

# BUILDING BLOCKS OF A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

## INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL INNOVATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Up to now, endeavours to distinguish between different types of Social Innovation have remained sporadic efforts by single European initiatives. Building upon the empirical results of the SI-DRIVE project, this article sketches the first characteristics of a typology distinguishing between different types of Social Innovation along their relation to the formal system or the social-cultural environment they are operating in.

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### MAKING A CASE FOR A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

Innovation has many faces: It can be technological, it can concern the organisational level or the workplace, or its main characteristic may be that it is disruptive or incremental (to name but a few of the most common types of innovation studied in innovation literature). Social Innovation can be placed among those main archetypes of innovation. In addition, the field of Social Innovation itself can distinguish several types based on the theoretical and empirical analysis of SI-DRIVE.

Despite the growing public and academic interest in Social Innovation throughout the last decade, attempts to classify different social innovation initiatives have remained sporadic efforts by single European research projects. The most popular example is BEPA's distinction of three levels addressed by social innovations namely that of social needs, societal challenges, and systemic change (scrutinized in the article Social Innovation Addressing Social Needs and Societal Challenges). This is partly due to the fragmented landscape of Social Innovation concepts (see article *Desperately Seeking a Shared Understanding of Social Innovation*). A well-defined concept of Social Innovation, which can clearly be distinguished from other forms of innovation, is the pre-requisite for differentiating types of Social Innovation within these conceptual boundaries.

The project SI-DRIVE set out to develop building blocks of a social innovation typology. On the one hand, this typology builds upon SI-DRIVE's definition of Social Innovation as a new figuration of social practices and, on the other hand, it distinguishes different types of Social Innovation by their relationship to social change. Hence, these first considerations

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can be regarded as the first steps towards a complexity reducing typology to understand which social innovations are more fruitful for social change and which are not. Given the diversity of social innovation initiatives all over the world, the aim is not to develop one central all-encompassing typology but to lay the ground for one that is able to answer this specific question.

In addition to using SI-DRIVE's definition of Social Innovation as a frame of reference, the typology approach presented here builds on SI-DRIVE's empirical results of the global mapping (see article *Social Innovation on the Rise*) and the in-depth case studies.

### TYPOLOGY, TYPES, AND CLASSIFICATION – CHOOSING A METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS

The starting point of this article is the assumption that the world of Social Innovation is full of different types. Yet, the very concept of the *type* is far from being clear-cut. Common

notions are e.g. ideal types, empirical types, structure types, or prototypes [1]. The multiple applications of the term *type* show that it is not reserved only for “grouping” as typology, but is also used interchangeably with the term class or category. Most confusion surrounding the concept of typology stems from it being used interchangeably with the term classification. A typology can be seen as a specific type of classification being mainly distinct in the method used to build them. In that sense, typology refers to a multidimensional conceptual classification used mainly in social sciences. It stands in contrast to other forms of classification such as taxonomy, which is a classification based on empirical data and used mainly in natural sciences such as biology [2]. Moreover, while classifications focus on grouping items in homogenous sets, typologies are based on the concept of the ideal type – types developed with respect to a certain predefined outcome [3]. The purpose of typologies lies in measuring the fit or deviance of variables of real entities to those of the ideal types. Accordingly, the typology may contain ideal types which are not observed in reality, but still represent a possible path for achieving an outcome. Therefore typologies allow specification of non-linear relationships between constructs and explanation of complex phenomena [3].

From this background, the typological approach is a useful tool and a enriching contribution to the development of a comprehensive theory of Social Innovation. SI-DRIVE’s theoretical underpinnings (in specific the key dimensions and mechanisms of social change) and the data collected during the two empirical phases (mapping 1 with 1005 cases and mapping 2 with 82 in-depth case studies) provide an opportunity to analyse and group social innovations in many different ways. In the following, a typological approach of SI-DRIVE, working with ideal types, is presented to distinguish between social innovations’ multiple ways to interact with the formal system (or social-cultural environment) they are related to.

## SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH SYSTEM INNOVATION

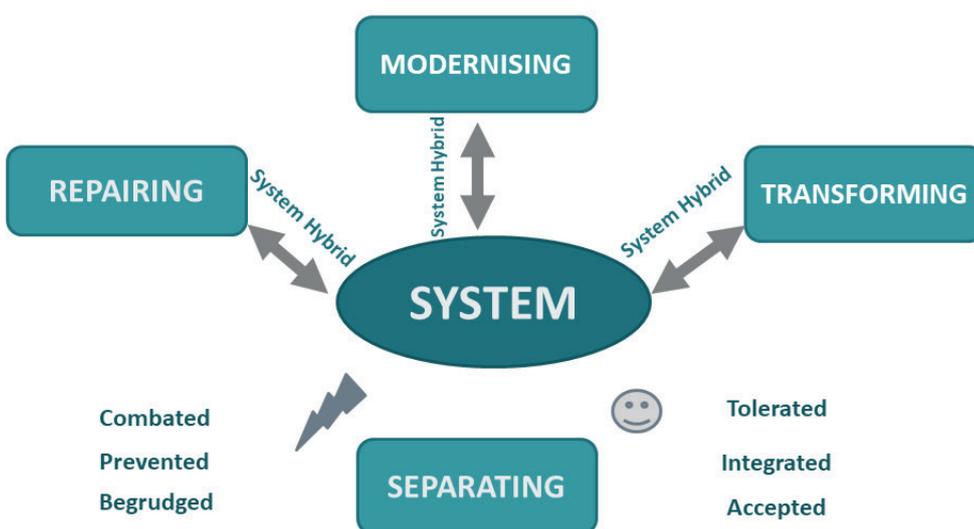
The SI-DRIVE results reveal that the initiatives’ overarching (world) regional, national, political and cultural context has to be taken into consideration. This background finds its replication in condensed formal systems (education, health, transport, energy, employment, environment systems), characterising the range and possibilities of social innovations to develop, scale, diffuse and institutionalise, and in the end foster processes of social change. Looking at the empirical results (especially of the in-depth case studies [4]) it becomes apparent that there are four different ways in which social innovations interact with the system it is operating in and using it as a lever for social change.

### Social Innovation and its Interaction with the Formal System:

Four different types of social innovation emerge out of their interaction with the formal system. Three of the types engage with the system. Here, social innovations might emerge within or outside the system or form a hybrid. One type acts completely separated from the system as either a potential friend or foe.

The proposed typology [5] comprises the four ideal types **repairing**, **modernising**, **transforming** and **separating** which can take different forms of interaction with or distancing itself from the system. This typology sees social change as interplay between the social innovation at hand and the formal condensed system with its institutions, formal actors and routinized practices at hand. Thus, to grasp social change it is important to look at the system’s reaction when dealing with a social innovation aka a new social practice.

In the first type “**transforming**”, social innovations change the system radically. **Transforming** the system through social innovation is often a kind of hidden agenda in the initiatives but not seen as realistic or actively done.



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However, there are some examples like Uber or Airbnb but also micro-financing and car sharing which affect the existing system with significant market impact. To transform a system a certain critical mass has to be reached, the practice field should have led to a lot of imitation, and imitation streams led to new social practices on a macro level, leading to social change.

#### Example: Transforming Social Innovation

**Agrosolidarity** has innovated in community capacity building strategies, with direct participation from rural agriculture families. The organisational structure is built on concentric circles formed by families, associative groups organised by product, process or services, mutualist associative figures, sectionals organised by micro-regions, regional Federations, and finally the Agrosolidarity National Confederation.

In the second type “**modernising**”, social innovations are leaving the system’s core identity untouched. **Modernising** the system is looking at the existing structures and is intending to improve the system. This type includes the improvement and supplement, for instance, of the health, education and employment system by digital solutions. For example, distant telemedicine like *Smart Elderly Care* (China) or *Care* (Russia) allow for the efficient and effective provision of home care for the elderly, providing a digital service which older people can use to contact medical professionals in the event of emergency or when they need medical information. Another

#### Example: Modernising Social Innovations

Especially, in the field of environment and energy there are a lot of cases that modernise the existing system with cross-sectoral and -responsibility solutions. The project *dynaklim* set up a regional network spanning across several administrative institutions, civil society organisations and local businesses to design a roadmap empowering the Ruhr region (Germany) and its actors to improve climate change adaptation.

good example for modernising an existing system (i.e. education) across separated responsibilities is setting up new overarching structures for lifelong learning (*HESSENCAMPUS*, Germany) across adult and vocational schools, training institutions and different public responsibilities to manage existing institutions from a learner’s perspective.

The third type of social innovations called “**repairing**” does not question the system as such but repairs single subunits. **Repairing** the system is the mainly represented type in the

SI-DRIVE mapping, often done by grassroots initiatives and focusing on specific system gaps or failures and vulnerable groups. For instance in the education sector there are several groups which are falling out of the system and where civil actors take care about: *Lernhaus* (Austria) is offering education measures for adult migrants because compulsory schooling is not formally responsible. Other activities are focused on measures for structurally disadvantaged children (with a migrant background) like *Tausche Bildung für Wohnen* (Exchange Education for Habitation) in Germany. *Abuelas Cuentacuentos* (Storytelling Grandmothers) is an example from Argentina tackling insufficient reading abilities of boys and girls with the help of senior citizen volunteers (grandmothers), in a programme that has expanded inter-generational dialogue and gives a leading role to elder people.

#### Example: Repairing Social Innovations

**Integrated Social Services (Servicios Sociales Integrados)** is an initiative founded by about 300 women, working irregularly (without a labour contract or social security). The cooperative creates self-employment opportunities to provide social services to elderly people at their homes: a high quality service for elderly people that rather continue living at their homes and at the same time a stable and prestigious job for the women. The initiative helped the women to get out of the informal economy into a more formal and legal part of the labour market.

In the policy field of Employment, *Mama Works* (Russia) is supporting young mothers in improving their labour market competencies through training, job search and even creating their own work. *LIFETool* (Austria) demonstrates the use of computer based technology to support people with physical or mental disabilities, particularly such which make speech difficult.

These first three types of social innovations act within or outside the system and either are transforming, modernising, or repairing it internally or externally. Another approach these types of Social Innovation take is to form a system hybrid. Either the social innovation is initiated outside of the system and merges into it or it can be initiated by the system itself with institutionalisation taking place outside of it.

The fourth type of Social Innovation, “**separating**”, acts completely separate from the system. On the one hand, this can take the form of peaceful co-existence, i.e. the social innovation is tolerated or even accepted or (partly) integrated (becoming – mainly in a later stage – part of the system and forming a system hybrid). On the other hand, a social innovation can antagonise the system at hand, in result being combatted by it, prevented from the beginning or begrudged. However, the potential shift from formerly separated social

innovations to system hybrids shows that social innovations are by no means stable, but dynamic, in principle changing their character and type during the innovation process, based on the acceptance, activities and attitude of the relevant system players. In that sense, different actors of the system, or in general actors taking part in the social innovation at hand, might influence the relationship between a social innovation and the system. This can lead to path dependencies. For example, in a system that is coined by strict regulations which do not allow any other practices to enter, a social innovation will remain separated from it. System **separating** initiatives are e.g. Repair Cafes like the *Repair and Service Centre (RUSZ)* in Austria that are setting up an own separate service and a market element (in peaceful co-existence to the big electronic trade companies). *She Taxi* (India) is offering safe travel options for women because of apparent attacks on women in public and other means of transportation. Antagonistic examples could be found in political movements like *Anonymous* and the *Arab Spring*, but also in extreme types of self-supplies in energy und nutrition (dropout cooperatives like rural communes) based on antagonistic lifestyles to the mainstream. The shared economy might also be seen as an example, setting up an antagonistic model of consuming.

#### Example: Separating Social Innovations – Tolerated

*Friluftsrämjandet* (Outdoor Association, Sweden) is an alternative education draft operating outside of formal education. It organises a wide array of outdoor activities based on local clubs for local communities with the purpose to learn about nature and team building by doing things together across age, religion, political opinion, etc.

## CONCLUSION

Because of the high process dynamics and the different development stages it is evident that the same social innovation initiative might be related to different types in the course of its development. The typology described is one example that will help to define the relation of social innovations to the existing system and their strategies based on the chosen clarification. System (in)compatibility and relation is one of the main success or failure factors for the development, diffusion and institutionalisation of social innovation initiatives. Therefore it is relevant to have a clear position and relation to the existing system structures. To unfold the potential of Social Innovation it is of high importance to define and require leeway to act in or outside the formal system and its institutions, taking up social demands not covered by the system actors. However, the typology described here only presents one of many possible typologies. Social innovations are diverse in terms of the actors involved, their level of maturity, their intended outcomes, and their sectoral alliances. All these aspects provide possible entry points for other typologies aiming to answer different research questions as the one of social change posed here. Ideal types, thus, might not only be constructed in relation to their interaction with the formal system, but can also describe the process dynamics (see article Ready for Take-off? Processes of social innovation) or describe their role in the social innovation ecosystem (see the six models described in Empowerment, co-creation and social innovation eco-systems).

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