SOCIAL INNOVATION - A GLOBAL SHAPER OF THE DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The present research paper is focusing on the way social innovation is shaping the digital civil society. As new as it is, this concept has roots in local and international initiative, coming both from citizens and from organizations, with the purpose to use private resources for the public good. The primary aim is to make an exploratory intercession in the way we can define digital civil society, to identify the patterns in the social innovation as a global shaper for it and to map a start line for future analytical research, analyzing a series of online platforms and applications across the globe. In order to map the current state of the concept of digital civil society and to identify the most important aspects of it, the authors have chosen to develop their methodology research based on international insights provided by nonprofit organizations whose mission is to offer access to technology and to use technology for the community development and from international examples of digital innovation for the social good. This emergent research gave the authors a better understanding of the international context and mapping initiatives that have passed the incipient stage and are become a norm.*

Keywords: *social innovation; digital civil society; nonprofit/NGO; digital technology; social good.*

Introduction

The discussion about social innovation is not new, but in the last few years, fueled by the development of digital tools, social media, the rise of the crowdfunding[1] etc. it has gained broader recognition and importance, becoming an instrument of national growth and development of the civil society initiatives, in each corner of the world. The more companies, governments and nonprofits understand their role in tackling global issues, with a local impact and the importance of solving social problems, such as poverty, climate change, emissions etc., the more the relationship between these three sectors is strengthened and brings into discussion new solutions to old issues, as well as an ambitious social entrepreneurial class coupled with the emergence of high class technology and mobile technology.

We believe that the next big leap in what concerns the social innovation is related with the way this concept is helping the civil society as we know to become the *digital civil society*, in Bernholz (2015) terms, a new concept that redefines the civil society as we know it.

Rob Reich and Brian Coyne (2015) offer a broader definition of the civil society. In their opinion, civil society can include for-profit firms, nonprofit organizations, religious bodies, informal associations, and networks. Civil society organizations can be enduring or transient, large or small, formal or informal, local, national, or global. In general, civil society organizations and associations mediate between individual citizens and state institutions; they are private, voluntary action with a public face.

[1] Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project or venture by raising monetary contributions from a large number of people, typically via the internet.

As Dennis Kingsley (2007) put it, in national societies, civil society conjures visions of a public sphere of voluntary association distinct from the state and, in some interpretations, from markets. The normative charge carried by this anodyne description is very powerful. Civil society institutions and practices are held to civilize governance. Far from being a mere description of a dynamic non-governmental realm of action and interaction, civil society also does service as an ethical ideal of pluralism and civility.

The new perspective, of the digital civil society, is based on the way both civil society *per se* and social innovation, especially the social economy, collaborate and manage to cross geographical, cultural and political boundaries to reach those who need help or to tackle the root of a social problem. In this equation, technology has a vital role: if chosen the right tech tool (be it software or hardware), organizations from any part of the world can improve their work, collaboration, reduce costs, find supporters for their cause and, maybe above all, can deliver better programs to their beneficiaries, most of them people living in poverty or coming from social-economically disadvantaged environments.

Research methodology

Our research methodology is based on the literature review and descriptive research based on empirical data from secondary sources. We have chosen this type of approach because our primary aim is to make an exploratory intercession in the way we can define this new concept, digital civil society, to identify the patterns in the social innovation as a global shaper for it and to map a start line for future analytical research.

An old-new concept: the innovation path

Innovation has become an increasingly common and strategic topic in politics, research and the public debate all over the world and, in the European Union agenda, the year 2009 has been declared "the year of creativity and innovation as a prerequisite for sustainable growth". As disrupting as it is considered today, innovation is not a new concept and many authors have tackled this subject in different times of our history. Adam Smith, Karl Marx or Alfred Marshall, together with many other scholars maintained the idea that innovation has an important role in what concerns the economic development and the rise of capitalism. Schumpeter, in his study about the phenomenon of economic development, noted that innovation is the production of a new good, the introduction of a new method of production, the opening of a new market, the conquest of a new source of raw material, and the creation of a new organization. Furthermore, he considers that new combinations must draw the necessary means of production from some old combination and that development consists primarily in employing existing resources in a different way, is doing new things with them, irrespective of whether those resources increase or not (Schumpeter, 1935).

In Peter Drucker's (1985) terms, innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurship, the means by which the entrepreneurs exploit change as an opportunity for different business or a different service. It is capable of being presented as a discipline, capable of being learned, capable of being practiced. Entrepreneurs need to search purposefully for the sources of innovation, the changes and their symptoms that indicate opportunities for successful innovation and they need to know and to apply the principles of successful innovation. The same point of view is argued by Hargadon (2002), who sees innovation as the implementation of new combinations of different resources within the organization.

Also, Drucker argues that innovation is both conceptual (at the ideas level), and perceptual (how people perceive it), pointing out that innovation is the result of a controlled and disciplined initiative. Systematic innovation consists in the purposeful and organized search for changes, and in the systematic analysis of the opportunities such changes might offer for economic or social innovations (Drucker, 1985). Innovative behavior is seen as a strategic activity, proving either the opportunity to gain competitive advantage or to loose (Jelinek & Schoonhoven, 1990; VonHippel, 1988).

More recently, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2004) offered a detailed definition of innovation in organizations, underlying that innovation is more than doing an assigned task faster, or better. Performing such assigned tasks requires ordinary resources, routine power and authority, and little or no information sharing or gathering outside of the unit; consequently, the changes encounter only minor opposition from the institution. One can accomplish a task within the boundaries of established practice. On the other hand, something that is "innovative" involves highly problematic situations that cross organizational lines and threaten to disrupt existing arrangements. Such problematic situations require resources and skills beyond what we need to do our jobs. From Kanter's perspective, innovations have implications for other functions and areas, and therefore require data, agreements, and resources of a wider scope than routine operations demand.

In addition, Matten, Crane and Moon (2007) propose that innovation and the application of new technological options by the private sector to be perceived as having fundamental implications for consumption choices and living standards of individuals across the globe. As seen above, innovation is in the same time a process of generation and exploitation of new things, and it requires a series of informational and coordination mechanism (Teece, 1992).

Not all authors see in innovation an honest process. For example, Cheverton, Vincent and Wilson (2000) claim that innovation should be linked to lying, cheating, and stealing in order to drive change. The authors define innovators in terms such as angry and frustrated mavericks looking for new ideas, people who will never become leaders because they are more interested in finding new challenges, and more obsessed by searching for the future than they are about following career paths. In other words, the mavericks are the ones who break the rules in order to invent new ones.

Unlike Cheverton et al. (2000), who see innovation coming only from a rebellion, Drucker (2002) identifies seven sources of innovation, based on changes within the enterprise or industry (the unexpected - success, failure and events-, the incongruity - between reality and 'ought to be'-, innovation based upon process needs, changes in industry structure or market structure (that catch everyone unaware), and based on changes outside the enterprise or industry (demographics, changes in perception, mood and meaning, new knowledge- scientific and non- scientific), offering a broader picture of the baseline of innovation.

Additionally, there are authors who see in innovation a creative act, an art, mostly based on imagination, rather than knowledge. For example, Peters (1999) is the most fervent supporter of the idea that in order to obtain innovation, somebody needs to go through a process of destruction and failure. The failure sources is, as stated above, in Drucker's approach as well.

Peters (1999) wrote that innovation derives mostly from a loss of control and authority, as opposed to Drucker (2000), who saw it as a controlled process. From Peter's perspective, it is easier to understand why during the history, the term innovator was used rather as an insult, not as an appreciative one. Williams (2009) mentions that in the 18th century, calling someone an innovator was an accusation of being impulsive, and likely to infringe on the law.

There are many types and many domains in which innovation can make a difference. Moore (2008) puts innovation in the context of the category life cycle and he defines innovation types as: disruptive, application, product, platform, line-extension, enhancement, marketing, experiential, value-engineering, integration, process, value-migration, organic, and acquisition. Keeley, Walters, Pikkel and Quinn (2013) defines ten types of innovation, taking into consideration the industry patterns. According to the authors there is innovation in the business model, networking, enabling process, core process, product performance, product system, service, channel, brand, and customer experience.

Other authors identify innovation as technological (Katila & Ahuja, 2002; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). The technological innovation plays an important role in helping organizations to differentiate themselves from the competitors, helping them not only to exploit new technologies, but also to find and exploit new opportunities.

One important type of innovation and the one most relevant for the current paper is the social innovation. This concept can either be defined as the process of developing innovation or to the social innovation output itself. Catsouphes and Berzin (2015) state that as an output, social innovation is often thought to be the development of new programs, services, products, or organizations. However, a social innovation could also be a shift in resource development strategies, new organizational structures, public or organizational policy innovations, or changes in service delivery processes.

The same authors also show that there are two principal pathways that lead to social innovation: *social intrapreneurship* (where the innovation is designed and implemented within an existing organization) and *social entrepreneurship* (the term often used to refer to processes where a new organization or organizational unit is established around the new social innovation). Organizations that use business strategies for resource development and management of their mission-driven activities are typically considered to be social enterprises (Catsouphes & Berzin, 2015, p. 408). The most important driver of the social entrepreurship is the focus on creating social value, not on creating wealth (Noruzi, Westover & Rahimi, 2010). In order to achieve the social value, the social entrepreneur has to be a change maker and a pattern-breaker, coming with new combinations of products, services, or production lines (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010).

Analyzing the theories above, we agree with Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller (2008) that innovation has four stages of development: the process of innovating and generation of a novel product or solution. This first stage involves many factors, such as technological, social and economic factors. The second stage is creating the product or the invention itself, stage called the innovation proper. In the third stage, it starts the diffusion and the adoption of the innovation that leads to the final stage, creating value.

Broadening horizons: the social innovation

Social innovation is defined by the Standford University's Center for Social Innovation as a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, sustainable or just better than present solutions- and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole than to private individuals. (Phills et al., 2008). The same authors point out that we can call social innovation a product, production process, or technology (an approach similar with the innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them. Indeed, many of the best recognized social innovations, such as microfinance, are combinations of a number of these elements.

Similar with the concept of innovation, social innovation has been present in the research field from the 18th century, starting with Benjamin Franklin who evoked social social innovation in proposing minor modifications within the social organization of communities (Mumford, 2002). Among the most cited authors in the history of social innovation are Max Weber (1968) and Joseph Schumpeter (1935) Weber brought into discussion the relationship between social order and innovation, stating that that changes in living conditions are not the only determinants of social change, but that individuals who introduce a behaviour variant, often initially considered deviant, can exert a decisive influence; if the new behaviour spreads and develops, it can become established social usage (MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier & Haddock, 2009). Schumpeter has seen social innovation as structural change in the organization of society (MacCallum et al., 2009).

From the point of view of the innovation that delivers both social benefits and business value, Pfitzer, Bockstette and Stamp (2013) propose the concept of innovation for shared value, the authors affirming that organizations which are leaders in innovating for shared values rely on five mutually reinforcing elements: embedding a social purpose in their mission, defining the social need, measuring shared value, creating the optimal innovation structure, and co-creating with external stakeholders. Mulgan (2006) advocates that social innovation represents innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need.

In the new paradigm of social innovation, Hochgerner (2009) believes that social innovations, together with the technological and economic innovations could be comprehended as components of social change in a 'holistic' interpretation of innovation. The concept of social innovation is strongly related with the concept of social development, defined as the orientation of a country, region, community or institution to achieve a desirable state, set as an objective, through a planned process and achieved through a set of related activities (Zamfir, 2006).

Hochgerner (2011, p. 5) states that social and economic changes of the 21st century pose further-reaching challenges going beyond the economic context to concepts, the implementation and analysis of innovations. The authors identifies five areas of the challenges social innovation confronts:
- in addition to technical and organizational innovations in the economy, social innovations beyond primarily economic guiding principles and their rationale are gaining increasing importance in research, the public and policy-making;
- in the scientific analysis and research of economically effective innovations – on the basis of indicators, scoreboards, evaluations and benchmarking - the social dimensions (range and outcomes of their effects) must be taken into account;
- apart from the 'classical' innovations (products, processes, organization, marketing), new categories are required for objectives enabling new solutions to social issues (e.g. concerning societal development, cohesion or quality of life);
- based on this, there is a need for a scientifically informed and empirically ascertainable development of indicators, scoreboards etc. for primarily social innovations with their own logics of action
- the interactions between economic and social innovations must be researched in targeted fashion and the results integrated in the relevant fields of policy.

Social innovation has been particularly championed to combat social exclusion: this is the case at both domestic and EU policy levels, but also further afield, such as in the US, where an Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation has been created (Roy, McHugh & O'Connor, 2014). Consequently, social innovation is present in different organizations, including for profit companies, that, as Dees and Anderson (2006) highlight, though their corporate social responsibility programs create social value.

At the core of social innovation has stood the microfinancing programs that offer loans, savings, insurance, and other financial services to persons who come from economically disadvantaged environments and who do not have access or have a restricted access to the conventional financial systems. Armendariz de Aghion, Morduch (2005) gave arguments in the favor of microfinancing, mentioning that it combats the widespread and intractable problem of poverty and, despite questions about the overall impact and effectiveness of microfinance, there are many voices who advocate that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, and just than existing solutions.

Technology has immersed in the social entrepreneurship initiative and in the social innovation domain *per se*. For example, Moraru (2014), offers the example of the applications allowing for direct payments to NGOs for live events and donations. These applications have payment technologies available, such as point of sale (POS) that can be installed on mobile devices and work as a scanner for credit cards. Also, money transfers through SMS has gained success and developed in new directions of raising money. Vodafone launched in 2007 for Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile phone operator, M-Pesa (m for "mobile" and pesa, the Swahili word for "money"), a program regarding banking services through mobile technology and micro-financing service, without needing a banking infrastructure. Starting from Kenya, the services expanded to Afghanistan, South Africa, India and Eastern Europe, Romania included.

Social innovation: the driver of the digital civil society

Wajcman (2002) points out that revolutions in technology do not create new societies, but they do change the terms in which social, political and economic relations are played out. Contradicting the traditional belief of social entrepreneurs as solitary bodies, innovating in isolation, existing studies show that social innovation is not undertaken in isolation by lone entrepreneurs, but rather it is shaped by a

wide range of organizations and institutions that influence developments in certain areas to meet a social need or to promote social development. On this basis, it is suggested that social enterprises and social entrepreneurs exist within a *social innovation system*—a community of practitioners and institutions jointly addressing social issues, helping to shape society and innovation (Phillips, Lee, Ghobadian, O'Regan, & James, 2014).

Technology has been used for the social good for some time by now, and due to the development of a better tech infrastructure, more internet access and digital innovations, every citizen and every organization can use them to solve problems from the local community or from any part of the world. From applications that inform the farmers about legislation changes (Moraru, 2014), crowdsourced home-cooked meals for people in homeless shelters or sharing software of videos from protests across the world (Bernholz, 2015) brings a new piece of puzzle the new face of the civil society, the digital civil society.

Social media plays an important role in this equation. In a guide developed by Tina Yesayan (2014) for United States Agency for International Development (USAID), called Social Networking: a guide to strengthening civil society through social media, it is underlined the fact that social media can be used as a tool to promote advancements in the field of development, allowing organizations with few resources to multiply their audience reach and connect with people through the use of innovative technologies, and to inform them about important issues affecting their lives and their communities. The authors offer an original example in this respect: to reach Jordanian youth, USAID's Innovations for Youth Capacity and Engagement (IYCE) program decided to use a Facebook city building game which would captivate young people's interest while at the same time raise their awareness about the roles and responsibilities of citizens and public officials, and the value of citizen engagement. USAID and the IYCE partners chose the Facebook gaming platform given the popularity of Facebook and social gaming among Jordanian youth. Social gaming is also compelling from an educational perspective given the potential for peer-to-peer learning. The "Our City" game, released in the spring of 2014, is engaging young Jordanians in building their own "Jordanian city." In the process, they are confronted with numerous challenges that they, as "virtual mayors," must address. The educational objectives are enhanced by linking the virtual game with real-world engagements, such as volunteer opportunities through partnerships with local NGOs (Yesayan, 2014).

In Europe, under the umbrella of the *digital social* concept are developed a series of digital technologies that call to social positive actions. For example, programs like *Community_boostr* (initiative that i*nspires, enables and promotes tech for civil participation in transparency and accountability initiatives in the Western Balkans; the project is run by U.G. Zašto ne and the Action SEE network in partnership with TechSoup Europe)* or *Restart Challenges* (initiative eengaging technology activists and socially concerned programmers who believe that positive engagement can lead to real-world change, as well as others (such as embassies and local businesses) who believe that more transparent and free societies with strong rules of law are more economically healthy; developed by TechSoup in Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia) bring a tremendous contribution to way social innovation is driving the shift to the digital civil society. Developing hackathons[2], supporting open data[3], developing application and voluntarily supporting tech innovations for the social good, every social innovator becomes a representative of the digital civil society and their work redefines the news, the humanitarian response, or provide services to those in need.

[2] A hackathon (also known as a hack day, hackfest or codefest) is an event in which computer programmers and others involved in software development and hardware development, including graphic designers, interface designers and project managers, collaborate intensively on software projects.

[3] Open data is the idea that certain data should be freely available to everyone to use and republish as they wish, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control.[1] The goals of the open data movement are similar to those of other "Open" movements such as open source, open hardware, open content, and open access. The philosophy behind open data has been long established (for example in the Mertonian tradition of science), but the term "open data" itself is recent, gaining popularity with the rise of the Internet and World Wide Web and, especially, with the launch of open-data government initiatives such as Data.gov and Data.gov.uk.

Studying this type of actions, Bernholz (2015) has developed the concept of digital civil society in order to define the initiative that come both from nonprofits, but also from citizens and use digital tools and involve informal networks, loose activist groups, social enterprises, government agencies, and commercial businesses. Then same author offers as example the *#yesallwomen* discussion that exploded on Twitter in January 2014 after murders on a southern California college campus. The discussion of women and sexual assault then moved to the pages of mainstream newspapers and eventually became part of the broader debates about gun rights and mental health. Another case that was intensely debated in the United States was the police killing of an unarmed man in Ferguson, Missouri; social media coverage by participants attracted major television and newspaper coverage and helped sustain attention on these issues around the globe. As Bernholz underlines, the double lens- civil society and the social economy- has an important role in the definition and understanding of the digital civil society, especially on the way citizens use private resources for the public benefit in the digital age.

Peter Back and Francesca Biaf (2014) noted that digital technologies are particularly well suited to helping civic action: mobilizing large communities, sharing resources and spreading power. A growing movement of tech entrepreneurs and innovators in civil society are now developing inspiring digital solutions to social challenges. These range from social networks for those living with chronic health conditions, to online platforms for citizen participation in policymaking, to using open data to create more transparency about public spending. All these types of initiatives are hosted under the umbrella of digital social innovation concept. Back and Biaf (2014) also point out that the people and organisations working on digital social innovation may not identify themselves as social innovators, and are often in very different communities from those who traditionally work on social innovation, such as established charities and social enterprises. Nevertheless, in the effort to map the European initiatives, they have crowd mapped the organization on www.digitalsocial.eu. 1,036 organisations with 646 collaborative DSI projects were part of this action. The final map data shows that UK–based organisations are involved in more than 500 projects, followed by France (198), Italy (156) and Spain (155). Building on this, the European cities with the most projects are London with 90 projects followed by Paris (39), Amsterdam (30) and Berlin (22).

Consolidating the landscape - develop locally, impact globally

In order to draw the basic line of the way social innovation is shaping the digital civil society, we have conducting an online research in order to identify applications and initiatives that have the potential to make an impact in the community, but also that can be translated in any part of the world.

In what concerns the hackathons, initiatives like National Day of Civic Hacking and Random Hacks of Kindness are a good starting point from the collaborative perspective between citizens with innovative ideas and technologist. National Day of Civic Hacking is an event that brings together urbanists, civic hackers, government staff, developers, designers, community organizers and anyone with the passion to make their city better. They collaboratively build new solutions using publicly-released data, technology, and design processes to improve local communities and the governments that serve them. Anyone is invited to take part, irrespectively of their technology background. Random Hacks of Kindness is a joint initiative between Microsoft, Google, Yahoo!, NASA, and the World Bank. The primarily objective is to bring together subject matter experts around disaster management and crisis response with volunteer software developers and designers.

On the crowdfunding front, besides worldwide recognized platform Kickstarter[4], local platform start to emerge, like Slicebiz in Ghana or Yomken, in the Arab countries. Slicebiz is a micro-investment crowdfunding platform providing seed funding for startups in Africa and a connection point of the largest aggregation of scalable African social enterprises to impact investors across the world. Yomken works with people who have brilliant ideas for innovative products and who are looking for a low-risk funding to support their pre-commercialization phase, including free PR and marketing.

[4] *Kickstarter* is the world's largest funding platform for creative projects.

In Israel, Kadima Mada - Kav Or (KMKO) a local nonprofit, developed a unique initiative, providing to hospitalized children aged 5-21 in all pediatric hospitals access to technological learning environments, distance learning technology and educational programs (over 100,000 children each year). The way this is done is via a holistic approach to its services using the advanced technology distributed in the hospitals in various educational activities, most of them documented and/or operated also by the program's website, which helps the community of the hospitalized children become an online community as well. In Spain, the Cibervoluntarios Foundation, a nonprofit who was named in top 50 entities that make the world a better place by Google (2011), promotes the importance of the cyber volunteers in social innovation and as contributors to the digital civil society. Through their program, cibervoluntarios.org, they facilitate events on how to use on how to use a computer and how its use can improve peoples' lives. In Brazil, Cidade Democratica, an online political participation platform who seeks to find innovative solutions based on the collective intelligence, brings together citizens, researchers, and nonprofits in order to map the participatory networks, to write manifestos, and to do research. The platform has managed to engage more than 1,500 people in the debate regarding the development on a stretch of the Amazon River and ultimately generated more than 40 proposals to the dam construction company and the federal government.

Conclusions and further research

As seen in our paper, social innovation is gaining a momentum. Social media, microcredits, crowdfunding, technology *per se* enable the rise of social innovation that, in turn, is defining the digital civil society. First thing to be taken into consideration is innovation. But unlikely the historical term, innovation nowadays relays on the disruptive ideas and technology, which are the main triggers of the status quo change and impact upon people's lives. This means that more and more organizations and persons who want to increase the awareness of their cause and built communities need to address the heart in order to move the mind. The digital citizen, the digital organization are no longer aspirational terms. The constant use of technology, coupled with storytelling, with video materials, with applications leverages the social media for a powerful multiplier effect. The digital civil society will also have the instruments to gather in more efficient ways data and will improve their analytics tools, in order to measure their impact and to scale it. Finally, a strong digital presence combined with social media and the use of crowdfunding platforms and mobile applications will propel the social innovation movement to the philantrophic mainstream.

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