

# Universities' contributions to social innovation: towards a theoretical framework

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## 1. Introduction: the 'missing middle' of the university third mission

There has been in recent years great interest in the idea of the university 'third mission', engagement with social and economic partners and the creation of wider benefits in society. Although this third mission is arguably not as central to the core purposes of universities, namely teaching and research, because universities have always been dependent on wider societal support, and need that societal support to prosper, the third mission does fit well with this idea of a societal compact between universities and society. In 1982, a seminal report from the OECD Centre for Education Research and Innovation, CERI, noted that this third mission activity, broadly defined as engagement, could be divided into two elements, business and community engagement respectively.

Although there has been a burgeoning interest in the third mission, these two strands have followed very divergent pathways in terms of both university focus as well as the academic study of those activities. Business engagement has moved to become an increasing central part of what universities do, and the cases that they mobilise to justify their existence. There has likewise been an extensive study of university business engagement, from the detailed practices and processes within universities, to the effects that this has both on business users, but also the wider economy, innovation system and technology change. There is consequently a detailed understanding of how micro-scale processes, universities exchanging and co-creating knowledge with businesses, lead to broader economic development processes, through new firm formation and business innovation, driving productivity growth and ultimately economic growth.

Community engagement has remained a relatively peripheral activity within universities, and has tended to operate on a piecemeal basis, as projects and experiments often carried

forward by the enthusiasm and good will of a number of lead institutional advocates without driving wider institutional change. The scholarly study of community engagement has likewise often taken an advocatorial rather than analytic position, seeking to celebrate and draw attention to activities and to mobilise a coalition of supporters to extend those activities. But at the same time, universities seem to have all kinds of resources and assets that are able to support all kinds of community development processes beyond the business sphere, and therefore this underdevelopment of the community mission appears to represent a clear lacuna.

But at the same time, part of the reason for the successful rise of the third mission has been a sense that it is valuable to users as well as to the universities. Much university community engagement remains characterised by a sense of 'detached benevolence', doing good things independent from user needs, whilst central to business engagement has been understanding what businesses need to improve their innovation, and focussing on delivering that more effectively. This paper seeks to make a contribution to a more systematic understanding of university-community engagement in terms of the contributions that it makes to society rather than the promise of the activities undertaken by institution. The focus for the paper is to consider the topic of social innovation, and how universities can contribute to processes of social innovation. Using social innovation as a starting point solves this central problem of detached benevolence, by identifying social development processes and considering university contributions to that social development process.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Firstly, the paper defines social development as an element of societal development, and distinguishes the various elements that may be involved in these processes. Secondly, the paper presents an overview of reasons for the renewed interest about social innovation. Thirdly, the paper defines social innovation as the means by which social development takes place, focusing on innovation within civil society groups (rather than businesses or governmental/ state actors). Fourthly, the paper develops a process model for social innovation, and in particular considers the various inputs which are necessary or possible from external actors, including from universities. Fifthly, the paper develops a typology of the kinds of contributions which universities potentially make to social innovation processes, and the effects that this has on the direction and magnitude of social innovation, and by implication social development. Sixthly, the paper presents a brief overview of a SI in order to illustrate the main characteristics of the proposed SI process and the contribution of the university for that process. Finally, the main conclusions from the paper are drawn and possible future research is presented.

## 2. Social development processes as a component of societal development

Our argument in this paper is that although some elements of universities' third missions are well understood (*cf.* May and Perry, 2013, for a more detailed analysis of the idea of third mission), other aspects, particularly those relating to more social, rather than economic, elements of innovation are largely ignored. As early as 1982, the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation's (CERI) 1982 report *Universities and their Committees* allocated parity between university contributions to businesses and societal groups. By the 1990s, the dominance of the AUTM-led discourse of 'entrepreneurial science' placed economic contributions above social, cultural, environmental and democratic contributions (CVCP, 1994; Popp Berman, 2012; Benneworth, 2013). These approaches argue explicitly or implicitly that university contributions via technology transfer and knowledge exchange drive economic development, creating various economic benefits that 'ripple out' through society, and improve productivity levels, growth rates and ultimately economic wealth.

At the same time, analyses of universities' social contributions has tended to be restricted by descriptions of universities' activities in terms of their outputs and sometimes outcomes, without ever really being able to make the case that these 'small' activities have 'bigger' macro-benefits (*cf.* Benneworth, 2010). What has been missing thus far from these analyses is a comparative approach to societal development which explores how universities' individual contributions produce wider macro-effects at the level of society. In short, whilst it is well understood that university technology transfer can drive economic development, it is not clear how universities' other kinds of knowledge contributions can drive wider societal development, and in particular social development. As a starting point, we regard societal development, in its widest form, as being a process in which a society increases its various capital stocks across social, economic and environmental capitals. Corea (2007) provides a working definition of societal development thus:

"the acceleration of economic prosperity and social well-being, involving a shift away from conditions of life perceived as unsatisfactory towards those that are significantly preferable" (p. 50)

Our contention is that university contribution tends to be understood in terms of contributions to economic development, partly because economic development is reasonably understood, and because there is a clear model for how universities can contribute. The relationship has been established between total factor productivity and economic growth (Rostow, 1994), with total factor productivity being the residual of capitals that are not land, labour and machinery, and is understood as knowledge capital (Temple *et al.* 1998). Universities contribute to economic growth by contributing to knowledge capital formation, application and exploitation (Benneworth & Charles, 2005). The question is whether universities also contribute to other forms of social development in other kinds of ways, through the application of their knowledge to create societal development.

We are here going to make a slightly artificial distinction between the economy and society: whilst recognising that all economic processes are socially embedded, and social activities have economic drivers and consequences, society can be understood as having a distinct sphere where the motivation is not the maximisation of profit. The Social activity can be understood as all those activities which are not necessary for material survival, and have an intrinsic value to the performer. What Alexander (2006) refers to as the civil sphere are activities and institutions that create solidarity between individuals and create capacity in those individuals to live better lives, such as literacy/ education, enfranchisement/ democracy, culture/ identity, or health/ wellbeing.

Social development is therefore a process by which society increases the capacities of individuals and groups to undertake activities of intrinsic value to themselves. There is a sense of crisis in many areas of social development at the moment, with a sense that in some areas, societies are at a threshold and risk moving backwards, for example in terms of the challenges relating to urban sustainability, climate change, or food security. Social development can also be framed in terms of the creation of solutions to these macro-scale problems in which societies create new capacities to deal with these emerging problems. In that line of reasoning, Jacobs & Cleveland (1999) define social development thus:

“the process of organizing human energies and activities at higher levels to achieve greater results. Development increases the utilization of human potential.” (p1.)

Social development can therefore be understood as a process of change, of organising human energies at higher levels to achieve greater results, measured in terms of the improved utilisation of human potential. This suggests to us that understanding universities' contributions can be understood in terms of their capacities to contribute to those wider change processes. Following that line of reasoning, we note that the mechanism by which economic development is driven is that of technological innovation, with new knowledge (including that from universities) being applied to create new products, services and techniques that have an added economic value. We therefore propose that universities' contributions to societal development can potentially be understood in terms of their capacity to contribute to social innovation. Social innovation is a concept that has emerged in recent years, and we contend that this is partly a reflection of a dissatisfaction with the failure of technological innovation paradigms to capture what really matters about change processes. In the following section we chart the emergence of thinking around social innovation, and then provide a more general definition of social innovation, which we use to develop a conceptual framework for how universities might be able to contribute to social development.

### **3. Emergence of social innovation**

Although the idea of SI is not new (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010), it has been an underdeveloped area in the field of social sciences and government innovation policies

(Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010; Neumeier, 2012; Adams and Hess, 2008), and only recently the attention has been directed to SI (Moulaert et al., 2005).

One of the primary reasons is the emphasis placed in technological innovation (TI) (Dawson et al., 2010; Pol and Ville, 2009; Moulaert et al., 2005). In fact, there is little knowledge about SI compared to the huge volume of research about TI (Mulgan, 2007a). As Adams and Hess (2008: 5) pointed out “innovation is overwhelmingly treated as economic innovation with a narrow focus on technical efficiency and the commercialisation of science and technology”. Certainly, TI contributes to economic growth and the development of human well-being. However, to fully explain the improvement in the living conditions of humankind, one has to consider also the role of SI (Pol and Ville, 2009). Actually, innovation in the non-business context is now being increasingly discussed (Iizuka, 2013; Chalmers, 2012) and, therefore, SI can be seen as a reaction to the bias towards TI research, policy and practice (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012).

A second reason is the consciousness that there are problems and challenges that cannot be addressed as has been until now (Iizuka, 2013; Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010). Some examples are: climate change and ecological risks; finding the cure for chronic disease; increasing and widening inequalities; the current financial crisis in developed countries and the rising of poverty rates; massive unemployment and the disaffection of some groups of young people; the erosion of the social security system; chronic shortages of welfare funding in developing countries; the impact of ageing population; diffuse security risks and threats; the mass urbanisation phenomenon; and the social exclusion phenomenon (Iizuka, 2013; Leadbeater, 2007; Moulaert et al., 2007; Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005; Gerometta et al., 2005; Center for Social Innovation). To overcome these problems or challenges SI can have an important role (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010) and this is facilitated by a change in culture and values (Murray et al., 2010) as, for example, the growing emphasis on the human dimension; on putting people first; and giving democratic voice (Murray et al., 2010).

Another reason for the increasing interest on SI derives from the possibilities arising with TI. In fact, technologies are transforming the world in which we live (Center for Social Innovation), the spread of networks and global infrastructures for information and social networking act as facilitators of new social practices (Brackertz, 2011), and blurred boundaries between production and consumption and the emphasis on collaboration and on repeated interactions (Murray et al., 2010), all contribute to bring forth SI.

#### **4. Definition of Social innovation**

To present a definition of SI is not an easy task (Salamon et al., 2010) given that SI is variously defined (Elliott, 2013), rarely appears as a clearly delineated scope (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010) and suffers from a number of conceptual overlaps (Iizuka, 2013). Moreover, several expressions that have been used to describe SI (e.g., ‘improving quality of life’,

‘desirable innovation for whom at which moment’) still need to be undoubtedly defined in order to allow a comparative evaluation among several cases presented in the literature (Iizuka, 2013).

An often cited definition of SI is that of Phillips et al. (2008: 36): “A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.”

Another definition is presented by Mulgan (2007a: 8): “Social innovation refers to new ideas that work in meeting social goals. We have also suggested a somewhat narrower definition: ‘innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social.’”

Two similar definitions are those by Murray et al. (2010: 3): “we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”; and Bacon et al. (2008: 13): “We use the term ‘social innovation’ to refer to new ideas (products, services and models) developed to fulfil unmet social needs”. The similarity of these three definitions can be explained by the fact that they have been defined in the context of studies developed by The Young Foundation and NESTA.

Also, the OECD’s LEED Programme has defined SI “as that which concerns: conceptual, process or product change, organisational change and changes in financing, and can deal with new relationships with stakeholders and territories. ‘Social innovation’ seeks new answers to social problems by: identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities; identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce.”

For Howaldt and Schwarz (2010: 21) SI “is new combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices.” In the case of Pol and Ville (2009) “an innovation is termed a social innovation if the implied new idea has the potential to improve either the quality or the quantity of life”.

Adams and Hess (2008: 3) define SI “as mould-breaking ways of confronting unmet social need by creating new and sustainable capabilities, assets or opportunities for change”. For Neumeier (2012: 55) SI are “as changes of attitudes, behaviour or perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that in relation to the group’s horizon of

experiences lead to new and improved ways of collaborative action within the group and beyond.”

Moulaert et al. (2005: 1978) offer the following definition of SI: “Social innovation is path-dependent and contextual. It refers to those changes in agendas, agency and institutions that lead to a better inclusion of excluded groups and individuals in various spheres of society at various spatial scales. Social innovation is very strongly a matter of process innovation – i.e. changes in the dynamics of social relations, including power relations. As social innovation is very much about social inclusion, it is also about countering or overcoming conservative forces that are eager to strengthen or preserve social exclusion situations. Social innovation therefore explicitly refers to an ethical position of social justice. The latter is of course subject to a variety of interpretations and will in practice often be the outcome of social construction.”

The definition by Westley and Antadze (2010: 2) is as follows: “Social innovation is a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs. Such successful social innovations have durability and broad impact”.

One attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of SI was that of Caulier-Grice et al. (2012: 18): “Social innovations are new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”

A final definition presented in this paper is that from the Center of Social Innovation: SI refers to “new ideas that resolve existing social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges for the benefit of people and planet. A true social innovation is systems-changing – it permanently alters the perceptions, behaviours and structures that previously gave rise to these challenges.”

From the previous SI definitions, two distinct clusters of characteristics can be identified: those concerned with social justice; and those concerned with social innovation practices.

In the first cluster, the following characteristics are included. One is related to the fact that SI primarily addresses social and human needs. In this context, the notion of human needs is wider than merely jobs and incomes for a large majority of people in the territorial community (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005). As emphasised by Moulaert et al. (2005: 1976) “the stress will be on the satisfaction of human needs that are not currently satisfied, either because ‘not yet’ or because ‘no longer’ perceived as important by either the market or the state”.

Another is the focus on social value creation and community development (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010; Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005). Social value creation can be defined as “social rents that accrue primarily to the end user who has unmet needs; social rents come from harnessing scarce resources to maximize social impact” (Munshi, 2010: 162). In fact, SIs are generally prompted by a concern with people and communities rather than commercial gain (Dawson and Daniel, 2010) and the community is viewed as a social agent (Adams and Hess, 2008).

An additional characteristic is the collaborative action and the role of networks. Actually, SIs need to operate within and across communities or collective structures to be successful and, to this end, the spread of networks and global infrastructures for information and social networking emerge as a fundamental enabler of new social practices which engender social innovations (Brackertz, 2011). At the same time, Leadbeater (2007: 7) emphasises that SIs “diffuse through a wide variety of channels, including word of mouth, consumer imitation, and formal learning networks, to link together organisations, licensing, franchising, policy prescription and regulation, merger and acquisition and organisational growth”.

A final characteristic is the empowerment of people and capacity to act (Moulaert et al., 2005; BEPA, 2010). These features enhances societal resilience and increases beneficiaries socio-political capabilities and access to resources and develops assets and capabilities through participatory approach enabling beneficiaries to meet needs over the longer term (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012).

As far as the second cluster of characteristics is concerned also four main characteristics can be underline. Firstly, several definitions refer that novel solutions are proposed to satisfy those social needs. This would imply, for example, a better use of assets and resources, namely by the recognition, exploitation and coordination of latent social assets (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Moreover, recently there is the acknowledgement of the importance of social input into the management of complex problems in order to achieve an innovative social solution, a growing recognition of the social dimensions to change, and the need for innovations that contribute to social sustainability and societal well-being (Dawson and Daniel, 2010).

Secondly, SI is system-changing in nature. In fact, SI contributes to overall social resilience, and demands a complex interaction between agency and intent and emergent opportunity (Westley and Antadze, 2010). Furthermore, this authors stress that SI “will challenge the social system and social institutions that govern people’s conduct by affecting the fundamental distribution of power and resources, and may change the basic beliefs that define the system or the laws and routines which govern it” (Westley and Antadze, 2010: 3).

Thirdly, SI is context-dependent, since basic needs are, to a certain extent, context and community-bound and SI at the local level means innovation in relations between agents



and organizations existing at various spatial scales (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005; Westley and Antadze, 2010).

Finally, SI is cross-sectoral, i.e. it is not restricted to any one sector or field (Bacon et al., 2008); is cross-disciplinary, i.e. it can take the form of a new service, initiative or organisation (Bacon et al., 2008), or is a new way of thinking about the role of the social in innovation (Brackertz, 2011); and is cross-geographical, i.e. it can address issues at the level of society, broad communities and regions, the nation state, regional areas within countries, local communities, organisations, and within families and groups (Dawson and Daniel, 2010).

From the previous definitions of SI and the two clusters of characteristics identified in them, it is clear that each are concerned with different things. Therefore, there is the need of a singular definition, that has a clearly delineated scope, it is conceptually clear and does not refer to other fuzzy concepts. Consequently, we seek to bring those characteristics together into a single definition, which encompasses the idea of novelty and change for a socially progressive purpose and that, simultaneously, address the critique of Neumeier (2012) and Cloutier (2003) demanding a more elaborated definition of SI with a more rigorous treatment of social justice. Therefore, the proposed working definition is:

A true social innovation is systems-changing by developing novel solutions in border spanning learning communities to create social value and promote community development, challenging existing social institutions through collaborative action developing wider networks.

#### **4.1. Distinction between social innovation and technological innovation**

Although some authors argue that all TI would also be SI (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010; Bright and Godwin, 2010), there are some important differences between the two kinds of innovations.

One major difference is that TI is profit-maximising oriented (Mulgan, 2007a) and SI is focused on creating or offering better solutions for people (Iizuka, 2013). Furthermore, Munshi (2010) stresses that with TI economic rents accrue to the innovator that is able to take advantage of an opportunity gap in the market with maximizing profitability as its primary goal, whereas with SI social rents accrue primarily to the end user who has unmet needs.

A second, and related, difference is that the SI is not the tangible improvement itself but the change of attitudes, behaviour or perceptions resulting in a new form of collaborative action that allows the improvement in the first place (Neumeier, 2012). Therefore, it can be stressed that the concept of SI is more comprehensive, context- and community- dependent and not as easily measurable as is the case of TI (Moulaert et al., 2005), and also explains why SIs are quite difficult to identify, since they are “not teleological” and may not necessarily have an economic impetus (Neumeier, 2012). Furthermore, as SI can be neither patented nor copy written, they must be considerably more attuned to the specific social

context or field and gain social acceptance (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010). Consequently, the processes, metrics, models and methods used to assess and evaluate TI are not always directly transferable to the social economy (Murray et al., 2010).

Another important difference between both types of innovations is that whereas TI emanate from the realms of corporate and academic research divisions (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010) most SIs start locally (Bacon et al., 2008) through the medium of "living experiences" and change-oriented "capacity-building" (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010). In fact, "in the social field the drive is more likely to come from a wider network, perhaps linking some commissioners in the public sector, providers in social enterprises, advocates in social movements, and entrepreneurs in business" (Murray et al., 2010: 7).

A final important distinction is related to the fact that SI might not be something completely new as in the case of TI. Actually, SI corresponds, frequently, to new ways of combining existing resources, new forms of cooperation and collaboration, rather than being entirely new in themselves (Mulgan, 2007a; Leadbeater, 2007). As highlighted by Brackertz (2011) whereas the TI paradigm is based on a model of problem identification, research and development, and marketing, usually undertaken by specialised firms and organisations, in SI social factors play a central role in the generation and implementation of innovations.

## **5. The process of social innovation**

The process dimension of SI is one of the least studied theoretical aspects on the literature about SI (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; Brackertz, 2011), and the "absence of sustained and systematic analysis is holding back the practice of social innovation" (Mulgan, 2006: 159). Therefore, in this section a framework to understand the process of social innovation is proposed after briefly reviewing three models found in the literature.

One of the first authors to propose a formulation for the process of SI was Mulgan (2006), and all the subsequent work with other collaborators (see, for example, Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2010; Bacon et al., 2008; Mulgan, 2007a; Mulgan, 2007b). These authors argue that the SI process is comprised of six stages: prompts (which involves identifying a need to be met); proposals (which involves generating a new idea that provides a solution to the identified need); prototyping (where ideas are tested in practice); sustaining (which means to develop a business model in order to ensure the future financial viability of the solution); scaling (which means the definition of strategies for the growth and spreading of SIs); and systemic change (the ultimate goal of any SI is that it works on a larger scale).

Mulgan and collaborators argue that although the proposed model appears to be linear, the development of real SIs are more like multiple spirals and the process' stages are often iterative and overlapping. In fact, SI "do not necessarily go through all six stages. In some cases, social innovations remain small in scale and locally based, rather than attempting growth and scale, and very few social innovations effect or reach the stage of systemic

change. In other cases, [...], social innovations can skip out stages entirely, quickly going from prototyping to scaling and only then exploring business models and revenue streams” (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012: 35).

Also Westley et al. (2006) have developed a framework for the SI process comprised of seven stages, emphasising the role of a social innovator during the process. This is explained based on the adaptation of Pinsent (2012: 26-7). The stages are: getting to maybe (corresponds to the initial recognition by an individual that there is a social need that must be met); stood still (which means a period where the social innovator first took the time to pause and studies the problem and works to identify its causes); powerful strangers (the social innovator starts to find those with entrenched interests in the current system, which would allow to uncover and identify important resources or opportunities worth unlocking); let it find you (the initiatives of the social innovator begin to become synced with others, his goal becomes increasingly visible, and he has begun to find a solution for the complex problem); cold heaven (where some unexpected organizational challenges and threatened powers from embedded interests are likely to emerge, which might difficult the scaling up of the SI proposed); hope and history rhyme (the SI has “achieved a critical mass, its message has succeeded, and the social innovator’s dream has been validated”); and the door opens (where the social innovator will see the value and successes of their efforts).

The third model of the SI process briefly reviewed in this paper is the one proposed by Neumeier (2012: 58), who argues that the SI process has three stages: problematisation (where “an actor or a small group of initial actors decides to change their behaviour and attitudes” after an initial impetus); expression of interest (other actors, mainly through their contacts with the initial actors, recognise “the changed behaviour and attitudes and become interested”); and delineation and co-ordination. As Neumeier (2012: 58) describes: “in a developed actor network of aligned interests, participating, as well as newly interested, actors negotiate the new behaviour and attitudes. In the actor networks co-evolutionary learning processes take place. Gradually the new form of action becomes shaped and solidifies [...]. Thus, the actor network is not a fixed or stable network but one that is in a state of constant flow as new actors might enrol in the network while others might leave it, and the role attributed to the actors involved might shift over time. If a critical mass of actors decides to adopt or mimic the new form of action so that it is generally accepted, leading in consequence to some kind of tangible improvement, the social innovation has been successfully implemented. If it is neither adopted nor mimicked, gains no general acceptance [...] and does not lead to some kind of tangible improvement the implementation of the social innovation fails”.

Each of the three models is trying to deal with different questions and produce their own perspective on the process. Mulgan et al. are primarily concerned with what is happening with the innovation, and offers a sequence of stages which define the way that the innovation progresses. Westley et al. (2006) describe what the social innovator is actually

doing at the different stages of the process, and the innovator’s perception of the process at each stage. Neumeier (2012) is describing how capacity builds up – in that there is a problem, people commit to solving it, and that creates a co-ordinating capacity which addresses the problem, and sows the basis for its later development. Therefore, we attempt to bring these three models together into a single process, which covers all three of these elements: the progress of the innovation, the agency of the innovator, and the building up of the societal capacity. We do this by defining a model of the innovation process as involving a series of interlinked stages inspired by the technological innovation model in the most generic sense: in Table 1 we map how these correspond with the elements of the Mulgan et al., Westley et al. and Neumeier models.

**Table 1:** Correspondence between different stages of the process in the models.

<b>Mulgan (2006), What is happening with the innovation?</b>	<b>Westley et al. (2006), What is the innovator doing?</b>	<b>Neumeier (2012), How is the capacity building up?</b>	<b>Cunha &amp; Benneworth, What is the stage of the particular process?</b>	
Prompts	Getting to maybe	Problematisation	<i>Idea Generation</i>	<b>Creating Loop</b>
Proposals	Stood still			
-	Powerful Strangers	Expression of interest	<i>Creation of Experimental Space</i>	
Prototyping	Let it find you	Delineation and co-ordination	<i>Demonstrator</i>	
Sustaining	Cold heaven	Problematisation	<i>Decision to expand</i>	<b>Upscaling Loop</b>
Scaling	Hope & History Rhyme	Expression of interest	<i>Support Coalition</i>	
	The door opens	Delineation & co-ordination	<i>Codification</i>	
Systemic Change	-	-	<i>Diffusion</i>	<b>Outcome</b>

Unlike the traditional linear process of TI (Godin, 2006; Russel and Williams, 2002b), which “fail to capture the overlap, interaction and different ordering of activities, and the variety of sources and inputs and the multiple relationships thus entailed” (Russel and Williams, 2002a: 55), we propose a framework for the SI process based on nonlinear innovation processes (Garud et al., 2013; Stam and Nooteboom, 2011; Rip and Schot, 2002).

Therefore, the SI process framework proposed is comprised of seven stages, which are described in following paragraphs and illustrated in Figure 1. Following Rip and Schot (2002), in the formulation of this framework, it was taken into account that: a) there are

contingencies and tensions during the SI process, and there is no path given in advance (what Van de Ven et al. (2008) called de innovation journey<sup>1</sup>); and b) regardless of those contingences, it is possible to identify some patterns that arise from linkages, alignment and networks (i.e. there is a coevolution of SI and society or organizations/institutions). As a result, it was recognised that, although the different stages of the process can occur sequentially, it is more likely that feedbacks and loops might emerge throughout the process. In fact, we identify two loops: the creating loop (which corresponds to the first three stages) and the up-scaling loop (corresponding to the next three stages of the process).

The first stage is idea generation. After a social problem has been identified, there is the need to come up with a solution that can solve that problem. Generally, it is possible that a multitude of actors will be involved on this stage (e.g. someone aware of the problem, someone who has ownership of the problem and might benefit from its solution or loses if not solved). In this regard, the co-creation approach might be a useful method (Voorberg et al., 2013). In fact, given that a critical factor for the success of a SI solution is its originality, it is likely that a wider range of possible solutions emerge following this approach. Also, the suggested solutions should be linked to “social principles” and use knowledge to generate an idea for a solution.

The second stage of the SI process is the creation of a protected space. After possible solutions have been identified, it is necessary to undertake a plan for its implementation. Since, unlike for TI, no firm is overseeing the process, it is necessary to create an immediate coalition for that solution, which implies the creation of a protected space for experiment (Russel and Williams, 2002a) to put that plan into action. It is necessary to persuade immediate stakeholders that the solution proposed can be effective, given that there is no guarantee that the SI solution will be successful since it, usually, addresses difficult problems.

The third stage is the demonstrator, which means the application of the new solution to one or more specific instances of the problem to be solved in order to allow the social innovator to assess whether the idea is feasible and actually works. Making a parallel with the reasoning of Rip and Schot (2002: 162), the key point is that, at the beginning, the SI solutions are seen as “hopeful monstrosities”, meaning that they are promising ideas but there is uncertainty about its performance. Therefore, “the actors involved will make specific promises (to sponsors) to mobilise resources to be able to work on the [SI solution], and nurture it into a semblance of functionality”. Those authors also argue that the “net effect of the networking and resource mobilisation is the emergence of a protected space for

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<sup>1</sup> Russel and Williams (2002a: 124) define the innovation journey as: “the course of development of an innovation. Stresses non-linearities and branchings, and acknowledges that artefacts may be transformed radically from the original concept”.

promising” SI solutions to be developed and that the “work within this space proceeds according to its own dynamics” (Rip and Schot, 2002: 163).

The fourth stage is decision to expand. After a successful demonstrator has been achieved, two questions arise: a) is the SI solution to be scaled?; and b) how it should be scaled. These are important questions since a positive answer to the first question it is likely to imply a significant commitment of resources (which have an opportunity cost) and the necessity of mobilising efforts to its accomplishment. We enter again in a new loop, the up-scaling loop, which comprises this stage and the next two stages.

If the decision to expand is made, the next stage is the setup of a support coalition. For that purpose, the creation of a supportive structure and the establishment of a ‘pilot team’ in order to further develop and improve the innovative solution becomes an essential feature of the process. In this context, once again the importance of a protected space can be observed in order to the new SI solution “survive an otherwise too harsh selection environment” (Rip and Schot, 2002: 165).

The sixth stage corresponds to codification. This stage will contribute to the up-scaling of the novel SI solution. To that end, it is necessary to identify how that solution can be repeated in other contexts. In fact, the scaling of a solution means that more individuals or organisations are involved in implementing that solution in new settings, places or circumstances. Therefore, it is important the transformation (from a small scale) and the codification (of the solution) to allow its scalability.

The last stage of the SI process corresponds to the diffusion of the solution engendered, which is focused on the wide spreading and sharing of the new solution. In fact, a new SI solution is only diffused if it is adopted through a larger portion of the society and helps to solve a large social problem. In the end of the SI process we get the outcome that would address the initial problem identified.

From the framework of the SI process just presented, four main characteristics can be highlighted already present in the innovation literature.

One is the importance and involvement of a “complex network of formal and/or informal partnerships between various stakeholders [e.g. beneficiaries, donors, public institutions, volunteers]” (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010: 7). Although it is common in the literature to talk about the systemic nature of these networks, their complexity and evolving nature justify them being conceived of more as ‘ecosystems’ (Huggins and Williams, 2011).

Secondly, for the process of SI to be successful there is the need of a thorough collaboration amongst the agents that contribute to the development of the SI solution, and capacity to comprehend complexity. As stressed by Moor (2013), individuals and organizations engaged in SI have to learn how to work collaboratively, must understand the complexity inherent to social systems, and to develop internal capacities that promote, foster and sustain SI.

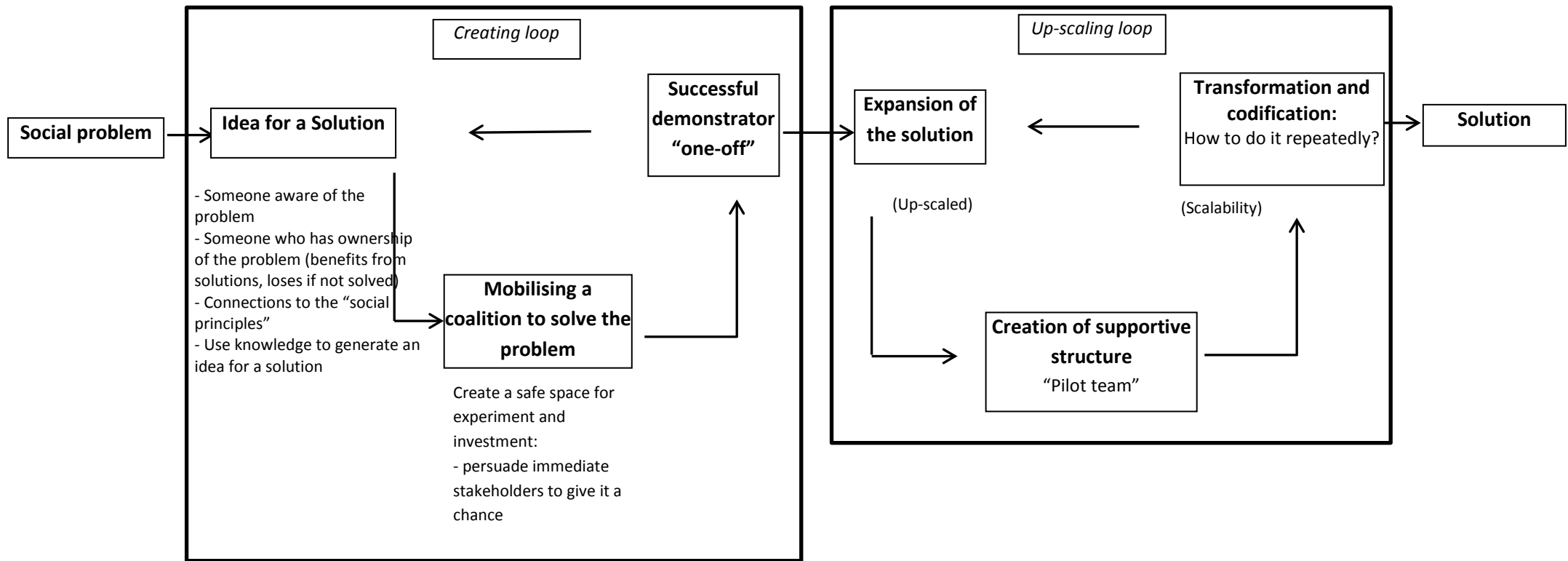
The third characteristic is that the framework proposed for the SI process is more close to those new models of TI known as open-innovation models (Chesbrough, 2003; Hippel, 2005; Vrande et al., 2009; Huizingh, 2011). In fact, “complex influences, unpredictable courses of development, multiple sites of innovative activity, and [...] extensive innovation during configuration and appropriation, has led to the overarching narrative frame of an *innovation journey*” (Russel and Williams, 2002a: 55).

The final characteristic is that the involvement of beneficiaries<sup>2</sup> in different stages of the process is of paramount importance in order to the solution proposed be successful. In this regard, Sharra and Nyssens (2010: 8) emphasise that SI is a “learning process supposed to give to the end users the tools to take care of themselves. Participation and autonomy distinguish social innovation from mere assistance”. A similar characteristic is stressed by Voorberg et al. (2013: 3): “[i]mportant in the concept of innovation is that it deliberately seeks the active participation of citizens and grass roots organizations in order to produce social outcomes that really matter. Participation is seen as a way of securing that citizen needs are really addressed in the innovations to be explored”.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sharra and Nyssens (2010: 11), the beneficiaries of SI can be of three types: individuals (e.g. abused women, alcoholics, young offenders), organizations (e.g. non-profits, schools, governmental agencies) and territories (e.g. neighbourhoods, cities, regions).

<u>Idea generation</u>	<u>Creation of protected space</u>	<u>Demonstrator</u>	<u>Decision to expand</u>	<u>Support coalition</u>	<u>Codification</u>	<u>Diffusion process</u>
Multi actors / interests: - principals - animators - civil society institutions	Necessary because no “firm” overseeing the process Immediate coalition of solution					



**Figure 1:** Framework of the social innovation process.



## 6. How can universities contribute to the different stages of the SI process?

In this section we turn our attention to how universities can contribute to the different stages of the SI process. This is important because there is few literature (Bacon et al., 2008) about how a regionally embedded university can effectively contribute to the process of SI (Elliott, 2013) compared with that about universities' contribution to the process of TI. This bias has been supported by policy makers, through technology transfer initiatives, and by research universities (Elliot, 2013). Actually, it is significant that much of the studies on universities entrepreneurship and engagement are couched in strictly economic terms with an emphasis on industrial linkages (Vorley and Nelles, 2008) but this has less impact for smaller and specialised institutions that cannot demonstrate high levels of TI (Elliot, 2013). Therefore, universities should be viewed in a broader perspective and taking into account its contribution to social, cultural and environmental development (Goddard and Pukka, 2008). In fact, a wider range of less research-intensive universities is becoming able to engage in community-engagement activities and, therefore, non-scientific and more creative and/or culturally orientated forms of activities are being considered (Vorley and Nelles, 2008). Some of those institutions can have a strong impact in terms of SI due to their focus on professional workforce development and transformative local and regional partnerships and civic engagement (Elliott, 2013). As emphasised by Mulgan (2007a: 31): "After two decades of energetic reform to improve technology transfer universities are only just beginning to think about how to achieve equivalent results in the social field, through the employment of heads of social innovation and social transfer, running social laboratories or incubators to connect users and innovators, or setting up 'social science parks'." Following Elliot (2013: 2), we argue that universities' involvement in processes of SI "stimulates and sustains diversity, social inclusion, citizenship, and local learning communities and partnerships, and these are central to economic growth and regeneration, and that it is therefore important to re-connect the social dimension of education with the economic".

The initial problem was to achieve a rigorous framework for understanding how universities can contribute to SI. Following the CERI (1982) report, it was possible to identify different universities' resources that could become involved in different stages of the SI process, such as: academic researchers; students; facilities; other employees; financial resources; managers/ decision-makers. Table 2 presents a detailed description of how these resources relate to each stage of the process.

**Table 2:** Universities' resources that could become involved in the SI process

	<i>Academic researchers</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Facilities (e.g. lecture rooms, science shops)</i>	<i>Other employees (technology transfer officers, other staff)</i>	<i>Financial resources</i>	<i>Managers/ decision-makers</i>
<i>Idea Generation</i>	<p>Own research knowledge</p> <p>Past practical experience</p> <p>Wider academic networks</p> <p>Academic could be the social innovator</p> <p>Uncover and support community solutions to major societal challenges</p>	<p>Stimulate creative thinking</p> <p>Identification of community and enterprise needs</p>	<p>Active learning and continuous professional development</p> <p>Lecturers on SI issues</p>	<p>Identification of community needs</p> <p>Past experience and leadership</p> <p>Provision of information resources</p> <p>Creation of joint research projects</p>	<p>Development of creative spaces</p> <p>Attract students of less favoured groups</p> <p>Facilities design for disable people</p>	<p>Commitment with free thinking</p> <p>Stimulate innovation exchanges</p> <p>SI integrated in strategic planning</p> <p>Work in close co-operation with local authorities and planning bodies</p> <p>Increase access to higher education</p>
<i>Creation of Experimental Space</i>	<p>Persuade/ convince others to join the coalition</p> <p>Facilitate the coalition running – organising/ hosting meetings</p> <p>Validate the ‘innovativeness’ of the SI</p> <p>Helping finding funding e.g. through a research project</p>	<p>Allow students to take risks to be innovative</p> <p>Improving the student experience</p>	<p>Living laboratories to foster SI</p> <p>SI summer schools</p>	<p>Can serve as a protected space (SI parks)</p> <p>Place resources available for use</p> <p>Application of knowledge for social impact</p>	<p>Acquisition of needed resources</p> <p>Creation of facilities for Social Innovators</p> <p>Funds for early stage ideas and incubation</p>	<p>Create the conditions for the existence of a protected space</p> <p>Provide a creative environment</p> <p>Acknowledge the benefits of the SI for the university</p>
<i>Demonstrator</i>	<p>Supporting the delivery of the demonstrator</p> <p>Validating/ publicising the success of the demonstrator</p> <p>Providing resources for</p>	<p>Student volunteering and community work</p> <p>Internships and work-placements for students</p>	<p>Used to organise events demonstrating the efficacy of the solution</p>	<p>Social enterprises collaboration, consulting and advisory services</p> <p>Development of SI</p>	<p>Programmes, courses, exhibitions and events</p>	<p>Recommend the novel solution/demonstrator</p> <p>Involvement of community groups in presentation of the</p>

	delivery e.g. students		Exhibitions, displays, and performances	transfer models Co-designs and prototypes solutions to social needs Test new approaches to user-centred innovation		new solution
<i>Decision to expand</i>	Committing resources to the next stage of the development Persuading the social innovator to start upscaling/ expanding Take the decision to start upscaling (academic as SI) 'Proof of concept' that the idea is expandable	Stimulate entrepreneurship potential Creating full-time and part-time job opportunities	Occupation of buildings that were previously not fully in use	Foster contacts with external parties Screen new applications of the solution Creation of longer term value for the community	Recognition of the importance of engagement activities in resource allocations Public procurement	Stimulation of new social enterprises start-ups / spin-offs Provide a fertile climate in which new solutions can be scaled-up Source of demand of novel SI solutions Budget share for SI
<i>Support Coalition</i>	Identify all of those interested in the solution Mobilise all of those interested in the solution Make the public argument for expanding the SI.	Students (SI) networks	SI workshops Meeting and conference facilities	Support a strong skills base Building up relationships of trust with suppliers Create long-term cultural and social change	Support a riskier innovative approach Regeneration and creation of sustainable communities	Bring strategic partners together Support future employment of the graduates Facilitate resource leverage Balancing SI with TI
<i>Codification</i>	Produce a guide, toolkit, vade mecum for the activity Provide training for the next wave innovators Creating an epistemic	Apprenticeships	Presentation of case studies	Development of new models of partnership	Build up and maintain resources within communities	Coordinate leadership of external partners

	disciplinary community, embedding in education					
<i>Diffusion</i>	Publicise the idea and sustain momentum Staff exchange	Workshops promoting successful previous SI initiatives Placement of students in new social ventures	Put in place structures and procedures that encourage the involvement of the wider community	Active agents for SI knowledge transfer Contacts with external partners Industrial and services linkages Staff exchange	Research commitments to enhancing knowledge flows between university and society	Use of networks in which universities are engaged Foster best practices in SI Senior managers and expert staff active partners in local social economy

## 7. Example of a Social Innovation

In this section we present a brief overview of a SI in order to illustrate the main characteristics of the proposed SI process and the contribution of the university for that process.

We start by describing, briefly, the University of Twente which was the institution involved in the development of the SI presented. Then, we present the organisation at which the university is linked and under which the SI project was designed. Afterwards, the project implemented is described. Finally, some comments are made regarding the project analysed and the framework for the SI process outlined in this paper.

### 7.1. University of Twente

The University of Twente (UT), located in Enschede, Netherlands, is a relatively recent university being founded in 1961 as part of an expansion of Dutch higher technical education (Benneworth and Hospers, 2007). Therefore, it initially started as a higher vocational institute of technology (*Technische Hogeschool Twente*), and later becoming a research university focusing on the development of technology and its impact on people and society (*UT web site*). UT offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees in the field of technology and behavioural and social sciences.

An important reason for the decision to locate the university in Enschede (region of Twente) was the fact that it was a way to compensate the declining local economy due to the declining textile industry. However, a landmark in the history of UT happen in the beginning of the 1980s when there was a change of vision and a new role for the university was adopted: to become an entrepreneurial university. Therefore, the UT should not only support the textile industry but also the entire economy of the region of Twente, assuming an increasing regional mission “which has evolved in a variety of directions with UT becoming increasingly institutionally engaged with regional economic development” (Benneworth and Hospers, 2007:141). In this new context, a paradigmatic example of this new approach of UT was the creation of a Business Technology Centre which then become the Business and Science Park (*Kennispark Twente*), that supports and assists entrepreneurs to start new companies. Until now, about more than 700 successful spin-off companies were created.

From the evolution of UT over the years, three main characteristics can be distinguished. The first one is its focus on entrepreneurship with “special focus on technological developments in the knowledge society. The university needs to be responsive to the requirements of the modern society and also has a special responsibility to develop and implement a broad knowledge potential in science and technology” (*Wikipedia*). The second is its focus “on the interdependent relationship between social and technological innovation”, given that from its inception UT “has sought to put the applied sciences in a wider social context”

(*Wikipedia*). A final important characteristic of UT is its multidisciplinary approach. In fact, “students and researchers are always challenged to look beyond the boundaries of their own subject area and to establish links between different disciplines” (*Wikipedia*).

## 7.2.KISS

This subsection is based on an interview with Professor Bas Denters from the University of Twente, and material provided by him.

*KennisInstituut Stedelijke Samenleving* (KISS), or Knowledge Institute Urban Society, is a joint initiative of the Province of Overijssel, Netherlands, the five major urban municipalities in this province (Almelo, Deventer, Enschede, Hengelo, and Zwolle), the University of Twente, two regional higher vocational institutes, and private organisations (from the business community and civil society, e.g. building companies, consultancies; minority organization; housing associations in Overijssel).

The main idea underlying KISS foundation was to set up an association, based on private law, to exchange expertise and knowledge about urban problems on the social domain, particularly with a focus on socio-economic deprivation and urban decay in big cities. Therefore, KISS can be seen as a public-private partnership (it is not a university research institute), financed and governed by its members (all active in urban Overijssel), with a small bureau of five 5 people.

Hence, the main objective of KISS is centred on urban re-development, focusing not only on “hardware”, that is in improving housing and physical living conditions, but also on social cohesion of the neighbourhood and promoting new opportunities for the individuals living in those neighbourhoods. Therefore, a new approach was followed based on decentralization (meaning more local autonomy) and accountability to central government (through ex post results evaluation).

One of the underlying principles of KISS is to mobilise knowledge of academia together with practical experience from private partners. In this context, the departure from an older knowledge transfer model to a new one was sought. In the former, known as the professional model, academic professionals enjoy a monopoly of knowledge whereas practitioners are dependent on scientific knowledge and which means that there is only one-way traffic of knowledge and the role of the scientist is, mainly, prescriptive. In the latter, known as the partnership model, the effective problem solution requires scientific (or formal) knowledge, everyday knowledge from citizens, and experiential knowledge from professionals. Hence, basis interactions occur through dialogue and deliberation, and the role of the scientist is to participate in debate and/or being a facilitator of it aiming at reaching a good solution (or a solution that works properly).

This new approach brings in mutual benefits for both practitioners and universities regarding urban policy innovation and innovation of urban governance. For practitioners the benefits will extend through all stages of the generation of the project. Before, it facilitates

systematic thinking for social action, allows access to the “Ivory Tower”, and access to other relevant forms of knowledge (e.g. meeting other urban stakeholders). During, it allows access to research capacity for monitoring projects. And after, it can be a vehicle for knowledge dissemination. For universities, the advantages are the following. Firstly, it contributes to the attractiveness of curriculum, by providing staff with links to practice, therefore increasing practical relevance of curriculum, and by more attractive and practically relevant internships and master theses. Secondly, it represents an opportunity for occasional research grants. Finally, it is a source of regional support and legitimacy for the university.

In general, KISS activities, which are essentially demand-driven and based on co-production with members, include: stimulate innovative thinking; design stage of expertise; mobilise expertise when implementing a project; evaluation reports about the results achieved with the implementation of the project, and dissemination of knowledge about project results.

One of the most emblematic projects developed by KISS, and which is presented below, was the Social General Practitioner (SGP) project which consisted in the adoption of a new innovative program in the city of Enschede to deal with problems of social exclusion.

### **7.3.SGP Project**

This subsection draws heavily on chapter four of Hambleton and Howard’s (2012) report and an interview with Professor Bas Denters from the University of Twente, which is one of the co-authors of that chapter and his the scientific director of KISS.

In 2007, the Velve-Lindenhof neighbourhood, located in the city of Enschede, The Netherlands, was identified as an area suffering from multiple deprivation and, therefore, it should receive special assistance and funding in order to improve households’ social inclusion and living conditions. In fact, it was understood that the combined effects of social, economic and physical disadvantage harm the social climate and has a negative impact on the individual life chances. Therefore, of the several measures outlined to improve these, the SGP project was the most innovative one and began to be implemented in 2009 with the aim of helping about six hundred residents in the neighbourhood.

In fact, the SGP initiative was conceived as a new way to address problems of social exclusion, which are seen as a multifaceted phenomenon, and as a way to overcome three major challenges that arise when trying to implement policy measures that aim at tackling those problems. Firstly, the lack of an integrated approach to address those problems since households are served by a number of different social workers from different support organisations. Secondly, in spite of the activities and actions of these social professionals, there is a small number of households that end up not receiving this support at a stage where those problems are still emerging and preventive action could avoid future crisis. Finally, although the main objective of this kind of support should be to empower people in order to overcome social exclusion problems and to improve the decision-making process,

actually what happens most of the time is that the care provided by social workers is essentially of paternalistic nature and of mere assistance.

In the context of the SGP project, several institutional providers of specialised services agreed to grant SGPs (also known as neighbourhood coaches) informal decision-making powers across various spheres of life (e.g. health, housing, education, safety, welfare, employment) while retaining the formal decision-making authority themselves. Hence, this approach empowers the SGPs to empower residents, taking as a starting point the individual residents' ambitions and competencies, rather than simply taking care of them. It should be emphasised that the SGPs were not employed by a lead organisation (for example, the municipality). On the contrary, they operate across different organisations, such as the housing association, the organisation for general social welfare and the municipal department of social security.

Another important characteristic of the SGP project was the shift of an emphasis on improving the neighbourhood's infrastructure either physical (e.g. demolition and reconstruction or renovations of housing estates) or social (aimed at improving neighbourhood facilities, social cohesion and public safety), to an emphasis on improving the individual life chances of neighbourhood residents. As pointed out by Denters et al. (in Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 20): "Rather than expecting the benefits from infrastructural improvements to 'trickle down' to individuals, this approach adopts the view that the aggregation of individual-level improvements will ultimately result in a better social climate for the neighbourhood. Thus, it focuses on both people and place".

Therefore, the approach preconized with the implementation of the SGP methodology can be understood as "an innovative model for the governance of service delivery" based on the principle of "one professional, one plan of action, one system". As explained by Denters et al. (in Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 21): "For each individual, one coach replaces a range of specialised frontline workers, unless specialist expertise is called for. The coaches act as individual counsellors to residents of the Velve-Lindenhof neighbourhood (one professional). Based on the ambitions and competences of these residents, the coaches determine, together with the residents, what should be done to solve their problems and start building a better future (one plan of action). Like medical GPs, the coaches try to meet clients' needs directly, unless the complexity of the situation calls for the expertise of a specialist. In case of referral to 'the second line', the coaches continue to govern the implementation of the plan of action. Their central position in both the governance of the network of professionals and in the actual service delivery is designed to enable the coaches to work across professional, thematic and sectoral borders in an integrated manner (one system)".

In this context, Denters et al. (in Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 22-4) argue that, from a governance point of view, the SGP project corresponds to an innovative hybrid. In fact, at the strategic level, it is based on shared governance since a coalition of twenty five community and governmental organisations "has voluntarily agreed upon an integral



approach to the social emancipation of residents and multi-problem households". At the operational level, "the legitimacy of the new model was strengthened by careful selection of the SGPs (experienced people from different, complementary backgrounds) and tactful operation of these frontline workers in relation to partnering organisations (collaborative rather than confrontational)".

#### 7.4. Discussion

Although only a brief description of the SGP project has just been presented, based on the conceptual framework proposed in this paper with no doubt it can be seen as a SI in the public sector and urban policy. As emphasised by Hambleton and Howard (2012: 11), public service innovation means "creating a new approach to public service and putting it into practice", where the role of local communities should be stressed, while the aim of achieving social inclusion, which means "being able to participate fully in social activities, and/or to engage in political and civic life" and implying the need to "empower people and work holistically to build capacities for participation in a range of arenas".

On the other hand, the university has had an important role during the SGP project. In fact, had been identified a social problem – the Velve-Lindenhof neighbourhood multiple deprivation and the phenomenon of social exclusion of people – the knowledge and expertise of the University of Twente (UT) was used to come up with a solution for that problem. The UT "team" was asked to think about a solution – the SGP project – and how to organise this project and, at the end, to provide a final evaluation report. The responsibility of the implementation of the project was given to other entities.

As argued in section 5, the process of developing and implementing the SI resembles an innovation journey (Van de Ven et al., 2008) where "people with different backgrounds and experiences can come together to engage in creative dialogue and foster breakthrough practice" (Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 4). Moreover, the role of UT was important in mobilising a coalition of stakeholders to solve the problem. Indeed, "a coalition of 25 community and governmental organisations has voluntarily agreed upon an integral approach to the social emancipation of residents and multi-problem households" (Denters et al., in Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 22). In this context, the creation of a safe space where "people with ideas [could] meet and 'cross-fertilise'" (Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 18) and the involvement of a "complex network of formal and/or informal partnerships between various stakeholders (e.g. municipality, university, social security and medical organisations)" (Sharra and Nyssens, 2010) emerged as important success factors for the implementation of the project.

Another important characteristic of the process was the involvement of the beneficiaries in different stages of the process and, particularly, at the beginning of the implementation of the SGP project. Indeed, "based on the ambitions and competences of these residents, the coaches determine, together with the residents, what should be done to solve their problems and start building a better future" (Denters et al., in Hambleton and Howard,

2012: 21). This way it is assured that needs of the residents are really addressed with the proposed innovation (Voorberg et al., 2013: 3).

As a final comment, one can say that the SGP project described so far can be framed on the first loop – the creating loop – of the conceptual model proposed in this paper. In fact, the SGP project was first tested in a single neighbourhood. Given that a “midterm process evaluation provides some [positive] preliminary insights on the impact of the innovation” (Denters et al., in Hambleton and Howard, 2012: 24) it seems that a successful demonstrator was achieved. As a result, the next phase of the innovation process would be to consider the up-scaling of the project/solution. This would mean to enter in the second loop of the conceptual model – the up-scaling loop.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this paper we were concerned with the role of SI as a way to contribute to societal development, and we have taken the perspective of how universities can contribute to the process of SI. As pointed out by Elliot (2013: 9) “Social innovation in higher education is a radical and risky undertaking, because it questions the orthodoxy or assumptive world of formal educators that universities should research and teach and transfer knowledge from within the ivory tower. However, this is a challenge that universities must accept if they are to sustain their influence in a changing world that increasingly comes to question what a university is for”.

To understand the contributions of universities to social innovation a conceptual framework of the process of social innovation was proposed in this paper. An advantage of proposing this framework is that it allows to “visualise the present as well as the future. Actors tend to project a linear future, defined by their intentions, and use this projection as a road map [...]. The present [conceptual framework] forces actors to consider the nonlinearity of evolution, accept the complexity, and thus become more effective” (Rip and Schot, 2002: 160). In fact, the study of the SI process highlights the fact that this process is driven by a constant interaction among all stakeholders involved in it and taking into account their needs, expectations and aspirations, which makes SI an inclusive phenomenon, dependent on the interactions of different social components (Bignetti, 2011).

To provide some insights on the role of universities in the process of social innovation, a brief description of a case study was presented – the Social General Practitioner (SGP) project. This consisted in the adoption of a new innovative program in the city of Enschede to deal with problems of social exclusion. The problem found is that nowadays social work is very fragmented with several different specialists trying to solve families’ problems (e.g. homelessness, huge debts, drugs abuse, criminal issues, children not going to school) in a non-integrated way (there are a lot of silos without the integration of those different specialised contributes). The solution proposed was the figure of a Social General Practitioner. These would take-over the responsibility of all those tasks to improve living conditions and

implement the solutions proposed with the advantage of a clear accountability and lowering the costs of the intervention. The aim of the project was to improve life chances of multi-problem households by introducing one SGP who agrees personal development plan with client and is responsible for implementation. In this way the SGP model replaces traditional fragmented supply of social care.

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