Management international
International Management
Gestiòn Internacional

Management
international
International Management
Gestión Internacional

Unveiling the Depths of Social Innovation: A Journey Through Scholarship and Critique. A review of *The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation* by Jürgen Howaldt and Christoph Kaletka (2023)

Mario Aquino Alves

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Unveiling the Depths of Social Innovation: A Journey Through Scholarship and Critique. A review of *The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation*
By Jürgen Howaldt and Christoph Kaletka (2023)

Mario Aquino Alves
Professor of Civil Society and Nonprofit Management at FGV EAESP, Brazil
mario.alves@fgv.br

It is unclear when, how, or by whom the term "social innovation" was first used. According to Moulaert *et al.* (2013), the term was coined in Europe in the 1960s. The first book on the subject was published in 1967 by Fairweather, who sought to address social problems through experimental methods and had a reformist and moralistic view of sociology. In Latin America, the terms "appropriate technology" (Caldas & Alves, 2013) and "tecnologia social" (Pozzebon, Souza & Saldanha, 2023) emerged around the same time. These terms were aimed at social development and questioned the role of technology in society, proposing an emancipatory view to create spaces and opportunities that redefine social relations.

The term' social innovation' has garnered substantial attention in recent academic and empirical research. This is evident in the proliferation of events, exhibitions, and platforms dedicated to discussing and promoting social innovations. The term has also become a prominent keyword in English language scientific research, particularly in business administration, public administration, and public policies, where it supports a wide range of theoretical and ideological positions on the nature of innovation in contemporary society.
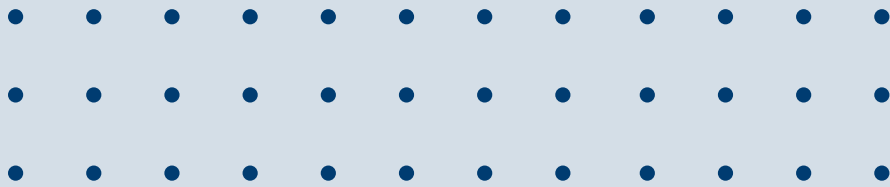
The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation, a monumental scholarly endeavor, is a testament to the power of collaboration. Edited by Jürgen Howaldt and Christoph Kaletka from the Social Research Centre Dortmund, TU Dortmund University, Germany, this comprehensive guide is the most authoritative resource on social innovation. It delves into key topics such as social innovation ecosystems, co-creation, new technologies and methods, education, governance, and policies. The book's interdisciplinary approach, drawing on various theoretical foundations, concepts, types, processes, and measurements of social innovation, is a testament to its scholarly rigor. The collaboration of 123 authors from diverse universities and research groups worldwide further enhances its value as an essential resource for anyone interested in social innovation.

The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation stands as a beacon illuminating the multifaceted landscape of social innovation, offering a comprehensive exploration of its depths and nuances. As we explore evaluating its scholarship, three key dimensions emerge the depth and breadth of entries, the contributions by prominent international scholars, and the accessibility and clarity of entries for scholars and students alike. Firstly, the encyclopedia's richness lies in the vast array of entries that traverse the spectrum of social innovation. From theoretical foundations to practical applications, each entry offers a nuanced perspective, providing readers with a holistic understanding of the field. Whether one seeks insights into social innovation ecosystems, co-creation methodologies, or governance frameworks, the encyclopedia's breadth ensures that every stone is turned in. Secondly, the contributions of prominent international scholars infuse the encyclopedia with scholarly rigor and diversity of perspectives. By drawing upon the expertise of thought academics from around the globe, the encyclopedia transcends geographical boundaries, offering a truly global perspective on social innovation. These contributions enrich the content and elevate the discourse, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration. Lastly, accessibility and clarity are paramount in ensuring the encyclopedia's utility for scholars and students. Here, the encyclopedia excels, with entries meticulously crafted to be informative and approachable. Complex concepts are demystified, and jargon is unpacked, making the content accessible to readers across different levels of expertise. Whether you are a seasoned researcher or a novice student, navigating the encyclopedia is a seamless journey of discovery.

The book is thoughtfully structured into nine distinct parts, encompassing a range of critical topics. These include theoretical foundations, various social innovation concepts, processes, ecosystems, actors and governance, social innovation within established research areas, business and economics, science and research, innovation policy, and resources and measurement. The authors of each entry have been invited to explore engaging themes under each part, ensuring a diverse and multifaceted perspective on this critical subject matter.

When it comes to social innovation, there are some key points that we should keep in mind. In the "Diffusion" entry, Howaldt, Kopp, and Schwarz offer a helpful critique of

the common practice of using an outdated theory to understand the spread of innovation in fields beyond the social sciences. Instead, they suggest that we should focus on social innovation and a theory of social change. By drawing on the work of Gabriel Tarde, a French sociologist, on the process of imitation in the spread of new ideas, we can gain a powerful concept that we can use to better understand how innovation can be translated across different fields. By examining the practices and processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, we can take a pragmatic approach to introducing new ideas and innovations.

Carolina Andion and Graziela Alperstedt, in their article "Democratic Experimentalism and Social Innovation", view social innovation as a collective action that arises from a process of coordination between various publics and regimes of engagement. They suggest that social innovation occurs through a long-term process of understanding a public problem and co-producing solutions that involve different actors in public arenas. This process is not linear and may be marked by setbacks, returns, clashes, and power relations. However, forming an experience field - which involves these conflicts and reconstructions - is fundamental to developing social innovations.

The publication's editorial team was discerning in their selection of authors from the Global South, who provided novel and compelling perspectives that necessitated attention from the Global North. The article "The South American Concept of Tecnologia Social" by Marlei Pozzebon, Ana Clara Souza, and Fabio Saldanha, is an exemplar of this approach. The authors assert that social technology is a political process that prioritizes the collective over the individual and that merely identifying social practices is insufficient. Their analysis identifies the processes that enable social transformations to occur, and they emphasize the significance of the *tecnologia social* (social technology) as a form of social innovation.

It is also remarkable that the compendium has opened space to discuss new themes in social innovation, such as "Citizen Science" by Kullenberg Christopher, which discusses how the research process may be open to the public. Also noticeable are two different perspectives on Social Impact Measure: one that defends a contingent approach to measure social impact according to the basic concept of impact, the methodological approaches, and the level of analysis (Gorgi et al.); the other that focuses on an integrated measurement model that offers advancing research in the public (Terstriep *et al.*).

The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation is a comprehensive source of knowledge. However, it has received criticism for not including niche topics such as the intersection of social innovation with territories. An entry on social innovation and territories is necessary to provide valuable insights into understanding the dynamics between social innovation and spatial contexts. As explained by Milton Santos, the concept of territory emphasizes that territories are not just mere geographical entities but the result of historical

processes and the social basis of human actions. By integrating Santos's perspective into the discourse on social innovation, scholars can better understand the relationship between social innovation and territories.

Nevertheless, *The Encyclopedia of Social Innovation* represents a pinnacle of scholarly achievement, offering an unparalleled depth of scholarship in its field. Through its comprehensive coverage, contributions from esteemed scholars, and accessibility to readers of all backgrounds, the encyclopedia is an indispensable resource for anyone seeking to explore the frontiers of social innovation.

References

Caldas, E. de L., & Alves, M. A. (2013). Tecnologia Apropriada: uma Modesta Apresentação de Pequenos Casos. NAU Social, 4(7). https://doi.org/10.9771/ns.v4i7.31214

Fairweather, G. W. (1967). Methods for Experimental Social Innovation. [S.l.]: s.n. Retrieved from https://www.amazon.com/Methods-Experimental-Social-InnovationFairweather/dp/0471252956

Haddock, S. V., MacCallum, D., Moulaert, F., & Hillier, J. (Eds.). (2012). Social Innovation and Territorial Development. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Howaldt, J., & Kaletka, C. (Eds.). (2023). Encyclopedia of Social Innovation. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Moulaert, F., McCallum, D., & Hillier, J. (2013). Social innovation: intuition, precept, concept, theory and practice. In F. Moulaert, D. McCallum, & J. Hillier (Eds.), The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research (pp. 13-24). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857930265.00006

Santos, M. (2017). The return of the territory. In L. Melgaço & C. Prouse (Eds.), Milton Santos: A pioneer in critical geography from the Global South (pp. 25-31).