When Innovation lost its Social Character. Or not?

Frank Moulaert

University of Leuven

Belgium

www.frankmoulaert.net Google scholar Moulaert F

Abstract

► Starting from the history of thought and practice of innovation, I will muse on the trajectories of *meanings* and *theorization* of the concept. I will use this history as a mirror to reflect on the relationship between innovation and development.

► I will explain how starting in the 1930s the social meaning of innovation lost its essential character, and innovation its diverse developmental potential.

► I will try to answer three questions:

▪ How to reconnect innovation with its social roots?

▪ And how this reconnecting can lead to a more integrated approach to the relationship between innovation and development in all its human dimensions?

▪ And what could be policy leads emerging from such an approach?

Outline

- Critical issues in the theory of innovation and development

- The history of innovation Thought and Practice … Contemporary fragmentation in innovation (systems) analysis – How human(e) is innovation?

- Reconnecting innovation with its social roots

- Innovation and development: socialising innovation and diversifying strategic agencies

- Challenges for social science

- Policy relevance

Critical issues in the theory of innovation and development

A few observations from the first day of the Globelics conference:

Lundvall citing Freeman:

"**Science and technology** have much to offer to solve the problems of mankind, if the insti**tutional settings** allow people have the **capacity to learn** not only skills but also new norms and values." (freely paraphrased)

And Lundvall's first major research question:
"What kind of institutional change is necessary to foster **new technological trajectories** that that give first priorities to **ecological sustainability** and the creation of better **living conditions** in the poor countries."

"Innovation systems theory lacks a study of power." […] "Sabato triangle of inclusive innovation" (Rodrigo Arocena)

Critical issues in the theory of innovation and development

It is our observation that the reintegration of innovation in the analysis of (human) development and progress still has a long way to go …

❑ Evolutionary +institutional economics, S&T analysis did a good bit, explaining that technological innovation cannot be studied or prescribed unless it is approached as embedded in a socio-technical system and fostered by institutional dynamics
❑ … but how is such a system analysed?

    ❖ … often in a too instrumentalist way (institutions ➔ technological change)
    ❖ … Reducing social dynamics to institutional dynamics.
    ❖ Underplaying the role of power relations, as Rodrigo Arocena pointed out
    ❖ … Insufficiently accounting for diversity, outlier behaviour, informal socialization

❑ … and how is innovation conceived? Technological, economic, institutional but not social …

❑ … and why is the relationship between **institutional change**, **technological innovation** and **development** so easily analysed as a closed system?

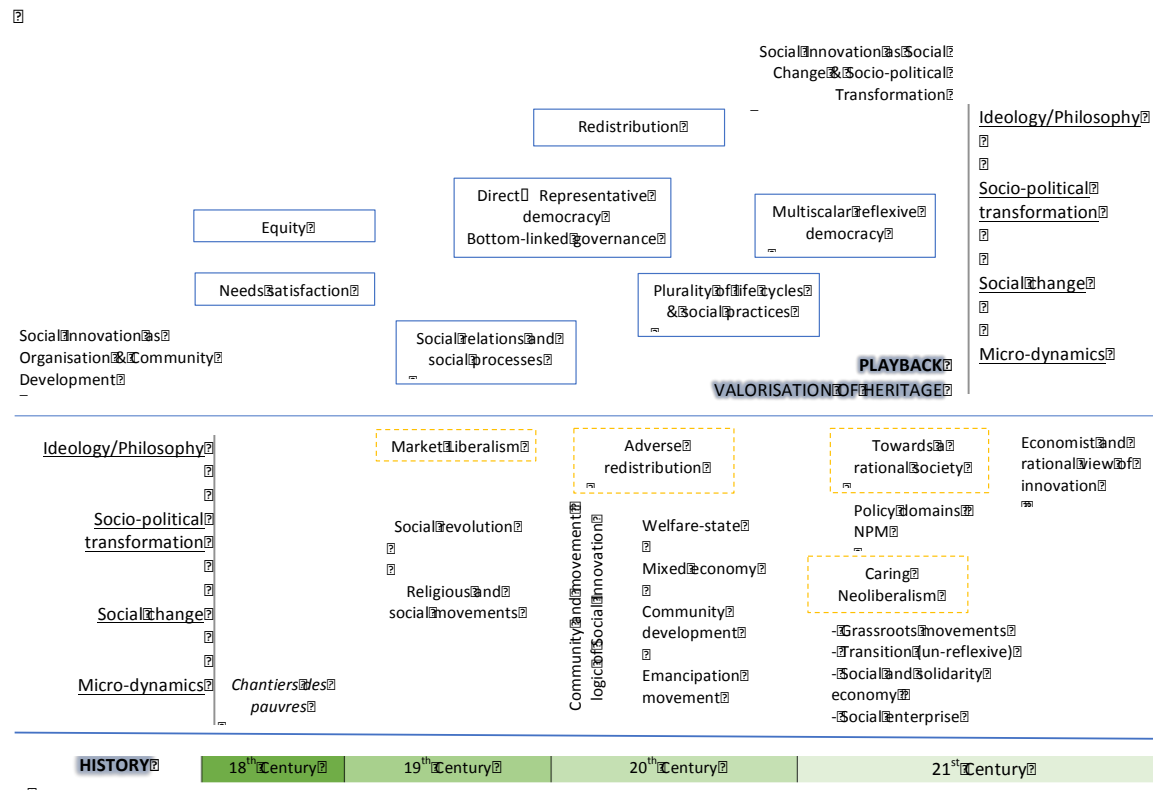# Critical issues in the theory of innovation and development

Let's contribute to deconstruct this closure by:

- Looking at evolving and diverse meanings of innovation as a concept and a practice from the 17th century till now

- … and investigating what it means for the place of diverse types of innovation and other human agencies in socio-economic development

- … with consequences for scientific research, and with some policy leads

The history of Innovation Thought and Practice

▶ Referring to Godin (see bibliography), but also to my own work (Jessop, Moulaert et al.), I argue that **innovation theory** when it started flourishing among academics say around 1950s, and later on among policy makers, had lost touch with the **history of thought and practice of innovation.** *The original meaning of Innovation was much more social, political and cultural, slowly hosting technology in its socio-cultural womb.* But unfortunately the (technological) baby rejected the womb – or redesigned it?

▶ My work on **Territorial Innovation Models and Spatial Innovation** showed the necessity to **look back at this history.** The following figure shows how the meaning of innovation evolved from social, political and religious to technological innovation, which was only coined in the 1930s, and organizational/managerial innovation later on.

History of (Social) Innovation and its potential to influence "Innovation" today

Social Innovation as Social Change & Socio-political Transformation

Ideology/Philosophy

Socio-political transformation

Social change

Micro-dynamics

Redistribution

Direct◻ Representative democracy
Bottom-linked governance

Multiscalar reflexive democracy

Equity

Needs satisfaction

Plurality of life cycles & social practices

Social Innovation as Organisation & Community Development

Social relations and social processes

PLAYBACK
VALORISATION OF HERITAGE

Ideology/Philosophy

Market Liberalism

Adverse redistribution

Towards a rational society

Economist and rational view of innovation

Socio-political transformation

Social revolution

Welfare-state

Policy domains NPM

Mixed economy

Caring Neoliberalism

Social change

Religious and social movements

Community development

- Grassroots movements
- Transition (un-reflexive)
- Social and solidarity economy
- Social enterprise

Micro-dynamics

Chantiers des pauvres

Emancipation movement

Community and movement logic of Social Innovation

HISTORY

| 18th Century | 19th Century | 20th Century | 21st Century |

Reconnecting innovation with its social roots

▶ Discursive, analytical and practical uses and meanings of innovation have changed over the centuries.

▶ Various political, social, cultural and scientific forces have played a role in these dynamics.

▶ In a way these dynamics are a mirror of the complexity of the changing society in which innovation has been aspired, pursued or taken place.

▶ The previous figure is useful is rebuilding the place of innovation in the analysis of societal development, and at interconnected spatial scales.

Challenges for social science

How to do this rebuilding?

o Reconnect collective human agency to development. The 19th century Historical School, 20th century development theories offer significant material to do so.

o Reposition *innovation* among other categories of collective human agency fostering development such as cultural emancipation, bottom-linked governance, participatory governance. This could, among others, been done by further detailing the different meanings of social innovation as given in the figure.

o Deconstruct the 'innovation idealism' (denovation, trial and error, failure, undo innovation, return to 'old', …)

o Reconsider the different meanings of institutions, governance, … Starting from a broader discussion on the different characters of social relations, the relations between development, social change and innovation along other types of collective agency … Institutions are any form of instituted or established social relations. (*Informal institutionalization* is not a contradiction.)

o Musing about the different historical meanings of innovation and social innovation can also be helpful to *deconstruct the nature of systems*. There is a great need for innovation scholars to read the critical literature on (innovation) systems.

Policy relevance

▶ Let's figure out what some of these critical reflections mean for *governance* and its *practice*. Let's do this using a small table …

▶ The table mixes empirically observed and desired features of governance (the latter being important for institutional change)

Policy relevance

Dimensions of governance	Adaptive governance 'systems approach'	Bottom-linked governance
Agents involved – Types of agencies	Experts, pro-active agents, managers, …	Inclusive (silent min- or maj-orities), leaders, collective leadership, activists, mobilization,…
Social fabric	Organized networks, lobby and power relations, official institutions	Community initiatives, social movements, breaking through uneven power relations, …
Rationalities	Target-oriented, communicative rationality	Multi and – irrationality – Psychological complexity of human beings
Reflexivity	Target-oriented, institutional efficiency, self-assessment	Negotiating diverse values and desires
Accountability	Essentialist justification (score boards)	Dialogical justification

Policy relevance

This table is not complete but gives an idea on how we could move to more inclusive governance, an issue that is of penultimate importance for the future of Europe.

If we project the issues addressed in the table onto the meaning of *learning*, we can draw a number of conclusions. Let's focus on the role of leadership in politics … politicians and '**good leadership**' for collective learning processes:

- Combining managerial with communicative capacity
- Being able of sharing leadership
- Being able to deal with multi-vocality and diversity
- Build up immunity to inequality reïnforcing power games
- Know the social fabric where the collective learning unrolls (develop phronesis from participative practice)
- Psycho-analysis …

Conclusion (and/or points to develop further)

▶ Innovation occurs in a very diverse society. This diversity cannot be grasped in terms of socio-technical and institutional trajectories only.

▶ Innovation has many faces. Its history is a pedagogical mirror to interrogate its different dimensions and its relations to other collective agencies, such as emancipation movements, socio-cultural association and governance.

▶ Governance encompasses a social reality that cannot be grasped in a rationalized systemic road-map. It is a complex hybrid of different modes of coordination.

▶ It requires open-minded learning processes respecting the ethics of social innovation (respectful communication, association, reciprocity, …).

▶ Ethical political leadership is essential in open-minded learning processes.

▶ The complexity of innovation and development requires interdisciplinary research.

Bibliography

▶ Godin, B. and D. Vinck (2017) Critical Studies of Innovation. Alternative Approaches to the Pro-Innovation Bias. Edward Elgar.

▶ Jessop, B., Moulaert, F., Hulgard, L. and Hamdouch, A. (2013) Social innovation research: a new stage in innovation analysis? Chap. 8 in Moulaert, MacCallum et al.

▶ Moulaert, F., MacCallum, D., Mehmood, A. and Hamdouch, A. (2013) The international Handbook on Social Innovation. Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research. Edward Elgar

▶ Moulaert, F., & Sekia, F. (2003). Territorial innovation models: a critical survey. *Regional studies*, *37*(3), 289-302.

▶ Moulaert, F., A. Mehmood, D. MacCallum & B. Leubolt (2017) Social Innovation as a Trigger for Social and Political Transformation. The Role of SI in European SSH research. Policy Review Paper, EC DG Research, forthcoming November 2017

▶ Van Dyck, B. and P. Van den Broeck (2013) Social Innovation; a Territorial Process. Chap. 9 in Moulaert, MacCallum et al.