Please cite the Published Version

Additional Information: This is an Open Access editorial article which appeared in NOvation - Critical Studies of Innovation

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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