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Volume 28, numéro 4, 2024

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La producción de innovaciones sociales en la era creativa y digital

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113044ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.59876/a-bej1-gwam>

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Éditeur(s)

HEC Montréal

Université Paris Dauphine

ISSN

1206-1697 (imprimé)

1918-9222 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Muller, P., Szostak, B. L. & Andion, C. (2024). Word from the Guest Editors: Producing social innovations in the creative and digital age. *Management international / International Management / Gestión Internacional*, 28(4), 5–5. <https://doi.org/10.59876/a-bej1-gwam>

Word from the Guest Editors

Producing social innovations in the creative and digital age

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The notion of social innovation has been addressed by numerous researchers from the humanities and social sciences over the last few decades. And this is what a team from economics and management sciences has been working on since 2019 as part of a research project on the governance of social innovations¹. This special issue has its origins in this project, which seeks to answer a central question: how are social innovations produced at a time when creativity is a necessity for imagining how to meet poorly or unsatisfied needs, and when digital technology is becoming consubstantial with many of our habits and practices? This issue is intended to be not only conceptual, by setting out a framework for analysis, but also pragmatic, by putting forward concrete answers to our central question. The eight articles in this issue each make their own contribution to this objective.

The article by **Romain Slitine**, **Didier Chabaud** and **Nadine Richez-Battesti** explores the role played by the intermediation process in the production of social innovations. Through an in-depth analysis of the case of the Start-up de Territoire (SUT) scheme, the authors highlight the existence of four processes, namely (i) building the vision of the territory, (ii) expanding the network, (iii) bringing out the middleground, and (iv) articulating the different levels by distinguishing between top-down and bottom-up translation.

Céline Merlin-Brogniart approaches the subject from a network angle, stressing the importance of social and institutional proximity and collaboration in the production of social innovations. Based on four case studies, the author reveals the extent to which common tools can be adapted and shared, and adhoc methods devised. This flexibility is conducive to collaborative and creative governance.

This question of governance is also central to the article by **Koussila Bedrane-Makhlouf** and **Youssef Errami**. Based on a multiple case study, the authors conclude that the nature of social innovation requires a transformation in local public governance. This may involve both bottom-up and top-down governance, but also so-called shared governance as it actively involves public and private players and civil society.

The article by **Müge Ozman** and **Cédric Gossart** introduces the place of digital technology in the production of social innovations, by studying digital social enterprises. Using data from 189 civic engagement platforms in Europe, the authors set out to identify

the strategies that enable these enterprises to scale up. These strategies are known as scaling out, scaling up or scaling deep.

There are other types of platform that encourage the production of social innovations. **Gilles Baille** and **Charlotte Caire**'s study of the "Les Oiseaux De Passage" platform shows that this is a border object that can facilitate the governance of social innovation. In this case, we're talking about a digital platform co-constructed by a creative collective from different social worlds, organized as a cooperative, to support alternative tourism.

This type of model, different from classic capitalism, echoes the research carried out by **Sophie Bollinger** and **Marion Neukam**. The authors explore the levers available to European organizations to lead the transition to sustainable development. Based on 82 interviews conducted in 16 European organizations, they show that placing people at the heart of this transition and choosing a collective approach are fundamental mechanisms. They also highlight the central role played by managers in this transition.

One way of making organizations' commitment to producing social innovations visible is to develop social R&D. **Jade Omer**, **Marie Ferru** and **Meri Réale** investigate the subject (conceptual and empirical survey of some fifty interviews) to ultimately propose a conceptual and operational grid specifying the contours of social R&D.

Still reflecting on other possible models, and to conclude this special issue, **Raphaël Didier** and **Yamina Tadjeddine** analyze the case of cryptocurrencies as social innovations, since they enable us to meet new needs increasingly expressed by citizens (aspiration to currencies freed from states and banks, search for anonymity, ease of international transfers and a credible alternative to the dollar). The authors show that the production of this social innovation presupposes the creation of communities, the valorization of digital goods and services, and the co-production of services by the network.

All in all, this special issue shows, through theoretical arguments illustrated by empirical studies, how possible it is to imagine a society and organizations united around values, principles and practices different from what the neoliberal capitalist model has so far proposed. It's not a utopia, but something we can all live with.

1. "Gouvernance des Innovations Sociale dans le Grand Est" research project, part of the ARIANE State-Region Plan Contract (2019-2021), co-financed by the European Union and the Grand Est Region (France).