

## ***A framework for social innovation identification: a case study***

**Alexandra Gheondea-Eladi<sup>1</sup>**

*Institutul de Cercetare a  
Calității Vieții*

**Sursa:** Revista Inovația Socială nr. 2/2010 (iulie-decembrie) pp.

**URL stabil:**

<http://www.inovatiасociala.ro/index.php/jurnal/article/view/.....>

**Publicată de:** Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții

---

Revista Inovația Socială este o revistă online creată în cadrul proiectului „Inovația Socială - Factor al dezvoltării socio-economice”, proiect coordonat de Prof.dr. Cătălin Zamfir în cadrul Institutului de Cercetare a Calității Vieții. Această revistă utilizează politica liberului acces la conținut, pornind de la principiul conform căruia cercetarea deschisă publicului sporește schimbul global de cunoaștere. Inovația socială este o revistă electronică pe care cititorii o pot urmări pe măsură ce este scrisă și pe care o pot scrie ei înșiși. Revista va avea o apariție bianuală, dar fără a avea o dată de apariție, ci un interval în care este scrisă. Astfel, în lunile ianuarie-iunie va fi scris primul număr, iar în iulie-decembrie, cel de-al doilea. În perioada respectivă, pe platforma online vor fi publicate în timp real contribuțiile și dialogurile generate între cititori și contribuitori.

Prin accesarea articolelor din arhiva Revistei Inovația Socială indicați acceptarea termenilor și condițiilor de utilizare care sunt disponibile la adresa <http://www.inovatiасociala.ro/> care indică, în parte, faptul că puteți utiliza copiile articolelor doar pentru utilizare personală, necomercială. Vă rugăm să contactați redacția pentru alte tipuri de utilizare la adresa [inovatiесociala@gmail.com](mailto:inovatiесociala@gmail.com).

Orice copie a materialelor din Revista Inovația Socială trebuie să conțină aceeași notă de drepturi legale, așa cum apar acestea pe ecran sau tipărite.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Alexandra.gheondea@googlemail.com](mailto:Alexandra.gheondea@googlemail.com)

## **A framework for social innovation identification: a case study**

Alexandra Gheondea-Eladi

### **Abstract:**

*Sometimes, in promoting a solution, a policy or strategy, its innovative character is used to legitimize its implementation based on the fact that the effort needed to verify such an assertion is relatively high not only epistemologically speaking, but ontologically, as well. On the other hand, as the conditions that stimulate innovation are yet to be clearly established, although there are efforts made in this direction, innovation cannot be assumed to appear automatically, if some efforts are made to support it. This issue is even more acute when it comes to social innovation. Consequently, in researching social innovation it is important to be able to decide which innovations should be disseminated based on a relevant set of criteria. Moreover, as most areas of the social sciences have overlapping elements, and thus, as one cannot simply assume that what is not an economical, political or other type of innovation is necessarily a social innovation, it becomes useful to integrate the links between these areas into the analysis. In the first section I propose a working definition and contrast it with existing ones. The second section will use the working definition to give an example of how we might classify innovations. After constructing the framework, in section three, I shall give, in the fourth section, one example of how it might be used, based on an analysis of two community projects. The concluding remarks will summarize the ideas of the project and suggest further development of the framework.*

**Key words:** social innovation, framework for social innovation, typology of social innovation, Pakistany/Bangladeshi women's employment in England

### **Abstract:**

*Câteodata, în promovarea unei soluții, a unei politici sau a unei strategii caracterul inovativ este folosit pentru legitimarea lor, având în vedere efortul și costurile ridicate necesare verificării unei astfel de aserțiuni atât epistemologic cât și ontologic. Pe de altă parte, cum condițiile necesare pentru stimularea inovației nu sunt încă foarte clar stabilite și în ciuda faptului că se fac eforturi în această direcție, nu se poate presupune că inovația va apărea automat dacă au fost făcute eforturile necesare pentru susținerea ei. Această problemă este și mai acută atunci când vine vorba de inovația socială. Ca urmare, în cercetarea inovației sociale este important să putem decide care inovație ar trebui diseminată pe baza unei mulțimi de criterii relevante. Mai mult, cum multe dintre domeniile științelor sociale se suprapun și deci nu putem presupune că ceea ce nu este inovație economică, politică sau de alt tip, este neaparat inovație socială, devine folositor să integram*

*aceste legături dintre domenii în analiza inovațiilor sociale. Ca urmare, în prima parte propun o definiție de lucru pentru ca apoi să o compar cu cele deja existente. În secțiunea a doua voi folosi definiția pentru a oferi un exemplu de cum se pot clasifica inovațiile. După construirea cadrului teoretic din secțiunea a treia, voi oferi, în secțiunea a patra, un exemplu de utilizare a acesteia, pe baza analizei a două proiecte comunitare engleze. În încheiere voi rezuma ideile lucrării și voi sugera o dezvoltare ulterioară a cadrului propus.*

**Cuvinte  
cheie:**

*inovație socială; cadru teoretic pentru inovația socială; tipologie de inovații sociale; ocuparea femeilor originare din Pakistan și Bangladesh, în Anglia*

## **ARGUMENT**

Since the debates around the topic of social innovation appeared in academia a few difficulties were profoundly persistent. As we may see from Polle and Ville's (2008) and Matei's (2009) literature reviews on the subject these debates are mainly set around defining and identifying innovation, as well as separating social innovation from different other domains like the economical, the technological and so on. Secondly, measuring the impact of social innovation and disseminating it (Battle Anderson, et al. 2004) as well as managing the innovative potential still pose serious challenges to those interested in the topic.

One issue that generally creates difficulties in the field of social innovation is given by the different perspectives about innovation. It is thus important to differentiate between the *process leading to an innovation*, the *outcome of this process*, namely the innovation, and the *implementation of the innovation*. In all these steps in an innovation's life course two approaches have been used. One psychological, interested in the mental processes of creativity (following the theories of Young, 1905 and his followers) and one sociological, interested in the characteristics of the social environment or group interactions, believed to stimulate innovation (see for example Sawyer, 2006). In this paper, I am only interested in exploring innovations and their implementation, as outcomes of the innovation process. Consequently, in this project I ask the following questions:

- 1) How should one decide which solution to a given problem is a social innovation?
- 2) How should one decide which solution to disseminate as innovative?

One reason why one should want to identify innovations is that we currently do not know exactly which conditions stimulate innovation. Although in economical innovations, it is believed that there is a pathway or a series of actions that may stimulate innovation ('introduction of a new or significantly improved product (goods or service) or process; engagement in innovation projects not yet complete or abandoned; expenditure in areas such as internal research and development, training, acquisition of external knowledge, or machinery and equipment linked to innovation activities' (Robson and Haigh, 2008: 48)), the data offer reasons to believe the opposite. For example, the *UK Innovation Survey*, (Robson and Haigh, 2008: 52) showed that while organizations became more active in supporting innovation by implementing 'innovation activities', the number of innovations remained approximately the same or decreased.

Just as in the case of business innovation, social innovation cannot be assumed to exist if some efforts are made to support the conditions that stimulate it, as these are not yet clearly established. Nevertheless, some strategies have been proposed, based on hands-on experience (see for example Centre for Social Innovation, 2010; Young Foundation, 2010a). The difference though is that while in business innovation identification of innovations is -- without trivializing the process -- divided between finding technological and organizational innovations (Polle and Ville, 2008) or between product and service innovations (NESTA, 2007, cited by Matei, 2009), in terms of social innovations we still don't know exactly what we are looking for. Basically, we may see that after the best has been done to support social innovation, identifying it and deciding which solution is the one to disseminate pose just as many problems.

## THE DEFINITION

Considering that:

- a *domain* is a context, or a situation describable through a series of indicators;
- a *problem*<sup>2</sup> in a certain domain is the incompatibility between a restricted series of indicators in that domain and a chosen set of values (moral, ethical, religious, etc.) that establish a standard for those indicators;
- a *set of values* gives the socially acceptable standard for a series of indicators in a domain; of course, a set of values may be

---

<sup>2</sup>Please notice that I am not referring to a social problem here, but to a general notion of problem.

constructed for the domain of all domains, yielding a standard for each domain<sup>3</sup>.

we call *social innovation* a solution to a problem in the social domain, with the following properties:

- it is a process (Mulgan, 2006; Le Corre and Mischke, 2005; Carlson, 1991) consisting of, but not restricted to, a series of steps: theory (definitions, explanations, perspectives, etc.), solutions, methods/strategies, means/instruments, outcomes, and feedback;
- it is new in all available domains (Pol and Ville, 2008; Phills and Deiglmeier, 2008, cited by Matei, 2009);
- it is feasible (Le Corre and Mischke, 2005);
- its outcome is measurable;
- its outcome brings a significant change to the defining characteristics of one or more problems belonging to at least one of the available domains;
- the outcome is positive, that is, the innovation is successful (Le Corre and Mischke, 2005) or the change in the defining characteristics of the problem is a positive one, strictly within the boundaries of the chosen domain;
- it can be described as a modification of the previous solution to that problem (Mulgan and Albury, 2003, cited in Matei, 2009), but it can also annul it;
- it does not create other problems with respect to the set of values employed in the definition of the problem, but not necessarily the same domain.

Two remarks should be made here. Firstly, although I make direct reference in this definition to the concept of indicator and its significant change, this raises a question of whether the only way to identify an innovation is a quantitative one. I would argue that indicators are also used in qualitative research, but in an implicit manner. This manner consists of establishing some standards for evaluating and interpreting the data. Consequently, a crucial aspect in analyzing qualitative and quantitative 'indicators', is the acknowledgment of the set of values employed to analyze them. Secondly, despite not openly mentioning the ethical character of an innovation in the definition, I consider the ethical rules implicitly included in the definition, as part of a set of values.

---

<sup>3</sup>As an example of this last case, we find problems of the type, 'economical problems are more important than social problems' or the other way around, pointing to a set of values that orders social and economical domains. This observation is useful especially when analyzing political decisions as innovative.

For social innovations this definition smoothens measurement, as we shall see later on, but it also brings difficulties because some of the boundaries of the terms used are not established in sociology as well as they are in other sciences. The first difficulty comes from defining the social domain. Other difficulties come from agreeing which indicators to use when trying to characterize a domain or a problem and when trying to establish causality between an innovation and its potential outcomes. Also, a phenomenon may be a problem according to some set of values and it may not be a problem according to other values<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, I would like to stress the importance of acknowledging the set of values employed to impose a standard for the indicators used to define the problem in one particular domain, because people always use their cultural values to solve the social dilemmas they are faced with Trompenaars (1993-1994), but also in defining which situation is a problem and which isn't.

Some implications of the first and the seventh characteristic of innovations are that:

- an innovation may be described as a single modification of the previous solution, in which case an innovation could be very similar to the previous solution to the same problem
- or it can also be a process with only one step (for example an idea)
- or it may be described as a series of modifications in the previous solution, in which case it remains a succession of more than one step.

Also, by defining the innovation as a process, we are safe from saying that an innovative idea had negative outcomes, when it was actually its implementation that led to its failure. The innovation as a process allows for the preservation of an idea and the modification of the implementation strategy or vice-versa and it also allows for changing the entire process. On the other hand, seeing the innovation as a process doesn't deny classifying innovations as 'product innovation' and 'service innovations' (NESTA, 2007, cited by Matei, 2009) because it sees the product as the

---

<sup>4</sup>Zamfir (2006; 2007) speaks about the social problem without explicitly referring to a set of values in the definition of the social problem. Nevertheless, I would argue that throughout his description of social problems, the classifications and the examples, the reference to a set of values is always present, implicitly, in words such as: 'normal', 'centrality' (in the sense of focusing the attention towards something) and 'importance'. Also, I see a set of values not only among the 'conditions for descendant movement of social problems' (Zamfir, 2007: 458), but as embedded in the very idea of problem, for a problematic situation is always as such with respect to some standard of how the situation should actually be.

outcome of a production process, and the service as a sequence of actions.

Note that, with this definition, it is possible to identify innovations by the domain of the problem which the innovation is supposed to solve and also by the domain of its outcome, as it is possible for an innovation to reside in one domain and impact on another. Pol and Ville (2008) say that an innovation is social, if the new idea may potentially increase either the quality or the duration of life. To put this in the framework proposed here, this actually means that when measuring the outcome of a social innovation one might use the indicators for quality and duration of life.

As an corollary of the eighth characteristic for social innovations – the condition that it does not generate problems with respect to the set of values employed, but not necessarily the same domain - I would argue against struggling to differentiate between social innovations and business innovations only throughout the domain of the problem they are trying to solve, but also by the domain of their outcomes and the domain in which they create other problems. In this way, we *allow a business to be socially acceptable (i.e. in accordance with the set of values of a certain community or society) if it doesn't build its profit by creating social problems*<sup>5</sup>. More specifically, unlike Mulgan (2006) for whom social innovation bares, among other things, a social motivation and is also characterized by the reinvestment of the profit, something which differentiates it fundamentally from the business innovation, I would argue that the reinvestment of the profit is not always based on a social motivation and it does not always have socially positive outcomes. For example, Pralong (2004:234) talks about the existence of a category of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 'the political frauds', that reinvested the profit obtained through different means in order to take advantage of the tax reductions and the legal advantages of such organizations, without having any positive social impact, in 1990-1996 Romania. On the other hand, Coates and Saloner (2009) bring to our attention a hybrid for-profit and non-profit organization that is currently running in the USA with great social impact for NGOs in Africa. This hybrid organization came as an answer to the oscillations in funding opportunities for non-profit organizations. Therefore, the reinvestment of the profit does not necessarily yield a socially acceptable outcome, as not reinvesting the profit does not necessarily yield a socially unacceptable outcome.

On a similar line of thought, the eighth characteristic in the above definition is the one that allows, for example, technological innovations to be considered innovations despite having an undesirable impact on the social, the environmental, or other domains. Similarly we may consider environmental innovations that impact negatively on economically effective practices.

---

<sup>5</sup>This definition is closer to how corporate social responsibility theories see organizations or businesses (Idowu and Filho, 2009).

## CONSTRUCTING A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

In the literature, there is also a debate around the question of what kind of innovation should enter the social domain, mainly due to the problems of defining the social domain itself. In the absence of a clear definition of the social domain and of its constituents, I would propose a structured classification of social innovations, based on the following variables:

- the domain of the problem (social, economical, technological; local, national, international; etc.)
- the set of values (personal, Christian, Islamic, Feminist, newly defined one, etc.)
- processuality (it should be describable as a process);
- novelty of steps in the process (idea, theory, definition, implementation step, etc.)
- novelty in the specified domain (new with respect to the domain of the problem; new with respect to all domains; etc.)
- feasibility (should be feasible);
- measurability of outcomes/impact (should be measurable);
- significance (the change in indicators describing the problem should be significant);
- direction (significant positive change in indicators; significant negative change in indicators; mixed);
- the degree of iterativeness (0 means that it is identical with the previous solution to the problem; 1 means that there is only one step in the process that is different from the previous solution to the problem; 2 means that there are two steps that are different from previous solution, and so on)
- the domain(s) of impact (social, economical, technical, political, etc.; local, national, international, supranational, etc.; mixed impact ;).

If the problem that needs to be solved by the proposed innovation is rooted in the social domain, then it should be clear that we are dealing with a social innovation, irrespective of the domain to which the outcomes belong to. If the outcomes or the impact of the innovation are social, but the problem it tries to solve is not, then we may only say that the



innovation has social impact. An example of this would be in the field of technological innovations that come from previous technical problems, but impact greatly on societies. Nevertheless, the problem and the outcomes may belong to more than one domain, and thus, the innovative solution should be analysed from all perspectives. A more detailed account of this is given in Table 1. All the criteria described in Table 1 should be measured relative to the domain and the set of values used to define the problem.

**Table 1. Types of innovation**

Indicator/Criterion	Type of innovation (I.)
Domain of the problem	Social I., Economical I., Political I., Innovative Domain, etc.  Local I., National I., Supranational I., etc.
The set of values used in defining the problem	I. according to religious, cultural, personal, etc. values
Processuality	Innovative Process  Innovative step
Novelty	I. in all available domains  I. in the domain of the problem  I. in a selection of domains
Feasibility	Feasible I.  Not feasible I.
Measurability	I. with a measurable outcome  I. without a measurable outcome
Degree of iterativeness	1st degree I.  2nd degree I., etc.  Distinct I. Or 0 degree I.
Direction	Successful I.  Unsuccessful I.
Significance	Significant I.

	Unsignificant I.
Impact domain	I. with social impact I. with economical impact, I. with impact in several domains, etc.
Creation of other problems with respect to the set of values employed, but not necessarily the same domain	Unproblematic I. Problematic I.

## THE FRAMEWORK

In developing the framework for identifying a social innovation, we take into consideration the definition proposed in the previous part and the indicators described to construct a typology of innovations. Identifying a social innovation means in this case the identification of its elements and its characteristics.

- What is the problem which is meant to be solved?
  - a. What are the indicators used to define it?
  - b. What is the set of values used to establish the standards for these indicators?
  - c. Which domain does the problem belong to?
- What is the solution proposed for evaluation (SPE).
  - a. What are the elements of the process constituting the SPE: the idea/principle, the theory, the definitions used, the methods/strategies, the means/tools, the results/outcomes, feedback loop, etc.
- Can you describe this solution as a modification of the previous solution to the same problem?
  - a. Does this solution annul the previous one?
- Is the SPE entirely new?
  - a. What is(are) the reference domain(s) to which the SPE is new?
- Are there any new elements (steps of the process) of the SPE?

- a. Which steps are new?
  - b. What is(are) the reference domain(s) to which the elements of the SPE are new?
- Is the SPE feasible?
  - Is(Are) the outcome(s) measurable?
  - Is the change in the indicators describing the problem a significant one?
    - a. To which set of values is this change significant?
    - b. Is there a different set of values to which this is insignificant?
  - To which domain(s) does/do the outcome(s) belong to?
  - Was the SPE successful in solving the problem in the chosen domain?
    - a. Is there a different domain with respect to which the SPE was successful?
  - Does this solution yield subsequent problems, with respect to the set of values used to define the problem?
    - a. Does this solution yield problems with respect to other sets of values relevant to the implementation process?
  - Does this solution yield problems in the initial domain of definition?
    - a. Does this solution yield problems in other domains?

Two remarks should be made here. Firstly, the set of values used to define the problem should be the same as the set of values used to define the solution. Secondly, I would be tempted to say that in employing this framework to decide which SPE to disseminate, one should consider analyzing the SPE with respect to the ethical standards, by including them in the set of values used to define the problem. Still, ethical standards are different in different parts of the world so, if this framework should claim general applicability, I would have to say that including one ethical standard for a project applied in an area which abides to a different ethical standard would be more than just problematic.

## **A CASE STUDY**

To exemplify the use of the above framework, I shall use a case study of two community based projects. The Sahara and Ananna projects (Carpenter, et al., 2007) for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Britain aimed to fight the poverty and unemployment issues of this minority ethnic group by providing education and training and thus making them more competitive on the labour market. The main problems they encountered were related to getting the women out of their homes and into the training sessions, as their religious values promoted a traditional image of the home bound woman, attending the house and the children. One serious issue in placing these women into the labour market was that they were not allowed to interact with men. The organization managed to attract this group by offering, first, simple socialization groups and then, in time, showing these women the advantages of getting into training for English learning and professionalizing the skills they already had, like cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. The projects also established partnerships with employers who agreed to hire only women, thus offering this group the comfort of a culturally and religiously safe working environment.

- *What is the problem which is meant to be solved?*
- *What are the indicators used to define it?*
- *What is the set of values used to establish the standards for these indicators?*

Generally, the problem has been defined as the difference in labour market activity rates between Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and white women in Britain. Labour market activity of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Britain were very low when compared to those of the British population, as about 25% of Pakistani and 70% of British white women were active on the labour market (Heath and Cheung, 2006, cited in Carpenter et al, 2007). The causes for this situation are related to the low levels of education, poor English language proficiency and cultural and religious beliefs (Dale, et al, 2002). Consequently, the value of the labour market activity rate for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women becomes a problem when compared to the standard given by the value of the same indicator for British white women. This points out that the set of values used to define the problem is a 'Western' one, that requires women to have similar labour market opportunities as men.

The Sahara and Ananna projects decided to employ a different problem definition that asks: how to successfully place Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Britain on the labour market, given their cultural and religious restrictions. This new definition of the initial problem described above uses a different set of values defined as the reunion of the Western, the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi ones.

- *Which domain does the problem belong to?*

The problem is both social and economical. Unemployment has an important social and economical impact as it is a situation with high risk of poverty (Darden, 2001). On the other hand, economically speaking, there is an unused human resource on the market leading to economical inefficiency.

- *What is the solution proposed for evaluation (SPE).*
  - b. *What are the elements of the process constituting the SPE: the idea/principle, the theory, the definitions used, the methods/strategies, the means/tools, the results/outcomes, feedback loop, etc.*

The main idea of the solution proposed was to use a different set of values in defining the problem. Consequently, the SPE, as a process, has the following steps:

- Gather women of the target group in socialization meetings
  - Later in the meeting, emphasize the importance of receiving education and training
  - Offer education and training
  - Offer culturally acceptable work placements
- *Is the SPE, as a process, entirely new?*

c. *What is(are) the reference domain(s) to which the SPE is new?*

The solution is new for the United Kingdom. In other Muslim countries, like Turkey, such working places that hire only women had already been present.

d. *Can you describe this solution as a modification of the previous solution to the same problem?*

Yes, there have been previous solutions similar to this one. The difference from previous solutions was first given by a different definition of the problem (as described previously) and thus a different solution offering culturally acceptable work environments. Previous solutions to the problem of poverty and unemployment of other ethnic groups consisted of similar patterns: offering training and then placement on the labour market, but they did not include in the problem definition the set of values of the target group. Public policy implemented to solve this problem was

partially unsuccessful because it treated unemployment as a cause and not as an effect of a broader context (Carpenter, 2007).

*e. Does this solution annul the previous one?*

No.

*f. Are there any new elements (steps of the process) of the SPE?*

Offering culturally acceptable work environments is the new element of the SPE within several domains that may be identified as English, Western, Christian, etc.

*g. What is(are) the reference domain(s) or set of values to which the elements of the SPE are new?*

In this case, there is an expansion of the set of values employed to define the problem. Although the standards used to define the problem are western, the set of values of the target group is also considered.

- *Is the SPE feasible?*

Yes, as may be seen from the implementation of the project.

- *Is(Are) the outcome(s) measurable?*

The results are measured in terms of the percentage of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who have been successfully placed in employment or who are more competitive now on the labour market from the population of women who accessed the services offered through the two projects.

- *Is the change in the indicators describing the problem a significant one?*

As these data are not yet available, I would like to continue the exemplification by considering that we are evaluating a project that has not yet been implemented. Consequently, the answers to points *h* and *i* will be presented hypothetically.

*h. To which set of values is this change significant?*

The change in labour market activity rate is likely to be significant with reference to the western set of values, but as the working environment offered is also culturally and religiously acceptable for the target group, it does not negatively impact the target groups' set of values.

*i. Is there a different set of values to which this is insignificant?*

Until now, there hasn't been one observed.

- *To which domain(s) does/do the outcome(s) belong to?*

The outcome is only social. It cannot be considered economical, yet, because the projects were not implemented on a larger scale, and because the change is significant only for a small community. Thus, the project cannot impact significantly on the economical indicators used.

- *Was the SPE successful in solving the problem in the chosen domain?*

As may be seen from the implementation of the project, it has been successful for the domain of the community where the project was implemented.

- j. Is there a different domain with respect to which the SPE was successful?*

No.

- *Does this solution yield subsequent problems, with respect to the set of values used to define the problem?*

- k. Does this solution yield problems with respect to other sets of values relevant to the implementation process?*

This solution has been successful at a local level and because of its holistic nature it might not be applicable as a public policy. So, from this point of view it may only solve a part of the problem, meaning that it can only be successful for a part of the affected population. Nevertheless, an evaluation of these projects on a larger scale was not undertaken until now, as far as I am aware of.

- *Does this solution yield problems in the initial domain of definition?*
  - l. Does this solution yield problems in other domains?*

No.

As an outcome of this analysis, we may also use Table 1 to classify this innovation. The result is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Classification of the Sahara and Ananna Projects as Innovations**



Indicator/Criterion	Type of innovation (I.)
Domain of the problem	Social I., Economical I., Local I.
The set of values used in defining the problem	I. according to religious, cultural, personal, etc. values
Processuality	Innovative definition of the problem  Innovative strategy step: offering culturally acceptable working places
Novelty	I. for the British environment
Feasibility	Feasible I.
Measurability	I. with a measurable outcome
Degree of iterativeness	1st degree I.
Direction	Successful I.
Significance of results	Unavailable data
Impact domain	I. with social impact

## CONCLUSION

In thinking how to decide which solution to disseminate as innovative, I would argue that disseminating a solution just because it is innovative or researching for innovations, bring us to a false problem while disregarding the main point: to identify and solve problems. Problem solving and identification should be the main focus of research and especially social research, while innovation should be regarded in terms of efficiency and not necessarily as novelty. In light of the framework proposed here, efficiency would come only if the solution does not create other problems and if the old problems are solved in a satisfactory degree.

Secondly, in order to help ditch the trap of innovation as a cliché, this paper sought to show how to decide if a solution is innovative by defining solutions as processes and considering that they may not be social innovations as a whole, but from some specific points of view, or some criteria only. Moreover, one ought to consider using a strategic approach to identifying innovations. In addition, more than just a solution's novelty to the social domain would be regarded as important, but also if the problem which needs solving is a social one or if the solution proposed has social impacts or influences social aspects of life in ways that are probably not intuitive. To sum up, the main criteria proposed here for evaluating the innovative character of a solution to a social problem are: the domain of the problem, the set of values used in defining the problem, novelty, feasibility, measurability, degree of iterativeness, direction (success or failure), significance or results, the type of the impact domain and whether the solution creates other problems with respect to the set of values employed, but not necessarily the same domain.

Having these issues in mind, this framework could further be improved by considering a perspective that was not taken here. In a systemic view of the social innovation process, an important part would be given to the feed-back loop. In effect, the feed-back loop could probably be regarded as the motor for innovation in cases – very frequent for the social world – when a solution cannot be entirely tested before employing it. Furthermore, if the model proposed here should be further developed, an interesting approach would be to analyze the effects of the feed-back loop both in its benign state and its malign state. For example, if this loop that informs about the effectiveness of new solutions is compromised or corrupted, this may lead to disregarding an effective solution or to consider continuing on an ineffective one. In societies, feed-back loops take many shapes, but we should differentiate between the feed-back loop itself and the mechanisms that allows it to function. For example we may see feed-back loops of the political system in the form of civil society organizations and we may see the means that allow a feed-back loop to take its path in the form of the legal framework for civil society organizations or informal regulations that dominate the formal ones.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank the members of the research group on Social Innovation at the Institute for Research on Quality of Life for the useful discussions during the 'Social Innovation' project in 2009. Also I am indebted to the reviewers at the Social Innovation Online Journal for their most helpful suggestions.

## BIBLIOGRAFY

Battle Anderson, B., [Wei-Skillern](#), J., Dees, J.G. (2004) Scaling Social Impact, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 24-33

Carlson, W.B. (1991) *Innovation as a social process: Elihu Thomson and the rise of General Electric, 1870-1900*, Cambridge University Press

Carpenter, M., Freda, B., Speeden, S., (2007), *Beyond the workfare state – Labour markets, equality and human rights*, Bristol: Policy Press

Centre for Social Innovation (2008), <http://www.socialinnovation.ca/about/social-innovation>

Dale, A., Fieldhouse, E., Shaheen, N., Kalra, V. (2002) The labour market prospect of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 5-25

Darden, J. (2001) Race Relations in the City, *Handbook of Urban Studies*, SAGE Publications, Available online: [http://www.sage-reference.com/hdbk\\_urban/Article\\_n11.html](http://www.sage-reference.com/hdbk_urban/Article_n11.html), [7 Apr. 2010]

Idowu, S.O., Filho, W.L., (eds.) (2009) *Global practices of corporate social responsibility*, New York; London: Springer.

Jung, C.G. (1905) Criptomnezia, in Zamfirescu, V.D. (ed.) (2004) *Jung - Opere Complete 2. Psihologia fenomenelor Oculte*, Bucuresti: Trei, p. 101-111

Le Corre, A., Mischke, G. (2005) *The Innovation Game. A new approach to Innovation Management and R&D*, New York: Springer US, available online: <http://0-www.springerlink.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/content/v35236/> (accessed in Nov 2009)

Matei, A. (2009) *Inovatia sociala, o harta tematica*, Revista Inovatia Sociala, nr. 2, p. 86-107

Mulgan, G. (2006) *The Process of Social Innovation* in Innovations. Technology, Governance, Globalization, Spring, MIT Press, p. 145-62 available online: [http://www.policyinnovations.org/ideas/policy\\_library/data/TheProcessofSocialInnovation/\\_res/id=sa\\_File1/INNOV0102\\_p145-162\\_mulgan.pdf](http://www.policyinnovations.org/ideas/policy_library/data/TheProcessofSocialInnovation/_res/id=sa_File1/INNOV0102_p145-162_mulgan.pdf) (accessed in Nov 2009)

NESTA (2008) *Measuring Innovation. Policy briefing*, Available online: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/PB25%20-%20Measuring%20Innovation%20v3.pdf> (accessed in Nov 2009)

Pol, E., Ville, S.J. (2008) *Social Innovation: Buzz Word Or Enduring Term?* In Economics Working Paper Series 2008, University of Wollongong, Australia, disponibil la: <http://www.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@commerce/@econ/documents/doc/uow044939.pdf> (accessed in Oct 2009)

Robson, S., Haigh, G. (2008) First Findings from the UK Innovation Survey 2007, *Economic and Labour Market Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, p. 47-53

Sawyer, K.R. (2006) *Explaining creativity: The science of human innovation*, New York: Oxford University Press

Trompenaars, F. (1993-1994) *Riding the Waves of Culture*, New York: Irwin Professional Publishing

Young Foundation (2010a), *Local Innovation*, <http://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/local-innovation>

Young Foundation (2010b), *Tools for innovation*, <http://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/local-innovation/strands/local-government-innovation/innovation-methods-local-government/to>

Zamfir, C., (2006) Dezvoltarea socială: cateva elemente teoretice [Social development: some theoretical elements], în Zamfir, C., and Stoica, L., *O nouă provocare: dezvoltarea socială [A new challenge: social development]*, Iași: Polirom

Zamfir, C., (2007) Problema socială [The social problem], în Zamfir, C. and Stănescu, S.M. (2007) *Enciclopedia dezvoltării sociale [Encyclopaedia of social development]*, Iași: Polirom