

Call for papers: advancing the study of complexity in social innovation and entrepreneurship studies

Social innovation and social entrepreneurship have a strong conceptual affinity with the complexity sciences. Authors have noted the social problems which motivate social innovators and entrepreneurs are often highly complex (Nicholls and Murdock 2012; Zivkovic 2018; French et al. 2020). Others have argued that social innovation and social entrepreneurship themselves should themselves be understood as complex processes, since they often involve multiple actors operating in dynamic and emergent contexts (e.g. Goldstein et al. 2008; 2010; Rhodes and Donnelly-Cox 2008; Swanson and Zhang 2011).

Theories, concepts, and research methods drawing from the complexity sciences therefore seem well placed to advance our understanding of social innovation and social entrepreneurship, and to inform related fields like social enterprise and social finance. However, as has occurred in other disciplines (e.g. Pollitt 2009), scholarship adopting complexity can lack consistency in application, lack relevance by adopting poorly-defined and insular language, and lack clear direction for practice. In addition, complexity theory is far more often adopted to describe social phenomena or criticise existing practice, than used to theorise new and better-performing approaches.

In this special issue, we invite empirical and conceptual papers which explain where and how the integration of complexity-informed ideas can advance theory and practice in social innovation and social entrepreneurship, and related fields like social enterprise and social finance. Below, we outline some key (though not exhaustive) research areas which can advance this research agenda.

- The social innovation and social entrepreneurship literature has drawn upon a range of concepts from the complexity sciences like emergence (Wheatley and Frieze 2009), self-organisation (Tapsell and Woods 2010), performance landscapes (Rhodes and Donnelly-Cox 2008), attractor states (Goldstein et al. 2008). Which concepts from the complexity sciences can most effectively advance theory? How can these studies ensure theoretical consistency and avoid a ‘pick and mix’ approach to the application of concepts from complexity theory? How does a complexity-informed understanding of social innovation and social entrepreneurship differ from other theoretical approaches?
- Complex systems are dynamic and unstable, making the linkage between cause and effect highly non-linear. What does complexity imply for how we understand social innovations to emerge, embed, spread and scale? How does a complexity-informed view of the innovation ‘life-cycle’ differ from other accounts in the literature, and what does it add to these? What can complexity theory tell us about how social innovation and social entrepreneurship are enacted within partnership structures or ecosystems?
- Complexity is attached to a range of research methods and approaches, spanning situated and action-oriented methods like action research and developmental evaluation, dynamic forms of network analysis, case-based methods like Qualitative Comparative Analysis, and computational methods like agent-based modelling. Which complexity-informed research methods are best placed to advance social innovation and social entrepreneurship theories, and what are their methodological implications for scholarship? Can complexity help us to value and validate traditional knowledge and better understand Indigenous social innovation and social entrepreneurship?
- Complexity makes a long-documented challenge to scientific objectivist evaluation methods (Plsek and Greenhalgh 2001). This is particularly significant given the requirements for objectivity and accountability in social financing mechanisms like Social Impact Bonds or

Impact Investing. How can complexity inform how we measure SE and SI, promote these processes or evaluate their social impact? What alternative approaches are available or might be developed to inform a complexity-appropriate model of social finance or social investment?

Enquiries should be directed to the special issue editors: Dr Max French (max.french@northumbria.ac.uk), Dr. Sharon Zivkovic (sharon.zivkovic@unisa.edu.au), Dr. Mary-Lee Rhodes (rhodesml@tcd.ie), and Dr. Katherine McGowan (kmcgowan@mtroyal.ca).

The deadline for full paper submissions is **30th November 2020**. Submitted papers should follow SEJ submission guidelines (http://emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=sej) and be written in good English to be fully considered. The submitted papers will go through the usual double blind review process as per the guidelines of the Journal. Submissions to this special issue must be made through the Social Enterprise Journal's ScholarOne submission system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/sejnl>). When submitting your paper, please ensure that the correct Special Issue is selected from the dropdown menu on page 4 of the submission process. The special issue editors will also be running a special track on Social Innovation & Complexity at the 12th International Social Innovation Research Conference **1st-3rd September 2020**, Sheffield, UK. Those submitting to the special issue are encouraged to also submit to this session, although this is not compulsory.

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