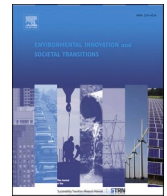




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## Transformative social innovation in, of and by the city: Beyond mission-driven policy rationales

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### ABSTRACT

Transformative social innovation policy encompasses more than the idea that policy defines directions about the expected outcomes of innovation. It also promotes new forms of governance and rationales based on more intersectional and decentralized processes of innovation. Such policy has thus to be studied primarily as a perpetual process of redefinition, rather than as an end in itself to achieve societal missions.

Through an examination of the 'G'innove' program implemented by the City of Geneva, we explore how a new social innovation policy can stimulate new types of innovation projects in the city, how these projects can change the established policy rationales of the city, and how innovation policy and policy innovation intertwine in the transformation of society by the city. Beyond this exemplary policy, we attempt to propose complementarities between transformations in, of and by the city in order to promote new policy agendas and rethink their underlying rationales.

### 1. Introduction

Over the past 40 years, innovation policy has mainly focused on technological progress, competition and economic competitiveness as drivers of change in and of production and consumption systems (Tukker et al., 2008; Weber and Rohrer, 2012). However, since the 2000s, new approaches have emerged, emphasizing current societal 'grand challenges', such as climate change or global social inequalities that policymakers want to address through innovation policy (Diecks et al., 2018; Kuhlmann and Rip, 2018). Beyond grand science and technology programs aimed at solving societal problems, mission-driven innovation policies that define strategic public priorities and societal goals have to become challenge-driven 'transformers' of new ways of producing, consuming and living (Larue, 2021).

In this vision, a new policy approach is gaining momentum. It promotes a shift from a competitive paradigm based on market selection to a transformative paradigm that recognizes and enhances social innovation as an additional key driver of system change. Social innovation is seen as contributing to institutional change in a specific social-material context 'changing social relations, involving new ways of doing, knowing, framing and organizing' (Pel et al., 2020, p. 1). This broadened focus on social innovation has moved the scope and issues of traditional and technology-based innovation policy. Social change is at the heart of collaborations that are not limited to the 'triple helix' interactions between research, industry and government. NGOs, civil society organizations and citizens are also considered key players of innovation policy designed to support the experimentation of grassroots solutions and the

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creation of new narratives, which in turn can lead to institutional changes in which policy instruments themselves are embedded (Avelino et al., 2019).

In this paper, we propose to view contemporary mission-driven innovation policy through the overarching notion of transformative social innovation policy, which encompasses more than the idea that policy should be more directional about the expected outcomes of innovation. It should also promote new forms of governance and rationales based on more intersectional and decentralized processes of innovation. We then argue that such a policy has to be studied primarily as a perpetual process of redefinition, rather than as an end in itself to achieve societal missions.

Beyond merely defining missions, transformative social innovation policy is therefore understood as involving co-evolutive dynamics between innovation policy and policy innovation that underlie change in established social practices and institutions as a whole. With social innovation playing a crucial role, this co-evolution embeds in multi-scalar geographies of policy concerns, place-based solutions and local empowerment (Coenen et al., 2012; Diecks et al., 2018; Loorbach et al., 2020). In these geographies, cities are prominent contexts for the development of urban policies that engage with transformations *in*, *of* and *by* the city (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021).

Using the case of G’innove, a pioneering social innovation policy implemented by the City of Geneva since 2016, this paper examines these three dimensions of urban transformation. It explores (i) how a new social innovation policy can stimulate new types of innovation projects in the city, (ii) how these projects can change the established policy rationales of the city, and (iii) how innovation policy and policy innovation intertwine in the transformation of society by the city.

Alongside these questions, we show how G’innove promotes more directionality, intersectionality and decentrality to stimulating new types of innovation projects that can seed transformation in the city. We then illustrate how these projects are in tension with different policy rationales to promote an upscaled transformation of and by the city. Beyond this particular case, the paper attempts a first heuristic step towards further exploring complementarities between transformations *in*, *of* and *by* the city in order to promote new policy agendas and rethink their underlying rationales.

## 2. Exploring transformative social innovation policy and its (urban) geography

Embracing the scope and issues of transformative innovation is not only a matter of new innovation policy, but also of policy innovation implying new forms of governance and rationales (Flanagan et al., 2011; Huguenin and Jeannerat, 2017). Innovation policy is understood as the objectives, means, structures and infrastructures (Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018; Mazzucato et al., 2020) defined by public authorities to promote and support the emergence and development of innovation projects. Policy innovation is understood as the new practices, rules and rationales (Flanagan et al., 2011; Raffaelli and Glynn, 2015; Wanzenböck et al., 2020) adopted by policy makers that challenge established frames of action in order to achieve public missions.

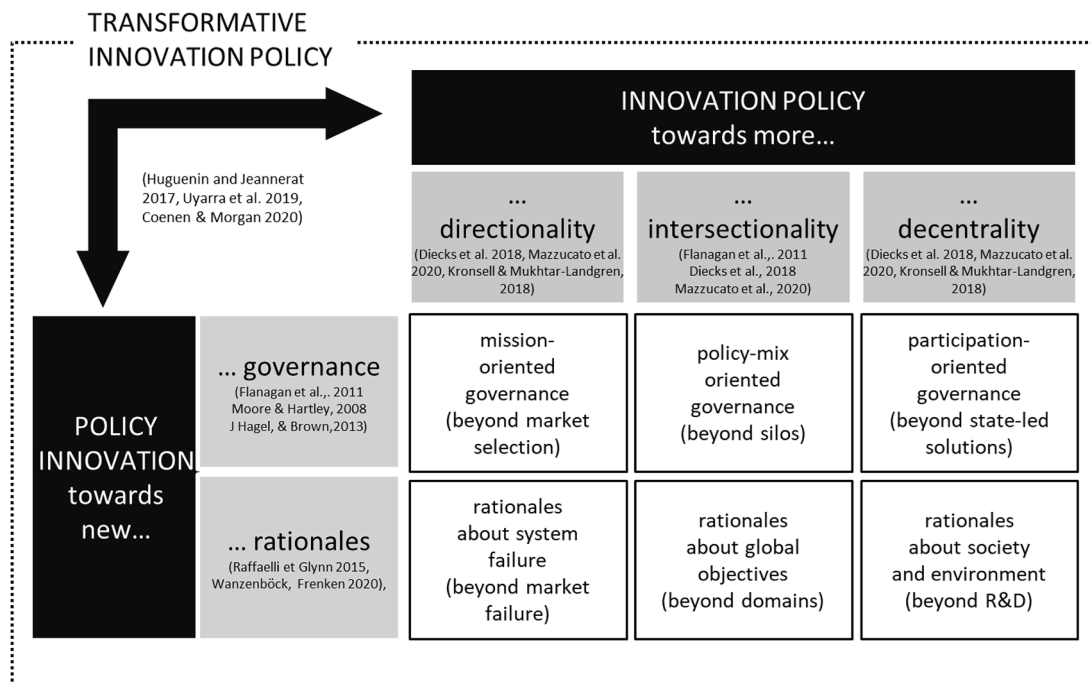


Fig. 1. Innovation policy and policy innovation in motion.

Source: authors’ own elaboration.

### 2.1. More directionality, intersectionality and decentrality

The aim of the paper is not to repeat already existing systematic literature reviews (see, for example, Köhler et al., 2019), but to propose a synthetic reading of contemporary transition studies that argue for the need to rethink innovation policy paradigms to address contemporary societal challenges. We propose to synthesize their arguments around three main guiding principles: directionality, intersectionality and decentrality. These guiding principles touch upon new policy governance as well as new policy rationales that characterize transformative social innovation policy in a context of democratized change (Fig. 1).

*Directionality* emphasizes that innovation policy governance does not only seed innovation to and for markets, but also steers innovation in the direction of politically defined social missions (Diecks et al., 2018; Mazzucato et al., 2020). Directionality concerns the policy means used to support projects, as well as the selection and impact criteria used to evaluate them, and is particularly salient at the moment, when grand challenges require decisive and rapid action in order to promote institutional change (Hagel and Brown, 2013). In this context, mission-oriented governance is not limited to technological fields and is not simply the result of market selection alone. An innovation can be considered ineffective if it achieves market success but does not add social value (Diecks et al., 2018).

*Intersectionality* follows on from directionality. To address complex societal problems, transformative innovation policies need to be more inclusive and cross-cutting (Diecks et al., 2018; Mazzucato et al., 2020; Grillitsch et al., 2023). They need to move beyond traditional silos to foster synergies between sectors, disciplines and fields of action, and to promote a holistic understanding of problems and their interconnected solutions (Domanski et al., 2020; Hagel and Brown, 2013; Mazzucato et al., 2020). For innovation policy, this not only implies a policy-mix governance to build collective action and frameworks across different policy sectors with different logics (Flanagan et al., 2011). It also means enabling rapid and reflexive learning between different bodies of knowledge and perspectives in order to imagine systemic solutions adapted to complex challenges (Flanagan et al., 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2020).

Hand in hand with intersectionality is *decentrality*. As societal grand challenges take different forms in different contexts, innovation policy governance needs to provide more space for a diversity of voices and initiatives in the definition of problems and solutions that are rooted in their contexts of action. Transformative social innovation policy cannot provide one-size-fits-all solutions to problems that are not the same everywhere, but requires a move beyond state-led governance to foster the decentralized participation of diverse stakeholders (Diecks et al., 2018; Hill and Lynn, 2005; Moore and Hartley, 2008). This participatory approach enables the full use of creative potential and collective expertise to address challenges and seize opportunities in a more sustainable way. In this view, public authorities are seen as promoters, facilitators or partners, rather than prescribers of top-down solutions (Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018).

### 2.2. Towards new policy rationales

The enhanced directionality, intersectionality and decentrality of transformative social innovation policy imply new rationales as well (Diecks et al., 2018; Pel et al., 2020; Avelino et al., 2019).

First, political directionality in innovation policy is leading to a rethinking of the innovation rationales that justify public interventions and assess the public returns of innovation. Traditional innovation policy rationales address the need to overcome potential market failures inherent in new, emerging technologies and evaluate the public return of innovation through market returns and growth that increase the general economic well-being of society (income and employment) (Weber and Rohracher, 2012). Now, however, there is a call for a shift from this growth-based logic to one that prioritizes a project's transformative capacity over its competitive capacity (Mazzucato et al., 2020; Loorbach et al., 2020; Diecks et al., 2018). From this perspective, an innovation is not one that finds a market, but one that contributes to systemic change. For this, public support and evaluation of innovation returns must be approached from a systems failure perspective, considering the cumulative and interdependent dimension of social, technological, cultural, societal and institutional innovations in transformative change (Weber and Rohracher 2012; Bleda and del Río 2013).

Second, greater intersectionality requires new rationales for the overarching goals of innovation. Public policies are usually conceived in isolation from each other, with specific sectoral objectives and rationales. This often leads to conflicts and possible misalignment between policies when a policy mix is required for cross-cutting public tasks (Alkemade et al., 2011; Flanagan et al., 2011). But for transformative innovation, new meta-rationales about the role of public administration and the social purpose of innovation must be found in order to enable policy cooperation beyond the specific motivations and purposes of different departments. These new rationales need to be established over the long term, not only to drive one-off intersectoral projects, but also to cumulate and capitalize on the solutions and results of transformative social innovation policies.

Third, decentrality requires a redefinition of the role of the state in broad-based innovation processes and in participatory cooperation with civil society (Wanzenböck et al., 2020). It requires a move beyond innovation policy rationales that focus primarily on research and development laboratories and economic entrepreneurship, in order to anchor innovation in its social and environmental context. In this view of innovation, public authorities are not limited to the role of setting incentive frameworks for new technologies and market-based innovations to be consumed, but are seen as co-players in the development, public legitimation, appropriation and diffusion of alternative solutions and practices.

### 2.3. Exploring transformative social innovation policy and policy innovation in, of and by the city

Transformative social innovation policy is thus at the core of co-evolving social innovation policy and policy innovation based on enhanced principles of directionality, intersectionality and decentrality that lead to a rethinking of policy governance and rationales (Fig. 2). This co-evolution is embedded in a multiscale governance that is not without tensions in promoting effective transformations

within and across multiple spaces (Coenen and Morgan, 2020; Tödting et al., 2022; Wanzenböck et al., 2020; Wanzenböck and Frenken, 2020).

On the one hand, the experimental governance promoted by transformative policy is locally anchored in specific social, cultural and material contexts. These contexts provide constraints but also opportunities for exploring new place-based solutions with transformative potential (Binz et al., 2016; Butzin and Terstriep, 2022; Flanagan and Goods, 2022; Grillitsch et al., 2023; Jeannerat and Crevoisier, 2022; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2012). On the other hand, this transformative potential can only be realized through governance that extends beyond individual local contexts, connecting different places and operating on various territorial scales (Bulkeley et al., 2018; Roebke et al., 2022).

In this perspective, cities are considered as privileged environments for transformative social innovation policies. They are seen as incubators for experimenting with local solutions while linking these solutions to global networks and frameworks. Current research highlights three main axes of transformation: *in*, *of* and *by* the city (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021).

Transformative innovation *in* the city emphasizes the configurations of actors, the interactions between players and the framing of problems that are at stake in urban ecosystems and that drive sustainability solutions (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021; Knox, 2005; Mayer and Knox, 2010). Focus is on the prominence of urban sustainability problems and on the particularly innovative urban conditions that facilitate explorative changes (Carvalho and Lazzarini, 2018). This perspective primarily addresses issues for new urban innovation policy designs that aim to foster experimental solutions that are not technologically focused but socially and locally anchored across varieties of economic enterprises, civil initiatives and public actions (Grillitsch et al., 2023; Hidalgo et al., 2018; Loorbach et al., 2020).

Transformative innovation *of* the city highlights the more permanent and systemic changes that occur at the level of urban social networks, infrastructures and institutions. Policy innovation is particularly at stake as it institutionalizes new public visions, practices and frameworks for future innovation and systemic changes. In this perspective, urban transformative innovation policy is addressed as a learning process in which urban policy rationales are reconsidered and transformed in place-based experimentation (Frantzeskaki et al., 2018; Loorbach et al., 2015; Winden and Carvalho, 2019).

Transformative innovation *by* the city stresses the role that cities play in global changes beyond the boundaries of specific urban contexts. In this perspective, urban transformative innovation policy relates not only to the internal dynamics of cities but also to the external links they maintain with their national state, and with other cities and regions. Transformative policy is thus also promoting these links as opportunities to diffuse sustainable solutions towards other places as well as to access new solutions from outside. These links can also contribute to national and transitional city movements that have the potential to influence changes on the scale of state and interstate policies (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021; McCann, 2011).

These three dimensions of urban transformation—in, of and by the city—have been the focus of specific research and conceptualizations. However, they are typically addressed separately rather than in a complementary manner (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021). A critical research challenge now is to explore how these transformations can be commonly promoted through enhanced principles of directionality, intersectionality, and decentrality, as well as through the emergence of new forms of governance and rationales implied by a transformative innovation paradigm. The next section attempts to take a first heuristic step in this direction through the case study of G’innove, a policy implemented by the City of Geneva to promote the transition to sustainability through social innovation.

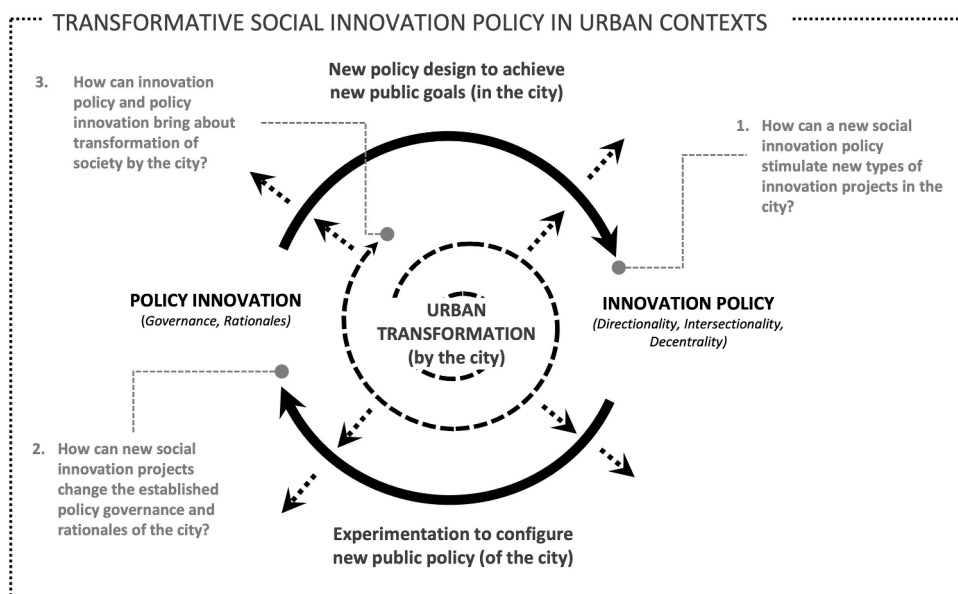


Fig. 2. Transformative social innovation policy in, of and by the city.

Source: authors’ own elaboration.

### 3. G'innove: exploring a transformative innovation policy in urban contexts

In 2016, the City of Geneva launched the G'innove program to encourage projects initiated by companies, not-for-profit organizations and individuals seeking to contribute with their enterprise to sustainability transition. To finance this program, a joint innovation fund was created using parts of the budgets previously allocated to different departments to implement public measures aimed at achieving sustainability goals.

This pioneering policy in Switzerland was designed in line with the principles of directionality, intersectionality and decentrality that characterize transformative innovation policy (2.1). Giving prominence to social innovation, it defines the expected public outcomes of innovation (directionality) by stating the mission 'to have an impact on the daily lives of citizens and on the quality of life in an urban environment' (translated from article 2 paragraph 1 of the G'innove social innovation program regulations). Managed by the Departments of Finance, Environment and Housing, in collaboration with the Departments of Culture and Digital Transition and of Social Cohesion and Solidarity, the program also seeks to promote cross-sectoral collaborations (intersectionality) and solutions developed by social actors in their specific urban contexts (decentrality).

Based on an in-depth case study, the following pages discuss the transformative potential and limitations of a social innovation policy such as G'innove. In line with the arguments already outlined, three guiding questions are used to examine how this social innovation policy may or may not contribute to transformative change in, of and by the city (Fig. 2):

- How can a new social innovation policy stimulate new types of innovation projects in the city?
- How can new social innovation projects change the established policy governance and rationales of the city?
- How can innovation policy and policy innovation bring about transformation of society by the city?

To address and discuss these questions, we have utilized, with permission, the qualitative data and primary analyses from a study commissioned by the City of Geneva between April and October 2021 to assess the G'innove policy after five years.

#### 3.1. Research Method

The study is based on an in-depth examination of the G'innove implementation and governance as well as of its funded projects since 2016. The methodology employed a mixed-method approach, gathering empirical data through document analysis, online surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a workshop with three levels (Table 1).

At the policy level, policy reports, user guides, web information and formal regulations provided by the municipality were analysed in order to gain a picture of the particular types of governance (organization, rules and tools) and rationales promoted by G'innove. In addition, there were four semi-structured interviews and a focus group with those in charge of implementing the program. This empirical material enables recognition of a political agenda to foster sustainability transition through bottom-up social innovations and to transcend silos, promoting innovation within the public administration. It provided a better understanding of governance processes and existing tensions between established public rationales within and between different departments (3.4; Fig. 4).

**Table 1**  
Summary of the research method.

Data method	Types of source	Purpose of investigation	Results
<b>Document analysis</b>	Policy reports, user guides, promotional webpages and formal regulations	To understand the objectives of the policy and the particular governance rationales that underlie the policy	Recognition of a political agenda to foster sustainability transition through bottom-up social innovations. Recognition of a political agenda to transcend silos and to innovate within the municipality.
	Project reports and webpages	To identify the types of project supported (objectives, initiators and partners, and key actions)	Identification of flagship projects to study in depth and to use as teaching cases. Recognition of G'innove as a key source of funding and legitimacy for initiating projects and facilitating further partnerships
<b>Online Survey</b>	Successful project applicants	To understand the projects' objectives and development vision as well as the main challenges in developing the projects	Recognition of G'innove limitations to support long-term development of projects with market failures and hybrid enterprises.
<b>Semi-structural interviews and focus groups</b>	12 semi-structured interviews with project leaders lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours	To gain an in-depth understanding of the aims, problems and processes at stake in the future development of the projects	Identification of 4 ideal-types of projects with different development challenges, purposes and impacts on sustainability transition (Fig. 3).
	4 semi-structured interviews 1 focus group with policy implementers	To understand the governance processes and existing tensions between established public rationales within and between different departments	Recognition of the intersectional G'innove's limitations of public management Identification of different policy rationales and possible tensions between them (Fig. 4)
<b>Workshop</b>	1 workshop with policymakers and stakeholders of the ecosystem	To understand the social innovation ecosystem and the challenges it faces; to identify possible futures for G'innove.	Mapping of the urban social innovation ecosystem Identification of a policy gap to support scale-up transformations through social innovation.

**Source:** authors' own elaboration.

At the project level, a preliminary document analysis of project reports and webpages (where these existed) was carried out in order to identify the types of project that had been supported by G'innove (including their fundamental objectives, initiators and partners, and key activities). A standardized questionnaire was then sent to the successful project applicants, with a response rate of 70%. The documents and survey enabled an assessment of the main contributions of G'innove to the projects' development and the identification of exemplary projects. In addition, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers of exemplary projects in order to gain insights into governance issues, visions and development challenges. Particular market failures and hybrid enterprises were also identified as a reason for difficulty in sustaining long-term development. Through this research focus on projects, four ideal-types of projects could be depicted (3.2; Fig. 3).

At the level of the social innovation ecosystem, interviews with project managers, innovation facilitators and policy implementers enabled an understanding of the specific context in which the G'innove program and its projects were launched and developed (3.3). Finally, a workshop was organized with policy makers, stakeholders and key actors of urban social innovation, such as elected representatives, members of the local administration, members of the Chamber of Social Solidarity Economy, representatives of the city's industrial services and project promoters. This workshop provided a better insight into how the social innovation ecosystem can be supported in the long term and how G'innove or other complementary policies can be developed in the future (3.5).

The following subsections first present the typology developed during the evaluation of the G'innove projects and then highlight key findings of the general case study in relation to the guiding questions above.

### 3.2. Different project types with different transformative scope and issues

In the years 2016 and 2017, G'innove was initiated in a fast-moving ecosystem of diverse institutions and initiatives seeking to promote sustainability-oriented innovation. Interviews and workshops with intermediaries involved in launching and supporting projects reveal a booming ecosystem. On the one hand, several initiatives were flourishing around the international organizations seated in Geneva to support the sustainable development goals of the United Nations, and regional antennas of international movements such as B Lab or Impact Hub were starting to initiate various programs to ideate and encourage sustainability-oriented enterprises.

On the other hand, more local-based initiatives supported by public authorities or public services (e.g. SIG, the Geneva water and energy provider company) were promoting, for instance, a competition to encourage creative enterprises or, later, a specific crowd-funding platform to support entrepreneurial projects with social impact. In addition to these institutional supports for innovation, various social innovation projects were also in development along with social movements such as the Chamber of Social Solidarity Economy.

These initiatives developed independently from each other, but within an ecosystem that was mainly based on and activated by interpersonal relations, often involving the same actors (project initiators and supporters) in more than one initiative. In this context,

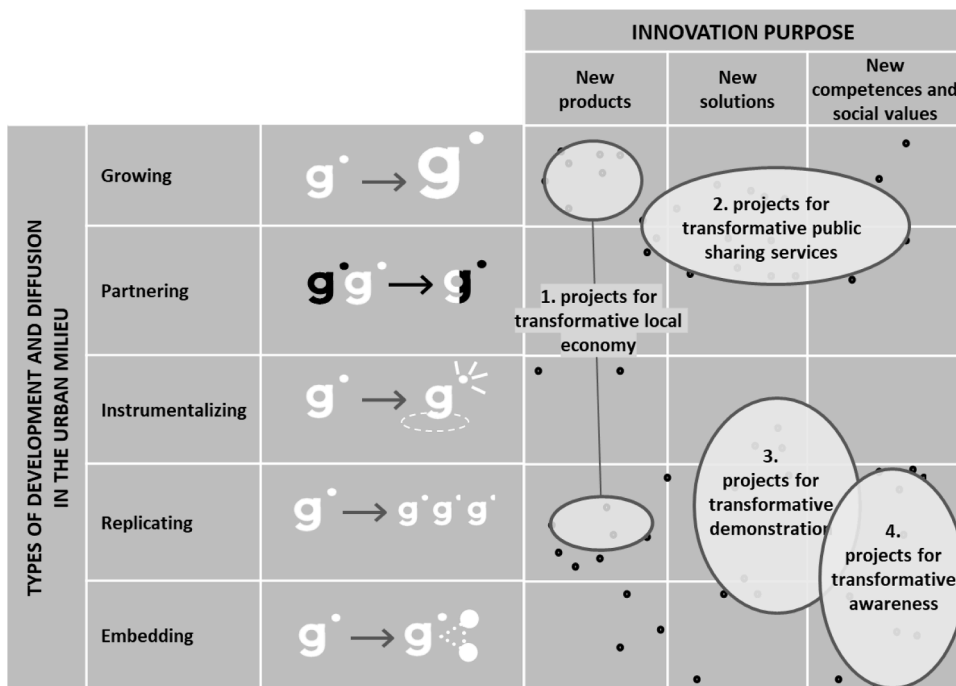


Fig. 3. Analytical grid and typology of projects. Source: authors' own elaboration based on Loorbach et al. (2020).

G'innove provided a new financial opportunity to bring latent projects to life.

Between 2016 and 2021, G'innove funded 57 projects of different types, including studies, events, training, pilot projects and entrepreneurial ventures. These projects were at various stages, from initial ideas to fully grown initiatives, and covered a range of topics like consumption, mobility, food, equality, work, biodiversity and education. Their transformative scope and issues were consequently very diverse.

To aggregate the main transformative characters of these projects, a typology has been drawn up along two analytical dimensions. The first dimension is the type of social innovation they promote, such as new products, services, or values. The second dimension is their potential for transformation through internal growth, external partnerships, showcase instrumentalization, replication, or embedding into existing institutions (Loorbach et al. 2020). Four ideal project types with different scope and issues have been derived from this analysis (Fig. 3).

First, *projects for transformative local economy* (type 1) are mainly aimed at developing new economic activities that promote circular or short-circuit supply chains to reduce carbon footprint and to favour proximate relations between small businesses and citizens. This type includes, for example, food cooperatives run by the local community, urban agriculture businesses and recycling schemes.

Second, *projects for transformative public sharing services* (type 2) provide new online platforms or collaborative spaces that enable the mutualization of resources, promoting sharing and helping people develop new skills through participation. These projects include, for instance, a FabLab (a workshop with shared digital and small-scale manufacturing resources) or a collaborative repair workshop. These social innovations are presented by project leaders as new public services that cannot be provided through a market mechanism; organic growth and partnering with other cognate projects are the main expected mode of development.

Third, *projects for transformative demonstration* (type 3) set up mechanisms to experiment with and communicate new solutions and ways of doing things from a sustainability perspective. These innovations inspire new practical activities and transform existing ones, and include a festival of hackathons or an urban aquaponics farm. These projects have a strong emphasis on media and events, and are at the interface of communication and breakthrough innovation.

Fourth, *projects for transformative awareness* (type 4) have as their main objective to raise public awareness of societal issues related to sustainability. These projects enable the recognition of certain public problems and have a strong educational component. Projects include, for example, new pedagogical activities for pupils or new concepts of kindergarten, such as forest schools, where most learning takes place outside. This kind of project also relates to the second type of social innovation, as the concern for education has a fundamental public dimension that is not market viable and needs to be embedded in existing institutions in order to develop in the long term.

These four project types identified during the study can serve as intermediate results to be reflected upon and further discussed in relation to the research questions and the potential transformations in, of and by the city.

### 3.3. G'innove as consolidator of an ecosystem of transformation IN the city

The typology of projects shows that G'innove stimulates initiatives effectively, with different objectives and transformative potential. The online survey shows that 47% of project initiators believe that their project would not have been possible without G'innove. Survey responses and interviews also indicate that G'innove encouraged people to turn dormant ideas into action by offering unique financial incentives and public recognition for their projects. To illustrate this, one project leader explains that, for instance, G'innove's funding not only enabled him to complete his project but also gave him the credibility to attract other sponsors.

During the interviews, most of the project initiators and ecosystem stakeholders claimed that G'innove had relied on this ecosystem from the beginning, funding different types of projects and involving schools, universities, civil organizations and local entrepreneurs in different ways (see 3.2). In addition, G'innove has played a consolidating role by promoting projects seen to be of potential benefit to the ecosystem. First, it allowed the ecosystem to evolve and regenerate by feeding it with new projects generated outside the traditional circle of 'serial' social entrepreneurs. Second, it accelerated the development of projects incubated at other stages of the ecosystem, contributing further to this evolution and regeneration. This is seen, for instance, in the funding of projects incubated or supported by other local institutions (e.g. hackathons, competitions or crowd-funding campaigns). Third, G'innove has also supported the establishment of strategic intermediaries facilitating collective creativity and innovation, as seen for instance in the support brought to the *Open Geneva* online platform and its festival of hackathons, which stimulates the ideation of new projects.

G'innove has thus played a determinant role in the consolidation of an ecosystem of transformation *in* the city based on the generation and regeneration of projects. Nevertheless, the study of the project development showed that their impact was constrained by the challenges of sustaining them over time. While most initiatives continued beyond the period financed by G'innove, their initiators all dealt with crucial challenges to maintain and consolidate their projects in the long term. These challenges are inherent to any enterprise and start-up innovation.

However, G'innove social innovation projects were particularly precarious because of their hybrid nature between market and non-market objectives, and between voluntary and paid work. A first problem is financial and human sustainability (and staff burnout). By nature, most of these projects are public services or non-market offerings. They rely heavily on volunteers, and so often lack sufficient financial and human resources, leading to precarious conditions for the project team. Handing over the project to a new project leader or team is also generally difficult as many projects are path-dependent on the original strategy and identity given by their initiators. A second problem is related to wider communication and influence. Good communication is essential in order to provide greater visibility to projects, but this requires a lot of resources and skills that project initiators often lack. A third problem is institutional continuity. Mostly perceived as providing a new public offering, most of the projects did not manage to get formal recognition from public services and thus to receive long-term funding from the state. Some rare exceptions include partnerships with schools and

universities that enabled some projects to keep going within the framework of established education programs.

For project initiators, the criteria for assessing the success of transformative social innovation must not be limited to indicators of market viability and growth. While this approach can work reasonably well for the first project type (projects for transformative local economies), the development and transformative aspects of the other project types are difficult to assess in this vision. They require a broader interpretation and assessment to meaningfully capture their transformative social innovation impact. For example, a project's ability to inspire and seed new projects, or to integrate into existing organizations and institutions, can also be considered a success. In this sense, project initiators see G'innove not only as a financial tool, but also as a supportive framework that has helped them to (re) structure their projects at different stages and has given them the legitimacy to find new partners for further development.

The policy challenge therefore remains how these projects can provide more general solutions to the public problem of the city and thereby teach a broader transformation of the city itself. This teaching could then inspire further transformations of the city, not only to other cities but also to higher levels of government, creating a ripple effect for wider societal change.

G'innove managers also assume that market viability and growth must not be the only indicators used to assess the success of projects, as was the case at the beginning of the program. They consider that in many cases projects are essentially 'non-competitive' and should be publicly evaluated and supported as such. However, such an assumption is not without fundamental tensions with the established policy rationales of the City.

### 3.4. Challenging the established policy rationales OF the city to upscale transformation

The G'innove projects illustrates some potentialities of the urban context of Geneva to consolidate in various ways an ecosystem of transformation of the city. First, an embryonic transformation of the city may be found in the funding of 'La MACO', an umbrella organization that brings together a library of tools and objects, a recycling laboratory and a FabLab already supported by G'innove. Second, a shared urban culture also facilitates a diffusion of concepts and solutions, as in the example of food cooperatives. Third, the density and diversity of institutions like schools, universities and civil organizations offer opportunities for projects to be continued within the framework of organizations that have been established for a long time, as seen, for instance, in the integration of training projects within public education programs, and in new recycling solutions financed by the local authority and working hand in hand with broader urban waste management services.

However, as highlighted above, upscaled transformations of the city are constrained by the difficulties of sustaining and developing projects in the long term. On the one hand, these difficulties lie in the non-market, public or hybrid nature of social innovation projects (Bauwens et al., 2020)(Doherty et al., 2014). On the other hand, these innovation challenges are also policy challenges at the nexus of different rationales. In the case of G'innove, several rationales are in tension (Fig. 4).

A first rationale behind the financial support of projects is that of competitive tendering, which is at the core of public procurement policy. According to this rationale, business companies delivering public services (management of waste, water, energy, transports, infrastructure, etc.) must be taken on following a market-based procedure based on competitive selection among different possible providers. As emphasized above, however, G'innove was open to both economic and social organizations. Yet providing funds to an innovative economic organization without a public call for tender was legally problematic for the municipality of Geneva, in order to

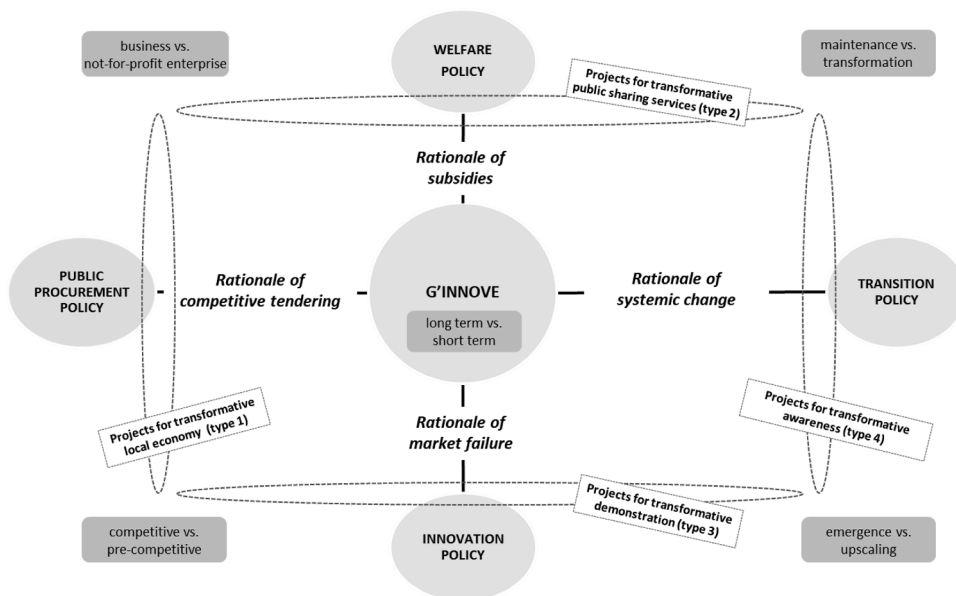


Fig. 4. G'innove in tension with established rationales of public policy.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

justify their financial support, because this could be considered a public intervention on liberal market competition. This tension is particularly evident in projects for transformative local economy (type 1).

Another traditional way of justifying public financial support of for-profit social enterprises is to invoke a rationale of subsidies for not-for-profit activities that is inherent to traditional welfare policy dedicated, for instance, to cultural, social or educational activities. However, the hybrid nature of many social innovation projects often challenges this rationale as it is not always easy to formally distinguish between profit-making and not-for-profit enterprises. Thus, many cooperatives with social goals often fail to be recognized as potentially profitable enterprises by private investors and are denied access to public subsidies because of their legal for-profit status. Projects for transformative public sharing services and for transformative public sharing services (types 1 and 2) highlight this tension particularly well.

A third rationale used to justify financial support for social enterprises has to do with market failure. In classical innovation policy, public funding for innovative enterprises is justified by the fact that an enterprise is not yet ready for market and cannot start up without public support. This means that funding is usually granted to projects considered 'precompetitive'. A similar justification was used in G'innove to support community-run food cooperatives. These shops were not considered potential competitors in the established grocery market, but incubators of new, sustainable modes of production, consumption and collaboration for a possible future market that was not yet established. Again, this tension appears clearly in projects for transformative local economy and for transformative demonstration (types 1 and 3).

However, the distinction between competitive and precompetitive innovation is not entirely satisfying when it comes to justifying support for new food cooperatives that have been set up more recently (as these may compete with previous ones). To justify support for such projects, a fourth rationale was used, this one based on systemic change, with a grammar of transition policy. Public support was provided for projects that educated, demonstrated and/or had the potential to be replicated, in order to initiate new practices and change institutional structures. This fourth rationale, however, in its emphasis on change, appears to be in tension with the rationale of welfare policy, which is more inclined towards the long-term maintenance of social, cultural and educational public services. One can particularly observe this tension in projects for transformative public sharing services, for transformative demonstration and for transformative awareness (types 2, 3 and 4).

While the tensions between the highlighted policy rationales seem inescapable, it is essential to make them visible to manage and tame them.

### 3.5. Transformations in and of the city as ingredients for a transformation BY the city

The G'innove case illustrates in various ways the challenge of designing and implementing a transformative social innovation policy based on established policy rationales that distinguish clear dichotomies such as public or market provision, for-profit or not-for-profit activities, projects or structures. It also highlights the limitations of an innovation perspective based primarily on projects, which have little direct influence on the structures and institutions in which they are embedded. This project-based approach also implies limitations on transformation by the city.

Hosting major international organizations such as the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and many others, 'International Geneva' aims to be an influential hub for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) around the world (geneve-int.ch). Yet while this ecosystem promoting global transformation by the city of Geneva is developing close to the local social innovation ecosystem of G'innove, very few connections have been made so far.

A few projects can also be seen as the beginning of a transformation by the city. Examples that have inspired similar projects in other regions of Switzerland include the *La Manivelle* library of tools and objects, the recycling laboratory *Materium* and the food cooperatives. Another emblematic example is the *Open Geneva* hackathon festival, which has opened up to a worldwide community through online facilities. An edition of this festival has even been organized in the Chinese city of Tsinghua in 2020. However, apart from supporting the Open Geneva online platform, G'innove has had very little influence on these diffusions.

While most interviewees (both project initiators and supporters) agree that some projects may develop in the long run and seed future upscaled changes, they also feel that G'innove itself is not able to trigger broader systemic transformation. They argue that this challenge cannot – or maybe should not – be tackled by G'innove in its current framework. According to one policy maker, although G'innove has an agile management style, it is still very dependent on a specific department and sticks to 'old-fashioned' ways of making policy. For some project initiators, however, the problem lies elsewhere: 'G'innove is a valuable aid at the start, but what happens afterwards when it comes to sustaining our actions?' To promote more transformation of and by the city, new policy instruments must be developed on the basis of new policy rationales, in order to handle and overcome the tensions highlighted above.

During the final workshop, one interviewee put forward the idea of an additional policy, complementary to G'innove, which could be called 'Ge'transit'. This policy would be a policy of consolidation rather than innovation. In order to meet the challenges ahead, transformative social innovation policies must therefore accept that policymakers need to go beyond the logic of innovation to think about how to take projects to the next level. This argument was based on the observation that transformative issues related to upscaled transformation cannot be fundamentally achieved by the current G'innove approach and, more generally, by a sole (social) innovation policy rationale.

These examples illustrate the fundamental tensions highlighted earlier. The short-term, demonstrative projects supported by G'innove does not change the policy rationales for sustaining the transformative demonstrations that they have initiated in the long term. Within our analytical framework, we argue that transformation *in* and *of* the city are both complementary and necessary ingredients for transformation *by* the city. This highlights the need for deeper, systemic changes beyond short-lived showcases, as

illustrated in particular by projects for transformative demonstration (type 3).

#### 4. Conclusive discussion: beyond mission-driven innovation rationales

G'innove was seen by most project initiators as a pathbreaking policy able to promote a broader view of innovation, to address a larger range of change initiatives and to finance strategic activities that would not otherwise have been supported. Public actors, meanwhile, found that G'innove's ability to break with their usual sectoral practices had the potential to inspire further cross-department policies, even within the context of traditional sectoral policies. This perspective highlights G'innove as an experimental policy that could be used more broadly as a laboratory of public action to reflect further research policy issues.

Returning to the guiding principles of directionality, decentrality and intersectionality called for to enhance transformative social innovation policy, our analysis shows that these elements are interrelated and in tension in the transformation in, of and by the city. For instance, defining public directions for social innovation projects involves promoting decentralization to define the concrete local problem to be addressed with innovation (Wanzenböck et al., 2020). As showed in the analysis of G'innove, this decentralization can foster transformations in the city by creating, stimulating and empowering ecosystems of stakeholders willing to develop different type of projects that initiating, testing or demonstrating new economic practices as well as new public offerings.

Directionality poses a significant challenge for intersectionality within public administration due to the varying objectives and priorities of different departments. For example, a policy manager involved in social cohesion policy pointed out that many innovation projects are labeled 'social' simply because they bring people together, without addressing concrete social problems. This illustrates the potential conflicting interests and policy rationales at play in defining public missions for the systemic transformation of the city. It also suggests that principles of intersectionality and decentrality could weaken the state's leading role in defining overarching public missions for innovation and transformation by the city. This aligns with arguments that highlight the risk of social innovation becoming a mere palliative for state disengagement, allowing the state to absolve itself of its responsibilities (Avelino et al., 2019).

Cities and their policies must 'dare to reinvent themselves' (*Oser se réinventer*), as the G'innove slogan suggests. And they must do so to bring about the radical change that is needed – now more than ever – to transform society beyond small-scale projects and innovation policies. To this end, transformative social innovation policy needs to be approached as a matter of new specific policy rationales that move past a mission-driven innovation paradigm, as well as a policy mix of established policy rationales (Uyarra and Flanagan, 2021).

Beyond G'innove, our study shows that transformative social innovation policy is not to be limited to promoting urban transformation on the basis of rationales inherited from traditional innovation policy, which focuses on start-up projects and market scale-up as drivers of change. While such an approach can stimulate transformations in the city, it can only go so far, because new rationales are needed to provide policy support to systemic transformations of and by the city.

To do so, our analysis calls for future research that also explores how the transformation of the city can lead to the reconsideration of new policy rationales in order to strengthen the mutual transformation of and by the city through dynamics of learning and (de) institutionalization (Fuenfschilling et al., 2019; Raven et al., 2019). In this view, geographies of mission should not be reduced to only the places where missions are defined and concretely realized through specific innovations. They should also provide an understanding of how place-based rationales advocate certain directions for mission and guide the way to achieving them, and how these rationales can be changed to better address contemporary grand challenges.

*During the preparation of this work the author(s) used DeepL and ChatGPT in order to correct and improve the language of the paper. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.*

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Hugues Jeannerat:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Pauline Lavanchy:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Hugues Jeannerat and Pauline Lavanchy report that financial and administrative support was provided by the City of Geneva. Permission to use their commissioned research was granted by the City of Geneva. In this research, the researchers were granted scientific independence to conduct interviews and ask questions, to ensure the anonymity of the data collected, and to interpret the results.

#### Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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