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## **ID 1365 | ‘SOCIAL INNOVATION’ AND CONTENTIOUS URBAN POLITICS: QUESTIONING THE INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL OF CONTESTED URBAN DEVELOPMENTS IN BERLIN**

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### **1. ‘SOCIAL INNOVATION’: DEFINING / SITUATING THE CONCEPT**

#### **1.1 SOCIAL INNOVATION AS EMERGING CONCEPT IN URBAN STUDIES**

The concept of ‘social innovation’ has gained increasing popularity over the last ten years, both in academia – where it has emerged as a key term in urban studies literature – and in the policy field. The term, which can be inscribed within debate about social change and social transformations (Moulaert et al. 2005: 1969), has been conceptualized according to different scholarly frames, following heterogeneous

disciplinary perspectives. This diversity has fostered a broad application of the term in different domains, but has also led to difficulties in identifying the conceptual boundaries associated with its meaning, which is increasingly perceived as vague and neutral (Grimm et al., 2013; Busacca, 2013).

Discourses about social innovation have been framed in different (not necessarily mutually-exclusive) terms also in urban studies, varying with respect to the object of change, the meaning of innovation, the importance attributed to the social dimension of transformation processes, and its possible fields of application. In this paper, we will focus in particular on the frame that concerns social innovation in (local) territorial development.

Following the 'territorial' approach, emerged in the 1990s, social innovation in and for local development is primarily conceived as a response to social exclusion dynamics and to the difficulties traditional public systems (including welfare ones) face in dealing with changing societal needs and in addressing 'wicked' challenges (Caulier-Grieco et al., 2013: 5; Borzaga and Bodini, 2012). It is conceptualized as both the (positive) outcome of social transformation processes and the means through which social improvement can occur. This only takes place "when the mobilization of social and institutional practices succeeds in bringing about the satisfaction of previously alienated human needs, the relative empowerment of previously silent or excluded social groups through the creation of new 'capabilities', and, ultimately, the changes in existing social – and power – relations towards a more inclusive and democratic governance system" (Gonzalez et al., 2010: 54). These conditions refer to what Moulaert et al. (2005: 1976 2010) define as the three main dimensions of social innovation. The product dimension focuses on "innovation in the conceptualization, design, and production of goods and services that address social and environmental needs and market failures" (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012). The process dimension focuses on the redefinition of organizational arrangement and on restructuring of social relations in more socially inclusive terms. This is related to governance innovation, but it also encompasses the reconfiguration of social practices (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010). The third dimension is more directly related to the empowerment of the actors involved, and it is based on the (progressive) assumption that "individuals and communities can muster the passion and have the capacity to self-organize and self-manage in equitable and inclusive manners" (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 221).

Elaboration of this multidimensional understanding of the concept in relation to urban and local development has led to the definition of a broad, comprehensive framework ('Alternative Models for Local Innovation' -ALMOLIN, see Moulaert et al., 2005; Gonzalez et al., 2010), which is conceived both an analytical device, i.e. "a descriptor for a set of practices" and an interpretative-normative framework for fostering transformation.

This addresses social innovation as "an emerging phenomenon, a theoretical construct and an ongoing field of research within a world of social transformation" (Moulaert et al., 2013: 2). In this context, reference to 'social innovation' is explicitly intended to counterbalance narrow technology-centered approaches to innovation policies, by proposing a more open view about human development, empowerment and local mobilization capable of overcoming technocratic approaches to urban planning (Moulaert et al. 2005). At a conceptual level, social innovation emerges from a "progressive vision" (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 221) based on solidarity and reciprocity values (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2008) that assumes that individuals and communities affected by marginalization and exclusion and suffering from the effects of uneven power allocation in existing political configuration can redefine their position through self-and re-organization. Social innovation therefore takes place through the involvement of new constellations of actors, including representative of civil society associations, institutional actors at different scales, as well as private stakeholders (Cattacin and Zimmer 2016: 23), it develops through the creation of new governance arrangements and it spreads within "networks of co-operation between community agents" (Moulaert et al., 2005: 1977).

While potentially supporting democracy and citizens' empowerment, the broadening of the political arena and the definition of new governance arrangements also present some contradictory tendencies (Swyngedouw 2005: 1992 ff., see next paragraph). On the one hand the inclusion of different actors could contribute to re-define the city as "a terrain of spatially-informed politics" (Dikec, 2002: 94, see also Swyngedouw, 2009), by supporting the co-creation of shared and livable space, and by providing (disadvantaged) citizens with "the freedom to make and remake our city and ourselves" (Harvey 2008: 23). On the other hand, the "gradual blurring, if not erasure, of the lines of demarcation between state, civil society and market" (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 224) potentially embedded in bottom-up practices is exposed to the fallacies related to the so-called 'democratic deficit' of governance arrangements, e.g. in terms of representation, accountability and legitimacy (see van den Dool et al., 2015: 18 ff.; Swyngedouw, 2005: 1999 ff.). This blurring can also lead to the strengthening of "neo-communitarian local regimes within a global neo-liberal turn" (Gerometta et al., 2005: 2010), while the increasing relevance of private actors may (further) support neo-liberal urban development models (see Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Fainstein, 2014), which aim to convert civil society in a "flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of market mechanisms" (Jessop, 2002: 455).

The understanding of social innovation advanced in this framework poses big emphasis on path-dependency and contextual dynamics, thus attempting to go beyond uncritical and ahistorical conceptualizations. Localized contextualization plays a relevant role in defining its critical-realist attitude. More specifically, social innovation is conceived as bearing potential to trigger “the transformation of societal relation in space, the reproduction of place-bound and spatially-exchanged identities and cultures, and the establishment of place-based and scale-related governance models.” (Moulaert, 2009: 12).

The local scale is maintained to be the privileged focus for the development of social innovation practices (Moulaert 2009: 16), which develop within constantly ongoing processes of social and political re-structuring. In order to avoid ‘uncritical localism’ and the local trap (Purcell 2006), the local scale is conceived as an ‘entry point’ for action which is embedded in a broader trans-scalar framework of relationships (Gonzalez et al., 2010: 50). In particular, urban neighborhoods are considered as “pivotal sites for initiating and implementing social change that may ripple through the city” (Moulaert, 2010: 5), whereby locally based initiatives are the ones that “can galvanize a range of publics to engage in initiatives that have city-wide impacts on the dynamics of urban cohesion and social development” (ibid.). Social innovation therefore takes place starting from the action of “spatialized urban communities [...that have] a powerful, area-based political and analytical meaning as the real life setting where needs resulting from exclusion can be satisfied, where initiatives grow and are established and which serve as springboard for multi-party, multi-governance dynamics” (Moulaert et al. 2010: 7).

The framework highlights the centrality of (local) public and institutional actors along the development of social innovative processes. Unlike other approaches, the local development perspective of ALMOLIN considers forms of grassroots collective action as complementary to the action of the local state, and both “public and private agencies seeking to overcome situations of exclusion” (Moulaert et al. 2005: 1986) as required. Specific attention is provided to interactions among actors and to the ‘governance’ dimension of social innovation, which “includes the interaction with and the embedding into the political-administrative system of the democratic state of the country where the communities belong”, implying that social innovation also “means innovation in representative democracy and governance state institutions” (Moulaert et al., 2005: 1973).

The dimension of governance innovation appears takes a key position in terms of both necessary means and outcome of social innovation processes. As a mediating and empowering factor of social innovation, governance practices are assumed likewise to foster reflexivity as a means for social transformation and to become a reflexive outcome of social transformation.

## **1.2 CRITICAL ELEMENTS: QUESTIONING THE NORMATIVE ASSUMPTIONS OF ‘SOCIAL INNOVATION’**

Several points of critique have been raised to ‘social innovation’ and its use. The concept is often perceived as “poorly defined and demarcated” (Brandsen et al., 2016: 4), and as “stretched in so many directions that it is at a breaking point” (Grimm et al., 2013: 236). As a discourse, it is seen as articulated in ahistorical and uncritical terms (Busacca, 2013), and perceived as deceptively neutral. Accordingly, it is seen as supporting neo-liberal processes and promoting an increasing centrality of private and entrepreneurial actors in public policies.

Any critique of ‘social innovation’ as a concept and as a discourse, however, is relative and must be critically related to the area of scholarship and of policy to which it refers. For our purposes, it is important to keep a focus on the features it takes in the area of urban and local development studies.

Reflecting on the general articulation of innovation discourse in the urban domain, Shearmur (2012: 9) argues that “the term, laden with positive normative associations, hides not only a multitude of processes that all lay claim to being innovative, but also gives little indication of why innovation is necessary, whether it is also a good thing, and, if it is a good thing, who benefits from it”. This is a good starting point for our discussion. While some of these issues are explicitly addressed in currently prominent models of ‘social innovation’, questions concerning the intrinsically positive normative value associated to social innovation appear to be justified on the basis of a critical scrutiny of both its analytical and normative assumptions (see Larsson and Brandsen, 2016: 294; Phillis, 2008; Mulgan, 2006).

Considering social innovation as an analytical framework, several critics observe that its comprehensive, holistic character may lend itself to categorizing as ‘socially innovative’ a broad range of heterogeneous phenomena, differing and diverging in terms of, features, scope etc. In this sense, Jenson and Harrison refers to social innovation as a “quasi-concept, [...] making use of empirical analysis and therefore benefitting from the legitimizing aura of scientific methods, but simultaneously characterized by an indeterminate quality that makes it adaptable to a variety of situations and flexible enough to follows the twists and turns in policies” (European Commission, 2013: 16). This, again, entails the risk of an

instrumental use of the 'social innovation' concept, as it may analytically support the legitimization of practices that are not effectively oriented towards socially inclusive change.

Considering social innovation as a normative framework, a set of key normative assumptions can be recognized:

- social innovation involves trust in dialogue and cooperation among parties interacting in a collaborative public sphere. It is premised on an associative understanding of the political arena: the existence of an open public sphere is assumed (cf. Gemerotta et al., 2005) where the re-articulation of interests is possible. Within this collaborative space, "socially innovative experiences can develop, interact and penetrate into urban governance relations" (ibid.: 2008). The right and the capacity to access to the public sphere are seen as requisite;
- social innovation focusses on social needs that have been ignored, neglected, or not effectively addressed by public action;
- social innovation expresses an explicit ethical position of social justice, recognizing social inclusion as a main goal of public action (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 222; Gonzalez and Healey, 2005: 2055).

As highlighted by Larsson and Brandsen, these "normative assumptions tend to obscure the dark side of the phenomenon such as failure, political conflict and oppression" (2016: 293) that is necessarily part of social change processes and that are intrinsically related to socio-spatial transformation. As also highlighted by Martinelli, forms of social innovation promoted by community, grassroots and neighborhood initiatives at the local level are often "strongly critical to the system, but [with] no intention to overturn the existing order" (Martinelli, 2010: 35). In this respect, for instance, the territorial approach distances itself from more critical and radical positions (defined by Moulaert et al., 2005 as 'another world is possible' approach: 1977 ff.) based on participatory democracy and collective mobilization. It therefore positions itself in a critical-pragmatist and ethical-reformist tradition enriched with a subsidiarity-based, grassroots-oriented social policy.

While legitimate, this position raises questions concerning the conditions for the realization of an open, collaborative and associative public sphere.

A first question concerns in how far a re-articulation of interests aimed at socially inclusive processes is subject to 'power geometries'. This highlights possible contradictions with respects to the recognition of social initiatives. On the one hand, the relevance of spontaneity, self-organization, grassroots experimentation is recognized in the process, and creative and spontaneous practices are held to have a higher innovative potential. On the other hand, the role of third parties is always conceived as complementary to public action. This contrast with critique of the idea of 'governance innovation' as articulated e.g. by Swyngedouw (2005), when he points out features of 'selective inclusion' of innovative models of governance and their tendency to support non-representational forms of autocratic technocracy and the consolidation of beyond-the-state arenas of power intermediaries. A second question concerns not only understandings of 'social justice' and of 'needs' and 'rights' for and by whom, but also how (ant)agonism is considered and what role it can possible play in their (re-)articulation.

As it apparently skips and/or elides social antagonism as a relevant dimension of analysis, and as it defines itself according to a set of normative principles concerning social and political agency, social innovation discourse incurs the risk of becoming self-referential and self-serving, and the case-studies chosen to make its point of being little more than deductive illustrations of its principles. That carefully chosen case-studies may fit the self-representation of social innovation, however, does not per se redeem it from possibly being counterfactual.

No question that the local-territorial approach to social innovation moves from a critical-progressive tradition which pursues a socially emancipatory project. In order to express its critical potential, however, discourse on social innovation would require to be corroborated, to be exposed to systematic falsification by contrasting its (normative) principles with (analytical) observation of the conditions under which claims for social transformation are raised and social innovation may (or may not) successfully emerge and develop. In order to do so, in other words, the (perfectly legitimate) normativity of social innovation would require to be backed by an adequate critical analytics.

## 2. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PAPER

In order to position discourse on 'social innovation' in a domain of critical urban research that addresses key challenges of contemporary urban policy, we need, first, to discern reference to the concept within its broader and somehow contradictory scholarly field and, second, to articulate a critical position on the concept within this domain. This means, in particular, addressing in how far the concept of 'social

innovation' is a viable analytical-interpretive contribution to understandings directions of evolution and change in public policy and governance practices and its contradictions and challenges.

Our critical position is therefore based on an attempt at constructing a framework for critical reflection on issues raised by the concept of 'social innovation'. In order to make this possible, we argue that there is need:

- for serious empirical grounding and assessment of discourse on 'social innovation', based on analyses open to recognizing its implications;
- for recognizing contradictions between the analytics and the normativity of 'social innovation' discourse.

We raise these issues also in view of their relevance for empirical research designs: firstly, in the sense that most the empirical case-study material produced by literature on 'social innovation' is framed deductively in a way which tends to sideline issues of domination and hegemony in the framing of policy and governance practices; and, secondly, in the sense that precisely highlighting these aspects is critical to recognizing the potential for rhetoric and manipulation involved in the adoption of 'social innovation' as a policy concept.

The paper accordingly adopts a tentative methodology which does not direct analysis – in somehow deductive ways – towards challenges, conditions and degrees of fulfillment of a normatively predefined understanding of 'social innovation', but frames analysis according to a methodological distinction between the analytical and normative dimensions of the concept:

- firstly, by analytically and interpretively addressing the nature of 'social innovation' – in process and outcomes – in the empirical cases at hand;
- secondly, by assessing in how far this either fits or contradicts – in process and outcomes – normative pre-assumptions of 'social innovation' discourse.

Our approach is therefore tantamount to inserting for heuristic purposes a 'critical wedge' in the contradictions between the analytics and the normativity of 'social innovation'. While it is obvious that normative understandings of the object of 'social innovation' frame action in significant and possibly even progressive ways, we are interested in analyzing the way they are defined and positioned in an arena which is potentially (ant-)agonistic and in which they interact with other understandings. The ensuing question is therefore in how far the outcomes of such interactions are to be understood as 'innovation' and in which sense.

The cases chosen reflect a variety of situations raising the issue of 'social innovation'. Their choice is exploratory and does not aim at a most-similar comparative design. In this respect, our approach is not primarily driven by a logic of comparison, but by a critical interests in the dynamics of innovation and in its contradictions. After a brief introduction to the features of the case, the cases-studies address three main analytical dimensions:

- a) the nature of the policy issue, as defined and/or acknowledged within the framework of institutional policy settings and governance practices which define the policy: this entails an analysis of the way specific social needs are selectively defined, recognized and included to become part of the definition of the policy issue, as conveyed by (dominant/hegemonic) narratives and frames;
- b) the nature of the policy issue, as re-defined through the emergence and evolution of forms of political contention and (ant-)agonistic social mobilization which articulate, challenge, and possibly contradict the framework of institutional policy settings and governance practices which define the policy: this entails an analysis of the way social claims are defined in a process of contestation and critical re-articulation of the definition of the policy issue, as expressed by (alternative/counterhegemonic) narratives and frames;
- c) the nature of actors and of their strategic-relational practices as they develop in the course of the re-articulation of the policy through the emergence of (ant-)agonistic claims.

### **3. 'SOCIAL INNOVATION' AND CONTENTIOUS URBAN POLITICS IN BERLIN: THREE CASE-STUDIES**

In light of our critical discussion, we now explore its application to the analysis of selected case studies currently taking place in Berlin. Our aim is to understand in how far the social innovation framework fits a critical analysis of the way 'needs' and 'claims' emerge and are articulated in socio-spatial transformation processes characterised by different levels of contention and antagonism. The case studies have been

selected – among a broader range of cases analysed<sup>1</sup> – and discussed according to their relevance to the purposes of the paper, in terms of raising questions which challenge both the analytical and the normative dimension of the ‘social innovation’ framework.

The case-studies are structured as follows. After a brief description of the case and of its evolution, the ‘needs’ that trigger the development of the transformative dynamics under study are identified and defined, possibly identifying diverging perspectives. Secondly, the object is redefined in terms of ‘claims’, with peculiar attention to the demands raised by different actors and by forms of mobilisation emerged along the process. Third, strategic and relational patterns developed by involved actors are considered. Finally, some preliminary critical reflections (to be further developed in the next paragraph) are presented.

### 3.1 DRAGONER AREAL

The Dragoner Areal is a 4.7 ha area located in Kreuzberg, a central neighborhood increasingly interested by gentrification dynamics. The area is owned by the Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben (BImA, the federal agency in charge for the administration of state-owned property) and hosts a former military barrack (about 82,000 sqm, 10,000 of which listed as heritage site), currently partially vacant and partially rented to small commercial enterprises. The area is one of the last public spaces with a potential for transformation in a neighborhood where – as in whole city – housing demand is constantly increasing and available building

Space is getting scarce. It is therefore particularly valuable for private investors, who tried to purchase it as soon as it was acquired and then auctioned by the BImA in an open highest-bidding procedure. In 2012, an investor bought the area with a plan foreseeing luxury property apartments, but also due to the refusal of local government to change the land use plan – which allowed only commercial uses on the area – it soon withdrew from the contract. In the ensuing months, a growing opposition to the privatization of the area arose, leading to the foundation of Bündnis Stadt von Unten (SvU, literary ‘Bottom-up City’), an alliance of local tenants, activists, professionals and citizens opposing the allocation procedure and any form of speculation on the area and demanding its designation for social housing. Nevertheless, BImA started a new bidding procedure, resulting in sale of the area to another investor at double the price. Despite opposition by local government and the campaigns carried out by SvU and other initiatives, the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) approved the sale in 2015. This decision was followed by a further intensification of the initiatives launched by SvU that, in collaboration with other (anti-gentrification) grassroots groups, tried to exert pressure on the Bundesrat (the Federal Council representing German federal states), the vote of which was required in order to legitimize the decision of the Federal Parliament. Thanks also to City of Berlin’s influence and to local district’s opposition, the Federal Council ultimately voted against sale of the area. Despite initial resistance of the Parliament, in 2015 BImA cancelled the contract with the investors. In the following months, Dragoner Areal was declared a ‘redevelopment area’ by the Berlin Senate. In 2016 the new red-red-green government of Berlin integrated some of the instances of SvU in the coalition contract, which foresees the implementation of affordable living and working spaces as well as participatory processes including local associations. At the beginning of 2017, following recent political pressures, BImA announced that there is no intention to sell the area in the near future.

As its evolution shows, the Dragoner Areal case bears features of a dispute developing along different dimensions. On the one hand, there is a substantial dispute (cf. Dzedzicki, 2014) over the (future) use of space, which assumes a peculiar symbolic character given that the area is one of the last free spaces with a transformation potential in a neighborhood that has been strongly affected by gentrification dynamics and by privatization processes over the last decade (see, among the others, Holm, 2013). This can be located within a wider discourse about the unequal distribution of citizen rights which takes central place in the contestation of several transformation processes taking place in Berlin. On the other hand, there is a procedural dispute (ibidem) over the way decisions are taken – e.g. about the political value of the allocation procedure – as well as over the legitimacy of different public bodies responsible at different levels for the future development of the area. In order to disentangle these aspects, we consider the objects of dispute from different perspectives, considering claims emerging from different actors during its evolution.

A crucial position is played by the Federal State, the owner of the area, and by BImA, the agency responsible for the administration of federal state properties. The Federal State’s interest in selling the area can be referred to a general debt-reduction strategy based on selling state-owned properties to the

<sup>1</sup> The cases presented here are part of an analysis conducted in the framework of a studio held in the B.Sc. in Urban and Regional Planning at TU Berlin in 2016-17, titled ‘Facing Urban Conflicts: A Chance for Experimentation? Grassroots Responses to Contested Urban Transformations in Berlin’ and further discussed at the joint student workshop Grassroot Innovation and Contested Urban Politics in Milan and Berlin held at Politecnico di Milano in May 2017. We acknowledge the contribution of students involved in collecting data and in analysing the case studies.

highest-bidding investors. The latter have a specific interest in acquiring and developing the area in the most profitable way, and therefore propose plans foreseeing luxury apartments and speculative uses. The highest-bidding allocation procedure is the key mechanism through which these interests are satisfied. When the most profitable conditions cannot be met, as in this case following local authority's refusal to change the building plan, investors loose interest in the area.

In this sense, a relevant role is played by Berlin's state government, the Berlin Senate, and by the District Administration of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Local government faces growing housing demand due to the steadily increase of Berlin population, and has a political interest in providing livable and affordable living and working places in cooperation with district administrative units, as stated by both the Strategy 2030 (Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, 2015) and the coalition contract (Berlin Senatskanzlei, 2016). The Berlin Senate opposed privatization in this case using different strategies. First, it negotiated with BlmA and gained pre-emptive right to buy the area to a moderate price. Although this did not impede the second bidding procedure in 2014, this pre-emptive right may play a crucial role in the future resolution of the dispute. Second, opposition to privatization is exerted through planning tools. In a first phase (2013-2014), the refusal to change the building plan forced the investor to withdraw from the contract. In a second phase (2016), designation as Sanierungsgebiet ('redevelopment area') opened the way to an alternative development of the area, including affordable and social housing, cultural projects and small businesses. Finally, Berlin's Finance Senator brought the instance to the Federal Council, which ultimately put a veto on the sale of the Dragoner Areal.

Finally, need for affordable housing is a key claim of grassroots initiatives involved in the process, which frame it in more critical terms as a claim to the 'right to inhabit', intended as the right to the re-appropriation of the city as a common good, implying inhabitants' collective right to use, produce and occupy urban space in a just, inclusive and sustainable way (cf. Purcell, 2013). This claim works as the focal point around which local initiatives such as Wem gehört Kreuzberg, Recht auf Wohnen and SvU organize their actions. Beside fair access to livable places, these civic initiatives also claim defense of diversity of the urban population and support for low-income and marginalized social groups.

SvU's claims, in particular, cover both the substantial and the procedural dimension of the conflict, insofar as they ask for 100% public property, 100% affordable and social housing to be 100% long-term secured, as well as socially-minded and self-determined administration of the area, proposing a direct involvement of people from the neighborhood. On the one hand, they criticize the allocation procedure established by the law and demand a more inclusive and decision-making process. On the other hand, the initiative and its network are proposing a pilot project for an alternative development of the area capable of including claims by different local stakeholders, including traders currently working on the area, neighbors, and other citizens groups. In pursuing their objectives, SvU used a variety of methods and a broad protest repertoire (neighbourhood activities, demonstrations, gatherings, events and network activities).

Although the conflict has not yet come to an end, it is possible to identify some elements characterizing it which are relevant for the purposes of this paper.

First, the dispute involved public administrations at different scales and led to a confrontation between national and local institutions. This led to a re-articulation of governance relations and to a growing centrality of local actors (both institutional and non-institutional). For the first time, the Bundesrat stopped a planned sale of state-owned property. Multi-level disputes over the decision-making process took place within representative political arenas, but were also strongly influenced by initiatives and campaigns proposed by activist groups. Furthermore, at least in the initial phase of the conflict, actions and initiatives aiming at social innovation were not launched by public actors, but promoted and strongly supported by grassroots movements through the use of a whole repertoire of collective action techniques which pertain more to direct and agonistic democratic action – relegated by territorial social innovation models into the 'another world is possible' tradition (cf. Moulaert et al., 2005: 1977).

Second, contradictions emerged in the way 'needs' are framed and defined at the local scale. The need for 'affordable and social housing', acknowledged by local government as a priority, can be certainly considered as one of the basic alienated needs not currently satisfied by public policies. However, this is strictly intertwined with more radical claims referring to the 'right to inhabit' and the right to accessible living and working place, as well as with structural critique which does not simply propose a redefinition of the role of local communities within the process, but challenge both the political legitimacy of representative institutions and the way decisions are made.

Third, the potentially innovative dynamics developed after failure of the first area sale, in terms of both process and outcome, is strictly related to the contested nature of the process and to initiatives taken outside representative arenas. This allows questioning some of the assumptions previously discussed, and call for recognition of the contribution that (ant-)agonistic practices can bring to the 'social innovation' debate.

### 3.2 SCHWARZER KANAL

Schwarzer Kanal is a 'radical queer wagon place' (see <https://kanal.squat.net/>) located on a city-administered lot in the District of Neukölln. The area has been occupied since 2009 by an association formed mostly by non-German activists belonging to discriminated minority groups (including lesbians, trans\*persons, people of color, and migrants or refugees with different legal statuses). Currently, it is undergoing major change, since planning foresees a conversion of the area and the installation of the so-called Modulare Flüchtlingsunterkunft (MFU, 'modular refugee housing'). Conflicts emerging on the area raise relevant questions from a social innovation perspective. On the one hand, there is a strongly symbolic political conflict over the right of marginalized people occupying the area to exist and live in the city. On the other hand, this identity-based conflict is strongly intertwined with a conflict over for the use of space, which has been designated as a MFU and is at the same time reclaimed by the groups currently living there.

The Kanal project has been existing in Berlin for 30 years, and it exist in its actual form, as Schwarzer Kanal, since 2003. After having relocated several times, the wagon place was evicted from its last location in 2009. Following a large campaign aimed at gaining public support for a permanent location, they were offered by the Berlin Senate a three year contract for an undeveloped land parcel in Neukölln. When the contract expired in 2012, they started to negotiate over the future of the site with the Berlin Senate and in particular with the Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH (BIM, a 100% city-owned company in charge of managing public land). This resulted in an agreement proposal which involved an increase in rent prices and which was considered as 'racist' by activists, since it stated that the contract would be terminated immediately should shelter be given to refugees on the rental space (Scharzer Kanal Activist, interview, January 2017). Since their refusal to sign this agreement, the association has been occupying the space without a contract. The existence of the wagon place was finally put in question in 2015 when, as part of the political response to the massive influx of refugees into Germany, the Scharzer Kanal's site was first considered as a location for a MFU. In 2016 this planning decision was confirmed by the Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales (Berlin State Office for Health and Social Affairs, LaGeSo) and by the Berlin Senate. The proposed blueprints called for the entire plot to be cleared for construction but the Schwarzer Kanal, with support from the Neukölln District, was able to negotiate a modified plan allowing the group to retain half of their plot. Construction of the MFU has begun in January 2017.

Actors' needs and claims emerging along the evolution of the conflicts are articulated within heterogeneous and strongly divergent frames.

The Schwarzer Kanal group (officially registered as 'Schwarzer Kanal e.V.')

adopts a radical perspective and is primarily concerned with a political struggle for the right of marginalized groups to live in the city. Their focus is on strife for overcoming dominant discrimination patterns, and the space they occupy constitutes the physical site for their resistance practices. They conceive themselves as an experimental, utopian project (Scharzer Kanal Activist, interview, January 2017) based on solidarity and aimed at supporting bottom-up activism, empowerment and self-determination among people who are marginalized in political discourses as people of color, women, lesbian and transgenders. The Schwarzer Kanal activists therefore aim to oppose to both structural racisms and its spatial consequences. From this perspective, the occupation of the space is aimed at counteracting gentrification dynamics, but also at guaranteeing an alternative and safe space for minorities which are excluded by the housing market because of their economic or legal status, or which are de facto marginalized because of their sexual, gender or ethnic-cultural identity. By looking at the conflict about the future use of the area, the Schwarzer Kanal group initially aimed at securing a fair rental agreement, but they were unwilling to accept the conditions posed by the BIM GmbH with respect to the legal status of the occupiers. Currently their main goal is to remain autonomous from the MFU.

A different position is held by the Berlin Senate, whose priority is to manage the refugee crisis and to guarantee access to shelter to those who gained legal refugee status. In this sense, the Senate's aim is to satisfy the needs of incoming refugees, which find their definition and legitimation within a juridical-institutional framework. With respect to the conflict, both left and center-right parties agreed about the need to find a compromise solution with the Schwarzer Kanal. While the conservative party (CDU) saw the refusal of the Kanal to sign the agreement as an opposition to the policy of the Senate, left-wing parties (die Linke, Bündnis 90/die Grünen) tried to define possible synergies between the Schwarzer Kanal and the MFU.

Yet another articulation of interests is defined by BIM GmbH, whose objective is to administer public grounds in the most profitable way. Given that the contested area is part of its portfolio, BIM is responsible for monitoring and executing the construction of the MFU. In line with its role, it does not assume political responsibility over the contested dimension of the area's transformation, and maintains that any aspect regarding refugee housing should be negotiated with the LaGeSo, as provided by a resolution of the Land Berlin.

Finally, the District of Neukölln, responsible as local planning authority, aims at finding a compromise solution and, despite conflicting views among District representatives about the Schwarzer Kanal project, at playing a mediation role in the conflict.

Looking at the position of different actors, it is possible to formulate some preliminary reflections about the social innovation potential of the Schwarzer Kanal initiative. In classical 'social innovation' terms, the project constitutes an attempt to satisfy – through self-organized living and community practices – needs that are “not satisfied by public policy and by the welfare system” (see Moulaert et. al 2005, 2010) and to foster social inclusion of discriminated and marginalized groups. People living in the space would not be indeed able to have access to resources and services (e.g. housing) within a market system, while some of them would be excluded from welfare provisions because of their legal status. Despite its inclusive goals and experimental character, however, the Schwarzer Kanal experience can hardly be seen as an example of social innovation, given the eminently antagonistic character of its claims and of its relationships with institutional actors.

The dispute highlights a conflict between two diverging perspectives on social inclusion and marginalization: on the one hand, the radical call for solidarity by the Schwarzer Kanal; on the other hand, the official refugee housing policy promoted by the Land Berlin. These perspectives develop within incompatible frames and narratives. The frame of the Schwarzer Kanal is defined in radical, antagonistic term. Not only the rights to live, exist and inhabit are fought for through strife and resistance, but the hegemonic status quo is challenged as such, and the 'inclusive' solutions proposed by Berlin's institutions are contested as part of it. The practices carried out by the Schwarzer Kanal take place outside of the political-institutional arena, and institutional arrangements aiming at supporting social inclusion are strongly criticized as discriminatory.

The divergence between these perspectives also leads to divergent claims over legitimacy, which result in radically questioning the legitimacy of the counterpart. On the Schwarzer Kanal 's side, the key claim could be formulated as follows: who has the right to define priorities between different legitimate rights and needs? On the Berlin Senate's side, viceversa, the key claim concerns precisely the legitimacy of institutions to define priorities among rights and needs and the lack of legitimacy of activists' actions as they are meant to satisfy differently defined rights and needs.

### 3.3 HOLZMARKT

The Holzmarkt is a site on the Spree river waterfront on which a mixed-used project promoted by a coalition of local entrepreneurs is currently under development. Unlike the previous cases, the Holzmarkt project does not directly represent an 'conflict'; however, its meaning and features must be understood against the background of one of Berlin's most contested urban developments, the so-called MediaSpree project (cf. Dohnke, 2013; Gualini, 2015; Scharenberg and Baden, 2009). 'MediaSpree' is the 'brand' for a large 180 ha area along the eastern Spree waterfront, designated since the early 1990s to become one of Berlin's key economic development areas, with mainly high density office development and a vocation to host media-and creative industries. Strongly criticized since the mid-2000s for its speculative character, plans for the area have sparked a broad mobilization led by dedicated local opposition groups, culminating in 2008 in a local consultative referendum calling for revision of the plan and the safeguard of open space access and diversity of uses along the waterfront. Despite massive popular support, the referendum could not significantly hinder its implementation, which has continued since 2010 on a site-by-site basis.

The Holzmarkt project is an attempt at realising some of the movement's claims through an alternative development of a portion of the area. It was initiated in the wake of anti-MediaSpree protests by local entrepreneurs, mostly active in the local club scene developed over years on land leased for 'temporary uses', forced to move their activities following plan implementation in the early 2010s. In 2012, a coalition funded the Holzmarkt Plus e.G. with the aim of proposing an alternative way of living and of creating a community village in Berlin (Holzmarkt 2013). The area was assigned to the Holzmarkt cooperative by a 75-years building lease by its owner, Stiftung Abendrot, a Swiss pension fund investing in sustainable real estate projects, winner of the open bidding procedure held that year. The ambitious plan presented by the cooperative provides for the realization of an alternative 'urban village', including affordable housing and working spaces, areas dedicated to artists and young creatives, a club, a hotel, a restaurant, a commercial village, and the Eckwert technology center hosting start-ups and student accommodations. It also provides for the realization of a 6,000 sqm public park, to be managed by the civic association Mörchenpark. This will connect the different parts of the village, host public urban gardens, and guarantee open access to the Spree waterfront, in line with the claims of the anti-MediaSpree movement. Since 2013, Holzmarkt organizes art events and festivals hosted in temporary structures and outdoor spaces, constantly changing according to the phases of construction (2015-2017).

The Holzmarkt project is explicitly creative and experimental, and includes a number of innovative elements. As for the physical transformation of space, the Holzmarkt masterplan foresees the realization of

a village to be built to the greatest possible extent with the involvement of local community members and using wood and other sustainable building materials. Temporary structures are foreseen in order to guarantee access to the area throughout different construction phases. The functional mix is intended to support interactions with the neighborhood and to promote spontaneous encounters between users. The project aims therefore to strengthen existing social relations at the neighborhood level and to support the building of a new community, to be jointly constituted by local inhabitants and by new users of the space. The Holzmarkt is conceived as a non-speculative project adopting a low-rent housing policy, guaranteeing affordable working spaces, and enabling the participation of groups (e.g. young professionals, creatives, craftsmen) which cannot access to the high-priced lofts and offices foreseen by mainstream MediaSpree developments. Direct involvement of the neighborhood and of local residents is held as crucial, as far as the design and management of open spaces is entrusted to civic associations. The project proponents also state to support experimentation and innovation with respect to project management and the business model adopted.

The Holzmarkt project formally covers most social innovation dimensions previously discussed, promoting social inclusion and establishing a cooperative internal decision-making structure. In order to better understand how the Holzmarkt Plus e.G. aims to achieve its objectives, we now look to the network of different actors involved in the process and to the way they frame their interests.

The Holzmarkt project is organized in a cooperative structure which “reflects the vision of the project” (Genossenschaft für Urbane Kreativität, 2017). The main actor is Holzmarkt Plus e.G., founded by the promoters of the project. It is responsible for the long-term development of the project implemented on the area. The cooperative includes the initiators, but also creatives, citizens and investors, whose acceptance is approved by the general assembly. All the decisions related to the project are taken by the general assembly, which deliberates with respect to project design and implementation, and which will be in charge for creating a special committee responsible for the selection of the tenants of the new living and working spaces. Both the Mörchenpark e.V., in charge of designing and managing the public and green areas in the Holzmarkt, and the sponsor Genossenschaft für Urbane Kreativität (GuK, ‘Cooperative for Urban Creativity’) have the right to vote in the general assembly. The former is a self-financed civic association, which represents the interests of neighbors involved in the project. The latter, which also has a cooperative structure, is the investment organization financing the project activities.

With respect to future tenants, Holzmarkt Plus e.G. has proposed a model based on three categories: ‘village comrades’, who are shareholders of the GuK (i.e. acquired at least a share of the GuK for 25,000 €) and will constitute the permanent core of the project, also having a voice in the decision-making process; ‘creative residents’, who will have medium-term contract (from 5 to 10 years); and ‘experimenters’, e.g. artists who will have temporary access to affordable working spaces. The organizational structure foresees an autonomous management of project facilities (restaurant, hotel, club etc.) which are run by individual firms under the coordination of the cooperative. Holzmarkt Plus also relies on external experts.

From the perspective of interests and definitions of needs of Holzmarkt Plus e.G., it clearly emerges that the promoters, as they were directly affected by MediaSpree plans, have a clear economic interest in re-activating the area. As entrepreneurs, they pursue a profit-oriented strategy based on a business model which combines autonomy of the project with support of an alternative development model for the area. They demonstratively embrace claims by the Spreeufer für Alle campaign concerning open public space, participatory decision-making, and non-speculative and creative urban environments. Looking at their organizational structure and specific goals, however, it is apparent that they do not frame these claims in critical terms, and that the strongly political and conflictual dimension that was driving the anti-MediaSpree mobilization is neutralized within a sustainable urban development frame strongly relying on the role of ‘creative classes’ in fostering urban experimentation and innovation.

Another relevant actor is the landowner, the Stiftung Abendrot, which bought the area in 2012 and is now supporting the project by leasing the area to the Holzmarkt Plus e.G. for the next 75 years (for around 500,000 Euro per year according to media). The pension fund does not intervene in the decision making process, and has convened with Holzmarkt Plus e.G. that they can buy the area to a fixed price at any moment.

It is interesting to highlight that local institutions are not involved in the project. As declared by one of the main promoters of the project, “the municipalities and the local residents of the neighborhood and/or initiatives don’t play a significant role in the Holzmarkt project” (Husten, interview, January 2017). The Holzmarkt project never really openly sought active political collaboration with any party, even if they gained support by Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the Social-Democratic Party.

With reference to the social innovation framework, some reflections can be advanced. The project aims to satisfy local needs related to access to public (open) spaces, affordable working and housing which are basically neglected by MediaSpree plans. With respect to the process dimension, the Holzmarkt proposes

an alternative financing model based on the close involvement of financial operators, local entrepreneurs and members of the local community, as well as on a cooperative organizational structure based on shared responsibilities along the decision-making processes. The project represents the initiative of what we could call a local 'coalition for innovation', and is widely perceived as such.

The frame adopted by the project proponents, however, contains also contradictory aspects. On the one hand, they refer to claims emerged from mobilizations against gentrification, privatization and finance-driven speculation in the area. On the other hand, the project conceives itself as "a group of users [that] formed a cooperative society to be able to plan and develop the area themselves" (Catalyst Studio, 2017), thus recalling an imaginary related to the self-made city and referring to the German tradition of *Baugemeinschaften* (literary 'building communities': cf. Ring and AA Projects, 2013). In so doing, the business and management model devised for the latter aim appears to dilute the political and contentious dimension of the former.

Furthermore, despite their declared objective not to maximize profits but to support creativity and promote alternative forms of living, their strategies and choices reveal a strong entrepreneurial imprinting, which might significantly constrain the socially inclusive dimension of the project. According to the typologies of tenants foreseen, it is for instance possible to have access to a permanent contract only by acquiring a 25,000 Euro share of the GuK. The short-term, temporary nature of other forms of contracts opens a potential for instrumental uses of the alternative uses of space to which they are dedicated, which might ultimately foster gentrification dynamics already taking place in the neighborhood.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The cases presented do not neatly fit a 'social innovation' paradigm in urban development. This does not mean, in our view, that they are not relevant to a critical engagement with 'social innovation' as scholarly discourse and as social phenomenon. We rather think that – even if ideosyncratically chosen – they stress aspects which may let models of social innovation appear counterfactual and, ultimately, heuristically inadequate.

We have indicated a reason for this in a discrepancy between its analytical and normative frameworks. In order to discuss this, we have chosen three distinctive cases – among a plurality of relevant cases analysed – from a context which presents a distinctive sensibility for social justice and inclusion, a diffuse capacity for civic initiatives, and policy issues demanding proactive change, but which also shows that the subject matter of 'social innovation' is contested, and that actors of 'social innovation' define their subjectivity largely in a process of contestation.

In the case of Dragoner Areal, (potential) elements of innovation are eminently developed through contestation of dominant policy frames. The case does not only show the evident discrepancy of urban policy agendas across different levels of governance, but also the importance of multi-scalar forms of engagement in their contestation. First and almost, however, it highlights the centrality of contentious politics and social mobilization in the process of generating (potential) elements of innovation. It is through the capacity of civic initiatives and social activism to overtly express dissensus and to develop alternative conceptions of policy issues that new alliances are built – which may integrate local government institutions as well as local civic groups – and may result in viable support for 'innovative' solutions. The contentious mobilization of actors is crucial for translating virtual social claims into an effective capacity for collective action.

In the case of Holzmarkt, (potential) elements of innovation result from the strategic-relational capacity of certain actors to build alliances around a selective interpretation of social claims emerged in a process of contentious mobilization. The self-representation of the project relies significantly on its claim to be innovative, and this claim in turn draws its legitimation from reference to claims raised by social mobilization against mainstream development plans in the eastern Spree river area. This however should not blind us to the fact that what characterizes the Holzmarkt project is the outcome of a process of strategic selection and retention from the repertoire of these claims. This means that claims raised by contentious civic groups are selectively retained and 'translated' in a way which makes them viable and system-compatible – not surprisingly, in the form of a (unconventional and 'innovative') business model which rather fits than challenge the overall logic of development. The 'allies' won in the process of translation are defined by the way the 'innovative' character of the project appeals to this system of compatibilities. It is within these hegemonic confines that the project is 'innovative'.

Schwarzer Kanal, finally, can be seen as a case of 'defeat' of social innovation, in as far as divergences in understandings of needs and rights lead to incompatible claims, conveyed by incommensurable frames, and with no instance of mediation being capable, so far, to realize a viable, 'socially innovative' translation. Here, again, the emergence of (potential) elements of innovation is premised on contestation of the existing order. It is only through radical claims that a paternalistic institutional hierarchisation of rights and

needs is challenged and a broader horizon of inclusion is addressed. However, the radicality of these claims vi-a-vis current policy agendas results in unmediated resistance. Notwithstanding the future possibility of negotiated arrangements to settle the issue, the case reminds us blatantly of the struggles over hegemonic understandings of the social order that are involved in phenomena of social change.

In a perspective of taking 'social innovation' discourse seriously, such observations are just a beginning. They hint of relevant areas of social theory and critical thinking which appear to be sidelined in 'social innovation' models. Addressing them, however, is crucial to understanding how far 'social innovation' can contribute to critical research of current challenges and contradictions of urban development or how far it is a normative policy concept premised on a discursive rationalization of such challenges and contradiction.

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## **ID 1415 | PLANNING THEORY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: CIRCULATING TRAVELLING MODELS FROM THE NORTH OR HYBRID ARRANGEMENTS?**

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The influence of inherited “Western” urban planning models and paradigm for African cities is not yet fully covered in discussions on planning theory. Research has mainly focussed so far on the colonial legacies in Africa, including housing policies and infrastructure systems. The “improvement in sanitary conditions for the white population” (Mabogunje, 1992) and the “segregation according to race” were key elements of colonial planning (Alexander, 1983) and were translated into colonial urban planning laws and urban planning instruments. These are still visible today in post-colonial legislations. For example, the zoning model and separated land uses categories are still the foundation of most planning legislation of the former British colonies (Watson, 2009). Furthermore, “planning education in Africa is firmly ensconced in the traditions and models of Europe” reflecting planning approaches as “colonial-type master planning systems” (AAPS, 2010). These approaches seem to have failed since African cities mainly develop outside formal planning procedures and statutory land use regulations (cf. Watson, 2003; Harrison, 2006).

Some studies have emphasised that in the cities of the global South a new “logic for resource allocation, accumulation and authority” (Roy, 2009) has emerged out of “Western” planning paradigms into the specific socio-spatial constellations of African cities; be it an “unintended outcome” of planning and policy interventions (Watson, 2009) or, on the contrary, a “calculated informality” (cf. Roy, 2009). However, it has to be acknowledged that African cities are shaped both by inherited urban planning ideals and urban planning concepts as well as by the current socio-economic reality.

Dar es Salaam in Tanzania serves as case study for this starting point with currently around 70-80% of informal urbanisation. In this city, the development and shortcomings of the inherited urban planning system will be traced. Based on a review of the historical development of the urban planning system, the first hypothesis is the existence of a continuum of colonial and post-colonial urban planning paradigms and models until today. This is, so the second hypothesis, one main reason for informal urban development as a result of shortcomings of these approaches. Third hypothesis is that although planning approaches has been transferred from the Western world to Africa, the common planning theories are not applicable due to different power relations of the involved actors and the prevailing informal urbanisation outside the statutory planning machinery.