

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Special Issue: Reimagining the Critical in Innovation Studies

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#### Journal: *Prometheus – Critical Studies in Innovation*

This special issue, ‘Reimagining the Critical in Innovation Studies’, seeks to spur a discussion on the history, present and future of critical innovation studies. It aims to provide a platform for critically minded scholars, practitioners and civil society activists to exchange knowledge, broaden the critical discourse and reshape the research agenda in a more critical yet socially impactful way than hitherto.

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#### Special issue information: background and aims

Contemporary societies, from the Global North to the Global South, face numerous challenges (Lawton Smith and Leydesdorff, 2014; Kuhlmann and Rip, 2018; Isakensen *et al.*, 2022; Voegtlin *et al.*, 2022). These include global warming, growing inequalities, aggressive military operations resulting in frequent wars, prolonged economic crises, increasing urbanisation, housing crises, declining birth rates, ageing populations, rising obesity and health costs, and growing dissatisfaction with political institutions.

Traditionally, the field of innovation studies has been among the most prolific in producing knowledge for addressing societal challenges (Fagerberg *et al.*, 2011; Lundvall, 2013; Martin, 2016a; Soete, 2019; Fragkandreas, 2022). However, contemporary innovation studies appear to be facing a ‘social relevance deficit’ (Martin, 2016a; Soete, 2019). They seem somewhat ill-equipped to identify the underlying structural causes that perpetuate many of the socio-economic challenges of our time. It is no exaggeration to state that most contemporary innovation studies offer neither groundbreaking analytical insights nor promising practical implications that could make a significant difference in people’s lives. In this regard, contemporary innovation studies can hardly help us envision an environmentally and socially just world.

Previous contributions have attributed this lack of social relevance to various factors. These include the (Kuhnian) maturity of the field (e.g., Steinmuller, 2013), intellectual lock-ins because of past successes (Fagerberg *et al.*, 2013; Martin, 2016a), the influence of donors and sponsors in shaping the research agenda (e.g., Godin, 2004, 2009, 2012), the rise of superstar scholars who shape the research agenda in self-referential ways (Macdonald and Kam, 2011; Martin, 2016a, pp.434–5), a ‘publish or perish’ culture in contemporary academia (Martin, 2016b), the increasing use of formal-deductivist methods in innovation research (Martin, 2016a; Fragkandreas, 2022), and a general lack of critical thought and research in the field (Godin and Vinck, 2017).

Although each of these factors has contributed to the gradual decline in the social relevance of innovation studies, this special issue revisits the question of critical innovation studies.

We believe this is necessary for at least two major reasons. First, previous contributions (e.g., Godin and Vinck, 2017) seem to have, in our opinion, wrongly portrayed the field of innovation studies as being overly uncritical. While it is true that innovation scholars have for several decades adopted, either explicitly or implicitly, ‘a naively Schumpeterian view’ (Dosi, 2013, p.127) wherein innovation contributes, in one way or another, to economic progress (Freeman and Louca, 2001; Fragkandreas, 2017; Papaionnou and Srinivas, 2019), one must not overlook the fact that the field of innovation studies was born out of outspoken critique and opposition to the dominant paradigms in both academia and policy in the mid–late twentieth century (Fagerberg *et al.*, 2011).

Secondly, we agree with Godin and Vinck (2017) and others (e.g. Perez, 2013; Flanagan and Uyarra, 2016; Fragkandreas, 2022) that creating relevant knowledge for addressing societal challenges presupposes an explicitly critical stance towards existing socio-economic structures, concepts, theories, methods, discourses and practices. To put it differently, generating knowledge that benefits society at large requires contemporary innovation scholars deliberately to embrace the original ‘critical spirit’ of the field.

This special issue seeks to reignite interest in critical innovation studies. It aims to provide a platform for critically minded scholars, policymakers and activists to exchange knowledge on how innovation studies can reinvent itself in a critical, yet socially relevant and impactful way. *Prometheus*, with its long history of publishing critical innovation studies (Hall, 2003), is undoubtedly the ideal journal to host a much-needed discussion on the past, present and future of critical innovation studies.

We welcome papers of all types (i.e., conceptual, methodological, empirical) using either or both qualitative and/or quantitative methods and data on innovation. Submitted papers may cover one or more of the following topics:

- 1 **Societal challenges:** We invite papers that provide critical insights into the underlying causes of grand societal challenges and/or offer solutions to achieve environmental and social justice (Papaioannou, 2024). We are particularly interested in papers that (a) consider innovation not only as a solution, but also as part of the problem, acting as one of the underlying causes of social challenges (Soete, 2013; Fragkandreas, 2022); and (b) explore strategies employed by privileged, less privileged and marginalized groups to cope with the effects and consequences of societal challenges (Lawton Smith and Owalla, 2023; Lawton Smith, 2023).
- 2 **Unpacking the critical in existing concepts and frameworks:** Since its inception in the late 1950s, the field of innovation studies has seen the rise and fall of several conceptual models, frameworks and theories, such as the linear model, science push and market pull models, innovation systems, clusters, industrial districts, triple-helix, open innovation, socio-technical transitions and innovation ecosystems (Rothwell, 1994; Moulaert and Sekia, 2003; Fagerberg *et al.*, 2012). We welcome papers that provide critical insights into these concepts, theories and methods. We also encourage papers seeking to reorient existing concepts and theories, or to advance new theoretical and methodological avenues.
- 3 **Essence and genealogy of the critical:** What does it mean to be critical in innovation studies? Critical social science has a long and intellectually rich pedigree, drawing from several philosophical traditions, such as critical realism, critical theory, feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism and postmodernism (Sayer, 2009; Benton and Craib, 2010). We invite contributions that seek to clarify the origins and reconceptualise the meaning of the critical in contemporary innovation studies.
- 4 **Alternative types and theories of innovation:** In recent years, new concepts and frameworks have emerged to help us understand the varied nature and multilevel effects of innovation (Godin *et al.*, 2021). These include common innovation, dark innovation, green innovation, inclusive innovation, social innovation, responsible innovation and educational innovation. We welcome papers that critically assess these new concepts and theories, examine their originality, challenge dominant views and policy discourses, and explore the

role non-academic actors (e.g., policymakers) play or could play in disseminating these alternative concepts, theories and practices.

- 5 **Academic autonomy:** In recent years, universities worldwide (especially in the US and UK) have adopted Fordist (hierarchical and centralised) structures, top-down planning, reduced local autonomy for departments and performance measures for research and teaching (Martin, 2016b). While this development goes against the contemporary business practice (for instance, the innovation management literature stresses the numerous benefits of flatter organisational structures, hierarchies and local autonomy), it has also created an unfriendly environment for critical innovation research and pedagogy. We welcome papers that provide insights into the experiences and challenges to academic autonomy that innovation scholars face, and which offer avenues for critical innovation studies in the current academic landscape.
- 6 **Synergies:** Over the past two decades, there has been a noticeable migration of innovation scholars from various interdisciplinary research centres and departments (e.g., heterodox economics, geography, development studies and sociology) to academic positions in business and management schools. This confirms that, unlike two decades ago when innovation was barely taught at most business schools, innovation is an essential subject in contemporary business studies; however, it also raises the question: Why have innovation scholars not yet joined forces with critical management scholars (Alvesson *et al.*, 2009), given that the latter are among the most active critical scholars in the social sciences? We welcome papers that shed light on the migration of innovation scholars, and discuss the possibilities of creating synergies between innovation studies and critical management studies.
- 7 **Teaching critical innovation studies:** One of the least discussed subjects in innovation studies is ‘innovation pedagogy’, i.e., the effectiveness of how innovation theories and research findings are taught in the classroom. This issue is particularly acute when considering critical innovation studies. The latter tend to be ‘theory-heavy’, often using rather obscure language (Spicer and Alvesson, 2024), and having little practical application. However, this does not mean that ‘theory-heavy’ work lacks significant practical implications (Regele, 2023). We welcome papers that problematise the delivery of critical innovation theories in the contemporary classroom, and/or share best practices on effectively teaching critical innovation concepts and theories within and beyond the classroom.

If you have enquiries, including questions about appropriate topics, please contact the guest editors, Thanos Fragkandreas (fragkat@westminster.ac.uk), Helen Lawton Smith (h.lawton-smith@bbk.ac.uk) and Theo Papaioannou (theo.papaioannou@open.ac.uk).

### Hybrid workshop

To help authors prepare their manuscripts for submission, the guest editors will organize a dedicated hybrid workshop for selected papers in London (date to be agreed). Presentation of a paper at the workshop is not a precondition for submission to the special issue.

Authors interested in taking part in the workshop are encouraged to submit an extended abstract of a maximum of 300 words by 31 Decembber 2024. The submission should include the title of the paper, author names, institutional affiliations and an email address for each author. Extended abstracts should be sent to Thanos Fragkandreas (email: fragkat@westminster.ac.uk) by 30 October.

### Submission procedure

Papers should be submitted as email attachments to the general editor of this special issue, Martin Meyer (martin.meyer@abdn.ac.uk). *Prometheus* does not use an automated manuscript submission system and authors should feel free to contact the journal’s general editor, Stuart Macdonald

(s.macdonald@sheffield.ac.uk) at any time. For more information on how to submit your paper, please read the Guidelines for Contributors (<http://www.prometheusjournal.co.uk/submissions/>”<http://www.prometheusjournal.co.uk/submissions/>).

### Keywords

Critical innovation studies, innovation studies, innovation, societal challenges.

### Time scale (tentative)

- Initial paper submission: 31 October 2024
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