

Enabling social
innovation – opportunities
for sustainable local and
regional development

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of a doctorate study that is exploring relationships between social innovation, local and regional development, and public policy and programs. The study design reflects the ‘social plasticity’ orientation core to social innovation theory and practice. This is demonstrated, in part, through the exploration of a ‘language politics’ that seeks to position enabling social innovation as a key strategy for generating more sustainable forms of local and regional development.

Drawing on the work of key theorists, a typology is being developed to characterise social innovation activity across three aspects - social relations dynamics, diverse economic agents and processes, and social market dimensions. In this paper, the typology is outlined and demonstrated through application to case examples that are being developed as part of the study. Generative workshops with ‘users’ have been held - exploring responses to the typology and social innovation concepts more generally - and a discussion on emergent themes is provided.

1 Conceptual framework

Local and regional development programs can be deeply connected to the people and places that are impacted by complex social and environmental issues. Local actors and assemblages have the capacity to drive adaptation to globally disruptive change (Pike et al, 2011, p.1) and to shape resilient and diverse communities. However, historical approaches to local and regional development reflect a predominance of ‘market-economic’ strategies (MacCallum et al 2009, p.1) that privilege for-personal-gain models of activity, at the expense of broader wellbeing objectives. These approaches narrowly interpret ‘development’ through traditional economic growth parameters and promote competitive advantage as the primary concern of economic development (Bristow 2005, p.285).

Competitiveness strategies provide clear performance objectives for individual firms, but places are much more complex. In effect, place-based competition strategies can have significant long-term negative consequences for regional development (Bristow 2011), particularly when competitiveness is sought through low cost. Tax incentives, bidding wars and the like deprive local and regional authorities of resources to invest in the quality of public services and amenities, and often place a controlling interest in the hands of profit-oriented stakeholders (such as ‘absentee landlords’), at the expense of building local capacities.

Competitiveness-based strategies are increasingly under attack for concentrating on the promotion of a place’s assets, rather than their development; for over-simplifying complex issues for the sake of policy agendas; and for failing to account for longer term impacts (Bristow 2011, p348-349). Pike et al note, however, that whilst there continues to be a diversity of opinion about what local and regional development should seek to achieve, that a broadening awareness of the limitations of the longstanding ‘economic and quantitative’ focus in local and regional development is generating interest in “. . . sustainable social, cultural, political and environmental dimensions and more qualitative, even subjective, concerns about . . . quality of life and wellbeing” (2011, p.3). These concerns are similar to those that drive social innovation activity.

1.1 Social innovation and public policy

Innovation is a complex, much debated concept in the literature and in practice. Following Schumpeter, it is understood to come from within the economic system, embodying the process of creative destruction that generates economic development (2010 [1943], p.71-75).

Social innovation is a similarly complex concept that combines all the vagaries of innovation processes with the messy nature of social issues and outcomes. Increasingly however, definitional debates accept that social innovation has two components: addressing issues in social relations - also called process changes; and addressing social needs - also called outcomes changes. In this, both the 'ends' and the 'means' are implicated - social innovations being 'good for society', whilst also improving the capacity of citizens to act (see Nicholls & Murdock, 2012 and Mulgan, 2012). These two components are also characteristic of sustainable forms of local and regional development¹ - defined as people centred, environmentally responsible and economically diverse.

To date, the role of public policy has been largely neglected in social innovation scholarship (Moore et al 2012, p.89), and material on the local and regional development context is particularly limited. Existing work that brings these two strands together is primarily focused on social exclusion, voice in governance and decision-making, and social organising (for example, see Moulaert et al, 2005 and MacCallum et al, 2009), and is therefore characterised as part of the 'social relations' conceptual strand of social innovation theory (Nicholls & Murdock 2012, p.17).

However, drawing on developments in practice, policy interest in social innovation is growing (see Moulaert et al 2013 and Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan 2010) and is positioned as having the potential to work as a 'sixth-wave' of modern macro-innovation in response to complex issues². Commentators suggest that the current period can be likened to that of the 1930s (Perez, 2009), where economic and social crises acted as a 'hinge between an old world and a new' (Murray 2009, p.5).

In this way recent (and ongoing) crises can be seen as creating openings in the prevailing economic discourse (Gibson-Graham 2006), making way for a 'wave' of creation and innovation that is concerned with (in some combination) reconfiguring social and political relations, reducing environmental impacts, and contributing to building inclusive and resilient economies. Innovations appearing as a result of this surge of interest are social innovations, being generally pragmatic in focus [address social needs] and being driven from within all sectors and by individuals [increase capacity to act] (Murray 2009, p.17).

This study seeks to shed light on the key contribution social innovation can make towards generating more sustainable forms of local and regional development, and the role the public sector can play in enabling this.

1 For a useful discussion on historical and emerging conceptualisations of the relationships between sustainability, social sustainability and social innovation see: Parra 2013.

2 The previous five waves are considered to have been driven by innovations in: 1780s-1840s - iron, cotton mechanisation, steam power; 1850s-1890s - railways, steel, coal, steam motors; 1890s-1930s - electric power, chemicals, synthetic materials, early combustion engines; 1940s-1970s - electrical and light engineering, petrochemicals, motor industry; 1970s on - electronics, information technology (Pike et al 2006; also see Nicholls & Murdock 2012, p.1).

2 Research process

This paper is based on research that is part of a current doctorate study³. The qualitative study is inductive, exploratory and descriptive in nature. It has an intentionally generative focus, involving 'users' (in this case, public sector officers) in the research process and ultimately seeking to support their work. The research question formulated to guide the study is:

How do public policy and programs enable social innovation activity that contributes to more sustainable forms of local and regional development?

The specific aims of the study are:

- to position social innovation activity as an economic process, whilst also broadening the understanding of what constitutes 'economic'
- to open up discussion about enabling more sustainable forms of local and regional development
- to assist with positioning public sector social innovation enabling work more effectively within a policy and programs context

To achieve these aims a two-stage data gathering process was designed. Coming out of the first stage, 23 case examples from around the world are in development⁴. Together these provide a sense of: the diversity of roles the public sector can play in enabling social innovation; the breadth of social and environmental issues that social innovation activity can contribute to; and the levels of local and regional development focus possible (from neighbourhoods to large regions, such as whole states/provinces). The focus in each case is on the social innovation activity itself, and in particular the range of assemblages it both generates and relies upon⁵.

A key component of the study is the development of a typology. Through the typology, the intention is to characterise several aspects of social innovation activity that often remain invisible, or are confusing, to public policy makers and/or program staff. In effect, the typology contributes to creating a 'language politics' around social innovation activity – seeking to position it within the mainstream economic discourse, and more clearly within the context of public policy and programs.

3 Due for completion by February 2015. It draws on experience supporting social innovation, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship activity over the past twelve years (mostly in Australia), and this experience also underpins the interest in public sector enabling roles. The study builds on three previous papers (McNeill 2009, 2011, 2012) and a book project (Kernot & McNeill 2011). A key motivation in undertaking the doctorate was to bring together practical and academic experience, and provide some opportunity for each to inform and ground the other.

4 The development of the case examples is drawing on interviews and desktop research. The majority of the 44 interviews (with 53 participants) were completed in May 2013 and were conducted face-to-face, with a small number being via Skype. Multiple perspectives were sought for each, and this was achieved in 17 of the 23 cases.

5 The study approach is based on an interest in 'learning rather than judging', in 'experimenting' rather than confirming what is already known (Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2009). The focus therefore is not on assessing 'good' or 'bad' examples of public policy and programs, but rather on generating energy and insight around attempts to enable social innovation to establish, survive and thrive.

The stage two research activities sought input to the typology, and explored thinking around social innovation concepts more generally. Two ‘user’ groups were chosen for this activity – Australian public sector officers, and residents and enterprise representatives from a specific locality⁶. In addition to seeking participants’ feedback, it was considered important that they found their involvement generative, and there was therefore an emphasis on also providing content on, and space for, exploration of key concepts that they could potentially apply to their work and interests.

3 Characterising social innovation – a ‘language politics’

Through the typology under development a key objective is to characterise social innovation activity in language that ‘carries weight’ in mainstream economic discourse, and that could assist with structuring enabling efforts in a public policy and programs context. The discussion below outlines the draft typology and applies it to the case examples.

The starting point for the typology development was the definition of social innovation discussed above – ie. activity that addresses issues in social relations (process changes) whilst also addressing social needs (outcome changes).

The ‘social relations’ (capacity to act) component of the definition has been characterised through consideration of the ‘ways of organising’ that contribute to the activity. Verweij et al identify four ways of ‘organising, perceiving and justifying social relations’ – egalitarianism, hierarchy, individualism and fatalism (2011, p2-3). The first three of these are the main focus of this study, with ‘hierarchical authority’ also helping to illustrate the public sector enabling role. As suggested by Taylor (2012), mobilising the three key sources of social power, whilst also navigating the inherent tensions between them, has potential to generate more robust approaches to engaging with complex issues. Including ‘ways of organising’ concepts in the typology facilitates identifying where interesting assemblages that contribute to improving social relations dynamics may be involved.

The ‘social needs’ (social outcomes) component of the definition is characterised through two aspects within the typology. The choice of these reflects an interest in exploring financially maintainable responses to complex social and environmental issues⁷. The two aspects chosen therefore aim to highlight the economic agents and processes involved, and to consider social market dimensions of the social innovation activity.

6 The input of Australian public sector officers was sought through a workshop and through a small number of interviews. The specific objectives of this research activity were to: build capacity around social innovation concepts and language; seek input to the approach being developed; share knowledge and experiences amongst peers; and provide content that may assist participants with their own work. The 13 participants were hand-picked – coming from all three levels of government (local, state, federal), with a range of role orientations, and all having had exposure to enabling social innovation activity through their work. The input of the second audience group was also sought through a workshop. The specific objectives of this research activity were to: explore understandings of social innovation concepts; build understanding about what social innovation is, and how it could benefit a specific ‘place’; and explore participants’ views on public sector involvement in enabling social innovation activity. Participants were again hand-picked for their interest in social innovation, and comprised residents and representatives of local enterprises (with a number wearing ‘both hats’) connected to the Parramatta Local Government Area (LGA) in Sydney, Australia. The ‘place’ orientation was chosen to connect with the local and regional development focus of the study. This activity phase of the study was completed on 15 October 2013.

7 Please note that the suggestion is not that social innovation activity should be commodified, or that activity that lends itself to this type of characterisation is somehow more ‘worthy’ than other forms. There are many important and successful social innovation activities that are shorter term in focus, and for which resources to deliver on the specific objective are available. However, in a climate of shrinking public resources there is increasing recognition (for example, Brandsen 2013) that social innovations that incorporate a revenue generation model are more likely to maintain over time, and where there is interest in and need for a longer term approach to improving social relations and addressing social needs this is an important consideration.

The first of the two ‘social needs’ related aspects applies a diverse economies lens. The Diverse Economies Framework⁸ is grouped around the traditional categorisations of labour, transactions, property, enterprise and finance. The focus is on alternative market and non-market activity as these are the sub-sets that are often invisible and/or not well understood. Examples of agents and processes within each of these categories, interpreted for a public policy and programs context, include (but are not limited to):

- Labour: secondments, student participation, work for welfare, in-kind, volunteer, self-provisioning
- Transactions: equal partner collaborations, social procurement, shared back-room-services arrangements, local currencies, barter, household sharing, gleaning
- Property: publicly owned hard assets, publicly owned ‘soft’ assets (eg. data sets), nonprofit organisation assets, community land trusts, open-source intellectual property, creative commons
- Enterprise: public-sector owned enterprises, social businesses, employee owned enterprises, community owned enterprises, cooperatives, social enterprises, nonprofits
- Finance: social investment products, community bonds, micro-finance, interest free loans, grants, crowd-funding

The second of the ‘social needs’ related aspects take the economic lens a step further by incorporating the dimensions of social market activity. This aspect assists with exploring how market concepts apply to those types of social innovation that are seeking, or have potential to generate, longer term and financially maintainable responses to complex issues⁹. Schumpeter’s five dimensions of innovation are the basis for this aspect¹⁰, and are summarised here as:

1. New or improved product or service
2. New or improved method of production or service delivery
3. New market or new entrant to an existing market
4. New source of supply or supply chain
5. New model (more efficient or effective organisation of a sector)¹¹

Through the application of the typology to each of the case examples, the contribution of the social innovation activity to generating more sustainable forms of local and regional development is also described.

⁸ See <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas> for a summary.

⁹ See Footnote 6 for a note on why this focus has been chosen for this study.

¹⁰ As interpreted into the social innovation context by Nicholls & Murdock (2011, p11-12).

¹¹ This dimension is also interpreted as the level where efforts concerned with ‘systemic innovation’ are focused.

3.1 Typology demonstrated

The final thesis will include all 23 of the case examples, characterised through each aspect of the typology¹². Within the scope of this paper, a summary version of two is provided to demonstrate how the typology could work in practice¹³.

Northamptonshire Libraries

As a result of significant reductions in local authority budgets in the UK, Northamptonshire's Library Services were reviewed in 2011. The approach developed has been applied to all 36 static library sites across the county. The local authority continues to fund the service and to provide professional staff into each library, but on a reduced basis and with volunteers providing add-on and wraparound support. As at May 2013 there were over 820 volunteers supporting 26 Libraries Friends groups. The libraries work closely with a wide range of community and local business organisations, and host many of their activities. Through their expanded roles and the increased involvement of community members, the Northamptonshire Libraries are becoming true community hubs.

Table 1 – Northamptonshire Libraries typology table

Ways of organising	Individual residents did not want to lose their local libraries, and lobbied the Council to look for creative options; they were also willing to contribute some of their time to keep the libraries open. Community members, nonprofit organisations and some local businesses, have worked together to design and implement a solution that provides outcomes for the whole community. Volunteers are gaining skills and experience, and are working together to initiate and deliver local projects. They now have a strong voice in library decision-making, as their involvement is central to the libraries remaining open. The Council was open to looking at alternatives to closing or reducing the library services. It facilitated a process that engaged local communities in the decision making, and was willing to work with a model that reduces its control and requires it to prioritise respectful and supportive relationships with its communities. It now sees a much more strategic role for the libraries, recognising that they sit at the heart of its relationships with local people.	
Diverse economic agents / processes	Labour	By working closely and respectfully with a willing non-market source of labour, the Council has succeeded in turning a threat to its service delivery into an opportunity. A ‘time bank’ model is central to the approach, and care has been taken to design roles that cover a wide range of volunteering motivations. Volunteers are also offered free adult learning opportunities.
Dimension of social market activity	Improved service	Access to a number of services within the County have been improved, for example: libraries now open at hours that local residents can use them (weekends and after work hours); libraries now offer a range of targeted courses and training opportunities; and a range of other Council services are being delivered through the libraries (eg. collection of parking permits).

12 Appendix A provides a listing of all the case examples participating in the study.

13 To provide some sense of the diversity, one of those included has a local focus and 'new service' dimension, and the other has a regional focus and 'new model' market dimension. In these two the public sector role is very central – please note that the full set includes a number of examples where other entity/s are driving the social innovation activity, and the public sector is playing a less central (but enabling) role.

Sustainable local & regional development	Despite significantly reduced funding Council and its local communities have succeeded in not just retaining their libraries, but improving access to them and other services. The library sites are becoming community hubs, and interactions between people are increasing. Other organisations in the area are utilising the library spaces, contributing to revenue generation and also creating opportunities for collaboration between services and participants around issues like employment and training. Spin-off projects are emerging, such as a re-use shop that is raising funds for the libraries and is proving attractive to younger people in the community. The libraries model is rejuvenating public assets and empowering local citizens to act in the interests of their communities.
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KOMOSIE

KOMOSIE manages two reuse and energy saving brands in Belgium, De Kringwinkel and Energiesnoeiers. De Kringwinkel is the shopfront brand for a federation of 31 Re-use Centres across the Flanders Region of Belgium, who jointly established KOMOSIE as a membership-based advocacy and coordination entity. With the support it is able to provide to the members, the Re-use Centres now have a network of 118 high quality, well designed and laid out shops selling used goods. KOMOSIE and its members invest strongly in the De Kringwinkel brand and the shops have evolved from being seen as ‘dusty’ unpopular second hand shops to young and ‘on-trend’. Combined, the De Kringwinkel and Energiesnoeiers enterprises make KOMOSIE Europe’s largest social franchise.

Table 2 – KOMOSIE typology table

Ways of organising	Individuals donate items to the re-use centres and individuals engage with the employment opportunities provided by the KOMOSIE network. Each Re-Use Centre is its own entity, and they are all members of the KOMOSIE network - this combines the strength of grass-roots knowledge and participatory decision-making, with a coordinated and professional approach. Working together over many years, the Flanders Government’s Work & Social Economy and OVAM (waste management) Departments have established a range of policies and programs that enabled the establishment of the Re-use Centres as robust and sustainable enterprises that assist the government to deliver on its policy objectives around waste reduction and employment. KOMOSIE’s coordinating role is seen as critical as it ensures an efficient approach to contract management and other operational matters, and support for this is built into the model.
Diverse economic agents / processes	Enterprise Both KOMOSIE and the individual Re-use Centres are established as social enterprises, ensuring a primary focus on increasing social and environmental impact, which continues to grow and develop. Through creating designated areas for each of the 31 Re-use Centres and requiring the local authorities in each area to work with them the Flanders Government has enabled a robust social enterprise network to establish and flourish.

Dimension of social market activity	New model	Through overcoming departmental silos, supporting the KOMOSIE network allows the government to deliver on its policy objectives around both waste and employment. It delivers an effective and efficient model for increasing the level of reuse, decreasing landfill and creating sustainable employment opportunities for people in the ‘most distant from labour market’ category.
Sustainable local & regional development		The Re-Use Centres and shops employ around 5 000 people, and over 80% of these were previously long term unemployed or with limited education levels. The model also diverts over 59 000 tons of reusable material a year from landfill, has 3.6 million customers, and a turnover in excess of €28.5 million. Identifying the potential for a connection between social and environmental outcomes has led to the creation of a sustainable model that delivers on both sets of objectives. This is now being refined further, to identify ways to continue to improve the outcomes being delivered.

4 Generative focus

As discussed above, a generative focus is central to the study design. This includes seeking input to the development of the typology from potential ‘user’ groups – specifically, to date, this has included the case example interviewees, and the two groups outlined above¹⁴.

Key themes arising from these ‘feedback loop’ activities have been identified and are discussed below. For the purposes of this overview paper, the focus in drawing out these themes was on identifying concepts and language that either enable and/or inhibit participants’ engagement with social innovation theory and practice. This input is informing the further development of the typology, and the themes will be further analysed and developed through the thesis.

4.1 Discussion of key emergent themes

At the broad level, participants in both groups indicated that the style of the sessions was valuable. Most emphasised that they have little time to stay abreast of developments and thinking, and that despite being engaged with social innovation activities that they find much of the social innovation literature difficult to interpret in relation to their work and interests due to length, denseness and the opacity of key conceptual ‘building blocks’. The combination of breaking down conceptual content, followed by opportunities to discuss with peers in relation to their own experiences, was appreciated. A definite appetite for generative ‘conceptual development’ opportunities was evident in both groups.

Both groups responded positively to the grounding of public sector roles around social innovation in a local and regional development context. It was indicated that the specificity of context that a place-based focus allows and requires helps emphasise the unique assemblages of actors and resources on which much social innovation activity relies. The potential for this focus to help divert attention from the preoccupation with the overly simplistic understanding of, and fairly generic approaches to, ‘scaling’ that much public policy suffers from was also raised.

¹⁴ Input from ‘Social Frontiers’ conference participants would also be very welcome.

Definitional

The starting point for each group was a discussion around ‘what is social innovation’, and a definition was presented and discussed¹⁵. Participants in both groups indicated they found social innovation definitions difficult to engage with, in the context of their work and interests. They were thought to be overly theoretical and lacking in practical substance.

Unpacking the definition through the case examples helped to address this, but definitional ‘wieldy-ness’ was considered a substantial barrier in communicating the potential of social innovation activity to community members and key stakeholders¹⁶. It was stressed that case studies are useful in countering this, but that reliance on these can reinforce opinions that social innovation is a ‘soft’ policy area - and consequently impact recognition of its role as a generator of the type of economic activity and outcomes that contribute to more sustainable forms of local and regional development.

Typology

The typology as a whole was seen as a potentially useful tool that provides a structure for unpacking definitional concepts, and for drawing out characteristics that are useful for positioning social innovation more strategically within a public policy and programs context. The use of case examples to step-through conceptual elements was considered especially helpful for developing capacities, bringing the material to life and also grounding it in practice. Participants in both groups indicated that a typology-style ‘framework’ could potentially strengthen the proposals, ‘pitches’ and ‘case’ presentations through which many seek support (internal and external) for their enabling efforts.

Participants in both groups were very comfortable with the social relations (process) component of the definition. It resonated with people’s experiences and with interests in ‘improving capacity to act’ around social needs issues, and generally made sense within their own contexts. It was indicated that the ‘ways of organising’ approach to characterising this component is useful as it helps trace and make visible the social power dynamics involved. It also highlights the interdependency of public policy and programs with local contexts, actors and assemblages.

Participants in both groups were particularly interested in the study’s focus on drawing out economic dimensions of social innovation activity, with this being a key ‘draw card’ for participation. Participants indicated that it can be difficult to identify and convey existing and potential economic dimensions, and these are therefore often missing from their own (and others’) accounts of social innovation activity. This was seen as a significant barrier to engaging decision makers and other audiences not already connected with social needs agendas. The diverse economies ‘lens’ helped make visible the economic agents and processes involved, and was therefore seen as a useful tool for communicating in language that resonates with existing policy and program priorities. It was suggested that the economic processes involved in diverse interpretations of ‘transactions’ could, for example, help strengthen the social procurement advocacy and capacity building projects that a number of participants are involved with.

15 The following definition was provided to participants prior to the workshops as a foundation for their engagement with the content: ‘... social innovation works on two levels – addressing issues in social relations (also called process changes), and addressing social needs by establishing or strengthening social markets (also called outcomes changes). Both the ‘ends’ and the ‘means’ are implicated - social innovations being ‘good for society’ whilst also improving the capacity of citizens to act’ (summary based on Nicholls & Murdock 2012, and Mulgan 2012).

16 Aside from the observations about definitions as a whole, two specific issues produced considerable discussion. The absence of any reference to ‘new’ in the definition was confusing, in light of popularly held views of innovation. The language of ‘social markets’ also proved provocative. Further consideration of these two issues is included below.

As noted above, the notion of social markets was the typology element that proved most awkward for participants – in both groups, but particularly the residents and enterprises group – with some expressing concern about trends around commodification of social needs. Our observation is that the language of markets can be alienating as it is associated with policy and program trends that can be unsympathetic to a social needs discourse. This distracts attention away from the potential ‘beyond-partisan’ merits of social innovation activity. The ‘language politics’ being explored here helped unpack this with participants: ‘markets’ is in effect a shorthand label for all the complexities that underpin ‘encountering others’ in order to meet our life needs (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy 2013); this shorthand label conceals and privileges certain approaches to economic development, in a similar way that the language of ‘profit’ has come to obscure the variety of possible ‘surplus flows’ a diverse economies lens helps to highlight.

Despite some difficulties with the concept, the dimensions of social market activity were useful in improving understanding that social innovation occurs at different ‘levels’ within a system. When applied to the case examples, this aspect showed how innovation can exist within any of the five market dimensions – and that whilst there may be potential to eventually impact at a ‘new model’ (or ‘systemic change’) level, that the activity may initiate through and be driven by a humbler or ‘closer-to-home’ goal. This was considered important in supporting the emergence of new social innovation activity as otherwise the scope of the task can discourage engagement - across all sectors and at the individual citizen level, and particularly for those working locally.

The social markets aspect of the typology also helped to address some of the confusion around where ‘new’ fits. Whilst ‘new’ is absent from the summary definition, unpacking it through the typology locates ‘new or improved’ at the level of each of the social market dimensions. This was seen as an important contribution to the ‘language politics’ as it helps interpret the concepts for practical use, whilst also connecting them to a more mainstream economic discourse. Participants were interested in how the case examples illustrated that, in practice, it may also be the new or different combination (‘bricolage’ effect) of the five dimensions that facilitates an innovation activity.

Adaptive Cycles framework

The public sector officers group was also provided with summary content on the Adaptive Cycles framework proposed by Moore et al (2012)¹⁷. This has been included in the study as it is considered potentially complementary to the typology - adding a life-cycle layer to the agents and processes focus. Participants suggested use of the framework could strengthen the case for resourcing social innovation activities, particularly as it includes recommended public policy approaches for each stage which could help structure how and when to position enabling efforts.

The emphasis in this school of thought on ‘systemic change’ being characteristic of social innovation was somewhat confusing to participants however, as it appeared at odds with the social markets dimensions (different ‘levels’) referred to in many definitions, including the one used for this study (see discussion above).

Whilst the content presented was very preliminary in this regard, there was some consensus that it could be quite powerful to structure thinking around social innovation enabling work through consideration of both life cycle stages and the economic agents and processes involved.

17 Appendix B provides an overview of the content covered - examples drawn from Moore et al’s work and from the Australian context were also provided.

Public sector enabling roles

The two groups were hand-picked for their interest in and exposure to social innovation. It is therefore not surprising that there was general strong support for public sector involvement in stimulating and strengthening activity. However, the content covered helped to expand participants' understanding of the variety of ways this can occur.

Through exploring the case examples, it was demonstrated that roles range from relatively simple activities – such as providing spaces for groups to meet; through to complex and long-ranging approaches – such as legislative and regulatory change. At both the local program level and at a much broader policy level, participants stressed a crucial role for the public sector in facilitating collaboration amongst diverse actors to create clarity around desired outcomes. This was seen as critical for countering the use of restrictive delivery vehicles (eg. output focused contracts) that can inhibit innovation. The need for more flexible 'ways of organising' relationships that involve the public sector was central to this discussion, and the 'transactions' strand of the diverse economies lens was seen as having some potential for supporting innovations in this area.

Through the case examples and the 'ways of organising' aspect of the typology, Verweij et al's 'clumsy solutions' concept¹⁸ was explored and discussed with interest¹⁹. It appeared to provide structure around what participants already see occurring through their work and interests, with a number discussing examples of complex assemblages that have underpinned social innovation activity they have been involved with.

It also drew out a discussion on the difference between policy drivers for enabling social innovation, and program drivers. Whilst a clear policy driver was considered the best case scenario for attracting support for enabling social innovation, it was agreed that much enabling work (particularly during the early stages) occurs at the program level. Many of the public sector participants indicated they often feel the need to 'fly below the radar' to support social innovation activities, as there may be no obvious policy 'hook' to attach their efforts to. In many instances this was identified as at least partly due to narrowly specified objectives that stifle approaches with potential to deliver across policy areas. The ensuing peer-to-peer discussion seemed to help participants think of their efforts as more 'legitimate'. The 'clumsy solutions' concept was also considered useful here, as it highlights the importance of encouraging different perspectives into the discussion and of working with the tensions inherent in social power relations – a strong counter to the dominant view that a top-down policy approach must be in place prior to becoming involved.

18 “... successful solutions to pressing social ills consist of creative and flexible combinations of these different ways of organising, perceiving and justifying social relations ... [and are] what we have come to call 'clumsiness' ...” (Verweij et al 2011, p. 1), and which are preferable to 'elegant' solutions as they place a process of *essential contestation* at the heart of policy making (p.20).

19 Although participants did indicate that they would likely find it difficult to gain traction using these specific words in a public sector context (due to perception issues).

Areas of interest for further development

Participants identified that they would be strongly interested in further developments in the following areas:

- expanding the detail included in case examples
- further refinement of the typology aspects, including relationships between
- additional interpretation of diverse economies concepts for the public sector context
- further documentation of examples of use (eg. case studies) of Moore et al's (2012) recommendations for public policy emphasis at different stages of the life cycle
- exploration of how the typology and life cycle recommendations could potentially be used together
- further documentation of examples of 'clumsy solutions' in practice

In addition to the thesis document, this study will produce an 'industry-focused' (pithier, less academic) report that will be distributed to all participants and other interested parties. The two 'user' groups agreed to reconvene to provide input to a draft of this.

5 Conclusion

The material presented in this paper provides a 'taste' of the data underpinning the thesis development and of the concepts that will be explored further over the coming months as it is refined and documented.

By intentionally directing policies and programs to enable social innovation activity the public sector (at all levels) has a myriad of opportunities to stimulate more sustainable forms of local and regional development. Murray describes an emerging economic landscape that will be made up of 'small units and large systems' (2009, p.9). He suggests that the relationship between 'centres and peripheries' needs to be transformed, to create 'distributed systems' that are capable of pushing complexity out to where the specificity of context is best understood, and away from centrally controlled systems geared to standardise and simplify. This is the territory of 'local and regional'.

But enabling social innovation is complexity personified. The inherent tensions that must be navigated and juggled may be likened to the complexities Latour identifies in his work on re-assembling the social. He argues that the process is "... in large part a painful oscillation between two opposite poles, one more structural [eg. public sector] and the other more pragmatic [eg. civil society actors]. ." (2005, p.168). Latour describes this as a forced migration between the sites of local interaction [eg. local communities and citizens] and global context [eg. public sector policies and programs], and argues that the focus should be on tracing connections between 'the controversies' and registering the links between 'unstable and shifting frames of reference' (2005, p.23-24). This attention to the oscillation between micro-macro-micro processes is foundational to working with and through complexity.

Capacity to act is influenced by the structure of social relations (through inclusivity, engagement, voice, governance) in any given place, and people's interest in and capacity to act is influenced by whether social market needs (access to education, health care, housing, transportation, employment etc) are met. When they are not, it impacts people's capacities to act to address those same needs. This interdependency is at the heart of social innovation processes and illustrates why engaging with complexity must be the foundation on which enabling policies and programs are based. Exploration of how these conceptual themes can be meaningfully translated into practice will be central to further development of the thesis.

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Appendix A – full listing of case examples participating in study

Case example	Local & regional development influence	Where located
atelier d'architecture autogeree	Neighbourhood	Paris, France
Bristol 'Social Enterprise City'	City	Bristol, UK
Centre for Social Innovation's (CSI) Community Bonds	Neighbourhood & City	Toronto, Canada
Chantier de L'Economie Sociale	State / Province	Montreal, Canada
CityMart	Cities (globally)	Barcelona, Spain & Copenhagen, Denmark
Community Ownership & Management of Assets Grants	Neighbourhoods & Towns (nationally)	London, UK
Developing Markets for Third Sector Providers	State / Province (equivalent)	Glasgow, UK
e-Adept	City	Stockholm, Sweden
East Dunbartonshire Dementia Clinics	Local Council Area	East Dunbartonshire, Scotland
El Carillo Studios	City	Santa Barbara, USA
Färdknäppen Housing Community	Neighbourhood & City	Stockholm, Sweden
Fusion21	City & Region	Liverpool, UK
Guifi.net	Region	Catalonia Region, Spain
Independent Transportation Network (ITN) America	Cities (nationally)	Portland, USA
Innobasque Social Innovation	Region	Bilbao, Basque Region, Spain
KOMOSIE	Region	Antwerp, Flanders Region, Belgium

Case example	Local & regional development influence	Where located
La 27e Region	Local Council Areas (nationally)	Paris, France
Lancashire Funding Circle	County Council Area	Preston, UK
Neighbourhood Management Berlin	Neighbourhoods	Berlin, Germany
Northamptonshire Libraries	County Council Area	Northampton, UK
Public & Collaborative: Designing Services for Housing	City	New York, USA
SAIATU 'Hospice at Home'	Region	Bilbao, Basque Region, Spain
Scottish Land Fund	State/Province (equivalent) & Towns	Glasgow, Scotland

Appendix B – summary of Adaptive Cycles concepts discussed at public sector officers' workshop

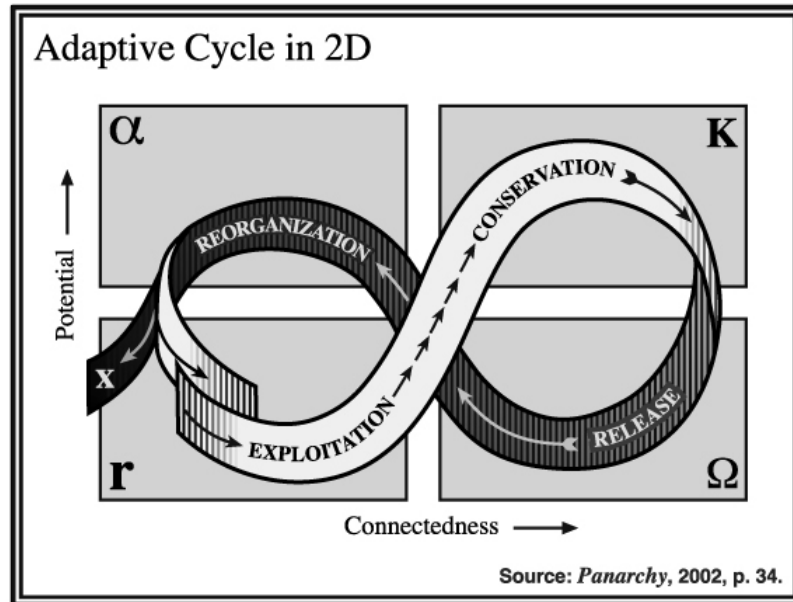


Image sourced from http://www.peopleandplace.net/media_library/image/2008/11/14/adaptive_cycle

Stages of adaptive cycle and suggested policy options (summary of Moore et al 2012, p.92-103):

Stage of adaptive cycle (loop)

Suggested policy options

- **Release** – collapse of rigid, powerful rules & institutions; generation of new interactions; (re)combinations of ideas, people & resources.

Approaches for ‘sense making’ around complex problems, and/or when no tangible innovation clearly exists.
- **Reorganisation** – restructuring around visions; selecting options; new processes; maintaining creativity.

Approaches for reorganising groups around new ideas, visions and innovations and policies to ensure progression to selection of an option.
- **Exploitation** – leverage resources across broad range; launch, stabilise & potentially scale.

Approaches for leveraging resources to stabilise successful innovations, and removing barriers to achieving scale.
- **Conservation** – establishing new norms, skills, efficiencies.

Approaches for institutionalising the innovation, scaling up, and preparing to be resilient in the face of the next disturbance.