Social innovation for societal transformation: insights from the TRANSIT project (and some conjectures)

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Central topics of my talk

- Social innovation as a modernistic metonym for an older phenomenon
- The diversity of social innovation
- Positive psychology insights for social innovation
- Social innovation as a socio-economic transformation phenomenon
- The sociotechnical transition perspective
- What the transition and transformation perspective can learn from each other
- The research agenda

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Social Innovation

Social innovation as changes in social relations, involving new ways of doing, knowing, organizing, and framing (Haxeltine et al. 2016)
Type of theory and approach to theory development

- Middle range theory
- Process theory
- Developed through deduction, induction and abduction – use of case studies and 'propositions'
- Draws on relational ontology with evolutionary and durational perspectives
- Draws on institutional theories and concepts to explain structuration while allowing for institutional change
Key publications and papers


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The historicity and diversity of social innovation

- Many initiatives based on alternative social relations do not refer to themselves as social innovations / innovators (Examples: RIPESS, Timebanks, energy cooperatives, ...)
- Unusualness in the world of today is a better label
- To different degrees and in various ways they involve co-production, empowerment/co-determination, experimental learning, community activism, open source, alternative currencies, purposes other than earning money

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The relative newness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social innovation network</th>
<th>Element of re-invention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Eco-village Network</td>
<td>Compared to the traditional forms of community life, they are modern in the sense of valuing individual freedom and equality and by being globally connected through virtual and personal networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Towns</td>
<td>Traditional forms of local, small-scale production and community-based exchanges, including local complementary currencies, complemented with modern communication technologies and individual freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Banks</td>
<td>A modern version of barter systems through the use of software and absence of barter (the time of doing a service is the basis for exchange) Services are exchanged via a service pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareable-Sharing cities</td>
<td>Sharing is an old phenomenon, with modern ICT infrastructure it can take different forms and go beyond family and friends, connecting various communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow Food movement</td>
<td>Protecting local landscapes, products and traditional production methods, while re-building community relations based on conviviality and humanization of relations in the food system. Local food traditions are actively maintained.</td>
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</tbody>
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[Diagram]

Pel and Kemp, under development
Three discoveries in TRANSIT

1) Social innovation initiatives fit with self-determination theory which says that people have innate needs for autonomy, relatedness and feelings of competence (as basic psychological needs), where
   - Autonomy refers to the idea that one’s actions are self-determined or self-motivated and that there is a sense of choice
   - Relatedness refers to the feeling of security, having a secure relational base and being able to relate to others in one’s environment (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon et al., 2003)

2) Transformative social innovation involves not a single transformation but diverse transformations based on different social relations, values and ideas of progress. Diversity of directions, institutional forms, ways of funding and collaboration are an integral and inherent element of the social transformations that are enacted and aspired to as part of TSI.
3. Social innovation is often considered as a beyond-the-state activity, or as a manifestation of new social movements that operate in the shadow of or against the state. But governments have a crucial role to play in creating a favourable environment for non-state social innovation initiatives. The Universal Basic Income exemplifies how some proposals for new social relations are not a matter of 'supporting grassroots initiatives’ – government will ultimately have to do it.

TRANSIT brief #6 TSI- What we have learned in 4 years of research?

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**TSI is part of broader historical processes**

- TSI as a **reaction** to a changing context
- TSI as an **assertive** historical process of emancipation, needs for self-direction, democracy, doing purposeful things based on people's assets and relation values (humanization of the economy)
The sustainability transition perspective

**Basic assumptions (viewpoint) of transition scholars** (Geels, Grin)
- The problem with achieving SD is that we are **locked-in** to sociotechnical systems which are not sustainable
- Sustainable development requires **system innovation** in the form of sustainability transitions

**System innovation**
- Is broad in scope and radical in character
- It is about the implementation of a system-wide novelty
- It involves a wide diversity of actors and often takes decades to move from margins to mainstream
- It is dynamic and non-standardised
- It is disruptive from the viewpoint of incumbent actors (including users) (Fred Steward)

The multilevel perspective

- Comes from the sociology of technology and evolutionary economics
- It is based on 3 elements: niches, regimes and landscape
- The "levels" refer to **degree of structuration and aggregation** – and not to hierarchical levels
Multi-level interactions creating a transition

Regimes

Regimes as socio-technical systems
- "a mutually aligned, established set of technological artifacts, use patterns, institutional contexts, regulations, infrastructures etc. that prevail for delivering a specific service, e.g. personal mobility" (Truffer et al., 2008, p. 1361)

A practice-centered view of regimes
- "the whole of implicit and explicit rules and associated ways of thinking that guide practical behaviour of professional people and which is being reconfirmed by everyday practice" (Loeber)
What is behind the idea of regimes?

- The idea that practices and structures “reproduce” each other (duality of structure)
- New practices require well-developed systems for their use, but such systems require users, companies, professionals for their development (“chicken and egg” problem \( \Rightarrow \text{Lock-in} \))
- Regime actors favour regime-preserving change (it is in the interest of many people to stay with the present regime)

Examples of regimes

- Supply-oriented education
- Supply-oriented system of health care
- Car-based mobility
- Regime of centralised electricity production
The landscape consists of the wider context consisting of

- Roads, towns, cities, ..
- Values, beliefs, norms, ..
- Aspirations and concerns of people
- Political associations,
- Prices, taxes, ..
- Life styles
- International relations in the global economy

What are niches?

Places in which novel configurations develop and grow

Niches are application domains with distinct selection criteria and resource pools

In which there may be an element of deliberate protection

Speciation in technological development (Levinthal 1998: 223)
Distinct transition patterns that stem from niche-regime-landscape interactions

- **Gradual regime transformation**: adaptation of socio-technical regimes to legitimacy pressures (fit-and-conform and fit-and-stretch)
- **Substitution**: of well-established technology and by a new one (through expansion of niche markets)
- **Reconfiguration**: New alliances (niche-regime) and innovation cascades that change systems architectures
- **De-alignment and re-alignment**: decline of old technologies and competition between innovations leading to new socio-technical configurations through processes of variation-selection-retention

Source: Geels and Raven (2006)
TRANSITIONS PATTERNS (source: Schot and Geels (2008) in Research Policy)
We live in a time of upheaval the outcomes of which are uncertain

- **The economic growth process based on marketization and debt is not sustainable socially** because of inequality, uprooting, environmental degradation and conflict with basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence
- The volatile voting behaviour and election of populists, distrust of experts, identity politics and opposition to exploitive forms of capitalism is testimony of the turbulence of the present age

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<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>System faults</th>
<th>Social-material solutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Education and science</td>
<td>Disciplinary knowledge; publication-centered, one-way learning, service to society low</td>
<td>Transdisciplinary research, transformative science and problem-based education. Greater role for arts and humanities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>We must shift to renewable energy sources to prevent climate disruption and for additional reasons of depletion of fossil fuel stocks and reducing geopolitical (resource) dependencies</td>
<td>Use of renewable energy technologies (owned by sustainable energy utilities and energy cooperatives), zero energy renovation houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Too many cars and too much car use. The physical infrastructure for cars cannot keep up with the rising levels. Cars and air travel are also responsible for noise and pollution</td>
<td>Cycling, electric cars, car sharing organisations, car-free zones, less long distance holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care and social work</td>
<td>Overspecialised and money-driven with constant efficiency pressures. Insufficiently patient-centered. Excessive reporting requirements and protocols. People with multiple problems cannot be helped well.</td>
<td>Neighbourhood care, use of experience experts (ex-drug addicts, prisoners), family conferences, caring as a normal activity for everyone (not just for paid professionals).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in the market economy</td>
<td>Job insecurity and anxiety. Profits are unequally shared. Workers are subjected to performance pressures. Competition amongst workers degrades relational values.</td>
<td>Work that is meaningful, fulfilling and fitting with values and competences, better work-life balance. Worker cooperatives</td>
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## System

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<td>State welfare system</td>
<td>Unemployment claimants are coerced to apply for jobs they have little interest in and very low chances at getting; failure to comply with rule and requests lead to punishment in the form of financial sanctions.</td>
<td>Basic income and availability of options to assume life in such a way that it is expressive of people’s integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land ownership and use</td>
<td>Private and individual ownership leads to private appropriation of rents and profits and negative costs for society</td>
<td>Land as a common property, land rents are used for the common good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production and consumption of goods</td>
<td>The production of short-lived goods consumed for status and fancy which are disposed after first time use. External costs are passed on to society.</td>
<td>Product-service systems, circular economy. Less materialistic lifestyles with an importance role for self-development and doing-it-yourself (cooking, growing vegetables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial system</td>
<td>Unsustainable levels of debts. Endemic tax avoidance. Orientation towards short-term financial gains at the expense of long-term stability. Contributing to disparities in wealth.</td>
<td>Separating high-risk ‘casino’ investment banking (e.g. derivative-market speculation) from traditional banking. Use of local currencies. Cryptocurrencies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### A better world involves multiple transitions / transformations

![Mindmap](image-url)
The socio-technical transition and socio-economic transformation perspective as complementary

What the Socio-Technical Transition perspective should consider
- The importance of non-material needs
- Root causes for sustainability
- The negative aspects of marketization and competition (for ST transitions and for well-being)
- The transformative significance of institutional hybridization
- Individual empowerment in niche processes
- Translocal mobilities of social niches

What alternative economy activists and social innovation scholars can learn from the socio-technical perspective
- Distinctive patterns
- Technology as an agent of change
- Alliances with regime actors for specific transitions
- Be involved in socio-technical transitions (food, energy, mobility, waste, ...) as citizens and prosumers
- Critical role of infrastructure decisions
Socio-technical innovations co-shaping the future (also for social innovation)

- Blockchain and cryptocurrencies
- Local energy markets
- Artificial intelligence and big data (used for surveillance and algorithm-based control)
- Open source technologies and software
- Electric mobility
- Precision farming
- …..

Pleas for an alternative economy

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No is not enough (Naomi Klein)

Politics of belonging (George Monbiot)

Envisioning real utopia (Wright)

Humanisation of the economy

Rebalanced society for better and worse

Social innovation in a three movement model

Karl Polanyi described a double movement in society:

1. The first movement is towards marketization, the spread of market thinking and market-based forms of allocation throughout society, driven by international trade and natural ideas of competition and utilitarianism.

2. The second countermovement consists of (state-based) social protection against the negative consequences of that same marketization.

In a paper with TRANSIT researchers, I suggest that the double movement model is best changed into a three movement model with:

3. a third movement called the humanization of the economy involving a re-embedding as the opposite of dis-embedding: the loss of social ties and sense of purpose in individualistic societies, not in the sense of restoring the past but based on need for autonomy and self-development (which are largely absent in traditional communities)
# First movement (marketization)

**Institutional aim**
Establishment of a self-regulating market

**Support of social forces**
Trading classes

**Organizing principle(s)**
Laissez-faire and free trade

** Emerged in response to...**
Inefficiency, feudalism, and oppressiveness of state-based rule

# Second movement (social protection)

**Institutional aim**
Conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization

**Support of social forces**
Those most immediately affected by deleterious action of the market: primarily, but not exclusively, the working and the landed classes

**Organizing principle(s)**
Protective legislation, accountability demands and other instruments of intervention

** Emerged in response to...**
Dis-embedding effects of laissez-faire economic (neo)liberalism: i.e. objectification of man & nature and economic stress cycle

# Third movement (humanization)

**Institutional aim**
Re-embedding of values of mutuality, social purpose and respect in economic relationships, in a way that offers conditions for humane human development and ecological thriving

**Support of social forces**
Those who are disenchanted by present arrangements for work and welfare state duties and seek to enhance human well-being through autonomy-enhancing solutions

**Organizing principle(s)**
Self-organization and purpose-orientation, generating a fitting context for autonomy, relatedness and competence.

** Emerged in response to...**
Inadequacy of protection- and hierarchy-based responses to dis-embedding effects of neoliberalism

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**Consequence for (concept of) selfhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration of individualism with little consideration of alienated or egotistic self</th>
<th>Individual as statistical fact: Not much attention is given to the authentic self in the application of bureaucratic rule</th>
<th>Authentic, self-actualized self: Important role for self-fulfilment through serving a greater cause / acting for the collective good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Welfare concept**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic growth &amp; “trickle-down” justification for the super wealth of individuals</th>
<th>Economic growth with top-down welfare redistribution to those in need</th>
<th>A good life (e.g. Buen Vivir) with important role for personal growth and well-being:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**View on freedom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom of individuals from interference from others</th>
<th>Freedom within constraints (to avoid exploitation)</th>
<th>Social bonds based on trust and mutuality constitute the means of our freedom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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The changing context: some possibilities

- Obligations for benefit receivers to do “voluntary work"
- Local authorities orienting themselves to the local economy (local food, buy local, local currencies, ...)
- Reform of care systems (less fragmented, more community based, ...)
- Social impact bonds
- Philanthropic foundations & individuals
- Basic income
- Teal companies (based on ARC) as a new model (Laloux)
- ...
Embracing paradoxes is key to TSI

- Whilst striving for inclusivity they may be excluding in some way and reproduce gender relations, social class divides.
- In order to make social innovation more inclusive and accessible and in order to have transformative impact, innovation must go through some sort of mainstreaming process, creating risks of co-option and capture.
- In calls for change, we may get transformations of the wrong kind, because of the power of other normativities (which celebrate efficiency, managerialism, values of meritocracy and agonistic views on government and solidarity).

For building a more just, responsible and relational economy based on alternative institutions and practices we need to have a portfolio of different and often paradoxical strategies, including resisting, protesting, disproving, demanding, lobbying and disobeying, but also supplementing, compromising, complementing, circumventing, improving, collaborating, seducing and surprising. These strategies need to be flexible, continuously adapting, updating and repositioning, so as to translate values and practices to a more mainstream context, while at the same time allowing us to hold on to our original core intentions.

Source: (TRANSIT) Manifesto for Transformative Social Innovation

The research agenda on TSI

- In what ways are social innovation initiatives responses to perceived gaps and deficiencies in established arrangements and provisions?
- How well do they cater to autonomy, relatedness and purpose?
- What problems do TSI face in institutionalizing themselves and achieving transformative impact?
- What interventions in social welfare provision, company law and the science system can help TSI to expand and build a more social, inclusive and responsible economy (e.g., what role for basic income, mandatory community service, social impact bonds, vouchers for research and advise, and the creation of new legal frameworks for the commons and for-benefit companies)?
- To what extent will a hybridisation of logics undermine the value base of grassroots and/or help TSI values and practices to enter the domains of health care, science, business and social welfare provision?
- In what respects are the TSI initiatives today different from those of the past? Is it true that they marry individualism (in the form of self-actualization and self-determination) with values of social relatedness and demands for social purpose?