



# Commentary

Luca Tricarico

LUISS Guido Carli- Email: [ltricarico@luiss.it](mailto:ltricarico@luiss.it)

## New Methodologies to tackle wicked problems

In both the European and global context we are observing how [is increasingly spreading](#) the deployment of techniques and methodologies which are traditional assets of the social innovation field expertise, often combined with the introduction of strategic management values coming from the 2030 [sustainability agenda](#), along with people-centered approaches applied for the transformation of industrial organizations governance and its regional [geographies](#).

These methodologies cross different spheres of interest and bring into play mechanisms of [collective intelligence](#) and shared responsibilities among actors with a strong role given to [cross-sectoral partnerships](#) and collaborations, transforming and recombining the traditional production factors enriched by the engagement of unusual initiatives and diverse interests. The experimentation of these methodologies has been driven by the idea that only collective action is able to effectively promote social change and tackle the so-called [wicked problems](#).

Among the evolution of the social innovation-based fields of experimentation we want to mention the most recent trends: new financial instruments (and related agendas) to boost [social impact finance](#); new approaches to combine

[employment, creativity and sustainability in regional development policies](#); the co-creation of [digital solutions](#) and [innovation labs](#) to tackle multidimensional poverty; the intertwined debate on [community based entrepreneurship](#), co-production and platform economy; the RRI framework ([Responsible Research and Innovation](#)) for open, responsible and sustainable research and innovation to improve the societal impact from primary research (especially in the fields of natural science and multi-disciplinary health research); collaborative governance schemes (i.e. [solutionlabs](#)) for sustainable use of resources and the prevention of natural hazards; the introduction of [digital platforms to engage citizens](#) in urban development decision-making related to urban services, public spaces and the configuration of the built environment.

The diffusion of these methodologies seems nowadays outlining an articulated community of practice, which exploits a common language among different sectors, targeting both [public institutions](#) and [corporations](#). These practitioners are bringing together actors and approaches that were hard to match until a few years ago: financial players, banks, civil society organizations, researchers from different disciplines (and not only coming from social sciences backgrounds), startups, public servants, creative freelancers, foundations, cooperatives, NGOs and non-profit organizations, SMEs & MNEs.

To date, we can acknowledge how these methodologies are playing a role in the reorganization of public functions in order to deal with constraints in public spending, triggering [transformative approaches and strategies](#): by applying experimental methods of collaborative design in policy making, adaptive regulation, open innovation management on the allocation of grants and financial resources, introducing impact measurement to support high-risk initiatives where creativity and talent exceed the economic solidity of the proposed financial plans.

A public-private cross-fertilization that derives from a particular historical moment, where the arise of the knowledge economy paradigm is showing both [advantages](#) and “democratic issues” in the light of the public opinion. Where the [crisis](#) of legitimacy of traditional economic policy has become a constant concern for governments and institutional policy makers, in a context that has seen a [setback in the process of European integration](#) and an ever more marked [gap between centers and peripheries](#) in the capacity of receiving benefits and advantages. Notwithstanding the knowledge economy-based is showing a strong interdependence between the blooming of creativity and emergent technologies, at the same time is transforming the way we manage organizations, communities, cities and regional contexts were these create their socio-economic ecosystems. In the long and controversial discussion on the use of these technologies we feel we have only one certain fact: the potential expressed by the fourth industrial revolution is able to significantly modify our individual and collective behaviors, thanks to a multitude of information capable of producing new [collective services](#).

To conclude, we can observe how social innovation is raising the level of its mission: where the effort of organizations

to adopt co-production decision making processes and develop collective intelligence solutions is one of the most promising tools to deal with wicked problems in the contemporary society. To face the rapid change given by this knowledge paradigm this can represent the last call for local governments, civil society and businesses to manage their exclusion from global power dynamics. As these are too often linked to international geopolitical balances (see the [Huawei case](#) between the US and China) and need innovative solutions to find the right “rooms and times of adaptation” [to support inclusion](#) in the transition towards an increasingly digital society.

Within this context, the combination of social innovation-based lens of analysis with an inclusion-driven perspective is the way forward. In this way, we are able to observe how different organizations (public and private) are dealing with wicked problems (from climate change to new solutions to tackle inequalities, ensuring cultural diversity, new citizenship rights and accessible form of education for all), by capitalizing on the intrinsic diversity of increasingly porous societies. In a political and social context where politicians and movements often play cards such as separatism, intolerance, and irreconcilable cultural divisions, diversity and openness are in fact the drivers for better research and more responsive public policies.