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Additional Information

Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development: an analysis of alternative food networks in the city of Valencia (Spain)

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Abstract

This paper explores the contribution the Capability Approach (CA) and Grassroots Innovation (GI) literature makes to a better understanding of the complexity, richness and specificity of bottom-up processes of social innovation (SI), and their specific contribution to social transformation. Using a purely qualitative methodology, the paper addresses a case study – organic food buying groups in the city of Valencia – and examines them through the lenses of SI, GI and CA. By taking four concurrent dimensions of the SI literature (agents, purposes, drivers and processes) and cross-fertilising them with the bottom-up, people-driven character of GI, and the concepts of agency, capabilities, deliberative democracy and conversion factors from the CA, the paper creates a novel framework that we call *Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development*. The analysis shows the potentiality of this novel framework to illustrate the elements that a bottom-up SI process should include in order to contribute to human development.

Key words: capability approach, social innovation, grassroots innovations, agency, deliberative democracy

1. Introduction

Social innovation (SI) is becoming a popular concept in various environments, from academia to policy-making. It has been considered a means of identifying, understanding and imagining solutions to current social, economic or environmental challenges. At the academic level, it has received attention from a diversity of disciplines, from sociology and organisational studies to environmental studies (Grimm et al., 2013). At policy and applied levels, there has been a proliferation of new government funding programs, leading to a wide range of projects, international networks and think tanks, which have led to a great diversity of practice-oriented approaches to the concept.

However, a number of academics consider that the idea of SI continues to be ambiguous and vague (De Muro et al., 2007; Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012; Mulgan et al., 2007). It is possible that this ambiguity, along with the plurality of definitions of SI, has kept the debate very lively, and may have created opportunities for activists and practitioners to arise and for them to benefit from these opportunities. However, it may also have limited the potential of academic work on SI to understand processes of transformative innovation, thus limiting the potential of academic discussion to identify and support positive social change. Without losing the plurality and the energy of the debates on SI, some clearer and more specific theoretical elaborations may be relevant.

A number of authors (for example, Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012; Grimm et al., 2013), have identified 4 key dimensions of the concept of SI that are relevant in order to characterise it: the first dimension refers to the *agents* of innovation, and addresses the question of who participates in the SI and what their role is. The second refers to both outcomes and *purposes*, and corresponds to the question of what the SI is for. The third core element concerns the *drivers*—what motivates and drives social innovation processes. The fourth core dimension refers to the *processes* of innovation, and addresses the question of how social innovation takes place.

Among the great diversity of approaches to the concept of SI, we concentrate on the literature that focuses on SI as a *bottom-up* innovation, in other words, “innovation generated by civil society (individual citizens, community groups, etc.), rather than government, business or industry” (Bergman et al., 2010). The idea of bottom-up thus relates to the ‘locus’ of the innovation, which can also be linked to the concept of “user-led innovation” (Von Hippel 1988,

Ornetzeder and Rohrer 2006) and also to the idea of innovation for “social transformation”, since they are considered as initiatives with a potentially significant contribution to the promotion of social justice, participation, empowerment and inclusion (Bergman et al., 2010; Mulgan et al., 2007). Although considerable research has been devoted to innovation coming from governments or from the market, rather less attention has been paid to social innovation from the bottom-up promoted by civil society. When this has been done, it has been limited in its understanding of the complexity, richness and specificity (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012) of these initiatives, as well as their specific contributions to social transformation (Echeverría 2010; Hubert 2010).

The aim of the paper, then, is to address this gap and to propose a framework to characterise and understand social innovations that are bottom-up driven, by understanding the *agents, purposes, drivers* and *processes* of this kind of innovation, the complexity of these dimensions, and how they relate with social transformation.

Taking the SI literature as our point of departure, our analysis departs from the idea that debates on two other literatures, Grassroots Innovation (GI) and the Capability Approach (CA), can throw new light on this shortcoming. On the one hand, GI can provide a complex and multi-dimensional perspective for understanding agents, purposes, drivers and bottom-up processes of innovation; on the other, CA can provide normative and transformative lenses on these four dimensions of social innovation.

To address the aim of the paper, we will explore a particular case study, using elements coming from the SI, GI and CA literatures. This analysis of the case will help us to explore potential connections between conceptual elements coming from these literatures, in order to propose the idea of *Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development*; a more specific and transformative conceptualisation of bottom-up social innovation processes.

Using a purely qualitative methodology, the paper addresses the case study of organic food buying groups in the city of Valencia, which can be considered as a bottom-up innovation. These are cases of people self-organising in voluntary associations, independent of market and state action, to provide themselves with local organic food. Our analysis draws upon the idea that such buying groups are not only innovative material solutions to the provision and consumption of food, but also to the empowering of people-driven spaces.

We have used the results of a participatory study with 8 groups to address the case and analyse it from elements coming from three analytical perspectives: Social Innovation, Grassroots Innovations and the Capability Approach. Specifically, we have focused on the analysis of four key dimensions of SI, namely, agents, purposes, drivers and processes.

The paper is organised as follows: in section 2 (theory) we present key elements on the literatures of SI, GI and CA. In section 3 we introduce the case of organic buying groups and in section 4 (analysis) we discuss how each perspective emphasises different elements of the case studied, regarding the 4 dimensions. Then, in section 5 we connect these ideas and discussions to propose the original framework of *Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development*, a more specific and transformative characterisation of social, bottom-up driven and transformative process of innovation. The final section concludes with some reflections on the relevance and usefulness of this framework.

2. Theory: The three approaches to bottom-up innovations

2.1 Conceptualising bottom-up Social Innovation: issues and key dimensions.

In recent years, SI has become highly popular among policy-makers and within academic discourses. However, various authors argue that SI has become a “buzzword” or a “container concept” that has no agreed definition (i.e., De Muro et al., 2007; Edwards-Schachter et al.,

2012; Mulgan et al., 2007), under which a vast diversity of approaches has been placed. In order to propose a more specific characterisation of social innovation, which we consider as bottom-up innovation processes, we address the four key dimensions identified in the literature which were mentioned: *agents* of innovation (who drives processes of SI); *purposes* (what is SI for); *drivers* (what motivates it), and *processes* (how social innovation takes place).

However, the discussion about what is considered in each of the dimensions is not a closed one. For instance, in relation to *agents*, the literature concentrates on who can carry out bottom-up SI and states that it can be promoted by authors belonging to civil society or the so-called non-profit sector (Echeverría 2010). In relation to the *purposes*, some authors maintain that SI is characterised by a type of innovation that is oriented to the social and public good (e.g. improving wellbeing and the living conditions of marginalised populations) and not to competition in the market and in technologies (Grimm et al., 2013). Another group of scholars advocate a wider definition, one in which the purpose refers *“to finding acceptable progressive solutions for a whole range of problems of exclusion, deprivation, alienations, lack of wellbeing, and also to those actions that contribute positively to significant human progress and development”*. (Moulaert et al., 2013). Regarding the *drivers*, they are identified with social demands which are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions, and also with local and global social, economic and environmental challenges. Finally, Mulgan et al. (2007) consider SI as a *process* of collective action and social transformation that pursues the development of new forms of governance, community formation, participation, empowerment and capacity building.

In most of these ideas, the transformative aspect of SI is present, even when it is not very clearly defined. For a number of scholars, transformation in SI processes is produced through participation and social engagement. Neumeier (2012) explains this by defining SI as *“new forms of civic involvement, participation and democratization... contributing to an empowerment of disadvantaged groups and leading to better citizen involvement which may, in turn, lead to a satisfaction of hitherto unsatisfied human needs”*.

We consider that the literature on SI identifies key ideas about innovation regarding the four dimensions (agents, purposes, drivers and processes), but that these could be explored further in order to understand the complexity and the different aspects of bottom-up innovations. Moreover, the literature does not examine the transformative aspect very deeply. To achieve this, we take, on the one hand, the discussions on GI and, on the other hand, some core ideas from CA.

2.2 The contribution of Grassroots Innovation: approaching the richness and complexity of bottom-up processes of social innovation.

According to Seyfang and Smith (2007, 585) Grassroots Innovation (GI) describes:

“(N)etworks of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved. In contrast to mainstream business greening, grassroots initiatives operate in civil society arenas and involve committed activists experimenting with social innovations as well as using greener technologies”.

Even though it is still underdeveloped (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012; Smith, Fressoli and Thomas 2013), the literature on GI may offer interesting elements to characterise further the four dimensions of SI:

First, the *agents* of GI are only and exclusively groups of people from civil society, mainly activists or non-profit organisations. These initiatives are rarely isolated: they usually work in relation to other initiatives, take part in networks, have relations of a different nature with

public bodies (support, pressure...). However, they are essentially people-driven, connected with people's perspectives, sometimes modelled but apart from public bodies or companies' agendas. Regarding the *purposes*—and similarly to SI—GI seeks innovative solutions for social needs and problems, in their own context. However, GI explores this dimension further, and identifies two main goals, related respectively to two types of benefits: intrinsic and diffusion benefits (Seyfang and Smith 2007). Firstly, GI aims at satisfying the needs of those people or communities who may in some way be disadvantaged by or excluded from the mainstream market economy. This implies the achievement of *intrinsic* benefits related to job creation, training and skills development, self-esteem and confidence growth or a sense of community and civic engagement. Secondly, GI also has a specific intention to challenge the dominant social and institutional arrangements to develop alternatives to the mainstream hegemonic regime. These are the *diffusion* benefits. They have a more ideological nature that tends to mobilise communities to create transformation in production-consumption goods and services and, in short, to transform the dominant, market-based, technology-driven regime. (Kirwan et al., 2013).

Regarding the *drivers*, GI takes place as a bottom-up response to a local need. It aims to promote systemic changes that lead to a transition to more sustainable societies. Finally, Seyfang and Smith (2007) explain that these *processes* differ from market-oriented innovation on several issues, such as: they are based on social economy through the production of alternative means of production and distribution of goods and services; oriented to social needs and local problems; promoted by a non-profit organisation and with resources usually deriving from voluntary donations or voluntary work. Due to these characteristics, these social initiatives differ from the top-down initiatives promoted by institutions or the market.

Ideas coming from the GI literature offer a deeper comprehension of the richness, specificities and complexities of bottom-up promoted social innovation. It highlights the active role of citizens, their direct participation in developing different forms of organisation and social relations, and the different kind of benefits. The following section outlines some main elements of the Capability Approach that can also be useful for rethinking and complementing these bottom-up initiatives.

2.3 The contribution of the Capability Approach: assessing bottom-up processes to foster human development

Some core concepts that connect with the ideas shared above can be taken from the literature on the Capability Approach, in order to characterise better the four key dimensions mentioned. These concepts are agency, capabilities, deliberative democracy, and conversion factors, and refer to the four dimensions that we want to explore further in order to understand bottom-up driven processes of SI.

First, regarding the dimension of *agents*, while the SI and GI literature refers to them as stakeholders, the CA makes the novel contribution of centring the debate on the people: through the concept of *agency*, each person is meant to be a dignified and responsible human being who shapes her or his own life in the light of goals that matter to her or him, rather than simply being shaped or instructed how to think (Walker and Unterhalter 2007).

Second, in respect to the dimension of *purposes*, CA considers bottom-up SI as a process to expand the *capabilities* people have to reach the things they have reason to value, at an individual or a collective level (Sen 1999). Moreover, by considering every individual as an able being who is willing to participate, through the CA lens, SI can be considered as a process of ensuring one's agency, and so to self-determine and to bring about change in the world (Crocker 2008), a view that goes further than a simple project to answer some social need.

Third, CA causes us to think of the dimension of *processes* in terms of *deliberative democracy*, which is conceived as public discussion and democratic decision-making (Crocker 2008), where agency and collectivity have a crucial role. Under the CA, individuals are seen as socially embedded agents who interact with their societies and participate in political and social affairs (Sen 2002; Nussbaum 1997). Deliberative democracy is based on the principle that encouraging individuals to participate in local decision-making encourages them to decide together how to construct an idea of the good. Hence, the relationships between agency and deliberative democracy are mutually reinforcing.

Finally, through the CA, *drivers* can be considered as *conversion factors* (coined by Robeyns 2005): they are the personal traits (e.g. physical condition, gender, ethnicity or intelligence), social arrangements (e.g., public policies, norms, values, power relations) and environmental conditions (e.g., pollution, state of the roads, communication) which determine the ability of a person to convert a specific vector of commodities into capabilities or valuable outcomes. These conversion factors enrich the analysis because they look at individuals as well as the circumstances in which they are living.

From a CA perspective, these four aforementioned core concepts (agency, capabilities, deliberative democracy, and conversion factors) can be used to address one of the criticisms of SI theory: that it does not explain how we can measure the real contribution of social innovation to bring transformative change in individuals and social relationships (Echeverría 2010; Hubert 2010). A framework that integrates the CA centred on the *agents* as autonomous and critical beings (agency); the expansion of people’s capabilities and the enhancing of their agency as a *purpose* of SI; an assessment of the *drivers* pushing for a SI (conversion factors); and concern about the *processes* in which these are discussed and exercised (deliberative democracy), responds to this shortcoming.

Table 1 summarises the cross-fertilisation potential of the combination of debates and ideas from SI, GI and CA:

Dimension of bottom-up innovation	Ideas from Social Innovation literature	Ideas from Grassroots Innovation literature	Ideas from the Capability Approach
Agents	-Civil society	-Committed activists involved, non-profit organisations.	-People with agency, which intrinsically entails that they participate.
Purposes / objectives	-To meet social needs. -Oriented to the social and public good. Non-profit. -Social inclusion and social justice	-Individual, intrinsic benefits: meet people’s demands, which are contextual and local, in the communities. -Collective, diffusion benefits, alternatives to the hegemonic regime, to social relations.	-Expansion of capabilities to reach the things people have reason to value, at an individual or a collective level.

Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions. -Local and global social, economic and environmental challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demands and processes, which are local and contextual. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not just demands, but personal, social and environmental conversion factors (context).
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Role of users/people. -Participation. -Contextual and path dependent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bottom-up initiatives and processes, ruled and managed by citizens, active role of citizenship, direct participation (control of processes). -Through the production of alternative means of production and distribution of goods and services (social economy). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Through deliberative democracy.

Table 1. Agents, purposes, drivers and processes analysis from three perspectives

3. Case study

3.1 Organic food buying groups

The local provision of organic food or of “alternative agro-food networks” has been seen as one of the most prominent and bottom-up promoted spaces for an alternative economy based on a fairer, more responsible, socially controlled, community empowering approach to consumption (Goodman et al., 2012). These kinds of initiatives may be prefiguring a new model of development, building democratic societies and more engaged and responsible citizens (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2011, Lamine and Le Velly, 2011). Due to its dual bottom-up and transformative character, we consider this case study to be particularly relevant in order to test the connections between SI, GI and CA.

This movement, which seeks to establish direct connections between producers and consumers through farmers’ markets, farm shops, veggie box subscription schemes, organic buying groups, food cooperatives, etc. (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012), arose as an alternative to an unsustainable food system, characterised by the concentration of power in a few corporations, exploitative trade relations, enormous adverse environmental impact, and the prominence of unhealthy industrially processed food.

The movement is very active in Spain (Díaz Escobar 2014; Cabanes and Gómez 2014; López 2011). Specifically, the growth of the so-called *grupos de consumo ecológico*, organic buying groups (Vivas 2010; FCCUC 2010) has been quite prominent. These have been defined as groups of people who self-organise, with the aim of “re-localising food systems and establishing direct relationships between consumers and producers [...] Their formats are usually cooperatives or associations [...] Their day-to-day practices respond to the principles of agroecology, even if they also have social and political dimensions” (Vivas 2010, 159-160).

3.1.1 Organic buying groups in the city of Valencia: Methodology

The analysis in this section is based on the results of a study carried out between January and June 2012¹, in which a group of researchers and members of 8 organic buying groups from the city of Valencia and its metropolitan area undertook a process of participatory research on the functioning, relationships and principles of the groups involved. The cases were selected according to three criteria: the maturity of the groups (they were all well-established initiatives), access (they were very interested in the process and results of the research), and representation (using 8 groups was considered to compose a representative sample of the organic buying groups in Valencia). This research was novel in the city, despite the rapid spread of food cooperatives throughout its districts and the surrounding urban area.

During the research, primary information was collected: 5 meetings with a group composed of researchers and members of the groups; 8 interviews, made with key members² of the buying groups; and 8 group discussions on the preliminary results, held with members of each of the participating groups. This primary information was complemented by secondary sources, essentially websites and internal documents of the groups, with information on the internal organisation and procedures, criteria for selecting products, or pedagogic and diffusion material.

The discussion was based on a purely qualitative research strategy, aimed at reconstructing processes and building and capturing meanings and interpretations (Corbetta 2007). The research had an exploratory nature. It did not aim to obtain generalisations or explanations of phenomena. On the contrary, it aimed at a better understanding of the processes of the particular buying groups under study and the experiences of the people engaged, while revising and deepening the theoretical and conceptual perspective proposed.

In the following three sections, we analyse the case of organic buying groups through each of our three analytical perspectives.

4. Analysis: Food cooperatives in the city of Valencia

4.1 Organic buying groups through the lenses of Social Innovation literature

Taking the inputs from the SI literature mentioned, we can consider that the *agents* of the initiative operate in the civil society arena. The groups under analysis were all formed by persons living in the same neighbourhood in Valencia (5 groups), in the same town close to Valencia (2 groups), or working or studying in the same place (1 group, in the *Universitat Politècnica de València*). The groups were all composed of “consumption units” or “families”. The average size of these units or families was 2-5 persons. The number of units in the groups varied between 7 and 50. There are differences between the groups regarding their formal entity: some are informal associations of people, while others are legal entities (usually formal associations, but never for-profit organisations or companies).

¹ The research was promoted and supported by *Utópika*, a group from the *Universitat Politècnica de València* interested in participatory research; ISF-Valencia, a local NGO working for the transformation of the agro-food model; and the *Plataforma per la Sobirania Alimentària del País Valencià* (Valencian Community Platform for Food Sovereignty), a local alliance of associations with the same aim.

² Key members were chosen through purposive selection: persons with extensive experience, knowledge, strong political awareness and a lengthy involvement with the group.

Regarding the *purposes*, using ideas from the SI literature, social innovations are oriented to promoting solutions to social needs and problems. From this approach, organic buying groups may be considered as initiatives that are contributing towards building a new model that is more environmentally sustainable (because it re-localises food systems, etc.), promotes sustainable livelihoods (because it makes the life of local farmers and family farming possible), and is more just because it creates solidarity (within the groups, between consumers and producers, etc.) and promotes natural and cultural diversity, etc.

Most interviewees state that there are at least two kinds of motivations for people to become part of the groups, which can be considered as *drivers*. The first kinds of drivers are motivations and we find some that are more individualistic – easy access to good quality, local, organic food; being healthy, etc. – and some that are more community-solidarity oriented – supporting small local farmers or protecting the environment.

A second group of drivers refer to more transformative issues. For the most committed members of the groups, the key motivation is to contribute to the construction of democratic arenas and of alternative provision systems beyond the market and the State, to make a bottom-up transformation of the social system.

Finally, the SI literature emphasises *process*, which is the dimension that most differs from market innovation. In the case of the organic buying groups, all tasks are carried out voluntarily by members of the buying group, who self-organise into smaller working groups and establish direct relations with local food producers.

Typically, members communicate their weekly orders of products to some person or to a working group. These are then conveyed to the producers. In most cases, the food is delivered by the producer to the group's premises and distributed to the individual consumers once a week, via the coordination of another working group. The premises are usually social or community centres managed by neighbourhood associations.

All the groups under study show horizontal decision-making and democratic procedures as key features. All relevant decisions are made in open periodic assemblies, which are celebrated in periods varying from one week to a few months (depending on the group). These democratic procedures are also considered to be fundamental to the relations with other people and associations.

4.2 Organic buying groups as Grassroots Innovation initiatives

Notions from the GI literature also led us to focus the analysis around the space where the innovation takes place, and to explore who is involved in this initiative, why and how.

From the GI lens, *agents* who are promoting organic buying groups are people making their own voluntary contribution, taking place in the civil society arena. It is important to highlight that no agents from the for-profit private sector are involved, nor public bodies (in fact, there is no public support for the groups). Relations with other groups (other organic buying groups, neighbourhood associations, etc.) are also frequent, and commonly based on shared perspectives and values.

As the earlier discussions on GIs posed indicate, the initiative seeks to find "*solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved*" (Seyfang and Smith, 2007:585). Hence, *drivers* can be considered as demands that appear as a bottom-up response to local and group needs. In the case studied, it seems that food cooperatives mobilise for particular needs (from access to healthy food to the need to build alternatives to the existing system). In relation to this, a prevalent feeling among the groups is that each buying group has to find its own way to respond to its particular situation. This is

frequently mentioned in the discussions: there is no formula or “good practice”, only experiences to share.

Moreover, the concepts of *intrinsic* and *diffusion* benefits help us to identify different *purposes* in all the groups, in regard both to their broader social and transformative aims and individual benefits for their members.

On the one hand, the groups declare—publicly, on their websites and other documents, but also in the interviews and discussions—that they want to address the material needs of their members; that is, access to local, organic, seasonal, high-quality and healthy food. Moreover, the groups mention other individual gains for the members: to learn more about the agro-food system, to meet neighbours and local producers, to take part in a space of reflection and sharing, etc.

On the other hand, the groups state broader social aims, in a number of ways. All the groups mention that they contribute to the transformation of the agro-food system, working towards making it more sustainable and just, through a collective, responsible and critical form of consumption. Moreover, they sometimes refer to the importance of the transformation of the food system for the broader overall transformation of the current social, economic and political system from below. Both group documents and members state that buying groups are key instruments in this transformative process, as long as they: support the local, family and rural economy, build just and close relations between food producers and consumers; create civic awareness, and build community links, etc.

Finally, regarding the dimension of *processes*, the GI perspective places the accent on the fact that these are bottom-up initiatives, ruled and managed by citizens. This means an elevated degree of citizen participation; hence processes are directly controlled by the people involved. Groups are organised into work groups: one to manage the economy, one to be in contact with producers, one to welcome new people, etc. Each work group has autonomy to carry out its tasks. However, in all cases, key decisions and discussions must be made in the periodic assembly, since there are no real boards or representatives.

Nevertheless, a great concern of most of the groups, one frequently mentioned in interviews and discussions, relates to the issue of participation; since there are, at one extreme, people who are very active, who contribute to performing the tasks and do most of the jobs, and, at the other extreme, people who are just passive consumers. Within this spectrum, different levels of participation coexist in each of the groups, and even for each individual, depending on their personal circumstance. As the literature on participation suggests, these different levels of participation have direct implications with power structures within the groups (Arnstein, 1969); because even though, theoretically, all voices have the same value, in practice the opinions of these leading, more active, members are usually more respected. This entails the idea that democratic and horizontal spaces may not be enough to achieve real participation. As Gaventa (2006) mentions, participation may limit visible power (for example, that achieved due to hierarchical structure or economic social class), but it may be unable to avoid other forms such as hidden or invisible power (for example, the case of actors who are powerful because they have more access to information, or more knowledge about the agrofood model, or more active just because they have more availability). As Cooke and Kothari (2001) and Hickey and Mohan (2004) mention, participation can become a tyranny and lead to an unjust and illegitimate exercise of power.

In any case, whilst being aware of the limitations of these participatory structures, it can be said that through the production of alternative means of production and distribution of goods and services, the groups are contributing towards building, from the bottom-up, another model of social relations, one based on certain values and attitudes. Beyond participation and democracy, the study showed frequent references to trust, friendship, engagement,

responsibility, and cooperation. Interviewees placed special emphasis on relations with farmers. As an example, groups do not consider that farmers' products necessarily have to include the official label for organic agriculture. On the contrary, they trust that the farmer is using agroecological techniques in production.

4.3 Organic buying groups as initiatives to promote Human Development

Regarding the dimension of *agents*, seen through the CA lenses, the processes are entirely controlled by "users" who operate as active citizens experiencing means of self-management through the creation of an alternative economy. Furthermore, beyond consuming, most groups organise a range of awareness raising activities or lobbying, and work with a range of stakeholders, from schools and NGOs to other buying groups. Due to this, the group has indirectly become a space to connect other bottom-up initiatives, based on shared values such as sustainability, justice or solidarity. Participants explained that these connections allowed them to feel part of a broader movement, where people were already acting and bringing change, that is to say, enhancing their agency. Regarding agency, group members also frequently indicate that, through their participation in the group, they are able to exercise their voice and transform their values into possible actions.

The *process* of public discussion and democratic decision-making in each of the groups is crucial; so all members of the collective are "*able to be active in the decisions regarding what to preserve and what to let go*" (Sen 1999, 242). In line with the idea of deliberative democracy, assemblies emerge as central spaces to learn abilities and attitudes to configure other personal and social relations, such as: to express one's voice, to exercise active and respectful listening, to practice self-reflection (those in an individual level), or to face and learn from conflict, to include all voices, to pursue consensus (on a collective level).

In this sense, we can say that from the CA perspective the *purpose* of the group is to promote participation, not just as a tool, but also a principle and a political position; an end in itself, as discussions from a human development perspective indicate, that prefigures the kind of society being sought. In other words, from the aforementioned ideas arising from CA discussions, the exercise of individual but also collective agency through the meetings is, in this sense, not only intrinsically important for individual freedom (to exercise one's voice and transform one's values into possible actions), but also for collective action and democratic participation (through the discussions).

It is also true that this may not be happening for all the people involved, some of whom may be meeting their individual needs (getting local, ecologic and accessible food), but do not get as far as developing capabilities (real freedoms in terms of voice, inclusion, participation, critical-thinking), or do not take part in collective process for building collective agency. As Alkire (2002) and Walker and Unterhalter (2007) mention when referring to the process of education, agency is a process of both being and becoming. It can further expand and advance our wellbeing, but it is a process and needs to be embraced over several areas of action. The organic buying groups and their participatory practices may not be a sufficient trigger for everyone to exercise their agency.

Lastly, connecting the evidence with the theoretical notions about conversion factors enriches the analysis of the *drivers* (as individual and collective circumstances) that lead people to join organic buying groups, and those to be developed. In terms of social conversion factors, it can be said that the non-favourable Spanish political context was a driver that led to the creation and development of most of the buying groups under study. At least five of them were born or were significantly bolstered during the period of intense social mobilisations of the *15-M* or *Los Indignados movement*—the Spanish antecedent of the *Occupy* movement, which exploded after the 15th May 2011, and involved the occupation of public spaces, huge mobilisations of

people and the emergence or growth and connection of a number of political and social initiatives. A great number of people engaged in these mobilisations found that they needed to develop practical alternatives to the current economic, social and political system—considered to be unfair, corrupt and controlled by elites—in order to be free to live the way one would like to live. This led them to join buying groups and other initiatives of the self-managed social economy.

In terms of individual conversion factors, it seems that the most powerful drivers are values, political affinity ideals, and trust. However, once again, this may not be true for every group participant. All of them seem to be driven by certain basic motivations but the more active individuals are also driven by more openly political and transformative perspectives. The results of the research also highlight the importance of emotional issues as key drivers in the processes under study. In short, it seems that emotional and political aspects are both important and connected, as in the recognition and support of local organic farmers shown by the groups.

Finally, in terms of environmental factors, it seems that the proximity of the agricultural field and the awareness about how infrastructure and urban development has neglected its social and environmental value, are the main drivers for the participants to engage and support traditional and small-scale agricultural production.

Table 2 provides a summary about how each approach interprets the case of organic food cooperatives in the city of Valencia:

Dimension	Broad ideas from social innovation	Grassroots innovation	Capability Approach
Agents (Case studied)	- Civil society arena (persons living in the same neighbourhood, town or working and studying in the same place)	- Bottom-up processes, led by people making their own voluntary contribution. Civil society arena (no public nor for-profit support) - Frequent relations with other groups	- People with agency, who operate as active citizens, experiencing means creating an alternative economy - Being part of a broader movement (work with a range of stakeholders in activities of awareness or lobbying)
Purposes / objectives (Case studied)	- To build a new model that: is more environmentally sustainable; promotes sustainable livelihoods; is more just; creates solidarity; promotes natural and cultural diversity	- Intrinsic benefits: to address material needs, to learn about the agro-food system, to meet neighbours and local producers, to take part in a place of reflection and sharing - Diffusion benefits: contribute to the transformation of the agro-food system	- Participation as a principle and a political position - The exercise of individual and collective agency
Drivers (Case)	Two kinds of motivations: - Individualistic: easy	- Demands appear as a bottom-up response to	- Social conversion factors: the non-

studied)	<p>access to good quality; community-solidarity oriented; supporting small local farmers or protecting the environment</p> <p>- Transformative issues: the construction of democratic arenas and of alternative provision systems beyond the market and the State</p>	<p>local and group needs</p> <p>- Each group has its own way.</p>	<p>favourable Spanish political context</p> <p>- Individual conversion factors: values, political affinity ideals and trust</p> <p>- Environmental factors: the proximity of the agricultural field and the awareness about how infrastructure and urban development has neglected its social and environmental value</p>
Process (Case studied)	<p>- All tasks are carried out voluntarily, members self-organise</p> <p>- Weekly order</p> <p>- Horizontal decision-making</p> <p>- Democratic procedures</p>	<p>- Elevated degree of citizen participation</p> <p>- Groups are divided by commissions</p> <p>- Key decisions taken in the periodic assembly</p> <p>- Participation not always ideal</p> <p>- The importance of references to trust, friendship, engagement, responsibility, or cooperation</p>	<p>- Public discussion and democratic decision-making</p> <p>- Deliberative democracy: assemblies as central spaces to learn abilities and attitudes</p>

Table 2. Food cooperatives analysis through the three perspectives

5. Discussion. Connections: proposing a framework to approach Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development

In this section, we discuss the aspects of the case study emphasised by each of the three literatures mentioned. We have approached how each of the three literatures used emphasises, approaches or explores varying aspects of the different dimensions of the case study. This analysis shows that these aspects are complementary, and that the combination of elements offers a more comprehensive vision of the case.

Drawing on this analysis of the case study from these three analytical lenses, we propose a hybrid framework, which may benefit from the contributions of all three literatures. We will now propose the elements that, regarding the four dimensions discussed, and combining the contributions of these three perspectives, could create a new framework, which we can call *Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development (GSI4HD)*. This framework may be useful for facilitating a deeper understanding of bottom-up driven, transformative social innovation processes, such as those of the organic food buying groups.

Regarding the *agents* of social innovation processes, a combined framework (GSI4HD) not only characterise them as committed activists, but also emphasises the social and political character of the individuals and the importance of having the freedom to engage in collective

action. This can help to understand better and approach the characteristics, potential and possibilities of people's commitment and citizens' action.

Concerning the *purposes*, the GSI4HD framework considers that social innovation from the bottom-up is oriented to social justice and public good, but also considers that innovations offer two categories of benefits: intrinsic (individual) and diffusion (collective, to promote alternatives to the hegemonic regime). Moreover, a major aspect of SI would then be to meet social needs that encourage processes that ensure that individuals as well as groups can be authors of their own lives.

The *drivers* of GSI4HD are seen as bottom-up responses to local and group needs. However, GSI4HD not only views these as a scarcity of resources or the demands to increase these resources, but also as the relation of personal, social and environmental conditions that influence one's ability to transform some of the existent resources into valuable outcomes.

Finally, on *processes*, the GSI4HD approach considers the importance of participation, deliberative democracy, voluntary work and shared values such as trust, friendship, engagement, responsibility, indignation or cooperation. Process can be conceived as people individually and collectively exercising their capabilities and agency to actively participate in social and political life, if they so choose.

Table 3 summarises these combined ideas regarding the four dimensions:

Dimension	Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development
Agents (GSI4HD)	Committed activists involved, non-profit organisations, operating in the civil society arena. People with agency, with a marked social and political character, who operate through social participation as active citizens making their own voluntary contribution. Frequently in relation with other collectives, as a part of a broader movement.
Purposes / objectives (GSI4HD)	Oriented to social justice and public good. Two kinds of purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intrinsic (individual) benefits: to reach people's demands (material needs, learnings), to expand people's capabilities and agency - Diffusion (collective) benefits: to generate alternatives to the hegemonic regime, promoted by collective action and democratic participation as a political position <p>To encourage processes that ensure that individuals as well as groups can be authors of their own lives.</p>
Drivers (GSI4HD)	Demands appear as a bottom-up response to local and group needs (needs can be more individualistic or more transformative). These demands are influenced by social, individual and environmental conversion factors.
Process (GSI4HD)	Elevated degree of citizen participation and voluntary work. Horizontal decision-making. Deliberative democratic procedures as central spaces to learn abilities and attitudes to configure transformative personal and social relations (on an individual and collective level). Importance of values such as: trust, friendship, engagement, responsibility, indignation or cooperation.

Table 3. Framework to characterise a Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development

To sum up, because it presents advantages over each of the three perspectives considered individually, we consider that the combination of the elements discussed in this paper may lead to a new framework, GSI4HD, which can serve as a robust tool for analysing bottom-up

transformative social innovations,: first, it moves from the concept of actors to the idea of agents with agency, that is to say, people organising from the bottom-up. Second, it evolves from the purpose of providing goods and services to expanding producers and consumers' capabilities and agency. Third, it interprets drivers from demands to a more holistic view, considering social, personal and environmental factors. Finally, it characterises processes based on new social relations, promoting participation and deliberative democracy.

6. Final remarks

This paper aims to make a contribution to the broader debate on the conceptualisation of bottom-up processes of SI, by combining and cross-fertilising them with ideas from GI and the CA. The analysis of the organic food buying groups through the three theoretical lenses has allowed us to emphasise different elements and complexities of the case, and therefore has showed the appropriateness of creating the framework that we call: *Grassroots Social Innovation for Human Development* (GSI4HD).

This framework is based on the four dimensions taken from the SI literature (*agents, purposes, drivers and process*), which have been useful in terms of offering us a broader description and comprehension of the case study, and helping us to organise the analysis of the bottom-up emergence of an organic food buying group initiative. Through the analysis of these four dimensions the framework allowed us to illustrate the complexities, richness and potential of these initiatives.

Furthermore, the combination of the ideas coming from the three theoretical approaches makes a contribution by going beyond the gaps in the SI discussions mentioned: on the one hand, understanding the complexity, richness and specificity of bottom-up processes of innovation; on the other, the specific contributions of this process to social transformation:

On the complexity of the innovation processes, our analysis, as well as the framework proposed, addresses a number of shortcomings of the SI literature, such as its difficulty in addressing how changes in individuals and in social relationships take place. For example, the analysis addresses how organic buying groups emerge in a context of crises and promote individual and collective capabilities, establish new social relations (between consumers and producers), and have a different impact on the members involved. Because it also takes into account the personal, social and environmental factors of innovation processes, our analysis has been able to identify key factors modelling innovation in the case study, which may be contextual (a non-favourable political context), environmental (an understanding of urbanism that excludes agriculture and traditions), individual and social (healthy habits, a sense of belonging, the will for structural change).

On the transformative character of social innovation, our analysis and the proposed framework of GSI4HD emphasises the relevance of people-driven processes to promoting people's ability to configure, plan and carry out valuable agendas. Agents are considered active "doers" having a transformative character, as was illustrated by the experience of the organic buying groups, which have promoted the agency of some—but not all—of their members. Moreover, our analysis emphasises the transformative dimension of participation, when it is open, democratic and deliberative.

Beyond addressing these specific gaps in the SI literature, our discussion also offers some insights into the between debates on social innovation, grassroots innovation and CA. CA offers a robust normative framework, as well as elements to assess processes of change, but it is less strong when addressing how processes of innovation and change take place. On the contrary, the literatures on social and grassroots innovation is more focused on describing and understanding how and why change takes place, although they do not have clear normative

standpoints. This indicates the limits of these approaches but also the potential of cross-fertilisation.

It is also important to note some limitations identified in the proposed framework. On the one hand, in relation to the 4 dimensions selected, these are so interdependent that they may easily be confused or mixed up (as can frequently happen in the distinction between purposes and drivers). Therefore, further work is needed to define these four dimensions more extensively, detailing and determining what we understand by each one.

That said, this is an exploratory work that aims to broaden the debate on the limitations of the discussions of SI, the ambiguity of the term, and the potentialities of merging this literature with ideas and concepts coming from Grassroots Innovation and Capability Approach perspectives. Through the construction of a conceptual framework called GSI4HD, based on both theory and empirical data, this paper stimulates the debate and offers some elements which may be relevant for addressing and characterising grassroots social innovation processes that seek to contribute to human development.

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