FROM INNOVATION TO X-INNOVATION TO CRITICAL INNOVATION

Today, innovation is one of the key concepts of our vocabulary, a value and an injunction. How did we get here? For centuries, the concept was pejorative and contested. This article documents the history of the concept over the centuries and how social innovation contributed to giving the concept a higher status.

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"Innovation is certainly a 'buzz-word' today", claimed engineer Jack Morton of Bell Laboratories in 1971. "Everyone likes the idea; everyone is trying to 'innovate'; and everyone wants to do better at it tomorrow" [1]. The concept of innovation is everywhere. In the media, in government literature and in academic journals. Innovation is a concept of Greek origin (kainotomia). The concept originally had an essentially political and contested connotation: introducing change into the political and social order. It entered the Latin vocabulary around the third and fourth centuries as "renewing" (innovo), with prominent uses that were positive: spiritual (return to pure or original soul – before sin) and legal (reenacting an old act). As a third step, at the time of the reformation, the concept entered the everyday vocabulary. Its use was widespread and mainly pejorative in the seventeenth century [2]. Over the last few decades, the concept gave rise to a plethora of new terms that gave some specific sense to an old concept. 'Technological innovation' is such a term, and it is certainly the dominant representation of innovation. Yet other terms that contest this representation have emerged more recently. 'Social innovation' is such a term that is now part of the semantic field of innovation. This article aims to make sense of the concept of innovation, historically and critically.

FROM RELIGION TO RELIGION

At the root of our modern concept of innovation is religion. The widespread use of the concept started at the Reformation, namely in England. As an innovation, but not so called at the time, the Reformation and its Reformers had to develop political, administrative and legal means to enforce and secure the Reformation. Language must also be added to this list as Monarchs used the concept of innovation to control the conduct of their subjects, through proclamations, declarations and statutes.

The use of the concept began as an instruction not to innovate. Henry VIII's private correspondence of the 1530s is full of letters to councilors and ambassadors as messengers, instructing them that His Majesty will not "endure" or "tolerate" innovation. In a second step, innovation became a public injunction. In 1548, Edward VI issued *A Proclamation Against Those that Do Innouate,* the first ever royal injunction against innovation. The proclamation placed innovation in context, constituted an admonition not to innovate (not to change but to respect the new doctrine and discipline of the Church) and imposed punishments on offenders.

From then on, the concept served every cause, political and ecclesiastical, and soon became an accusation. Throughout his reign (1625-1649), King Charles I suffered the accusation of innovating. The Presbyterian Scots and the English Parliament were particularly violent in their words against Charles, who was accused of "popish innovation". It is during this period that the concept became polemical. Everyone (archbishops, bishops, parliamentarians) accused the others (puritans, catholics, separatists) of innovation in religion and government. During the Reformation and afterward, the concept was used predominantly in the pejorative sense. The very few positive uses that existed were legal and spiritual. For example, popes used it for renewing a previous Act, and Thomas More for renewing of the soul. Overall, however, the negative meaning of the concept of innovation, a dominant connotation, continued until late in the nineteenth century.

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Evolution of the Uses of the Concept

INSTRUCTION

INJUNCTION

ACCUSATION

POLEMICAL

INSTRUMENTAL

THEORETICAL
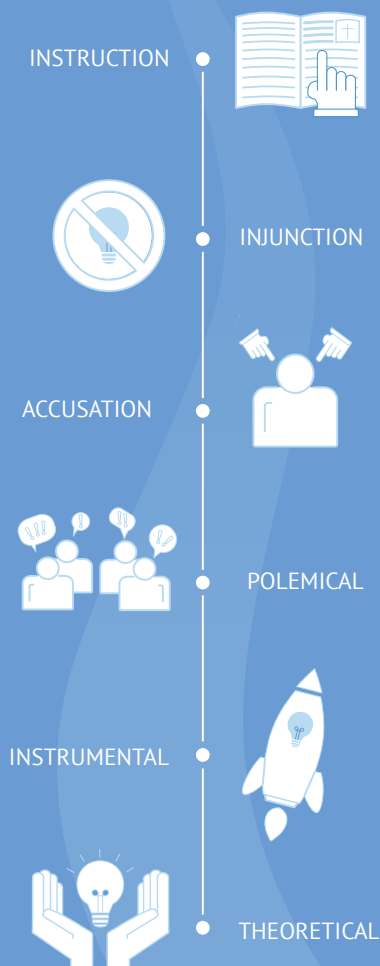
Evolution of the use of the notion of innovation

Then in the twentieth century, innovation became a word of praise. It came to be considered a source of progress, political, social and material. To be sure, such a discourse began in the decades following the French Revolution. What was called "dangerous innovation" before, like revolution, became a "happy innovation", a key phrase to Auguste Comte. The latter makes a contrast that became very popular later. In his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1839), Comte contrasts "esprit de conservation" [the spirit of conservation] to "esprit d'innovation" [the spirit of innovation] as two fundamental instincts, and explains social progress as the result of the latter. Yet a complete rehabilitation of the concept of innovation had to wait until the twentieth century, thanks to or because of engineers, practitioners and policy-makers, seconded by economists. The view of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries was eminently conservative. There was no question of progress. Then, after a long period of conflict, a new conception emerged. The qualities that were denounced as social vices emerged as moral virtues. In the name of economic growth, technological innovation became instrumental to economic policy. *"There is little doubt",* stated the OECD in one of the first titles on technological innovation ever produced in the Western world (Government and Technical Innovation, 1966): *"that if governments succeed in helping to increase the pace of technical innovation, it will facilitate structural changes in the economy, and increase the supply of new and improved products necessary for Member Governments to achieve rapid economic growth and full employment and without inflation".*

Religion, or rather a new kind of 'religion', remains in the background here. The concept of innovation diffused widely because of the context of the Reformation. Now innovation is THE modern belief or faith, as the OECD Innovation Strategy (2010) and the Europe 2020 strategy proclaim (2010):

"Most current social, economic and environmental challenges require creative solutions based on innovation and technological advance." (OECD)

"Innovation is our best means of successfully tackling major societal challenges, such as climate change, energy and resources scarcity, health and ageing, which are becoming more urgent by the day." (European Commission)

FROM INNOVATE TO WHAT KINDS

After World War II, technological innovation was studied as a fact of life, and was promoted to individuals (e.g. farmers), organizations (particularly firms and industries), and then whole nations. The concept gave rise to a growing literature concerned with firm strategies and public policies for innovation, in management, economics, research policy and sociology. Innovation acquired a new meaning here: the commercialization of inventions or new goods embodying knowledge or research and development (R&D). In the name of economic growth, innovation became a matter of market. Technological innovation is the commercialization of new products for the customer. Economic growth is no longer explained mainly by industrial processes as source of productivity (technological change), but by firms' capacity to invent and sell new products.

Starting around 1980, a series of criticisms appeared that questioned the dominant idea of innovation as being concerned principally or even entirely with the market, or technology and industry. New terms began to appear that argued for a different kind of innovation. As Geoff Mulgan from NESTA put it recently: "The big question now is not whether to innovate but what kinds of innovation we need" [3].

I call these new terms X-innovation – a semantic pluralization of forms or kinds of innovation. Scholars began theorizing about X-innovation in the 1950s-60s. At that time, X-innovation was concerned with an object, like technology, industry, organization or education. In a second step, namely c.1980s-90s, new forms appeared that define innovation with adjectives: disruptive, open, frugal, responsible and sustainable. Certainly, adjectives existed for a long time in typologies of technological innovation: 1. major, revolutionary, radical, paradigmatic, systemic; 2. minor, incremental. However, now an adjective rather than an object defines what innovation is. This has to do with the 'quality' of innovation: we need a different type of innovation. Two characteristics define the newest kinds of X-innovation. Firstly, the societal in X-innovation. On one hand, namely on the input side (the process) X-innovation emphasizes inclusion, namely the participation of the public in the deliberations about innovation, from an early stage and in the decision process. Hence, we have X-innovation forms like inclusive innovation, democratic innovation and free innovation. On the other hand (the outcome), X-innovation places the emphasis on societal, ethical and environmental considerations. There is a moral imperative here. Innovation must be social, responsible and sustainable.

Social innovation is the oldest of these terms, which originates from the mid-nineteenth century. At the time it was contested, as was the concept of innovation. To some, social innovation was socialism and was subversive of the social order. In 1888, a popular edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica included a long article on communism, which begins as follows: *"Communism is the name given to the schemes of social innovation which have for their starting point the attempted overthrow of the institution of private property"*. To others, social innovation was much needed. Among these others are reformers of a different kind than religious reformers, namely social reformers like Jeremy Bentham, Auguste Comte and the French socialists (Claude-Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier) and their followers (Victor Considérant, John Patterson). Socialism was to many the 'new spiritual power' in post-revolutionary France and elsewhere in the Western world. The concept of social innovation served this "new Christianism", as Saint-Simon called it.

Social innovation as a term re-emerged (in a positive light) in the last 20 years as a reaction to technological innovation and to hegemonic discourses on industrial innovation. As "new ideas that work to meet pressing unmet needs and improve people's lives", to use Mulgan's definition, social innovation is a counter-concept to technological innovation. Social innovation came to mean alternatives to established solutions to social problems or needs, that is, alternatives to industrial innovation and state or government-supported social reform. In this sense, residues of the nineteenth century's concept of social innovation as socialism are still inherent in the theories. To many scholars, the term is situated within a left-wing ideology, either explicitly or implicitly. Social innovations favor (or should favor, to be so named) the non-institutional, the 'alternative' and the 'marginal'. Furthermore, the 'community' and non-profit organizations are favored sources of social innovation and the focus of many studies. Autonomy, liberty, democracy, solidarity and liberation are key words that came into use in theories on social innovation. Social innovation is "democratic, citizen- or community-oriented and user-friendly"; it assigns significance to what is "personalized, small, holistic and sustainable"; its methods are diverse, not restricted to standard science, and include "open innovation, user participation, cafés, ethnography, action research", etc.

Historically, social innovation is a further development of (and a reaction to) the concept of innovation as a pejorative category. One hundred and fifty years ago, it served to make a contrast to, and a distinction between, other types of innovation. It emphasized something. To early critics, the purpose of 'innovation' in 'social innovation' was to equate 'social' or societal novelty (socialism) to innovation, and to label it as a pejorative category. To others, the 'social' in 'social innovation' was to contrast it to other types of innovation or to qualify the innovation: social innovation is innovation of a public or participative nature. It is distributive and good. To most writers, the distinction is moral. This rhetorical practice has not changed very much today. The 'innovation' in social innovation serves to put (more) innovation into the social. The 'social' of social innovation serves to put (more) social into innovation.

X - INNOVATION	
Oldest (an object)	**Newest (an adjective/ a metaphor)**
Technological innovation*	Inclusive innovation
Product/process innovation	User innovation
Industrial innovation	Free innovation
Marketing innovation	Democratic innovation
Organizational innovation	Common innovation / Open innovation
Educational innovation	Hidden innovation
Political innovation	Disruptive innovation
Social innovation*	Reverse innovation
Another word used in place of 'innovation' in these terms is 'change'	Frugal innovation
	Jugaad innovation
	Responsible innovation
	Sustainable innovation
	Grassroots innovation
	Eco-innovation

X-innovation – a semantic pluralization of forms or kinds of innovation

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CONCLUSION

I trace the history of the term social innovation as a two-step process, firstly as an appropriation (extension or application) of the concept of innovation, and secondly as a contestation of that concept. There is a third step to consider: critical innovation.

X-innovation terms emerged as a critique of the dominant framework or paradigm of innovation: the economic or market connotation. Yet innovation itself, whether social, sustainable or responsible, remains uncontested. Innovation is an a priori solution to social problems, to every social problem. Our worldview spontaneously suggests technological solutions, without any need to inquire seriously into the real problems of society. Such is the case with environment. Innovation is a panacea. But is innovation really the solution to environmental problems, to poverty, to literacy and education, to welfare? 'Social needs' (often called 'demand'), a major concept of innovation in the 1960s, has almost disappeared from view today. Supply (innovation) is the main focus of studies. Even where need takes first place, as in theories of social innovation, innovation (supply) is always the ultimate solution. Innovation as an object of study has an autonomous status.

As scholars of innovation, we have to learn to be more critical and more reflective about our objects of study. We espouse "sympathy" for innovation, to use Howard Becker's word [4], or what sociologist Everett Rogers calls a "pro-innovation bias": innovations "are good and should be adopted by everyone" [5]. Max Weber thought that a distinction between facts and values should guide scholarship. Today, we know that the moral is inevitable in social research. What is important is to be aware of it, to be critical and reflective. Currently, we are writing narratives in the form, or under the name, of theory.

Being critical means:
- Taking seriously the scholarly imperative to discuss, argue and criticize.
- Questioning our representation of innovation, especially when it is called an 'alternative' representation, and asking to what extent our assumptions are normative and performative.
- Placing innovation as a solution into balance with other possible (but less fashionable) means to achieve 'progress'. Innovation may appear to not always be the best solution.
- Asking whether we are writing a piece of academic work as a scholar or an ideologue (in scholarly journals).

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