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Policy Responses to the Healthy Aging Challenge: Confronting Hybridity with Social Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Tackling the issue of healthy aging in society is complex. It requires an interdisciplinary perspective and different forms of innovation. This article provides a commentary on the role of innovation policy in addressing healthy aging, particularly in the UK context. We argue that the wide range of economic activities related to healthy aging is part of a hybrid domain rather than a single sector. This represents a new generation of innovation policy for healthy aging which prioritizes understanding how different actors can be connected to support a spectrum of types of innovation which will contribute to providing better goods, services, and practices for older people. We explore social innovation as it relates to hybrid domains such as healthy aging and discuss the role of place in creating policy which generates both societal and market value. We recommend that policymakers use these concepts to build a better understanding of the economies that are evolving around healthy aging and where opportunities exist to better conceptualize, connect, and support actors, initiatives, and places to optimize economic potential and social outcomes.

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Introduction

Population aging will affect all aspects of society, including how we live, work, and relate to each other. On a global level, several countries are responding to trends and changes through a focus on healthy aging framed by the UN Decade of Healthy Aging (2021–2030) which provides a platform for collaborative action to improve the health and wellbeing of older people. Within the UK context, one policy response is to view aging as an opportunity as well as a challenge; with the impact of an aging population opening avenues for business to develop services and products to meet the needs and wants of a diverse aging population. Policymakers and aging populations alike are anticipating that innovations will mitigate pressures, create new opportunities

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for older people, and facilitate higher quality and longer lives. These innovations have both economic potential and a social purpose and policymakers are eager to create so-called “win win” situations where industry benefits and social impact are created (Gallistl & Wanka, 2019). To tackle major industrial and societal challenges through science and business, the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund was set up in 2017 with one component being the Healthy Aging Challenge (HAC), a £98 m research and innovation investment to help people to live active, independent lives as they age.

The landscape of aging research and innovation in the UK demonstrates that, like our aging society, it is in a similarly transformational stage, evolving as an economic ecosystem and as a policy system. Two points stand out: first, while there are individual areas of research capacity and focus, this is somewhat poorly interconnected with national policy or business practice and has little connection with business priorities. Secondly, within their areas of specialty, social sciences, arts, and humanities (including gerontology) researchers are not well versed in business engagement and translating findings into economic, industrial, and innovation policy, which is still relatively new territory. A need to weave together research, innovation, national frameworks, and implementation threads has prompted calls for a new approach to optimizing the economic and social outcomes related to healthy aging investment.

Increasing innovation has been presented as a solution to a broad spectrum of social issues. The expectation is that new breakthroughs, products, and ways of thinking can overcome existing barriers and unlock a better future. From this perspective, identifying Grand Challenges, and supporting innovation to address them, is meant to kill two birds with one stone: solve thorny societal issues and generate economic windfalls. However, insights unlocked in the course of the HAC revealed a complex domain in which neither traditional understandings of innovation nor the standard innovation policy toolkit seemed especially well suited.

This commentary reviews the state of the art of healthy aging policy innovation in the UK, tracking its evolution and suggesting a future. In doing so, it brings together the cutting edge of both innovation and gerontology studies to contribute fresh perspectives on the wide range of economic activities related to healthy aging, characterizing them as part of a hybrid economic domain rather than as a single sector. In doing so, we answer calls for more analysis on collaborative models in the field of support for older people (Reyes Uribe & Gonzalez Flores, 2023). This more holistic vantage represents a new generation of healthy aging policy innovation which prioritizes understanding how different types of actors can be connected to support a broad spectrum of types of innovation which will contribute to providing better goods, services, and practices for older people; and leveraging healthy aging activities to make places better serve multi-generational populations. We

explore social innovation as it relates to hybrid domains such as healthy aging and discuss the role of place in creating policy which generates both societal and market value. Taken together, these lessons also make a case for how social science research can contribute to a better understanding of the economies that are evolving around healthy aging and where opportunities exist to better conceptualize, connect, and support actors, initiatives, and places to optimize economic potential and social outcomes.

This paper is organized in the following way: we begin by elaborating on dominant approaches to date in the support of research and innovation in healthy aging, charting the evolution of policy thinking, research support, and practice. This culminates with the establishment of the HAC and its mission and journey in supporting innovation in this area. The next section outlines the turn toward place-based innovation strategy focusing on the logic and anticipated potential of a cluster approach. We introduce the concept of hybridity and explore literature of social innovation to better understand the dynamics and challenges of innovation in this space. We share some thoughts about the role of geography and place-based innovation in the policy toolkit. This is followed by a discussion of what is next for aging research and policy.

Approaches to healthy aging research in the UK

Research on aging and social gerontology has a relatively long history in the UK, and the sector has a strong mix of university research centers, charities with a research or evidence function, networks, and professional groups and learned societies (Bernard et al., 2020). This has included research programs in the 1980s under the Social Science Research Council; programs funded by the Economic and Social Research Council such as the Growing Older Programme (1999–2004), New Dynamics of Aging Programme (2007–2014), and Life Long Health and Wellbeing Programme (2008–2015) funded by two UK Research & Innovation councils. Other funders of aging research (e.g., Nuffield, AgeUK, and Wellcome) have also contributed to a shared agenda. Each program has had distinctive elements. The New Dynamics of Aging program, for example, was the first program aimed at providing an evidence base for policy and practice, including product development to contribute to wellbeing and quality of life, through the co-production of research with older people (Bernard et al., 2020).

The success of the Healthy Aging research agenda was reflected in an assessment of aging and gerontology undertaken separately following the last REF (a review of UK university research). In 2021, the quality profile of outputs was above average in two main panels (Medicine and Life Sciences and in Social Sciences); there was a high degree of interdisciplinarity and considerable uptake of knowledge beyond academia (Technopolis and Science Metrix, 2022). However, the extent to which emerging research is translated

into innovative products and services beyond social gerontology's traditional focus on policy and practice is unclear. Similarly, innovations in one area are not visible to another, e.g., what is going on in genomics is not visible to social scientists, yet this is crucially important if a solution-based approach to societal challenges around aging are to be addressed. To address these issues and with the context of the need to engage with business, the HAC introduced business and innovation as a central focus.

Healthy aging innovation policy: vision & framework of the HAC

In 2017, the government announced its Industrial Strategy, which set out four Grand Challenges and an Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to enable the delivery of activity addressing the identified Challenges. One sought to harness the power of innovation to help meet the needs of an aging society. The UK government's mission for the Aging Society Grand Challenge was to "ensure that people can enjoy at least five extra healthy, independent years of life by 2035, while narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest" (HM Government, 2017). The vision of the HAC was to enable businesses to develop and deliver products, services, and business models at scale to support people as they age. This would allow people to remain active, productive, independent, and socially connected across generations for as long as possible. As an initiative of the UK's Research and Innovation funding agency (UKRI), the HAC relied heavily on innovation as a mechanism to influence social outcomes.

Consistent with this agenda, its vision states that by investing in UK-wide innovation and research UKRI aims "to support both our ageing society and the economy through the delivery of market innovations within the growing healthy ageing domain, while also addressing inequalities in healthy life expectancy" (UKRI, 2022). HAC adopted a framework of seven themed areas where market stimulation was possible and where there was potential to reduce inequalities in life expectancy. These themes included supporting social connections; living well with cognitive impairment; managing common complaints of aging; sustaining physical activity; maintaining health at work; design for age-friendly homes; and creating healthy and active places.

Investments of £98 million and interventions within the HAC were spread over the 2020–2024 period and focused on supporting business and research commercialization efforts (UKRI, 2022). Catalysts helped entrepreneurial researchers develop spinouts, particularly from the social sciences and arts. Investment partnerships worked with the private and third sector investors to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Social venture support provided 100% investment in solutions developed by social enterprises to scale up, and a program called Designed for Ageing focused on innovation in user-centered design. The largest investment was

in service integration collaborations aiming for impact at scale (called Trailblazers). A Community of Practice and a research stream (the Social Behavioural and Design Research Programme) focussed on supporting business to improve impact (UKRI, 2021a).

With the focus squarely on increasing impact from business, social, behavioral, and design elements were also central to the research stream of funding in the HAC. This approach opened new territory for those in arts and humanities, design, and social scientists, with the objective of stimulating the aging market through collaborations between business and researchers. The HAC recognized the need to promote expectations and a deeper understanding of social science methods such as co-production not only between researchers and business but also older people, including socially excluded groups (Yarker & Buffel, 2022). Social science can go beyond the product-society fit question into areas of interaction between society and business – this can include behaviors around intergenerational working, the impact of ageism on business models and design, and the built environment. The challenge of bringing together research priorities, innovation, social, and behavioral elements of the healthy aging landscape in national frameworks and implementation has prompted a stream of research that explores this particularly complex policy frontier. This research issued challenges of its own and highlighted the difficulty of adapting the toolkit of traditional industrial and innovation policy to a societal challenge. These difficulties stem both from the narrowness of a market-based perspective of innovation and the limitations that ensue from applying it in a diverse and fragmented economic domain.

Interrogating and expanding the definition of innovation in healthy aging

Innovations are new practical knowledge – ideas that have impact and application. Definitions center on innovation outcomes – new products, new values, new forms of organization, new practices, etc. – with the focus on marketable products (e.g., OECD, 2009). HAC's vision uses market innovations as the mechanism through which economic activities in the domain will grow and flourish with expectations that this growth and its outputs will yield positive benefits to the wellbeing and life expectancy of an aging society. Enabling businesses to develop and deliver products, services, and business models, adopted at scale, will support people as they age.

While market innovations can play their part in resolving societal issues, they typically do not design in measurable social impact; this is the remit of social innovation. While definitions of social innovation vary, they have converged around innovations that change social and power relations and have a social impact (Ayob et al., 2016) especially on vulnerable individuals or

communities (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019). Much of the innovation in the healthy aging economy is social innovation, defined here as “new ideas (products, services, and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations” (Social Innovation Exchange, 2010, p. 18). Social innovation leverages market mechanisms toward social outcomes but can also emerge from the noncommercial pursuits of actors (such as government, research, or social sectors) to more effectively reach constituencies, generate insights, or provide services.

Social innovation is not just a practice field but has been widely adopted within policy in Europe to tackle pressing social needs (Sinclair & Baglioni, 2014; Von Jacobi et al., 2017), including aging-related challenges (BEPa, 2010). This can include both dedicated social innovation policies (e.g., European Social Fund and the Social Business Initiative) or subsumption within other social and economic policies (e.g., Europe 2020 Strategy, European Green Deal). Social innovation can feature within policy in two ways: “Policies for Social Innovation” and “Policies as Social Innovation” (von Jacobi et al., 2019, p. 418). “Policies for social innovation” entails facilitating socially innovative actions where the locus of innovation lies outside the public sector, i.e., with third and private sector or cross-sectoral collaboration. It can involve supporting specific vehicles for social innovation-like social enterprises, providing funds like social investment and/or access to funds, developing targeted programs like social impact bonds, etc. “Policies as social innovation” falls within new public management and public sector innovation. It involves novel ways of organizing and delivering policies, for example, incorporating social value in public procurement or restructuring the relationship between state and citizens by co-designing policies. Recognizing this, the HAC has increasingly sought insights to prioritize investments that help translate different types of innovation to improve societal wellbeing. Embracing this broader conceptualization of innovation creates challenges in thinking about innovation support more broadly. This is also complicated by the relatedly high degree of diversity and plurality of actors and activities – what we term hybridity – in the healthy aging space.

Generating new insights and learning from wrong turns: methodology

In 2022, the HAC partnered on a research project to explore the feasibility of a place-based approach. Place-based approaches to aging support are common in other contexts (see, for example, the Aging Area Agencies in the US (Gallo, 2023)). In other sectors (e.g., digital technologies or advanced manufacturing), place-based approaches – such as seeding or supporting innovative clusters or ecosystems – remain popular and are seen as mechanisms to both economic growth and “level up” lagging areas. These approaches seek to magnify the

impact of innovative interventions by supporting actors such as firms, intermediary organizations, higher education, and research that are collocated within spatially concentrated areas of related economic activity.

The idea that increasing innovation in these contexts can enhance outcomes for both the organizations that are recipients of support and proximate actors who benefit due to spillovers and externalities in the form of knowledge, talent, enhancements to collective resources (such as business incubation, shared specialized services, core technologies or infrastructures, and financial support, etc.) justified the need for research. These spillovers generate positive feedback loops that ideally become self-sustaining, augment the attractiveness of the place to investment and talent, increase firm foundation and competitiveness, increase potential for scaling up, and raise the international innovation profile (Cooke, 2001; Martin & Sunley, 2003). For instance, the Creative Industries Challenge launched the Creative Industries Clusters Programme in 2018; the £120 million investment funded 9 creative clusters. A recent impact report shows that it has redefined the “way in which industry and researchers across a range of disciplines from the arts to engineering can collaborate to develop new products and experiences across the creative sector” creating new pipelines of products and services and the talent to deliver them (Creative Industries Cluster Programme, 2021, p. 3). It also reports that initial investments have functioned as multipliers by unlocking significant additional funding support for clusters from public and private sources.

This place-based framework has a number of advantages. First, the focus on place and innovation encourages leaders to bring together unique local assets, expertise, and research capacity to forge new pathways and develop and multiply localized advantages. Doing so would help, at least in a localized way, address some of the silos the HAC identified in its existing approaches. Secondly, the centrality of universities and public research organizations as anchors provides a natural interface point for research and innovation funding councils to stimulate commercialization and to direct support to business through knowledge transfer. Thirdly, that the cluster approach has been adopted by other Challenges and that it explicitly feeds into UKRI’s (2022) evolving place-based policy agenda is also an advantage.

Determining if place-based policy approaches might be suitable required the development of a typology of industries and activities and their locations. We partnered with glass.ai, a company that uses artificial intelligence to map and measure markets, to adopt their innovative web scraping technology to map healthy activities and their geographies (see Nelles et al., 2022). As that research unfolded, it became apparent that the expected innovation-enhancing spatial dynamics would be extremely difficult to detect if they existed at all. This stemmed in part from the wide range of types of actors and activities involved in the healthy aging economy. This diversity – which the researchers termed hybridity – meant that

activity in this domain was likely taking place in, and exacerbating, silos between industries. Furthermore, this diversity coupled with the importance of social innovation in this domain suggested that the traditional market and supply chain relationships that are the hallmarks of more conventional clusters and innovation districts would not be evident in the data. Abandoning the search for spatial dynamics enabled the researchers to focus on understanding the different dimensions of hybridity that were complicating the landscape and consider their implications for innovation for healthy aging outcomes and healthy innovation policy.

Tracing domain hybridity

In their analysis of activities and organizations involved in the healthy aging economy, Nelles et al. (2022) identify three main types of hybridity and highlight some of the challenges that they pose for healthy aging research and innovation policy. Due to this diversity, they refer to healthy aging as a hybrid domain, borrowing a concept from an extensive literature on organizations, such as social enterprise, that have both market and social (and sometimes other) missions (Pache & Santos, 2013). Here we extend the concept of hybridity to acknowledge not only the economic/social duality of the healthy aging policy objectives, but to describe the economy and actors within it.

Subdomain diversity refers to the wide variation in areas of healthy aging activity. These can span healthcare, logistics, design, professional services, and more. While this diversity is a strength of the healthy aging domain, it also creates challenges for strategic investment into healthy aging goals and innovation. For example, the factors that support innovation in heart disease are unlikely to generate similar outcomes in estate and retirement planning or programs designed to reduce isolation and loneliness. Although these activities can be grouped into subdomains (e.g., home care/care homes, housing, social programming, healthcare, financial and legal services, etc.) there are many overlaps between them, and conceptualizing them in silos also carries risks (Hamilton-West et al., 2020). For instance, healthcare and medical technologies are already treated differently and as more central than other sectors involved in healthy aging, which has tended to privilege clinical solutions – a regime that has only begun to change relatively recently as the profession begins to more widely recognize the value of social prescription (Costa et al., 2021).

Functional diversity highlights the fact that many actors and organizations that are involved in healthy aging but are not exclusively focused on healthy aging objectives or markets. Certainly, some “pure play” firms that mainly concentrate on issues related to aging exist. But for a significant proportion of firms and organizations, aging populations may be only one of the several

target markets. For example, a legal firm may provide many types of services to its clients in addition to consulting on estate planning and transfer. A mobility aid manufacturer makes equipment for people of all ages with mobility challenges. A software company might design apps to help seniors engage in social activities but may also make apps to help college students organize clubs. This diversity creates difficulties in effectively identifying organizations involved in healthy aging and creating guidelines to target innovation funding and may result in under-/mis-estimation of the size and significance of the healthy aging economy.

Organizational diversity refers to the fact that some organizations involved in healthy aging are themselves hybrids and combine elements of different sectors (such as public, private, and nonprofit). Often this means they look to integrate profit and purposes that are traditionally associated with the social economy or third sector. In this sense, they serve a social function but generate some proportion of the revenue used to support that function from selling goods or services rather than being purely reliant on grant funding. Hybrid organizations, such as social enterprises, perform important functions in the healthy aging domain (Murtagh, 2017). However, these organizations are easy to overlook or under support in innovation-driven policy. Furthermore, because they are neither a business nor a charity, they can be cut out of funding streams geared toward these actor types. In domains such as healthy aging, where hybrid organizations make up a significant proportion of participants, it is vital to understand the role they play in the innovation system and in terms of social delivery. This hybridity creates significant hurdles in relying on innovation to address the highly complex set of social challenges associated with aging, particularly when innovation support tends to focus on “traditional” research and innovation ecosystem levers. These observations about the nature of innovation and hybridity are important as they reveal significant challenges, and opportunities, for policymakers leveraging innovation support to advance parallel goals of stimulating research and innovation excellence and optimizing societal outcomes in healthy aging.

Discussion: where next for aging research and innovation policy?

While hybridity creates challenges for innovation policy in the healthy aging space, there are also opportunities. We argue that more fully adopting a social innovation approach, although not a simple proposition, can enhance cross-sectoral collaboration; and within that, prioritizing co-creation can help shift innovative mind-sets in order to magnify social and market impacts. In these contexts, modified place-based approaches to innovation that prioritize well-being before market impact can also create conditions where different kinds of spillovers can affect both social and economic bottom lines.

Designing social innovation

Expanding the understanding of innovation in the healthy aging domain by incorporating social innovation centralizes the needs of users (i.e., the aging population) in innovation processes. Since social innovation is primarily concerned with social impact, its application can cut across the hybrid domain of healthy aging, be it onto the actions of the private sector service providers, voluntary sector organizations support providers, or policy-makers. Social innovation thus can be a key contributor to healthy aging outcomes in terms of both securing benefits and removing barriers to access.

Socially innovative processes crucially emphasize strengthening the social connections of the aging population. Additionally, mainstream views of innovation like that of market innovation can neglect the barriers faced by the aging population in accessing and adopting the innovation itself, as seen especially with tech-based products. The aging population requires both age-friendly solutions and support to help them adopt and adapt these solutions (Kavandi & Jaana, 2020). To this end, a social innovation approach can facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration where both market and social innovation can reinforce each other. Most importantly, social innovation can contribute to healthy aging outcomes by rethinking the role of the aging population. Users are not passive recipients of innovation; rather, they can be active contributors through knowledge sharing and learning. Good examples are found in the Social Behavioural and Design Research Programme of the HAC itself, with all projects co-producing their research with older people and business and ensuring older people were at the heart of knowledge creation and innovation (UKRI, 2021b).

However, designing social innovation solutions requires a different mindset. These are not linear but collaborative and dynamic processes, much of which evolve with user input and behavioral changes. Hence, mainstreaming such an open approach in an ecosystem where a traditional, regimented approach to innovation management prevails, will require a cross-sectoral undertaking and a reimagining of funding models. At a policy level, devising and diffusing social innovation policy can be complex and challenging. Despite its popularity within (European) policy circles, the authors have cautioned against the treatment of social innovation as a silver bullet policy solution (Sinclair & Baglioni, 2014; Von Jacobi et al., 2017). This is because the efficacy of social innovation policies may come down to circumventing or overcoming the complex “institutional dominance and hierarchies of power that shape and sustain policy issues” (Nicholls & Edmiston, 2019, p. 289). Additionally, the conceptual malleability and social innovation’s operation within hybrid domains have led to plural motivations, objectives, and processes. Thus, for social innovation to be effective within the healthy aging

domain, there has to be alignment and buy-in between policymakers and practitioners about its definition, goals, and means.

Co-creation and the role of citizens, communities, government, and business

While concepts such as collaboration and co-creation have a long history in the healthy aging domain, business innovation remains more siloed. Co-creation can provide a mandate for innovation and allow a balancing of stakeholder agendas to begin to create value across the board (Van Hees et al., 2021). That is why co-creation is considered as a significant step within social innovation processes (Voorberg et al., 2015).

It is important for successful and vibrant hybrid domains to work increasingly across functional, subdomain, and organizational boundaries to tackle the need for new ways of addressing the challenges associated with healthy aging's core mission. Within technological business innovation in aging there has been a tendency toward creating products which unquestioningly adopt a negative perception of older people and their capabilities (Van Hees et al., 2021). Negotiating complex stakeholder relationships to garner legitimacy is more common in some segments of the healthy aging domain than others. For example, this is a strong strand of research in the third sector (e.g., Taylor & Warburton, 2003), but despite the encouragement of advocates of responsible innovation and policy instruments adopting standards such as the PAS 440 on responsible innovation, adoption of consultative approaches, and acknowledging multi stakeholder perspectives is still rare.

Facilitating more multi-stakeholder collaboration across all levels of hybridity is no easy task. Place can play a key role in activating the collaborative effect of social innovation and stimulating co-creation. Hambleton (2019) provides an exemplar of this working within a public innovation setting in Bristol, where a New Civic Leadership approach has a significant effect on the trajectories of public innovation. Co-creation needs to be considered as more than target market input at the beginning of project design (Van Hees et al., 2021). Integrating diversity of stakeholders for the duration of a project through meaningful inclusion and regularly listening is important.

Bringing place back in

There may be significant place-based advantages to collocated healthy aging activities if we adopt an expanded definition of innovation to support and stimulate localized market and social innovations. Actors can benefit from a critical mass of related activities even if they are not specifically contributing to knowledge spillovers that enhance market innovation. In places with significant concentrations of healthy aging activity, then, we might expect that networks will evolve to drive social

innovation for social and market benefit and that this collective action might coalesce around one or several key public needs. Investing in clusters is thought to create multiplier effects for market innovation, enhancing local assets, shared knowledge bases, and labor pools, among many other expected benefits. We argue that similar effects may hold for investments in social innovation, but through very different mechanisms (Gerli et al., 2021). In these cases, rather than enhancing the pool of inputs to a localized market, investments in social innovations can multiply outputs as social changes reduce barriers for all, ease accessibility issues, support the broader dissemination of practices, and further strengthen governance networks. These may open up more space for innovation (social and otherwise!) as well as (ideally) generating actual social impact.

As with traditional forms of clustering, collocation is not enough. Places might host a plethora of healthy aging activities, with world-leading research into health and social aspects of aging, an innovative private sector, broad foundation of third-sector organizations, and an active regional government. However, even an ideal environment such as this does not guarantee that connections are made across the hybrid domain. This creates a strong role for coordinating actors and intermediaries to pull together different actors around an innovative agenda. Here a vision for a place, and outcomes for local aging populations, can provide a focal point. This stands in contrast to typical policy approaches to place-based innovation and clustering.

In typical clustering approaches, the objective is to catalyze localized innovations to feed into international markets so that places prosper and increase wellbeing as a consequence of those activities through retained benefits (e.g., turnover, incomes, skills, etc.). In this model, we propose that similar mechanisms will play out, but in a different order. Rather, we focus on supporting innovation to increase the wellbeing of places first and treat benefits beyond the immediate ecosystem (to international markets, to national knowledge networks, etc.) as a welcome but bonus outcome. The focus is on enhancing mechanisms for organizations to connect to better reach, incorporate feedback from, respond to, and support their localized constituencies.

Limitations

Our insights were developed predominantly from the UK policy context, and while we see that there are likely to be similarities in other countries, a broader investigation comparing policy approaches would be beneficial. Furthermore, this commentary did not delve into the empirical evaluations of policy interventions to understand the outcomes of such policies on a more concrete basis. An empirical study doing so would add value to the field of study.

Conclusion

Social innovation and aging have been the features of a strong strand of developing research (Ayob et al., 2016). However, typically social innovation is a secondary consideration in the design of traditional innovation policy and its implementation. Furthermore, studies typically focus on either social or market innovations, without acknowledging that, to some extent, most innovations are in some part social and market (Franco-Leal et al., 2020). Rather than seeking to create support systems for either social or market innovations, the idea of hybrid domains allows us to grapple with the complexity of innovations in domains with societal challenges at their heart. This may involve segmenting the hybrid domain for support around different types of diversity; allowing support to target functions or populations, rather than organization types or subdomains which has been the status quo so far.

Academic fields and policy departments often artificially separate economic issues and societal challenges. This creates silos which unhelpfully prevent the achievement of better outcomes by developing knowledge and practice in one area, without due consideration of how the other can support. By looking at economic and societal issues as they are, interlinked and inherently complex, we begin to create more solutions. We argue that a social innovation lens allows researchers and policymakers to consider the domain of hybridity in the design of solutions. Social innovation promotes a more collaborative approach across stakeholder groups, blurring the boundaries, and breaking down silos. Most importantly, it can provide routes to increasing responsibility in innovation practices by rethinking the role of the aging population by meaningfully involving them in co-creating innovations that are designed for them.

Since the HAC was a part of the wider Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund which had the broader aim of addressing the UK's productivity challenges and encouraging (technological) innovation, it was inherently designed with economic and social goals at its core. This is not unique to the UK; within the European policy landscape, there has also been interest in creating aging policy which encourages technological innovation that firms can engage in (Gallistl & Wanka, 2019) – addressing a social policy issue with an industrial strategy tool. These policy interventions offer an opportunity to explore the complexity of integrating societal and economic goals in policy domains.

This has implications for approaches to policymaking which attempt to integrate societal challenges with economic stimulus. These are often present in grand challenges, and mission-based approaches to policy. In designing policy and subsequent policy interventions, we suggest that a mapping that acknowledges this complexity is essential to understand not only what hybridity is present, but also how actors within the hybrid domain interact. Not only acknowledging hybridity, but also encouraging it, could be a means of ensuring that the innovations that stem from the hybrid domain are not only more

responsible (i.e., designed for the right audiences) but are able to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equal society.

Key points

- Hybrid domains are those that bring together a diverse array of actors and activities creating complexity for innovation policy
- Innovation policy that attempts to address healthy aging in society can be enhanced by a hybrid domain perspective
- Supporting innovation in a hybrid domain benefits from a consideration of place-based approaches and social innovation

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