

Partners in Social Innovation: Government, Public Policy and Social Innovation

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For good reason, discussions on social innovation focus primarily on the use of resilience and complexity theories to explore contemporary social, economic and environmental challenges. This paper argues that the examination of historical circumstances involving attempts at major social/ societal transformation provide valuable insights into the nature of both government policy as an instrument of social change and the processes, impacts and outcomes of attempted social innovations. Governments have, since the 19th century, been involved in various efforts to effect substantial and permanent change through significant policy initiatives. Some of these initiatives have succeeded in achieving government and public objectives; others, demonstrating complexity in action, had very different outcomes than anticipated. Combining historical examples, the evaluation of the effectiveness of government policy as an agent for transformation, and the evolution of attempted social innovations, the paper argues, provides important means of contributing to the understanding of social innovation, resilience and complexity.