

# SOCIAL INNOVATION AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

The article stages spaces and places as habitats of hope and change, resistance and social innovation, with high potential of socio-political transformation. It summarizes two long-term action research trajectories, one in Europe and one in Québec, showing the importance of socially innovative initiatives, governance and institutionalization processes.

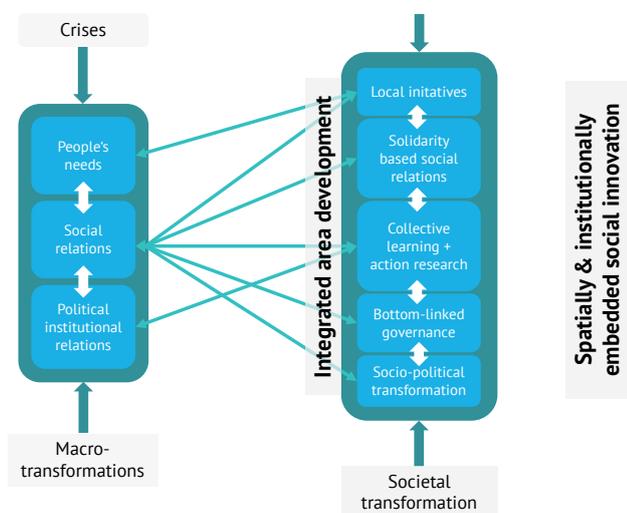
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In the 1980s, in Europe and Canada, social innovation was rediscovered as both a scientific concept and an action slogan for analysing and guiding territorial development, especially in urban areas. Mainly referring to two action research trajectories, one focused on Europe, the other on Québec in Canada, this short article addresses area-based community development from a social innovation perspective. It explains how bottom-linked governance is a *conditio sine qua non* for durable socially-innovative urban commons and why neighbourhoods, socio-spatially identifiable localities and spaces, work as breeding grounds for social innovation.

In section 1, it sheds light on the place of social innovation in territorial development. In the subsequent two sections, it explains two trajectories of territorially rooted socially innovative action- research. The article closes by making some more general reflections on spaces of SI.

## SOCIAL INNOVATION: FROM URBAN STUDIES TO TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Urban studies and the disciplines practicing them have been among the main incubators of social innovation theory. Although the concept of social innovation goes back to the 17/18th century [1] and has been used in many different contexts since then, it only reached scientific status in the debates starting with the social movements in the 1960s, the role of social innovation in the social economy and corporate responsibility, and as a structuring principle in the analysis of local development trajectories and how they have nourished socio-economic change in neighbourhoods, cities and (semi-)rural localities [2]. The original historical meaning of social innovation refers to social change and social transformation. Today its meanings are more diverse and show affinities to different macro-ideologies, the most important being caring neoliberalism and socio-political transformative social innovation [3]. According to the *first ideology* social innovation should pursue more equity among citizens and social groups by 'socialising' market mechanisms: eliminating market failure, thus creating the necessary opportunities to make the market more inclusive, for example by integrating more fragile workers within existing firms, or by providing institutional spaces in which social economy initiatives can build up their own activities, yet in harmony with the market. The *second ideology* starts from the failure of governance and politics in different spheres of society and considers social innovation as a strategy and process not only to satisfy individual and collective needs abused by the market, but to strengthen the solidarity content of social relations between people involved in social innovation initiatives, as well as call up these relations as triggers of socio-political empowerment. Urban studies have almost naturally adopted the view of social innovation following the second ideology; naturally, because of the material, social and political conditions inherent to a territory looking for renewed human development.



Territory in this approach is defined as the localised interconnected spatial forms of the relations between actants (agents, beings, natural substances) living and acting there. These forms can be physical, natural or social. A useful way to characterise a territory is by way of a systems metaphor, as for example done in the Integrated Area Development approach [4] which divides the city in different spheres referring to social and ecological functions which, through different types of (collective) agency, seek integration or enter into greater conflict. In this metaphor *social innovation is organically present in three ways*:

- as the strategies of agents seeking satisfaction of their material, economic, ecological, political and socio-cultural needs;
- as the improvement of spatialised social relations between agents and the socio-ecological relations between actants – a tripartite sustainability perspective in relation building. Improvement here refers to pursuing values such as solidarity, reciprocity and association; respect between and rejection of exploitation of actants by actants;
- as the building, from the revived social relations up, of new territorially based political relations – new governance systems inseeded by the experiences in the socially innovative governance systems cooperatively constructed by socially innovative agents (organizations, social economy firms, associations of actors and actants, etc.).

The (re)building of territory and territorial community is based on the interaction between these spatially embedded strategies, social relations and socio-political empowerment leading to new governance dynamics. In this (re)building process, the intrinsic relationship between action and research is of high interest. By itself, this relationship is an expression of a social innovation practice: it

applies the basic principles of improved social relations and governance to the action-research process itself. When defined, produced, managed and implemented together with all actors involved, research not only is instrumental to understanding and building social innovation, it also becomes a socially innovative practice itself, renewing the theory and practice of research, questioning its hegemonic assumptions, conventions and methods, and stimulating researchers to take up cross-bred roles between research and practice.

We now present two action research trajectories focusing on social innovation in urban territories, and especially the neighbourhood or the 'quartier'. Both trajectories start in the 1980s, but in different parts of the world, with teams who only learned to know each other at the later stage of their research activities (in the 1990s) and started to work together. Both teams have also worked on 'La région sociale' or the 'Social Region' [2][5]. Both trajectories are based on

close relationships between action and research, with roles of different actors often exchanged or shared between actors. For example, consultation, participation and co-construction events are typically the concerted responsibility of researchers, local organizations, leaders of development corporations, etc.

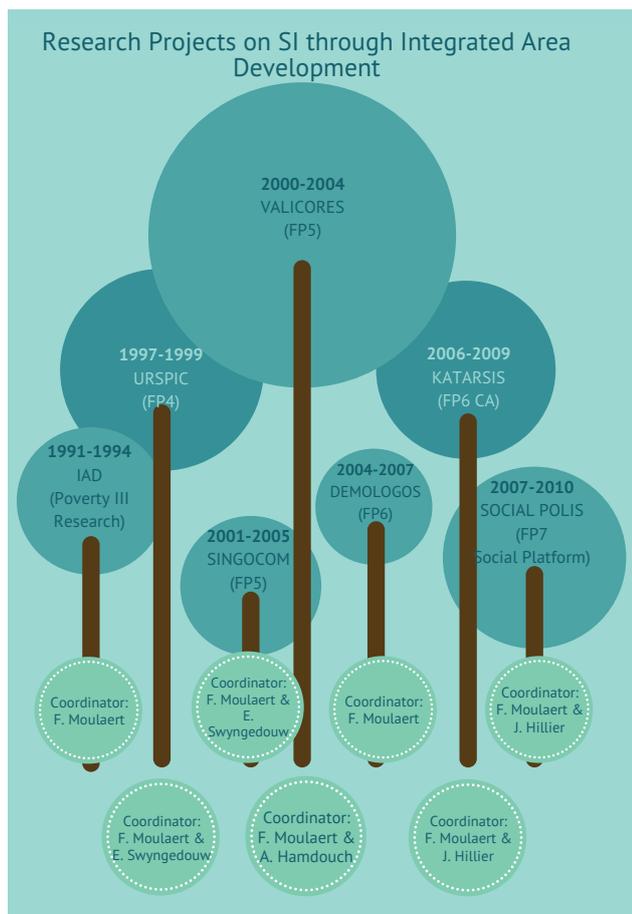
## INTEGRATED AREA DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN CITIES

This action- research trajectory started in the late 1980s / early 1990s as part of the research activities of the European Commission's Poverty III programme, and lasted till 2005. It covered seven research projects with specific objectives, focused on fighting social exclusion in cities and localities, and on analysing their structural and institutional features in which social innovation materialises or could so in the future. Most of these research projects were funded by the EC's Framework Programmes (see infographic on the chronology of research projects).

The base model of this trajectory was Integrated Area Development (IAD), explained above. The model was built through observing socially innovative development trajectories, especially in urban neighbourhoods in decline, e.g. in cities like Bilbao, Antwerp, Athens, Charleroi, Milano etc. Connecting (integrating) strategies, actors, assets, social

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dynamics and neighbourhoods showed the promising way forward for socially inclusive local development. The implementation of the model was supported by institutional dynamics and policies of the time such as the European Commission's Urban Programme, other sections of the European structural funds, national, regional and city-wide urban development programmes in the EC Member States. Several successful cases were identified such as neighbourhood development in North East Antwerp, Quartieri Spagnoli in Naples, Olinda in Milano [4]. The IAD model kept its status as both an analytical guide and action framework in the subsequent projects. URSPIC and DEMOLOGOS focused on the structural and institutional dynamics of alternative territorial development. SINGOCOM gave a more concrete content to the opportunities for social innovation in diverse institutional contexts. VALICORES examined the relationship between social and other types of innovation in development and innovation (systems). KATARSIS and SOCIAL POLIS worked hard to operationalise



Chronology of research projects on social innovation through integrated area development

models for socially innovative action research developing new modes of (transdisciplinary) cooperation between actors, not only applicable at the local level, but also in a wider spatial network.

## TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACTION RESEARCH IN URBAN QUÉBEC

Territorially based action research involving scientists, activists, union members, associations and politicians has played an active role in territorial development in Québec since the 1960s. As of the 1980s the role of civil society associations became more explicit. For the Québec case, where interaction between the different state levels (Federal, Provinces, Québec being the only francophone province) and civil society organizations, has been overall synergetic over the last half century, we can argue that “it is a good example of a configuration in which social cohesion relies on important social innovations that have occurred since the 1960s” [6, 7] in many fields, the most important probably being labour, living conditions and local development. Klein et al. characterise the nature of these social innovation dynamics as the interaction between collective governance, co-production of (social) services, co-construction of public

policies and the plural character of the economy. In local development, these dimensions have adopted particular territorial forms. In terms of governance, under pressure of several waves of economic crisis, a more endogenous development perspective was adopted, which went along with a decentralization in state structures (agencies) and the creation of bodies of cooperation and co-production, in which the role of civil society organizations working from specific areas became strategic. Given the economic needs, social movements increasingly took economic initiatives, yet in full respect of the principles of economic democracy. In Montreal, for example, this change in governance was materialised in the creation of Community Economic Development Corporations (CDEC) whose main objectives are to promote the collaboration among the actors at the neighbourhood level to launch ‘partnership-based development projects, support local entrepreneurship for job creation, and improve the employability of unemployed people [7]. The reliability of this approach led to the creation of Local Development Centres (CLDs) as “multiservice organizations bringing together socioeconomic, political and local community centres”. The CLD are operating across Québec, also in outlying regions, at the level of the MRC (“Municipalité régionale de comté”; freely translated as Regional County). In the neighbourhoods, these new governance dynamics created space for influential roles of social movements, especially a leadership position within the Communitarian Development Corporations in Montréal (CEDC). The latter could be considered as an institutionalization of successful bottom-up experiments at the neighbourhood level. Indeed these new state-civil society forms of cooperation created opportunities for co-production and the development of a plural economy. The plural economy model is based on consensus building between economic, social, cultural and political actors, working together to let education, cultural, social services (not the least health services), labour market training and enterprise creation in various sectors synergise with each other. Within the CEDC, soft and hard economic concerns are no longer profiled as antagonistic, but as *reinforcing each other*.

## ALTER SPACES FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION ACTION AND RESEARCH

The two trajectories of territory-rooted social innovation explained in this text show the importance of the interaction between new socially innovative initiatives on the one hand (housing experiments, people-centred learning, solidarity-based work spaces, alter networks of action research, etc.), governance and institutionalization processes on the other hand.

The involvement of civil society organizations in the building of new forms of territorial cooperation fostered more democratic forms of governance (especially bottom-linked governance), opening up the range of economic activities

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The strength of the Quebec model compared to that of many of the European countries, is that state and civil society symbiosis has led to shared institutionalization, while in the European context the state and private market sector have pushed civil society organizations into a subsidiary role; and this despite the innovative role many of these actors have played in setting up socially innovative initiatives and modes of governance [3][4][6]. In Western Europe neoliberalism has privileged policies which reduce social innovation initiatives to instruments for rationalising the welfare sector and accompany socially innovative enterprises onto the road to the market economy. This trend also tends to reinforce the trend to reduce social innovation to the

creation of social enterprises, thus underplaying different other dimensions of social innovation such as building solidarity relations in neighbourhoods and democratising urban governance. Fortunately, there is mushrooming of social innovation initiatives beyond the state realm that keep

experimenting new social initiatives, relationships and modes of governance. Moreover, hope has risen because of the growing disapproval of citizens with European neoliberalism, with electoral expressions more in favour of territorial development despite the global market. The political translation of the Indignados movement into Podemos and other political formations, strongly defending new housing and neighbourhood policy in local governments, is probably the most explicit expression of such transformation till now. But also the

fighting back on both the Left and the Right of rural communities regain the right to local initiatives in agriculture, food production, culture and education, social services and so forth, as expressed during the recent French (presidential) electoral campaign, is politically significant.

Spaces and places as habitats of hope and change are a very important focus in social innovation action research today. In addition to the references cited in this short article, several other cases of places of resistance and social innovation have recently been covered in the literature as triggers of socio-political transformation, judged as absolutely necessary to guarantee the future of happiness for all [8].

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