SOCIAL INNOVATION: A NOVEL POLICY STREAM OR A POLICY COMPROMISE? AN EU PERSPECTIVE.

Matteo Bonifacio

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An EU Perspective.

Matteo Bonifacio, University of Trento, Italy

Is Ass. Professor in Organizational Sciences and Research and Innovation Policy at the University of Trento. He was member of the group of the Policy Advisers of the President of the European Commission (BEPA) on research, higher education and innovation where he co-authored the EC report on Social Innovation. Previously he was Policy Developer at the European Commission as member of the team to develop the proposal and regulation to establish the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. Formerly, he has been program manager for the Institute for Scientific and Technological Research and Senior Consultant in Andersen.

Abstract

Spurred by the recent global economic crisis, Social Innovation (SI) has gained increasing attention in the European Commission (EC) agenda. However it remains a heterogeneous and ill-defined concept, whose boundaries are unclear. Presently within EC discussions, it encapsulates a variety of concepts from social enterprises to societal change. Adopting an ethnographic methodology, this analysis provides insight into the contrasting official "front-stage" and the "back-stage" views, constraints and practices by which SI has been adopted and promoted by the EC. While the "front-stage" perspective is more intentionally based on the official situations, documents, and statements, the "back-stage" is informed by both the ethnographic analysis and its relationship with the "front-stage" perspective. The main finding of the analysis is that SI might be presumably seen as the only way to align the Commission's conservative-liberal policy, which is rooted in the Lisbon Agenda, with the pressing social demands which stem from the 2008 financial crisis. However, this analysis also indicates that, rather than a novel policy stream, SI can also be seen as a policy compromise that can be used to detract from debates around the need to develop a full-fledged EU Social Policy; more deeply, detract the policy debate from facing a thorough reflection on our society and development model. The analysis will also provide an overview of the risks associated with current thinking viewed from the perspective of EU players operating in the socio-political domain.

1. Introduction

Along 2007, with the first signals of the recent financial, economic and social crisis, Social Innovation (SI) has come to the forefront of the European Union policy thinking[1] and has accelerated in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis explosion. SI ranges across a wide area of community policies from new models of childcare to web-based social networks; from the care of the elderly to climate change. It is commonly understood as a new policy and management stream field that cuts across traditional domains encompassing notions of novelty harnessed to the active involvement of citizens aiming to address current social challenges.

The seminal work "The EU Social Reality Report"[2] and the subsequent European Social Agenda[3] made clear that Europe and the world were facing an unprecedented and unexpected social crisis. This evidence challenged many of the assumptions that had shaped the Lisbon Strategy[4], which assumed that investing in knowledge would deliver growth and jobs; the social welfare, according to this framework, was implicitly a kind of "spill over" that would stem from improved wealth and more equal distribution as far as knowledge was proposed as an asset for all. Hence, it is appropriate to question whether the deep social impact of the crisis, which was already clear at its early stages, was caused by wrong assumptions about the strategy itself or by weak policy implementations by member states and a need to broaden its fundamental goals: is the Lisbon framework the right strategy which simply requires a broader implementation or should the strategy itself be reconsidered and be re-discussed at its roots?

It is to be noted that, already in 2005, when facing stagnating growth and the emerging challenges of global competition, at the start of Barroso's mandate and its Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy[5] the Commission was facing a similar issue: is it a matter of strategy or implementation? At that time the second answer was chosen; namely, policy action should have been focusing on a better, more thorough and focused implementation of the strategy, while confirming its validity. Through the years of the crisis, the same question was raised and a similar answer provided. The strategy is valid although there is a clear need to broaden its focus to embrace the social sphere which was, up to that moment, substantially neglected. Hence, there were no specific or self-standing EU Social Policy proposals for direct interventions by what was traditionally called "the welfare state". Rather it was more a matter of fine-tuning current strategic directions, rather than developing new policies to directly tackle increasing social demands and face a dramatic social context. In this view, SI becomes a vehicle that allows the inclusion of a "Social" dimension within the overarching Lisbon umbrella. However, since the SI concept is so ill defined, there was a clear risk of inventing policies based on old solutions that are seeking for new problems to legitimize their existence[6] or else on the basis of fads and fashions[7].

In this context, the first goal of this paper is to explore the various definitions given in literature to the concept of SI and, on the basis of the EC report on Social Innovation[8], to provide a preliminary but at least bounded set definitions of SI able to draw some limits about what it is and what it is not. We will refer, in the first part of the paper, to the "Front-stage" policy stance which represents the official reasons that were put forward to pursue and justify such a new policy pathway.

The second goal of this paper is to explore the reasons why such a concept, even when ill-defined and unproved, was so enthusiastically adopted by the EU Commission. This explanation will be based upon the author's ethnographic study based on data collection of this process from October 2005 to December 2011. This study presents a more intimate view delving beyond the "official" stance in order to understand what led the EC to embrace so swiftly this new concept and what evidence was used to support it. In short, we will explore the reasons why this policy choice has been made and how the trajectory of this decision has developed.

Thirdly, in the context of the current economic crisis (we refer to the year 2012), we question whether it makes sense to speak about SI in the current form, as this risks adding to the already existing confusion about what should be done in the social domain and postponing a deeper reflection on the assumptions underlying the European social and development model.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 will provide of the current of the concept of SI and will try to outline a logic in their evolution. Section 3 will provide some context about our focal point (the European commission), describing a brief "factual" history of how SI became popular in the EC policy phrasing and actions, and explore the EC definition(s) of SI, as they stem from the EC Social Innovation Report, adopting a "Front-stage" perspective. Section 4 will introduce a "back-stage" view from a methodological perspective while section 5 will analyse from this "Back-stage" (that is, from inside the EC) the development of the SI concept according to the people, views, practices, aims and motivations that were relevant within the EC debate at that time. Section 6 will highlight some risks related to current concepts and their implementation while section 7 will draw conclusions, limits, and opportunities for further research.

2. Definitions of Social Innovation

Definitions of Social Innovation (SI) abound and it is easy to get entangled in a debate over meanings and nuances. A recent collection of definitions can be found in the chapter on social entrepreneurship and SI in the OECD report[9].

In a first and intuitive sense, we find that SI could be seen as innovation inspired by the desire to meet pressing social needs which can be neglected by traditional forms of private market provision and which have often been poorly served or unresolved by services organised by the state[10,11]. In this sense, **'Innovation'** refers to the generic capacity to create and implement novel ideas which deliver value. Focusing on the **outcome dimension** (social value), 'Social' refers to the kind of value that innovation is expected to deliver: a value that is less concerned with profit and more with issues such as quality of life, social justice and well-being. Here, SI has been pursued at different levels, from the micro level, delegating the role of generating SI to the individual entrepreneur, through the meso level of public/private partnerships, to the macro level whereby governments and institutions innovate patterns of social interaction to generate social value through policies, laws, and institutional reforms. In this direction, Social Innovation is "… can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them"[12].

According to this view, the social entrepreneur or innovator is often seen as an important player in transforming social norms[13]. They are pioneers, having to deal with those who resist social change as they fear the unknown outcomes of it[14]; by forming social partnerships and cooperation networks, social innovators are able to adopt novel approaches in solving social problems, and thereby overcome this inertia and risk aversion[15,16]. They engage in economic activities, producing goods or social and health services or pursuing various societal objectives that contribute to the development of local communities as well as society in general[17], but the managers and partners of these companies operate without seeking to add pecuniary or material gains to their assets[18]. Profits, when they occur, are (re)invested in the enterprise to help it to achieve its social objectives. According to this approach, SI are innovations that respond to social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards the vulnerable groups in society. Here, SI questions and calls for a review of the way in which the welfare state is to be organised and delivered[19,20,21] and how it should be reinvented[10] and wealth measured[22]. Yet, while innovation traditionally refers to shifting the technological frontier to increase productivity, SI goes hand in hand with the increasing ongoing reflections on the nature of well-being. Hence, as pointed out by Daniel Kahneman[23] and more recently by the Stiglitz Commission[24], traditional wealth measures, such as those related to the Gross Domestic Product, do not fully reflect the quality of life or more general notions of 'happiness'[25] or 'well-being'. In this sense, Social Innovation has been said to add multiple dimensions of output measurement beyond those related to material growth[26].

Such definitions shift and enlarge the notion of SI not just beyond the micro dimension, but also beyond the outcome dimension. In particular, as regards the latter, some have stressed also the **process dimension** of SI underlining that it is not just about pursuing an innovative social outcome, but also about an innovative endeavour, a novel way to shape patterns of social interaction to achieve a social goal. Indeed, many have stressed that an important aspect of SI is the process of social interactions between individuals to reach desired outcomes. As again Stiglitz puts it, "we care not only about outcomes, but also about processes. It makes a difference, for instance, whether we choose what we consume or if it is given to us... an economic system is to be evaluated not just on outcomes but on how outcomes are arrived at."

This evolution of the 'process' dimension is consistent with many other recent developments in the field of business innovation which have stressed open, collaborative, participative and non-linear aspects. In fact, the recognition of SI as a force for innovation and change follows the rise of Open Innovation[27], a business-oriented concept whereby end-user involvement and open collaboration is stressed. In this line, it has been noted that often the most exciting social innovations occur at the edges or interfaces between sectors[28]. Indeed, the concept of SI stems from the need for a change both in terms of the outcomes that innovation is expected to deliver and the process through which these outcomes are generated. Hence, **SI relates not only to developing innovative solutions to address social demands, but also to new forms of organisation and interactions to tackle social issues**.

These two views led to the suggestion made by an EC commissioned study of the Young Foundation which would define SI as innovations that are social in both their ends and their means[29]: "Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words they are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act". As we will see, this consideration poses the issue of scaling up Social Innovations from the micro experience to the macro level, transforming a local solution in an innovative policy or institution[30].

Thus, as the concept of Social Innovation has (re)gained popularity, its meaning has broadened to wider fields and levels of application[29,30, 28]. While it was formerly related mainly to local level systems, or relegated to the action of the so called "third sector", its new relationships with invention, organisational innovation and social change have considerably

enlarged the concept in terms of size (e.g. Local Exchange Systems vs global Fair-Trade value chains), actors (from traditional charity organisations to social businesses) and scope (transformative of the organisation, or of society with a more participatory governance system).

Hence, against this background, rather than giving a precise definition, the EC's characterisation of SI's wide range of applications has resulted in a rather elastic view of the concept. Such a view was mainly elaborated by the author (see below) as part of the EC team in charge for the production of the EC Report; a view that was, both before and after, the final delivery of the report, presented in many institutional settings, such as the OECD Working Group on SI[31].

3. The Front-stage of SI in the EC: an Opportunity to Face a Crisis through the Refinement of a Consolidated Strategy

3.1. A brief history of the emergence of the concept of SI and the SI report at the Commission: connecting the context, the official documents and the policy statements

If one was supposed to write the official story of how SI came to the forefront in the EU policy making, an official story can be easily drawn by the executive summary of the EC Social Innovation Report, provided some integrations with some past official and public events, documents or statements. This is what we intend to do in this section, also because we wish that the reader will be in the condition to re-read this section again, but under a different light, after the reading of the "back-stage" perspective.

The start of the "social" and "innovation" match

The story starts by reaffirming that the EU was, since the start of the Lisbon strategy[4] and its mid-term review[5], actively engaged in a new growth strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe by 2020. On the other hand:

"The lessons learned from both the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the financial crisis have revealed structural weaknesses and presented the social dimension of Europe in a new light: the well-held belief that economic growth creates employment and wealth to alleviate poverty has been disproved by recent events, and the time has now come to try new ways of bringing people out of poverty and promoting growth and well-being not only for, but also with, citizens"[8].

Such a statement does not stem out of the blue, since it rises from a story of reflections and official recommendations that have been evolving from 2005, starting with the famous Aho Report[32] and the Renewed Social Agenda[3], passing through the Europe's Social Reality Report[2]. Other important voices such that of Wim Kok had already in 2004 questioned the Lisbon Strategy[33] as well as the Commission itself[34]. Although these points of passage were presented as somehow planned and reflecting a consistent process of policy awareness and making, they, as we will see in the following sections, can also be read as the result of a "garbage can model" where decision makers, opportunities and solutions had the chance to meet[6].

However, since the 2006 Aho report, the term "socio-economic challenges" was introduced in the EC policy jargon and actions though, at the time, the "social" was intended more as broadening the goals of a growth strategy based on knowledge. The clear emergence of globalization, the new competing developing countries and the still powerful U.S. growth engine required Europe to bet on goals that were less narrow but that were embracing the efforts of the European society at large to face the global competition. Among these, as an example, climate change was seen and presented as an opportunity to increase wealth and competitiveness. The "social" referred more to the fact that all EU stake-holders were called in this endeavor rather than solving social demands. The assumption was still that knowledge was the core asset, but that it should have been oriented towards broader challenges. The brand of the voice who stated this vision, a former Finnish Prime Minister, made this report a corner stone in making socio-economic an EU term and, moreover, an attractor in shaping EU efforts (not by chance, all the following initiatives, such as the European Institute of Technology or the 7th Framework Programme for Research made clear references to these as their main aim). In a nutshell, the issue was to bet more and on a wider playing field.

The Social Reality check

While the EC was following this direction, an EU social Reality Report promoted by the same EC was on its way in 2007. Again, besides the plan, this stemmed from a mixture of some facts that can be easily spotted without an ethnography: i) the composition of the advisers of the President was not necessarily of the same political orientation (a bibliographic analysis of its composition at that time would show profiles that were not in the same conservative line of the President); ii) the EU always wanted to stress its care for the social dimension especially due to cohesion issues stemming from the enlargement process, and; iii) the signals that a crisis was "out there". To be more precise, it was clear to some that, besides a specific crisis, a too often hidden social reality made of inequality, poverty, eldercare, early stage school drop-off[35] and other important social issues was characterizing the EU landscape although it wanted to present itself as the "place" where competitiveness and solidarity could coexist. However conservative, the EU was the fatherland of the welfare state.

Such a report, as it is usual practice in the EC, originated with a Communication from the Commission to the EU Parliament and the Council. And at the time the report was delivered (2007), the crisis started to take shape and an increasing number of voices were asking what the Commission planned to do to face such a troubling situation situation. In this context, The Renewed Social Agenda, adopted by the EC in 2008, tried to sketch the lines of Europe's response to new social realities and challenges that were exacerbated by the global crisis. The Political Guidelines of President Barroso, that are clearly stated in the EC SI Report[8], made it clear that:

- there was a need for a new, much stronger focus on the social dimension of Europe. The valuation of the Lisbon Strategy underlined that growth and jobs have not succeeded in helping people out of poverty;

- yet, stimulating innovation, entrepreneurship and the knowledge-based society were all at the core of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs;

- and Social Innovation could offer a way forward in coping with the societal challenges and the crisis that the EU is facing.

To make even clearer the positioning of SI, it was unusually stated that "at a time of major budgetary constraints, social innovation is an effective way of responding to social challenges, by mobilizing people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources. Social innovation can also promote an innovative and learning society". Such

a phrasing was basically delegating to people what states seemed not to be able to afford any longer. As clearly stated in the same report:

"Government responses to the crisis have involved major fiscal stimulus packages, but at the same time they are confronted with budgetary constraints. Public finances have been severely affected, with average deficits now reaching 7 % of GDP and debt levels having increased by 15 percentage points in two years. They are particularly attentive to social budgets which, in the EU, represent 27 % of GDP on average. In this context of limited resources, social innovation offers a way forward by providing new solutions to pressing social demands while making better use of available resources. These growing social needs, together with budgetary constraints, call for innovative public service models."

The narrative, which was based on a well-known and still used (not just in the EU – see Obama's fund for Social Innovation Fund) policy idea to transform a threat into an opportunity, continued stating that many of these developments can — and should — be viewed as also offering economic and social opportunities. The author himself wrote with papers based on the mythology of growth such as those offered by climate change[36].

The drawbacks or the missing promises of material growth were not questioned at all besides the few voices that put under discussion whether growth was still to be considered as our final aim[37,38,39].

The meeting of President Barroso and the formal endorsement of SI by the EC

In this context, the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) organized on 19th and 20th January 2009 a two day workshop with around 40 European stakeholders (representatives of the Economic and Social committee, social partners, the social platform), experts and social innovators as well as a few representatives of Commission Services The objective was to debate how Europe supports and integrates social innovation in its policies, in the wake of its renewed social agenda. Commissioners Špidla and Hübner participated in the seminar as well as the vice-president of the EIB (European Investment Bank) and President Barroso who, during the last part of the meeting, had an exchange with the participants and drew some conclusions. It is to be noted that already during the workshop, some amongst the invited representatives from the SI world expressed some of those concerns and risks that will be further explored in this paper. Among these are the unclear relationship between Social Innovation with public policies or that Social Innovation must be used to strengthen (not to replace) the European social model giving up the role of the welfare state.

In his conclusions, the President publicly highlighted the crucial role of SI in sustaining the renewed social agenda so as to empower citizens to cope with the rapid pace of economic and social changes. He underlined that it is a very timely policy instrument that responds to the crisis and the high levels of unemployment which are forecasted. Thus, an EU initiative in this field was needed to make an improved use of existing policies and funding instruments to create the conditions in which SI becomes an asset for the European Economic Recovery Programme. President Barroso concluded that he would engage all the relevant Commission services in contributing with suggestions. BEPA was asked to draw up a report on SI where suggestions received from the workshop participants and Commission services would be analyzed. Participants were asked by the President to further contribute by sending written contributions. So far, the majority of participants have sent further comments and suggestions. For a more detailed reading, see the Annex to SI Report. Here we just underline, as it will be useful for the back-stage analysis, that the workshop was chaired by a person that was very near both to the President and to an expert who, few months later, would have delivered a report on SI commissioned by BEPA to feed the EC report.

In this context, the EC moved along two lines. The first one was to show that, however called, SI has been sustained and supported by the EU, as it has been prolific in the development of programmes (such as Equal, and the European Social Fund) and policies empowering actors to address social needs. In this sense the BEPA set up an Inter-Service group[a] involving the main EC Directorates (from health to employment, from development to education and research, from enterprise to regional cohesion) to produce a stock taking of what, under different names, has been done by the EC in this domain. The aim was to show that the EC, even before the formal rising of SI, took many actions in this direction well before the crisis even if labeled under different names. Here we anticipate that this required a very difficult internal exercise of pulling together what has been done in the social or the innovation domain, and of differentiating among those actions what could have been properly referred to as a SI and what was not, as every EC Directorate produced an amazing number of actions carried under the label of either innovation or social. This exercise was made even harder by a lack of consensus on what SI referred to, which was in a sense an expected outcome of the Report. Thus many times members of the group found themselves in the circular situation of labeling something that was not defined while having at the same time the goal to define it.

The second line was to commission to an external organization and expert for the delivery of a SI report making stock of the various definitions that were available, to provide a working definition, to collect what was done in the EU in the field

of SI, which were the main obstacles, and provide policy recommendations. Unfortunately these two processes went on in parallel, so that the EC group could not at least rely on the definition provided by the external experts. On the base of these two inputs, BEPA elaborated its report that has been published in a first version in July 2010 (followed by an updated version in 2011) and represents one, if not the main artifact, that constitutes the base of this analysis.

3.2. Issues Related to the Outcome View: a Multi-level Approach

While the EC report embraced this means/ends and multilevel view of SI, a question mark remained still open on what should be intended by social outcome, that is, what does it improving human well-being mean given the variety and broadness of the various approaches and definitions[39]? The issue at the time was to put some boundary to what this 'social' output refers. The perceived risk was, provided this variety, generating such a confusion and ambiguity that all that had and was being done in the social realm, within or outside the EC, could have been included and thus labelled as SI. Hence, in order to avoid the provision of a wide, but presumably meaningless, single definition of SI, the decision has been to acknowledge the existence of different views, reaching, as we will see, this multi-level (Front-stage) or "elastic" (Back-stage) view of the "social output": elastic or multilevel, because instead of giving one definition, it tried to provide different ones within a framework able to contain those different views while differentiating them and at the same time offer a sound relationship between these different perspectives. Moreover, besides providing a wide overview of experiences and suggested policy actions, it led to some considerations about some risks that the concept could bring into the social policy debate, although avoiding to make this connection explicit and critical as indeed we propose in this paper. These three views are briefly presented below, as they will serve the purpose of the following "back-stage" analysis.

3.2.1. The Social Demand Perspective: Approach 1 (or the "Ghetto" view)

According to the EC Report, a **narrow** interpretation of 'social outcome' views the social dimension as something complementary if not separated from the economic or the business dimension. We refer to this as the "ghetto" view, since what is social is treated as something separated from what is to be considered as economic and is thus targeted and "confined" to specific actors (such as social enterprises) with specific instruments and policies. 'Social' would refer to

the needs of those groups, communities or segments of society which are more vulnerable and less able to be involved in or benefit from the value generated by the market economy. The main rationale behind the need to pursue SI is that the effects of the financial and economic crisis on the social sphere are more than ever uncertain and dramatic. At one level, these SI programs can accelerate long-delayed changes; at another, they can prevent psychological pathologies (such as those stemming from unemployment) arising from these unprecedented uncertainties. It is therefore necessary to bring a change that will protect those who are most vulnerable to the crisis, prevent discrimination and increase the capacity of all to find a new place in this changing world. The main focus would then be on issues such as the integration of disadvantaged groups (including unemployed youth, migrants, etc.), new ways of providing unmet social, health and educational services, care of children and the elderly or urban regeneration. Both the EC report and the Study by the Young Foundation present many cases of this type.

3.2.2. The Societal Challenges Perspective: Approach 2 (the "reforming" view)

A broader view, anticipated by the previously mentioned Aho Report, suggests that in a sustainable development perspective, the creation of well-being can be pursued achieving Grand Challenges, which are at the same time social and economic (indeed, they entered the EC vocabulary inspiring many EC policies and instruments, such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology). The boundary between the social and the economic domains blurs, and the 'social' becomes an opportunity, rather than a constraint, to generate value. In other words, instead of complementing economic innovation with a social dimension, this policy "philosophy" aims at 'reforming' the very meaning of what is economic and what is social, whereby these two domains tend to collapse. Climate change is a paradigmatic example; it is both an economic and social challenge, and it involves all of us, from the wealthier to the poorest[40,41,42]. Another is Rifkin's so called "Third Industrial Revolution"[36]. Here, innovation is seen as a process that should tackle long term 'societal challenges' through new forms of relationships between social actors[8]. From this perspective, all the main challenges currently faced by the EC are both economic and social in nature. Taking for example the Cohesion Policy, R&D excellence and regional innovation, they are seen as complementary policies with a common objective to maximise the development of a knowledge-based economic potential[43] throughout the European Union. In this context, both gender mainstreaming and issues related to disadvantaged groups such as young and elderly people, disabled people, ethnic minorities and migrants should not be regarded as purely 'social' issues, but as an integral part of a broader view of what we shall refer to as economic development[44]. Equally, major and chronic

diseases— responsible for 86 % of deaths in the EU — and rising levels of overweight and obesity are linked by common risk factors produced by food quality, lifestyles and physical inactivity. They can be reduced, and thereby deliver significant economic outcomes by bringing down health costs. A similar argument is that innovation in the social sector generates productivity and economic value for the whole society.

3.2.3. The Systemic Change Perspective: Approach 3 (the "empowering" view)

A third view focuses more on the ultimate objective of SI: a sustainable systemic change to be reached through a process of organisational development and changes in relationships between institutions and stakeholders. The empowering/learning/network process dimension is central and the outcomes are improvements in the way people live and work. In a sense, the outcome of SI is reshaping society itself, or, said differently, the process dimension becomes also the main outcome. Here the social dimension of innovation relates to changes in fundamental attitudes and values, strategies and policies, organisational structures and processes, delivery systems and services, methods and ways of working, responsibilities and tasks of institutions and linkages between them and different types of actors. It refers to a process that incrementally changes human attitudes and behaviours, and the related responsibilities of — and relationships between — organisations and target groups. As stated in the report: "The dialectic relationship between SI and an innovative society takes its place here since an innovative society offers the conditions for social innovations to emerge and in return SI reconfigures the common culture, structures and relationships to suggest different approaches and the choice of new priorities which reinforce the innovative society".

In terms of concrete policy-making, this view suggests that institutions should encourage the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders and target groups in the definition and implementation of policies. For example, a vast array of innovative Commission-led policymaking processes go in this direction, from the Open Method of Coordination in the creation of platforms, social experimentation and service delivery mechanisms, to participative processes such as the inclusion of gender bodies, disability organisations and other NGOs in monitoring committees (e.g. the ESF and the ERDF EU Funds). In this context, the issues addressed range from the organisation of work to lifelong learning and vocational training, and from alternative forms of care, in particular childcare, to the management of change and institutional capacity building.

3.2.4. A Working Front- Stage Definition

It is now clear that according to the EC, as SI emerged as a new concept, it could not be encapsulated within a tight definition with strictly designated actors, objectives and means. It also became clear that SI is part of a broader movement that risks using SI as a "container" concept in which everything bearing the word "social" can fit. Here we will summarize the official definitions of the EC as regards SI and its positioning in the EU policy landscape.

"Assuming that the process dimension is a sine qua non requirement in defining a Social Innovation as such, those social outcomes can be seen according to three different approaches (the outcome dimension):

1. The narrow approach: Social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society. Approach 1

2. The Societal Challenges approach: Societal challenges in which the boundary between 'social' and 'economic' blurs, and which are directed towards society as a whole. Approach 2

3. The systemic change approach: the process of reforming society in the direction of a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are sources and outcomes of well-being. Approach 3

As it has been proposed, these approaches are proposed as not mutually exclusive, but rather as interdependent parts of a common framework: the first approach is the foundation for the second which creates the conditions for the third — an innovation that addresses a social demand (e.g. care of the elderly) contributes to addressing a societal challenge (e.g. ageing society) and, through its process dimension (e.g. the active engagement of the elderly), it contributes to reshaping the society in the direction of participation and empowerment.

In the next section we will leave the front stage and explore the story from the backstage.

4. Going to the Backstage: the Manufacturing of a Social Innovation Policy at the EC (Approach 4)

4.1. Methodology: a full ethnographic immersion with a partially covert strategy

The study was conducted during 7 years of the author's full participant observation in the European Commission. Standard ethnographic methodologies of participant observation were applied[45,46,47,48]. In particular, he was engaged in a full participant observation similar to Van Maanen's[48] seminal observations on the making of a policeman (though he did not reach the point to become a policeman himself), or the masterpiece of Julian Orr[49].

Indeed, here a strong caveat needs to be made which qualifies and differentiates the methodology from a participant observation. The author falls undoubtedly in the realm of a full participant observer, but, as a clear differentiating aspect, such an observation was not part of his tasks while, on the other hand, he was completely part of the group observed. In this sense, he literarily followed and brought to its full consequences Van Maanen's suggestion who states that:

> "When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork
>
> (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who
>
> 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more."
>
> (Van Maanen, 1996).

In particular, the author was detached to the EC as policy officer in a Directorate Générale (2005-2007), and as a member of BEPA (2007-2011). In both experiences, he was able to observe the highest level of decision making in the EU institutions and, during his work, he had to interrupt his research work although his research competence and background were amongst the main reasons for his recruitment. Indeed, his knowledge as a researcher in organization studies was needed to work on specific policy projects (being, amongst the last ones, SI) though he was neither

requested nor expected to conduct an ethnographic participant observation. Nonetheless, he had the opportunity to make clear, in many situations, his interest in observing the many EC phenomena in which he was engaged. This EC assignment was thus related to a research competence; although it was not formally envisioned or expected, the observations he conducted that were, obviously, embedded in the very nature of his role. Moreover, for the wide range of issues and domains he was involved in, he did not join the Commission with a predefined research goal or strategy but on the other hand, being a researcher, he had general hypotheses on the making of decisions and, in particular, of policies that he wished to inquire about and test. The author engaged in the field work had the goal, once his experience was completed, to portray the social views and practices he observed[50], including the current one related to the SI, but also on other issues such as the making of EU organizations (Forthcoming). In a nutshell, the field work could be described as a strict and even extended application of Van Maanen's views , but without the need of engaging in a complete covert strategy (as those researching within criminal groups[51]). We would call this method as **full immersion with a partially covert strategy** (in the sense that the goal of observing was not stated either as the primary one, or as part of his job duties, though this intent was disclosed with peers and high ranking officials).

This approach follows the direction of the seminal work of Pierre Bourdieu[52,53] or Edward J. Nell[54] when describing fieldwork in sociology.

Such an intensively immersive experience allowed him to rely on a wide range of well-defined, though un-planned methods such as informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of personal or confidential documents produced within the group, self-analysis, results from activities undertaken off or online, and life-histories and mythologies. Thanks to the extended and in-depth exposure, the researcher has been able to obtain more detailed and accurate information about the individuals, community, and/or population under study and his "embedding in it". Such a strong point of observation and interaction over an extended period of time allowed the researcher to discover discrepancies between what participants say or publicly disclaim — and often believe — should happen (the formal system – or, as we call it here, the front-stage) and what actually does happen (what is here referred to as the back-stage); moreover, as he was both involved in front-stage (e.g. presenting the report or other similar official activities) and back-stage situations (e.g. internal discussions or documents revisions), he could observe the relationships and interactions between these two levels which are, in the specific case of policy making, rather distant due to obvious needs to manage issues related to diplomacy, consensus and political negotiation.

The fieldwork involved collecting data in the forms of briefings, emails, conversations, meetings, notes, working practices, symbols. It also included, as noted by many ethnographers[55], observations of rituals of passage from one stage to another along the path that leads from a legitimate peripheral participation to centrality[56], forms of celebrating decision, roles, and identities, distributing glories and blame or rationalizing actions as planned and wanted although they were indeed the result of casual situations, temporal orders or even unwanted behaviours that proved to be, ex-post, more or less successful[57]. For reasons of confidentiality and also for the EC practice to never share "sensitive" information in a written form but rather through oral conversations, the bulk of the author's information was based on the very nature of the policy work itself, based on few traceable written notes and documents, and many conversations which were spoken through a typical EC policy jargon. For these reasons, **sensitive information will not be disclosed and, for the purpose of this paper**, these rituals, celebrations and gorgons will not be explored further as they would deserve a work on its own.

5. The Backstage of SI in the EC: Making Sense of a Mismatch between a Strategy and its Expected Outcomes

5.1. The Back-stage Process between 2005 and 2008

Since 2005, it was clear to all "in the house" that the Lisbon Agenda was not delivering as expected. At that time, concerns were almost exclusively about stagnating growth and increasing unemployment. The President wanted to differentiate himself from his predecessor who launched the strategy, but wanted to give a signal of continuity. Yet a "black" crisis was not at the horizon, but an increasing number of policy documents and reports, first and foremost the "Aho Report"[31], followed by many others[5,32], started to mention the need to orient EU efforts towards Grand Challenges that, shortly, became "Societal Challenges". Among these, Climate Change or Ageing were mentioned, but not positioned in the dramatic context of an unprecedented crisis. The framework was still based on the assumption of a possible and endless knowledge driven material growth and employment, which was underpinned by deeper

assumptions on the need to increase the openness of markets, foster individual initiative and an unassailable faith in technological progress. In this line, the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy[5] stated that the strategy itself was right, but the weakness of results was a matter of poor implementation, in particular as regards the Member States. Definitely, a Societal Challenge was seen as a broader vision to gather, orient and foster the fragmented EU efforts to increase global competitiveness through an increased investment in knowledge, its free circulation (the so called 5th freedom), Research and Technological Development (RTD) and the social entrepreneur or the societal enterprise or institution (such as the EIT, the JTIs or the ERC) as protagonists.[58]

It would be an euphemism to state that the 2008 crisis, for its unpredictability (yet, some did anticipate it such as Taleb's seminal work in 2007[59]) and magnitude, put the entire Lisbon set-up under discussion. The question in the Commission entourage, inside and outside, was rather clear: in order to get out of the tunnel, is it only about pushing more for market/competitiveness and technology driven innovation policy? The larger question was: is there a need for an explicit social policy governed at the state or even at the supranational level - which is, indeed, what is currently under discussion in Europe? Yet it is important to note that, even before 2008, none of the EU countries respected, with a few minor exceptions, the Maastricht parameters as well as the mandates of the Lisbon Agenda. States' interventions going beyond the boundaries of a pure market driven approach were still a normal practice, however blamed and criticized. After 2008, with the EU still unable to understand where the crisis was leading, the Commission had to recognize a certain level of elasticity in applying the strict rules of a zero deficit policy. On the other hand, such a concession was avulsed as it was difficult to be framed within the conservative nature of the European Commission, the strong role played by Germany on zero deficit policies, and UK's policies on innovation and market liberalization. Beyond that, the recognition of the need for a Direct Social Policy would have been politically hampering Barroso's Commission at its roots, that were basically based on the Lisbon Strategy. Against this background, and pushed by an emerging lobby of conservative-liberal thinkers, hereby referred to as the -SI policy lobby[b] -, connected to EU institutions through strong political ties, the President of the EC set up in 2007 a workshop on SI chaired by him personally. As mentioned before, BEPA was in charge for the organization of the workshop.
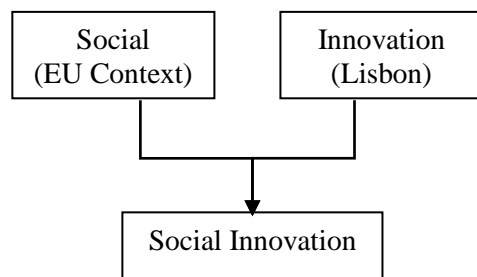
5.2. Why Social Innovation and not a Social Policy? The Hope that a New Policy Fashion will Drive Stakeholders' Energies in Sorting out a Solution

The reason for the choice to go for SI is intuitive but also more interesting when studying policy making by observing the process from the inside. At that time, the SI policy lobby pushed the President, through an intermediate high level contact, to organize the above mentioned workshop on SI that he attended personally. This lobby was composed by those whom we refer to here as "policy-entangled-entrepreneurs", who had political connections within the EC and interests in pushing new concepts in the Commission's agenda. Once these concepts would have been in, they would have been first-comers in exploiting the economic and political value that would stem from the transformation of the policy agenda into funding programmes, advisory groups and major events. This approach in lobbying, that it is not at all illegal, was not new at the author's eyes, and was often taking the form of daily courtesy visits at the 11th (where BEPA was) and 13th floor of the Berlaymont (where the President was). Similar lobbies were composed by Universities and were concerned with EC manoeuvres in the area of higher education, notably, the EIT, others by inspirational leaders and backing enterprises aiming at influencing and orienting the EC energy agenda[c].

As said, after the workshop, the President gave a mandate to BEPA to deliver a report on SI and set up-an inter-service group[d] to support its production. The author was one of those in charge of both the report and the group (and co-responsible for asserting what has been reported in this article as the Front-Stage beliefs of the EC in SI). The report would have been based on the results of a mix between the EC internal experiences , the results of the external study commissioned to one of the members of the "SI policy lobby" and their use and synthesis operated by BEPA who would have generated the "European Commission Report Social Innovation Report". The need to use BEPA as the final producer was clearly because, whatever the study, the Commission always underlines its independence, thus wants to disclaim that the results of the many external studies are not binding in any sense the EC policy action.

What stems from briefings, formal and informal speeches, email exchanges but also implicit taken for granted, was that the concept of SI was combining the policy mainstream of Lisbon based on entrepreneurial, market based, bottom-up, liberal, technology and innovation driven growth (and the implicit role of the private actor in supplying what the state

should not and could no longer do) with the growing demands for doing something about the dramatic situation of the social European landscape. The EU was suffering continuous bailouts, increasing unemployment, deficits out of control and a decrease in social expenditure: the very notion of the welfare state as we used to know it since the 19th century[60] was at stake[19,20,21] and such a belief is well stated in the Report's sentences that we quoted above. SI seemed to combine these two apparently diverging demands in a harmonious synthesis: innovation could safeguard the conservative/liberal DNA of the Commission while its focus on the "Social outcome" could avoid the criticism that the EC was insensitive to, and unable to give responses to pressing social demands. From this perspective, SI appears more as a policy compromise than a novel policy stream.

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┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│   Social     │   │  Innovation  │
│ (EU Context) │   │  (Lisbon)    │
└──────┬───────┘   └──────┬───────┘
       │                  │
       └────────┬─────────┘
                ▼
       ┌──────────────────┐
       │ Social Innovation │
       └──────────────────┘
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This compromise was only possible due to the *cul de sac* in which the Commission was, and still is operating, as clearly reflected in the *milieux* of stakeholders' and Member States' interests at that time, which is not so dissimilar from the geopolitics of today's debates. In short, a leading club composed by Germany, UK and the Nordic countries, that were led by conservative liberal governments, did not want to rely on any state intervention and a deficit spending policy. As the same line is still and perhaps even more strongly debated in the year in which this article is written (2012), that would have hampered the making of the single market after painful reforms that have been carried by some of those in that direction, bearing high political costs, (just considering Mrs. Thatcher's period or Angela Merkel's reforms in the labour market and pensions). Also those more in trouble, like Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland, were led by conservative albeit not concretely liberal governments. And although the second group would have been more willing to support some kind of Social Policy that would have implied a clear "green light" for deficit spending, their weak position in terms of

public debt and EU credibility somehow forced them to "follow" the mainstream thinking that the old welfare state had to be revised, if not buried, as part of history. Still, this contradiction is at the very core of the EU impasse of the Euro zone. Allowing for EU deficit spending was seen from the club, in a few words, as legitimizing a heavy slow down in structural reforms aimed at building the single market, reforms that had to be carried firstly by the followers. In this context, the space for a self standing Social Policy was, as it seems to be still now, almost impossible, since it would have required some degree of "sovereign control" by virtuous Member States or the EC on the treasury, social expenditure and reforms of the followers. In this sort of trade-off between the need to act, and a political orientation contrary to any sort of public direct intervention, the author had the mandate, as a counter-balance, to put the word "social" here and there in briefings, speeches and inter-service consultations (from which EC Communications would have stemmed) to show that the EC was aware and taking action on the social sphere.

The table below shows the occurrence of some key terms in the Commission Communications to the Parliament and the Council between 2005 (year of the mid-term review) and the end of 2011.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Innovation	313	421	440	428	402	442	370
social	622	781	796	815	837	885	681
social innovation	0	0	6	4	10	20	20
social innovations	1	1	6	4	3	6	7
Sum of soc. inn.	1	1	12	8	13	26	27
societal challenge	0	0	0	2	2	2	9
societal challenges	10	17	23	46	28	39	37
Sum of soc. chal.	10	17	23	48	30	41	46

Source: Euro-lex (www.euro-lex.eu)

It is to be noted that Social Innovation had a marked increase since 2007 in one of the most official documents of the EC (Communications are the basic document and act through which the Commission makes proposals or anticipates them to the EU Council and Parliament). Less marked, but noticeable, is the trend of the societal challenges. These

ones, which were less concerned with the weakest segments of society but more on competitiveness through global challenges, were chosen as a focus in 2008. If we consider that a Commission Communication takes almost one year to be developed, it seems that this choice occurred prior to the 2008 crisis (thus showing up clearly in 2009).

Such a situation provides a back-stage for re-interpreting the above three approaches to SI proposed by the EC. Accordingly, these will be phrased differently:

1. The narrow approach: Social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society. Approach 1

A back stage reading: as public resources are going to be over soon, and cuts in social expenditure are unavoidable not to betray the faith in an unreachable control over public deficits, the weakest segments of society should start to equip themselves to find new solutions to their demands, with the charitable help of social entrepreneurs. What the public sector can do is to remove as much as possible barriers to innovation pursuing, as done before, a knowledge market more sensitive to social demands. Indeed, this was one of the main conclusions of the President's Workshop, the EC report, and the external experts' report.

2. The Societal Challenges approach: societal challenges in which the boundary between 'social' and 'economic' blurs, and which are directed towards society as a whole. Approach 2

A back stage reading: as we cannot disperse the few resources available and Europe needs to lead the global challenge in some domain, it is required to concentrate EU efforts and institutions towards few priority goals, provided that growth will come only through an increased privatization of these efforts, a public actor playing the role of mediator in setting the ground for industrial "collusions" to standardize major technological developments, and technology pushing as the main driver to scale up in the global rankings. In this direction, the so called Public Private Partnerships were increasingly supported, concentrating research and development funds in the hands of groups of leading academic and industrial partnerships with the wish that, through their agreement, new EU technological standards, as it was the case

with the GSM, could find their place in the global competition. For reference, see the JTIs, the ETPs and the forthcoming flagships.

3. The systemic change approach: The need to reform society in the direction of a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are sources and outcomes of well-being. Approach 3

A back stage reading: while it is indeed a repetition of the process dimension when set also as a goal (societal change to change society), it politically advises people and institutions that they will be increasingly delegated responsibility for their destiny (the so called "empowerment"); namely citizens are called to find innovative ways to sort it out themselves through novel types of alliances that will not rely for long on public assistance. In a sense, the demonstrated incapacity to set up effective global governance mechanisms to tackle fundamental challenges such as climate change, induces a perspective of governance as something that should be increasingly delegated to citizens giving them the tools to feed, bottom-up, the policy making impasse.

4. An undeclared perspective on Social Innovation: to acknowledge the impossibility to think about a new welfare or a full-fledged EU Social Policy

In the context of this painful acknowledgement that the state will not be able to do what it did until now in ensuring proper levels of welfare nor will the EU set up a full-fledged Social Policy, it is more digestible if it is put in the terms of a challenge rather than a paralyzed policy-making process which is now struggling to find new ways to act in a context of dramatically decreasing resources and increasing social problems. For obvious confidentiality reasons, and strongly believing that politics cannot be dealt according to a wiki-leaks approach, we will not disclose who and where these considerations came from. On the other hand, we would find this exercise as fruitless. We honestly believe that it is enough to open a newspaper to grasp that politics is facing un unprecedented *cul de sac* and that, to hold society together, however debatable, it is better to sell a dream hoping that a sound answer will come. In this sense the authors do not express any opinion about any kind of political cynicism or any other sort of unfair policy behaviour. We simply observe that here is where we stand.

6. Risks Associated with Social Innovation

Like every new attractive concept, Social Innovation holds some risks. We examine some of them below, underlining that some of them stemmed from the workshop conclusion itself (the reader could easily spot them out with a bit of attention to what was reported or, as it would have been preferable, remain unreported), others from internal and external discussion, some from the author himself (either by adding new risks or trying to make others more explicit).

The first risk is the fourth approach proposed above, namely to provide EU citizens and social actors with an unknown, unproven and ill defined mechanism to think that something new could take society out of the tunnel. Indeed, as empirically proven by Kahneman and Tversky[61], people show a risk-averse behaviour in gains involving moderate probabilities and small probability losses; risk-seeking behaviour in losses involving moderate probabilities and small probability gains. In this sense, the wider public prefers a risk with a small chance of a gain rather than the certainty of a loss. SI could be seen as a possible loss, but with a minimal gain. In the same spirit, SI could be easily seen as a good way to keep people busy in embracing and filling the meaning of this new policy, while taking time to spot how to sort out the situation.

The second risk is to view SI as renaming or relabeling all those initiatives and practices that carry some social dimension. Such a risk was echoed during the BEPA workshop where it has been underlined by social players that SI cannot be seen simply as a rebranding of current programmes. As Social Innovation has been defined here, the social outcome is a necessary, but not sufficient, component. However, the process that leads to the outcome should also carry elements of novelty in reshaping social interactions. In this sense, helping children to succeed at school is not a Social Innovation if this achievement, however important, is not obtained through, for example, a new way of involving parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Furthermore, such an extension became valid for the term "innovation". When looking and current documents or FP7 work programs, many ICT or RTD calls for proposals try to fall into the basket of Social Innovation.

The third concern, which was also raised during the SI workshop, is about the respective roles of the private, public and third sectors. Of course, the private sector has an important role to play providing additional resources in a time of limited public budgets, but also for injecting the creativity, flexibility and innovativeness that characterise the business/entrepreneurial world. However, such an involvement also raises issues of ethics, responsibility, quality of services, and access. Indeed SI should not be interpreted as the public sector giving up its social responsibility; the public sector must continue to play a pivotal role[62].

The fourth concern is that the involvement of the private sector in the provision of social services should not be pursued to the detriment of some of the fundamental values underpinning the European Social Model. None of these values should be excluded. However, some studies have shown situations of abuse or, more simply, of reduced access of the weakest groups as a consequence of a market logic. Indeed, SI requires an increased capacity for the public to assess and monitor that appropriate quality and access is ensured, whoever the actor that delivers them. In this sense, such an involvement should go hand in hand with an increased effort from the public sector in setting the rules of the game and ensure they are respected. Such an effort could take various forms ranging from regulation to certification, from monitoring to evaluation. As underlined during the BEPA workshop, SI must be used to strengthen, not replace, the European Social Model.

The fifth risk is to confine SI to bottom-up or grassroots initiatives. Often, Social Innovations emerge at the local level from sharing and networking between a wide range of actors; it can also be generated by market initiatives with a social concern. However, as the European experience has shown over centuries of experimentation, SI can also stem from the macro/policy level, when policy-makers, public administrators, business and opinion leaders or academics reflect, propose and implement new ways to address social issues. Hence, innovative pension schemes or unemployment policies might be rightly conceived in terms of SI provided that they are able to deliver more in the context of the constraints and challenges ahead. Indeed, SI places an increased role on the involvement of citizens in the design and implementation of solutions to social needs.. But vis-à-vis policy-makers, such a role shall not be seen as a substitution, but rather as a means to support policy-making bodies in being more effective. In this sense, as was underlined in the BEPA workshop, SI should be mainstreamed in all societal areas and be seen as a contribution to the EU's social objectives and not as a substitute to current public social policies.

The last risk, as for any new concept, is that one should avoid seeing SI as a *panacea* for solving all problems. Furthermore, each innovation has to be examined on the base of the evidence of its impact and its limitations. Too often, the benefits of SI as adduced by its enthusiasts were based upon anecdotal evidence rather than on scientifically proven facts. In addition, the potential costs are often minimised or ignored altogether. For this reason, a particular attention should be devoted to issues related to evaluation, impact assessment and measurement. Moreover, whatever the policy, it seems that the moment has come to question what are the underlying goals and assumptions as they lead to very different results. Taking SI, if this means giving up the role of governments in guiding change, that should be clear as well as that governments understood that nothing can be taken any longer for granted, no one can be protected life-long and that we must take more responsibility for our destiny as other options have shown that we can try to close our accounts with the past, but the past will not necessarily close its accounts with us.

In this sense, if Social Innovation stands for social responsibility, awareness and action at all levels (from the micro to the macro level), sustaining the creation of a new social pact where all do their best to make it work, then we express our hope that further research and inquiry will be pursued. Indeed, it is rather obvious that our development model and life-style is no longer sustainable. Besides myopic dreams of the past or even more dangerous wishes for less freedom in exchange for promises of wellbeing, if Social Innovation is a way to name the many possible pathways to fundamentally rethink our societies in the direction of well being, intergenerational fairness, equality and awareness of our environmental and anthropological limits, then this paper hopes to contribute to such an urgently needed debate.

7. Conclusion: Time to Re-label or to Re-think the Social?

It would be redundant to say something about the economic, social and environmental situation in 2012. It is indeed disastrous but what is worth considering, as wisely said by Carmen Reinhart, Kenneth Rogoff[63], is whether or not we still believe that this time will be different. An empirical analysis of centuries of defaults and bailouts is still not convincing enough to ask ourselves whether, if we don't do things differently, this time will be the same or, different in the sense of worse.

SI on its own, for what we know, cannot be either categorized among the responsible, or as the difference to change the current socio-economic trajectory. From the latter perspective, there is no systematic evidence that SI can deliver the value it promises or scale to a level where this value makes a substantial difference. Up to now, we still see that this concept embodies great uncertainties and even less strategic and tactical oversight and direction.

There is no systematic evidence that Social Innovations deliver a tangible social value at both the outcome and process level. As said by the same EC report, there are plenty of anecdotal stories at the micro-level which suffer method and homogeneity in the parameters and data used to evaluate results. This is also due to the lack of a clear definition, as we can measure something when this something is somehow defined. To us, a single definition does not exist, nor a range of accepted ones. Here we tried to propose a possible set of definitions, but they are still too broad and, moreover, bear plenty of risks when applied with a lack of rigorous research. Seemingly, and related to this, there are clear issues about the scalability and the possibility to replicate these experiences at a wider and meso/macro level. Indeed, SI experiences seem to remain confined in the local context in which they raised, experiencing also great difficulties in growing in size, scope and target (EC 2011). But most of all, they have difficulties in growing in their capacity to be generalized. Scaling up is not just a matter of doing something small bigger. It is rather about making experience a model, and a model a possible way to shape society. Scalability here is intended as the opportunity to transform a success for few in a policy for all, and an anecdotal story in a scientific paper. There is no reason to blame SI for the dramatically decaying of the social situation. Yet, it is as well hard to claim that most of the promises made by social innovators and their fans (EC included) have been kept or had a concrete possibility to be kept unless SI is addressed as more than yet another policy fashion to keep our minds busy and hopes alive. Indeed, besides or even thanks to SI, a reflection on a wider and direct EU Social Policy or a new role of the welfare state cannot be said to be shadowed by the achievements of SI unless, as we did when intended SI in the broader sense, this would inspire policy makers, institutions and heads of governments to become more socially innovators.

As regards the former perspective, SI can be held responsible, together with many other policy fashions, of being a way to distract society from a urgently needed reflection that goes at the roots of how the EU, and the world in general, though it could make the machinery work when this is based on assumptions such as endless material growth, debt economy, technology as a solution and not, also, as a problem maker, and innovation as a necessity. While writing this

article, the author received a call for proposals issued by the EC making an explicit reference to Social Innovation and ICT. The risk is that many others, when looking at forthcoming calls for proposals, are doing and will do the same in domains like health, agriculture or energy. Again, text analysis might be very helpful. Sincerely, it is not clear to the author if all this policy *bricolage* signals that we embraced a development philosophy that can be compliant with our anthropological features and natural rights and duties to build a world in which we can decently live and let live, especially for those that are yet to come and have no right to vote. Indeed, SI, as much as many other policy fashions that might stem or are in the process to blossom, can play the role of providing new solutions, but also that of keeping society bound to assumptions that were not written in Abram's table. Hopefully for this reason, within the current FP7 call for proposals, under the theme social sciences and humanities, there is a specific call for proposals, which is worth 2.5 million Euros, that should strike our attention. Its title is: "Social innovation: empowering people, driving change?". The author confesses how that question mark, which follows the title of the same EC Report, is surprisingly summarising what this paper is about, reinsuring that such a question is seeking for an answer also by the same EC.

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Full References

a. An Inter-Service group is a group that gathers EC officials to deal with matters that are transversal to the traditional domains of action of a single Directorate Générale.

b. For confidentiality reason, the author cannot disclose the members of the lobby as they are still active and they would surely not be happy to be named as a lobby. He just stresses their strong political entanglement with the worlds of business, entrepreneurship and Social Innovation.

c. The author was indeed in friendly and informal relationships with both, as well as he attended many of their meetings as an EC observer.

d. An Inter-Service group is a composed by members of different EC Directorates when a dossier is transversal and requires the contribution (albeit the endorsement) of different sectors of the Commission. The results of an Inter-Service group might feed the leading directorate, such as BEPA in this case, in producing a Report or a Communication from the Commission.