FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP. EMPOWERMENT AS SOCIAL INNOVATION HUB

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Abstract

Social innovations are considered to be effective measures that help to find answers to social problems (Zapf 1989). They promise to find solutions in a simple, fast and efficient way, especially under conditions of a decreasing welfare state (Kazepov et al. 2020). However, there is not one only definition or one only type of social innovation what makes it difficult to support their realization or to govern them. The contribution develops three main forms of social innovation. The central distinguishing feature is the emergence from below, i.e. bottom-up. This kind of innovation usually has emancipatory goals. It is op-posed to emergence from above, i.e. top-down. In this case, public administration or politics intend to real-ize solutions that tackle social problems as identified from above (Pausch 2018). A classification as simple as possible may be useful in order to come to conclusions about the governance of the different types. How-ever, a third type of social innovation will be presented additionally. This third type combines bottom-up and top-down approaches at an early stage. This concept will be highlighted in the context of the govern-ance of social innovation because, firstly, it is mentioned in a huge part of literature about social innova-tion. Secondly, its value as a means of encounter and cooperative development of innovations is underrat-ed: Empowerment in literature about social innovation usually appears as a goal of innovative interven-tions or as a characteristic of social innovations. But the respective contributions often do not discuss em-powerment as a method, although it is its inherent strength to mediate different perspectives, to support civil society in awareness-raising processes and to avoid paternalistic dominance of institutions (Berner 2022). Thus, the contribution introduces empowerment as a social innovation hub, that reconciles bottom-up and top-down processes.

Keywords: Empowerment; social innovation; social work

1. Introduction

Social innovations are considered to be effective measures that help to find answers to social problems (Zapf, 1989). They promise to find solutions in a simple, fast and efficient way, especially under conditions of a decreasing welfare state (Kazepov et al., 2020). In some cases public authorities develop social innovations – when the state has to react promptly to immediate miseries or when obvious social problems

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emerge over time. In other cases, social innovations are the result of bottom-up-initiatives – especially when groups of people suffer from disadvantages and stigmatization.

However, there is not one only definition or one only type of social innovation what makes it difficult to support their realization or to have an impact on them. In literature we find various contributions that distinguish categories of social innovation. Markus Pausch (Pausch, 2018) differs four types by describing their emergence historically. Leading dividing line is the difference between bottom-up and top-down engagement in the moment they appear. The authors Dominik Rüede and Kathrin Lurtz (Rüede/Lurtz, 2012) describe seven types through a literature review. They define the types by means of various categories such like focus of the intervention or its practical relevance. Other authors mention different characteristics of social innovations without distinguishing them into categories. Frank Moulaert et al. highlight the need for action research as a tool that helps to find out more about the "emancipatory intent" of social innovations (Moulaert et al., 2013, p. 21). But not every social innovation has emancipatory intentions. Top-down processes, driven by public administration often just want to find an effective way of problem solving. The introduction of the Youth Welfare Act in Germany 1924 and in the following of youth welfare is an example of such an innovation from above. In the 1920s local politicians had realized that care and monitoring of poor, illegitimate, or malnourished children were a social problem that had to be addressed by state actors (Euteneuer et al., 2014, p. 397).

The success of a social innovation often manifests in new rules or regulations or even laws. The bottom-up initiative of the suffragettes of Great Britain started their movement at the end of 19th, beginning of 20th century as a bottom-up-initiative. They finally succeeded with the Representation of the People Act of 1928 that gave women the same right to vote as men (Smith, 2010). It is not easy to decide what exactly is the socially innovative part of this progress. Is it the new idea and the organized struggle of women? Or is the new law the actual social innovation? Therefore, it makes sense to focus on the very early moment of such a development: "Does it emerge bottom-up or top-down?" is the decisive question, when we want to elaborate specific forms of governance of social innovation. Related to this distinction governance takes place in public institutions, in civil society organisations, or in cooperation of both. In empirical reality, even this differentiation may appear simplified, because social innovations "depend on a wide array of actors, including social entrepreneurs, movements, governments, foundations, teams, networks, businesses, and political organizations, each with different ways

of working, motivations, and capacities" (Mulgan, 2012, p. 34). However, analytically it is useful to introduce a system as clear as possible

In the following, three main forms of social innovation will be elaborated, each of which can be subdivided into sub-forms based on a number of characteristics. The central distinguishing feature is the emergence from below, i.e. bottom-up. This kind of innovation usually has emancipatory goals. It is opposed to emergence from above, i.e. top-down. I argue that a classification as simple as possible is useful in order to come to conclusions about the governance of the different types. However, a third type of social innovation will be presented additionally. This third type combines bottom-up and top-down approaches. The concept of empowerment connects the two perspectives at an early stage. I want to highlight this concept in the context of the governance of social innovation because, firstly, it is mentioned in a huge part of literature about social innovation (Berner, 2022). Secondly, its value as a means of encounter and cooperative development of innovations is underrated: Empowerment in literature about social innovation usually appears as a goal of innovative interventions or as a characteristic of social innovations. Empowerment as a method is often not discussed in the respective contributions, although it is its inherent strength to mediate different perspectives, to support civil society in awareness-raising processes and to avoid paternalistic dominance of institutions. Thus, I want to call empowerment a social innovation hub, that reconciles bottom-up and top-down processes. In a first step these two "pure" forms will be discussed and illustrated by examples (section 2: bottom-up and section 3: top-down). After that, empowerment as cross-cutting approach will be introduced in detail (section 4). I will end up with a summary and conclusions on the governance of social innovation by pointing out the strengths of empowerment in the context of social innovation (section 5).

2. Bottom-up Forms of Social Innovation: Characteristics and Examples

Among the bottom-up types of social innovation, we may count the historical precursors of social innovation from the late 18th and early 19th century: the socialist revolution and social reform. Markus Pausch calls this type "social innovation as emancipation" (Pausch, 2018, p. 43).

With these first forms of social innovation the idea that society was not God-given but could be shaped by people emerged. Innovations therefore appear less as inventions but more as desired or intended changes. The central feature of social

innovation in this era is the striving for emancipation. This can manifest as a struggle for liberation from slavery or they "have as its overall goal the liberation of individuals from coercion, oppression and inequality" (Pausch, 2018, p. 44, my translation). The most prominent example in Europe is certainly the French Revolution with its complete readjustment of power relations. But also the only successful slave revolt in history, which took place in the French colony Haiti in 1791 (Hanke, 2017), can be counted among them.

Although the type of "emancipatory innovation" always has a democratic core, it cannot be normatively classified independently of historical conditions. The example of the conflict between France and Haiti shows that even democratic concerns always have to be considered in the context of claims to power and interests. One party to the conflict was France, liberated from the monarchy, with its revolutionary claims of freedom, equality and fraternity. However, economic interests also played an important role in the attempt to put down the slave rebellion in Haiti: after all, the island was an extremely profitable colony. The other party, however, consisted of slaves who stood up for the same values of freedom as the French revolutionaries before them, while at the same time struggling for economic independence. Which of the two parties can be described as the actual emancipatory one? Certainly, this question can be answered in favour of the rebellious slaves. Nevertheless, the French Revolution was the historical starting point that brought all of Europe into a democratic era in the following centuries.

A more recent type of emancipatory innovation are civil society actors that act as NGOs. Methodologically, these social innovations vary widely (Pausch, 2018, p. 45): They can take the form of demonstrations or civil disobedience, but associations or political parties are also possible places of action. Amnesty International or Greenpeace, for example, can be counted among them. These are characterised by the fact that they emerged from citizens' initiatives and developed – independently of state funding – into major international actors. It is precisely their independence from public funding that allows them to act as a corrective to state action, the joint action of communities of states or intergovernmental agreements. Larger political-social movements such as Occupy Wall Street or Fridays for Future (Haunss & Sommer, 2020) are also social innovations with emancipatory aspirations. The difference to NGOs is that they do not act as organisations and are thus not centrally governed. Their actions are organised in a decentralised way (Kolbinger, 2022). Besides participation in public debate, the distribution of resources is an issue (Millard, 2018), like the example of Occupy Wallstreet illustrates.

However, the effects of these innovations are supra-regional, international or even global. This type of social innovation initially has a subversive moment, but it is nevertheless part of a liberal-democratic society that allows resistance and can always develop in a processual way precisely out of contradiction (Honneth, 1994).

Pausch distinguishes "social innovation as local norm deviation" from the latter, broader innovations. The central moment of innovation as a local norm deviation is its cause: a "concrete social and locally limited problem" (Pausch, 2018, p. 49). In this characteristic is reminds of the type of so-called contribution to urban and community development that the authors Ruede an Lurtz describe. With Moulaert they claim that "it is about people and organisations who are affected by deprivation or lack of quality in life" (Moulaert 2010: 10, here in: Ruede/Lurtz, 2012: 9). According to the authors, due "to the empowerment dimension and the focus on change in social relations and governance, this approach is often in favour of bottom-up initiatives" (Ruede/Lurtz, 2012, p. 18). In the given context, this is important because the authors promote a certain understanding of empowerment, without defining it properly. They do not discuss the role that local governments or administrations play here. We will come later to that point.

However, since local action cannot be categorically distinguished from supra-regional innovations the two forms are to be thought of together here, since both are linked by their emancipatory claim. This local sub-form thus emphasises the origin of an innovation, i.e. the emergence of a social problem among individuals who subsequently come together as a collective and act together. Similar to its larger sibling – the emancipatory innovations – this type also has a certain inherent subversiveness. It is directed against prevailing norms or rules and attempts to assert claims that have not yet been taken into account in the nomenclature of the normal. This form of innovation could partly be seen as chronologically preceding the larger emancipatory innovations. Such local movements can give rise to larger movements that sometimes later become institutionalised. The assertion that the local type categorically coincides with the broader emancipatory type is also shown by Pausch's description, according to which local deviations from norms must end with institutionalisation in order to be called successful, and for this to happen they must be "usually associated with state intervention" (Pausch, 2018, p. 50).

3. Top-down Forms of Social Innovation: Characteristics and Examples

In contrast to the bottom-up type of social innovation, the top-down forms are generated and implemented in an institutional framework.

A first subtype of top-down forms deals with social problems that come to light in the course of technical innovations. Pausch calls this type "social innovation as adaptation and utilization" (Pausch, 2018, pp. 45-47). Historically, it goes hand in hand with innovations as described in the early 20th century. These are innovations that are intended to cushion social change, which is driven by technical innovations. They are intended to restore the social balance that is endangered by the technical changes. Technical innovations are usually accompanied by economic changes. The economist Josef Schumpeter established the concept of economic innovation and emphasised the subordination of social innovations to economic innovations. In this understanding, they are acts of "creative destruction" (Borbely, 2008, p. 408), which simultaneously produce winners and losers.

In this understanding of innovation, the actual impetus for change comes from economy. Individual entrepreneurs develop new ideas or implement technical innovations in the market. Schumpeter describes them as risk-taking, creative and visionary. Their actions fundamentally change society. In contemporary history, developments in production such as mass production and assembly on the assembly line, known as Fordism, can be cited as examples.

But this form of innovation can also occur more closely linked to social content. "With regard to the social side effects that result from technical and economic innovations and the adaptation to them, emancipatory developments are also possible" (Pausch, 2018, p. 46). Often it is not possible to distinguish whether and how exactly economic and social concerns are interrelated.

"Social innovation as adaptation or utilisation does not necessarily run counter to the idea of emancipation. It is just not its explicit goal and it can just as well have the opposite effect." (Pausch, 2018, p. 46). A prominent example of the social change brought about by new technologies is the social media made possible by the internet and smartphones. These technologies have had an immense effect on the social sphere and sometimes combine with bottom-up processes. The examples of this are manifold. Ruede and Lurtz summarize this type with the title "To change social practices and/or structure" (Ruede/Lurtz, 2012, p. 9). In their understanding it is not of importance if technological innovation is cause or consequence of the social innovation. However, most of them have the "goal of better satisfying or answering

needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices." (Howald/Schwartz, 2010, p. 16 in: Ruede/Lurtz, 2012, p. 9)

In this regard, they are similar to the second major top-down driven type of social innovation. It is the so-called "social innovation as a solution to social problems (governance)" (Pausch, 2018, p. 47). The term is somewhat unfortunate because it implies that the other forms of innovation do not serve to solve social problems. The real difference to the bottom-up-forms lies rather in their originators, i.e. in their contexts of origin. Whereas the emancipatory innovations mentioned above arise from individuals' experiences of injustice and are aimed at changing social structures, they are now of a type that is developed within established institutions and therefore have a less subversive effect.

Nevertheless, they differ from the innovations which follow technical or economic changes, in that their intention is to improve social interaction. On the other hand, they aim at solving such social problems that are not so much articulated by citizens on their own initiative, but formulated from the perspective of responsible institutions. Often these are social administrations or political leaders. "The actors of social innovation understood in this way are usually representatives of organisations or institutions, such as ministries or their subdivisions, which are entrusted with concrete tasks to solve social problems and engage in social management" (Pausch, 2018, p. 48).

One example is the above-mentioned Child Welfare Act and the introduction of the Jugendamt in Germany in the 1920s (Euteneuer et al., 2014).

Another example – in the context of private economy – is the VW company agreement of 1996 (VW, 2007), which was the first to integrate "three aspects of discrimination – mobbing, sexual harassment and xenophobia – in one agreement" (Kecskes, 2006). The preamble of the company agreement explicitly refers to the connection between the working atmosphere, the personal well-being of the employees and the economic success of the company. The company agreement defines the forms of discrimination, lists binding measures and regulates the consequences up to and including dismissal.

4. Empowerment: The Conjunction of Bottom-up and Top-down

Social innovation that play a role in the democratic togetherness may be summarized under the term "democratic innovations" (Pausch, 2018, p. 44). Among these, as a sub-form, Pausch counts participatory budgeting or citizens' councils or

so-called citizens' assemblies. Here, citizens are selected by lottery and can deliberate on regional or even national issues in the course of meetings lasting several days, sometimes repeated over a period of weeks. The results are then presented to political leaders. Usually, they have only the status of recommendations. Nevertheless, they are regarded as a means of direct democracy, which makes it possible to add a direct moment to the usual indirect procedures in a representative democracy. They seem to be a kind of domesticated type of the original form of social innovation as emancipation. However, they foster democratic values without questioning the democratic state. In the context of this contribution it seems to be important to distinguish forms of social innovation that have their origins in direct movements (civil society) from others that realize the interests of citizens through institutionalized democratic measures. In the third type social innovation appears as a hub between institutional actors and citizens. Participatory budgeting or citizens' assemblies are examples for this kind of mixtures of bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Another concept brings both perspectives together in an even deeper way. It is the concept of empowerment. Back in 1976 Barbara Bryant Solomon published her book "Black Empowerment. Social Work in Oppressed Communities" (Solomon, 1976). It was the first time the concept of empowerment was introduced in literature. Solomon herself was a "black faculty member in the white university" (Solomon, 1976, S. 1). She was professor and dean of the University of Southern California. In the same time, she engaged as an activist in the Black Civil Rights Movement. This double loyalty led to a certain role dilemma that she solved by elaborating the concept of empowerment. In this very first understanding, empowerment meant to bring together professional social intervention with civil society. The aim of social work was to focus on the strengths and resources of stigmatized persons and groups. Additionally, its goal was to support them in awareness-raising processes. In this sense, social work received a quite political aspect (Berner, 2020).

In nowadays literature on social innovation empowerment became an often mentioned characteristic and goal of innovative interventions (Berner, 2022). The aspect of participative development of common goals is particularly important for the elaboration of social innovations. For this reason, empowerment is a concept that obviously matches social innovations (Howald et al., 2018, p. 14).

But an inherent strength of empowerment is not systematically discussed in literature: it allows explicitly the combination of the two approaches – bottom-up through civil society movements and top-down through social (or social work) interventions that usually are commissioned by public authorities or

administrations. Empowerment measures foster the merging of the two types of social innovation discussed above.

Examples for empowering measures are public-civil partnerships. In this context Jeremy Millard describes a "School of Life" project in Ghana, that is dedicated to basic education in rural areas. Public authorities deliver "the framework and expertise" while civil society "provides community activism, knowledge and resources" (Millard, 2018, p. 41). Another example for empowering social innovation is the "microfinance project 'Strengthening Popular Finances'" that the authors Maria Elisa Bernal and Simone Cecchini mention. In this project the communities of several provinces in Ecuador engaged in the management of microfinance institutions. They considered themselves as "subject of their own local development" and thus achieved "the active participation and empowerment of local partners" (Bernal & Cecchini, 2018, p. 127).

Many contributions about social innovation that mention empowerment assume that it is related to bottom-up processes only. But if we follow the original approach of US-American authors like Barbara Bryant Solomon (1976) or Julian Rappaport (1981) we see that the concept was elaborated as joint action that brings civil society movements and public stakeholders together. In the early years – the 1970s and 80s when empowerment came up as a concept – the actors were mostly social work or community psychology organisations. Social innovation as a joint action may profit from these early considerations, that I want to introduce briefly in the following.

Literature about empowerment recognizes a certain ambivalence between individual and organizational level. Solomon mentions that such "paradoxes and contradictions must be confronted head on; e.g., the dual commitment to the maintenance of established social institutions and to the empowerment of powerless people" (Solomon, 1976, p. 15). What she calls "dual commitment" is widely discussed in recent literature on social work. So, Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2007) distinguishes even three commitments that she calls triple mandate: (1.) the mandate of the public, that usually funds social work measures and that has certain expectations towards social work; (2.) the mandate of the clients, that have expectations that often differ from the latter and (3.) the mandate of the profession itself that is related to ethical principles. Social work – here: empowerment as a social work concept – has to follow theses mandates and social workers have to balance them. Nevertheless, the mandate of the client mostly is the most important, since one crucial claim of empowerment is advocacy.

Consequently, a general issue concerns the role that practitioners play when working with their clients or addressees. Rappaport emphasizes the ambivalence of the task, practitioners have to resolve: on the one hand, they should act like advocates of their addressees, but without acting in a paternalistic way. On the other hand, empowerment means supporting the clients in finding solutions but without overstraining them (Rappaport, 1981). On the level of organization "help systems that supposedly assist the poor and the powerless in the search for more rewarding and rewarded lives have earned the reputation of holding power *over* their clients rather than providing them opportunities to exert it; and of encouraging and reinforcing their dependency rather than contributing to their sense of autonomy." (Solomon, 1976, p. 343) In order to avoid the "power-over-approach" Solomon suggests to act like a resource consultant – instead of a resource provider –, to enable the client to find his/her own solutions, and to encourage clients to learn in alternative educational settings. Finally, Solomon describes the idea that clients themselves may take the role of practitioners and thus a peer-to-peer-offering may create a positive dynamic. "This innovation, when broadly conceived, is a potentially effective means of bringing the client into a more egalitarian relationship with the practitioner" (Solomon, 1976, p. 354).

Solomon describes concrete skills of (social work) practitioners that allow them to get into a productive and just relationship with their client[1]:

1. Openness towards a variety of explanations of the client's behaviour. This behaviour may correspond with the practitioner's hypothetical or even stereotypical assumptions, but they may also be totally different (pp. 301-304).

2. Openness towards all information and cues – verbal or non-verbal – that a client offers, and reflection and discussion of all possible assumptions that result from the information with the client (pp. 304-308).

3. Warmth and empathy. This professional attitude requires professional means of (self-)reflexion, otherwise personal preferences or rejection may come up (pp. 308-311).

4. Open confrontation in case of misunderstandings, misinterpretations or distrust (pp. 311-313).

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[1] Solomon focusses on the work with ethnic minorities. Therefore, the skills are related to "nonracist" practices. They may be adapted to other vulnerable or stigmatized groups.

Besides these concrete skills that practitioners should realize other authors describe trajectories of empowerment processes, that usually begin with the doubts of disadvantaged persons or groups that lead to changes and uncertainty. The exchange with other people sharing the same situation follows. After that, professionals may support them as mentors in consciousness raising processes. Finally, it becomes possible to articulate a problem and to demand real changes (Kieffer, 1984).

5. Summary and Overview

In this contribution three main types of social innovations were defined and illustrated with examples. The main distinguishing feature is authorship, i.e. the first context in which social innovations emerge. Here, bottom-up processes, in which persons affected act themselves out of a sense of injustice, were distinguished from top-down processes, in which institutions are responsible for defining the problem. The third type combines the approaches.

Within the first type, also referred to here as emancipatory innovations, Pausch mentions those innovations that have a broader sphere of influence and that can even develop revolutionary power in some cases.

The second main type – top-down initiated social innovations – is divided along the dimension of intention. In the first subtype, social innovations occur in the context of technical and/or economic innovations. In the second subtype, the intention associated with the innovations is originally social. The actors are to be found in the area of the politically responsible and the (social) administrations.

The third type is the concept of empowerment. It connects the needs and interests of activists and the problem perception of public institutions right from its origins. Therefore, it is able to bring together the approaches.

		Initiating actors	Origin	Intentions
Type 1	Bottom-up-types	directly affected persons	supraregional, decentralised	(partly subversive) intention to change society
			Local	(partly subversive) intention to change local society
Type 2	Top-down-types	Institutions	Economy	Economic profit, partly linked to social goals
			Politics and administration (governance)	Social goals on the level of planning
Type 3	Joint action	Self-organisation AND public actors	Civil society OR politics / administration	Publicly recognized social goals AND/OR interests of disadvantaged groups

Figure 1. Types of social innovation

This categorization has several consequences on the governance of social innovation. It is obvious, that the second type may be conducted and influenced directly by public authorities and politics. Its origins are exactly there.

For the first type, the influence is indirect. While this type has some subversive or even revolutionary components in its origins, in its more recent forms it is a common part of deliberal democratic practices. Governance takes place within self-organizations. This may happen in sounding boards or in less formalized ways, depending on the degree of organization. Authorities should use this type of social innovation as an inspiration for decisions and as a basis of political debate. It is necessary to foster participatory forms of exchange between authorities and citizens. Above, some democratic innovations were mentioned, like e.g. participatory budgeting or citizens' assemblies.

The third type has a more immediate impact on activities driven by the public. In empowerment measures, representatives of the public (often: social workers) and civil society meet directly and have to find ways of understanding each other and each other's interests. Early literature on empowerment concretely describes ambivalences of this approach and resolutions at organizational level. The resolutions are widely unmentioned in recent literature on social innovation. This contribution intends to close this gap and shall serve as a basis for further adaptation in practice and deeper elaboration at theoretical level.

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