

INTRODUCTION: Special Issue on Innovation and Research, The Innovation Journal

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The transition from an industrial society to a knowledge and services-based society leads to a new way of thinking about the connections between the creation of knowledge and its application. The social innovation process sheds light on this social transformation and the way knowledge is being produced and diffused. Since Michael Gibbons' cornerstone volume *The New Production of Knowledge, The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (1994) about Mode 2, that is, the co-production of research outcomes through interdisciplinarity and a problem focus, and later in 1998, Loet Leydesdorff and Henry Etzkowitz' seminal paper about the Triple Helix of University-Industry-Government Relations, it is well acknowledged that the process of knowledge production in natural sciences as well as in social sciences and humanities is being developed in an effort to find and to bring about solutions to social, economic and cultural problems. Research and its application are introduced in a transdisciplinary and evolving framework that guides efforts towards solutions. This framework includes the collaboration of heterogeneous practitioners as well as academic researchers who together create knowledge that addresses the problem defined in a specific and local context and timeframe. Moreover, the outcomes are easily transferred to those who participate in its production. This mode of research is adaptable and flexible; it is the product of mass production of research. The triple helix model points to the links between university, enterprise and government as a new mode of knowledge production. Together they co-evolve and make durable a model of transfer of knowledge among different production and operational units. These models are also applied to social innovation even though they must be adapted to a civil society, a social movement or a social entrepreneur. Research funding from public agencies has been strongly influenced by these models. Governments and their programs encourage the creation of alliances among different actors, state representatives, academics and researchers as the core element of the research process for the production of codified knowledge; alliances are transferable and open to the dissemination of innovation at local, regional, national and international levels. Those modes of knowledge production lead to the transformation of the institutions in such a way that the learning process evolves according to a dynamic and non-linear path. Production of knowledge is the keystone for the comprehension of post-industrial social and economic development. How are researchers becoming actors in the innovation process? How are networks of knowledge production taking shape? In practical terms, how are the connections between heterogeneous actors with different interests being built? Is the knowledge created in the social innovation process deserving of equal importance and attention as its counterpart in technological innovation?

Knowledge about the innovation process is probably increasing at a faster pace than ever before. Research plays an important role in that process. I will summarize some key points about its function. Innovation is now understood as both a result and a process. Research shows that innovation may be a solution to economic and social problems, at least as anticipated by social actors. These actors create alternatives to some key challenges that have developed as a result of a decline in legitimacy or efficiency of the institutionalized forms of problem solving. These alternatives can take the shape of improvement in well-being compared to what is available (continuous innovation), or of production of a service that represents a breaking-off from routine or, as the most critical configuration of innovation, of a completely new way of producing or delivering services, of creating new relations or norms for social interactions or rules for living together. How are these innovations created? The work of Lewis Mumford (2003) is significant here to understand the process, as is the work of the socio-constructivists such as Michel Callon (1992) and Karin Knorr-Cetina (1997), and the work of the new institutionalists like John Campbell (2004) who introduces the concepts of 'institutional entrepreneur' and 'bricolage' as a way to make a break from old institutions and produce new ones. They argue, each in his own way, that innovators are not individualists who can generate brain waves just because they gather together all the knowledge necessary to bring forth ideas. They are rather individuals who possess many relations and connections at the crossroads of mixed networks, and they are able to move people forward through their involvement, considered to be essential to the innovations. The creation of a novelty can be understood as the recombination of things that already exist, or as an analogy, meaning the transfer of a set of arrangements in a specific situation to another completely different situation. An innovation is not pure invention of something that has never existed before. It is rather a 'new combination,' to use the expression coined by Schumpeter (1975).

Academic knowledge about innovation is important to practitioners. It serves as inspiration to do something in the absence of a normative process because there is no blueprint. Indeed, there is no such thing as labs in social innovation (with a few rare exceptions). People experiment and when they have an answer, after the fact, they analyze what has been done, steps through which they had gone. Innovation belongs to every one. Through a well organized process, people become empowered so that they can find out themselves how to cope with the problems of their community and drive the appropriate changes to improve their well-being. It means leaving enough space to the associations and organizations within which people are involved as citizens or employees, managers or stakeholders, and through which they meet and share relationships, information, knowledge and emotion that agree with their needs, values and interests. Indeed, social innovation fits perfectly well with civil society which is the main mover of the system of change, introducing new values and new courses of action which are empowering to people (Klein & Harrison 2007; Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller 2008). But civil society cannot do everything by itself in the innovation process. That is why corporations and states are involved. Innovation is a matter of networking among a variety of heterogeneous social actors. The main role is given to civil society in partnership with the state and corporations. Innovation is the outcome of knowledge shared by people who are connected in many ways within associations and social movements that are developing ideas and courses of action. They need the commitment of state or corporations, however, to disseminate the form through which the innovation takes shape.

Lastly research on the process of innovation has shed light on how institutions play a role in the making of innovation and its diffusion. Work done by the institutionalists and the evolutionists has pointed out that social creativity does not proceed in an institutional vacuum (Freeman 1995, Campbell 2004). On the contrary, actors are constrained by the sum of past decisions that give way to some future path dependency. Nonetheless, the paths are not just constraints but possibilities as well. Innovators know how to deal with the rules, norms and values shared or being debated. They also learn how to make alliances and partnerships with opponents by using institutional rules or, during some other moments in the process, by hedging the constraints or by eliminating them. In the end, a successful social innovation is the one that reaches the state of a new institution proposing new agreements and arrangements among social actors who are capable of achieving legitimacy and efficiency for the new ways of tackling economic and social problems.

The five papers collected in this special issue represent a sampling of this pattern among the many ways of doing research. In the first paper, "Ethics of Innovation for Public Service Professionals," Gerald Andrews Emison points to "relentless change in the public service" at the moment when public servants face changing conditions due to new values, politics or technologies. It is well known that government bureaucracies prefer stability over taking risks and coping with uncertainty. Failures, as a critical component of innovation, are not accepted in the public sector for political reasons related to the accountability of the representatives. Therefore, practitioners have predispositions for established approaches. This situation is challenged when new conditions appear. For these reasons, professionals in public service seek ethical choices of a specific nature. Such choices should acknowledge that actual conditions require partial and proximate rather than categorical, *a priori* decisions. Today public service professionals face a unique set of challenges as they innovate in an evolving world. They need approaches to ethical decision making that acknowledge the unavoidable fact of continuing change.

The second paper, "Enhancing Public Sector Innovation: Examining the network-innovation relationship," by Travis Bland, Boris Bruk, Dongshin Kim, and Kimberly Taylor Lee is a logical continuation of the first paper. The public sector currently faces some huge challenges. Public servants are not cautious in face of these changes. Public sector organizations are operating in a more unstable environment than ever before and must be able to improve their capacity to innovate. This particular situation is sufficient reason to adopt the network form of governance; that is, collaboration that brings people and their organizations together to address the complex problems facing communities. The paper presents a case study in which the network-innovation relationship is analyzed through the study of the relationship between the network form of governance and innovation; the management of obstacles to innovation posed by the network form of governance; and the necessity for the design, development, and institutionalization of several processes completing innovation building. These processes the authors call *network-innovation mechanisms*. This is an important concept if the innovation is being viewed as a process rather than an outcome.

In “When agents become principals: the possible perversion of the incentive based compensation in the Norwegian academia,” Jarle Aarstad presents the side effects of the incentive based system in which academic scientists receive economic compensation for publication in first rate academic journals. If in flux, the classification of journals can hamper the quality of research, there can be secondary consequences for knowledge and innovation. Indeed when scholars from different institutions contribute to the same paper, the funding is distributed evenly among the institutions and this may limit co-authorship. This paper is a theoretical contribution and does not empirically test the propositions advanced.

The contribution of Jean-Marc Fontan, “Recherche partenariale en économie sociale : analyse d’une expérience novatrice de coproduction des connaissances,” aims to study the relationship between science and society through the interaction between academic scientists and social practitioners who meet in a situation of joint production of knowledge. This situation, going back to the 19th century corresponds to a transformation of the meaning of thinking for the support to community-based development. The idea at the root of this methodological approach gives priority to the pairing of expertise between academics and civil society practitioners. Academics are not considered specialists who can put aside the cognitive skills developed by social actors. They each rely on the pairing of knowledge. This mode of knowledge production brings together all people who can use intellectual capacities to think about social reality. Everyone can participate to this process but it is not sufficient to make a positive contribution to the development of a community if this knowledge is not disseminated through accessible outlets.

In a relevant case-study, “Modelling cost-benefit analysis in a data-scarce environment: developing a heuristic tool,” Mark O’Brien demonstrates how a heuristic tool can be useful for modeling cost-benefit analysis. Based on research on service innovations involving parent-carers in an English city, the author starts with an explanation for the causes of flaws in government expenditure. Drawing upon a study of a small scale pilot service innovation involving parent-carers and babies in schools, the paper points out that this represents an unnecessary gap in the design and development of such service innovations that can be addressed using a “semi-systematic” mode of cost-benefit modeling. The methodology identifies criteria that can be mobilized to frame cost-benefit considerations with some degree of rigor despite the absence of significant impact data.

To conclude, we do not pretend that all the topics relative to social innovations, the appropriate process of its production and the formation of relevant knowledge are covered in this special issue. However, the quality of the papers presented here and the variety of the contributions portray the new way of producing knowledge that will have an impact in combating the problems of modern societies at the beginning of the 21st Century.

About the Author:

Denis Harrisson is professor in the Department of Organization and Human Resources at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM). He is a member of the Centre for Research in Social Innovations (CRISES), a strategic group composed of 30 scholars dedicated to research on social innovation and social transformation. His research interest concerns the process of innovation in organizations and trust building between actors reputed for their adversarial type of relationship. Following work on innovations in the manufacturing sector, and later in the public sector, he is now involved in research about innovation in the social economy and voluntary sector. His publications have been published among others in *Relations Industrielles*, *Management Studies*, and *Human Relations*. He is the author or co-author of *L'innovation sociale: Émergence et effets sur la transformation des sociétés* (PUQ), *La construction du partenariat patronal-syndical: contraintes du marché et négociations locales* (L'Harmattan), *La confiance: Approches économiques et sociologiques* (Gaëtan Morin éditeur).

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