Thematic session on social innovation (network F)

SASE conference –New School New York

27-29 June 2018

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The challenges of shaping the future through social innovation

In the current context where the concepts of knowledge society and knowledge economy have taken a key role, innovation is becoming an imperative for the development of individuals, organizations and societies more in general. Within the broader field of innovation, but also in comparative social policies and in European studies, *social* innovation is becoming a contested buzzword that requires refinement.

On the one side, *social* innovation could become an answer to the negative effects of the ongoing transformations of the economic cycle (e.g. increasing social inequalities and exclusion of several groups and populations...). On the other side, social innovation could become a neoliberal Trojan horse off-loading social responsibility to civil society, families and individuals and dismantling the redistributive structures of the welfare state.

In this call for papers, we move from the assumption that social innovation is a relational process, which is contextually embedded, and which – at the same time – challenges its own context. It raises as a reaction to the inability of consolidated social policies in meeting emerging or existing needs and its potential growth or consolidation may depend (also) on the governance systems' capacity to identify, accept and share new ideas.

Even though social innovations may emerge as isolated initiatives, they bear the potential of challenging conventional policy balances, existing stakeholders' relations and distribution of power and resources. Social innovation is indeed considered for its potential of social transformation at both the level of the state, the market and the community. For this reason, it may rise conflicts and contestations and conflicts. It might also challenge the multi-level institutional arrangements with the aim of expanding and influencing broader contexts.

This session invites scholars to reflect on the processes of social innovation considering their context-sensitivity and the different multi-scalar governance arrangements within which they are embedded. Papers might address the different actors involved and their dynamic interaction, for instance considering the way resources are mobilised and produced at different scales (local, regional, national level…). They might also consider the specific challenges social innovation tries to address and the way they address them.

We would like to gather researchers exploring these issues and disentangling the context specific elements of social innovation from what seems to be common to all innovative initiatives. We believe it is indeed vital to understand social innovation considering the institutional and social economic contexts as well as spatial and territorial issues, time perspective and the trajectories of social innovation, including the issue of the institutionalisation process and its risks.

We invite authors to submit theoretical, empirical or methodological propositions. We also welcome cases studies going deeper into this issue of the structuring, persistence and impacts of social innovation. These cases can concern different countries around the globe (beyond the global north), different fields (social policies and intervention; technology; production; services etc.) involving both public institutions, private sector, NGOs and community groups etc.

To submit your proposal through the SASE website (www.sase.org), you must choose

network F and include an abstract. Abstracts should be no longer than 500 words. All

submissions need to include three key words.

Attention: The deadline for submitting proposals is 14 January 2019. Acceptance

notifications will be sent by mid-February 2019.