

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Social Innovation: fields, definitions and theoretical scope

Social innovation is a field of study that in recent decades has been occupying an increasing interest both by academic institutions by organizations linked to the field of organized citizenship or by the public administration itself. This interest has been stimulated by a social, economic and civilizing scenario in which the incapacity of the classic mechanisms to cover the basic social needs, to respond to the new social demands or to dynamize processes of social change of a more structural character was discovered. The interest in what have been called "practices of social innovation" had already been announced in the last decades of accelerated change, in which certain social structures have been dismantled and replaced by others. The economic and financial crisis that characterized the change of decade has certainly accelerated this process.

Given this failure, social innovation has been identified as a series of emerging practices, involving an increasingly large and diverse number of social actors, who did have the potential to meet society's expectations of these needs, those demands or those changes.

Despite being a booming phenomenon, in the current scientific literature there is no academic or social agreement about the meaning of social innovation. On the contrary, we have an extremely flexible concept, which can be approached from very different disciplinary approaches and contexts. This terminological openness is aggravated by the existence of countless practices that coexist in society, which prevents the establishment of systematic models that allow rigorous scientific research. And all this despite its increasing incorporation in programs and public policies, both by movements and organizations linked to social change.

Precisely, the present work aims to cover this gap presented by the literature on social innovation. To this end, a systematic review of the definitions that have given rise to a greater impact in the scientific literature and in social practice will be carried out, with the objective of identifying the articulating elements that structure the concept with the objective of Systematize the main constituent elements of these definitions, searching for common and divergent elements, originalities and consensuses, as well as the identification of possible absences.

In a second moment, the historical development of the concept will be analyzed, in order to establish the possible relations between historical moments and emphases that are adopted in the successive definitions, and that show a series of tendencies that have been superposed and complementing over time.

Finally, a synthesis of the implication that the development of this concept has had in different disciplinary areas and that present common features will be made.

A cross-cutting question to this work is whether "social innovation" is a "buzzword" that will later be abandoned or is "an enduring term". The reason for this question has to do with the prevailing impossibility of defining this term in a canonical way, as it does with the definitions of other fields of study that have a precise, universally accepted meaning. A clear example is the multitude of definitions available to any researcher, which provide each of them variants and nuances that make them difficult to unify, as will be seen in this article.

It is for this reason that we have found it pertinent to the first of the objectives, to carry out a comprehensive bibliographic review process that would allow us to identify the most relevant definitions about social innovation. In order to carry out this selection, citation criteria have been used (those definitions that are incorporated in later works), relevance (those that give rise to more or less elaborate theoretical frameworks) and genuineness (that is, that contributes elements of great impact either by the fact that they have consolidated within schools of thought, or by belonging to institutions of reference in the field of social innovation).

A bibliographic review was carried out by manual search in key journals of the main databases (ISI Web of Knowledge, SCOPUS), using the keywords "social innovation" and Other combinations ("defined social innovation", "definition of social innovation", "social innovation refers to", "social innovation is conceptualized", "dimensions of social innovation", and "research on social innovation").

It was considered that the languages of the most relevant publications were English and Spanish, since they were the most influential areas of the subject under study. A first result of this search yielded a total of 1,986 records. On this initial catalog it was decided to apply a more restrictive filter consisting in the body of the article appeared the explicit definition of social innovation. Using this criterion the search was reduced to 62 articles, which gave rise to 48 different definitions.

We also did a floating search in Google Scholar and gray literature that included books, articles, working documents and reports quoted in decreasing order ING and editorials and theses excluded, to complement the information obtained in the search in database. However, it should be pointed out that this search did not obtain any worthy results.

After the analysis carried out, we could emphasize that although the concept of social innovation is acquiring a progressive independence of the generic definition of innovation, there is not yet a definition of consensus that allows to establish common points of encounter for the students of the subject.

Over time, a series of definitions have been happening that have been affected by the historical moment in which they emerged, impregnated therefore of the values projected by the social agents that

proposed them, which has served on the one hand to increase the wealth Of the concept and to expand on the other the aspects of theoretical reflection. This dependence on the values projected by social agents, which can only be defined in a given context, has enriched the concept but has also made it impossible to obtain a unitary definition that is fully accepted by the entire scientific community. In spite of this difficulty, interesting attempts have been made to identify what could be considered as "structuring dimensions" of social innovation, as a starting point for developing a definition of consensus, which has both a practical and theoretical utility in this ambit.

A second conclusion, which arises from a diachronic analysis of the waves of definitions of social innovation that follow, is that the object of analysis of this term goes from focusing on the application of technical innovation to the social spheres To be interested in the relations between a problematized society in search of solutions and these same solutions, intermediate stages of this change of interest being how innovations respond to social problems or the specific contribution that is made from the concrete sphere of social action or Of non-profit organizations.

With regard to the disciplinary implication we can identify three macro areas:

- Economic-managerial: In the first place, the importance of the economic approach emerges whose main contribution lies in helping to better understand the cycles and economic dynamics that society is going through. The managerial perspective delves into the economic approach by emphasizing the social value of innovative initiatives through public-private partnerships to solve social problems.
- The approach that emerges from political science and the science of administration, delves into the analysis of public policies as an instrument to seek innovative solutions that involve, in addition to solving specific social needs, institutional changes in programs, legislation, ultimately, Changes in the way of exercising government action.
- The social sciences approach addresses social innovation as a systemic process whose objective would be to correct misalignments in political, legal, economic, cultural and social environments.

In short, the present work has shown that there is an intimate correlation between the concrete definitions of the concept of social innovation, the historical development of this concept and its disciplinary implications. On more occasions than would be desirable the study of social innovation has been done from a partial perspective, without the holistic approach that this subject requires. Precisely, this work brings new nuances, perspectives and colors that help to finish the picture, contributing to a better knowledge of the phenomenon and to building bridges between the tree of social innovation and the forest of the model of society that is intended to be built.

Likewise, the present work identifies a hollow in the studies on social innovation that has to do with the consideration of "processes" as an element to be taken into account in the definition itself and in the systematization of these phenomena.

KEYWORDS: Social innovation, economic theory, Sociological theory, Political theory, Social technologies.