

## Chapter 2

# Methodological Rationale

### ABSTRACT

*The fragmented and scattered nature of the conceptualization of social innovation calls for rigorous attempts to understand the core fundamentality of its elements. This book is underpinned by two overarching research questions: 'How has the conceptualization of social innovation evolved over time?' and 'What patterns of core-meanings and characteristics can be found in the social innovation definitions and various social innovation knowledge clusters?' A rigorous mixed-method approach employing a sequential research design based on a combination of advanced bibliometric indices and case study analyses is adapted in the development of each chapter in this book. The findings were generated from advanced bibliometric methods of citation, co-citation, and bibliometric coupling. This was supported by networks to visualize these relationships which constitute an ontological analysis and subsequently supported by single case study analysis.*

### INTRODUCTION

Social innovation is viewed from multiple perspectives. For example, as new governance approaches involving a wider stakeholder community (Vanderhoven, Steiner, Teasdale, and Calo 2020); innovative actions by not-for-profit sector (Desmarchelier, Djellal, and Gallouj 2020); locally developed

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territorialized actions as opposed to novel progressions originated by large organizations and institutions (Klein 2013); and new forms of collaboration (Ayob, Teasdale, and Fagan 2016; Vanderhoven et al. 2020) aimed at addressing wicked socio-economic challenges. Thus, social innovation spans a wide variety of forms (Desmarchelier et al. 2020) such as a piece of legislation, a procedure, service redistribution mechanism, a product or a service and even an organization. Given this significance, public policy has become a main driver of social innovation (Ayob et al. 2016) giving rise to a growing interest among researchers, policy makers and practitioners interested in social innovation outcomes and resulting outputs.

Despite this diversity and significance, social innovation is recognized as a contested concept (Vanderhoven et al. 2020) with an ambiguous and vague meaning (Grimm, Fox, Baines, and Albertson 2013) and the absence of clarity around relevance and meaning in social sciences and humanities (Pol and Ville 2009). Application of this concept to an array of varied initiatives and organizations ranging from the third sector to the public sector and to the private sector; the lack of detailed discussion associated with actors and the mechanisms of designing and delivering social innovation have seemingly contributed to the immense ambiguity surrounding the social innovation concept (Borzaga and Bodini 2014). Therefore, it is believed that social innovation theory lags behind practice (Nicholls, Simon, and Gabriel 2015) and as a result contributes to being a nascent, emerging (Krlev, Bund, and Mildemberger 2014) and underdeveloped (Cajaiba-Santana 2014) field of study. This may impede the research endeavors of conceptualizing and establishing its socio-economic underpinnings (Grimm et al. 2013) and the legitimization of the field.

This timely book is a response to the call for rigorous attempts to understand the fundamental concept of social innovation given the fragmented nature of its conceptualization and despite the extensive use of social innovation concept by scholars, policy makers and practitioners (Foroudi, Akarsu, Marvi, and Balakrishnan 2020). A substantial number of case studies, conceptual discussions and policy reports reside in social innovation literature providing multiple overviews to its conceptualization (Cajaiba-Santana 2014) which mainly reside within qualitative approaches (Ayob et al. 2016). Yet there is a strong need for a central understanding of the social innovation concept (van Wijk, Zietsma, Dorado, de Bakker, and Martí 2019). In a mixed method research design (Creswell and Clark 2007) presented through a bibliometric analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses this study aims to broaden the understanding of the research field (Chabowski et al. 2018) and

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