

# T12P03 / Linking social innovation and empowerment: A public policy role?

**Topic :** T12 / GENDER, DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

**Chair :** Raquel Gallego-Calderón (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

**Second Chair :** Lara Maestriperi (Politecnico di Milano)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Open debates in the Welfare State include social investment, equality of opportunities, diversity, equity, or gender equality among others. Recently, **social innovation** in these areas has raised questions not only on citizens' **empowerment**, but also on the capacity of existing **public policies** to address new demands and challenges in an increasingly complex and uncertain context (Barbieri *et al.* 2019, Gallego 2019). However, the connection between the research on social innovation and empowerment and the research on public policy has been scarce. We argue that the **capabilities approach** may help formulating research questions that integrate both strands.

Most of the literature has linked “**social innovation**” and “**empowerment**” together, as two sides of the same coin (Moulaert *et al.*, 2016). Social innovation includes practices that generate provision models different from institutionalized public and private sectors, and which are supposed to empower citizens (Grimm *et al.* 2013). In theory, social innovation aims to empower the communities and the individuals who are involved in its activities (Baglioni and Sinclair, 2015), but this does not necessarily always occur in practice (Blanco and Leon, 2017, Maestriperi, 2017a). Empirical results from studies on the relationship between women's empowerment and involvement in social innovation have given contrasting results (Cukier, 2018, Maestriperi 2017b).

The **missing link** between social innovation and empowerment has been a concern in the research on social innovation and on women's empowerment from a **capabilities approach** (Cornwall 2016, Maestriperi 2017a,b, Lindberg *et al.* 2015). Capabilities refer both to the potential and to the actual power of what a person is able to do and achieve in terms of valued choices, and indicates a person's well-being (Gangas 2016, Sen 1985). Empowerment is conceptualised as an increase in women's capabilities and is operationalized through the relationship between three elements: resources, agency and achievements (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). Citizens' resources are preconditions that influence their agency, which in turn influences their achievements (outcomes) (Chiappero *et al.* 2017). Thus, social innovation empowers only those with sufficient resources to participate in it, which deepens inequality a context of retrenchment (Oosterlynck *et al.* 2013). Therefore, as Ziegler (2018) points out, we need to pay attention to the **capabilities conversion factors**, among which **public policy** plays a central role.

### Research questions:

How can public policy enhance citizens' collective and individual capabilities to promote social innovation?

Is public policy intervention a contradiction *in terminis* with the aims and means of social innovation?

What can public policy learn from social innovation?

### Hypotheses:

Hp1. Social innovation leads to inequality when it occurs in a context of welfare retrenchment and reduction of public intervention.

Hp2. Social innovation can have a beneficial spillover over public policy, if it complements the action of the public, raising awareness on potential social needs not covered by current welfare provisions.

Hp3. Social innovation generates women's empowerment if women are actively involved in the definition of the scope and goal of the social innovation and social innovation occurs in a favourable institutional context in which public policies learn from socially innovative projects.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

We welcome papers investigating the **relation between social innovation and public policies**, in particular those exploring the potential beneficial spillover over policy learning and which type of institutional context is favourable to social innovation. We also welcome papers on **how public policy may promote social innovation** without compromising either its social or its innovation dimensions, but avoiding, at the same time, adverse consequences such as the reproductions of inequality structures. In particular, we would like to assess the

**capacity of social innovation to empower women and promote diversity**, using an intersectional analytical framework in which gender is only one (intersecting) axes of inequality, which is inseparable from other potential structures of inequality. As per **intersectionality theory**, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, locality and other statuses are not only closely tied to each other but also cumulative over the life course. Social innovation is in theory capable to intercept the complexities of social needs more easily than public policies as its scopes and goals are defined in a bottom-up process of negotiating among participants and beneficiaries. We are particularly interested in research that explores to what extent social innovation is able to acknowledge the co-existence of multiple forms of disadvantage across women and its capacity to scale up through the leverage of public policies.

We **welcome all approaches** - theoretical and empirical, substantive and methodological, micro and macro, qualitative and quantitative, as well as geographically specific research or comparative studies-.

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## Session 1 Approaches to social innovation in public policy

Wednesday, July 7th 10:00 to 12:00 (253)

### **(Virtual) A relational approach to gender and social innovation: Gendering Social Innovation as alternative theoretical framework**

Silvia Cervia (Università di Pisa)

The paper derives its specific approach to analysing social innovation (SI) from a gender perspective by adopting a relational approach to defining a unitarian framework in which SI would become more effective. Some scholars have pointed to SI as a contested concept by taking a relational perspective to analysing SI and its core goal, which is universally identified by its alleged ability to address and satisfy unmet social needs by including marginalised groups in decision-making processes. SI is a contested concept poised between two opposite outcomes: the redefinition of social relations in a more inclusive and equitable way with the aim of addressing and satisfying unmet social needs by including marginalised groups in decision-making processes and the manipulative use of this redefinition as a smokescreen for cuts in public service delivery for the purpose of furthering neoliberalism, which leads to a reduction in public services and the shift of service provision to societal sectors (Ayob, Teasdale and Fagan, 2016; Massey and Johnston-Miller, 2016).

To avoid this risk, the paper draws on the relational theory of gender theoretical implications to move from gendered social innovation - based on a categorical thinking of gender - to gendering social innovation as a more profitable and gender-sensitive framework in which SI can become more effective. As I will argue, this is not a merely terminological issue but a substantial change, as the gender relational perspective has the potential to foster the core goal of SI.

In the domain of SI studies, the relational approach claims to provide a 'holistic framework' focused on SI as innovation of social relations, which emphasizes the link between the effect (innovation) and the process, which is innovative itself because it is defined by including marginalised groups in the decision-making process (Moulaert et al., 2013). First, the paper analyses this framework, which pretends to offer a theory able to face the risk that SI will become a sort of Trojan horse to pave the way for neoliberalism, fostering the diminishing role of governments in guaranteeing basic universal rights. Second, the paper theorizes gendering social innovation as a framework for SI that overcomes the shortcomings of the previous concept of gendered social innovation, which is described in the academic literature as a specific kind of SI (Lindberg, Forsberg and Karlberg, 2015). Considering that the focus on power relations point out the necessity of building upon the recognition process developed by gender and feminist studies, the paper defines an approach to recognition and gender that it is sensitive to the other axes of social differentiation (Fraser, 2007). The relational theory of gender and its multidimensional perspective (Connell, 2012) reviews the epistemic warrant of gendered social innovation by defining gendering social innovation as a useful lens through which complex relations between multiple groups not only within but also across identities and analytic categories, at the intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional levels, can be used to analyse the effect of specific initiatives and processes from multiple perspectives.

### **(Virtual) Social innovation policies in higher education institutions for women empowerment: A Case of Lithuania**

TITTY VARGHESE (Kaunas University of Technology)

Paulina Budryte (Kaunas University of Technology)

Women's empowerment is considered one of the bases for all forms of social and economic development across the globe. However, the lack of suitable policies and their implementation often becomes a barrier for women's overall access to equality. Therefore, the UN has identified gender equality as the 5th Sustainable Development Goal. To achieve this, social innovation (SI) and technological advancement do have an imperative role in fulfilling this task. Therefore, UN Women is also focusing on promoting innovative policies to increase women's potential

in various sectors and create opportunities for them. Poverty alleviation, occupational achievements, advances in education, protection of women and children, prevention of sexual violence, and enabling women to access various development can achieve through social innovation programs (Lombardi et al., 2020). Since education is considered a critical fundamental element that acts as a mentor for orienting the young generation to social, cultural, and economic developments, it is essential to focus on innovative social practices in the educational sectors. In this spectrum, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) play a significant role in addressing local and global issues through their knowledge creation in the Universities. Lithuania holds the 34th position in the Human Development Index. The governmental expenditure on education is 4% of GDP, and inequality in education is only 3.9 %, Lithuania shows its effective system advancement in the educational sector (UNDP, 2019). However, there is a lack of study on the role of social innovation policies in higher education institutions and how it affects women's empowerment at Universities in Lithuania. Therefore, this research focuses on how social innovation influences women's empowerment in Lithuania and the possible challenges to achieve it. During this research, qualitative interviews were conducted with persons directly involved in HEI and participated (or still participating) at least in one social innovation developing stage (implementation, executing, monitoring, investigating, etc.). The results uncover linkages between a person's willingness to participate and a positive attitude towards SI and suggest the direction of SI development in the country, along with the areas of further research.

**Keywords:** social innovation, public policy, Lithuania, higher education, women empowerment

## List of References

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## Care Policies in Local Settings: Municipal regulation and provision of care services

Mara Yerkes (Utrecht University)

Mara A. Yerkes\*, Carla Brega, Samuel Briones, Karen van Hedel, Mehri Zamanbin

Social innovation, whereby new public or private initiatives develop from the bottom-up, depends, in part, on the capacity of existing social policies to address citizens' needs. In a context of far-reaching decentralization of (social) care services across European welfare states (Martinelli et al., 2017), we can question the extent to which local social policies demonstrate such capacity. The retreat of national welfare states and the shift to local governments creates an interplay between central and local policy (Kazepov, 2010) that can lead to increased central-local tensions and increased inequality (Jansen et al., forthcoming). These tensions and their effects remain understudied (Jensen et al., 2017; Kazepov, 2010; Martinelli et al., 2017) yet many questions remain. In particular, what does the local implementation and regulation of (social) care services mean for the capacity of local policies to address citizens' needs? Answering this question is crucial because the availability of policies and services does not guarantee equal access (Yerkes et al., 2019).

In this paper, we apply a capability approach to an investigation of the local discourse and regulation of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies and services in eight European cities: London and Leeds (United Kingdom), Amsterdam and Nijmegen (the Netherlands), Barcelona and Pamplona (Spain), and Ljubljana and Maribor (Slovenia). While ECEC policies are widely researched in comparative work-family and social policy analysis (Yerkes and Javornik, 2019), few studies exist considering local variation in ECEC policy (Ruppanner, 2021). We use qualitative data collected for the European research project CAPABLE, including comparative document analysis and interviews with local policymakers and interest groups. Taking this approach to how care policies are discussed and regulated at the local level, we seek to explain variation across geographical identities and understand the potential consequences of this variation for social inequality and individual wellbeing. This investigation thus provides much-needed evidence on the capacity of local policies and services to address the needs of citizens across European societies.

\*Corresponding author

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## Session 2 Social innovations in public policy: analysis of empirical cases

Thursday, July 8th 16:30 to 18:30 (253)

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF CASH TRANSFER POLICIES ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN DARFUR, SUDAN**

Amelea Omollo (University of Nairobi)

Cash transfer Policy refers to one of the social policies used by governments or their agencies to disburse cash to the vulnerable population as interventions to socio-economic challenges. Over the years, Sudan has been variously described as a: complex political emergency; politically fragile state, strong, but unresponsive state; and on occasions, a failed state. In the last half of 2020, Sudan has faced several challenges including the closure of nonessential businesses, high food prices, undernutrition, cash, and fuel shortages, and disruption of basic services. Vulnerable populations including internally displaced people and refugees were not spared either. Other vagaries to the households included in Sudan included the desert locust swarms, heavy rainfall, and flooding. Between September and October 2020 that affected over 850,000 people. The Nile River floods destroyed over 111,000 homes forcing the Government to declare a 3-month State of Emergency. An estimated 65 percent of the population in Sudan lives below the poverty line, according to Government reports. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation. The Government had to identify an innovative way in which the vulnerable population could be supported, hence the Cash Transfer Programme, known as The Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP). It aimed to mitigate the effect of the economic crisis compounded by the adverse socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The SFSP was designed to provide direct cash transfers each month to around 80 percent of Sudanese families to support them through the challenging economic circumstances currently facing the country, safeguarding people at risk of slipping into extreme poverty. The Government of Sudan with support from various governments and entities including, European Union, World Bank, Government of the Republic of Korea, The World food programme among others developed a cash transfer delivery and payments system. The platform developed is to provide an efficient and accountable digital delivery of a broad range of social protection and other Government services to the People of Sudan. So far the SFSP has received a total of €230 in emergency humanitarian assistance from 'Team Europe' and \$110 million from the World Bank to the Family Support Programme.

As of December 2020 Since the launch of the pilot phase on 11 October 2020, 15,172,500 SDG (\$275,863) has been transferred to enrolled families. So far, 18,720 people (3,744 families) are receiving assistance through the Program.

The study, therefore, wishes to investigate the contribution of this innovative social service delivery to the recipients by carrying out interviews of vulnerable women who have benefited from the SFSP. Specifically, we would wish to find out how the cash transfer service through the SFSP has empowered women through enhanced socio-economic status, participation in decision making, and improved livelihoods. A mixed-method approach will be used to collect the data, which will be analyzed using SPSS to establish both descriptive and correlation statistics. It is expected that there will be correlations between the cash transfers and Women empowerment in Sudan

### **THE CITIZENS' INCOME IN TARANTO: ANOTHER MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION?**

Maristella Cacciapaglia (Università degli Studi di Bari )

The Italian citizens' income only apparently refers to what is now back into the debate as "Universal Basic Income". Fundamentally, it is an active labor market policy, aimed at contrasting poverty, inequality, and social exclusion by providing a conditional money transfer upon recipients' commitment to work and social inclusion activities.

During a pandemic to be considered as a "perfect storm" mainly, its implementation proves to be very complex,

somewhere with only a few fair work opportunities and intra-family simplistic projects of care. Actually, some recipients receive nothing but a monthly and fixed amount of money, which is not necessarily what they want beyond rhetoric.

In particular, the involvement of social innovators and of the Third Sector as a whole is left to the discretion of local social workers and actors. However, the latter are differently relevant from place to place and tend to focus more on other vulnerable groups of citizens than on citizens' income recipients.

This can be a missed opportunity either for those recipients who choose to be "active" – I refer to something well distant from mandatory activation, and for social innovators who want to make an impact on local communities, especially in pandemic times and marginal areas that need to rethink their development model.

In these cases, in fact, the processes of social policies can be integrated with the ones of urban renewal, economic restructuring, or sustainable development more generally, for a larger individual and common benefit.

All this is happening in Taranto, Southern Italy. It is a broken steel city in the middle of a huge socio-economic urban change, where citizens still don't trust each other and least of all in institutions, and where policymakers still prefer slogans to facts and processes, among other things.

Under these premises, this article proposes a critical ethnography on the implementation of the Italian "Citizens' income" as experienced by its recipients and Third Sector actors in Taranto during the city's changing times. The experience of institutions is considered as well.

Given the research purpose, qualitative methods like participating observation and semi-structured interviews are chosen, while quantitative methods are selected as a support of the analysis.

## **Social innovation and public policies: lessons from the case of Barcelona**

Raquel Gallego-Calderón (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

Lara Maestripiéri (Politecnico di Milano)

Since the wave of the new municipalism in Barcelona, the city became a favourable environment for grassroots initiatives and citizens' participation. In the last years, then, there has been a creative unrest that has favoured the capacity of the public administration to listen to citizens' needs and a space for the agency of collectives who wanted to engage in active participation at local level. In theory, such an environment constitutes the most fertile breeding ground for social innovation, defined as those citizen-led initiatives aiming at proposing new products and services that satisfy social needs. These new solutions are tailored on the needs of the citizens who actively engage in their promotion and management. On their view, these practices are more effective and efficient than existing institutionalized (public and private) provision models for the coverage of their needs. Empirical evidence has confirmed the constant growth of social innovations' initiatives in the city of Barcelona in the last years, across various welfare areas.

However, numerous studies have also demonstrated that social innovation might create new inequalities at local level. On one side, the need for social innovation emerges when the current welfare fails to satisfy citizens' needs, thus, citizens' support to social innovation might be used as a justification to reduce investment in public policies. On the other, not all the citizens have the capacity and the agency to engage in social innovations: studies demonstrated that social innovators are usually more educated and active than those who access traditional services. Thus, public investment in social innovation might result in Matthew effects, more than producing positive returns in terms of equality. Nevertheless, the capacity of the public sector to learn from social innovation can produce positive spillovers over traditional services, who can be transformed to intercept and respond to current needs from citizens. Social innovation is a win-win game then only if the public learn from it, instead of delegating services to it.

Stemming from these considerations, we use the case of social innovation in childcare 0-3 in Barcelona to sustain this argument. In 2019-2020, we conducted interviews with professionals (15) and mothers (18) who are engaged in socially innovative childcare in Barcelona, investigating their relationships with the public administration and the support they are receiving from the municipality. As a follow up, in 2021 we interviewed key informants chosen among local policymakers and representatives of the social innovations initiatives, in order to disentangle the complex relationship between social innovation and public policy, and to investigate to what extent public policy is capable to learn from social innovation.

In this paper, we have two goals: i. to understand if the public bodies are able to support social innovations, or if public support to social innovation can come only to the detriment of investment in traditional solutions; ii. to assess to what extent public support to social innovation can trigger the renewal of public services, making them more tailored to citizens' needs.