

# **Social innovations as repair innovations.** Some paradoxes of governing social change

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Paradoxes of Transformative Social Innovation  
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Overview

**Introduction**

**Social innovation and repair**

**Some paradoxes**

**Conclusion**

## Introduction

- Sociology of technology: - social and technical change  
 - performativity of instruments  
 - means are not neutral towards the ends.
- Innovation studies: - emergence and persistence of dominant designs  
 - change in the direction of “more of the same”  
 - contingent rather than controlled processes.
- Focus on: - paradoxes,  
 - contradictions,  
 - ironies,  
 - dilemmas, and  
 - unintended consequences.

## Social change, institutions, innovation, and repair

# 1

Institutions and social change: behind the backs or in the hands of the actors?

The “Weber” mode of institutions: a rigid iron cage.

“The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. [...] In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the “saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.” But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.”

Weber, M. (1930). The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. London: Allen & Unwin: 181

The “Hughes” mode of institutions: a contingent enterprise.

“It is their fiscal separateness [from the community] and the consequent precariousness of their existence that makes institutions, perforce, enterprises. The entrepreneur is one who undertakes to coordinate the activities of others; he makes decisions and meets contingencies.”

Hughes, E. C. (1936). The ecological aspect of institutions. American Sociological Review, 1(2): 183.

## Social change, institutions, innovation, and repair

# 2

Innovation and repair: progressing or repairing in times of inevitable change?

The “Schumpeter” type of innovation: progress & creative destruction.

- Pressure to change stems from competition within the economy.
- Entrepreneurial invention through technical or economic creativity.
- Supply and demand regulate the diffusion of novelty into innovation.

Schumpeter, J. (1942). Capitalism, socialism and democracy. New York: Harper & Row: pp 81.

The “Ogburn” type of innovation: repair & cultural lag.

- Pressure to change stems from misaligned yet interdependent social spheres.
- Dissolution of the cultural lag through adaptation of the dependent sphere.
- Forces of societal integration balance the misaligned social spheres.

Ogburn, W. F. (1922). Social change. With respect to culture and original nature. New York: Viking Press: pp 200.

## Social change, institutions, innovation, and repair

# 3

Governing social change: two paradoxes from the literature.

Revolutions and small scale social experiments: the “Popper” perspective.

- Large scale utopian revolutions limit societal freedom.
- Piecemeal social engineering transforms society without great revolutions.
- Social change should happen through step-by-step, localised interventions.

Popper, K. (1945). The open society and its enemies. Volume I: Plato. London: Routledge: pp 138.

Intervention and irritation: governability from the “Luhmann” perspective.

- The limits to governability reside in the self-referentiality of systems.
- The effects of governance are both uncontrolled and uncontrollable.
- Results are side-effects, performance deficits, and self-defeating prophecies.

Luhmann, N. (1988). Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp: pp 324.

## Social innovation as repair innovations

Social innovation as repair innovations: A “social” fix to “technical” problems.



Kindergarten: repairing  
the side-effects of  
industrialisation

Today's societal challenges:  
climate / environment  
health / ageing  
participation  
poverty

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_183-31215-0003%2C\\_Th%C3%86rey%2C\\_Spielplatz\\_des\\_Erntekindergarten.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-31215-0003%2C_Th%C3%86rey%2C_Spielplatz_des_Erntekindergarten.jpg)

## Social innovation as a mode and a means of social change

Social innovation as a **general mode** of social change:

- Adaptive solutions to “problematic” situations.
- Mindful inventions in existing practices.
- Increase of social innovations with increasing societal “maladjustments”.

Social innovation as a **specific means** of social change:

- Discursive shift to social innovation as a “dominant design” for social change.
- Bottom up, local initiatives (where politics and markets fail).
- New (participatory & sustainable) ways of addressing societal challenges.
- Creation of reflexive knowledge on social innovation processes.
- Problems of scaling and controlling novel practices upwards.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, including links for HOME, PUBLICATIONS, BLOG, GRAPHICS WAREHOUSE, SCRUTINY TOOLBOX, and ABOUT. The main content area features a post titled "Fostering Social Innovation In The European Union" dated January 19, 2017. The post includes a large orange spiral diagram with six stages: 1 Prompts, 2 Proposals, 3 Prototypes, 4 Sustaining, 5 Scaling, and 6 Systemic change. To the right of the diagram is a smaller graphic with the text "Empowering people, driving change" and the logo for DG BEPA (Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs).

Paradoxes, dilemmas, (un)intended consequences

<u>Fundamental reflexivity</u>	<u>Reflexivity of social order</u>	<u>Reflexivity of consequences</u>
-contingency and choice	-social innovations become promise as well as requirement	-social innovation as a one size-fits-all solution
-in technology assessment: Collingridge dilemma	-social innovations need to be managed and controlled	-more knowledge on social innovations may lead to increased uncertainty
-in social innovations: Unanticipated consequences of purposive social action (Merton)	-the imageries of social innovations become performative models of social change  -creating pressures to comply with dominant rhetoric of creative novelty	-enforcing entrepreneurial / competitive ideology -reifying notions of a linear technical progress  -empowering citizens by retreating state agencies

### When social innovations become social technologies

Social innovations:	Social technologies:
bottom-up participative grassroots	top-down paternalistic entrepreneurial
local / internal creative sustainable	universal / external planned instrumental
contingent	manageable
social empowerment	social fix

### Conclusion

1. Social innovations as repair innovation:  
fixing the “lags” of modern societies.
2. In the EU discourse, the framing of social innovations very much resembles entrepreneurial/technical innovation in the sense of Schumpeter.
3. As a policy instrument, social innovations increasingly take the discursive shape of social technologies – adding to a market/mechanical model of change rather than an evolutionary mode of emergent development.