People-Centered Social Innovation

Social Innovation is emerging as an alternate interdisciplinary development pathway of knowledge and practice that aims to understand and address contemporary complexities and multidimensional social realities. However, though Social Innovation is a widely-used term; its conceptual understanding and the specific relation to social change remains under explored.

*People-Centered Social Innovation: Global Perspectives on an Emerging Paradigm* attempts to revisit and extend the existing understanding of Social Innovation in practice by focusing on the lived realities of marginalized groups and communities. The emerging field of people-centered development is placed in dialogue with theory and concepts from the more established field of social innovation to create a new approach; one that adopts a global perspective, engaging with very different experiences of marginality across the global north and south. Theoretically, *People-Centered Social Innovation: Global Perspectives on an Emerging Paradigm* draws on “Northern” understandings of change and improvement as well as ‘Southern’ theory concerns for epistemological diversity and meaning-making. The result is an experiment aimed at reimagining research and practice that seriously needs to center the actor in processes of social transformation.

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Social enterprises seek to combine an entrepreneurial spirit and behaviour with a primacy of social or societal aims. To various extents, their production of goods or services generates market income which they usually combine with other types of resources. A social innovation consists of the implementation of a new idea or initiative to change society in a fairer and more sustainable direction.

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Contents

1 People-Centered Social Innovation: An Emerging Paradigm with Global Potential 1
SWATI BANERJEE, STEPHEN CARNEY AND LARS HULGÅRD

2 Social Innovation Learning From Critical Social Entrepreneurship Studies: How Are They Critical, and Why Do We Need Them? 17
LUISE LI LANGERGAARD

3 Arenas for Gendering Social Innovation and Marginalized Women’s Collectives 42
LINDA LUNDGAARD ANDERSEN AND SWATI BANERJEE

4 Genealogy and Institutionalization of People-Centered Social Innovation in Kudumbashree, Kerala, India 69
P. K. SHAJAHAN AND LARS HULGÅRD

5 Ethos of Social Innovation: In Search of a Decolonizing Analysis 89
ADRIANE VIEIRA FERRARINI

6 Informal Entrepreneurship as Adaptive Innovation: Strategies Among Migrant Workers in Indian Cities 110
SUNIL D. SANTHA AND DEVISHA SASIDEVAN

7 Buen Vivir as an Innovative Development Model 128
ANDRES MORALES, ROGER SPEAR, MICHAEL NGOASONG AND SILVIA SACCHETTI

8 Indian Diasporic Communities: Exploring Belonging, Marginality and Transnationalism 156
RASHMI SINGLA, P. K. SHAJAHAN AND SUJATA SRIRAM
Contents

9 Innovations in Multistakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development: Fostering State–University–Community Nexus 179
ABDUL SHABAN AND PRASHANT B. NARNAWARE

10 Social Innovation in Africa: An Empirical and Conceptual Analysis 195
JEREMY MILLARD, MOHAMED WAGEIH AND BEV MELDRUM

11 Social Innovations as Heretical Practices 225
SILLA MARIE MØRCH SIEVERS

Notes on the Authors 239
Index 245
1 People-Centered Social Innovation: An Emerging Paradigm with Global Potential

Swati Banerjee, Stephen Carney and Lars Hulgård

Introduction

On the dusty plains of Andhra Pradesh, Madhavayya found his father’s limp body in the small hut where he would rest from the midday sun. Scorched by debt and despair and at the mercy of both harsh weather and fickle markets, Mallappa took his own life rather than continue what seemed like an endless struggle for moderate prosperity on his own land. His story—one shared by hundreds of thousands of struggling farmers across India—only made global headlines because Mallappa had planned his funeral in advance. After purchasing the white cloth that would cover his body, as well as garlands, incense and a laminated photo for his grave, he left a final note to his family that explained that he had made these preparations in order to ease their burden during the hard days ahead. A good farmer who had planned the use of his land with care, Mallappa had no control of the price of his crops, access to markets or the conditions for financing short-term hardships. Indeed, these factors appeared to work actively against him. Madhavayya has now left his father’s land, joining a growing exodus of young people to India’s mega-cities in search of a different future but equally dependent on circumstance and the small favors of global capitalism.

In another case, this time closer to our own work in rural India, a group of poor and marginalized women explained their desire to create a small-scale livestock farming project. Like Mallappa, their aim was to create a livelihood that might provide a degree of autonomy, security and social justice. Their ultimate goal, however, was something else: to enable their children to obtain a level of education that would free them from the struggles of rural existence and open the way for a different type of future in the metropolis. For one farmer, the aim may be to live securely in the familiar surrounds of home. For another, it is the prospect of transcending that: to leave and never return. While examples from the global South seem somehow extreme or more urgent, the experience of hardship, despair, desire and human initiative is global. Such experiences frame capitalism wherever it takes form. How, then, can we understand
and act with respect for such perspectives while holding firmly to our commitments to change unjust structures at their roots, help others in egalitarian ways and make a fairer world?

The contested concept of “development” is about change and some understanding of progress or improvement, but the distinctive contribution of the approach we outline in this book—a people-entered approach to Social Innovation—suggests that such change must take as its starting point the ontological, social and political perspectives of those it aims to support. Following the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016), our starting point is an acknowledgment that “the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world”. Additionally, there can be “no global social justice without global cognitive justice’ and that ‘emancipatory transformations in the world” might well “follow grammars and scripts other than those developed by Western-centric critical theory” (p. viii). This radical perspective requires an equally radical and courageous reassessment of the role and potential of academic work at what many acknowledge to be a turning or tipping point in the history of humanity. For change to be meaningful, something meaningful has to change in the way we approach the world.

Making a Difference in an Age of Ideas

Our time is definitely complex and increasingly marked by the clash and conflict of interests and policies. Growing social and economic inequality and the concentration of wealth marks our time as dangerous and unstable. Some claim that the unfolding 21st century may be the most unequal period ever faced by humanity (Piketty, 2013). In spite of their active engagement in developing and maintaining societal inequality, individuals of extreme wealth and the foundations that carry their names and message have successfully created a headline-grabbing policy agenda. Here, we see a small fraction of the profits of such work used to set the agenda for social innovation globally. With marvelous linguistic innovation, we are offered the promise of “catalytic philanthropy”, “corporate social innovation”, “social impact investment” and, for example, “scaling for impact”. Such word craft rarely stands alone from the heroic individuals it celebrates. Ashoka, a leading body promoting social entrepreneurship gives British business tycoon Richard Branson its seal of approval. With a long history of for-profit entrepreneurship packaged as socially aware and alternative, Branson’s metamorphous from businessman to determined social innovator was complete after his cameo appearance in Al Gore’s groundbreaking documentary An Inconvenient Truth. Responding to Gore’s home visit where he was given a personal PowerPoint presentation, Branson remarked that it was “one of the best presentations I have ever seen in my life . . . As I sat there and listened to Gore, I saw that we are looking at Armageddon” (Klein, 2014: 231).
On the spot, Branson gave a pledge to turn his Virgin Group into Gaia Capitalism, a notion he invented that would redefine and celebrate the earth as a single living organism. Following this pledge, he publicly announced a commitment to spend US$3 billion to develop biofuels as an alternative to oil and gas. Thus spoke the social entrepreneur, innovator, savior and collective conscience of the planet. One man, one voice, one vision, all based on a privileged right to speak and act.

On the surface, such passion and vision seem a service to the majority of the population but avoids another “inconvenient truth” that collective challenges are best met by political consensus and the establishment of common resource pools through systems of taxation and the shared sense of ownership and obligation they engender. While the charismatic change agent offers a new perspective and can possibly break an impasse in public policy making, other perspectives are closed down or obscured. Some social activists have noted that while committed wealthy individuals have a role to play, they and their corporate connections are able to extend their wealth as the spotlight of change shifts from the state, its democratic institutions and the people who, ultimately, have most at stake. What happened to Richard Branson’s pledge? According to Naomi Klein, the investment in biofuel was well under $300 million in 2014 only two years before the $3 billion target was to be reached in 2016. By 2018, some environmental lobby groups had claimed that less than 3% of the original commitment had been honored.1 Klein ends her analysis of Branson as a change maker for the common good by indicating that the skeptics may be right. “Branson’s various climate adventures may indeed prove to have all been a spectacle, a Virgin production, with everyone’s favorite bearded billionaire playing the part of planetary savior to build his brand, land on late night TV, fend off regulators, and feel good about doing bad” (Klein, 2014: 251).

Rather than solely a critique of certain strategically motivated individuals, we may be seeing the beginning of a new phase in the political process where media, charismatic leadership and our collective desperation to find solutions make us especially vulnerable to the image, slogan and unsubstantiated promise. Clearly, it appears that powerful business tycoons such as Richard Branson and, for that matter, policy makers, do not need to implement their ideas in order to be celebrated as successful and passionate change makers. In the airline industry, Branson needed planes in the air to achieve his success as a tycoon. In social innovation, he only needed to outline his vision in the broadest of strokes. When business leaders enter the field of social innovation, they often do so with exaggerated goals that are a large part of a strategy for recognition. Pamela Hartigan of the Skoll and Schwab Foundations, one of the most influential discourse makers in the world of social innovation, once noted “that a social entrepreneur is what you get when you cross Richard Branson with Mother Teresa” (World Economic Forum, 2003). Just
by entering the field with ideas and visions, the global social innovator reaches the goal of having an impact. He becomes a change maker for the common good.

Following the legacy of Joseph Schumpeter, it was assumed that innovation and social innovation had to be implemented in order to be successful. This capacity for implementation distinguished an inventor from an innovator. Here, the practical development of new products or procedures had to take place: while the ability to envision something entirely new was a precondition, actual change had to be achieved. This need not necessarily take the form of a new service or product but could also emerge as changed societal power relations driven by social movements. However, in contemporary times, it seems that business leaders, in particular, can become successful social innovators by simply launching an idea aimed at seducing people and policy makers to open their hearts, minds and funds. Top-down, energetic, authoritative, connected but, nonetheless, distant from any lived understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized groups. Supported by a short-term media cycle and an emerging political culture where message outruns action, our genuine and collective impulse for socially oriented change is in danger of being transformed into understandings of the world and strategies for engaging with it that will only intensify the damaging pathologies of the previous century.

Using rhetoric to ride the wave of interest in social innovation may serve the ends of those select superrich and their network of corporate partners but stops the vast majority of human beings from contributing to immense societal challenges that range from demographic and climate change, rising inequality, xenophobia and a contemporary political disorder marked by a populism. In some countries, typically in the global North, these changes appear to have a lesser impact but, even here, we see a kind of permanent crises of consciousness, particularly amongst the young who face precarious futures and a failing political system. As such, to advocate for social innovation is to also advocate for a people-centered perspective: one where strategies of change are first envisaged in dialogue with those who stand most to lose but, by the same token, have most to offer.

**Approaching People-Centered Social Innovation**

A people-centered approach to social innovation rests on a number of important assumptions. First, social innovation was never a question of how to use the capitalist firm or the conventional market model as a blueprint for serving the needs of people. The dominance of a market-centered approach to social innovation is, in fact, quite recent. Neither innovation or, for that matter, social innovation can be thought of as originating from the market economy (Moulaert et al., 2017; Godin, 2015). Indeed, the origins of the concept of innovation precede those of social innovation by many centuries (Moulaert et al., 2017) and are grounded
People-Centered Social Innovation

in two characteristics: “the quest for freedom” and a prioritizing of practice over “contemplation” (Godin, 2015: 6). In its earliest iterations, innovation can be located in Western religious texts in the 15th century (Moulaert et al., 2017) but has more ancient roots in 5th-century-BCE Greece. Here, innovation stems from the word kainos (new). Initially, kainotomia had nothing to do with our current or dominant meaning of innovation as commercialized technical invention. Instead, innovation meant “cutting fresh into” and was used in the context of concrete thinking (“opening new mines”) as well as abstract thought (“making new”): “In the hands of ancient philosophers and writers on political constitutions, innovation is introducing change into the established order” (Godin, 2015: 19). Benoit highlights an additional feature of innovation that is crucial for the people-centered approach articulated here. Innovation was initially envisaged as “subversive” and inherently political, “it is regulated by Kings, forbidden by law and punished. Books of manners and sermons urge people not to meddle with innovation” (Godin, 2015: 22). Innovation was also understood as reflecting diverse struggles for freedom. As such, we can say that social innovation has been concerned historically with issues of emancipation and self-determination: an inherently political concept today dramatically emptied of its original meaning and potential. Since the quest for freedom and emancipation lies the core of any activity labelled as innovation, one may wonder if there is even a need to develop theory about social innovation, especially for any understanding that positions people at the center of the change process.

Second, the people-centered approach to social innovation adopted in this volume takes an important point of departure in Karl Polanyi’s understanding of economic activity which, he warned, could never be reduced to the virtues of markets:

Let us make our meaning more precise. No society could, naturally, live for any length of time unless it possessed an economy of some sort; but previously to our time no economy has ever existed that, even in principle, was controlled by markets. In spite of the chorus of academic incantations so persistent in the nineteenth century, gain and profit made on exchange never before played an important part in human economy. Though the institution of the market was fairly common since the later Stone Age, its role was no more than incidental to economic life.

(Polanyi, 1957: 43)

Polanyi made a distinction between a formal and a substantive view of the economy. Economy, in the formal sense, is about economizing scarce resources, whereas

the latter centers on how human beings organize and allocate the pursuit of the things needed to sustain human life, humans are social
animals; they define and realize themselves in relation to others. It is collectively through social arrangements that human beings work out how they will secure their livelihood.

(Block and Somers, 2014: 30)

Economic activity is as much about actions shaped by changing configurations of redistributive and reciprocal actions as of the actions of a market. To Polanyi, “robust human freedom depends on a coalition of state and civil society that has the power to protect society against the destructive forces of marketization” (Block and Somers, 2014: 4). This perspective lives on in the claims of influential economists such as Nobel Prize recipient Joseph Stiglitz who has reiterated the need for social innovations that can address the inequalities produced by conventional market economies. To Stiglitz (2011), “[t]he problem is that the growth that has been achieved may not be sustainable and the benefits of the growth that has occurred are accruing to but a fraction of the population”. As such, “social innovations are as important as technological innovations” and the lessons from recent economic crises are moral as well as a structural.

This moral dimension is emphasized when he argues that the same people who brought the global community to the abyss due to their greed were, in the wake of the economic crisis, allowed to walk away with much more than they deserved by successfully managing to externalize the full costs of their actions. In structural terms, he adds that the growth produced by the conventional market economy is neither sustainable nor able to benefit the majority of society (Stiglitz, 2011). Inequality is on the rise everywhere, also in countries that used to be pioneers in reducing inequality and income differentials. No one doubts that we are blessed with talented social innovators and policy makers but if we are to build and reinforce policy conditions and ecosystems of social innovation that fundamentally challenge the view of the market as a driver of social innovation, people have to find their way to the center of change processes.

The third foundation for a people-centered approach to social innovation lies in a commitment to promoting what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “ecologies of knowledge” (Santos, 2016) to challenge the monocentric approach that has led us to the precipice of irreversible inequality and environmental devastation. An approach that identifies ecologies of knowledge would recognize material differences and injustices and make visible alternative worldviews, values and epistemologies. In research terms, it requires that we go beyond classical paradigms of Western and Northern thought in order to engage with other equally valid knowledges. This commitment is fundamental to a people-centered approach to social innovation as it creates not only new spaces for discussing the meaning of progress and innovation but also for inviting otherwise silenced voices into conversations about our common future.
Some “Southern knowledge” perspectives view modernity itself as a European phenomenon constituted dialectically “with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content” (Dussel, 1993: 65–66). Here, the global South is defined not on its own terms but by its difference from the supposed norms and ideals of the global North. For de Sousa Santos, “Northern” thinking is “abyssal” because it operates in a space that relies upon “non-existence, invisibility, nondialetical absence” (Santos, 2016: 118). As such, a “Northern” perspective erases “nonmetropolitan experience” even though such experiences are vital to establishing what can be said:

Modern knowledge and modern law represent the most accomplished manifestations of abyssal thinking. They account for the two major global lines of modern times, which, though being different and operating differently, are mutually interdependent. Each creates a subsystem of visible and invisible distinctions in such a way that the invisible ones become the foundation of the visible ones. In the field of knowledge, abyssal thinking consists in granting to modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false, to the detriment of two alternative bodies of knowledge: philosophy and theology . . . that cannot be fitted into any of these ways of knowing. On the other side of the line, there is no real knowledge; there are beliefs, opinions, intuitions, and subjective understandings, which, at the most, may become objects or raw materials for scientific inquiry

(Santos, 2016, p. 119)

By exploring the empty spaces created by abyssal thinking—what de Sousa Santos fashions as a “sociology of absences”—we find the subject of social innovation waiting patiently for a time when voices of singularity, difference and experience become the foundation of programs of social justice as well as of research-based knowledge.

None of this is to suggest that the major structural problems of today can be solved without linking top-down actions by the state with the bottom-up actions of civil society, the third sector and the social and solidarity economy (Somers, 2008). This is probably the most important challenge confronting public policy makers wishing to harness the potential of social innovation. In a seminal report for the European Union (EU) written by a team of scholars led by Frank Moulaert, 30 EU-funded research projects totaling 91 million euros in funding were examined to explore how public policies underpin the bottom-up initiatives of social change makers (Moulaert et al., 2017). Two observations stand out. First, the term innovation is far from new and originates in the sphere of religion rather than the spheres of technology or economy. It has a moral and ethical dimension that insists we place the citizenry and the
commons above the parochial interests of the private sector: innovations must be social in both their “ends and means” (BEPA, 2011). Second, while initiatives should be grounded in local understandings of need, they must relate to the public sphere and to political leaders who are charged with ensuring their sustainable implementation.

**Interrogating People-Centeredness: Some Conceptual Issues**

While *social innovation* is a widely used term, its conceptual understanding and specific relation to social change remain underexplored. This book aims to revisit earlier conceptual developments and to extend them by focusing on the lived realities of peoples and communities as they seek change. The emerging field of people-centered development is placed in dialogue with theory and concepts from the more established field of social innovation to create a new approach, one that adopts a global perspective, engaging with very different experiences of advocacy, participation, marginality and precariousness across the global North and South. Theoretically, we draw on “Northern” understandings of change and improvement as well as “Southern” theory concerns for epistemological diversity and situated meaning-making. The result is an experiment aimed at reimagining research and practice for social transformation.

A number of perspectives are worth clarifying before we elaborate our own approach to people-centered social innovation. To begin, we acknowledge that the category of ‘people’ is not viewed as homogenous but, rather, located within an understanding of complexity, heterogeneity and the complexity of relations of power. A focus on experience thus becomes essential to unfolding subjectivity and actorhood, where politics, power, ideology and struggle frame the daily lives of people and their life worlds. A focus on agency helps us to understand the ways in which material conditions and discursive frameworks intersect to present certain choices for individuals and groups. Ultimately, this orientation recognizes the affective desire to reach the types of outcomes that have become enshrined in global frameworks (e.g., Women Development Report, World Bank, 2012). Building on Amartya Sen (1999: 4), we are also conscious of the powerful trope of freedom as a perspective that “enhances the ability of people to help themselves, and to influence the world”. This does not imply a continuation of earlier welfare approaches. Like Dreze and Sen (1989: 373), we recognize the capacity of the people to actively participate in developmental processes where the public is not merely constructed as “the patient” whose well-being commands attention but also as the “agent” whose actions can be transformative. Agency is an important factor for social value creation and therefore social innovation.
Beyond such clarifying work, it is also necessary to acknowledge the ways in which the landscape of social innovation takes shape across disciplinary borders that make interconnected perspectives possible. These include epistemologies that extend beyond Northern ways of knowing (Santos, 2008), diverse theories of social change (Jessop et al., 2013) and orientations that transcend the “institutionalized field(s)” of public or private action (Moulaert et al., 2013). This last perspective is critical: social innovation comes to the fore when traditional, dominant approaches to change are unable to address the problems of “poverty, exclusion, segregation and deprivation or opportunities for improving living conditions” (Moulaert et al., 2013: 2).

This leads us to people centered development as a way of positioning (and theorizing) actors and agency in processes of social innovation. Originating in alternative ideas about development, including postdevelopment, postcolonialism and poststructuralism, a people-centered approach to development attempts to question mainstream strategies to change. By deconstructing established notions of representation, it challenges universalist frameworks for action and by elevating the importance of engagement it positions purpose and intention at the center of theory, policy and practice.

The Politics of Practice in People-Centered Social Innovation

A people-centered orientation to social innovation is thus one powerful way to address the multidimensional challenges that confront policy makers, activists and marginalized groups worldwide. Such an orientation must theorize societal context in ways that enable us to work with the situational or contextual dimensions of the social, cultural, economic and political spaces at various levels: macro, meso and micro. The aim here is to better identify challenges and problems from the perspective of actors themselves. Developing a politics of practice also invites for the articulation of “innovation solutions” that can provide insights into the proposed new idea as well as the new knowledge and learning that can inform it. The identification of key societal problems includes things that are immediately pressing at the local level as well as larger societal challenges that combine both economic and social concerns as well as deeply entrenched societal and systemic inequities and strategic needs.

The development of an innovation strategy helps us to understand the entire pathway of innovation from idea to implementation, diffusion and scaling. It also helps locate the barriers and drivers along that pathway. As we shall see in the chapters presented here, the varied nuances and complexities of societal context, innovation strategy, innovation solution
and actors/actorhood come together through the optique of people-centered social innovation.

**Between Imaginary and Reality: Centering People in Practice**

Any discussion of the “local” and the “community” must grasp that it is diverse, compromising multiple and hierarchical power relations and affective dispositions. Avoiding essentialist or romanticized appeals to the “other”, participation in social innovations occurs in complex, interconnected networks and spaces. Guijit and Shah (2006) remind us that “community” is often viewed naively or, in practice, dealt with as a harmonious and internally equitable container. Indeed, it is only possible to talk of an “ideal” community by neglecting the discontinuities and irresolvable differences that lie within any social hierarchy. This has serious implications for practice as any innovation or intervention is in danger of re-creating the very power imbalances and hierarchies it seeks to address. Andrea Cornwall (2002: 8) elaborates by suggesting that “power relations pervade (all) spaces for participation” where spaces established by the powerful may be “discursively bounded to permit only limited citizen influence, colonizing interaction and stifling dissent”. Here, the well-rooted structural inequities of caste, class, gender and race gain new legitimacy and purchase and obscure the deeper forces that social innovation strategies attempt to expose and counter.

The outside gaze of the policy maker, researcher or institutionally located activist can impede our understanding of grassroots realities and processes of engagement. Following Chambers (2008: 31), it is important to identify biases in both research and practice that can reinforce misperceptions about people and their contexts. These include spatial, project, person (elite/male, etc.), seasonal, diplomatic and professional issues. Without an understanding of such biases, participation can only remain at the level of rhetoric. Crawley (2006: 24) notes that “the application of participatory approaches has raised increasingly critical questions about their impact”. A simple example comes from our own participatory fieldwork in rural communities in India. Exploring “context” one morning, we realized that women were not part of our mapping exercise. Were they unimportant? Uninterested? Unable? Being aware of the rhythms and flows of particular places, we soon realized that they had moved on to household chores and therefore could not be present. Sometimes, “voice” becomes a simple commitment to ensuring that all are heard, not assuming that those who have an interest—or are interesting to researchers and activists—will make themselves heard. In this sense, and above all else, a people centered approach to social innovation is about a willingness to share expertise, to co-produce understanding and to work toward social value creation that serves the interests of all.
The Contributions

The themes and perspectives opened up here suggest numerous ways to approach this emerging field. With its genesis in a research and development collaboration between Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India, and Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark, the book reflects diverse perspectives on people-centered social innovation from leading researchers and practitioners from across the world. In the process, it embodies the very diversity and difference of the people-centered approach itself.

We start with a chapter that explores the theoretical richness and potential of social innovation as a research lens with which to conceptualize change processes. Luise Li Langergaard provides a conceptual opening by considering the related area of social entrepreneurship. Often presented as a panacea for solving social problems, this influential way of approaching social change remains a contested concept. Despite its clear normative and political implications, critical studies of social entrepreneurship are limited. She presents and analyses the types of critique employed in the literature and discusses the implications of these for understandings of social change and emancipation. One important insight to emerge here is that these critical studies, as they exist, tend to emphasize discourse and resistance, as well as an empirical methodology, rather than questioning the inherent normativity and ideology of the field. The limitations on the framing of critique place, in turn, limitations on how we might conceptualize the social itself. Drawing on early critical theory, she develops a more coherent and thorough conceptual outline of the literature and thus provides us with a greater understanding of the normative and political dimensions of social innovation and social entrepreneurship as well as their potential.

In their chapter on gendering social innovation, Linda Lundgaard Andersen and Swati Banerjee explore marginalized women’s collectives, positioning them in the largely “uncharted” realm of gendered social innovation which they unfold through an intersectional research awareness. Building on Gibson-Graham’s work they argue that “a much wider range of social relations bear on economic practices” than hitherto captured by much of the policy and research literature. These include “trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, future orientation, collective agreement, coercion, bonding, guilt, love, community pressure, equity, self-exploitation, solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, environmental and social justice” (Gibson-Graham, 2014: 151). Through rigorous casework, grounded in this broader awareness, they conclude that temporality is an “important feature” in people-centered social innovation: empowering marginalized women takes time and focus beyond that usually provided by external bodies and funding agencies.
In the second of three TISS/Roskilde collaborative chapters, P.K. Shajahan and Lars Hulgård provide a genealogical analysis of the institutionalization of people-centered social innovation in Kerala, India. The Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, better known as Kudumbashree, was initiated by the government of Kerala to de-root absolute poverty from the state. Treating women not as isolated individuals and entrepreneurs, but in the “totalities” of their communities and everyday life, Kudumbashree combines microcredit, entrepreneurship and empowerment (social, economic and political) initiatives to strengthen the solidarity economy of the community. Their work is heavily indebted to de Sousa Santos’s “ecologies of knowledge” perspective, one taken up further by Adriane Vieira Ferrarini in her decolonizing analysis of the ethos of social innovation. Here, the concept of ethos is used as an analytical device for epistemological and methodological considerations of economic rationality (where the “the social” is given primacy over “the economic”) and where the ethical-political intentions of actors can be understood in relation to the quality of participation. She concludes that if the critical epistemological debate proves necessary in the North, it is indispensable in practices aimed at overcoming poverty in the South. In effect, social innovation cannot be restricted to solving societal problems alone: it also creates, legitimates and therefore consolidates constellations of knowledge and power.

Notwithstanding the potential of decolonial analyses to uncover embedded marginalities, this orientation also enables us to reimagine existing processes of social innovation. Sunil D. Santha and Devisha Sasidevan argue that adaptive innovations are social innovations that are context specific, developmental and always committed to the values of social justice and environmental sustainability. They involve processes by which social innovators understand the political economy of the larger social system and apply their knowledge, networks and skills to shape or modify these social systems to adapt to diverse risks and uncertainties. Their chapter describes how informal entrepreneurship could be developed and strengthened as adaptive social innovation in order to counter livelihood insecurity. By using a social innovation “lens” they illustrate the livelihood adaptation strategies of migrant informal workers, highlighting their capacities as active subjects. The outcome is an ambitious framework that blends agency-based adaptation with a socio-ecological system perspective on innovation.

Such cutting-edge concept work continues in the chapter by Andres Morales, Roger Spear, Michael Ngoasong, and Silvia Sacchetti. Drawing on indigenous community organizations (ICOs) in Colombia, they examine “Northern” understandings of development with Buen Vivir, a community-centric, ecologically balanced and culturally sensitive development model which challenges the “dominant” market-based model of capitalism adopted by Latin American countries in the wake
of colonialism. Drawing on the thought of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, they examine the transformation of indigenous peoples’ organized groups into ICOs within the social and solidarity economy, showing processes of hybridization that provide not only institutional protection but also the threat of incorporation into dominant Western forms of organization. Their research points to the ever-present abyssal power of hegemonic frames of thought that always threaten the possibilities for alternative forms of action.

A final trio of chapters extends our gaze much further outward. In the chapter on Indian diasporic communities, Rashmi Singla, P.K. Shajahan and Sujata Sriram explore the intersections of belonging, marginality and transnationalism, applying a people-centered approach grounded in what they call “first-person voices and interests”. This perspective enables them to identify spaces such as places of worship as addressing the (often) unmet demands of people who fall through the cracks of formal ‘state integration’ efforts. By retaining an openness to those (non)state institutions that play a central role in actual lives, we are able to see the potential role that deeply established local organizations can play in social innovation. In this way, integration becomes the collective responsibility of state and community partners rather than something driven only by the obligations, interests and field of vision of government and its private-sector partners.

Another institution of central importance in the creation of social value—one often overlooked or reduced to the realm of the formal economy—is the university. Abdul Shaban and Prashant B. Narnaware ask, “How can we look at development alternatives or alternatives to development in an increasingly neoliberal world with its deepening marginalities?” Their case study of state–university–community partnerships takes a different turn from the long tradition of such collaborations by starting from the perspective of the local. With the example of the Tuljapur Campus of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences—an initiative designed primarily to serve local stakeholders—we see the potential of the university for bringing together the agenda of the state (here, the district administration), civil society groups and educational providers. The result is an experiment in transformative and sustainable change that could inspire higher education systems globally.

The global potential of people-centered social innovation is captured in the mapping research of Jeremy Millard and Mohamed Wageih and Bev Meldrum, who draw on worldwide experiences of social innovation and sustainable development initiatives to reflect on achievements across much of the African continent. Their analysis suggests that the ‘crisis of development’ in Africa can be addressed in part by policies that promote social innovation and entrepreneurship at the local level alongside top-down regulatory frameworks. The growth of the cooperative movement resonates with a long tradition of similar approaches to social
value creation in Europe and suggests an alternative pathway to change in Africa that can mediate the effect of uncertain governmental and funding regimes and that centers people (and grassroots democratization) in change processes. Often overlooked in global studies of social change and development, the African experience of rapidly declining inequalities, youth-driven entrepreneurship and growing links between civil society and the public and private sectors, as well as international donors and investors, suggest a dynamic set of practices that may come to inform if not lead our understanding of social innovation into its next phase.

Finally, in an especially provoking piece, Silla Marie Mørch Sievers explores the origins of the concept of social innovation from the reformation to the 19th century when it was regarded as unwelcome and where innovators were often looked at as heretics who disturbed an accepted order. She argues that the disturbance of order can be viewed as a central feature of social innovation, something that is also key to Schumpeter’s idea of innovation as “creative destruction”. However, in the social innovation literature we see an imbalance favoring “creativity” and other positive aspects where its full(er) potential is lost in favor of less dangerous forms of change. Viewing social innovation as a heretical practice may be one way of reimagining it as a tool for deeper structural action.

An Invitation and Opening

The chapters presented here make clear that there can never be one approach to people-centered social innovation. To think so would be to misunderstand the very idea of a social innovation generated by and for people. We hope that the contributions in this book—some theoretical, others methodological and practical—do some degree of justice to the rich, context-specific nature of an emerging approach to working together toward our common humanity. We invite you to join this journey!

Note

2. LSGs are the lowest level of institutions of governance and came into being in 1994 in India with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments for giving constitutional status to these institutions in rural and urban contexts, respectively.
2. Kudumbashree has a locality-based approach, with NHGs formed as collectives of 20 or more women from socially and economically marginalized households in the immediate neighborhood as the lowest functional structure. Several such NHGs in the local electoral constituency, called a ward, are integrated into an ADS, which is further amalgamated at the LSG level as a CDS. (Kudumbashree, n.d.b). A CDS is a registered nonprofit society under relevant legislation in the state of Kerala.
3. Panchayats are the LSG institutions in rural areas. A three-tier panchayat system exists in rural areas, consisting of village panchayats at the lowest level and intermediate and district levels at the levels above.


5. The first popularly elected communist government in Kerala in 1957 brought land reforms aimed at abolishing the feudal system in the state through a legislative process amid strong opposition from the landed class. This gave tenancy rights to people who had worked on the land for generations under the feudal system.

6. SC/ST refers to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe which are historically marginalized communities in India and are notified in the Constitution of India. By virtue of their historical disadvantages, these communities have been extended positive discrimination by way of guaranteeing reservation in education, jobs and political representative system.


1. Postcolonialism is the total sum of all the social, political, cultural and economic changes brought about by the impact of colonialism (Claeyé and Jackson, 2012).

2. Pachamamismo is referred to, generally negatively, as an indigenous political discourse that only relies on indigenous peoples’ view of the world and is considered populist because it is not consistent with the existing conditions in society (Stefanoni, 2010).

3. The indigenous landholdings.

4. This CSE can be defined as an SE (e.g., Giovannini, 2012).

5. Local government council.

6. See the importance of bartering for the Misak community in the following link: https://youtu.be/CroUSFEzRiE.

7. Community members: individuals who are part of the indigenous community.

Associates or Members: individuals who are part of an indigenous association or cooperative.

8. NB: 32% of the participants were either part of the board of directors or were directly involved in the management process.

9. Remarkably, 58% of the participants were either professionally trained (vocational or technical courses) or educated in universities.

1. Scandinavian countries consist of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, while Nordic countries also include Iceland and Finland.

2. The first author is part of the Indian diaspora in Denmark, the second and third authors live in India with experience of working internationally, and the third author has researched the Indian diaspora in the United States.

3. Transnational: composed of prefix trans meaning “through” and national, phenomena that takes place through nations.

4. Denmark scrapped the green card scheme in June 2016, but the current holders were spared.

5. Indians are concentrated in Asia, Western Europe, North America and the Caribbean. Taking 1,500 as the minimum figure, there are Indians in 53 countries.

6. They have established a firm in the field of pharmacy, as her husband had master’s degrees in pharmacy and biotechnology.

7. Breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge and (to a lesser extent) people across the border (Stiglitz, 2002: 9).
8. **Benign colonialism** is a controversial concept that refers to an alleged form of colonialism in which benefits outweighed risks for indigenous populations whose lands, resources, rights and freedoms were preempted by a colonizing nation-state. Literature challenging this has not been as widely publicized.

9. Diwali refers to the Hindu Festival of Lights, which is celebrated by most Indian diasporics who follow Hinduism.

10. Kollu is the traditional women's festival from South India celebrated during Navratri (Nine Nights) during fall.

11. Mela is a fair.

12. Short tunics, worn with leggings.

13. Tight leggings, traditional Indian clothing.

1. **Tehsils** are the intermediate administrative units in Maharashtra state between block and district.

2. **Gram panchayats** are the lowest development administrative units in India and are governed by elected representatives from a single or a group of villages. Gram panchayats mainly use development funds provided to them from district level but also are empowered to impose some minor taxes for land use change and so on.

1. Northern Africa (UN classification): Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Tunisia, Western Sahara.

2. UCT (South Africa) and Heliopolis University (Egypt).


7. Numbers add up to more than 100%, as almost all initiatives have more than one actor.

8. Numbers add up to more than 100%, as almost all initiatives report outcomes at more than one level.

9. CSOs are termed Community Service/Support Organizations in Northern Africa.


1. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Sievers, 2016).

2. Derrida is referring to invention, but I believe his idea could equally well be applied to innovation.

### References


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