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POLITECNICO DI MILANO

SUMMER CUMULUS CONFERENCE - POLITECNICO DI MILANO - 3-7 JUNE 2015

Design and social innovation for systemic change: Creating social capital for a Farmers' Market

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ABSTRACT (Arial Bold 10 pt)
Social innovation is a form of systemic change to society, and designers are key proponents of this approach. This paper describes how design interventions were used in the Izindaba Zokudla project that aims to create opportunities for urban agriculture in a sustainable food system in Soweto. The creation of the Soweto Imvelo Market by designers and researchers from Izindaba Zokudla, a local farmers' organisation and other stakeholders identifies two aspects of social innovation that were instrumental in developing this alternative in the Johannesburg Food System: The creative contribution that designers can bring to social innovation and the need to socialise design into broader coalitions for change. The paper describes the socialisation of designers and their artefacts and technologies in terms of the theory of social capital which leads to specific recommendations on how methods should be used and how we should understand the interaction of design with social movements. The creative contributions designers make disrupts and transforms the ways we think of food, and this facilitates the socialisation of design in social innovation interventions. The paper makes recommendations from this analysis in order to guide further interventions by designers for social innovation.

KEYWORDS (Arial Bold 10 pt)
Food systems change; Social capital; design for social innovation

figure 1: The design for the Soweto Imvelo Market that was adapted by the Soweto Theatre. Photo: Author

INTRODUCTION

'Social innovation' is being used with increasing frequency by designers and it holds meaning as fundamental and meaningful social change which happens 'when the social and cultural changes [design] generate are capable to reduce the environmental impact, regenerate common goods and reinforce the social fabric' (Manzini 2014). In contrast, 'social design' is a charitable activity that aims to solve social problems, but this is not equated with innovation and deeper or structural changes in society. Both the depth and severity of current crises and the scope of social innovation indicates it is a radical practice. Deep and structural changes to society is an idea similar to 'development' which refers to 'positive change' or as Marx intended, the ability of humankind to control and shape nature. Social innovation is similar to 'intentional' development (Cowen & Shenton 1996) that aim at deliberate and planned interventions in society to achieve normative and instrumental outcomes like increases in human well-being, ecological sustainability and a conducive form of economic growth and governance. Dissecting social innovation is however necessary as it is often unclear what needs to be done to achieve such systemic change.

Designers use variations of participatory methods[1] in engaging with social change and innovation and the proliferation of 'toolkits' that designers proffer could create the impression that method is all that matters. However, design approaches for social innovation (Desis-network.org) carry normative claims and values that have to be justified, particularly in the context of 'development.' We need to know what design should strive for and what it would do to actors and contexts (Smithsonian 2013:24) in order to justify it as a means for social innovation. Clarifying social innovation is a complex undertaking but food activists (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck 2011:323) mention, that for

[1] Here I have to mention the similarities in both method and approach of participatory technology development (Smillie 2010), participatory research (Selener 1997; Chambers 2010), farmer participatory research (Scoones & Thompson 2009) and approaches implied in user- and human-centred design for the developing world (IDEO n.d.).

food systems change, ‘progressive and radical organisations [have to] find ways to build strategic alliances.’ The practice of design for social innovation uses participatory methodologies that are appropriate for a social movement context. Additionally, it often develops technology (artefacts, systems and services), and these methods and technologies converge in enterprises, products or institutions that should realise ecological sustainability, people’s well-being and economic growth. This suggests a large field of impact for such design interventions, and this needs to be unified with the help of social theory. By drawing on the Izindaba Zokudla project we describe our own experience of intervention in the South African food system and then introduce theoretical themes that explain social innovation. This indicates the theoretical field relevant to the assessment of social innovation through design. The paper presents a recommendations that may not only indicate how we should evaluate design for social innovation interventions, but also makes strategic recommendation for practitioners. Izindaba Zokudla is a project with a broad scope, and this paper will focus only on one programme, the Soweto Imvelo (Natural foods) Market in order to arrive at recommendations relevant to the practice of designing for social innovation.

SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEM

Systemic social change is necessary to address complex and interrelated problems of historical injustice, food system change, poverty and inequality in South Africa. Engaging with ‘the entire food system’ (Drimie & McLachlan 2013:218), to ‘catalyse the broader political and systemic changes needed to redress food insecurity beyond the intermediate term’ (Ashe & Sonnino 2012:2) is called for. This indicates the need for design approaches to reflect on their embededness in broader contexts, and be socialised downward to actors and participants (Batta et al. 2011:105), and upwards to enterprises, social movements and state actors to achieve socially innovative solutions. Social innovation methods for food system change builds relationships

figure 2: A 'Spaza-' shop. This example is at the informal end of the continuum. Some 'Spaza' shops resemble modern convenience stores.

amongst actors so changes can be institutionalised in new enterprises (see the examples in SA Foodlab & PLAAS 2013; 2014). This is implicit in social movement activism and here we clarify how this can be incorporated in design for social innovation approaches.

The analysis of the market system for food (also in poor areas) in South Africa allows us to understand not only the context where social innovation would be felt, but it also allows us to gain some certainty on what technology design should aim for, and what kind of enterprise could herald systemic change to the food system. The market for food in poor areas includes supermarkets but also peculiar small-scale retailers and these '*Spaza-shops'* sell food to 70% of households in poor areas (Rudolph et al 2012: 18). They could be key actors in the development of a local market system for food. However, they have problems of refrigeration, storage and the cost per volume is in fact higher than at supermarkets (Battersby 2012:152) which constitutes a market failure in food security. Hence, retail and market patters are a key theme in social innovation for food system change, and in this regard this paper concentrates its analysis on the SIM. Only 45.6% of the population of South Africa is food secure (MRC & HSRC 2013), but in poor areas over 70% of all households are food insecure (Rudolph et al 2012:9). However, 'Urban food security is caused … by food markets, employment patterns and the spatial configuration of the city' (Battersby 2012:151) which point to the need to incorporate the informal retail chain (either through service or technology design) in a local food system (Kelly & Schulschenk 2013) that includes urban farmers.

Innovation in the food system in South Africa is part of a broader movement for social change. It needs to not only promote African smallholder agriculture (of which urban smallholder farmers are a key constituency) in the context of White rural commercial agricultural dominance (Greenberg 2010), but also has to create employment opportunities for historically marginalised Africans and address public health considerations (Pretorius & Sliwa 2008). It is clear the need for social innovation is acute in South Africa and this enables designers to find partners in aiming at

socially innovative outcomes for their interventions. The Izindaba Zokudla project reported on here was nested within a complex of initiatives that aimed at social innovation and food security. These includes activists and social movements, state programmes, local organisations and these are all to some extent informed by discourses (Holt-Giménez 2011) like food justice and food sovereignty. This diagnosis reveals a number of crucial areas where design could contribute to systemic change: refrigeration and storage through technology design is a key example. However, the foregoing points to the mobilisation of design in a social movement context. This need to be described in terms of theory on social capital, civil society and also the firm and here refreshing approaches like service design and systems design could be appropriate. Engaging with a broad coalition of actors and discourses reveals what design for social innovation would need to aim for. The experience gained through the Izindaba Zokudla project and enables us to specify what and how strategies and methods should be used by designers in aiming for social innovation. This outcome is of course not guaranteed and the project itself is still in progress. However, the experience gained is sufficient to give clear indications on how design could aim for social innovation.

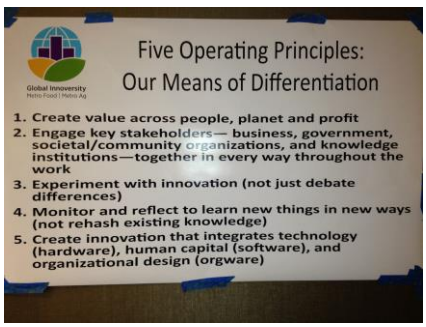

figure 3: Principles of the Global Innoversity (photo: author)

IZINDABA ZOKUDLA: THE CONVERSATION ABOUT FOOD

Izindaba Zokudla means ‘the conversation about food’ in the isiZulu language. It emphasises creative, participatory, open and plural approaches to change (Schumacher 1973; Hamdi 2004). It is linked to international actors like the Global Innoversity (globalinnoversity.org), and the Dutch NGO TransForum (Latesteijn & Andeweg 2010) and a number of local actors. The NGO Reos Partners who facilitated the first GlobalInnoversity Summit in 2010 introduced the researchers to multi-stakeholder engagement methods that converge strongly with the need to build strategic alliances in aiming for social innovation. Izindaba Zokudla started by using both participatory and multi-stakeholder methodologies to develop a strategic plan for an urban farmers’

figure 4: Selling vegetables at the launch of the Soweto Imvelo Market (Photo: author)

organisation in 2013 and this formed the basis of the project as currently implemented. This plan is aligned with the City of Johannesburg's Food Resilience policies (CoJ 2014), a number of service learning courses at the University of Johannesburg and individual research projects. In 2014 it developed appropriate technology with urban farmers, created a farmers' market, the Soweto Imvelo Market (SIM) and has launched the School Garden's dialogue with educators and farmers in Soweto, Johannesburg. This paper concentrates its analysis on the SIM.

Izindaba Zokudla aimed to shorten supply chains and keep capital circulating in the local economy with the development of the Soweto Imvelo Market (SIM). The SIM was only possible after we linked local farmers through the GlobalInnoversity with marketers from Detroit USA that showed us how a market can be operated, and after we recruited a local student organisation, Enactus, that supplied the necessary labour in launching the first market. Later it linked with a strategically placed actor, the Soweto Theatre which enabled the farmers to hold the market at an important landmark in the community. The Theatre also allowed the farmers to convert the parking lot to a food garden which suggests a cultural shift aligned with the idea of a sustainable food system. A key influence in the development of the market, and which illustrates how design is relevant to such change was the use of graphic design students. They developed marketing and promotional materials for the market, in close collaboration with farmers. This cultural 'input' was conducive to launching the market at this cultural venue, and served as means to differentiate the SIM from the informal sector. The way these graphic designs were used and sometimes not used, illustrates how design could be relevant to such social innovation. The establishment of this market not only shortened supply chains and transformed some aspects of the food retail system in doing so, but it also brought together a diversity of actors and it is in forming this coalition that we gained insight into how social innovation progresses. Izindaba Zokudla linked participatory and user centred methods with multiple- actors and sites of change in order to approximate an intervention that would 'engage the entire food system' (Drimmie & McClachlan 2013) although it is clear that such a comprehensive intervention cannot be

completed by one group of actors alone.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AS THE CREATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The SIM emerged once all stakeholders could meet and in its genesis led to some policy change merely through its creation, giving clear indications on how social innovation takes place. The Soweto Theatre and Arts and Craft Fair needed to open themselves to ordinary consumers which the SIM would attract. This was at some odds with the City's policies which emphasised wholesale market access for urban farmers in Johannesburg through their Agri resource centres. However, urban farmers are able to receive top retail prices for their produce, and the high cost of food transportation (in both monetary and environmental terms) implies direct supply chains between farmers and consumers and a farmers' market where farmers sell directly to customers. This also supports the idea that capital should circulate locally to make a decisive impact on poverty and inequality. Nevertheless, the need to sell at retail level could have resulted in a conflict between farmers and city policies. Urban farmers however now sell at the fair and not to wholesalers. This compromise was facilitated by the fact that the Theatre is part of the city and needed to open its doors to more than theatre patrons. Selling food at the Theatre is an exception to the current policy and this is done on city premises. Furthermore, the Theatre now campaigns on behalf of urban farmers from within the Arts and Craft Fair and bureaucracy of the city.

The socialisation of actors is illustrated by how the SIM came about. To arrive there, we had to first consolidate the position of the farmers themselves. This was done by developing a strategic plan with the participation of the farmers' organisation, and later through interaction with marketers from Detroit, USA. At a later stage the farmers linked with the ENACTUS student organisation from Business Management at the University that enabled them to consolidate their business strategy. Only after this, after media

exposure, did the market (which was now comprised of farmers, students and university departments) link with the Theatre. It is this interaction amongst actors in civil society that needs to be clarified in order to understand how designers can engage with social innovation.

Figure 5: Marketing and promotional material by Graphic Designers. These proved too complex for farmers to reproduce independently.

This socially innovative outcome of multi-stakeholder engagement is here analysed with theory of social capital and civil society. The SIM shows how novel interventions emerge from a confluence of actors. It is this embededness in social capital (Woolcocks 1998:163) amongst actors and contexts that makes social innovation possible (Moulaert & Nussbaumer 2005). Furthermore, creation of marketing and promotional materials by Graphic Design students allowed urban farmers access to the mainstream market and differentiated them from numerous informal food vendors. This was starkly illustrated by the failure of farmers to incorporate the designs successfully in their enterprise. The Soweto Theatre was able to transform the designs for the launch of the market, but farmers, mainly because of a lack of resources were not. This facilitated the incorporation of the SIM in the Arts and Craft Fair. Farmers' inability to utilise these designs corresponded with their inability to sell in large enough volumes at the Fair. Design, through its creative benefit made possible the confluence of actors and this shows how economic activity is embedded in relations between actors and with discourses. It is also clear that this creative content is needed to sell food not as only food but as 'locally and naturally produced food.' To sell food framed as locally produced food that addresses sustainability issues like food miles and local employment, need to be communicated through creative means that change the phenomenology and ways people think about food. This shown why design is important: It affords us ways to transform the cultural meaning surrounding food, and clearly this needs to be linked to opportunities like enterprises that institutionalises new cultural meanings. A key theme revolves around the relationship between this creative input that design brings and the socialisation of actors. We reflect on this point in the conclusion.

Social capital is the economic benefits people derive from trust

and association and there are three key concepts in this theory that are relevant to assessing social innovation. When social capital amongst similar actors is created we speak of bonding social capital, and when farmers link with dissimilar farmers, like the ENACTUS organisation, we can speak of bridging social capital (Szreter 2002:576). When farmers linked with the Soweto Theatre we can speak of linking social capital (Szreter 2002:578). Each approach holds implications for our thinking on social innovation, and leads to distinctive recommendations. The building of social capital suggests that the interaction of design with actors should occur in a public sphere that allows design interventions to link with broader coalitions and to bring politics into the design process.

Social innovation as a form of structural change has strongest affinity to the idea of linking social capital. Because we need to aim at social change at multiple levels in society, social innovation interventions should take care to involve a broad spectrum of social actors in its recruitment of participants. This much is implicit in Izindaba Zokudla's choice of multi-stakeholder methods. However, a broad coalition of actors is often unable to agree or take decisive action, and consequently the recruitment of a broad range of actors inevitably has to be scaled down for a particular action to take. We found that coordination in such context is difficult, and actors often took initiative on their own without others knowing. At times this is beneficial, and in fact the graphic designs were developed after they linked with ENACTUS on a prior initiative (the UJ's Green Week student exhibition) that was loosely connected to Izindaba Zokudla.

This convergence took place because all actors subscribed to some extent to ideologies and discourses underlying food systems change. Consequently, to bring design to bear on the public sphere and to build coalitions, designers, and other actors, should understand the political and social history of the issue they want to address. This will enable them to link strategically to discourses and ideologies and key outside actors who aim for similar outcomes. Here the grounding of social innovation in actual practices are important, and here the creative representation of issues in food system change made the SIM

appropriate to the Arts and Craft Fair, and less so for the informal sector. Food regime change (Friedmann & McMichael 1989) is a broad theoretical field with multiple sites where actors can converge. As food could easily be produced in unsustainable ways, it is further recommended that the right partners need to be selected in order to aim for appropriate outcomes.

Bonding and bridging social capital are undoubtedly also important but for secondary issues within the broader coalitions that need to emerge through linkages in civil society. On one hand, bonding social capital where similar actors converge hold the negative consequence that poor and marginalised actors will reinforce their own inabilities (Szreter 2002:577). This explains the endless debates about relatively unimportant issues when planning for the market (like who can sell what, and which eventually emphasises 'natural' foods over 'organic'). However, the use of participatory methods was instrumental in developing appropriate branding and marketing materials, as this enabled us to develop designs that was highly appropriate to the needs of farmers. Because these were easily manipulated by the Theatre's own designers, it further facilitated relationships between farmers and the theatre staff. It also shows the complexity of technology adoption: there were clear material barriers to farmers' utilising these designs themselves.

Social capital theory allows us to understand the need for solidarity amongst similar organisations for specific aspects of the design and social innovation process. Outside but similar stakeholders (like the Arts and Craft Fair) are necessary for the development of a political position representing, in this case, market participants. This solidarity and common identity (in addition to other identities like being an urban farmer) is important for aligning the powerful (in this case the Theatre) with marginalised (farmers and other market participants) interests. For the farmers involved in Izindaba Zokudla to engage fully with such outside but similar organisations, a prior bonding exercise amongst urban farmers was necessary. Nevertheless, when participatory methods bring together different organisations, the facilitation of such interaction becomes important. Should this become a form of 'linking' where differences particularly of class

and wealth are particularly acute, the ‘workshop’ should be facilitated to such an extent that it would proverbially allow the powerless to speak truth to the powerful.

Bridging and bonding social capital are key to the rationalisation of the identities and interests of local organisations in broader society. Here powerful participatory methods, building on the ‘Open Space’ methodology and complemented by the prior organization and strengthening of the most marginalized is important. The ‘decision making power of disadvantaged groups’ (Edmunds & Wollenberg 2001:232) need to be strengthened independently of bridging and linking exercises, and here the need for groups to bond before engagement is important. Should this not be done, it is unclear how marginalized actors would benefit as the contestation over benefits would be severe and can easily undermine marginalized interests. To do this, Izindaba Zokudla, first engaged (or *bonded*) with urban farmers to develop a plan that articulates their interests. This plan served the basis of engagement with more powerful actors (*bridging*) and allowed us to mobilise these actors in the programmes of the farmers, and later *linked* these to the broader objectives of the City’s policies.

CONCLUSION

Social innovation, if embedded in social capital could lead to both system transforming and system reinforcing change, as powerful and conservative interests are also embedded in social relations. In the examples discussed here it was however the creative energies of designers, in the form of graphic designs and new technologies that critically realigned interests to point to system innovation. System transforming change is possible if design becomes an activism and a social movement: its own alignment with ideologically strategic actors is key in such change. We have seen how creative designs can realign actors and interests, and this will influence technologies as well, and impresses on us the need for the education of actors and the strategic communication of new ideas to society that are instrumental in shifting systems that govern us. In this regard, a partnership

between the creative energies of designers and the resolute commitment of social movements is how we will achieve social innovation.

Recommendations that can be made are the following:
Bonding social capital is essential to consolidate political identities of actors in social innovation practices. Participatory methods would organise beneficiaries as a group and allow them to articulate their interests. Appropriate design also means that participants can control the technologies developed and this allows marginalised actors to engage in new ventures which is key to the promotion of their position in society and is in many ways the end point of social innovation. This is the first requirement of social innovation: the consolidation of the position of the most marginalised. However, social change and innovation is not completed by a singular social actor and is best served by linking with both participants and stakeholders across systemic boundaries. Strategic alliances are necessary here to push innovation to explore novel and experimental practices. This can however only be sustained through a broad coalition or social movement. Liking social capital, or creating trust across social class, divisions and identities is necessary for deep structural change.

Social capital illuminates how we could work towards social change, but sublimely it shows we can only work from within the diversity of positions in society. This is why art and design is important, as the isthmus to social innovation needs to be created before we can walk on it. We cannot know what is socially innovative until this is created. Social capital can make us blind to disruptive possibilities and in this sense social innovation and the introduction of new enterprises in society is dependant on our critical and creative sociological imaginations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is supported by the National Research Foundation in South Africa, through a grant given by the Thuthuka Programme for the research project: *Innovation in the*

Johannesburg Food System: Engaging with Soweto Agriculture. Any opinion, finding and conclusion or recommendation expressed in this material is that of the authors and the NRF does not accept any liability in this regard.

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