



# Social innovation: a systematic literature review and future agenda research

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## Abstract

The concept of Social Innovation (SI) emerged 70 years after the work of pioneering researchers such as Schumpeter. Starting from the linear model of innovation, a systemic and expanded concept of innovation was reached, in which several social agents can be innovative and not only companies. This research proposes to review and synthesize the evolution of innovation until reaching the focus on the analysis in the SI (origins, definition, agents, differences with other forms of creativity, contemporaneity of the concept, evolutionary perspective and political rhetoric). Through the methodology of the systematic review of the literature, an analysis by citations, content analysis and research by the references of the found articles was carried out. The results show a recent and somewhat marginal interest in the notion of SI, but with a contemporary intensification of studies, largely motivated by global socioeconomic and environmental changes. We intend to contribute to the systematization of the scientific knowledge of this field of study.

**Keywords** Innovation · Social innovation · Linear model of innovation

## 1 Introduction

From its beginnings, the human species has been able to create tools and utensils useful for their day to day life. Since the times of ancient Greece, manual and intellectual works have been seen as opposites. The theory was valued before the practice (Godin

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2006). The appearance of the city, arising from the continuous impulse of innovation, represented (in the ancient world) the possibility of a world away from nature, where more energy, more technique and organization is always required, and wherein some way the principle of a disorder is always present. To rely on innovation was to set in motion a principle that did not self-regulate as it did in nature (Martinez and Scalzo 2015). The Second World War brought a new world order. In the early 1940s, the federal government of the United States of America began to foster scientific and technological development through grants and research contracts in order to broaden the opportunities for technical careers and to accelerate the process of innovation. In this respect the Device Research Conference (DRC) opened in 1942 played a key role. There, many innovations were first presented (Franklin et al. 2017). Public and private investment in innovation has produced antibiotics, vaccines, electronics, computers and has been promising cheap nuclear power.

With the rise of the personal computer, and the biotechnology industries in the 1970s, small-scale private innovation got its impetus. Entrepreneurs were encouraged by the promotion of the free market of capitalism, by government policies that encouraged deregulation, or by transferring universities to small businesses from practical know-how acquired through federal support. Innovators have created high-tech start-ups that have helped redesign the technology landscape (Kevles 2015).

Innovation has been drawing the attention of economists much because of the increasingly frequent technological advances and supported by the ever greater demand for economic benefits at all costs. For postmodern economists like Keynes or Schumpeter, economics is not a closed, conservative system that maintains a balanced, optimal state of social welfare. Economics can invest both on the good side and the bad side, always in an unpredictable way, in view of the fact that they not only recognize the importance of innovation but also consider it essential to explain the ever-unpredictable nature of the economy and enterprises (Martinez and Scalzo 2015). Schumpeter, influenced by Max Weber (who in turn was based on the liberal Protestantism of Harnak) saw innovation as a divine gift, a boldness of creativity that allows a new beginning of the story, but which in fact does not know where it comes from (Martinez and Scalzo 2015). One of the first concepts to perceive the relationship between science and technology for economics was the linear model of innovation. This model understands that innovation begins with basic research, then goes on to applied research, development, finalizing production and diffusion (Godin 2006). Social innovation has not for a long time been taken into account as a very conducive field for innovation, much owing to the prominence of the linear model (research & development & information). This concept understands that scientific research and technological developments, together with their implementation by companies and their diffusion in markets (I), are the only sources of innovation (Puelles and Ezponda 2016). Today the paradigm is changing and European policymakers have tried to define and promote the SI concept (Hubert 2010). In fact, the notion of innovation is no longer just and only aimed at responding to the problems of market competitiveness, technological advances in the most varied areas from medicine, sciences or even military industry. The idea of innovation is increasingly being referred to in order to tackle social issues in order to improve the quality of life and society. Already it is conceded that several social agents can be innovative and not only the companies (Puelles and Ezponda 2016). As we can verify despite all the investigations on the concept of innovation and social innovation, this field of study still needs a theoretical systematization, because it is very fragmented. Given this fragmentation, our goal

is to develop an intellectual mapping on the concept of social innovation. In order to do so, we will elaborate a systematic literature review in order to approach the concept of social innovation, both in its current state of the art, in its origins, in its agents, in its contemporaneity, its differences with other forms of creativity, political rhetoric and finally the evolutionary perspective. In the end, lines of future investigations are proposed.

## 2 Literature review

The innovation is seen by several academics (Sandal 2017; Martinez 2017; Milley et al. 2018) as an engine for development in a market-based economy. Entrepreneurs, be they from the business area or on a more social side carry out the innovations. The result of the success of these innovations takes the form of economic development, equal rights, freedom, in short, a better and safer world for all. (Sandal 2017). This view is confirmed by other authors for whom SI pushes the social enterprise and acts as a motor for local development as if it were working in a circle (Tortosa Conchillo et al. 2018).

The role of social entrepreneurship, business activity is driven by a social mission, is fundamental to the creation of SI in emerging economies (eg the Emergency Management Research Institute in India) in the face of the shortcomings of the states (Rao-Nicholson et al. 2017). SI is the engine of transformative change and in turn an insufficient compensatory palliative in the face of inequalities and more structural problems (Tortosa Conchillo et al. 2018).

According to the study of Puelles and Ezponda (2016), innovation, whatever its nature, the values it represents, and how it can be used in social contexts has been an issue studied since the first third of the last century, from the pioneering works of Schumpeter (1934, 1939 and 1943). The debate about innovation has not always been peaceful: does innovation develop through a revolutionary or evolutionary path? Do the progress happen abruptly or through smooth changes? (Ordóñez 2007).

The permanence of the linear model of innovation will be due to statistical factors largely because of the methodological manuals of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it has remained a social fact (Godin 2006).

For Carty, a US industrialist from the early twentieth century, the home of science is the university and is the foundation of future great innovations that will enhance comfort and reduce the sufferings of mankind. But Godin (2006) warns that the limit of science is investment and that universities should resort to philanthropists and patrons. Modern development is typically more and more rapid, systematic and conscious, due to the close relationship established in recent years between science and technology (Ordóñez 2007). After nearly a century since Schumpeter's work, which various SI proponents favour, and whose commitment to socialism was tempered by his optimistic view of the possibility that liberal democracies might affect gradual and endogenous change to the general welfare of all (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005), of investigations and works of definition of the field of innovation, this naturally underwent several transformations. From a linear to a systemic model of R & D, in which science is the necessary engine of change, an economist, in which companies and only they are the ones leading the innovative field, a systemic and expanded concept of innovation in that various social agents can be innovative and not only companies (Puelles and Ezponda 2016).

For Mumford (2002), the nature of the SI originates in three lines of work: a historical one focused on the life path of notable people (such as Gandhi and Roosevelt), whose contributions were mainly in the social or political arena; another focused on leadership but an empirical approach to identifying the capabilities that leaders must possess in order to solve new organizational problems and the latter based on the developments, introduction and adoption of innovations in industrial and technological organizations. For the same author, Benjamin Franklin was a pioneer in the field of SI in Philadelphia between 1726 and 1757. The North American politician and philanthropist played a key role in the development of social innovations by examining SI in a number of cases (on an individual scale and in a social environment). Closer to us, the first steps of the SI were given with the emergence of the Welfare State in post World War II (national health system, school parks). Most of the things we have as guaranteed in life come from radical innovations (Mulgan 2006). But in the impossibility of the state to solve all the problems of society, other actors developing academic activities and other intellectuals who actively involve contemporary social problems to achieve socially beneficial results (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010) and to solve social problems, innovating. The development of the ideas behind the SI seems to have arisen from intense dissatisfaction with some aspect of performance within society and organizations (Mumford and Moertl 2003). The concept of the existence of a need still to be supplied for the introduction of SI is shared by Mulgan (2006), who associates it with an idea as a solution. For this author, if the needs are often obvious (hunger, no shelter, illness), this is not always the case in the situation of racism or domestic violence. Social movements, activists, or even voluntary organizations then enter into the field to identify these needs to be met.

If some authors disagree as to the exact date on which the concept, the expression of SI appeared, at least agree on the time. Thus, for Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010), citing Chambon et al. (1982), the expression SI emerged mainly from the French-speaking intellectual community in Europe and Quebec from the 1970s. According to Puelles and Ezponda (2016), the notion of SI is more recent and appeared between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century in four countries: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Some research work “*Recherche en sciences humaines et sociales et innovations sociales: Contribution à une politique de l’immatériel*” of Bouchard (1999), “*Innovation sociale et innovation technologique: L’apport de la recherche en sciences sociales et humaines*” of the Conseil de la Science et de la Technologie eu Québec (2000) and an investigation of Julie Cloutier (2003) “*Qu’est-ce que l’innovation sociale?*”, staged this concept. Cloutier defined social innovations as those that deal with “consumption, the use of time, the family environment, the insertion in the labor market, the habitat, health and safety of people.

### 3 Systematic review methodology

The systematic literature review, a scientific method that, through a set of activities such as collecting, knowing, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating helps in the search and analysis of articles of a given discipline (Juliani 2014) is a robust, (Tranfield et al. 2003) and a detailed bibliographical research that can reduce the researcher’s bias by making

a scientific theoretical study of the work (Crossan and Apaydin 2010) and improving its quality (Tranfield et al. 2003).

In order to identify articles about the subject, a search was made in the Web of Science database, in December 2018, with the following strategy: “social innovation” in the title. Only English terms were used. Without any filter, 540 results were displayed. The “article” filter was introduced. A total of 331 publications (Fig. 1) were published with publication dates between 1970 and 2018 (Fig. 2).

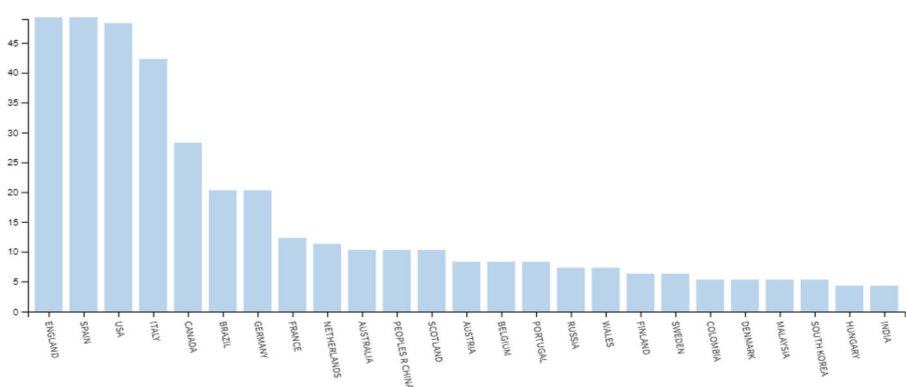
Considering the number of articles presented, we chose the most cited articles (Table 1). In a panorama of 2232 citations (Fig. 3), the 20 most cited articles were selected, totaling 1259 citations.

A content analysis was then performed (Figueiró and Raufflet 2015). Titles and abstracts were read (when available). In cases where the reading of the abstract was not sufficient to establish whether or not the article should be included (articles related to innovation, social innovation, social sector, non-profit sector), considering the defined inclusion criteria, the article has been read in its entirety to determine its eligibility. When the summary was sufficient, the articles were selected and then obtained the full version for confirmation of eligibility and inclusion in the study. When the articles were not available for consultation and / or download in the Web of Science, the Emerald, ResearchGate and Google Scholar databases were used. To extract the data of the articles, an instrument was elaborated containing the following information: title, author (s) and year of publication; objectives and results. In addition to the electronic research, some manual searches were made in the bibliographical references of articles found whenever these were considered relevant for this purpose (figure 4).

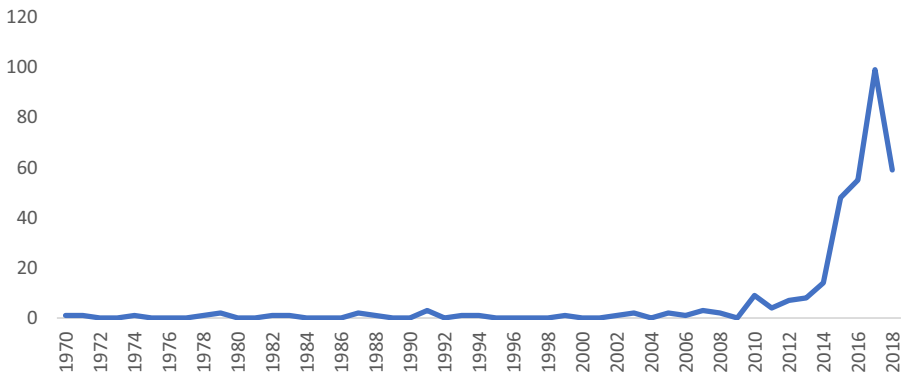
Table 3 presents the co-citations of articles collected and analyzed.

Despite the growing recognition of the values and contribution of its activities, SI is still poorly studied (Rao-Nicholson et al. 2017). The current fragility of the area is evidenced, especially in Brazil, by the little approach of this subject by the researchers, where only 7 Brazilian studies were identified. It was also evident the current relevance of the theme since most of the articles found were published as of 2010 (Juliani 2014).

Mulgan (2006), Hubert (2010) and Cajaiba-Santana (2014) agree that the SI theme remains little explored although numerous successful examples can be found. For them, while market-driven (profit) innovation processes are thoroughly studied in academia,



**Fig. 1** – Publications by countries with “social innovation” in the title **Source:** *Web of Science*



**Fig. 2** Publications by year with “social innovation” in the title **Source:** Web of Science

the parallel field of SI needs to be deepened. This, for Mulgan (2006), reflects the lack of attention paid to SI, since the amount of spending on innovative social solutions by governments, non-governmental organizations and foundations is small (Juliani 2014). In fact, when comparing the investments made in commercial or military innovations with those in the non-profit and social sector by the government, for example, the latter is quite inferior to those (Mulgan 2006). According to Mumford and Moertl (2003), one of the reasons we find few SI studies in the literature is that we are facing a notoriously difficult phenomenon to study using the methods commonly applied in the social sciences. Social innovations are not only highly complex events that unfold for substantial periods of time; it has proved difficult to identify the nature and origins of the new idea, together with the conditions to support its implementation.

Many authors have proposed several definitions of the SI concept. Although different, they all implicitly recognize the satisfaction of social needs and the promotion of social inclusion as a backbone.

Mumford (2002) defines SI as the generation and implementation of new ideas for people and their interactions with social systems. SI refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of reaching social needs and which are predominantly diffused through organizations whose purposes are primarily social. Wealth creation may even be part of the process, but it is not an end in itself (Lettec and Parekh 2010). However, SI can also be described as the search, discovery, experimentation, development, imitation and adoption of alternative social arrangements to produce something (Farfus et al. 2007); or even designed as an event where unprecedented solutions are put into practice, aiming at solving situations involving social precariousness (Brunstein et al. 2008). The SI contemplates ideas that meet social objectives: it is the reconfiguration of social practices, the promotion of social development (Phillips et al. 2015), in response to social challenges that seek to improve lasting results (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015) of social welfare and necessarily involves the voluntary commitment of civil society actors (Ludvig et al. 2018, citing Polman et al., 2017), crossing organizational boundaries and jurisdictions (Voorberg et al. 2015). The European Commission (2010) states that SI refers to the way in which “associations, institutions and social entrepreneurs use the ingenuity to address social needs that have not been detected and solved by the market and the public sector” (Mayoral and Martínez 2018). In Table 4 we present a systematization of the definitions of SI.

**Table 1** - List of selected articles in the Web of Science

Articles	Citations
Social innovation: Ten cases from Benjamin Franklin (Mumford 2002)	134
A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the social innovation journey (Voorberg et al. 2015)	125
Surmountable Chasms: Networks and Social Innovation for Resilient Systems, Moore, Michele-Lee; Westley, Frances (2011)	97
Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework (Cajaiba-Santana 2014)	84
The rise of community wind power in Japan: Enhanced acceptance through social innovation (Maruyama, Yasushi; Nishikido, Makoto; Iida, Tetsunari, 2007)	82
Navigating the Back Loop: Fostering Social Innovation and Transformation in Ecosystem Management (Biggs, Reinette; Westley, Frances R.; Carpenter, Stephen R., 2010)	81
Social innovation and civil society in urban governance: Strategies for an inclusive city (Gerometta, J; Hausermann, HH; Longo, G, 2005)	78
The dynamics of social innovation (Young, H. Peyton, 2011)	63
(Re)Forming Strategic Cross-Sector Partnerships Relational Processes of Social Innovation (Le Ber, Marlene J.; Branzei, Oana, 2010)	63
How could we study climate-related social innovation? Applying Deleuzian philosophy to Transition Towns (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010)	63
Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre: Social innovation and the dialectical relationship of state and civil society (Novy and Leubolt 2005)	59
Social innovation: Enhancing creative performance through causal analysis (Marcy and Mumford 2007)	50
Understanding social innovation: a provisional framework (Dawson and Daniel 2010)	44
Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship: A Systematic Review (Phillips et al. 2015)	41
Cases of social innovation: Lessons from two innovations in the twentieth century (Mumford and Moertl 2003)	37
The social innovation process: themes, challenges and implications for practice (Lettice and Parekh 2010)	35
Social innovation, social entrepreneurship and the practice of contemporary entrepreneurial philanthropy (MacLean et al. 2013)	33
Social innovation, an answer to contemporary societal challenges? Locating the concept in theory and practice, (Grimm et al. 2013)	31
Introducing social innovation, (Taylor, JB, 1970)	30
Social innovation research: An emerging area of innovation studies? (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016)	29

Source: Author based on Web of Science

### 3.1 The agents of social innovation

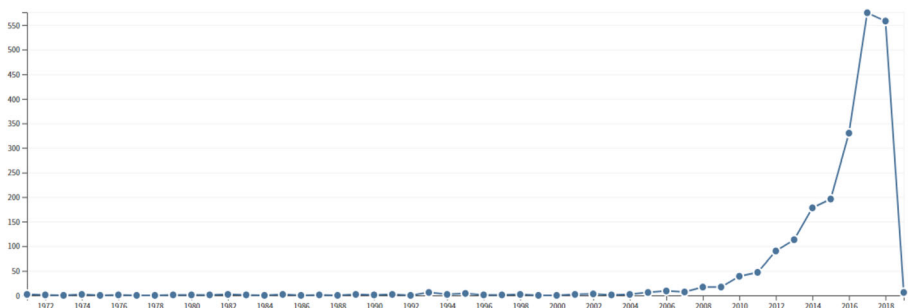
According to the European Commission, SI mobilizes every citizen to become an active part of the innovation process (Hubert 2010). Thus SI is not undertaken in isolation by isolated entrepreneurs, but is shaped by a wide range of organizations and institutions that influence developments in certain areas (Phillips et al. 2015). For Mulgan et al. (2007) there are three types of agents in SI: individuals, social movements and organizations. Other agents, such as governments and companies, can coordinate

**Table 2** - Summary of articles consulted based on Web of Science research

Article	Research objectives	Results
Social innovation: Ten cases from Benjamin Franklin (Mumford 2002)	Examine creativity and innovation in the field of social innovation by applying a case study drawn from the historical records of Benjamin Franklin.	Because it is complex, social innovation is difficult to study. However identifying key aspects using alternative methods such as historical cases, it is possible to formulate concrete hypotheses that allow to help in the conduction of studies.
A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the social innovation journey (Voorberg et al. 2015)	SLR 122 articles and books (1987–2013) in order to analyze objectives, processes and results of co-creation / coproduction with citizens in public innovation.	Most studies focus on identifying influential factors, while the results are by no means addressed.
Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework (Cajaiba-Santana 2014)	Develop and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and contribute to the conceptualization and study of social innovation.	Proposal for a new model to study social innovation as an engine for social change
How could we study climate-related social innovation? Applying Deleuzean philosophy to Transition Towns (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010)	In what ways can social innovation affect the lives of the socially excluded, and to what extent does it provide a space for radical social change	Transition cities create sustainable livelihoods outside the formal economy through self-provision and alternative currency creation. This vision requires a re-examination of the concept of exclusion and social inclusion.
Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre: Social innovation and the dialectical relationship of state and civil society (Novy and Leubolt 2005)	To deepen the understanding of the contradictory relation between State and civil society, using a detailed analysis of the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre	New public and democratic forms of the local state are open to civil society, to its interests, rather than to traditional closed-door governance.
Social innovation: Enhancing creative performance through causal analysis (Marcy and Mumford 2007)	Quantitative evidence of the operative causes of a social system (social innovation, generation and implementation of new ideas about social relations and social organization)	The induction of causal analysis with training and distancing contributes to the originality of the problematic solutions obtained, especially in less familiar domains.
Understanding social innovation: a provisional framework (Dawson and Daniel 2010)	Draw boundaries and examine the relationship between the social, commercial and technical dimensions of innovation.	Development of a provisional framework to make sense of social innovation: adopting a more critical and reflexive approach can somehow open the mind to interpretive possibilities in the generation of new ideas and their application to innovations that meet social objectives
Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship: A Systematic	Provide a collective vision of research that links social	Synthesis of research fields previously dispersed in an

**Table 2** (continued)

Article	Research objectives	Results
Review (Phillips et al. 2015)	innovation to social entrepreneurship, demonstrating a growing interest in the area over the last decade.	analytical framework, signaling an approach of innovation systems for future studies of social innovation and social entrepreneurship.
Cases of social innovation: Lessons from two innovations in the twentieth century (Mumford and Moertl 2003)	Consider the emerging conclusions of two books that examine the history of two notable twentieth century social innovations: the development of scientific management and the use of standardized tests for admission to colleges.	It may be necessary to extend existing theories to develop truly comprehensive models for understanding social innovation.
The social innovation process: themes, challenges and implications for practice (Lettice and Parekh 2010)	To better understand the process of social innovation, as well as to explore the lessons that can be transferred from the theory and general practice of innovation in business.	It is necessary to change the prism, rebuild lost connections, attract a new 'customer base' and leverage peer support.
Social innovation, social entrepreneurship and the practice of contemporary entrepreneurial philanthropy (MacLean et al. 2013)	To enrich the literature on social innovation and social entrepreneurship with regard to the integration of empirical practice in theory.	The study revealed the importance of community involvement in social innovation processes through a case study.
Social innovation, an answer to contemporary societal challenges? Locating the concept in theory and practice, (Grimm et al. 2013)	To redesign the concept of social innovation in order to make it more effective in solving social issues.	There is a growing link between social and technological innovation in the digital age, the areas of science and humanities research can no longer be dealt with in isolation
Social innovation research: An emerging area of innovation studies? (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016)	Synthesize the recent history of research on modern social innovation and explore its relevance to studies on innovation	Synthesize the recent history of research on modern social innovation and explore its relevance to studies on innovation



**Fig. 3** - Number of citations per year **Source:** *Web of Science*



Fig. 4 - Articles by publication year

with SI projects, but innovation comes from society itself. Companies and social entrepreneurs exist within an SI system: a community of professionals and institutions that together deal with social issues, helping to shape society and innovation (Phillips et al. 2015). Social groups represent, in the image used by Mulgan et al. (2007), the bees that fertilize the trees, that is, companies and governmental institutions. Mumford and Moertl (2003) caution that social innovations as well as their resolutions (Marcy and Mumford 2007) only originate from people who have long been involved in the system in question. Many of these agents appeared through co-creation or co-implementation. Services and activities once implemented by governments were transferred to citizens who became co-creators and co-implementers in the SI field (Voorberg et al. 2015). By innovating, entrepreneurs find new ways to create value, and the result of their innovation is to shift economic and social practices to a more efficient and productive equilibrium. If value creation in innovative and transformative ways is a

Table 3 - References citations

	Artigos citados																																																			
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Source: Author

**Table 4** – Social innovation definitions

Authors/year	Definitions
Mumford (2002)	Generation and implementation of new ideas for people and their interactions with social systems.
Mulgan (2006)	Innovative activities and services motivated by the goal of achieving social needs and predominantly diffused through organizations whose purposes are primarily social
Farfus et al. (2007)	Search, discovery, experimentation, development, imitation and adoption of alternative social arrangements to produce something.
Brunstein et al. (2008)	Event where unprecedented solutions are put into practice, aiming at solving situations involving social precariousness.
Lettec and Parekh (2010)	Wealth creation can be part of the SI process, but it is not an end in itself
European Commission (2010)	How associations, institutions and social entrepreneurs use the ingenuity to address social needs that have not been detected and solved by the market and by the public sector.
Phillips et al. (2015)	Ideas that meet social goals: reconfiguration of social practices, promotion of social development
Voorberg et al. (2015)	Responding to social challenges, which seek to improve long-lasting results of social welfare across organizational boundaries and jurisdictions
Ludvig et al. (2018)	Response to social challenges that necessarily involves the voluntary commitment of civil society actors.

Source: Author

hallmark of all entrepreneurs, then the social entrepreneurs subcategory includes those whose impact also serves a social function (Schneider 2016).

### 3.2 Differences with other creativity forms

Unlike innovations that are driven by profit or competitive business pressures, social innovations are often triggered by concern for people and communities, not business gain (Dawson and Daniel 2010). It is important to emphasize that for an innovation to be considered “social” it must improve both the economic and social performance of the society in which it develops (Juliani 2014). SI differs from other forms of creativity as the development and eventual implementation of new ideas involves large numbers of people and changes in their daily pattern of interactions. As a result, most forms of SI may require substantial investment of resources (Mumford and Moertl 2003). SI refers to innovative activities and services motivated by the supply of a social need and which are predominantly carried by organizations whose main purpose is social. Innovation in its commercial aspect is usually motivated by the pursuit of profit maximization and diffused through organizations whose purpose is to maximize profits (Mulgan 2006). Table 5 presents a summary of the differences between innovation and Social Innovation.

What distinguishes social innovators from others is that their approach to problems is driven by a supply of needs rather than a market logic (Rao-Nicholson et al. 2017).

**Table 5-** Summary of differences between innovation and social innovation (profitable and non-profit sector)

	Profitable sector	Non-profit sector
Unit of analysis	Companies	Community or organization
Innovation Process	Maturity phase	Early
Innovation Protection	Professional secrecy	Disclosure

Source: Author

### 3.3 Social innovation as political rhetoric

As has been seen previously, SI fields and social entrepreneurship are recent and still in an emerging phase. However, its importance is recognized by academics, in particular regarding the treatment of social issues (MacLean et al. 2013). The SI field has likewise come to know some political interest in the last decade (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016): European Commission Initiative for SI, Office for SI and Civic Participation of the United States of America, Local Development for Economy and Employment of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Government legitimacy is under pressure, because public service production does not really meet citizens' needs, which is one reason to embark on the SI day (Hubert 2010).

SI does not always come easily, even if people are by nature inventive and curious. In some societies, especially in those where power is monopolized, where the means of communication and access to capital are controlled, the SI is born dead. Generally, SI has a better chance of succeeding when good environmental conditions are met, such as guaranteeing basic rights and freedom of communication (Mulgan 2006). SI also plays an active role in reinforcing the resilience of the territory to adverse situations such as the economic crisis (Mayoral and Martínez 2018). In the Norwegian tradition, Sandal (2017) stresses how the individual entrepreneur demonstrates the ability to introduce innovation in the economy and thus contributes to democratic development and progress.

For Sandal (2017), organizations such as Uber, Google, Amazon, Netflix, Airbnb, Alibaba, Tinder, OKCupid, Skype, Whatsapp, WeChat, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat are examples of innovations that spread the ideals of democracy on day of individuals to the four corners of the world.

## 4 Discussion

Innovation does not come from a spontaneous invention but has been developed along several stages: the connection between pure and applied research, the combination of experimental development and the end of production and diffusion. These steps correspond to the successive entry of 3 scientific communities in the field of the study of sciences (Godin 2006), first the pure investigators, then the researchers of the business schools and finally the economists. Each of these communities has made its mark in this process. These three stages also correspond to three priorities: public aid

for university research, the strategic importance of technology in industry and the impact of research on the economy and society (Godin 2006). The development of the concept of innovation has been shaped over the centuries largely in the light of the evolution of geopolitical and socio-economic contexts. Thus, one of the greatest impulses was undoubtedly given by World War II where pure science was spoken of in Britain and applied science to Nazi Germany, at a time when it developed the so-called *ersatz*s, substitutes by necessity, and the Soviet Union in reference to the scientific experiments carried out in these two nations. Wartime research has led to chemotherapy that helps cure cancer, but also to penicillin. Later the discovery of other antibiotics constituted a revolution in medicine. The literature review has shown that SI research has increased over the last decade, accelerating over the past 5 years, attracting a wave of attention from a wide range of disciplines. Much of the interest can be attributed to dissatisfaction with existing for-profit business models (Phillips et al. 2015), but also environmental concerns raised by climate change (Lettice and Parekh 2010). It has been found, through the frequency of publications, that the more the analysis of the history of the evolution of SI approaches the present time, the more it intensifies its process of creation, which, as we have seen, is relatively recent. SI plays an important role in regenerating communities, the example of the “Transition Towns” brought by Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010) is elucidative. The recent economic depression has accentuated existing social fractures and the concept of SI (and entrepreneurship) is recent and emerging (MacLean et al. 2013).

Persuasion and leadership play a critical role in SI (Mumford and Moertl 2003), regardless of the actors involved (natural or legal person, whether or not for profit). The various definitions of the concept of SI have a common backbone: SI involves the generation and implementation of new ideas about people and their interactions within a social system. In fact, SI seems to represent a particularly significant form of creativity, leading to the formation of new institutions, new industries, new policies and new forms of social interaction (Mumford and Moertl 2003). The literature also showed the intense interaction between social entrepreneurship and SI as well as the importance of ten factors that influence SI: openness to newness, awareness, responsibility, proactive thinking, lifelong learning, positive experience, passivity, conservative thinking, distance from power and bureaucracy (Oganisjana et al. 2015). Advanced economies face increasing social, economic and environmental challenges; (Grimm et al. 2013). In addition, the SI can refer to new products and services that meet social needs, that is, products and services that help build a more sustainable, cohesive and inclusive society. However, the SI requires a greater effort to mobilize, sensitize the authors, since the goal is not to generate profit. Many authors consider that SI functions are about identifying a need that needs to be addressed and generating the idea that will provide a solution to solve the social problems that the State and the Market can not solve. Going further, from this macro view of SI, the micro strand focuses on third sector actors organizations. In social organizations, SI acceleration is driven by networks, political allies, consistent civil organizations (from unions to hospitals) and the growing support of foundations and philanthropists. In all these fields, global connections make everything easier (sharing and sharing of ideas, learning lessons) (Mulgan 2006). The third sector, made up of *mercies*, voluntary organizations, community groups, cooperatives, mutual societies and social enterprises, has undergone radical changes much because of changes in the economic and social panorama in Europe

(Hodges and Howieson 2017). The demand for this sector has increased a lot in the last 10 years. If we close ourselves to the case of Portugal, a number of programs have been put in place to tackle this increased demand: the creation of the social canteens program, the support program for the most deprived people (Segurança Social, n.d.), or local social development contracts (CLDS +, CLDS 3G), not to mention more. At the same time, the demands of this sector have increased significantly (obligation to publish accounts reports on the institutional page since 2015; compliance with employee ratios according to the number of users, requirement of organized accounting and in certain situations of statutory auditor, etc.)

But not everything is so clear already some social innovations were taken advantage of by for-profit organizations in order to generate business and its consequent profits. Other innovations driven by social concerns may produce unexpected results that, while influenced by goals, are not determined by them. Moreover, while trade innovations may complement social developments, these two perspectives can also come into direct conflict. For example, there may be a conflict of interest between the commercial development of pharmaceuticals for greater profits and the social drive for low-cost medicines that can alleviate health problems. In such cases, social innovations can compete with difficult business ventures and pose a threat to business objectives (Dawson and Daniel 2010). Let's look at the example of residences for elderly people that until a few decades ago were exclusively managed or directly by the State through the Social Security Institute, or by the Private Institutions of Social Solidarity, *Santas Casas da Misericórdia* or Mutual Associations and that lately created a profitable market in which even international groups such as ORPEA, for example, not to mention micro or small and medium-sized enterprises, decided to invest tens of millions of euros in Portugal. From the analysis of the articles found, it was verified that many research objectives are based on issues related to a recent issue: defining limits between SI and innovation, examining and / or deepening the knowledge of the phenomenon, enriching the literature, and even refocusing the concept of SI that, according to some authors, was too dispersed as if it were a matter of drawing attention to a rebellious teenager.

## 5 Final considerations

NESTA ([www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)) distinguishes SI from business innovation. SI is described as having a cultural bias, emphasizing the importance of ideas and a vision of how things could be different and better. The SI occurs to meet unmet human and social needs, while business innovation is driven by the market and the consumer. However, the concept of SI can be considered as an innovation that brings social benefits, besides guaranteeing certain commercial, technological, organizational or scientific goals (Dawson and Daniel 2010). The ground is changing under our feet as we try to measure it and describe it. It is at this point that the concept of SI can be useful, with its celebration of the emancipatory potential of change. Climate change is undoubtedly the strongest pressure for SI on a global basis as well as a great motivation for academic activity (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010), and it is urgent that things be done differently (Lettice and Parekh 2010). SI is thus a multidisciplinary concept that has resonated in various academic disciplines and policy circles in recent years. It also plays a prominent

role in achieving the European Union's goals for 2020, which aim, for example, to raise the activity rate from 20 to 64 years to 75%, reduce dropout to 10%, raise tertiary education, or reduce the risk of people falling into poverty and reduce carbon emissions to 80% of 1990 levels. Grimm et al. (2013) state that the concept offers solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges. The notion of SI was presented to pursue extremely ambitious goals. However, so far, there is only limited evidence of whether SI can or has already fulfilled some of its promises. In the absence of a clear theory and a rigorous evidence base (Grimm et al. 2013), it is difficult to judge to what extent SI can help develop sustainable responses to meet the social challenges of the twenty-first century. The main selection criterion was that the journal article should include the expression "social innovation" in the title. It is possible that studies have been devoted to the subject of SI, but without the expression mentioned in the title and relevant investigations may have been neglected. However, this question was partly circumvented by the manual search in the references of the articles consulted. The search for the single word "innovation" has also been ruled out in view of the number of existing publications, although it is recognized that the analysis of these literature flows is also valuable. Perhaps future studies will be able to resolve this flaw.

Mulgan et al. (2007) proposes 7 fields of investigation in which, according to the own one, a deficit of analysis is found. All these fields belong to what qualifies as macro, since its referent is a community. Thus, another field of micro-research is proposed in order to study the innovations carried out within the non-profit organizations themselves, in order to improve the living conditions of the populations to which they provide assistance.

Future studies may contribute to investigate other issues that were discovered during this review process, mainly to develop a clearer understanding of how social innovations differ from business innovations. Other investigations may address the relationship between SI and social entrepreneurship as referred to in the present paper. "Unless a non-profit organization is profiting from its activity, it will not be acting in an entrepreneurial way ... It will be innovative, not entrepreneurial" (Boschee & McClurg, 2003). While it is recognized that business innovations deal with social issues, the role that business organizations play in the development of social innovations has been neglected (Phillips et al. 2015), this may also be a line of future research. Since the concept of SI is a modifier of the system (MacLean et al. 2013), the perspectives of future lines of research are open to the academic and scientific community.

At the end of this study, it is time to take stock. This research aimed to take stock of the state of literature on the evolution of innovation from its inception to the emergence of the (new) concept of SI. It has been found that this notion is based on supranational cross-cutting values, in short, universal ones that have arisen with the evolution, not always in the most desirable way, of society. The failure of governments to support the most needy and to protect the environment has created a void made possible by people and organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit) who have distinguished themselves through notable actions for the social well-being of the communities in which they operate.

This idea makes clear that this notion of SI still has much to give, either in its practical application in protecting the environment, in supporting disadvantaged populations, through for example social inclusion, in conjunction with social entrepreneurship as far as the development of low population density, or in the scientific field.

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