions can influence SE and the way we understand it. Curtis (2008) revisited a project with a critically reflexive view and found that their analysis had been co-opted by the competitive narrative whereby the evaluation of success rested on a managerial measure. This drew attention to the role of values in SE research and a need to be aware and explicit about them, as they can influence evaluations of success or reported impacts of SE (Ranville and Barros, 2022). Ruebottom (2018) highlighted how the integration of economic logics into community food production is not necessarily a negative step, but the problem arises if we automatically assume it to be good. Similarly, replication of programmes across geographical boundaries can impose certain values on communities which in itself is problematic (Ruebottom, 2018). This points to the argument that SE can undermine democracy, as SEs make decisions of public provision outside of the political realm. It highlights the importance of voice and public participation in SE/SI.

Summary

The second wave of critical perspectives on SE/SI had researchers looking in the mirror, examining how research was undertaken, with purpose given to a recognition of language, identity and power relations, with a view to creating spaces for alternative voices and experiences. In doing so SE/SI researchers were influenced by critical management studies scholars, exploring denaturalisation, reflexivity and performativity, adopting critical discourse analysis. The shift here, from the first wave,

is from a concern about the co-option of SE/SI into neoliberal organisational forms, policies and assumptions, to questioning the very basis of SE/SI itself, critiquing the assumptions that the early critiques made about the 'goodness' of SE/SI and its effect in the real world. Wave two, therefore, marked a shift towards using the progressive toolkit of critical theory to lay bare the underlying power dynamics implicit in research. The analytical frames, however, in making local context matter, in giving voice to alternate and minority voices – questioning mainstream narratives, is that everything is circumstantial and equally valid.

THE THIRD WAVE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISE/SOCIAL INNOVATION

When we look back at 2010, we saw a high point of what was understood to be critical theory (that informed SE/SI theorising). Yet, much has changed since 2010, especially in the world of sociology and critical theory. There has been an implicit notion that the 'Frankfurt School', the intellectual home of Horkheimer, Habermas and Gramsci, represents a left-of-centre, progressive world view critiquing dominant narratives and truths to arrive at a more accurate representation of the world. But new right (*nouvelle droit*) intellectuals such as Jordan Peterson and Alain de Benoist have been steadily co-opting the intellectual armoury of critical theory. Peterson, the more popularly well-known writer, champions attacks on what he calls 'cultural Marxism', calling it the new 'hegemony' (Sharpe, 2020). He misrepresents (or misunderstands) what the Frankfurt School project was about, and casts it as a communist plot to overtake academia and social discourse. Nevertheless, despite the apparent misunderstanding, he uses the very frames of critique used by the Frankfurt School in his own analyses to claim that the progressive project is the dominant mainstream logic. The anti-progressive has become the minority voice, in their argument, and Frankfurt School critical theory strategies are open to be co-opted by them.

Less well-known, but highly influential in the new right intelligentsia, is Alain de Benoist. His contribution is considered to be a 'novel restatement of fascism' (Sheehan, 1981) that takes up the influences of those traditionally accepted to be the core of critical theory, namely: Gramsci, Marx, Buber, Debord, Baudrillard and Pareto, amongst others, in an attempt to go beyond traditional left/right politics and mix radical left with radical right ideologies. He went on to have a significant influence in the English speaking right-wing intellectual circles (Copsey, 2013). The strategy of the new right is to co-opt the very terms used by critical theorists and twist them to non-progressive outcomes. An example is the use of Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony.

For the left, the insights of Gramsci are used to inform analyses of the functions of economic class within structures created for and by cultural domination. Cultural artefacts transmit and disseminate the dominant ideology to the populations of a society. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970), Louis Althusser develops this notion of a dominant ideology created and sustained by culturally dominating institutions to the state. *Ideological State Apparatuses* are all pervasive, from the clergy, through schools, the police, political parties, mass communications and the academy. For Althusser, the object of such critical analysis is the conservative state. For the new right, the object is what they refer to as left leaning neoliberal, globalist elites including state and capitalists.

For Peterson and De Benoist, the cultural hegemony is progressivism itself. Powerful university positions are, in their claims, dominated by 'Frankfurt School' informed 'cultural Marxists' (Tuters, 2018; Mirrlees, 2018). This leaves a strong question mark over attempts at applying 'critical theory' to thinking about SE/SI. We can take for granted Horkheimer's own notion of social innovation as 'sociological change and intellectual emancipation' as being a progressive or left-leaning interpretation. Sociological change is no longer solely a progressive project. Conservative, anti-globalist, reactionary and fascist movements also seek 'sociological change and emancipation', but their type of change? Change can be negative or positive, and emancipation is not just something that only the left does for its adherents. The right also seeks emancipation from the "expansive institutional complex that produces and regulates public opinion to ensure the perpetuation of the "progressive" status quo" (Woods, 2019. p. 39). When we reconsider phrases such as anti-performativity, denaturalisation and reflexivity, we can no longer assume the hegemony to which they are directed. What emerges is a debate, long avoided, about whose ethics are good?

This problem presented by the new right lays bare an ontological blindness that has hampered clarity in the field. In the contestation about the meaning and function of the terms (and associated phenomena), most often epistemology is elided with ontology. This is an 'episteme' that underlies our cognitive formations (Foucault, 1980, p. 197). What is known about social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, innovations and innovators, acting in a social(ised) economy or field is discussed endlessly, because such phenomena are knowable and measurable. The first wave assumed a common episteme, the debates centred around definitions, for example, in the same epistemic space. The relativistic shift in the second wave rightly pointed out that other knowledges existed (and had been ignored) but assumed that ontologies were also diverse and equally true. When this happens, without explicitly dealing with the ontological assumptions of the minority voices and experiences, new (and less savoury) voices and experiences are given the same space as those who are genuinely the subjects of SE/SI attention.

The dancing around the notion of the 'social in social enterprise' arises because the purpose of the social is deemed to be intrinsically (ontologically) good and progressive. The outcome of the new right challenge is to identify the relativism present in the ontological assumptions of the theorists involved. We do not want to call out research and researchers that have been affected by this, but journal papers can fly too close to 'environmental nativism' (Reidel, 2021) when exploring bio-regionalist innovations which emphasise community, localism, place-based interventions. Pursuing local community-based control is not the same as pursuing social justice (Pendras, 2002). Pro-local scholars tend to essentialize local communities as the network of trust and social harmony, and uncritically celebrate (assumed) ecological and political benefits of localism (Park, 2013). A community garden can be taken over by a far-right community group and become a white space. Bioregionalist social enterprises can frame their work in neofascist indigenist discourse (Manavist, 2018). Stopping with Frankfurt School analytical strategies, and unthinkingly adopting relativist social constructionist epistemologies is dangerous and demands a response. We think that this response lies in the field taking seriously the philosophical position of critical realism (Bhaskhar, 2013 [1975], Mingers, 2014).

In formulating our thesis of three waves, we have been influenced by the now common reference to 'critical turns' hailing new and more theoretically informed developments, or 'waves' of differing underlying epistemologies, ontologies and implicit assumptions in sociology and in SE/SI literature. Steyaert and Dey (2018), at a decadal moment, refer to three decades of "sometimes highly functionalistic research, anecdotal evidence and 'best management' thinking (2018, p. 6) in their rationale that it was the 'right time' (*kairos*) for their book. We believe that linear time (*chronos*) still cuts through their pivotal moment, in that all the issues with SE/SI research that they critique still continue, as new people enter the field unfamiliar with theoretical developments, unknowingly or deliberately further contributing to the growing mountain of un(self)critical research in the field. Steyaert and Dey use five forms of criticalness, the first three of which we find in our first two waves, (1) questioning popularist assumptions, (2) making visible the ideological foundations of those popularist messages, and (3) the performance of those foundations in speech and action. They suggest that (4) the normative moral foundation of SE/SI is 'participation and democracy', yet Ruebottom (2018), Eikenberry (2018) and Horn (2018), in the same volume break that down into pro-business liberal democratic values of freedom through work (sic), internationalisation of social ethics and an attempt to shift power to community-based deliberative democracies through stakeholder participation. These lead to the fifth point (Friedman *et al.*, 2018), that 'alternative realities' can be now imagined (p. 251) with 'fundamental changes of meaning' (p. 253) in which "neither 'social' nor 'entrepreneurship' is a fixed signifier"

(Calas *et al.*, 2018. p. 264) – dangerously conflating epistemology with ontology. The physical form of SE/SI is no longer fixed in the minds of critical theorists of SE/SI, it is now mobile and inconstant. The outcomes created by SE/SI now become liquid and slippery (Bauman, 2013). The conditions for this are set in the second wave, and are ripe for exploitation by the new right by processes of normalisation. This opens the door to alt-realities, flattening ontology (Choat, 2018), or in critical realist terms, conflating epistemology with ontology (Kant, 2014). Social innovation is reduced to an assemblage of individualistic actants, with no purposive ontology, no ultimate purpose or meaning, no structures that govern or structure action or thought. This matters, because if there is no ontological truth to good or evil, then post-modern and new materialist epistemologies of SE/SI are open to evil social innovation as well as good.

Where positivism posits that there is an ultimate reality, and it is reliably analogous to our perceived (epistemological) empirical reality, social constructionism (in its post-modernist extreme) claims there is nothing real except the surface, nothing real behind the hyperrealism of what we perceive and experience (Eco, 1986, 1995; Baudrillard, 1994; 1998) – the only thing that is real is what we think about the real; reality is merely constructed. Our notion of what social outcome is 'good' is merely a matter of one's political stance. The ontological is confused or conflated with the empirical in both these positions. A critical realist stance parses the difference between ontology and epistemology, whereas positivism and social constructivism conflate the two (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). Critical realists assert the existence of a causally efficacious reality (Greek: ὄντος ontos) independent of human experience about which we can acquire justified knowledge (Greek ἐπιστήμη episteme), whilst recognising the inevitability of the knowledge being limited, contextual and contingent (epistemically relativist). Critical realism allows for a reality that is independent of human knowledge (but perhaps not as simply permanent and unchanging as a positivistic naïve realism) and our knowledge of that reality is (sufficiently) reliable, but contingent on the limitations of human perception and the impermanence of reality, ontologically.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first wave, the purpose of the SE/SI concept is implicitly to smooth the functions of society and capitalism, to address the gaps and inconsistencies of (post)-modern capital and to ameliorate the negative outcomes of capital. What is deemed positive or negative is glossed over. In the second wave, the epistemological assumptions begin to be unpicked. The contexts within which social

enterprise/innovation arises are questioned, and the purposes for which SE/SI is created are also questioned, but still, the ethics of 'social' outcomes are left untouched or are assumed to be relativist (i.e.; a good social outcome; greater solidarity amongst people; less dysfunction within capitalism; a reduction in poverty with addressing the causes of poverty; or a means to tackle a hegemony of elitist neoliberalism, through progressive or regressive means). The theorist Max Horkheimer described a theory as critical insofar as it seeks "*to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them*" (1982, p. 244): One person's social enterprise is another person's liberation from hegemony.

We have presented the histories of two waves of the critical turn in SE/SI literature, first an instrumentalist critique, debating what agents and institutions get to be called social innovators and social enterprises, and which social movements gave rise to the 'new' phenomena. The second wave, a post-modern turn, shifted the critique to questioning whose voices and experiences were dominant in the framing of the practice of SE/SI and how it was written about in the academic and grey literature. Gaps and contradictions (Curtis, 2011) in the mainstream discourses were opened up and exploited to make spaces for feminist, environmental, race and class (Schachter, 2022) based discourses. Consequentially, the assumed ontological common ground has been shaken, such emancipatory shifts then run the risk of being co-opted and exploited.

We are not accusing any of the fantastic papers published in SE/SI research of being fascist, anti-progressive or at all antithetical to the positive social contribution of social innovation and social entrepreneurship, but we do wish to point to how the new right can readily co-opt the terminology and analytical strategies that progressive theorists have used, which (if unchecked) will result in taken for granted notions of 'the goodness of the social' being captured by those who are also anti-modernist, anti-globalist, and who judge that inequality is a naturally positive state of affairs (Finlayson, 2021). We ask whether the third wave will be where relativist critiques are co-opted by reactionary perspectives, or where critical realism demands a more forensic focus on 'the good' that we all purport to desire. In the aspirations to grow the field and be generous and inclusive, we are in danger of letting other, more circumspect, wolves in at the back door.

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Paradoxes of Transformative Social Innovation: From Critical Awareness towards Strategies of Inquiry[1]

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ABSTRACT

Society is transforming through a whirlpool of innovations. This includes technological as well as social innovations, i.e. changes in social relations involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing. Especially the potentials for *transformative* social innovation (TSI) are gaining the interest of progressive political actors and critical scholars. Occurring in the form of new modes of governance and alternative ways of working and living together, TSI involves the challenging, altering or replacing of dominant institutions. As documented in various strands of critical social inquiry and innovation research, TSI praxis is pervaded with contradictions, anomalies and paradoxes. This methodological contribution addresses the challenge that tends to remain: How to elaborate this general critical awareness into more operational 'strategies of inquiry'? The paper discusses paradoxes of a) system reproduction, b) temporality, and c) reality construction. Identifying distinct kinds of contradictions and distinct empirical phenomena, this differentiation also calls attention to the associated differences between realist, processual and constructivist research philosophies. Gathering the empirical analyses, theoretical interpretations and methodological advances that have been made on these paradoxes, this contribution opens up the scope for critical and practically relevant innovation research: It is important to bridge the divide between rigorous but sterile methodological know-how, and critical-reflexive theorizing that lacks operational insights.

Keywords: Social Innovation; Societal Transformation; Paradoxes; Critical Analysis; Methodology.

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INTRODUCTION: TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION – NARRATIVES, CRITIQUES AND PARADOXES

Society is transforming through a whirlpool of innovations. This involves technological innovations such as renewable energy systems, artificial intelligence and nanotechnology, but a wide array of social innovations is developing as well. Social innovations are innovations in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing (Avelino *et al.*, 2019; Pel *et al.*, 2020). They include a wide variety of attempts to change the prevailing ways of living and working together. Examples of such socially innovative practices and governance arrangements include Participatory Budgeting, Ecovillages, Timebanks, social entrepreneurship, Slow Food, and the various movements towards commons-based consumption, Degrowth, circular economy, and solidarity-based economy.

There is much interest from both policy and research for social innovation that is somehow *transformative* – supporting shifts towards more sustainable societies (Haxeltine *et al.*, 2017) or more sustainable and just energy systems (Hiteva & Sovacool, 2017; Mikkonen *et al.*, 2020). Such transformative social innovation (TSI; cf. section 1) is often juxtaposed against incremental innovations through which society is merely maintained (Klein *et al.*, 2016; Moulaert *et al.*, 2017; Westley *et al.*, 2017; Avelino *et al.*, 2019). Moulaert and MacCallum (2019) similarly distinguish between conventional and counterhegemonic SI. This quest for counterhegemonic, transformative social innovation has a long tradition. Even if not approached under that particular header, transformative social innovation can be considered a shared research area for scholarship on (amongst others) real utopias (Wright, 2010), diverse economies (North, 2014), grassroots innovation (Seyfang & Smith, 2007), degrowth (Pansera & Fressoli, 2021), social movements (Monticelli, 2018), social economy (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005), sociology of work (Ferreras *et al.*, 2022) and social enterprise research (Steyaert & Dey, 2010).

As we will argue, there are compelling reasons to draw a line between 'transformative' and regular, incremental social innovation – *but where, and how?* The praxis of attempts towards TSI is pervaded with tensions, contradictions and paradoxes. Critical perspectives on social innovation have pointed out the dramatic discrepancies that often exist between narratives of transformation on the one hand, and their transformative impacts on the other hand (Shin & Yeong, 2019; Teasdale *et al.*, 2020). Critical analyses have also deconstructed many of the narratives of empowerment accompanying emblematic TSI examples such as microcredit (Khan *et al.*, 2007), participative beyond-the-state governance (Swyngedouw, 2005), social enterprise (Bull *et al.*, 2018), or energy prosumerism (Lennon *et al.*, 2020). TSI

narratives may often take explicit distance from statist visions of transformations (Wittmayer *et al.*, 2019), but the aforementioned critiques show how also these less grand transformative visions – paraphrasing Scott (1998) – are vulnerable to failure and undesirable consequences. TSI research is thus pervaded with observations of *paradoxes*: Social innovation is both a buzz-word *as well as* an imaginary with real implications and distinct 'hype' dynamics (Schubert, 2018; Grimes, 2021). Attempts towards TSI need to be radical enough to have transformative impact, but also incremental enough to remain acceptable (Smith, 2007; Dey & Teasdale, 2016). Social innovations may often be attempts to restore practices existing earlier and elsewhere (Shove, 2012; Ziegler, 2017), but simultaneously they may acquire a certain innovative significance (Pel & Kemp, 2020). Westley *et al.* (2017) explained well why such paradoxes are rather inherent to TSI phenomena: Attempts at change in institutional structures often seek to reconcile fundamental conflicts of values – between the protection and the public disclosure of natural areas, for example.

This paper aims to make a methodological contribution. It argues for a critical perspective that acknowledges these paradoxes as inherent and practically vital aspects of TSI phenomena. This sensitivity to paradox follows seminal works in organization theory (Morgan, 1997), institutional theory (Poole & van de Ven, 1997) and social theory (Luhmann, 1995). Yet in line with Andriopoulos & Gotsi (2017), we stress the need for more operational understandings, i.e., for empirically detailed and methodologically well-considered engagements with these paradoxes. Conventional innovation scholarship provides abundant and well-established methodological repertoires. Yet however rigorous they may be, these methods also tend to be rather sterile, i.e. insensitive to the paradoxical aspects of innovation phenomena (Godin & Vinck, 2017). By contrast, critical scholarship on issues of innovation and transformation does have a strong antenna for TSI paradoxes, but this relies heavily on conceptual work: The engagement with TSI paradoxes could do with some more empirical concreteness, and some more methodological elaboration in terms of (easily understandable and applicable) strategies of inquiry. Aiming to advance the critical awareness in this direction of methodological specifics, this contribution is guided by the following research question: *Which kinds of TSI paradoxes can be distinguished, and which strategies of inquiry could help to grasp, analyze and communicate about these paradoxical phenomena?*

The paper is structured as follows. First, we specify what TSI is, clarifying how TSI paradoxes form crucial areas for critical innovation research **(section 1)**. We distinguish three kinds of paradoxes. Indicating distinct kinds of contradictions and distinct empirical phenomena, this tripartite distinction also calls attention to the associated differences between realist, processual and constructivist research philosophies **(section 2)**. Next, we discuss these three key TSI paradoxes in more

detail. We explain what is paradoxical about them, how they manifest empirically, and through which strategies of inquiry they can be grasped. We discuss paradoxes pertaining to system reproduction **(section 3)**, temporality **(section 4)** and reality construction **(section 5)**. The concluding section wraps up the main answers to our research questions. It shows how critical social innovation research can rely on various methodological advances, within and beyond innovation studies **(conclusion)**.

1. TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION PARADOXES

1.1. Transformative Social Innovation: Reclaiming social innovation

Somewhat in the shadow of technological innovations, a wide array of social innovations is developing as well: Participatory Budgeting, Ecovillages, Timebanks, social entrepreneurship, Slow Food, ethical banks, and the various movements towards commons-based consumption, Degrowth, circular economy and solidarity-based economy are just a few examples. Acknowledging a broad range of socially innovative practices (Jaeger-Erben *et al.*, 2015), we define social innovation (SI) as innovations in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing (Avelino *et al.*, 2019; Pel *et al.*, 2020). This parsimonious conceptualization avoids teleological assumptions of necessarily benign and 'social' effects (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014), the particular form of 'pro-innovation bias' (Godin & Vinck, 2017) that pervades SI discourse. Rather than proposing some kind of neutral SI understanding, however, this definition calls attention to the multitude of possible SI interpretations. The main bone of contention is the 'transformative' significance of social innovation.

As indicated in the inaugural article of this journal, SI is one of the oldest of the so-called 'X-innovations' (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019, p. 8). It is an appropriation of the innovation imaginary that historically has been ventured mostly by social reformers. Often juxtaposed against imaginaries of technological innovation and innovative *products*, SI is tied strongly to the socialist project of emancipation – it seeks innovation that truly empowers individuals. The resurrection of social innovation (SI) in the last decades has retained much of this emancipation spirit. Promoted as alternative solutions to meet 'grand societal challenges' (European Commission, 2011), the social innovation imaginary has institutionalized into social policies and research programs. In the process, it has gained traction as an instrument for social change (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017). Considered as a means to achieving societal ends (Schubert, 2018; Wittmayer *et al.*, 2020), SI has also been taken well beyond the original core issues of social equity, inclusion and socio-economic justice. Mobilized for 'grand societal challenges', it has also been deployed for issues of sustainable development, democratization, and digitalization.

The institutionalization of SI has come with a certain dilution of its commitments to empowerment. The same trend has been observed regarding social entrepreneurship (Dey & Steyaert, 2012). The instrumentalist appropriations of SI have in turn evoked attempts to resuscitate its transformative contents. Stretching the SI concept into a 'Swiss army knife of social problems', one can ask what is *not* social innovation (Solis-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021). Apart from the observations on analytical dilution, there have been fierce critiques of the associated normative void: the neoliberal appropriation of the concept has arguably created a managerial breed of SI approaches (Jessop *et al.*, 2013; Klein *et al.*, 2016; Moulaert *et al.*, 2017). Taking distance from incremental problem-solving, critical scholars have thus stressed that SI should not be reduced to marginal patches ('caring liberalism'), or to isolate projects to alleviate social problems (Moulaert & Maccallum, 2019). Instead, it should be taken seriously as a program of empowerment (Avelino *et al.*, 2019) and radical societal transformation (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017).

The above critiques have initiated a discourse on *transformative* social innovation (Klein *et al.*, 2016; Haxeltine *et al.*, 2017). This prefix reclaims social innovation as a counterhegemonic, transformative concept. TSI has been defined as the process through which SI challenges, alters or replaces dominant institutions (Pel *et al.*, 2020). Unger (2015) and Westley (2017) similarly underline the SI potentials for 'double-loop' learning and institutional transformation. Similar to the approaches of 'real utopias' (Wright, 2010) and 'working utopias' (Crossley, 1999), TSI rests on the 'prefiguration' (Monticelli *et al.,* 2018; Wittmayer *et al.*, 2022) of alternative social relations and institutional arrangements. The key objective is to unleash broader institutional changes. Social enterprises, for example, can be evaluated in terms of individuals empowered, community needs catered for, and societal added value provided. Seeking to radicalize the idea of the social economy, advocates of the social solidarity economy (SSE) (Laville, 2014; Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2021), have underlined the broader transformative potentials of social enterprises, however: their pioneering role in the demonstration of alternative modes of production, democracy at the workplace and sustainable business models, and alternative *institutional arrangements*. TSI can be considered the SSE equivalent for social innovation: It reclaims and radicalizes the SI concept.

1.2. TSI paradoxes and critical innovation research

The SI/TSI distinction is not as clear-cut as these juxtaposed acronyms suggest. There are good reasons to draw a line between them, yet empirically it is seldom obvious whether social actors are doing TSI, or 'just' regular SI. There are many shades of grey between *de forma* social enterprises, and enterprises that *de facto* pursue ideals of social and solidarity-based economy (Bull *et al.*, 2018; Dey & Teasdale, 2015).

Alternative food networks come with certain *promises* of being alternative (le Velly, 2019). SI initiatives can *become* transformative, to *some* extent, on certain *dimensions*. As usual this depends on strategies, resources, and conditioning factors (Westley *et al.*, 2017; Pel *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, language plays tricks on us: the discrepancies between transformation narratives and concrete transformation processes are often obscured by evasive innovation lingo (Teasdale *et al.*, 2020; Westman & Castán Broto, 2022).

The above examples show how TSI is pervaded with tensions, contradictions and paradoxes. We follow Westley *et al.* (2017) and Swyngedouw (2005) in emphasizing the paradoxical character of TSI phenomena. The latter called attention to the Janus-Face of social innovation activities: on the one hand the face of counterhegemonic impulses and apparent TSI, and on the other hand the face of quite conventional, incremental SI. For almost any empirical example of apparent TSI, there is a quite system-confirming counterpart: consider the two faces of the 'maker movement', comprising both the radical innovation democracy of the Hackerspaces as well as the plain celebration of making products. Regarding the Slow Food movement, one could consider the two faces of food sovereignty and gastronomic fetishism. And indeed, how does the transformative face of the Ashoka 'changemakers' fit with their apparent resignation into the neoliberal imperatives of adaptiveness, self-realization and incessant innovation (Teasdale *et al.*, 2020)? Such paradoxes of two-faced SI/TSI are pervasive, as we will substantiate further in sections 3-5.

These SI/TSI Janus-faces, are they really paradoxes? Indeed, some of the observed tensions, anomalies and contradictions may not qualify as paradoxes in terms of formal logic. On the other hand, they are paradoxical in the dictionary sense of a 'statement that is seemingly self-contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true'. Furthermore, one can consider how (T)SI practitioners appear to *experience* their activities as paradoxical: examples are the social enterprises strategically mimicking the innovation discourse that gets them funded (Dey & Teasdale, 2016), or the Basic Income experimenters acknowledging their crowdfunding initiative to be a 'gimmick' (Pel & Backhaus, 2020). Yet ultimately our sensitivity to paradox is a matter of interpretation. To us it is a principled choice for an *explorative* mode of critical innovation research: critique should not remain limited to demystification and unmasking, or to deconstruction that forgets about *re*construction (Avelino & Grin 2017). Various critiques have exposed the plain, system-confirming SI that often hides behind alleged TSI. Unfortunately, many of these critiques take the form of 'I see something you don't see' (Luhmann & Rasch, 2002), i.e. of unveiling power structures supposedly overlooked by SI practitioners themselves. However, many SI practitioners – consciously and overtly – seek to leverage the forces of 'neoliberalism' and innovation society. Seeking to show the 'real face' of a certain

social innovation, the critique then remains caught up in naïve, essentialist views on social reality. The long, checkered genealogy of appropriations has shown it already (section 2.1): SI cannot be unequivocally either 'transformative' or 'incremental'.

Different from the 'unmasking' modes of critique, we propose an explorative line of critical innovation research. Rather than seeking to expose false representations and 'capture' of innovations, we seek to engage with the concrete contradictions, anomalies, and paradoxes of innovation that tend to be ironed out in ideological representations of it (Godin & Vinck, 2017). This sensitivity to paradoxes is in line with the anti-essentialist modes of critique of Adorno's (1966) negative dialectics and the genealogical deconstructions of Foucault (Kelly 1996): the double face is considered as the true face, and the task is to articulate its contradictions.

2. FROM CRITIQUE TO STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY: 3 KINDS OF TSI PARADOXES

The sensitivity to TSI paradoxes is growing. Apart from the recent moves towards critical innovation research (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019), innovation is becoming a prominent area of Social Science and Humanities research (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017; Ingeborgrud *et al.*, 2020). Yet this critical awareness of paradoxes is not enough. To take critical innovation scholarship beyond deconstruction and unmasking, explorative modes of critical analysis are needed (section 1.2). This implies a reconstructive, empirically concrete engagement with paradoxes. Such empirical engagement could disclose the potentialities that reside in ambiguous SI realities (Anderson, 2006), and it could yield instructive lessons on the practical handling of paradoxes: Stirling (2016), for example, calls attention to the 'judo' that SI protagonists play with the forces that dominate them.

Seeking more operational understandings of TSI paradoxes, the critical-philosophical awareness needs to be complemented with social science, and with dedicated methodology (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2017). This step is notoriously difficult to take. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017, p.12) point out a persistent gap between methodological reflections on the one hand, and on the other hand the operational considerations of data gathering methods and research practice. It is for example easy to agree that the methodological repertoires of conventional innovation scholarship are systematic and rigorous, yet rather sterile in the face of the paradoxical aspects of innovation phenomena (Godin & Vinck, 2017). As indicated earlier by Poole and van der Ven (1989), straightforward roadmaps, phase models and heuristics tend to obscure the nuances and paradoxes of innovation practice. Haxeltine *et al.* (2017) similarly identify methodological pitfalls and negligence of TSI paradoxes, yet they

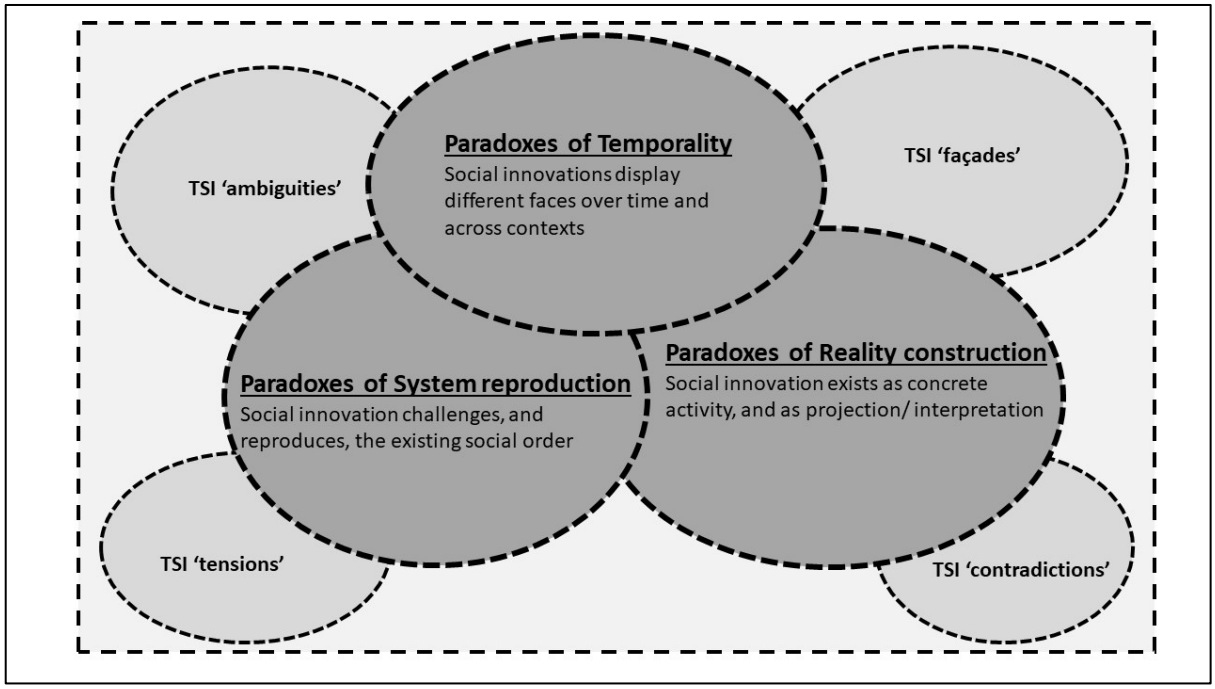
also show the challenge to elaborate methodological approaches through which to grasp them empirically. Seeking to bridge this operationalization gap, this paper elaborates the critical awareness of TSI paradoxes into appropriate *strategies of inquiry* (SoI). SoI are comprehensive methodological approaches that integrate considerations of ontology, epistemology and research methods. Other than methods in the narrow sense of data gathering techniques and analytical procedures, they are methodologies in the broad reflexive sense: they also comprise ontological and epistemological considerations of research philosophy (Ulrich, 2003; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Importantly, such SoI reach beyond the tacit 'Fingerspitzengefühl' of the seasoned researcher: TSI research needs explicit, codified investigation repertoires that can be applied across research contexts.

An important first step towards such SoI is to distinguish between different kinds of paradoxes. Elements of somehow paradox-sensitive strategies of inquiry can be found across the social sciences. Yet it is crucial to order this mixed bag, and to combine the many pockets of insights and methodological advances into a more coherent repertoire of SoI. As we will discuss further in sections 3-5, we have started our methodological reflections from our own case studies. Reflecting upon our empirical encounters with TSI paradoxes and reviewing similar studies, it became apparent that the various Janus-faced SI phenomena are not always labeled and treated as TSI *paradoxes*. Various scholarly traditions rather speak of 'tensions', 'contradictions', 'ambiguities'. In our own case study descriptions we often stuck to matter-of-fact descriptions of empirical phenomena 'with two faces'. Meanwhile, certain modes of critical analysis prefer to speak of 'false representations' and 'facades' (section 1.2). Most importantly, we observed that analyses in terms of 'paradoxes' are not always referring to the *same kinds* of paradoxes.

Along the lines of the seminal Poole and van der Ven (1989), we could distinguish how studies have approached TSI paradoxes in terms of 1) opposition; 2) spatial separation; 3) temporal separation or 4) synthesis. Seeking to mobilize methodological advances from a broad range of TSI-related disciplines, such rigorous approach seemed overly restrictive, however. Our classification stays closer to the observed variety of conceptualizations, approaches and empirical cases. **Figure 1** provides an analytical canvas that covers a wide range of 'paradoxes', 'contradictions' and 'tensions'. It shows three kinds of paradoxes as fairly distinct, yet fuzzy-demarcated and partly overlapping spheres. Other than trying to be logically exhaustive or to propose analytically foundational categories, we have taken a more inductive approach: the tripartite distinction reflects first and foremost our aim to capture the variety of TSI Janus-faces that we have encountered in our own research. Importantly, these categories are also covering a large portion of the TSI paradoxes frequently reported in TSI research. Beyond these basic considerations of salience

and coverage, our clustering does indicate certain more fundamental distinctions. As will be elaborated in the next sections, the paradoxes do indicate quite distinct kinds of contradictions. The distinguished kinds are prominent in particular disciplines and strands of research, and they bear the imprints of different research philosophies and epistemological/ontological assumptions. One can consider for example how the paradoxes of system reproduction revolve around the substantive and politically urgent contradictions between the transformative and system-reproductive effects of certain social innovations. By contrast, the paradoxes of temporality tend to be highlighted in relational, processual modes of inquiry: Various analyses have unfolded TSI paradoxes less as absolute contradictions, but rather as ambiguities and 'double faces' manifesting *across time*. Meanwhile, the paradoxes of reality construction are indicating contradictions that – unlike the first two – refer only indirectly to empirical states of affairs. Indicating contradictions resulting from observation, interpretation and performativity, this kind of paradoxes is quite clearly reflecting constructivist philosophies of science.

Fig. 1: Three kinds of TSI paradoxes



Source: own elaboration (Pel *et al.*, 2022).

The linkages between particular kinds of paradoxes and particular research philosophies will become more apparent in the following three sections. For each of the three kinds of paradoxes we provide a brief description, some empirical examples, and (elements of) appropriate strategies of inquiry.

3. TSI PARADOXES (I): TRANSFORMATION AS SYSTEM REPRODUCTION

A first kind of paradox encountered frequently in TSI research is the paradox famously described in De Lampedusa's 'il Gattopardo': "Everything has to change, so that everything can remain the same." Innovation has indeed long been associated with renewal, and with the maintenance rather than transformation of societal structures (Godin & Vinck, 2017). The system reproduction paradox in its basic form indicates the contradictory two faces of many social innovations: one face of transformation and counterhegemonic agency, and the other face of working within, and reproducing, the customs and formal structures of the existing social order. It is therefore not easy to distinguish TSI from regular SI (section 1.1).

Observations of this reproduction paradoxes abound in TSI research. Despite being revolutionized through a multitude of more or less transformative innovations and structural changes, society remains very familiar and stable. TSI scholarship has brought forward many observations on the '10 square miles surrounded by reality' that innovation initiatives tend to be confined to (North, 2010), on the isomorphic pressures that push social enterprises back into profit-seeking (Dey & Teasdale, 2016), on the reproduction of power asymmetries through participative governance arrangements (Swyngedouw, 2005), and on the tendencies of 'smart' technological solutions to reinforce technological path dependency (Grin *et al.*, 2010). The mainstreaming of eco-communities in e.g. eco-city projects has been criticized for a *"dilution of the original ideas and concepts (with emphasis on social justice, civic empowerment and local democracy), which do not appear to feature largely in many current projects, and the prevalence of mainly technocratic approaches"* (Joss, 2011, p. 246). While participatory budgeting is often celebrated as a case of social innovation with political and democratic potential, it has also been described as "watered down" in the "sustained export of a lite version of participatory budgeting by rather non-democratic and non-participatory institutions such as the World Bank" (Chavez, 2008).

A telling example in our own research experience is the Impact Hub network of social entrepreneurs. On the one hand, the Impact Hub can be argued to reproduce the 'enterprise society' and enforce the hegemonic dominance of the market logic at the macro-level (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2019). Others have argued that the case of the Impact Hub demonstrates how *"social entrepreneurship is used to forge links between ideological values which hitherto seemed incompatible (…) perhaps the most revealing example pertains to how the prospect of becoming a social entrepreneur conflates traditional notions of doing business with hedonistic values of enjoyment"* (Dey & Lehner,

2017, p. 764), and that *"the promise of enjoyment which pervades portrayals of the social entrepreneur might cultivate a passive attitude of empty 'pleasure' which effectively deprives social entrepreneurship of its more radical possibilities"* (*ibid.*, p. 753). On the other hand, we can also clearly observe how this network empowers small and independent upcoming social entrepreneurs to challenge, alter and possibly replace large incumbent enterprises by providing social entrepreneurs not only with co-working spaces and options for pooling resources and skills (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2019), but also with a strong shared identity and autonomous motivation (Avelino *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, it has also been studied how the Impact Hub managed to transform a franchising process and respective business models, thereby navigating the mission drift tensions between commercial and social value relatively successfully, by developing decentralized decision-making and shared governance (Giudici *et al.*, 2020).

The reproduction paradox is clearly not a fringe phenomenon. There is an accordingly wide range of strategies of inquiry to consider. One line of strategies of inquiry to deal with this reproduction paradox are the dialectical approaches that take the paradox as the 'driver' of TSI processes. Key examples are provided in the set of case studies compared in Westley *et al.* (2017), who emphasize that TSI revolves around attempts to reconcile conflicting principles – for example between the disclosure and the protection of natural areas. Another example is le Velly (2019) on the evolution of alternative Food Networks. Likewise, there are the studies that start from the institutionally or ethically hybrid character of TSI. This is done for example through multi-criteria analyses, showing shifting emphases in the balancing of conflicting principles. There is a rich tradition of social enterprise research that handles TSI paradoxes through analyses of balances between institutional logics (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). In this way it can be shown in more detail how TSI processes involve transformation and change on *some* dimensions, whilst largely reproducing existing practices in other aspects. In similar vein, TSI researchers have sought to specify *degrees* of transformation and *dimensions* of change – this similarly works towards statements specifying how transformation X is accompanied with, or possibly even facilitated by, reproduction of Y and Z.

A second strategy of inquiry is multi-perspective analysis. There is a myriad of studies that combine different theoretical perspectives to show different faces of TSI, and therewith, its respective transformative and reproductive sides. Empirical studies along this format are still rare, but there have been various conceptual advances. One example is Geels (2010), exposing how sustainability transitions can be understood through different ontologies. Highlighting how conceptualizations can be incommensurable with each other, this study also sheds light on reproduction paradoxes: a TSI process can be understood in terms of institutional change, and of

institutional stability. An empirically more concrete example is Novy & Leubolt (2005): the analysis shows how the institutionalization of Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre can be understood to have resulted from 'bottom-up' community action, but it can also be attributed to the institutional work of governmental actors. Even if focusing on the interactions between these two innovation activities, this analysis also unfolds that the TSI has two faces. In our own work (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2019) we used the Multi-Actor Power perspective. Its shows how TSI-initiatives challenge and change power relations in some aspects and at some levels, whilst reproducing them in others.

A third way of handling the paradox has been brought forward by the interpretive policy analysis (IPA) tradition, especially through critical discourse analysis (Hajer, 1995). These interpretive approaches start from the understanding that TSI realities are framed and shaped by the narratives constructed around them. Other than designating a self-evident phenomenon or corresponding with objective entities or processes, TSI and related innovation categories order and accord meaning to society and its governance (Fischer & Forrester, 1999). Alongside with the interpretive core business of eliciting how certain innovation attempts mean different things to different people, IPA analysis also confronts the difficulty that any description of an innovation process implies a debatable vantage point – leaning towards some actors' narratives of change (Wittmayer *et al.*, 2019) and rather alien to those of other involved parties. Critical discourse analysis (Howarth, 2010; Fairclough, 2013) is a branch of interpretive analysis that not only reconstructs but also critically scrutinizes what TSI narratives disclose and hide, confirm and negate. Key examples are Teasdale *et al.* (2020) who critically challenge the moral underpinnings and political choices (or rather lack thereof) of social innovation discourses on e.g the role of 'changemakers'. Another good example can be found in Westman & Castán Broto (2022, p. 1) who analyse discourses on urban transformations. They argue that these tend to be "cloaked in emancipatory terminology" and "grow from a radical foundation", but "do so while reproducing assumptions and values of mainstream discourses" and thereby "prevent the flourishing of radical ideas".

4. TSI PARADOXES (II): TEMPORALITY

A second kind of paradoxes encountered frequently in TSI research pertains to time. Innovation and transformation both imply a certain difference between a situation 'before' and a situation 'after' – without such difference, 'innovation' is not an appropriate framing of a social activity. Regarding this temporality, TSI researchers often run into the paradoxical conclusion that the innovation in case is at the same

time new and old – and therewith at the same time an innovation and not an innovation.

These temporality paradoxes have been pointed out in various analyses. For historians (of technology, of ideas, or of institutions), these temporality paradoxes are quite regular phenomena. Focusing on the time aspect, the paradox is often unfolded in terms of 'phases' and 'shades', becoming and fading. As indicated by Poole and van de Ven (1989), paradox can be dissolved by taking a temporal perspective on them. The following empirical examples are instructive: many supposed 'niche' innovations also involve attempts to revive or restore practices existing earlier and elsewhere (Ziegler, 2017). When looking for innovations to foster societal transformations, it may therefore be wiser to look instead for such 'pockets of persistence' (Shove, 2012) that have survived against the tide. Related to this are the observations of the waves of revival and fading of certain innovations. Whereas innovations revolving around new material-technological configurations follow rather a pattern of successive waves, technologies undergo more clearly progressive evolution, and they seldom get dis-invented or fully 'exnovated' (Arnold *et al.*, 2015). By contrast, SI involves innovations in practices and institutions, following more fuzzy cycles of fading and re-emergence. Telling examples are the Social Economy (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005) or the 'new communalism' displayed by Ecovillages and certain kinds of energy cooperatives and commons-based initiatives (Forsman *et al.*, 2020). Processes of transformative social innovation often display patterns of recurring tensions between fundamental principles and values – singular innovations are therefore only passing moments in longer series of innovating and adapting (Westley *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, various contradictions tend to arise around the identification of origins of innovations, and of supposed pioneers. The grey zone of being not yet, or no longer, innovative is open to various social constructions: new *for whom*? (Roth 2009). As a consequence, TSI research is deeply implicated in the paradoxes of practices that have a 'manifest' face ('makerspaces' such as Repaircafés and Hackerspaces gaining transformative significance for their democratization of technology and means of production) and the 'latent' face (Pel & Kemp, 2020) of secluded, local and seemingly regular manufacturing. These faces change along with the societal context, and along with the directions that innovation society (Rammert *et al.*, 2018; Gaglio *et al.*, 2019) is taking.

The temporality-related paradoxes have been taken up through various strategies of inquiry. Very important has been the actor-network based sociology of translation, with its relational, ontogenetic analyses of how things come into being. These ontologically cautious methodologies have shown how innovations do not diffuse like gases (Akrich *et al.*, 2002), but rather involve processes in which the identities of innovations, innovators and adopters are continuously transforming (Pel

et al., 2017a). A very important development is the creation of 'mobile methods' that are sensitive to a dynamic, mobile social world (Büscher & Urry, 2009). The methodological insistence on studying innovation *in-the-making* – as opposed to retrospective 'whig history' accounts in which the uncertainties of the innovation process have been driven out – has also made for strongly interpretive strategies of inquiry. Focusing on situated actors' translations (interpretations, adaptations) of innovations, it is shown concretely how a certain innovation can be a breakthrough to one organization and a quite insignificant case of 'more of the same' to another. The material semiotics of ANT (actor-network theory) offer strategies of inquiry similar to those in interpretive policy analysis: disclosing how innovation and novelty are socially/historically constructed, the paradox is shown to result from the competing appropriations (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019) of innovations. Research on the history of technology has delivered essential groundwork, in this regard. In the context of TSI, revolving around changes in power relations, this means that innovations tend to become deeply ambiguous entities (Smith, 2007). Their multiple faces can be understood in terms of alternating *phases* of radicalization and domestication (Hargrave & van de Ven, 2006).

Next to the sociology of translation there is also a broad repertoire of process-analytical methods (Langley, 1999). These methods are well-established in innovation research, and they can be used in ways that basically iron out the paradoxes: methodologies like causal process tracing aim to identify conditions and mechanisms to explain particular process outcomes, and they help to reconstruct stages of innovation diffusion, innovation trajectories, or transition 'pathways'. These strategies of inquiry seek to avoid 'paralysis by analysis', i.e. they zoom out from TSI paradoxes to get a sense of the bigger picture (Grin *et al.*, 2010). By contrast, process analysis can also zoom in on particular events, rather than on the generic patterns in sequences of events. One approach we have used for that is the 'Critical Turning Points' (CTP) database, describing TSI cases as series of critical turning points. The database contains about 450 qualitative descriptions of these CTPs, i.e. *"moments or events in processes at which initiatives undergo or decide for changes of course"* (Pel *et al.*, 2017b). Even if stating mostly factual information on events and phases that TSI practitioners considered *important*, this dataset does provide a cross-section of the 'tensions', 'challenges', and 'dilemmas' of TSI practice, i.e. the different ways in which practitioners make sense of what we describe as TSI paradoxes. More generally, process methodology can be put to many uses, and interpretive-reflexive approaches exist that can be tailored to investigation of TSI paradoxes. A highly inspiring example is the reflection on temporal demarcations by institutional change theorist Grzymala-Busse (2011). The interpretation of TSI paradoxes can be deepened by framing a TSI process along different timelines. This clarifies how it can display both the classical

breakthrough of an innovation, as well as a passing moment in an ongoing process of up-and-down. Similarly, one can play out the evolutionary, relational and durational temporal perspectives of Garud and Gehman (2012). This helps to develop nuanced views on the relative novelty of an innovation.

Finally, critical innovation research offers various conceptual tools that help to deal with the temporality-related paradoxes. The basic move is to resolve paradoxes by discarding the underlying binary categorizations (le Velly, 2019). Poole and van der Ven (1989) discussed this as the 'synthesis' approach to paradox. Innovation phenomena are often ambiguous and shady, it is easy to agree. Yet they come mainly across as 'paradoxical' through framings in terms of dichotomies: innovation vs adoption, innovation vs imitation, or innovation vs maintenance (Godin & Vinck, 2017). The historical development of innovation thinking – historical, genealogical methods are essential resources – can indeed be seen as an endless juxtaposition of 'X-innovations' (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019). Looking for ways out of conceptual deadlocks over what is and what isn't innovation, Godin and Vinck (2017) have opened up a broad range of conceptual interventions and 'outcast' innovation categories. Calling attention to in-between phenomena, these categories help to explore innovation as a multifaceted phenomenon. Notable examples are reinvention (Rice & Rogers, 1980), imitation (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015), 'repair' innovation (Schubert, 2019) or the forgotten groups under the innovation diffusion bell-curve: Geels (2021) urges the transitions research community to mind 'followership', and not just *leadership*.

5. TSI PARADOXES (III): REALITY CONSTRUCTION

A third kind of TSI paradoxes are the paradoxes of observation and reality construction. By researching, describing and informing others about TSI phenomena, researchers are engaged in the shaping and co-production of these phenomena. This includes think tanks such as the Young Foundation and others: linking social innovation research to entrepreneurial strategies, they have established themselves *"as central agencies for organising societal change"* (Schubert 2019, p.57). TSI research seems particularly heavily affected by this 'double hermeneutic' of social science (Stirling, 2016). Audet (2014) discussed the same circumstance in sustainability transitions research. Researchers often share the transformative ambitions of social innovation protagonists, and then participate in the creation and diffusion of innovations (Lefèvre *et al.*, 2016; Aiken, 2017). In relation to social entrepreneurship, Dey and Steyaert (2012, p.92) for example, encourage scholars to engage in different forms of critical analysis of current understandings of social entrepreneurship with the goal to "*in the end, be able to enact social entrepreneurship differently*". The paradox that results is the simultaneous existence of social innovation as a factual process,

and as a projection. Organizers of crowdfunded lotteries for individual basic incomes played into this paradox, consciously creating a TSI 'hype'. Dramatically remote from the ideal of a *universal* basic income and in that sense a 'fake' social innovation, the provision of basic incomes for selected individuals did make the basic income concept tangible, understandable, communicable, and in *that* sense real. The initiators, very well aware of the paradox, considered the basic income experiments as a very mediagenic gimmick (Pel & Backhaus, 2020). As the initiative captured our scholarly attention as well, and as it become a 'case of TSI', we may ask ourselves: *How important and transformative was it really, within the larger picture of decades and even centuries of basic income advocacy? Whose TSI narrative were we telling? Was this 'real' TSI?*

When engaging in research on phases, conditions, incentive structures and ecologies that could help innovations to thrive, TSI researchers develop heuristics, policy instruments and discourses that not only provide academic understanding. The findings and framings also structure how TSI processes could be navigated in practice. This comes to the fore when researchers work closely with policy actors to explore, operationalize or co-produce concepts such as sustainability transitions (Turnheim *et al.*, 2020). Voß (2014) gives the example of 'transition management': as it gained credibility through researchers as well as policy makers, 'transition' has become a highly performative concept. It refers at once to concrete transformation processes in socio-technical systems, to visions of desired futures, to patterns in transformation processes, and to certain modes of governance and innovation management. *How can we support the energy transition? Which transition, and why? Is a transition actually taking place?* These issues are hard to untangle. In our own research practice, this unclear reality status of transitions came up for example as we worked towards a 'roadmap' on collective renewable energy prosumerism. Informed by a series of systemic contradictions or tensions (e.g. between market and community logic; or between energy islands and full system interconnection), we avoided overly linear projections of the future transition. The subsequent participatory integrated assessment process involved over more than 100 practitioners. Formulating possible pathways towards desirable forms of collective prosumerism (de Geus *et al.*, 2021), the challenge arose to depict the 'transition' both as a walkable path and as an elusive set of uncertain possible futures.

Importantly, TSI phenomena circulate through particularly intensive 'policy mobilities' (Temenos & McCann, 2013). This involves benchmarking of 'best practices', mappings of innovation 'hotspots', online networks and establishment of charters and declarations. Communicating their innovation insights through policy briefs, practitioner handbooks, blogs, webinars, and innovation management programs (Pfotenhauer & Jasanoff, 2017), TSI researchers create expectations about the possible

governance roles of actors and initiatives (Voß & Freeman, 2016). Similar to the 'looping effect' described by Hacking (1995), innovation researchers are inextricably involved in the constitution of innovator identities: TSI case study reports cast individuals as 'grassroots innovators'; 'regime actors', or 'incubators'. These descriptive concepts have emancipating or confining effects. This paradoxical creation of TSI realities is particularly intensive in the mapping activities undertaken in many EU-funded research projects – of social innovations (SI-DRIVE Atlas of Social Innovation[2]), of TSI processes (TRANSIT Database[3]) or of approaches linking urban sustainability and justice (URBANA wiki[4]). In doing so they co-shape understandings of what counts as transformative social innovation, and what not. An explicit intervention in this regard was the 'Transformative Social Innovation Manifesto' to which we participated, aimed to "*redirect attention to the emerging movement of transformative social innovation: communities and individuals across the world that are making change on the ground*"[5]. Such collaboration among researchers and movements also takes on more institutionalized forms such as in the Global Ecovillage Network research working group where an explicit aim is to encourage researchers to "*give something back to the ecovillages*" (GEN Website[6]).

The observation paradoxes pervade TSI research. Several strategies of inquiry exist to address them. First, the most prominent one is through pursuing normatively engaged and action-oriented research, e.g. Participatory Action Research (PAR; Arthur, 2013; Moulaert *et al.*, 2017; Bartels & Wittmayer, 2018). Confronting the positionality of the researcher head-on (Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014), these approaches take the fact/projection duality as a starting point for their analysis (Lefèvre *et al.*, 2016; Aiken, 2017). These approaches are not necessarily designed with the purpose of handling TSI paradoxes, yet they do provide practical instructions and epistemological guidance: the fact/projection paradox corresponds with the balancing between the 'action' and 'research' components. Through its engaged, practical approach, PAR has become a particularly prominent strategy of inquiry in TSI research (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017). As Arthur (2013) indicates, its primary purpose in this context is perhaps to support social innovators' struggles with 'system reproduction' paradoxes (section 3). Still, PAR also helps to address the observation paradoxes,

[2] https://www.socialinnovationatlas.net/ (accessed April 20th, 2022)

[3] http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/sii (accessed April 20th, 2022)

[4] https://wiki.sustainablejustcities.eu/index.php/Main_Page (accessed April 20th, 2022)

[5] http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/tsi-manifesto (accessed April 20th, 2022)

[6] https://ecovillage.org/our-work/research-ecovillages/ (accessed April 20th, 2022)

through its 'post-normal science' epistemologies (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 2001): It directs attention to the co-production processes through which TSI becomes known as TSI.

A second strategy of inquiry is to turn TSI researchers, their communications about TSI, and the societal conditions that shape TSI research into objects of research. Critical theory and critical innovation research provide innovation-historical tools to decode the origins and underlying motives of new innovation categories such as 'responsible' or 'frugal' innovation (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019) – or social innovation, for that matter (Schubert, 2018). Analyses of 'innovation society' (Rammert *et al.*, 2018) clarify how innovation researchers are expected to report on novel, cutting-edge phenomena – not the mundane repair work, or the innovations with only nebulous transformative impacts. TSI researchers thus take part in 'hype' dynamics, which appear to be important factors in social innovation trajectories (Grimes, 2021). This underlines the particular usefulness of the strategies of inquiry developed in Science & Technology Studies. These approaches help to reconstruct the co-production of TSI realities through science-policy interactions (Jasanoff, 2004), the co-performance of social institutions by science and experts (Callon, 2007), the circulations of 'best practices' (Temenos & McCann, 2013), and the emergence of new knowings-of-governance (Voß & Freeman, 2016). Such reconstructions make the observation paradoxes tangible – highlighting in particular the face of *projected* TSI realities.

Finally, there are various applications of reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). This revolves around transparency about underlying assumptions. This acknowledges for example that researchers may have long discussions about what is (not) social innovation (Solis-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021), but the practitioners involved have their views on this well (Dey & Steyaert, 2012). Callorda Fossati *et al.* (2017) indicate for example how the sampling of supposed SI cases can be informed by Delphi method procedures, to avoid silent introduction of researchers' assumptions. Similarly, Pel *et al.* (2017), and McGowan *et al.* (2017) propose ways towards a more cautious cutting up of innovation processes into units of analysis, and into supposed key actors and points of origin. Especially researchers on socio-technical and social-ecological systems have invoked critical systems thinking (Ulrich, 2003): this unwinds the observation paradoxes surrounding statements about 'systems' that are supposedly transforming, or in need of transformation – *whose* systems? And what would a transformation amount to? (Smith & Stirling, 2010). Finally, reflexive methodology also comprises noteworthy quests for adequate, paradox-acknowledging representations of TSI phenomena: Stirling (2019) discusses in detail how 'incumbency' and power asymmetries keep being reinforced through misleading *visuals* of TSI. Composed through levels, arrows and clear-cut entities, diagrams in scientific analyses keep perpetuating dominant assumptions on how TSI can be 'implemented', 'managed' and controlled.

CONCLUSION

TSI research is pervaded with paradoxes. Whilst critical-reflexive innovation scholarship tends to provide the crucial conceptual deepening, it does often come with a certain lack of empirical and methodological concreteness. By contrast, conventional innovation scholarship tends to provide rigorous methodological repertoires, yet these tend to be rather sterile, i.e. insensitive to the paradoxical aspects of TSI. Seeking to bridge this divide, we raised the following research questions: *Which kinds of TSI paradoxes can be distinguished, and which strategies of inquiry could help to grasp, analyze and communicate about these paradoxical phenomena?*

Table 1. Three kinds of TSI paradoxes: Descriptions, empirical examples, strategies of inquiry

kinds of TSI paradox	Description	Empirical examples	Strategies of inquiry
System reproduction	SI challenges, and reproduces, the existing social order.	• Social enterprises challenging incumbent industry while also reproducing market logic • Eco-communities that mainstream some principles of e.g. ecovillage movement while losing some of the more radical aspects. • Democratic potential of participatory budgeting watered down into 'partial' pseudo-participation.	• Dialectical approaches • Multi-perspective analyses • Critical discourse analysis
Temporality	SI displays innovative/ normal, manifest/ latent faces over time and across contexts.	• Makerspaces as transformative social innovation and as regular repair and manufacturing • Re-emerging cooperatives • Social innovations as 'pockets of persistence'	• Translation analysis • Process analysis • Critical innovation research
Reality construction	SI exists as activity in the social world, and as projection/ interpretation.	• The Basic income lottery 'hype' • Co-created 'transition' roadmaps • Mapping of social innovations	• Participatory Action research • Reconstructions of co-production • Reflexive methodology

Source: own elaboration (Pel *et al.*, 2022).

The summary table conveys several answers and insights. A first insight is that the TSI paradoxes can be considered central phenomena to this area of study – especially when also considering the range of studies that deal with them in terms of 'tensions', 'contradictions', 'ambiguities' or 'dilemmas'. We have substantiated this through various empirical accounts and theoretical insights, spanning different research strands and different traditions of TSI research. It is interesting to see how critical innovation studies and various social science angles on societal change are converging. Interpretive policy analysis, Science & Technology Studies, critical social theory and innovation theory seem to be key sources to tap from. They provide potentially complementing insights and methods.

Second, we have clarified how TSI research involves paradoxes of different kinds. The system reproduction paradoxes, the temporality-related paradoxes and the observation paradoxes are each in their own ways relevant. Their multiple overlaps are worthwhile to think through: one can consider for example how the reproduction paradoxes tend to coincide with temporal paradoxes, and how certain strategies of inquiry are fit to deal with either of the two. Likewise, one can consider how both of these paradoxes are in turn connected with the reality construction paradoxes: the different empirical faces of TSI can be associated with different reality constructions, for example with the 'inside' and 'outside' perspectives distinguished by Smith and Stirling (2007). Likewise, it is worthwhile considering the linkages with other angles on TSI Janus-faces (such as 'tensions', 'contradictions', cf. Figure 1). Meanwhile, we have clarified how the three kinds of paradoxes are really distinct. Certain paradoxes are gaining particular attention in particular empirical fields of study, and in particular disciplines. For example, we distinguished between explorative modes of critical innovation scholarship and the more essentialist ones that seek to challenge and 'unmask' (section 1.2). Discussing empirical examples, our analysis has shown how these approaches are drawn either towards issues of projection and interpretation, towards issues of becoming and fading, or rather towards discrepancies between claimed and realized transformative impacts. Highlighting how different ontological and epistemological assumptions are consistent with different methods, our analysis helps TSI scholars to determine their research approach.

Third, we have confronted the persistent difficulty to move beyond general critical awareness, and beyond paradox-acknowledging *vocabularies* (e.g. the 'two-handed explanation' and the 'Janus-faces', and the wider register of expressions for ambiguity, tensions, contradictions and shades). It is crucial to develop appropriate *visualizations* as well. As discussed by Stirling (2019), TSI research repeatedly winds up with simplistic representations of transformation processes. Whilst conveying misleading ideas about the degree to which these processes can be known and managed, many of the otherwise so useful schematic diagrams tell us little about the handling of paradox. Set up to clarify the matter, our figure and our summary table admittedly share in this betrayal of paradox. We look forward to seeing advances on this front – in this journal, and in innovation research more broadly.

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Everything and nothing: A critical review of the "social" in Innovation and Entrepreneurship studies

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades we have witnessed growing academic and policy interest in phenomena such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship. In these instances, the "social" element has often been described as a new or rediscovered category, indicating a normative predisposition to "elevate" existing or emerging innovation and entrepreneurship processes by identifying and promoting socially-acceptable standards of behavior and goal-setting. While previous reviews on social innovation have focused on the historical development of the concept and its role in academic debate, this article critically reviews the place of the "social" in current mainstream Innovation and Entrepreneurship (I&E) studies. The aim is to understand how this literature has been evolving in relation to this element and to what extent this addition has promoted a radical shift in the research direction. Our review, based on selected articles from 16 I&E mainstream journals, advances a novel classification of the dominant approaches to the social dimension in I&E studies, identifying four main categories: disciplinary, integrationist, separationist, and essentialist. What emerges is that most I&E studies ignore, minimize, or compartmentalize the "social", using it to extend existing frameworks rather than to evolve them. Indeed, while the "social" has been offering an avenue for critical views to challenge mainstream discourse, at present it does not seem to significantly affect the latter's evolution.

Keywords: Critical Social Studies; Innovation Studies; Entrepreneurship Studies; Social Innovation; Social Entrepreneurship.

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INTRODUCTION

The term *social innovation* has been utilized by academics for more than two centuries, albeit with an evolving meaning (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019). Although it was originally employed to describe, and often condemn, social change in the direction of socialism, it eventually shed its political connotation, emerging in the last two decades in the academic literature and usually portrayed in a positive light. This resurgence is demonstrated by the growing academic interest in social phenomena such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship, which has led to a plethora of definitions. For example, Mulgan *et al.* (2007, p. 2) describe social innovation as "new ideas that address unmet social needs – and that work", pointing at innovation processes targeted for a "social goal". Social entrepreneurship is at times similarly understood as "the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/ or address social needs" (Mair & Marti, 2006, p. 37). In this field, scholars have focused on issues such as the conditions for the emergence of social entrepreneurship or the obstacles to obtaining the necessary funding and networking – employing new or existing theoretical lenses to understand these "new" phenomena (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018; Lehner & Kansikas, 2012; Zahra *et al.*, 2009).

Public institutions have echoed this interest, devising research and development funding programs to achieve so-called social goals – more recently placed under the banner of Grand Challenges (Kuhlmann & Rip, 2018; Mazzucato, 2018). Examples can be found as early as 2010, when the European Union, emerging from a financial crisis, once again stressed the need to put innovation "at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy". Here, the "social" element was highlighted as a new – or at least rediscovered – category for innovation and entrepreneurship. In the Innovation Union initiative document, "social innovation" concerns "tapping into the ingenuity of charities, associations and social entrepreneurs to find new ways of meeting social needs which are not adequately met by the market or the public sector (…) to tackle the major societal challenges" (European Commission, 2010, p. 21). One possible explanation for this newfound interest could be the recognition of the widespread negative consequences generated by previous innovations (e.g., Mulgan *et al.*, 2007; Murray *et al.*, 2010) – a veiled condemnation of our past decisions more or less collectively participated in (see for example the disasters caused by oil and gas installations or chemical plants, such as Deepwater Horizon and Bhopal, or by artifacts such as asbestos and plastics), or the realization that the introduction of *mere* technical innovations has, in fact, failed to solve long-standing and wicked problems such as hunger and youth unemployment (Nelson, 2011). Indeed, emphasizing the "social" could be read as an attempt to correct the long-prevailing focus on the technical and economic aspects of these processes (Godin, 2015). Recent

contributions have also revealed that this interest in the social dimension of innovation could be seen as part of a broader, long-term academic and cultural trend of re-inventing innovation to suit or criticize the present ideology (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019; Schubert, 2019).

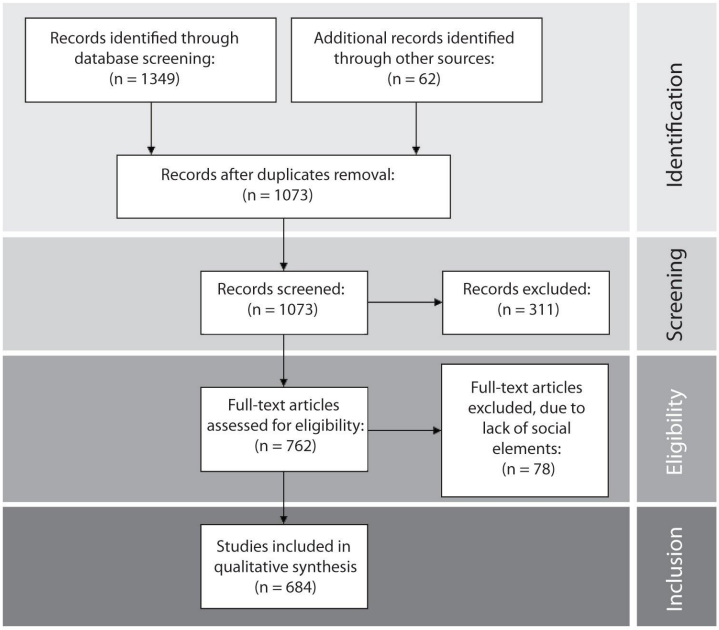
In this article we dig further into the social dimension of "X-innovation" (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019), extending it to the discussion of social entrepreneurship and focusing on how the social dimension is currently conceptualized and appropriated by mainstream innovation and entrepreneurship research. Conceptually, Gaglio *et al.* (2019) identify two characteristics of the "social". On the input side, the "social" could refer to inclusion, a process requiring the participation of the public in deliberations from an early stage. On the output side, the "social" could refer to ethical and environmental considerations, with an expectation that the innovation should be responsible and sustainable. Although this distinction has been useful for conceptualizing the "social" in X-innovations, we would argue that the current understanding and use of the social dimension in the mainstream innovation and entrepreneurship literature is much more diverse. This led us to the following research question: *has the social dimension actually contributed to shape the mainstream discourse on innovation and entrepreneurship towards more critical perspectives or has it, instead, been used to extend or validate existing theories?*

To make sense of this complex picture, after reviewing contributions from leading I&E studies journals, we advance a novel classification of mainstream approaches to the "social", illustrating the key features that identify each category through examples drawn from the literature. Having made the case for such a classification, we discuss its merits and consequences for innovation and entrepreneurship studies, and conclude by reflecting on what the classification reveals about the role played by the social dimension in the development of mainstream innovation and entrepreneurship studies. Despite its seemingly critical nature, we find that the social dimension has largely been adapted to mainstream discourse in order to extend and support dominant frameworks. While critical voices do exist, their impact is limited to ensuring the continuation of pluralist discussion, rather than succeeding in prompting a re-thinking of the underlying ideological foundations of the dominant I&E discourse. The article is structured as follows. Section 1 briefly describes the methodology adopted for this literature review. Section 2 introduces the analysis behind the proposed classification and describes a number of examples from the literature for each category. Section 3 illustrates the limitations of the proposed classification by discussing articles whose classification is challenging. The paper ends with concluding remarks.

1. METHODOLOGY

This literature review follows the PRISMA guidelines as described by Moher *et al.* (2009). The PRISMA methodology uses a 27-item checklist to organize references – including title, abstract, methods, results, discussion, and funding categories – and a four-step flow diagram describing the selection process. The first step is to identify all the papers to be analyzed by searching previously defined keywords in pre-selected academic literature databases. The second step is to screen the abstracts of all papers that meet the inclusion criteria. The third step is to analyze the full text of the remaining papers in order to select those eligible. The final step is to apply a coding scheme to identify the elements from each paper to be included in the literature review. Although PRISMA guidelines were initially used in the health sciences, their high generality and usability has enabled their application in many research fields, such as economics (Havránek *et al.*, 2020; Stornelli *et al.*, 2021; Zinyemba *et al.*, 2020). A PRISMA diagram outlines the process (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1: PRISMA guidelines applied to our literature review



Source: elaborated by the authors (Callegari *et al.*, 2022).

Based on these methodological choices, we selected all journals recognized by the ABS50 list as belonging to Innovation and Entrepreneurship Studies and ranked with 4 or 3 stars (see *Table 1*). We then identified an extensive list of keywords covering some crucial aspects of "the social" in innovation and entrepreneurship studies. These were: social value, social theory, social aspect, social dimension, social context, social ontology, social innovation, social entrepreneurship. Applying these criteria, we ensured that no relevant papers were left out on purely nominal grounds and, as an

additional safety mechanism against human error, we used cross-referencing and targeted searches through specific scientific journals' archives, selected on the basis of their thematic relevance, to identify additional records. From these, we analyzed their abstracts and, when the abstract did not provide firm evidence of the article's irrelevance for our aims, we searched the main body of the paper in question for evidence of a relevant discourse. Finally, we proceeded to read and categorize the corpus of articles according to their specific interpretation of the social dimension. To validate our categorization, described in the next section, each of the selected articles were blindly assessed by at least two of the co-authors and then validated. The selected articles are updated to March 2022.

Table 1. Journals analyzed in the literature review

Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Journal of Small Business Management
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Journal of Technology Transfer
Family Business Review	R&D Management
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	Journal of Small Business Management
Industry and Innovation	Research Policy
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research	Small Business Economics
International Small Business Journal	Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal
Journal of Business Venturing	Technological Forecasting and Social Change
Journal of Product Innovation Management	Technovation

Source: elaborated by the authors (Callegari *et al.*, 2022).

Although certainly restrictive, the choice of the above-mentioned journals has clear intent, namely, to ascertain the role of the "social" attribute produced by innovation and entrepreneurship literatures. This strand of research not only contributes heavily to the creation of a "mainstream" discourse around innovation, its meanings and functions, but strongly influences national and local policies. Yet, we acknowledge that many critical works will therefore not be included in our review as they have been published elsewhere. However, one question that emerges in this regard – and which will be argued in the concluding section – is how much these critical contributions have been able, over the past two decades, to modify and steer the mainstream discourse and how much they struggle to influence it. Indeed, as expressed by Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 8), the objective of critical research is "to identify and challenge assumptions, to recognise the influence of culture, history and social position and to imagine and explore extraordinary alternatives, disrupt routines and established orders" (Curtis, 2007, p. 277). One way to test this critical aim is to use mainstream I&E journals as a source of background information, being aware of the

entry barriers of these journals, which inevitably force researchers to engage with mainstream discourse. A further limitation of our methodological review concerns the search terms, which might exclude those authors who deliberately avoided the use of the prefix "social" while still discussing social innovation/entrepreneurship. However, we assume that critical scholars who have criticized the discourse in mainstream outlets have somehow had to refer to existing research and, thus, have used at least one of the aforementioned keywords.

2. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION IN INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDIES

Although there is a consensus that entrepreneurship and innovation studies belong to social sciences, research in these fields is predominantly characterized by an individualistic orientation largely inherited from economics (Goss, 2005; Lundvall, 2013). Over the past two decades, however, work acknowledging the importance of the social dimension is growing in influence in the field (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Shepherd *et al.,* 2020; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016). These studies have, for example, contrasted a humanistic conceptualization of entrepreneurship (Kupferberg, 1998) underpinned by a logic of social processes, relations and changes, as opposed to entrepreneurs "investigated as undersocialized economic animals or robots" (Zafirovski, 1999, p. 354), or identified a specifically social type of entrepreneurship as conceptually distinct from other forms (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012; Nicholls & Cho, 2006). Yet, there is tremendous variation in the analytical use of the "social", ranging from implicit assumption to explicit conceptualization to defining methodological foundations. This variety is a potential source of critical tension within I&E studies, as the social dimension is commonly associated with contentious implicit or explicit epistemological, methodological, and normative assumptions. This is a consequence of the holistic nature of the social sphere. Human life is, by and large, a social affair. From a fleeting tryst to a global war, most human phenomena are performed in interaction and are, therefore, amenable to social analysis. The complexity associated with such a potentially extensive area of study, however, does not fit the precision requirements of an effective analysis.

A common analytical response has been to narrow the object of study to a more manageable dimension, thus distinguishing between what comprises the theoretical core and what belongs to the contextual phenomenological sphere. This entails an understanding of the "social" as a *residual component*, associated with phenomena lying outside the analytical core. This distinction between core and social periphery can be made across two different lines. The first option is to identify a specific frame of social life – a dimension present in the entirety of the "social", albeit

with varying intensity – and develop a pure analysis of that frame, discarding all other aspects in search of precise and abstract theorizations. We can describe this as the *disciplinary solution*, characterizing for example economics, which focuses on the analysis of *Homo Economicus* and discards, *prima facie*, all other social aspects: the analytical approach in which "the social is often treated solely as a background factor, the *ceteris paribus* of the economists" (Korsgaard & Anderson, 2011, p. 135).

In I&E studies, we can trace this approach back to the early works of Schumpeter (2010). The second option is to specify a set of real phenomena of peculiar interest to be analyzed in their actual complexity. From this type of analysis, domain-specific theories can be developed to explain the most relevant causal mechanisms at play. This can be described as the *phenomenological solution*, applied by I&E studies (among others) to define their analytical perimeter (Brazeal & Herbert, 1999; Malerba & Brusoni, 2007; Urban, 2010). The complex nature of the phenomena under study gives rise to a multitude of both competing and complementary theorizations, each focusing on a specific set of active mechanisms (*e.g.,* novelty generation, entrepreneurial disposition, innovation diffusion) based on different theoretical cores, usually borrowed, although often adapted, from existing social disciplines. The former approach identifies a specific method, based on a corresponding set of assumptions, which can potentially be applied to any aspect of life (Lazear, 2000). The latter approach identifies a set of objects of study, open to any analytical method and any set of assumptions, as long as the resulting study contributes to academic debate.

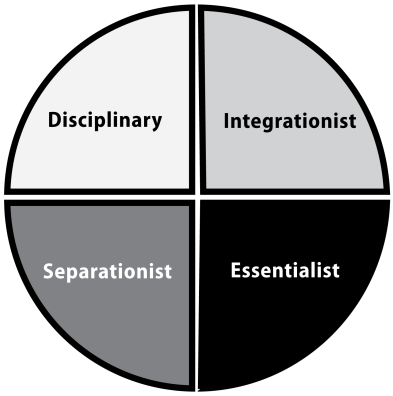
Both options have their limits. The holistic nature of social life resists any attempt to cleave it into neat and distinct slices. While a specific, internally consistent dimension can be identified and described by providing a disciplinary core, its actual reach and relevance for the multitude of real-life phenomena can hardly be determined with any certainty. Likewise, any phenomenon, no matter how narrow, influences and is influenced by a potentially unlimited number of other phenomena, leaving any phenomenologically defined core with unclear boundaries. In general, the complex nature of the social process implies that, however limited the dimension or the original set of phenomena chosen as the object of study, any social science has a potentially unlimited field of expansion. Successful disciplines can extend their analytical frame to include more and more phenomena. The obvious example is the seemingly unstoppable imperialistic trend of economics, which applies economic theory to the analysis of phenomena as diverse as fertility (Becker, 1960), criminal law (Posner, 1985), prostitution (Edlund & Korn, 2002) and torture (Yakovlev, 2011). These expansions can be seen as the gradual colonization of the phenomenological residual by the successful theoretical core. The successful application of the theoretical core to alternative empirical settings is considered a sign of disciplinary vigor. Critical

perspectives within the discipline, however, may point to the phenomenological residual to argue that social aspects currently excluded from the theoretical core mediate key disciplinary mechanisms and, therefore, should be included (Dequech, 2012). Furthermore, application to areas far removed from the traditional focus of the discipline may reveal a number of tensions and limitations plaguing the theoretical core, offering a flank to criticism (Dosi & Roventini, 2016). Within a discipline, then, the "social" can be considered a frontier – a target for ambitious researchers looking for new grounds in which to establish themselves and a refuge for outsiders wanting to challenge the *status quo*.

Similarly, successful phenomenological fields, besides their unlimited methodological potential, are bound to gradually discover that more and more phenomena are intimately connected to their original set, and that their analytical inclusion could lead to higher theoretical validity. Just to cite a few well-known examples, the success of the Triple Helix perspective (Leydesdorff, 2000, Leydesdorff & Meyer, 2006, Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) has already spawned a potential expansion to the Quadruple, the Quintuple Helix and beyond (Carayannis *et al.*, 2018ab; Bartoloni *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the National Innovation System perspective (Lundvall, 2007) has generated a Regional (Cooke *et al.*, 1997; Asheim & Coenen, 2005; Tödtling & Trippl, 2005), Technical (Bergek *et al.*, 2008), and now even Global variant (Lee *et al.*, 2020). The dividing line between phenomenological core and social residual depends on the epistemological assumptions, methodological choices, and theoretical frame adopted by every strand of literature included in the field – if not by every researcher. Inevitably, what the "social" means and the role it plays in regard to the main object of study will be the subject of significant, unsettled debate, but the generally acknowledged pluralist approach inherent in phenomenological fields facilitates the acceptance of differences, even within the definition of the theoretical core.

Understanding the main directions and distinctions within the academic debate, however, becomes a necessity in order to critically analyze its development. In this regard, we found the distinction between disciplinary and phenomenological approaches useful but insufficient as an analytical instrument to understand the evolution of the academic debate. In an attempt to exhaustively classify all the contributions identified by our literature review, we further divided the phenomenological category into three distinct approaches based on how and the extent to which the social dimension has been integrated into the proposed analytical contribution in the context of I&E studies. As a result, we identify four main categories: disciplinary, integrationist, separationist, and essentialist (*Figure 2*).

Fig. 2: Classification of the integration of the social dimension in I&E studies



Source: elaborated by the authors (Sardo *et al.*, 2022).

2.1. The disciplinary approach

The most peripheral approach is the *disciplinary* approach, which focuses on an abstract conceptualization of the main object of study and its primary causal mechanisms, limiting the analysis to a single interpretative frame. This approach is usually associated with its quintessential example, namely economics and, consequently, with those strands of I&E studies that adopt an economic framework of analysis (e.g., Dosi, 1982; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Rosenberg, 1982). Although both innovation and entrepreneurship are implicitly acknowledged as social phenomena, the social dimension is not explicitly conceptualized in order to reduce complexity and generalize analytical results. Consequently, studies in the disciplinary approach integrate social elements in a purely phenomenological sense: existing theories are applied to "social" phenomena without any significant modifications to the theoretical core, in the pursuit of theoretical validation rather than modification or extension.

Pittz *et al.* (2019) provide a straightforward example with a study on how knowledge shared through collaboration can generate co-created value by fostering the development of absorptive capacity in cross-sector partnerships. While the partnerships studied are characterized as "social", described as pursuing social innovation through social entrepreneurship, the social element is used exclusively to identify the field of phenomenological exploration, without the "social" concept entering either the theoretical framework of the article or the propositions that the empirical section of the study endeavors to support. In another example, Brieger and De Clercq (2018), drawing on two theoretical frameworks – the resource-based perspective and Hofstede's cultural value framework – examined how individual-level resources affect the likelihood that entrepreneurs will embrace the goal of social value creation in their startups. They conclude that the relationship depends on the type of resources involved. Human and social capital are both positively associated

with the entrepreneur's propensity to embrace the goal of social value, while financial capital is found to be negatively associated with social goals. The results reinforce the key theoretical axioms of the *resource-based perspective*, while not developing any specific theoretical propositions regarding social value creation or social capital. In a similar vein, Hechavarría and Brieger (2020) investigate how cultural contexts influence the likelihood that female entrepreneurs will engage in social entrepreneurship. To examine the relationship, they utilize *practice theory* as background and nine cultural dimensions drawn from the GLOBE study. The findings show that female entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in social entrepreneurship in contexts where there is a high cultural practice of uncertainty avoidance and future orientation. However, human orientation, in-group collectivism, and power distance would have to be low for female entrepreneurs to have a higher likelihood of engaging in social entrepreneurship. Thus, they conclude that female and male entrepreneurs develop different intentions to engage in social entrepreneurship depending on cultural practices, validating the initial theoretical proposition that a society's practiced culture and gender interact to create cultural capacities for social entrepreneurship.

2.2 The integrationist approach

The second approach to analyzing the social in I&E studies is the *integrationist* approach, so called because it integrates in fashionably explicit "social" elements within existing theories (previously lacking a social dimension), thus leading to theoretical extension rather than modification. Social conceptualizations are often introduced as contextual, background factors affecting the primary causal mechanisms – such as the composition characteristics of teams, the consequences of economic crisis on innovation processes, the influences of social relations on processes of regional renewal, and so on. A significant heterogeneity exists regarding the factors associated with the social sphere and their relevance for explanatory purposes. This approach is most commonly found in empirical studies, where social aspects can be used to explain a certain phenomenological variance (Landry *et al.*, 2002), or in systemic theoretical work aiming to integrate a variety of related phenomena with the main objects of study (Lundvall, 2007). Yet, it can also be found in analytical efforts aiming to integrate new explanatory factors to clarify contentious areas of current debates (Welter, 2011).

Numerous examples can be found in the literature, such as the concept of *social capital*. Gedajlovic *et al.* (2013) suggest that social capital – the "sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by individuals or social units" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243) – should be integrated into the theoretical core of entrepreneurship.

Many studies demonstrate the relevance and role of social capital at the individual (Davidsson & Honig, 2003), regional (Kleinhempel *et al.,* 2022) and national (Kwon & Arenius, 2010) levels. Social capital also finds applications in innovation studies as a key resource for overcoming the uncertainty involved in radical innovation and for securing and maintaining control over the resources required for achieving a breakthrough (Baba & Walsh, 2010). At the macro level, social capital has been correlated with innovative performance (Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004), although both the conceptualization and measurement of the construct remain challenging and open to various interpretations (Landry *et al.,* 2002). Scholars within the *Innovation System* approach (e.g., Asheim & Coenen, 2005; Bergek *et al.,* 2008; Lee *et al.,* 2020) have used social capital theory to explain differences between national and regional systems, as these are less reproducible and intangible resources (Lundvall, 2007). They also focus on the extent to which industrial clusters, regions and industries can evolve in terms of "activating" social capital through policy interventions (Cooke *et al.*, 1997). Indeed, firms' innovative activities are shaped by the institutional set-up affecting, for example, the "national education systems, labor markets, financial markets, intellectual property rights, competition in product markets and welfare regimes" (Lundvall, 2007, p. 102). Social capital is, thus, conceptualized as an additional resource explaining performance at various levels of analysis.

In the field of entrepreneurship, social interaction is widely acknowledged as one of the most important factors affecting entrepreneurs' ability to recognize and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities as well as to acquire the resources they need (Davidsson & Honig, 2003). Shepherd *et al.* (2020) suggest that individual characteristics of the entrepreneur mediate the usefulness of social networks for resource acquisition. Social networks are also found to facilitate entrepreneurs' resource acquisition (Lee *et al.*, 2019) and affect firm performance (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017). In their study, Ibáñez *et al.* (2022) explored the connection between the spur of exogenous events like the Covid-19 pandemic and the emergence of digital social entrepreneurship from multiple-agent collaborations, arguing that digital entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and n-Helix collaborations supported both economic and social needs, integrating the social dimension in both the theoretical structure and their contributions. Authors like Dabbous and Tarhini (2019) look at how social factors influence sustainable consumption and what role trust and intention to engage in sustainable consumption play in this relation. This work does not engage in a theoretical criticism but uses the sharing economy to expand existing conceptual relationships to include a social dimension. Instead, De Silva and Wright (2019) use the term "social" as a broad category that includes a wide variety of entrepreneurial impacts, encompassing technological development, stakeholder outreach, value-creation, and so on. The integration of social concern allows existing entrepreneurial

theories to be expanded to a broader set of phenomenological elements. As a final example, in their empirical study Stirzaker *et al.* (2021) investigate the drivers of social entrepreneurship and explore whether there is evidence of commercial opportunism versus personally informed altruism in social entrepreneurship. Based on their investigation of social entrepreneurs in Scotland, they extend the refined version of *Entrepreneurial Event Theory* (EET) adapted to social entrepreneurship by adding two elements: personally informed mission and ideological preference for the business model of social entrepreneurship. This integration of social conceptualizations and factors in additional fashion to existing theories characterizes the quintessential integrationist approach.

2.3. The separationist approach

The third category is the *separationist* approach, which aims to define and analyze a specifically-social subset of the main phenomena under study and results, for example, in the creation of concepts such as *social innovation* (Avelino *et al.*, 2019; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016), *social entrepreneurship* (Hoogendoorn, 2016), and *Responsible Research and Innovation* (Paredes-Frigolett, 2016; Stilgoe *et al.*, 2013; Wiarda *et al.,* 2021) that oppose, rather than integrate, their "non-social" counterparts. Underlying most of this literature is a critique towards the assumption of self-interest, under the guise of either profit- or rent-seeking, and towards the instrumental or complementary use of altruistic, lifestyle, democratic, and inclusive practices in relation to the transactional dimension (De Silva *et al.,* 2021). These concepts are commonly associated with behavior patterns geared toward improving social and/or community welfare, achieving altruistic goals, and/or pursuing non-monetary aims (Gallouj *et al*, 2018; Verleye *et al.*, 2019).

As an example, the concept of *social innovation* has gradually emerged in recent years (Avelino *et al.*, 2019). Although it is still ambiguous (Linton, 2009; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016), scholars have sought to further develop this concept to the status of a middle-range theory (Pel *et al.,* 2020), defining it both as a process of changing social relations and as a qualitative property of ideas, objects, activities, or people. Kohler and Chesbrough (2019) illustrate the use of social innovation as a separate category of innovative practice in their study of how crowdsourcing platforms can practically support these activities. The authors find that crowdsourcing facilitates the bottom-up and decentralized processes that characterize social innovation, supporting the involvement of many actors with different capabilities and interests and the diffusion of novel solutions to social problems. Crupi *et al.* (2022) provide a suitable point of comparison. While distinguishing between social innovation and other types of innovation practices, and between social entrepreneurship and other entrepreneurial activities, the authors investigate how

social innovation and entrepreneurship are effectively carried out by more traditional for-profit organizations. Social bricolage and organizational agility turn out to be effective strategies. The former relies on leveraging resources, both internal and accessible through stakeholders' involvement; the latter, on the other hand, is based on internal innovation and resource fluidity.

Another illustration of studies that can be found within this category is that of *social entrepreneurship*. Established as a subfield since the early 2000s, it has been defined as the "process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs" (Mair & Marti, 2006, p. 37). By addressing social needs and problems, the common mission of social enterprises is the creation of *social value* (Chell, 2007), with a varying degree of ambition towards the creation of *economic value* (Stevens *et al.,* 2015). Some scholars have also recently argued for the need to reconceptualize social enterprises. Bull (2018) examined how social enterprises are conceptualized in the UK and found that current conceptualizations disregard ownership, legal identities, and governance types. Furthermore, the paper urges theoretical frameworks to consider factors such as regional, cultural, as well as political and economic histories in conceptualizing social enterprises, as this will help broaden the scope of conceptualization.

Although there is no consensus in the literature on what *social value* is (Stevens *et al.,* 2015), studies in the separationist approach category suggest that the activities constituting social entrepreneurship are uniquely affected by the context in which they operate. For example, entrepreneurs may need to push for changes in local institutional conditions (e.g., policies, rules, practices) if they want their social innovations to succeed, and this should be done together with local communities (Venugopal & Viswanathan, 2019). How entrepreneurs perceive and interpret the social challenge can also define their actions and, in turn, the beneficiaries of their project (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018). To mobilize their social capital and gain legitimacy from different stakeholders (Verleye *et al.,* 2019), these entrepreneurs often use a rhetorical strategy, especially against antagonists, i.e., those who do not support the "social change" they intend to achieve (Ruebottom, 2013). However, as noted by Desmarchelier *et al.* (2020), it would be wrong to assume that the social economy – from which social innovation processes emerge – is simply characterized by an entrepreneurial regime à la Schumpeter (i.e., heroic individuals, radical change). On the contrary, it exhibits routinized characteristics, sometimes facilitated by organizations posing as facilitators of social innovation/entrepreneurship and promoting replication and scaling-up. All in all, the "social" is conceptualized as a specific type of entrepreneurial opportunity that entrepreneurs identify and pursue, as well as the type of value they seek to create as part of an entrepreneurial process whose content remains highly context-dependent.

A recent addition to I&E studies comes from science, technology and innovation policy and academic discourses in relation to the concept of *responsibility* (Flink & Kaldewey, 2018; Stilgoe *et al.*, 2013). While this strand of research openly recognizes innovation and entrepreneurship as inherently social processes and, thus, close to our fourth categorization (see below), it also identifies a specific subcategory of research and innovation activities aligned with societal values and expectations, although both are context-based and project-dependent. Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) scholars study cases and refine practices to either "fix" existing innovation and entrepreneurship processes or design new and better ones according to the principles of inclusivity, reflexivity, anticipation, and transparency (Stilgoe *et al.*, 2013). Although the RRI literature recognizes the relevance of the social dimension to research and innovation activities, it continues to draw a line between socially "responsible" and less desirable practices, identifying important qualitative differences between the two – the key element that identifies the separationist approach.

2.4. The essentialist approach

The fourth category, the *essentialist* approach, argues that the social nature of innovation and entrepreneurship should be integrated into the main concepts and causal mechanisms of the fields. Many essentialist scholars (e.g., social constructivists such as Bijker *et al.,* 1987) implicitly or explicitly argue that mainstream I&E studies have obscured the social nature of the object of study and the relevance of specifically-social mechanisms – such as power and identity – for analysis. This has resulted in a sterile, limited and, even worse, skewed academic debate that ignores or outright conceals key real-world dynamics.

Geels' (2010) review of influential schools of thought in innovation studies highlights the assumptions and analytical consequences of essentialism. Innovations are here seen as socially constructed processes that emerge from the frames of interrelated circumstances. When innovating, entrepreneurs, designers, and engineers combine heterogeneous resources and try to convince others to participate in their projects, even though these actors may have different ideas about what the innovation is and what problems should be solved through it. This contentious process introduces a specifically social source of uncertainty all along the innovation journey, from design to development to adoption and, finally, discontinuation. Carayannis and Forbes (2001), for example, criticize the usual depiction of large systems engineering projects as linear and 'rational' activities external to social processes. This normative definition *de facto* fails to take into account the nature of these projects as "interpretive activit[ies] embedded in on-going social processes", and the struggles that project participants face in withstanding the inherent complexities and

uncertainties they encounter. Another example comes from Soraa *et al.* (2021), who employ *domestication theory* (Lie & Sørensen, 1996) to analyze the social taming of technologies through their use. To comprehend technologies – they argue – we must analyze not only the patterns of social interaction, but also the broader ecosystem in which they are used, including how a technology affects existing connections and transforms human behaviors. In general, what a technology is – i.e., what it becomes in space, time, and through socio-technical interactions – is influenced by the different power wielded by the individuals, organizations and groups involved. In a similar line of thought, transition theorists (Geels, 2010; Geels & Schot, 2007) have combined an understanding of innovation as *socially*-constructed with evolutionary economics and institutional theory to understand the dynamics and governance of system transitions. Transition processes are intrinsically social and uncertain endeavors, and agents are assumed to be imbued with agency while, at the same time, being constrained by a semi-coherent and socially constructed system of rules. Therefore, instead of proposing causal mechanisms as outcomes of their studies, these scholars work with interaction patterns (Geels & Schot, 2007; Markard & Truffer, 2008).

With regards to *entrepreneurship studies*, critical research has highlighted the orientation of mainstream research toward economic approbation as the main focus, and the individual as the analytical starting point (Minniti & Lévesque, 2008), thus suggesting the need to develop a social ontology of entrepreneurship. Although orthodox economic theory postulates that the primary motivation of entrepreneurs is profit, Zafirovski (1999) suggests that entrepreneurship actually has an eminent social character and that entrepreneurial motives are rather culture-specific and constrained by institutional incentives. A key assumption here is that "entrepreneurship, development and related economic activities are primarily complex social processes, and only secondarily physical, technological or psychological" (p. 354). Ignoring these social conditions and processes can only lead to a partial explanation of the phenomenon, and it is necessary to adjust the lens to focus on other mechanisms. In this regard, Tatli *et al.* (2014) argue that Bourdieu's relational perspective could provide both an appropriate set of conceptual lenses and methodological blueprint to support the analysis of entrepreneurship. Their argument is that the relational perspective counters the reductionist tendencies of mainstream social research by offering a deeper and more layered understanding of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as essentially social. For their part, Korsgaard and Anderson (2011) extend the argument for the social character of entrepreneurship by arguing that the "social" is not just the context in which the entrepreneurial process takes place or the arena for enabling mechanisms: the outcome of the entrepreneurial process *is* itself social. Therefore, "the examination of entrepreneurial processes should include a focus on the "social"

as an enabler, as context and as outcome" (p. 136). The motives and preferences of entrepreneurs as decision makers should be considered endogenous to the culture, institutions and societal context in which the phenomenon is taking place, rather than an exogenous and homogeneous factor (Zafirovski, 1999).

A final mention goes to essentialist studies tackling the social dimension in I&E studies as a whole, generally characterized by a critical stand. An example is provided by Fougère and Meriläinen (2021), who criticize the hegemonic depiction of social innovation as inherently "good", arguing that social innovation can have negative consequences, including that of (re)producing inequalities, especially when the aims of such a process are defined by elites and in a top-down manner. Broadly speaking, essentialist contributions emphasize how I&E studies should raise critical questions about power and politics.

3. THE SPACE BETWEEN: REFLECTING ON THE PROPOSED CATEGORIZATION

We believe that the continuum identified by these categories provides a comprehensive description of the role played by the social sphere within innovation and entrepreneurship studies found in mainstream journals. This taxonomy conceals a significant degree of heterogeneity, with each category containing significantly different conceptualizations and theorizations of the social dimension. This diversity cannot be reduced, as it stems from foundational differences within the analytical traditions employed, and it should be understood as an inevitable consequence of the pluralistic nature of phenomenological approaches to the social sciences. Moreover, these categories should not be intended as clear-cut, but as having porous boundaries: several authors, schools of thought and single contributions straddle them. For the sake of completeness, we review here some interesting contributions that may fall in-between categories.

Integrationist-essentialist. The papers by Fu *et al.* (2022), Ford *et al.* (2017), and Yan and Sorenson (2006) can be categorized as integrationist in terms of their contribution, although somewhat rooted in essentialist theoretical perspectives. The first article describes how the Chinese government has imported, adopted, and contextualized Western makers' discourse. The Chinese approach to the makers' culture is enforced by the government in a top-down fashion, diminishing its innovation potential and reducing the makers' culture to a mere empty buzzword, with the sole goal of pursuing the government's economic development agenda. While clearly considering policies as socially constructed and innovation/entrepreneurship as social processes, the study applies existing frameworks and methodologies to a "new" empirical case, leading to the integration of a new social process within

established theories, rather than challenging their core. The second article advocates for the use of the Energy Cultures framework to enlarge the Multi-Level Perspective of socio-technical transitions. By emphasizing the social embeddedness of behavioral changes Ford *et al.* (2017) argue that one needs to understand how these changes are affected by demand and lifestyle considerations in order to conduct a proper analysis of change in energy systems. Thus, it is by taking into account the energy culture surrounding adopters and innovators, that we can better understand the interrelations between the different analytical levels of regime, landscape and niche, and provide a more comprehensive view of change. Again, while coming from an essentialist perspective, the authors focus primarily on a specific empirical case and their theoretical advancement is incremental compared to the academic core. In the third article, Yan and Sorenson (2006) address one of the major problems of family firms: succession. To this end, they discuss the effect that Confucianism ideology may have on succession in Chinese family businesses. Confucianism defines what relationships in the family should look like, emphasizing the importance of loyalty, harmony, trust, and sympathy. The article may appear at first glance essentialist in that it argues that business relationships are significantly affected by social values and, thus, implicitly embedding entrepreneurial behavior into the social dimension. However, the study ultimately applies the Confucian framework to the empirical context without drawing any theoretical contribution, rather using the context of family firms succession decision-making to validate the Confucian framework. These cases reveal an important limitation of our proposed classification, namely, that in order to achieve a degree of consistency, one must take into account the specific analytical contribution rather than the general implications of the study as a whole.

Disciplinary-integrationist. Neumeyer *et al.* (2019) extend the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory by studying how entrepreneurial ecosystems differ with respect to venture types, finding differences with respect to connectivity, density and strength of the social networks associated with sustainable and conventional entrepreneurs respectively. While the main conceptual distinction operated by the authors is between sustainable and conventional business models, with social conceptualizations not being invoked at the outset, a "social" dimension is introduced later – along with "technological" and "organizational"– to form a comprehensive categorization of sustainable business models. Therefore, although the social element is in an auxiliary position, it is nevertheless integrated into the theoretical framework of the contribution, rather than playing a purely empirical role. Consequently, the article can be considered integrationist, rather than disciplinary.

Separationist-essentialist. Acs *et al.'s* (2013) contribution to the debate challenges, but ultimately confirms, the validity of the taxonomy we propose. Initially, the authors identify and contrast social and economic values, thus apparently joining

the separationist side of the debate. However, their primary argument is that such separation lacks clarity, since in most cases the generation of economic value implies, irrespective of entrepreneurial intentions, the concomitant creation of social value. Against this distinction they support instead the Baumolian classification of productive, unproductive and destructive entrepreneurship. Ultimately, their argument is essentialist: economic value is inherently social. Excluding unproductive and destructive forms of entrepreneurship, all successful entrepreneurs are social entrepreneurs, no matter their intent, which – although subjectively relevant – is objectively uninfluential.

CONCLUSION

The proposed classification begets the following evaluation of how the social dimension is being currently integrated within I&E studies. The disciplinary approach illustrates how the social dimension can be harmlessly integrated within existing dominant frameworks, in a process parallel to those at work within the economic discipline at large. The integrationist approach, while equally harmless to the continuation of mainstream discourse, at least offers an avenue through which social phenomena and mechanisms can receive some analytical attention. The separationist approach, while subject to a tendency towards the creation of separate analytical sub-categories, distinguishes itself for its capability to conjugate critical frames within mostly mainstream theorizing. In this regard, it may be considered the most promising approach in terms of cross-paradigm communication. Finally, the essentialist approach utilizes the social domain to promote more thorough and extensive critical theories against mainstream narratives, whose weaknesses are exposed. On one hand, papers belonging to this approach are more likely to provide original contributions to the analysis of the social dimension within I&E studies while, on the other, the main goal of prompting change within mainstream discourse does not seem to be met, as we have not found evidence of scholars from other approaches engaging with critical discourse. This classification highlights how, while social innovation as other forms of X-innovation (Gaglio *et al.*, 2019) can be used in opposition to mainstream innovation discourse, it can also be deployed to extend and support dominant ideological frameworks.

Nevertheless, while it is true that social innovation has become a "quasi-concept (...) benefitting from the legitimizing aura of the scientific method" (European Commission 2013), it is also true that this theoretical and policy trend that emphasizes the social aspects of entrepreneurship and innovation has *de facto* enforced a

conceptual separation between innovation and entrepreneurship processes with social purposes and those driven primarily by economic profit.

From the above discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of the social dimension within the context of I&E studies. First, I&E studies, as phenomenological fields rather than disciplines, are necessarily characterized by plurality of analytical interpretations of the social dimension. This diversity should not be considered a sign of immaturity of these fields, or a preliminary, exploratory phase to be reconciled through further analytical development. Rather, it is a permanent feature. If anything, the success of these fields will lead to an empirical and theoretical expansion of the phenomena analyzed, resulting in even more diversity in the near future. Secondly, understanding the epistemological roots of these varieties of views, found in the conflict between the social sphere's complexity and the requirements of scientific analysis, allows for a reconciliation of these differences: not in a single perspective but, rather, within a pluralist field capable of admitting and fostering constructive interaction between different camps, in contrast to the rigidities and conflicts characterizing disciplinary approaches. In this sense, we would argue that this can happen only if the field itself recognizes its intrinsic plurality, i.e., if it is reflexive of itself. Thirdly, essentialist conceptualizations of the "social" (our fourth category) serve a systemic critical function of checking the growth of transactional and individualist assumptions nested in mainstream approaches of I&E studies, and providing spaces for critical, alternative analytical perspectives to grow. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of critical inquiry in mainstream I&E journals, which seems to support the hypothesis that critical perspectives are not succeeding in affecting mainstream discourse.

On the other hand, the lack of a clearly defined and generally accepted theoretical core and a clear demarcation between the object of study and social dimension in I&E studies is bound to remain a potential source of academic debate and division. Once the issue is framed as a necessary consequence of the phenomenological nature of these fields, the heterogeneity of positions with respect to the analytical role played by social elements can receive pluralist interpretation as an evolving richness, rather than early confusion. Recognition, however, does not imply consensus. A more substantial integration of the social dimension involves a critical tension that cannot be reconciled with a linear development of the fields along existing lines. The "social" provides an entry point for critical perspectives within the mainstream development of I&E studies. But, so far, their role has been limited to providing a much-needed counterpoint to the analytical simplifications adopted by mainstream analysis. The social dimension has not provided an avenue to reclaim mainstream I&E discourse from a critical perspective, although it has provided a space for cross-paradigm communication. It has also illustrated how the dominant discourse

is able to embrace concepts and mechanisms once characterizing more critical perspectives, effectively disarming them in the process. The expansion of social discourse within I&E studies, therefore, does not seem to prelude the abandonment of dominant theoretical frameworks. More likely, the "social" will remain an arena of continuous advancement and incessant challenge, where explicit and implicit advocates and opponents of the current capital system meet, responding to apologies with criticism, and vice versa.

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Beyond bricolage: social innovation as systematic, consistent and repeatable processes

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides empirical research demonstrating that there are clear, consistent and repeatable processes at play in social innovation, calling into question the currently hegemonic postmodernist concept of 'social bricolage' in social innovation literature. The paper applies a critical realist & systems analysis approach, utilising Checkland's (1981/2000) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). The research project investigated 8 neighbourhood and community policing projects using a handbook called Locally identified Solutions & Practices (LISP). LISP was implemented in a range of different social contexts to construct context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) chains (after Pawson, 2013) in a two-step process to identify which social innovation mechanisms contributed to what outcomes in which contexts. The paper reports on empirically based evidence of social innovation processes that do not rely on the characteristics of the individual social entrepreneur or the serendipity of social bricolage 'freeplay' (Derrida, 1970). The paper makes the case that social innovation is more than 'bricolage' (Derrida, 1970; Di Domenico *et al.*, 2010), not an eclectic mysterious craft of innovation that relies on the skills and characteristics of the social entrepreneur, but instead a systematic, consistent and repeatable process.

Keywords: Bricolage; Soft Systems; Community Policing; Social Innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framing of this paper, and its consideration of the notion of bricolage in social innovation, is based on empirical evidence collected over a ten-year period as part of the author's doctoral studies. The context within which the empirical research was undertaken was neighbourhood based public safety, or problem-oriented policing, in UK communities between 2010 and 2019. The LISP Handbook was created to assist local social innovators. Including police and community support officers and warranted police officers, to implement a consistent set of practices over eight (in the PhD) and eventually 14 UK based projects at the time of writing. The purpose of the research was to understand how the practices were implemented and what practices lent themselves to (relative) success and failure. The research identified the dynamics of twenty-seven factors that contributed to the success of social innovation interventions, giving rise to the question whether social innovation really is primarily a practice of 'social bricolage', as claimed by the contemporary literature.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bricolage

In entrepreneurship research, bricolage has emerged in the past decade as one of the central concepts to understand an entrepreneurs' complex behavior and strategies in resource development and utilization (Kickul *et al.*, 2018). Servantie and Rispal (2018) claims that most social entrepreneurship literature uses this concept, likewise, Mair and Marti (2009) and Desa and Basu (2013) suggest that bricolage is an appropriate construct in social entrepreneurship. Whilst, Di Domenico *et al.* (2010) recognize 'social bricolage' as a distinct concept, extending the constructs of bricolage beyond an initial metaphor to define social bricolage as a set of six processes: (a) the making do, (b) the refusal to be constrained by limitations, (c) the improvisation, (d) the social value creation, (e) the stakeholder participation and (f) the persuasion of significant actors.

The bricolage concept relates to the decision-making processes of the agent (entrepreneur, social entrepreneur, innovator, or social innovator) in 'making do' by associating resources at hand to solve new problems and grasp new opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Baker and Nelson note that Levi-Strauss' concept of bricolage is eminently flexible in that he didn't offer any specific definition of the concept itself apart from 'making to with whatever is at hand'. Nevertheless, their grounded theory work did elicit some detail that "bricolage often draws on degraded, fallow, and otherwise undeveloped resources" (2005, p. 360). Levi-Strauss himself applied the

term more specifically to the "creation of mythical thought" (Johnson, 2012) and the concept requires both the bricoleur (the agent) and the bricolage (the activity) to be considered. If Derrida's (1970) critique is also to be considered, then neither the bricoleur nor the bricolage is entirely 'freeplay'.

This sets up the challenge for social innovation in general, and for the Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and police officers specifically in this research and their challenges in grappling with how to go about the design of social innovation in different contexts in different neighbourhoods, with different personnel, but in a consistent and repeatable manner? This bricoleur/bricolage challenge may have arisen because of a post-modern turn in social entrepreneurship theorising (Steyaert & Dey 2010; Dey & Steyaert, 2018) where it seems that Hu is the only one publishing in this specific critical realist modality in entrepreneurship research (Hu, 2018, Hu *et al.*, 2019). This post-modern turn may be liberating theoretically, but throws the theorist back on the force of the individual heroic and maverick personality, placing social innovation beyond the skills and abilities of ordinary people.

Entrepreneurship and innovation research (and thereby their X-innovation neighbours) are closely associated with uncontrollable mavericks (Taylor & Labarre, 2006) or deviant (non-conformist) personality traits (Vries, 1977). Other authors have focussed on innovation in the public sector (Newman *et al.*, 2001; Mulgan & Albury, 2003; Albury, 2005), but few have explicitly considered innovation in social enterprises, except by separating social enterprises as organisations from social entrepreneurship as a process of innovation (Leadbeater, 2007). By separating the enterprise from the entrepreneur, Leadbeater allows innovation to be considered as an individual behaviour rather than an organisational process, such that innovation is promoted heroically by the talented individuals and only restrained by personal ethics rather than governance. Fewer authors have explicitly considered the ethics of innovation (Glor, 2002; Hanekamp, 2005; Fuglsang & Mattsson, 2009). Whereas in the private sector innovation can often be an end in itself, for Hartley, in public services, innovation is justifiable only where it increases public value in the quality, efficiency or fitness for purpose of governance or services (Hartley, 2005).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research used two methods, both consistent with a critical realist epistemology, to first collect, sort and analyse real world data, and then to construct a relationship between the unique localities within which the data arose and the outcomes that were expected or observed. This was a unique combination of Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology to sort and present data across multiple cases in a systematic and

comparable manner, and Pawson's Context-Mechanism-Outcome chains to link different localities to different outcomes.

The different localities, and the police and community safety teams within them, in collaboration with community members, were tasked to attempt to implement the LISP Handbook within the limits of the resources available to them. The researcher collected naturally occurring data, conducted interviews with key stakeholders, and used a standard self-reporting proforma for the projects to report progress and evidence.

Having sorted and analysed the evidence using Soft Systems Methodology as an analytical process, the research sought to identify the mechanisms that function to facilitate the (relative) success or failure of each social innovation interventions. This was done by applying Pawson's Context-Mechanism-Outcome chain analysis. This method formed a dual process of sorting and comparing the data across the 8 case studies involved in the doctoral research, using SSM procedures, and then making sense of the data in critical realist terms using CMO logic chain analysis.

Soft Systems Methodology and 'wicked' social issues

A 'wicked issue' (Camillus, 2008, p. 98) is a social problem in which various stakeholders can barely agree on what the definition of the problem should be, let alone on what the solution is. Social issues and problems are intrinsically wicked issues (Webber & Rittel, 1973) or messy problems (Mitroff & Mason, 1980), and it is very dangerous for them to be treated as though they are 'tame' (Lach *et al.*, 2005) or 'benign'. Real world social problems have no definitive formulation and no point at which they are definitely solved. Furthermore, solutions are not true or false – there is no test for a solution, and every solution contributes to a further social problem. Wicked problems are unique, in that they are symptomatic of other problems; they do not have simple causes and have numerous possible explanations, which in turn frames different policy responses. The people acting to intervene in the problem are not allowed, by virtue of public censure, to fail in their attempts to solve wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Soft System Methodology (SSM) was devised specifically as a means of systematically and systemically analysing wicked problems. Soft systems thinking is a way of describing and analysing the real world, or a part of it, so as to understand and change the way in which (that part of) the real world operates (Checkland, 1981). The process of thinking about and describing the real world in parts is understood as 'general systems theory' (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Conventional systems thinking assumes that the parts of the system of interest are clearly defined and separate, and that the system that has a clear purpose and well-defined goals is useful for designing

solutions that achieve those goals. A soft system is characterised where there is no agreement about the precise objectives of the system. The process has qualitative rather than quantitative objectives, there is acknowledgement that there is no single solution, but a range of equally valid alternative solutions, and a need for involvement of all those affected by the system (Kirk, 1995), allowing the analyst to account for wicked issues.

Context Mechanism Outcomes

Pawson (2013), in his review of hundreds of innovations and evaluations in the public sector, concludes that there is a consistent set of ingredients or critical factors (in his terminology, hidden mechanisms) that create successful interventions, and crucially support the mainstreaming and scaling of such interventions into organisational and cultural change.

The cases explored below are not really interventions themselves, but ways of going about designing and delivering socially innovative practices and solutions that are more robust and resilient. The idea being that it shifts the centre evidence-based social innovation from 'what works' to 'how do we make it work better?'. This is also what Pawson and Tilley (1997) refer to as 'cumulative evaluation', building on their meta-study evaluation, rejecting the Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 49) assertion that all situations are unique and that problems or solutions cannot be generalised from one context to another, whilst at the same time also rejecting the notion that different contexts can be stripped of their value and outcomes passed down to mere numbers and statistical relationships. Pawson and Tilley (*ibid*.) draw comparisons across a wide range of different interventions and projects to identify regularities, and therefore to propose context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) relationships. Building on Pawson and Tilley's fine work, this study looks across several different interventions, in different neighbourhoods, regarding different crime types and developing different solutions, but (at least in theory) applies the same *means* of developing the interventions. To reiterate, the unit of investigation in this paper is not the contents or results of the cases explored below, but the approach to developing the interventions themselves: the systematic, consistent, and repeatable processes of social innovation at work. Developing CMO relationships across a range of pilot interventions help to understand what makes the LISP Handbook work, and under what circumstances.

Locally Identified Solutions and Practices (LISP) Handbook

The research deployed the LISP Handbook. This is essentially a published guide to developing 'locally identified solutions and practices' (Curtis & Bowkett, 2014, p. 4), to address the wicked issue conditions that lead to high levels of chronic crime that affects the public. It was particularly designed (during the research undertake in 2010-

13) for use in areas where there are hotspots of crime (real and perceived) and anti-social behaviour, which have been problematic for a sustained period. Each of the eight steps represents a collection of techniques, strategies and approaches drawn from social innovation, community development and community based therapy literature and practice, to help the social innovators (in this case, the PCSOs, and/or a community policing team) [1] explain why a social innovation design process is needed, [2] find what resources and assets are already available in the locality to work with, [3] establish who could be involved in that process, and their networks of influence and capability, [4] make sure the social innovators and the community understand the different aspects of, and perspectives on the problem(s), [5] pulling together a function and purposive working group, [6] only then develop a range of proposed interventions and plan, in order to [7] take actions that include immediate solutions and ongoing practices, whilst knowing how to [8] escalate the plan to the right level to get action.

The processes and activities that are described in the LISP Handbook and communicated to the social innovators through a training process, were an approach to intensive community engagement designed to tackle some of the observed weaknesses and limitations of community development and neighbourhood policing from the USA (and operated in the UK in the 21st century). Much of what the LISP Handbook sought to address in neighbourhood policing is the 'where, whom and how' of community engagement in order to create interventions that tackle crime and improve the legitimacy of the police. Legislation has placed a duty on the police to engage with and involve the community in police governance but leaves open the modalities of that involvement. There is a danger that the most vulnerable locations are left out of that involvement and innovation process and that the processes of engagement are ill-designed, or ill-executed, and result in vulnerable communities being excluded from the processes. Finally, the processes of problem solving can also be technocratic and exclude those most affected by the problems.

The intent to engage meaningfully with the public seems to be clear in UK policy, but the purpose of that engagement is not clear. The chief police officer[1] 'has to receive (and provide) information from the public'. But the policy does not state what the chief officer should do with that information. In a local document[2], the Police force investigated here committed to "…listen to every complaint, look at individual circumstances, and respond to it in a fair and reasonable way". Firstly, the notion of

[1] UK Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

[2] Looking after East Northamptonshire: https://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/info/200217/crime_safety_and_emergencies/43/safer_community_teams [Accessed 9th Oct. 2015, p. 2].

the 'public' only having a complaint is flawed, but also operationally 'listening to and dealing with every' seems to be a wasted use of resources, if there is no clear plan as to what to do with the results. A local document on community engagement does hint at a purpose – on page 3 the police say, "We work on the principle that 'prevention is better than cure' but also commit to deal with every complaint regardless of its veracity or relative importance". In community development terms, it seems an unusual method for communities to 'hold their local police to account' when only those with a complaint are listened to. No assessment is made of the extent to which the complainant is cognisant of policing activities or performance, and no attempt is required to ensure that hard to reach or hard to hear communities are also able to communicate their complaints, thoughts or experiences. This would be especially important in vulnerable localities.

3. FINDINGS

The pilot projects

Over a period of three years starting in 2011, PCSOs in a UK Police force (having received training and follow-up support from the LISP Handbook) were asked to find opportunities to experiment with this alternative approach to neighbourhood policing. They had the support of their Chief Constable, but their Sergeants and Inspectors were not necessarily aware or supportive to the PCSOs in going about this work. One reason for these pilots being run without direct and specific support from middle leaders was to establish what could be done without significant structural changes to policing patterns, and to identify the conditions under which supportive middle leadership emerged.

Eight pilot projects were investigated in detail to allow for a in depth understanding of the mechanisms that lead to the perceived success, or failure, of the socially innovative intervention strategies. The LISP Handbook represents the framework by which social problems are considered, researched and subsequent solutions or interventions are developed. The projects described below are some examples of where the social innovation process has been applied and social innovations developed ready for implementation.

The following descriptions form part of the Soft Systems Method data analysis process. Space prevents all of the data being presented, but this section provides an overview of the cases and the different types of data included in the analysis.

Case 1: Ethnic minority burglaries

This case study started in a locality within an English town, assigned to two PCSOs (Wimsey and Bunter[3]) at the heart of their community, but soon extended to a specific ethnic community within a wider East Midlands area, as the unique crime type revolved around their community's faith and beliefs. The incident shifting from a 'community of geography' to a 'community of experience'. The partnership between the two PCSOs who had been allocated to the estate for several years, had a good working relationship with the wider community in this neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is a mixed suburb, urban extension of the west of the town, built around older villages into what is effectively a sixties council housing estate with significant, but incomplete, private ownership through right-to-buy. It is a significantly Asian community, with 10% of the population reporting as Asian and 13.7% of the population stating that they were Muslim in 2011[4], compared to a 4.2% overall Muslim population in the town. Forty percent of the population have no formal qualifications but just short of 40% of the working population are in full time work.

The presenting problem situation for the PCSOs was a spate of burglaries of jewellery from private residences in the neighbourhood. In the space of one month (July 2012), there were 36 serious acquisitive crime (SAC) reports, two thefts from vehicles, 9 burglaries, and 2 robberies. This became 51 burglaries by September and the same in November 2012. The PCSOs in the neighbourhood identified at the start of the LISP initiative in 2013 that the community affected by the burglaries were predominantly Bangladeshi, and that the burglaries were occurring during the Haj pilgrimage period. The PCSOs were anticipating in 2013 that there would be a repeat pattern, further eroding the relationships within the neighbourhood.

As well as meeting the screening criteria the rationale for PCSOs Wimsey and Bunter was clear:

> Tensions rose in the Asian Communities due to what they believed was a lack of response from the police. The majority of the tensions occurred within the Bangladeshi Community in the […] area of […]. In 2013 a trigger plan was recommended in order to prepare for a possible increase in Asian Burglaries for the autumn. Trigger plan including providing General reassurance and advice to the […] Asian community. (LISP Proforma, 2014).

The LISP pilot reporting proforma (Figure 1) reported a significant drop in burglaries across all types of crime. Burglaries peaked at 4 in the neighbourhood in 2012, and 55 in the same year across the whole of the town and dropped to 1 in the neighbourhood and 22 across the whole town. Serious acquisitive crime showed the highest number

[3] pseudonyms

[4]http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=6275190&c=NN5+7BZ&e=13&g=6452153&i=1001x1012x1013x1003x1004&j=6309090&m=1&p=-1&q=1&r=0&s=1453121622672&enc=1&dsFamilyId=2477 [Accessed 15 Aug 2017]

of 266 incidents in 2012: up from 131 in 2009 and dropping to a new low of 44 in 2014. It is not clear whether these figures are averages per month or total figures. The official crime data suggested that they are close to the average number of incidents per month.

On the other hand, low numbers of incidents are reported in the Crime Impact Survey (May 2014) by selecting a much smaller area in which the PCSOs were operating in order to claim "In 2011 there were 2 [cases of burglaries where gold jewellery was taken], in 2012 there were 4, in 2013 and in 2014 there was 1 per year. Between 2012 and 2014 there has been a 75% decrease in "Asian Gold" burglaries within the [neighbourhood]". The Police analyst was, however, able to conclude that "This is a much bigger improvement when compared to the rest of the town which has seen a 60% decrease in "Asian Gold" burglaries.")[5]. One might wish to conclude from this that the LISP Intensive Community Engagement techniques are 15% more effective than standard policing, but random effects, small data samples and other confounding factors would prevent such bold claims.

Fig. 1: Extract from LISP Proforma on outcomes of pilot

Source: Curtis (2021, p. 182).

[5] Northamptonshire Police (2014) Crime Impact Statement Asian Gold LISP 22nd May 2014. Unpublished report.

Case 2: Sheltered Housing

The second neighbourhood is essentially, a geographical cluster of Sheltered Housing, where vulnerable people live. This includes the elderly, hard of hearing or deaf, people with learning difficulties or mental health problems. Some of these residents are house bound or suffer with dementia/ Alzheimer's. Some of these people have fallen victim to burglaries.

The neighbourhood statistics for the ward, however, give no clue as to the specifics of this case because they operate at too large a scale. The wider neighbourhood does score[6] poorly on education, crime health and living environment deprivation. Full time work is predominant but significantly above average proportion in 'elementary occupations'[7] with 27% of the population with no formal education.

The neighbourhood in question comprises a square of 24 detached buildings with approximately 64 residents, distributed around a small central roundabout, with a community centre and a mix of single person dwellings and small flatted accommodation. The boundaries of the haven are porous in that there are no gates on the road, and there are extensive gaps in the perimeter hedgerows. It is surrounded by post-war housing, much of the same style as that of concern in the Asian Gold case. The properties are owned and operated by an arms-length management organisation that manages over 12,000 other homes on behalf of the local housing authority. In the Community Safety Partnership vulnerability report of the time[8], this ward is mentioned several times as being vulnerable to domestic abuse, hate crimes, and serious acquisitive crime (which includes burglary of homes).

The PCSO involved in this case, 'Vera', had been working on this issue for a period of time before the social innovation project was initiated. There had been a spate of burglaries and an area deemed as vulnerable, and the police officers had implemented the 'Trafford model super-cocooning' tactic which involves meeting with the victim but also informing the 45 nearest houses that the burglaries had occurred and providing target hardening advice. Vera identified that the recipients of the super-cocooning visits were not responding as expected:

> […] the information we were providing, in black and white …they were not acknowledging… and also the way the paper was folded in, it gets mixed up in your

[6]http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=7&b=6275190&c=NN5+7EE&g=6452156&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6309089&m=1&p=2&q=1&r=0&s=1465219891625&enc=1&tab=9 [Accessed 6 June 2016].

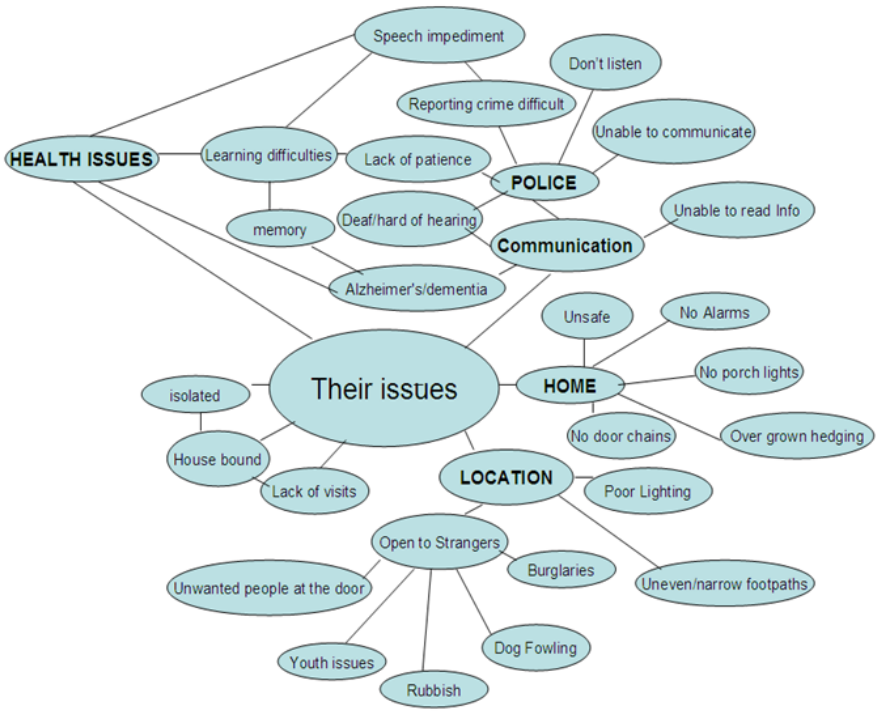
[7] Percentage of population in elementary occupations: ward 24.7%, Northampton 14.9%, national 11.1% http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodSummary.do?a=7&b=6275190&c=NN5+7EE&g=6452156&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6309089&m=1&p=9&q=1&r=0&s=1465219903812&enc=1&tab=1&inWales=false [Accessed 6 Jun. 2016].

[8] Anon (2011) Northampton Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2011/12 NCSP_Strategic_Assessment_2011_12.pdf.

> average… leaflet drop, so it wasn't easily identified that it was something that needed to be looked at. (Vera[9] Timestamp 5:07)

In a progress seminar in May 2014, Vera presented the two following diagrams (Figure 2 and Figure 3) highlighting the significantly different worldviews of the police compared to the residents. This exercise in perspective taking was unique amongst the pilots and led to the use of a long list of interventions. What was innovative here was not the individual interventions, but the complex mix tailored to the specific situation, in sharp contrast to the centralised, standardised letter which assumes the reader is a standard English reader, that they are the home-owner and that they have means and resources to implement the care and repair recommendations the letter stated as the solution.

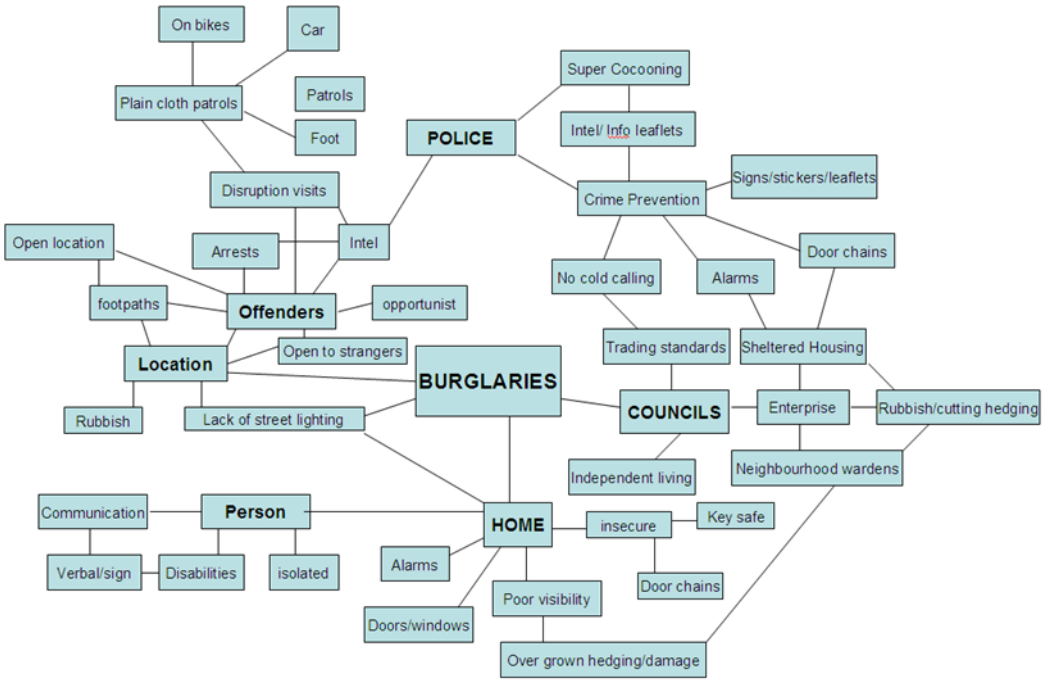
Fig. 2: Issues mentioned by residents of the sheltered housing



Source : Curtis (2021, p. 199).

[9] Personally Conducted Interview: Vera Voice 010_BressinghamGardens_10032015 10th Mar. 2015.

Fig. 3: How the Police saw the Spencer Haven problem



Source : Curtis (2021, p. 199).

The empathetic perspective-taking of the PCSO Vera enabled a mix of twenty-six complex and interrelated interventions to be deployed. Each intervention was not unique on its own, but the interrelationships meant that they would have a cumulative effect. Many of the strategies required co-production of the solution and were of a complex and interwoven nature important for tackling marginalisation (Molnár & Havas, 2019).

Case 3: Anti-social behaviour

This locality is a small neighbourhood in an East Midlands town in the UK and centres on an ancient church and graveyard. Within a few hundred metres is a sex shop, a pharmacy that supplies methadone to many of the town's drug users, a homeless shelter, a massage parlour, a pawn shop, three workingmen's clubs, a night club, two pubs and a children's nursery. It is a perfect storm of anti-social behaviour and street drinking. Further, it is one of those hotspots of crime that has been frustrating the local police force for years, distracting PCSOs and police officers alike from tackling serious acquisitive crime. Dozens of strategies have been used over the years, from high visibility patrols to designated public place orders to prevent public drinking, all with little visible effect. The neighbourhood is just around the corner from the police station and magistrates court, both with very high police visibility.

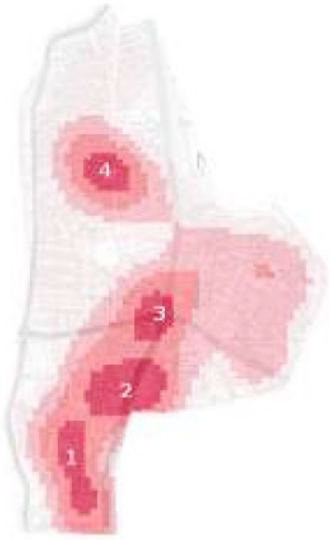
There are about 2-3% more people in the ward that report bad health than the national average, and 13% more people working in 'elementary occupations' with 23%

of population with no formal qualifications in the 2011 census. In the census, the majority of the population reported as being white British, but the most significant minority were 'White, Other White' most likely to be of eastern European origin. The next largest minority are 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; African', the majority 'not living in a couple' in mostly privately rented accommodation.

The monthly rates of reported crime had already dropped markedly around the time of the project, and the remainder rates suggest an on-going steady state in terms of crimes reported. Despite initial progress in connecting two different community associations together to clear vulnerable under-used land for use by a children's nursery, this project failed insofar as it was closed down for a critical mass of community-based action to take hold and for crime rates to remain low. The PSCOs thought that a critical mass of community engagement had been reached, and the senior leaders were under pressure to redeploy scarce resources to other parts of the town due to short-term concerns. Failure of the project to gain ground or achieve lasting effect is a good case study to consider, as it tests the veracity of the mechanisms of implementing social innovation reported below, in particular the necessity of a stable team of social innovators.

In September 2013, the local police published a Priority Area Problem Analysis (PA) report presenting data analysis based on crimes recorded on the Police Crime Recording System between May 2012 and April 2013.

Fig. 4: Hotspot analysis of all crime in PA3 (Parker, 2013a, p. 3) original indistinct



Source: Curtis (2021, p. 218).

The PA goes on to analyse in more detail the various categories of crime, identifying the LISP pilot area again with respect to non-domestic violence (Figure 4), targeting a local homeless shelter as the source or centre of this violence. The same shelter comes up again as a drugs intelligence hotspot (Parker 2013a, p. 28) and an Anti-social

Behaviour (ASB) hotspot (Parker 2013a, p. 30) but identifying the soup kitchen that had been operating in a nearby street as the source of this, even though it notes later that it is not a high-scoring 'repeat street' for ASB, whereas 25% of ASB repeat calls come from the specific area dealt with by this case analysis (the first time location is singled out).

The report also provides suggestions for actions by the police based on the desktop data analysis. This provides an insight into the thinking of the analysts at the time, and the approach to problem solving within the local police at the time: "Turning intelligence into positive frontline action to either detect more crime or generate better quality actionable intelligence is required to have a more beneficial impact upon drugs in PA3".

Police were beginning to get to grips with the location of crime for the first time through hotspot analysis, and had extensive (if inconsistent and not collected in a rigorous manner) data on the perceptions of the citizens with regard to police priorities, but the data about where the crime hotspots were was not being connected to any information or data about the vulnerability of the localities to crime, or in enough resolution to provide a detailed appreciation of the issues at a street level. This is where the LISP investigations begin to fill in the missing detail regarding the nature of the problem. The problem-solving suggestions in the PA report are still rudimentary and generic, suggesting more "Cohesive community interaction and engagement", "liaising and organising meetings", as well as more policing activity (in the context of austerity politics and significant budget cuts to Policing resources) in the form of "prevention and enforcement ideas".

The project struggled for resources, the sergeant noting "I'm conscious, because of the [sigh] change in demographic of the police, because I have lost both of my, I've lost N[], she's on the town centre now and I've lost T[]". This constant churn of staff and a severe cut in street level resourcing was both the prompt for the research project, and a constant problem in this research and subsequent projects.

Case 4: New migrants and public disorder

The designation of this locality as a Designated Public Places Order (DPPO) as a response to complaints of street drinking by groups identified as new migrants to the UK from Eastern Europe, and associated anti-social behaviour required significant additional policing resources to be deployed, particularly because PCSOs are not on shift during the late evenings and weekends, necessitating that uniformed police officers were deployed from the patrol activities from the town centre.

DPPOs help local authorities deal with the problems of alcohol related anti-social behaviour in public places. This order is not a total ban on drinking alcohol in public

places but makes it an offence to carry on drinking when asked to stop by a constable or authorised officer. The operation was a result of a Joint Action Group populated by Councillors, Community Safety Manager, Licensing Manager from the Borough Council, the local Police, the National Health Service, Chair of the Pubwatch Community Association, local Taxi-drivers Association and the local Trade and Commerce, thereby exercising control over the disenfranchised new migrant communities with no consultation or engagement.

This ward is an area in which 41% of the population are unskilled labour[10], with 22% of the population having no formal qualifications. The 2016 deprivation indices indicate that out of over 32,000 wards in the UK, this ward is in the lowest 5,000, and in crime terms ranks within the bottom 400 wards (372 out of 32,844). The living environment index also ranks this ward in the bottom 1,500 in the UK. Although the population are generally economically active in terms of age, the percentage accessing Jobseekers allowance were double the town rate in August 2010. A total of 36% of the households in the area are one-person households, in high density 'houses of multiple occupancy'. The police officers involved reported that these are predominantly rooms to let within the Victorian tenement housing and converted factories. Only 9% of the housing in the town is local authority owned, so there is a strong likelihood that this housing is all privately owned-to-let.

In conceptualising the problem, PSCO 'Nikita' focussed immediately on the language barriers implicit in the street drinking problem. 'Nikita' demonstrated an awareness of the problem being more widespread than the immediate locale, noting similar behaviour in neighbouring streets. She also noted "Initial engagement and education of persons caught in DPPO area has not yielded a reduction in self-generated police incidents. Prolific offenders are taking no notice." (LISP Proforma May 2013).

In a year, PCSO Nikita had developed the scope and detail of her LISP pilot with evidence of more rich-picture based problem analysis from a wider range of stakeholders (LISP Proforma July 2014), with a few more active stakeholders, including widening their scope to landlords and employers of the street drinkers. This is an important strategic shift, as the analysis moves away from the direct symptomatic behaviour to seeking to intervene in the conditions that give rise to the behaviour (their living conditions) and patterns of cultural expectations exacerbated by the short-term employment and living arrangements. Although the connections with the employers were at a low level (they accepted to brief their workers and provide

[10]http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodSummary.do?width=1366&a=7&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1478873165366&enc=1&profileSearchText=NN16+8JS&searchProfiles= [Accessed 11 Nov 2016].

posters) Nikita had indicated in an un-recorded conversation that her aim to change the employers' recruitment policy to reduce the number of single, male and short-term workers, and also change the letting policies of the landlords to lengthen the minimum stay of the residents, thereby increasing their investment in civic behaviours. In the meantime, more focussed enforcement action was taken against the shops supplying the alcohol, with the participation of other public-sector partners. This resulted in one shop's owner losing their operating licence and a range of other statutory enforcement measures being instigated. Although PCSO Nikita reported that there are no 'community groups' to get involved, she was clearly thinking of individuals, rather than a community of organisations. Nevertheless, she reported beginning to have meetings with employers, landlords and owners of non-residential property, which are a different type of community, of organisations rather than individuals.

Figure 5 provides an indication of an underlying problem that came up in a number of different projects in this research (and in the 14 subsequent projects that were undertaken after this research) which was the presence of certain groups within the neighbourhoods which were seen as 'part of the problem' rather than a part of the solution. In this project, new migrants from eastern Europe were a part of the street drinking culture but the police really struggled to conceptualise them as potential stakeholders.

Fig. 5: Anti-drinking sign in different languages

Source: Curtis (2021, p. 251).

PSCO 'Nikita' reported "I have no stakeholders wiling (sic) to take part in a working group at the moment due to on-going personal issues. At some point I will re-evaluate this issue but for now it is purely a police based working group". Hidden communities, who were not deemed to be part of civil society seemed to be missed regularly. In other projects undertaken to implement LISP, sex workers, illegal and new immigrants, those thieving from charity shops, local drug barons and youth knife gangs were all stakeholders in systems of crime that were rarely identified as being part of the solution, instead an excluded other, part of the problem.

Summary

This paper has reported on four of the eight projects in substantial detail. Firstly, providing a naturalistic rich description of the case with evidence from a wide range of sources, from street observations and internet based demographic data (some of which has been selected in the summaries above), and then structuring this analysis using a Soft Systems Methodology. The review of each case study covers the implementation phases of the LISP, based on the LISP proforma submitted by the lead PCSO in each situation, supported by post-hoc interview data from the PCSOs and colleagues.

The projects described above were evaluated using a standard Mode 1 soft systems framework aimed at producing conceptual models of each of the problem situations, based on CATWOE[11] analyses and rich pictures[12] developed by those involved in the LISP problem situation. These are then taken forward to a Mode 2 SSM analysis where the systems analyst considers the events (practices) and ideas (theories) which unfold over time. The final task for each case study was to establish whether the known mechanisms within policing community engagement literature, and Pawson's own policy intervention mechanisms, were being triggered in each of the projects. Each case yielded possible new mechanisms that have to be in place, that had not already been covered by the known police or Pawson mechanisms.

4. ANALYSIS

Unique contexts/localities

Eight real world research projects (**Table 1**) were developed where systematic, consistent and repeatable processes of social innovation were applied (using the

[11] An SMM mnemonic that stands for Customer, Actor, Transformation, Worldview, Owner, and Environment.

[12] An SSM specific diagramming technique.

Locally identified Solutions and Practices (LISP) Handbook and training), to differing degrees, to structure intensive engagement by a UK Police force across eight different localities. All of these contexts were demographically different and have different 'target' crime types. The only thing that links them together is that the police officers and PCSOs who were part of the LISP training process and that some attempt at implementing LISP was considered or used.

Table 1. The LISP projects

Case No.	Location	Origin	Priority Area	Crime	Confidence	Stable team	Mgt involved	LISP Quality
1	Spencer/Asian Gold	Pilot	yes	down	up	yes	yes	Gold
2	Spencer Haven	Pilot	yes	down	up	yes	yes	Gold
3	Holy Sepulchre	Pilot	no	steady	steady	no	no	Silver
4	All Saints Kettering	Pilot	yes	steady	steady	no	no	Silver
5	Daventry Skatepark	Pilot	no	low	up	yes	no	Gold
6	Towcester	Self generated	no	down	up	no	yes	Bronze
7	Daventry no LISP	N/A	no	steady	steady	yes	no	None
8	Wellingborough no LISP	N/A	no	up	down	no	no	None

Source: Curtis (2021, p. 158).

According to the LISP protocol, each proposed LISP process is initiated by a screening process, to establish whether the locality is an area of significant demographic deprivation or vulnerability and that there was a pattern of long-term, chronic crime. The Priority Area process implemented by the Police force reinforced this screening process, such that three of the projects were clearly localities that were similar in that regard. All of the localities were vulnerable and suffered chronic patterns of crime, albeit in most cases the LISP was initiated because of short-term crime data, i.e. a symptom of a wider problem. These unique localities were investigated and described in detail using the SSM reporting protocol and categorises according to three context statements. Each locality that would host the LISP process would be a (C1) **vulnerable locality or area of significant multiple social deprivation,** as well as experiencing (C2) **long-term chronic crime patterns**, extending over 5 years or more, ignoring peaks and troughs in cyclical and seasonal crime patterns, as well as experiencing (C3) **complex, publicly contested crime types** including anti-social behaviour, and serious acquisitive crime.

Different stakeholders may have different opinions regarding the causes of the problem; or significant amounts of the problem are not under the direct influence or control of the Police. Implicit throughout the research was the notion that the crime types had to be 'sufficiently public' to be conducive to the community-based intervention process. Clearly there are 'private' crimes that would not be appropriate contexts for a LISP process, including domestic violence, person-to-person abuse or negligence or even inter-neighbour disputes, or crime types hidden from public view, such as drug or human trafficking. A much later initiative using LISP, in a different Police force, was considering community responses to the cultures that propagate Female Genital Mutilation, but the project did not proceed.

Mechanisms

Pawson (2013) identifies (in his terminology) 'hidden mechanisms' that create successful socially innovative interventions, and crucially support the mainstreaming and scaling of such interventions into organisational and cultural change. Having analysed the projects in turn, including existing evidence from policing literature on 'what works' and 'what is promising', the research proposed a set of twenty-seven possible mechanisms, which connect the contexts (the unique localities) to predetermined social outcomes. Merely following the 8 steps of the LISP process still relies on the skills, experience and confidence of the practitioner, in these cases the PCSOs, and represents bricolage in action.

The practitioners would utilise the resources they had available to them without questioning the limitations of their contexts. In Case 1, the gold burglaries project, the practitioners failed to identify that their means of community engagement excluded women and young people (by holding a public meeting) which links to the mechanism (below) in-depth understanding of people and places (and mechanism) not described in detail here regarding sensitivity towards hidden communities'. This was also the situation in Case 3 where the PCSOs were not aware of a children's day care centre immediately adjacent to the crime hotspot. Once the staff there had been connected to the nearby homeless centre (a factor in the street drinking), significant new interventions were identified that could replace and add to the resources and strategies the PCSOs would otherwise have gathered together – specifically time to conduct more patrols through the crime hotspot. The process of LISP helped them to identify 'highly connected and highly capable' individuals within the community who were prepared to be that visible safety and reassurance resource, replacing the limited police resource. It was identified that these factors were implemented at different points and with differing amounts of effort by those involved, giving rise to the idea that mechanisms are not triggered smoothly or equally. Making accommodations for set-backs was an important mechanism in this respect, because Cases 3 and 4 did not achieve a thoroughly implemented set of interventions, because the senior officers involved deemed that the projects had succeed (enough for them to claim success) and withdrew the socially innovative PCSOs before critical mass could be achieved to sustain the interventions beyond reliance on the police for constant action.

The detailed consideration of the cases, mapping all of the possible mechanisms against the outcomes achieved allowed the logic of the relationships between action and outcome to be abstracted and tested.

Social Outcomes

Desirable outcomes of neighbourhood policing would be incredibly diverse. Pawson's approach to outcomes is to derive them from 'regularities', patterns of behaviour that he identifies from the policy interventions he is studying. Each of the LISP pilots established (or were supposed to) their own expected outcomes for each project. None of the pilots robustly measured whether the planned outcomes were achieved. All that the detailed analyses do is observe whether the wider crime rates were improving or not, but not posit whether the actions within the LISP were designed to achieve those improved outcomes.

Throughout the interviews, the PCSOs, and in some cases the Sergeants identified that reducing crime was not the only desirable outcome. Thus, the outcomes, for the police are more complex than merely reducing reported crime rates. Further, the desired outcomes of the residents and users of a given neighbourhood would equally be complex – perception and fear of crime is not connected directly to actual crime rates, so improved feelings of safety and confidence may be as important as actual crime rates. Nevertheless, these are both important measures of police performance.

The effectiveness of a Police force, based on the 'Peelian principles' is assessed in relation to how it carries out its responsibilities including cutting crime, protecting the vulnerable, tackling anti-social behaviour, and dealing with emergencies and other calls for service. Its efficiency is assessed in relation to how it provides value for money, and its legitimacy is assessed in relation to whether the force operates fairly, ethically and within the law.

Clearly, there is plenty of potential outcomes for the community stakeholders that could also be considered in this process. These could have been derived directly from the projects themselves, from the outcomes expected by each of the projects. Had the research been able to cover the whole lifecycle of all the projects, and all the projects had decided on and measures progress against a basket of outcomes measures, as the LISP requires, it would be possible to extend the CMO configuration exercise to cover non-police outcomes. Nevertheless, undertaking the exercise only with police-based outcomes still demonstrates the use of the concept.

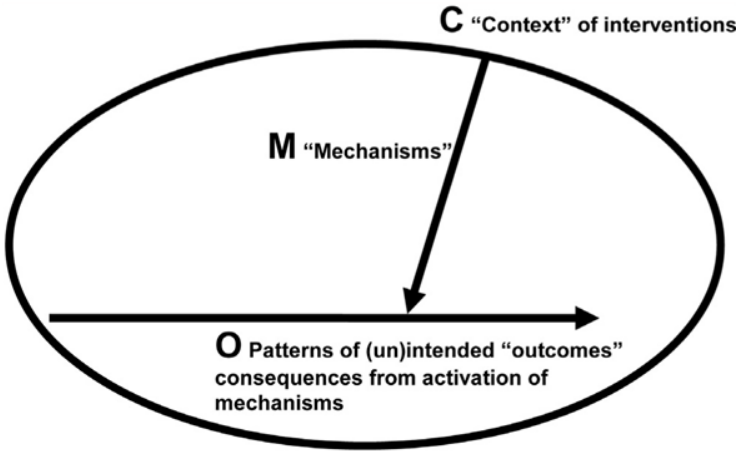
Testing the CMO chain

Having identified the characteristics of the unique localities, and categorised them by social vulnerability through deprivation, chronic crime patterns and a sufficiently complex interaction between the community and the crime types, the outcomes that are desired (including police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) are matched to the localities, through the mechanisms. It is then possible to establish which of the

mechanisms across all the projects were most strongly or weakly enacted. It appears that not all the mechanisms are triggered to the same extent. The idea of a trigger suggests that it is a one-off instant 'hair trigger' moment that fires a mechanism, like a gun. But if the mechanisms have differently weighted 'triggers' (light or heavy), using the same weight of pressure on the trigger might mean that some mechanisms do not fire even when we want them to.

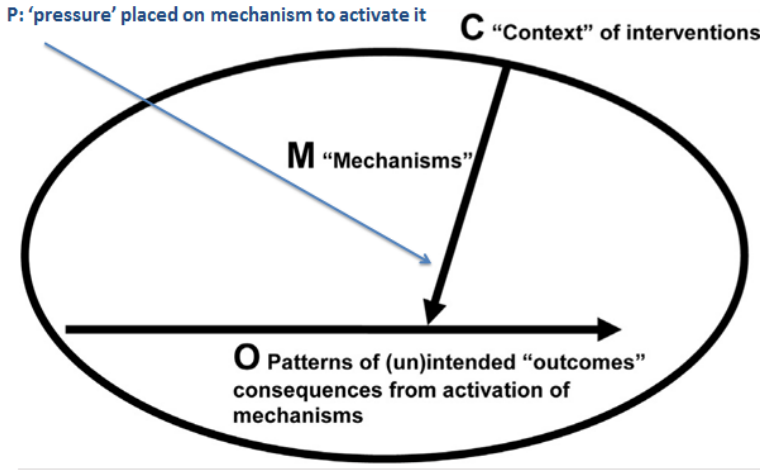
This idea of the 'pressure' that needs to be borne on a mechanism for it to be trigged can be used to modify the basic CMO model developed by Pawson (shown in Figure 6) into a more developed model (Figure 6).

Fig. 6: Pawson context-mechanism-outcome model



Source: Curtis (2021, p. 292).

Fig. 7: Pawson CMO model modified to show the role of 'pressure'



Source: Curtis (2021, p. 292).

An example of the context-mechanism-outcomes analytical process is given below. In all 12 key logic statements were developed in detail, out of a possible 243 configurations. Table 2 shows the mechanisms tested. There are important caveats to

some of these most readily activated mechanisms. An in-depth understanding (M1) of a vulnerable locality (C1/3) will result in better performance (O2), if understanding gained is used focussed on identifying skills and assets to contribute to reduction in crime. It will only improve legitimacy and/or confidence in policing, if co-created with the stakeholders. Drawing on and utilising the skills and capabilities of the community stakeholders (Tacit Skills M10) would increase their assent towards interventions delivered by the police. Where those tacit skills are recognised, the stakeholders begin to appreciate the tacit skills that the police officers elicit.

There are a series of 'least active' mechanisms that represent those that have been the hardest to implement. Mechanism 1: the in-depth investigation into the problem, with the depth and breadth necessary was rarely done to the level necessary and was only significantly improved when case study was prioritised at a more senior level. The 'dose' (M3) was also problematic, because project leaders were being constantly abstracted[13] for additional tasks, so it required a very determined and dedicated sergeant/inspector team to defend the use of the staff time on LISP activities. Ultimately, a perfectly implemented LISP project ought to trigger all of these mechanisms equally across the lifetime of an intensive engagement process, but this process of identifying the least and most engaged mechanisms allows a few of the 243-possible context-mechanism-outcome configurations to be narrowed down to investigating just a few.

Table 2. 'Logic chain' between contexts-mechanisms-outcomes

Contexts		Mechanisms		Outcomes	
C1	deprivation	M1	In-depth understanding of people, place and problems	O1	Performance. /Efficiency
C2	chronic	M7	Highly connected individuals	O2	Effectiveness
C3	complex	M9	Attuned to community dynamics	O3	Legitimacy
		M10	Tacit skills		

Source: Curtis (2021, p. 297).

CMO statement ***C1/3+M1>O1*** *states that an in-depth understanding (M1) of a vulnerable locality (C1/3) will result in reduced demand, lower crime rates, less enforcement activity (O1).* In-depth understanding requires greater effort than in standard policing but may not automatically result in reduced demand. The officers involved would have to

[13] Policing term for removed for other duties.

either build on long-term existing knowledge or invest heavily in a priority vulnerable area to gain sufficient knowledge about the opportunities to reduce demand and enforcement activity. Without an orientation towards this type of performance, officers could drift towards 'business as usual' responses such as greater patrolling, visibility and reassurance without focusing on the endpoint of reduced police activity. This was demonstrated in two projects where the initial strategy was to increase enforcement activity without an outcome of that activity being reduced demand. In-depth understanding has to be oriented towards the outcome of reduced demand to be useful here.

CMO Statement ***C1/3+M1>O2*** *states that an in-depth understanding (M1) of a vulnerable locality (C1/3) will result in better performance (O2)* such as reduced activity per outcome, greater focus on prevention than patrolling, other statutory partners participating fully, and skills and assets levered from community to support crime reduction. There is a stronger relationship here than the first CMO configuration, in that an in-depth understanding (in the terms outlined in the LISP Handbook oriented towards seeking out the community assets rather than deficits) will result in a better understanding of the skills and capabilities of the key stakeholders in the neighbourhood in question, understanding their motivations for being involved, and therefore (as the community begin to co-produce the safer community) the outcomes per unit of police activity will reduce, if the knowledge and understanding gained is used for that purpose.

CMO Statement ***C1/3+M1>O3*** *states that an in-depth understanding (M1) of a vulnerable locality (C1/3) will result in better legitimacy (O3) and confidence in policing.* If this process of developing an in-depth understanding of a vulnerable locality is co-created with the key stakeholders in an open and transparent manner, then confidence that the police understand the dynamics of the neighbourhood and know they are using their policing experience to tackle the root causes of the right problems, that matter to the community. Officers own sense of legitimacy will also improve.

Table 3. Testing Mechanism One

Context		**Mechanism**		**Outcome**		**CMO configuration**	**Caveats**
C1/3	High deprivation, chronic crime, & complex problem situation (vulnerable locality)	M1	In-depth understanding of people, place and problems	O1	Performance: Reduced demand, lower crime rates, less enforcement activity	C1/3+M1>O1	If oriented towards less enforcement as an outcome

Context		Mechanism		Outcome		CMO configuration	Caveats
				O2	Effectiveness/Efficiency: Reduced activity per outcome. Greater focus on prevention than patrolling. Other statutory partners participating fully. Skills and assets levered from community to support crime reduction	C1/3+M1>O2	If understanding gained is used focussed on identifying skills and assets to contribute to reduction in crime
				O3	Legitimacy: Improved legitimacy and/or confidence in policing	C1/3+M1>03	If co-created with the stakeholders

Source: Curtis (2021, p. 300).

Strong CMO configurations (Table 3) can readily be constructed between the context of a 'vulnerable locality', i.e., that it is an area of high deprivation, chronic levels of crime and a complex problem situation. This does not mean that all other types of areas (low deprivation/high crime or low deprivation/low crime or low deprivation/low crime) the LISP social innovation process does not work, but in the terms mentioned above, less 'pressure' would be necessary on different mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS

Four of the pilot projects were investigated in detail, using Soft Systems Methodology as a means of structuring the comparison of the projects, and to derive conceptual models of the problem situations. The projects all varied significantly in the extent to which they fulfilled all the requirements of the designed LISP process, but all of those that produced a LISP proforma demonstrated some improvement in the performance, effectiveness and legitimacy.

Within the ethical approval of the research study, it was not possible to gather data from members of the public involved in the LISP pilots, interviews were only conducted with PCSOs and uniformed police officers. This made it impossible to adequately include the community voice in the research beyond that which was expressed through the rich pictures collected by the PCSOs themselves.

Another limitation was the inability of any of the pilots to complete the LISP eight step process within the pilot phase, due to operational limitations. Further work is needed to explore the CMO configurations in steps 7 and 8, and to test the evaluation of the interventions. However, the strengths of this approach are that it resolves the problem of idiographic, story-driven case-based research which dominates much of social innovation work. This research could have been 8 separate unrelated and incomparable projects, but the rigour of the soft systems methodology allied to the context-mechanism-outcome chain analysis demonstrated that the seemingly unrelated projects are comparable and have deep structural similarities

that supersede any a priori statistical demographic similarities that might be identified when trying to construct a counterfactual in a 'gold standard' randomised control trial. This opens the way up for social innovations from much more diverse backgrounds to be compared in a structured, coherent and consistent comparative process.

Twenty-seven mechanisms drawn from what works in neighbourhood policing and from other public policy interventions have been shown by the research to be at work in the LISP framework and six of which have been uniquely developed in this study, providing a most robust complex of key activities that make LISP projects successful in the appropriate contexts. This study has demonstrated that the twenty-seven mechanisms satisfactorily map from the vulnerable locality contexts to the PEEL policing outcomes, therefore demonstrating that the LISP process is an effective new tool in neighbourhood policing for engaging with high-risk vulnerable neighbourhoods in an effective, legitimate and confidence building manner.

The LISP social innovation process has been demonstrated to achieve stronger outcomes in contexts (different neighbourhoods) where there is chronic crime and/or deprivation is worse. Beyond reducing crime, different communities have different aspirations, and different ideas of how to keep crime low: those are outcomes. But regardless of context or outcome there are five mechanisms that work quickly and easily, and five that are really difficult to implement. Those that are readily triggered are:

- Highly connected individuals;
- Attuned to community dynamics;
- Tacit skills;
- Demand effort from stakeholders;
- Offer encouragement and feedback.

These will not take long to establish and will suggest that the social innovation LISP project is going well and there will be high confidence of success. The following mechanisms are much harder to implement:

- In-depth understanding of people, place and problems;
- Sufficient 'dose' of intensive engagement with sufficient time;
- Make accommodations for setbacks;
- Explain the theory of change;
- Share execution and control of the intervention.

Without clear and careful attention to ensuring that these mechanisms are in place and soundly implemented, not matter how desperate the context or how modest the outcomes, how engaged or enthusiastic the community or how modest the interventions that are designed, the LISP project will probably be deemed a failure. Community engagement based social innovation requires a stable team, responsibilisation, a mix of contingent interventions, perspective taking, a sensitivity to hidden communities, and attention given to connecting communities together that hitherto are not.

Social entrepreneurship has been associated with the practices of an individual combining "passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination" (Dees, 1998, p. 54), but later emerging as both a set of distinct processes, plus effectuation (Servantie & Rispal, 2018; Owusu & Jansen, 2013; Nelson & Lima, 2019) and bricolage (Desa & Basu, 2013; Di Domenico *et al.*, 2010; Janssen *et al.*, 2018). Both effectuation and bricolage are described in these references as ad hoc or unstructured strategies of resource identification and collation and signal a postmodern twist to theorising.

The literature on social innovation identifies that the current understanding of social innovation is that it is an eclectic craft called 'bricolage', whereas the contention of Pawson (2013) in public policy interventions is that these mechanisms structure and order the process of innovation. This may lead to an assumption that the 'agent' is the key to the social innovation seen in the LISP projects reported here, i.e., that the PCSO, or other individuals, possessing or creating networks of high social capital to create the socially innovative interventions, but to leap to this sparse conclusion would be to render the 'wicked issue' of both social innovation, and neighbourhood policing, 'tame'. It would be an adequate observation, but does not account for the evidence, and is not the complete outcome of the 'context-mechanism-outcome' work. Most notably, it doesn't account for how the agents go about this creative process, or at least, not in a manner that allows for a consistent and repeatable framework to be parsed from the evidence. The current theoretical account of this process undertaken by the social innovation agent is that of 'bricolage'. Although Di Domenico *et al.* (2010) endow social bricolage with six features (making do, refusal to be constrained by limitations, social value creation, stakeholder participation, and persuasion of significant actors) at its core their theory is still informed by Derrida's original (1970) concept of 'freeplay' and therefore still reliant on the agents' skills and talents to make do, confidence to refuse to be constrained, and find and persuade significant actors. The findings encompass Di Domenico *et al.* (2010) six features of social bricolage but resists the temptation to tame the wicked issue by oversimplifying the challenge of social change to six elements, but instead provide twenty-seven verified mechanisms

(parsed out to 5 straightforward and 5 more challenging) that work across hundreds of potential circumstances.

This research specifically identifies that a common idea in contemporary social innovation theory is that of 'bricolage' but that it is generally understood as a random, eclectic and essentially mysterious craft, consonant with postmodern thought. This research, grounded in critical realism, that identifies mechanisms that drive social behaviours and regularities, shows that social innovation can actually be a process of consistent and repeatable activities. This is not to reject the concept of bricolage, at least in the form identified by Di Domenico *et al.* (2010) above, but rather to suggest that the improvisation is not wholly 'freeplay' as the theorists might suggest or wish for, and that bricolage is constrained and structured. This research does not suggest that social innovation must be constrained and structured, but that social innovation can be consistently and repeatably applied and yet create unique interventions, whilst yet activating and mobilising the same underpinning mechanisms. Sorting through the mess of bricolage seems to reveal a different set of layers (laminar layers as Bhaskar (1975) would describe them) that comprise the mechanisms that contribute to the social impact that social entrepreneurs are seeking to achieve.

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A vicious cycle of superficial conceptualization: Deconstructing nature in social innovation (policy) discourse

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ABSTRACT

Critical studies of social innovation (SI) reveal sustainability concepts are widely used by scholars, policy makers and practitioners on a superficial level (Eichler & Schwarz, 2019). Even if SI is mainly linked to social and economic dimensions, the relationship between SI and environment is still vague and needs further research. One possible reason for this disconnectedness would be the dominating anthropocentric assumptions instead of ecocentric assumptions? To fill this gap, this paper aims to explore the conceptualization of nature in SI documents. We do this through an analysis of United Nations (UN) publications, particularly, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Labs. In addition, we consider how SI is understood, executed, promoted and how perceptions of nature affect SI. Eco-critical discourse analysis (ECDA) is adopted as an analytical approach for this study. This study utilizes texts as empirical material on SI published by the UN. The focus on the UN is appropriate, as they are a highly influential institution on national economies in shaping their SI policies and practices. Therefore, this study is undertaken on the basis that the discourse of these documents affects the SI discourse and practices of countries and the field. The contribution of this study lies in its effort to reveal embedded propositions in SI texts through language-driven analysis, then to discuss how a deeper understanding would regain the agenda for long-lasting socio-economic problems through an ecocentric critical discourse.

Keywords: Social Innovation; Sustainable Development; Ecocentrism; Policy Discourse; Ecocentric; Critical Discourse Analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The modern, and supposedly civilized way of organizing has proven to be ecologically and socially destructive (Heikkurinen *et al.*, 2016). Concepts like sustainability, sustainable development (SD), social innovation (SI), social economy, social entrepreneurship have however emerged as possible solutions to this destruction. Together with increasing impact of intergovernmental organizations, the interest in the sustainability field has also increased in line with research in the SI field. However, there are still significant global social and environmental problems, despite this immense interest on sustainability and academic efforts for developing knowledge network (Whiteman *et al.*, 2013).

Some SD related concepts, including SI, have emerged from anthropocentric mainstream organization and management thought, which seems to be the root cause of today's ecological problems (Heikkurinen *et al.*, 2016; Vlasov *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it would be naïve to expect to solve the problems with the same mindset that already created them. Thus, if the underlying assumptions of innovation, technology and entrepreneurship are not exposed and questioned then the so-called solutions that are born from these concepts would not solve the problems and may even deepen the problems. Without changing the assumptions and conditions that create these problems in the first place, mainstream SI discourse and practices which are mainly market-and-technology driven become just quick "fixes" of the problems (Haskell *et al.*, 2021, Heikkurinen *et al.*, 2016, Vlasov *et al.,* 2021). The relationship between SI and environment is still vague, research on the conceptualization of nature and/or ecology in SI is still missing (Haskell *et al.*, 2021, Olsson *et al*. 2017). Although critical studies of SD and SI exist, many of them arise from an anthropocentric point of view and ecocentric criticism on this field is needed (Haskell *et al.*, 2021).

To fill these gaps and reach our aim, we've focused on the assumptions of SI reports of UNDP Accelerator Labs (hereafter AL) in terms of ecocentrism. We try to understand the underlying and implicit assumptions that may have negative impact on the diagnosis and may jeopardize the results of the practices these reports propose to solve. As per ecocentric discourse analysis (ECDA) (Stibbe, 2015) the texts give the impression of being ambivalent towards the perception of nature, while explicitly aiming to propose practices for SI, whereas implicitly reproduces the basic assumption sustaining the mindset and structure that generated the problems. The texts are also written in a way that aims to convince the reader to believe that this is the 'way things are', rather than adopting a particular perspective, in this case they are mainly neo-liberal technocentric.

1. ECOCENTRIC PHILOSOPHY

In the past century, economic growth, technological development, and prosperity have been achieved by human-beings at the expense of the natural environment and social equality. Today's idea of human development has proven to be destructive. The problems that we encounter are in fact cultural, as much as economic or technological, as developments are guided by values and culture. The way of how we perceive nature is also determined by our values and culture (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005). Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are two distinct environmental viewpoints that govern our understanding of, and relationships with, nature. In anthropocentrism, there is a fundamental duality between human and nature by keeping the human at the centre of everything on this earth, and everything surrounding earth is to serve the needs of humanity. Since the 16th century, the rise of capitalism, and the Industrial Revolution anthropocentric view is frequently presented as the only way of living, and human progress is the ultimate aim in this world (Mead, 2017). In anthropocentrism, everything is viewed and interpreted from the human experience and 'a thing' has value only if it is useful for human-beings. This mentality created egocentric organizing and ways of living (Purser *et al.*, 1995). There are serious attempts to modify anthropocentrism in terms of ecology. For instance, Stephens *et al.* (2019) proposed to recast "*social awareness*" to "*socioecological awareness*" and "*human emancipation*" to emancipation with the aim of converting ecological justice into practical action in the critical systems thinking framework. Another attempt was to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate anthropocentrism and redefine the concept (Hayward, 1997). These rehabilitation attempts of anthropocentrism are valuable but of limited value to human utilization which is the driver of ecological destruction and is insufficient for a regenerative potential (Kopnina *et al.*, 2018).

However, from the perspective of ecocentric philosophy, humans are considered as a subsystem of the natural systems and are responsible from the health of the ecosystem (Purser *et al.*, 1995). Human beings are not privileged creatures of nature, and they are subject to same ecological rules as other creatures of nature. Nature has intrinsic value regardless of utility and value that humans ascribe to it. Hence, the preservation of nature should not be linked to its value to human beings, but rather its presence is valuable on its own. A holistic approach is a further characteristic of ecocentrism. Rather than studying biological organism in isolation from nature, ecocentrism considers the whole context, relationships, and interrelated processes. Ecocentrism requires acceptance of human and man-made objects' embeddedness in and dependency on the ecosystem. Ecocentrism emphasizes that most of the problems humans encounter today are the result of the separation of mind from nature (Heikkurinen *et al.*, 2016; Purser *et al.*, 1995).

As organizing and management fields are built upon anthropocentric assumptions, sustainability and related concepts derived from the same management field will just be the greening of intrinsically destructive business practices and creating unrealistic expectations for the improvement in the ecological situation. Positioning consumption and material acquisition as the "standard" way of living and promoting "green consumption" just changes the "colour" of the situation. Alienation from nature, materialist lifestyles and absence of caring non-humans and ecology results in ecological destruction and social inequalities. Therefore, according to an ecocentric worldview, a radical transformation of our worldview is urgently needed (Purser *et al.*, 1995) towards reconnecting human beings with nature and accepting that the embeddedness of humans in nature will change our relationship with ourselves, others and nature, our production of knowledge and technology, our decision making and living (Allen *et al.*, 2019). In terms of SI, understanding our anthropocentric mindset and discourse and evolving it into an ecocentric orientation could enable more desirable outcomes of SI.

Social Innovation in Critical Sustainability Discourse

An innovation is called social when it solves a societal problem, benefits the society, prioritizes societal enrichment rather than private enrichment, enhances society's capacity to act and brings social transformation (Murray *et al.*, 2010; Sharra & Nyssen, 2011). Some also propose that SI has emerged as a response and remedy to a neoliberal ideology which causes social and ecological inequalities (Nussbaumer & Moulaert, 2007). SI is not limited to only solving occurring societal problems but also is expected to serve the transformation of a different society.

SI is not a new concept and entered the public discourse in the early 19th century with a narrative of the social innovator being a "social reformer" or "socialist" who challenges the established order (Godin, 2015). This political impression recently has been re-presented as a-political and as positive progress without questioning anything about the concept and its outcomes (Godin & Vinck, 2017). Approaching SI from an evolutionary perspective proves that SI was first used by sociologists to explain the diffusion of technological innovations in networked communities and the social effect of innovations (Ayob *et al.*, 2016). Collaboration at, and between, different levels of the society is a core concept for SI. Another important element of SI is the restructuring of power relationships within the society. Hence, social change is at the node of SI. SI can challenge the existing order and ruling elite and/or serve as a means of dealing with social inequalities (Schubert, 2019). In other words, collaboration leads to new forms of relationships which leads to innovation. Innovation also causes changes in relationships, creates social value and consequently creating societal impact (Moulaert *et al.*, 2005; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019). The current western

'modern' orthodox where capitalism and the individualisation of society creates wealth disparities, and a blinkered view of the world is an enormous challenge to SI and social change. Within this context, SI is formulated as a way to deal with the consequences of modern late capitalism (Schubert, 2019).

Although contradictory views on SI and SD relationship exists, Millard (2018) argues that SI as a concept comes under the umbrella of sustainability and is mainly used as the practice of sustainable development (SD). As the interest in SD has increased with the promotion of UNDP Sustainable Development Goals, SI is also encouraged as the hope for all our social and ecological issues (Millard, 2018; Schubert, 2019) with UN necessitating the use of social innovation approaches to reach SDGs, making SI popular and nearly obligatory (Millard, 2018).

Critical studies of sustainability primarily criticize the lack of a universal agreement on the definition of sustainability, although it is a popular and 'politically correct' term amongst scholars and practitioners+. The vagueness of defining sustainability also enables the term to serve as the general rubric which suffers from ambiguity in theory and practice (Ala-Uddin, 2019; Hopwood *et al.*, 2005; Zygmunt, 2016). In fact, critical studies have shown that since the very beginning 'sustainability' literature, practices and research never questions the structures and relations that create these problems (either intentionally or unintentionally) (Carroll, 1991). Therefore, although sustainability is introduced to find solutions to the problems, it has remained far from solving them and seems to inadvertently empower the *status quo*. Studies also discuss the term 'weak sustainability' which emphasizes economic growth, objectification and utilisation of nature, and denial of existing power relations' responsibility (Bonnedahl & Eriksson, 2007). Thus, the UN's application of SD as a policy concept mainly fits to weak sustainability as it has been criticised by Adelman (2018) and Bonnedahl and Caramujo (2019) for being economically oriented, and ecologically modernizing, reenforcing the *status quo*. In this perspective, a balance between society and nature can be achieved and managed by sustaining economic growth through SD which is also called sustainable growth (Bonnedahl & Caramujo, 2019).

This notion of weak sustainability that seeks to protect nature at the same time as pursuing economic growth seems to be not working when the planetary limitations are ignored (Ayres *et al.*, 2001). On the other hand, strong sustainability calls for new ways of organizing beyond the current capitalist economy and accepts the embeddedness of society and economy in nature (Stål & Bonnedahl, 2016). Strong sustainability argues that natural resources cannot be substituted by human-made solutions and accepts the non-linearity of ecology (Steffen *et al.*, 2015). Haskell *et al.* (2021) argue that while studying SI, strong and weak approaches to sustainability

should be considered because the SD approach will provide the framework of how SI will be conceptualized and practiced. In their study, Eichler and Schwarz (2019) showed that most SI interventions fall into one or several SDGs and affects the interactions between SDGs. Furthermore, not all interactions are positive, as one improvement in an SDG (for example food production to end hunger) may lead to deterioration in another SDG (e.g., clean water and sanitation) (Franklin *et al.*, 2017). Indeed there are many contradictions when adopting a market and technology focused SI mindset to societal problems. For SI to serve SD, the embeddedness of society and economy in nature must be acknowledged. Otherwise, SI will become a tool to reinforce existing assumptions about human organizing that puts the market ahead of all other considerations (Haskell *et al.*, 2021).

As critical scholars, we need to be aware, as if the SI field is not opening pathways to radical transformations, then it might be supporting the existing structures (Olsson *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the anthropocentric conceptualization of SI can be the reason that SI and SD is not achieving the desired outcomes. Putting 'humans' in the centre and objectifying everything to serve us denies the human dependency on ecology. If SI practice is not questioning the existing power structures in human organizing, underlying assumptions of human-nature relationship and offering new ways of connecting, then the desired outcome of societal change is unlikely to occur. Although the aspect of 'not to damage nature' is fundamental, SI can also be conceptualized in a way that it enables human-beings to adapt, regenerate and co-create with nature. Thus, why reducing negative impacts is important, it is more so that as human beings we should also have the capacity to be a positive contributor to nature.

2. METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

The pattern of language is a helpful tool to understand the cognitive structures within people's minds and reveal their underlying stories (Stibbe, 2015). Our actions are based on our values and mentality, our values and mentality are influenced and expressed by language. Hence, language can encourage us to act in certain ways. As our aim in this study is to expose the assumptions underlying the dominant narratives and then establish the type of behaviour that is promoted in terms of ecocentrism.

Ecolinguistics proposes that our language is a helpful tool that can contribute to preserve (or damage) nature and helps search for new ways of expression that inspire people to flourish with nature. In short, language and ecology are interdependent. Our assumptions, values, beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews determine the relationship between each other, and nature and all these processes

are expressed through language. We do not want to undermine the fact that human beings are in fact active participants who can understand the real purpose of the texts they encounter, and develop their own meanings as stated by the New Materialist approaches (Donovan, 2018; Moore, 2017). However, critical discourse analysis can help us to deconstruct the stories within the discourses that make up our everyday life. These discourses are important as they influence us in our relationship with nature.

To make visible the underlying stories of United Nations Development Programme's, social innovation focused Accelerator Lab texts are analysed through ecolinguistic discourse analysis (ECDA), a method offered by Stibbe (2015). An ECDA method deconstructs texts to uncover the underlying stories and find out "*whether it encourages people to preserve or destroy the ecosystems that support life*" (Stibbe, 2015, p. 24).

According to Stibbe (2015) to reveal the "*stories-we-live-by*", texts are analysed in terms of ideologies, frames, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure and salience. Stibbe (2015)'s ECDA is a combination of different critical discourse analysis techniques and ecolinguistics. Under this technique, ideologies "*are stories shared by specific groups*" to make sense of the world. All institutions employ a specific language that is based on an ideology. Framing is "*the use of a story from one area of life (a frame) to structure how can other area of life is conceptualised*." Metaphors are "*a type of framing which can be particularly powerful and vivid since they use a specific, concrete and clearly distinct frame to think about an area of life.*" Evaluations are used to differentiate between what is good and bad in a context. Most of the time evidence is not provided and taken for granted assumptions are emphasized as "*innovation is good*", "*economic growth is good*". These evaluations can become absolute truths in time, and we ignore to question them or their outcomes. Identities are provided to define a particular type of person. Convictions are about convincing the readers that "*a particular description of reality is true, likely, unlikely or false*". Erasure refers to the absences or in other words what is not presented or suppressed in the texts. Salience on the other hand is highlighting something as the most important and crucial. These eight types of stories are not separate, as they interact with each other. Therefore, this study is structured on the following framework: main frames are articulated as the first level analysis, then within each frame, decision of which metaphor, evaluation, identity, conviction, erasure and salience feeding the overall pattern is made as the second analytical level. Thirdly, interaction between human and nature including peripheric dynamics has been visualized to show the connections, direction and characteristics of the relationships.

Data analysis technique and steps

In order to conduct an ECDA of SI in the context of sustainable development, 14 publications of the UNDP's AL materials are used including their SDG main policy text to make a thorough analysis. The underlying reason to select these texts is that they involve "praxis" based on the SI policy. UNDP AL's were established in 2019 under UNDP with the aim of being the "largest and fastest learning network on sustainable development challenges". In other words, they were created with the aim of substantially achieving UNDP SDGs. In the beginning they established 60 Lab teams in 78 countries, which increased to 91 Labs once they had added developing countries. Therefore, the UNDP ALs are designed to cultivate and implement SI systems to reach SDGs particularly in developing countries. These texts have already been issued as an extension of UNDP SI policy instrument principally to show the transformative role of Accelerator Labs in developing countries.

The texts, that frame the live accelerator labs, were taken from the organization's website (Please see Table 1. for further details)[1] they were read in detail by the authors at several times in a period from January till the end of May 2022 and then open coding was performed for each of the ECDA's eight types. To acknowledge the wider context, fourteen other UNDP reports and texts were purposefully included to obtain more inclusive analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Document Characteristics

Name of the document	Year of Publication	Number of pages	Document Label
Innovating in an Uncertain World: One Year of Learning and Breakthroughs – 2020 Annual Report	July, 2020	37	ACCL_R1
The Fast and Curious: Our Story So Far	June, 2020	34	ACCL_R2
Strategy to Scale Social Innovation for Development	August, 2020	126	ACCL_R3
Strategy to Scale Social Innovation for Development (Toolkit only)	May, 2020	43	ACCL_R4
The Changing Nature of Work: 30 signals to consider for a sustainable future	APRIL ,2021	53	ACCL_R5
Collective Intelligence for Sustainable Development: Getting Smarter Together	May, 2021	53	ACCL_R6
Collective Intelligence for Sustainable Development: 13 Stories from the UNDP Accelerator Labs	May,2021	60	ACCL_R7
Grassroots Innovation: An Inclusive Path to Development	August, 2021	111	ACCL_R8

[1] https://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs/publications

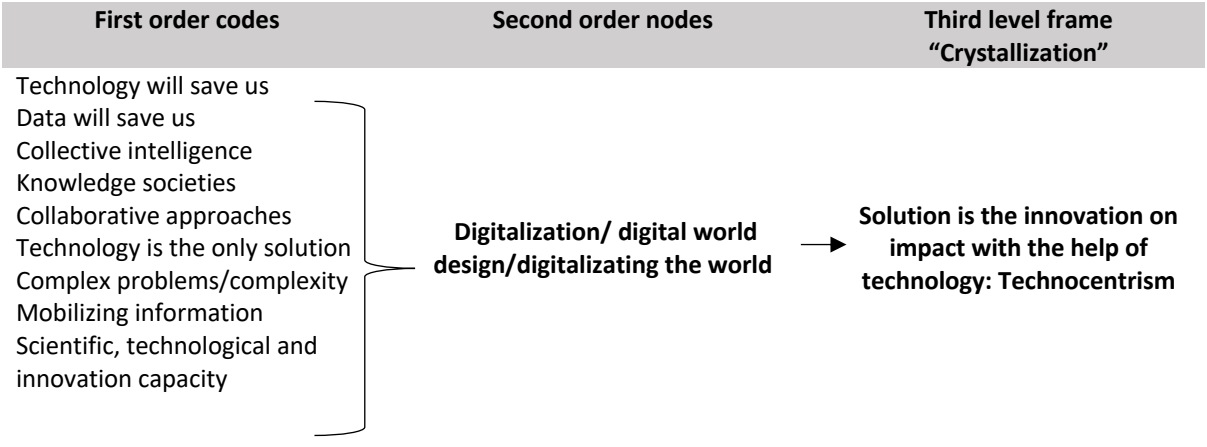
Lessons Learned from Applying the Data Powered Positive Deviance Method to Identify Grassroots Solutions Using Digital Data	October, 2021	24	ACCL_R9
The Data Powered Positive Deviance Handbook	November, 2021	138	ACCL_R10
Midterm Evaluation of the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network Project	February, 2022	62	ACCL_R11
Resolution adopted by General Assembly	September,2015	35	UN_GA_REPORT
UNDP Accelerator Lab Brochure	N\A	16	ACCL_B
			Total Pages: 792

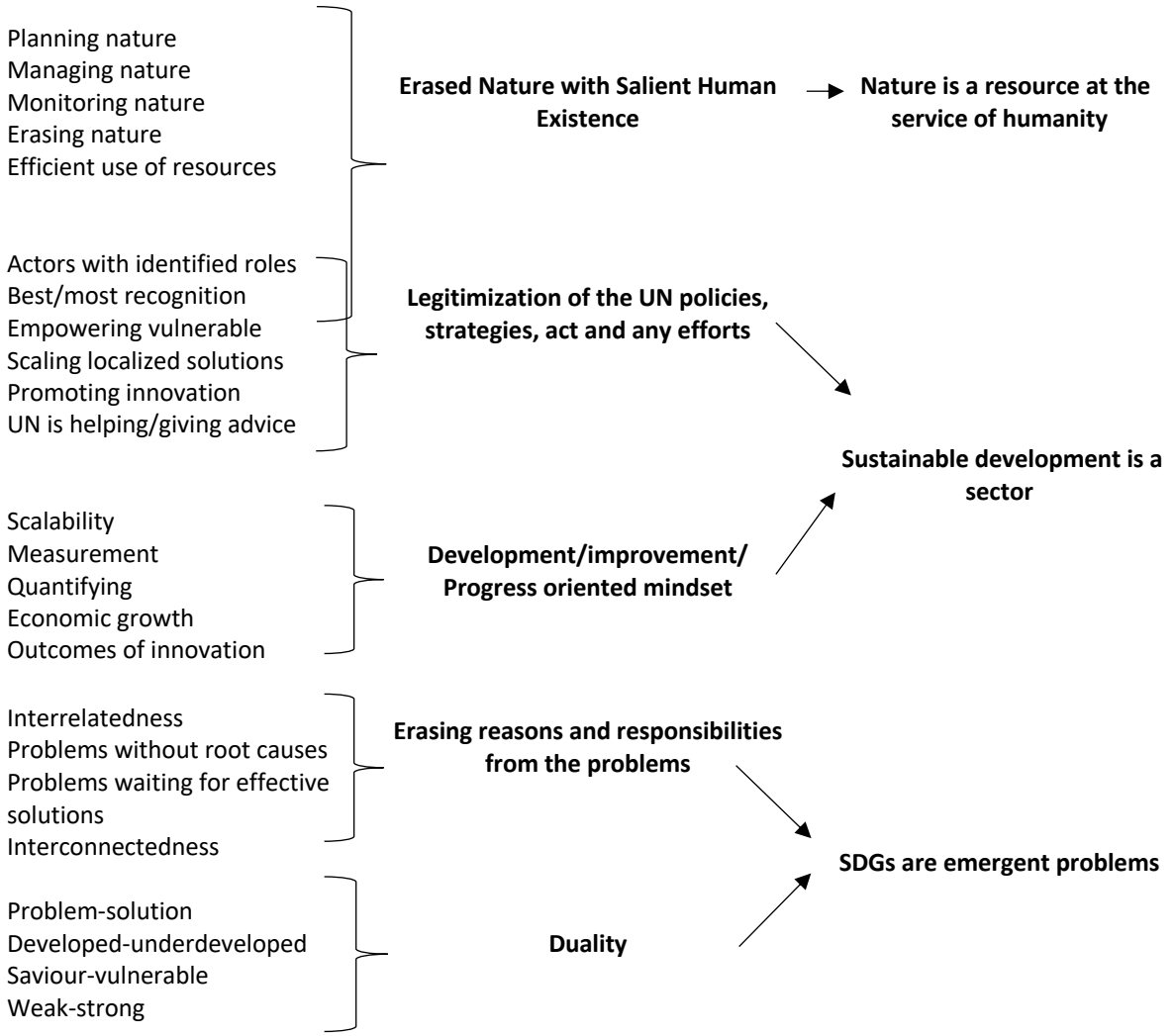
Source: elaborated by the authors (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

Before creating the coding scheme, we derived word frequencies, performed extended lexical search with some key words which were selected based on researchers' own judgment such as technology, innovation, growth, nature, human, people, sustainability, nature etc., and lastly looked some of those key words in their context through utilizing MAXQDA 2020. The aim for this initial analysis is both to approach the data and as analysts to prepare for more detailed analysis.

Coding was conducted iteratively at three layers, starting with text-based N-Vivo coding, creating linkages among categories. During these analytical stages of coding, researchers were interacting with texts both independently and interdependently through creating mind maps to represent the coding structure. Further, researchers noted their feelings and created document memos separately after reading each text. Then, all memos were read and unified to represent each document. Texts were analysed through multiple shifts in the meaning of codes, feelings of researchers and changes in understanding about internal logic of the research. As a result of several analytical stages, we reached data driven first order codes, second order nodes and lastly third level frames as shown in the Figure 2. below.

Fig. 2: Analysis Path





Source: elaborated by the authors (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

3. FINDINGS

This section provides four frames including representative excerpts from the texts, underlying assumptions, and document labels. There are four frames within the texts that feed anthropocentric neo-liberal technocentric ideology: nature is a resource which is impressively mentioned in the UN General Assembly Resolution; SDGs are emergent problems; solution is the innovation on impact reduction with the help of technology; and SD is a sector. The texts mainly emphasize entrepreneurialism in terms of innovation and technology, importance and necessity of economic growth, multiplication and expansion of social innovation which are the main components of neo-liberal technocentric discourse (Fougere *et al*., 2017).

Frame 1: "Nature is a resource at the service of humanity"

Under this frame "Nature" is conceptualized as a resource to be planned, managed, owned and used instead of a living being/organism, then it is stated as "ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources", "achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources", "climate change-related planning and management", "sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests", "forest management". Besides this passivation of nature as something which could be sustainably managed, controlled, efficiently used, all throughout texts nature seems to be erased and human existence is salience and prominent in nature perception.

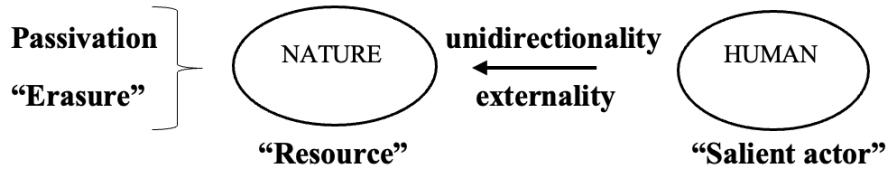
> […] How could the Accelerator Lab strengthen ocean-based economic sectors in a way that promotes the sustainable use of ocean resources? Throughout the year, the Lab focused on boosting a more sustainable form of tourism and supporting fisheries to generate income, reduce waste, and increase renewable energy use. (ACCL_R1, p. 25)

Following excerpts strikingly represent dominance of "people" over nature, thus emphasize the logic of human-centeredness with a belief that humans will save nature.

> […] It is an agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success. (UN GA_Report, p. 12)
>
> […] The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hand. (UN GA_Report, p. 12)
>
> […] They will be people-centered, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind. (UN GA_Report, p. 32)

As a summary all of these, Figure 1 characterize "nature" and "human" relationship under Framework I. According to the representation, nature is associated with humanity, but the relationship between human and nature is unidirectional, human being the salient actor and nature being an external resource.

Fig. 1: Mind Map on Nature and Human Relationship for Framework I



Source: this mind map is based on authors' own elaboration (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

Frame 2: "SDGs are emergent problems"

Under this frame, texts mainly focus on the problems rather than the roots, hence findings revealed that SDGs are framed as emergent problems that emerged out-of-nowhere which are threats to development, challenging and urgent, extrapolated from following excerpts:

> […] As we look at the speed of change around us, and the way many stubborn social and environmental problems morph into new (and usually more entangled) challenges, we're driven by the question – are there best practices for the challenges that we are now facing? (ACCL_R2, p. 26)
>
> […] We're dealing with challenges that emerge and evolve. (ACCL_R2, p. 26.)

Expressions include "climate change" "climate-related hazards" "natural disasters", "desertification", "deforestation", "air pollution" seem to remove the responsibility for these situations and can be interpreted as if these problems do not have causes, happened on their own and have nothing to do with the way that human-beings are organized and living today. "External attribution" is used to connect cause and effect without an understanding of the real mechanisms operating behind the scenes.

The cases of environmental problems presented in the texts are considered problems only insofar as they affect people. "[…] The WHO has estimated that around seven million premature deaths globally are caused by air pollution every year…" convinces the reader that air pollution is dangerous for people, so it is an important problem to be solved. The reasons for air pollution are erased and in addition such phrases underline the mindset that natural issues are important only as long as they affect human beings.

> […] Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades. (UN GA_Report, p. 5)

These emergent problems are not the result of "the development progress made in recent decades" rather they are threats to "development" as stated in Goal 13 (please see the Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly). "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" and "combat desertification" particularly stated in SDG Goal 13 implies a metaphor with an underlying assumption that nature is something out there, separated from us and we should fear it and fight it if necessary.

In addition, the excerpt "the pandemic will turn back the clock on decades of progress, pushing 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020" erases the responsibility of the economic system for the increased poverty. This also indicates

rested paradox in "problem and solution" duality, they are solely regarded as problems which were considered as positive concepts until today.

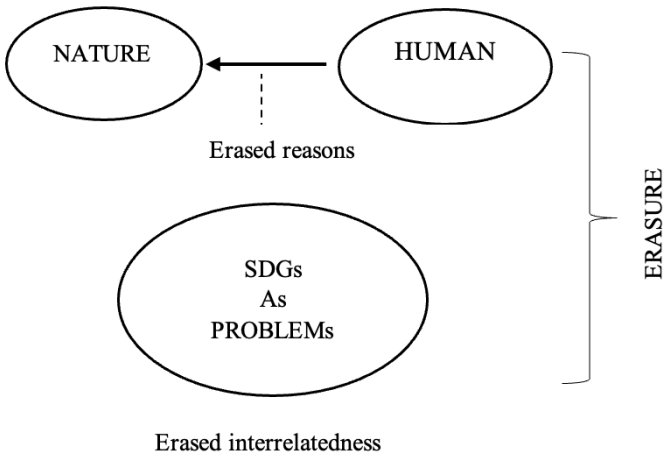
SDGs are labelled as threats and "ills", which is an evaluation that these problems are bad and can "reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades" which correspondingly means that development progress in recent decades is good and desirable.

> […] We started the UNDP Accelerator Lab network deliberately focusing on acceleration: building on what exists, rather than assuming that not-yet invented ideas or technologies are the cure to development ills. (ACCL_R2, p. 14)

Despite acknowledging the interconnectedness of these problems, there are still questions about the "interrelatedness" aspect. Interconnectedness mainly refers "intertwined" and "connected at multiple points or levels", however interrelatedness is used when things have a mutual or reciprocal relation or it indicates parallelism, which then also be correlative.

> […] They are problems that aren't simple to solve. They are compounded by billions of actions and interactions. They change by the minute. They are complex. They are interconnected. (ACCL_B, p. 2.)

Fig: 2: Mind Map on Nature, Human and Problem Relationship for Framework II



Source: this mind map is based on authors' own elaboration (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

Frame 3: "Solution is the "innovation" on the individualized impact reduction with the help of technology"

Presenting the solution as merely reducing the impact via technology and innovation includes convictions and evaluations. The convictions and evaluations are mainly based on the complexity of the problems, and their solution rise in the collaborative approaches in innovation with the help of technology.

> […] These problems […] can't be analysed with five -year-old datasets. And they won't be solved by a singular technological breakthrough. (ACCL_B, p. 2)
>
> […] The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy. (UN_GA_Report, p. 5)

Statements in the texts emphasizing the importance of education, awareness-raising, human and institutional capacity, improvement on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning necessitate urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, therefore seems to convince the reader that the solutions should be aimed at "impact reduction" instead of focusing on the root causes of these problems. It appears in the texts that when the solution is applied the problem will go away. Phrases like "*By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination"* (UN GA_Report, p. 16)", "waste management" also aims to reduce the outcome rather than not producing and consuming hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination or decreasing consumption or production to eliminate waste. "*Based upon these archetypes, the Lab in Ghana is designing a set of behavioural nudges to encourage and accelerate the adoption of recycling practice in the communities*" (ACCL_R2, p. 25), excerpt withdrawn from UNDP Accelerator Labs Story document as an additional indication of erasing the impact of consumerism and salience of outcome on individualized behaviours.

Another conviction revealed from the texts is that the solutions are to be developed by people who are affected by the problems rather than the people that cause these problems therefore "Social Innovation" is conceptualized as 'with people, not for people' as seen in the following excerpt:

> […] By involving community volunteers in collecting and interpreting data, they also help those affected by pollution to see system dynamics and take action against environmental degradation. (ACCL_R7, p. 9)

Among other convictions embedded in the texts including how Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and globalization will benefit human progress also erases the ecological and social outcomes of such technologies.

> […] The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy. (UN_GA_Report, p. 5)

Findings also explicitly attributed higher meaning to "innovation" which is a saviour for humanity in this age against complicated problems. Thus, innovation will save us, everything is for innovation and economic growth and therefore the whole education system should be built on developing such skills is another conviction that are constantly repeated in the texts.

> […] The industries that provide these technologies will thrive in a world that is already dependent on a constant flow of innovation in all aspects of life. The knowledge and skills required to nurture this kind of growth will have to come from the existing workforce as well as younger generations who are still in the education system. (ACCL_R5, p. 23)

> […] Effective education can provide citizens with the tools to help them become successful innovators and better prepare them for life outside of the classroom. (ACCL_R8, p. 17)

Texts also emphasize mission for developed countries as "strengthening developing countries' scientific, technological and innovative capacities to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production" (UN_GA_REPORT, p. 8), then solutions will appear. This again clearly erases the reasons and causes of these developing countries' problems and implies that consumption and production habits will stay the same only in a sustainable fashion.

> […] Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology. (UN_GA_Report, p. 26)

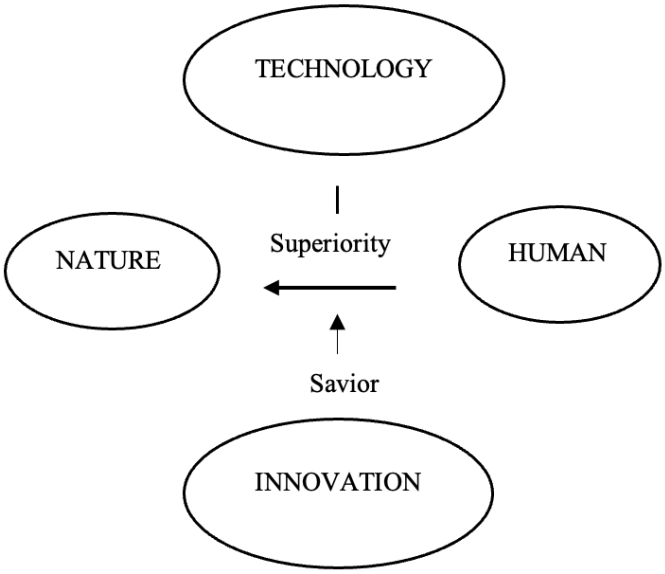
This conviction stresses a "collectivist approach" through collective intelligence which "can be understood as the enhanced capacity that is created when people work together, often with the help of technology, to mobilize a wider range of information, ideas and insights" (ACCL_R6, p. 5). It plainly defines the solution as "Technocentrism" with its illustrated power as detailed:

> […] The power of technology means that machines can now perform some of the functions of intelligence that humans are not so good at – such as processing large volumes of data. (ACCL_R2, p. 20)

Conviction of being faster and bigger also feeds this frame. Time constraints and salience of urgency seem to create a vicious circle which also includes many dead ends stopping humanity to go the so-called planned vision but with oxymoron strategies.

> […] We need to make faster and greater strides towards the SDGs, otherwise those goals will not be achieved by 2030. (ACCL_R2, p. 20)

Fig. 3: Mind Map on Nature, Human and Technology Relationship for Framework III



Source: this mind map is based on authors' own elaboration (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

Frame 4: "Sustainable development is a sector"

The texts frames "Sustainable Development is a sector" [2] in which various identities could be created. The UNDP AL reports reveal these actors and their identified roles. The UN positions itself as a saviour of the "poor and the vulnerable" without any mention about the non-human beings and nature, implying that these concepts are covered under the category of "being vulnerable":

> […] We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. (UN_GA_Report, p. 2)

Therefore, the field, actors and rules of the game have already been defined by the UN, which is the fundamental actor and has a right to define the complete sector with its strategic borders. In this sector "*people who are vulnerable must be empowered"* and "*support and strengthen the participation of local communities"*, therefore the responsibility is placed directly on the vulnerable, and the real responsible performers of these problems are apparently erased.

Texts are also signalling a strategic challenge for the UN as "*how to better orchestrate a broad range of intelligence relevant to the SDGs – from science and data*

[2] In the study, a sector is used to refer to the division of the whole economy in which businesses engage in similar operating activities. The UNDP names Sustainable Development as a sector; therefore, we followed the same terminology for consistency.

to public policy evidence and emerging findings from experiments – to help innovators on the groundwork more effectively" (ACCL_R6, p. 8). which is also making the UN the conductor of the sector. As an important intervention tool into this process, UNDP Accelerator Labs "*…is uniquely positioned to lead on this transformation*" (ACCL_R3, p. 44*)* and "*The Labs are building on local solutions to see where breakthroughs are possible"* (ACCL_R2, p. 17) to scale the local solutions which are emergent.

The method of how it would intervene in this process has already been articulated as follows:

> […] The UNDP Accelerator Labs focuses on three areas of innovation: 1) Grassroots innovation: building on the knowledge and ingenuity of women and men living in poverty and facing the effects of climate change, 2) Collective Intelligence: Tapping into the power of people, data and machines to get smarter together, 3) Portfolios of experiments: To intervene in complex systems, multiple safe-fail interventions are needed. (ACCL_R8, p. 94)

UNDP becomes the leading actor in this sector and convinces the reader about its possible impact on the ever-changing world-order. The UNDP AL also aims for growth through the work of the Labs which are *a time-bound initiative to inject innovation into organizational DNA and taking innovation from a boutique venture to a corporate reflex*:

> […] UNDP has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to promote innovation through initiatives such as the Accelerator Labs and Innovation Facility and we see government adoption of innovation policy as a key ingredient to create the right incentives for bottom-up innovation as part of sustainable development. (ACCL_R8, p. 93)

The metaphor "reflex" (mentioned in ACCL_R11, p. 49) is interesting as it points an action performed without consciousness as a response to a stimulus. This is also humanizing the system and sounds risky as the time for more conscious responses are indeed needed.

The governments have been provided with a role of facilitator to increase investment in technology and innovation, with special emphasis on integrating innovation skills to education. However, the governments, especially of developing countries, are still facing significant "*challenges to achieve sustainable development"* (UN_GA_Report, p. 13) and they are also "*unfamiliar with the new sources of data available."* (ACCL_R6, p. 7). *Therefore*, UNDP is helping them and advising them in that sense. From the texts, we are led to understand that government policy for innovation is regarded as a key ingredient to create the right incentives for bottom-up innovation as part of sustainable development.

If this is a sector, then SDGs are opportunities. This sector is also ruled by success and failure which is all about scalability of social innovation. This sector is also driven by ambition, competition, success orientation and being the "*best*", "*most*",

"*fastest*" etc. Performance of "positive deviance over time" seems to be constantly evaluated and whether they consistently outperform their peers is also checked. Acknowledging the importance of contextuality and intercultural diversity, bright minds, outperformers, positive deviants are the stars of this sector. Thus, the aim of UNDP AL is to find these positive deviants via technology and scale their innovations if they are "worthy of scaling"[3].

> […] Positive Deviance: An approach that seeks to identify outperformers to understand and replicate their strategies and practices within a community. (ACCL_R10, p. 6)
>
> […] This is specifically addressing the question: Is it worth scaling? If it is likely to fulfil certain goals, it is also likely to be worth scaling. (ACCL_R3, p. 11)

This sector is believed to operate most effectively with collective intelligence in which the technology makes full use of human experience.

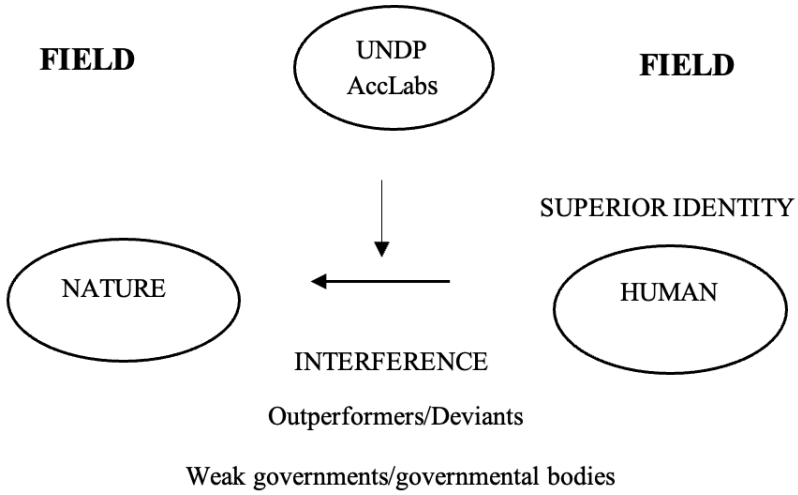
> […] We now need to fully harness the knowledge of the almost eight billion people on the planet – and disseminate their often-surprising solutions and innovative approaches. (ACCL_R6, p. 4)

This idea behind this statement seems that if we can collect all of information and data about all the people on this earth, with the help of ICT and disseminate the innovations, all the problems will be solved.

The multiple identity of private sector companies is somehow erased in the texts in terms of their contribution to SDGS. However, they are encouraged, especially large and transnational companies "*…to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle*". Further, their "*business missions are expected to be more involved in tackling burning global and social issues"* as "*private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation*". (UN_GA_Report, p. 29).

[3] Scaling is common concept in entrepreneurship which indicates a start-ups capacity to grow in a way that its revenues continue to rise faster than its costs.

Fig. 4: Mind Map on Nature, Human and UNDP Relationship for Framework IV



Source: this mind map is based on authors' own elaboration (Ergun & Samur-Teraman, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From an ecocentric perspective, the discourses of UNDP AL can be considered ambivalent; however ambivalent texts are not destructive, but they might be modified to encourage people to flourish with nature. In UNDP AL Reports, nature is framed as a resource to be "used" in a sustainable way, the reduction of overall consumption and production and/or concepts like "degrowth", "deconsumption", etc., are not mentioned at all, nor are the agencies and/or power relations and/or structures and/or mentalities that cause ecological destruction and societal problems.

Considering the ecosophy of the authors which seeks a global reduction in consumption and production and a redistribution of wealth from rich to poor, designing life and ways of living inspired by nature with the intention of enabling humans to become a better-adapted species for life on earth and flourish with nature for nature, the texts seem to be nowhere near it. The documents emphasize the anthropocentric way of human development and business as usual. Consequently, they are unsurprisingly written in an anthropocentric neo-liberal technocentric ideology. The expressions are obviously human-centred. The discourse in these documents employ the mentality that everything is an instrument for human-beings. Everything from nature to technology, human to social innovation are instruments that are valuable only if they can be utilized. The nature is regarded as a resource if it benefits the people, it is seen as a threat when it damages people. When the nature is framed as a resource at the service of human-beings or a threat we should "take action against", its value is determined in terms of the objects' degree of utilization and functionality which diminishes the objects' autonomous, intrinsic, and unique

dimensions. From the texts, in fact, human nature duality leads to the idea of human domination over nature which results in considering nature as resource affects all the other framings and conceptualizations in terms of SI. Human-nature duality also enables to remove the responsibility of humans from the emergence and evolution of the "problems". This problem mindset creates the perception that when the solution is found then the problem diminishes which is not the case most of the time in real life (Stibbe, 2015). Instead of a problem frame, predicament frame can be proposed which encourages people to come up with responses rather than seeing the world as a "problem" and rising with "reactions" (Stibbe, 2015).

We encounter the technocentric convictions of the texts in which the combination of technology, innovation and human will save the planet is further highlighted. The problem with this "innovation-led development" mentality lies in its tendency to evaluate innovation and technology as good without any deep questioning. This can be labelled as "innovation fetish", as harm caused by an innovation and an innovation mindset is not assessed. This innovation and technology fetish diminishes the value of a maintenance perspective and focuses on "improvement" of everything. Notwithstanding, technology and innovation in ecocentric sense can be an important tool for people to find ways to flourish with nature and coexist with other forms of life which would eventually make people a better adapted species for nature. Therefore, moving away from existing ambitious values of having more and growing more is required for such a transformation (Fromm, 1976).

We also encounter the emphasis on the outcome of SI. Although the word outcome is replaced with impact in scaling SI, the difference between the two are ambiguous. In an ecocentric text, intrinsic goals are more valuable as the extrinsic goals caused the ecological damage in the first place. The SI may not be "worth" scaling up, down or deep, however as every object is valuable and deserve support.

The capitalist society's obsession with competition and outcome achievement (Savran, 1998, p. 16) is obvious in the texts. If an innovation solves a problem now, then this is a successful innovation without considering the side effects of these fixes in terms of nature and future generations. Perhaps that's why animals and children are missing in the texts? In the texts, the need for being fast and urgent is emphasized. Although it may sound positive, fast way of living is in fact highly damaging for people and society. To deal with SDGs we might need new reflexes which are in alignment with nature and correspondingly not so competitive. Rather than achieving, being the best, most, fastest, biggest or considering the worth of things due their expansion capacity, we can move on to the value of small things, with modest steps and respecting the timing of nature.

These discourses do not encourage the reader to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and act in a regenerative way with nature (Cachelin *et al.*, 2010). Mühlhäusler (2003, p. 134) stated when "*the concepts… are studied in isolation from its makers or its effects, it can become a commercial commodity*". In the case of the UNDP AL reports, the makers and the causes are erased, and SD is framed as a sector in which SI becomes a commodity. SI in fact substitutes *allowing people to imagine, and practically seek another conceptualization of nature and life,* in other words ecocentrism. Erasure of the key actors responsible for ecological destruction can lead to development of solutions at the wrong level (Schleppegrell, 1997). The current solutions are trying to fix the victims rather than the creators. Therefore, the reports encourage us to think and act about nature if we only encounter any "problem" caused by it. Since reduction in consumption with corresponding redistribution of wealth is not mentioned in the discourses, we can assume that the "buying mood" of people can continue as long as we can solve the problems created by buying and producing. As Bloor and Bloor (2007, p. 12) states, "*how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice*', this way of approaching SI is the "*neoliberal*" ideologies frozen in language.

There is a need for urgent consideration of the human nature duality. It is obvious that we cannot solve the problems with the mindset that created them, we must rethink and encounter where nature stands in this relationship. Acknowledging our embeddedness in nature and designing our lives accordingly might be more regenerating than trying to apply the mainstream innovation concepts in a sugar-coated way, in this case "sustainable-coated" way. The discourses are driven by the mentality of entrepreneurship opportunity. The social innovators in the reports are not regarded as intermediaries of ecology but rather as separate individuals/groups that can dominate nature or society.

Conceptualizing and implementing SI based on four frames derived from the UNDP AL's documents moves the concept of SI far away from the notion of bringing societal change and solve these problems. The SD sector in fact can be regarded as a market innovation. A new market is created which can only develop patches to the issues and if the society keeps the same anthropocentric neoliberal technocentric mentality, this market has a great potential to grow. The current and mainstream SI becomes a substitute for discovering new ways of human organizing and living, in this case ecocentrism. Eventually, SI becomes the obstacle in natural SI and SD. In other words, SI and SD becomes oxymorons. It would be delusional to expect a different result from a sticking plaster since they are being conceptualized and applied with the perspectives that created these problems. By only expanding the behaviour of positive deviants and changing the behaviour of the victims, the societal change, as defined by UNDP and developed nations, is only required of the victims

of these problems not the perpetrators. As a macro societal change in our way of living is not encouraged within the texts, then the current way of living will create new victims.

Besides this study's contribution, we acknowledge that there is quite a long way to reach a complete understanding about what rests behind these discourses. The analysis of the documents might also be supported with in-depth interviews in the future with people who have engaged in shaping these documents in some way. Their views, feelings, assumptions, and/or personal opinions (might be captured easily or implicitly emerge both from casual and formal discussions) would have been valuable resource to deepen the understanding extrapolated from the texts. Besides UNDP AL's documents which were the main focus of this paper, the corpus for critical discourse analysis might be extended by including other reports issued by UNDP and related agencies.

In conclusion UNDP's SI discourse can be considered as a superficial discourse. Instead of a discourse that encourages examination of the current orthodox and anthropocentric views, looking for solutions to the causes of environmental concerns. On the contrary, UNDPs published reporting fails to challenge anthropocentrism, ignoring its failings. In this conceptualization SI can only serve as cosmetic repair. Unfortunately, the UN have failed to grasp that SI has great potential to support planetary regeneration. Our ecosophy should be about designing life and ways of living in alignment with an ecological paradigm, inspired by nature with an intention that enables humans to become better-adapted species for life on earth to flourish with nature for nature. This necessitates a global reduction in consumption and production and a redistribution of wealth from rich to poor. We call for a deeper understanding of the relationship between organisational behaviour and the planet, that involves the realisation of the reasons for our environmental problems, accepts our dependency on nature, and acknowledges nature's independency from us. There is a need for a perspective and praxis in the form of adaptation to ecological thinking. However, it would appear we are a long way from achieving this ambitious project where power lies in anthropocentrism that controls the dominant narratives we live within.

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