



# Macro-Social Marketing Research: Philosophy, Methodology and Methods

Ann-Marie Kennedy<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Macro-social marketing is the use of social marketing – up, mid and downstream – to affect holistic systemic change (Kennedy 2016). Presently, fragmented views within macro-social marketing threaten to divide the field. Much of this fragmentation is due to a confusion between systems thinking and systems theory, the basis for macro-social marketing. This article presents an explanation of the key facets of systems literature, a macro-social marketing philosophy and a macro-social marketing methodology to show the benefits of combining systems thinking and systems theory, thus alleviating conflict within the field.

## Keywords

Macro-social marketing, systems theory, methodology, social marketing, systems social marketing

## Introduction

Macromarketing's interest in the intersection of society and marketing (Hunt 1981) has fostered theory concerned with systemic problems. Social marketing fits well with a systems approach. Previous articles on social marketing in the journal cover areas such as contraception in India (Dholakia 1984), HIV prevention (Chance and Deshpandé 2009), relational paradigms (Hastings 2013), social change (Duhaime, McTavish, and Ross 1985), historical change (Krisjanous 2014), negative ideologies (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Goven 2013), and macro-social marketing (Kennedy 2016).

This combination of systems theory and systems thinking within social marketing has been steadily growing since the inception of the *Journal of Social Marketing (JSM)* in 2011. JSM has promoted holistic thinking in addressing “wicked” problems, or systemic issues that are inherently macro, they have many interrelated and interconnecting societal factors that perpetuate the issue, and are inherently hard to define or solve (Rittel and Webber 1973). Environmental degradation, obesity, poverty, gambling, fast fashion, smoking, all are examples of wicked problems and often are examples where the market system plays a leading role in allowing or encouraging these pandemics. As such, much recent work in social marketing refers to wicked problems and the need for a holistic, systemic approach to address such contexts (Dibb 2014; Hastings 2003; Hoek and Jones 2011).

Systems research is especially important when considering the many stakeholders who matter in the environment in which social marketers operate (Lefebvre 2012). Practitioners of social marketing often rely on or interact with other systems such as funding bodies, lobbyists, governments, NGOs and community groups. Such practitioners are often firmly embedded in the fabric of their community and thus need an understanding of the systems structuring their environment.

In an effort to minimize the future fragmentation of this emerging area, this article seeks to place the areas' development within a framework of understanding. It applies critical systems theory philosophy, while respecting the special context of the social marketing discipline. It is not a competition between better or newer theories or approaches. Instead, one might see synergy between multiple methodologies, such as systems thinking and system theory, which are further linked with social marketing literature, and the articles from this special issue, to aid reflection on the areas of work that are currently being undertaken and those that need development.

## Systems Theory

A system is “a set of interrelated entities” (Kramer and Smit 1977, p. 14) that are dependent on one another (p. 15). If one entity changes, the others are also affected, changing either their relationship with one another or changing the whole system. The entities could be physical (e.g., a computer, or the human body), or processes (e.g., communication, or markets), and are each relatively stable and related to other systems in a hierarchy (Anderson and Johnson 1997).

The hierarchical organization of systems shows their embeddedness and control structure. There are fewer systems at the highest levels, which control and often co-ordinate the

<sup>1</sup>Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

## Corresponding Author:

Ann-Marie Kennedy, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand School of Business and Law, University Drive, Ilam, Christchurch, 8041, New Zealand.

Email: marie.kennedy@canterbury.ac.nz

lower systems. These higher systems are also independent of the lower systems and can exist without some of them (Skyttner 2005; Kauffman 1980). This does not imply that if a lower level system ceased to exist, the higher-level system would carry on without consequence. For instance, if one considers the government as a high-level system within the hierarchy, it has control over and/or co-ordinates such groups as the Department of Health (which is a system) among other systems, and below that might be district health boards and social marketing NGOs. As such, if a social marketing organization ceased operations, the Department of Health could keep functioning while looking for a replacement. If the Department of Health ceased operations, there would be turmoil and chaos while the government looked for a replacement for its function. However, the government system would not cease to exist.

As can be imagined, problems that emerge between systems in general and their hierarchical 'parents' include conflicting goals, questions over centralization of decision making, distortions in feedback and losses of predictability (Kauffman 1980; Anderson and Johnson 1997). Considering the potential top of the hierarchy of social marketing systems, Dao Truong's article in this issue: "*Government-led Macro-social Marketing Programs in Vietnam: Outcomes, Challenges, and Implications*" provides examples of macro-social marketing programs undertaken by the government in Vietnam. His historical coverage of government-led macro-social marketing interventions provides an analysis of the challenges faced in macro-social marketing by governments. It extends recent thinking on the use of regulation in a macro-social marketing program (Kennedy and Parsons 2012) to multiple cases and contexts.

There are multiple notions of what types of systems exist and how they are placed within the hierarchy. For instance, systems could be natural, created by biology. They might be designed by humans as with engineering. Lastly, they may be social and made up of human interactions, such as with the market system, government, and religion (Checkland 1981; Dixon and Wilkinson 1984). Such social systems (i.e. the family system and the market system) often integrate with one another (e.g. for food supply) or are paired with designed systems for certain purposes (such as agriculture, or transportation) (Checkland 1981). Boulding suggests that the hierarchy between systems is based on their complexity and as such, social systems are above most other types of systems (1978).

A system is more complex when it involves a higher number of elements and interactions; they are open and constantly evolving due to behavioral influences. Unlike with a system such as the human body, interactions within the entities in the social system are only loosely organised and cannot be predetermined (Flood and Jackson 1991; Kauffman 1980). Such complex networks are likely to have multiple, ever changing goals through feedback and reflection (Skyttner 2005), as human interactions make for endlessly complex systems.

Another typology of systems that is favoured in social marketing is the ecological framework which sees the individual as enveloped by their personal microsystem, which directly

influences them (e.g. their family, and peers). These are surrounded by their mesosystem which links indirect influences in their exosystem (industry, social services, transportation, mass media, local politics) with their microsystem (e.g. through school, workplaces, church, and clubs). Finally, their macrosystem envelopes all these layers with their culture, beliefs, laws and institutions (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This provides another perception of how system hierarchies are organized, again emphasizing the researcher's focal points. Such a socio-ecological approach helps to avoid blaming consumers for inimical market choices, as individuals are often motivated by systemic issues (Hoek and Jones 2011). Multiple authors in social marketing have used a socio-ecological approach to analyse healthy eating (Dresler-Hawke and Veer 2006), tobacco control (Elder and Stern 1986), physical activity (Elder et al. 2006) and alcohol consumption (Brennan, Previte, and Fry 2016), and this advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO 1989).

Such hierarchical views of systems are shared by macromarketers (Layton 2009, 2011; Dixon 1984). Dixon (1984) uses an alternative typology of systems which originates from Parsons and Shils (1951) and reflects a functionalist perspective. Here, social and cultural systems are separated, with a cultural system conceived as the values, norms and institutions which guide actors in other social systems. A social system is thus a group of people with a function or purpose. Such functions include attaining goals between the focal system and other social systems like maintaining relationships. Social organization within the system occurs through pattern maintenance of cultural system aspects, and adaptation to the material environment. However, in Checkland's view, both cultural and social systems come under human activity systems (1981). This would seem to also reflect the views of Layton in his discussion on how 'deeply influenced' social systems remain from their cultural contexts (Layton 2011, p. 261).

While the system as a whole has a purpose, so too do each of the entities that make up that system (Churchman 1967) and as such, together the entities make more than just the sum of their parts. Feedback loops (Anderson and Johnson 1997) enable self-regulation between entities and their goals. As such, the study of systems is the study of the structure and relation of the interacting entities and how they relate and interact with one another with a purpose. This functionalist view was also taken in marketing by Alderson (1957, 1965) and is the basis of the definition of a marketing system:

"...a network of individuals, groups, and/or entities linked directly or indirectly through sequential or shared participation in economic exchange that creates, assembles, transforms, and makes available assortments of products, both tangible and intangible, provided in response to customer demand" (Layton 2007, p. 230).

Within marketing systems, hierarchies were also created, the one developed by Dixon and Wilkinson (1984) which placed individual marketing roles at the base below primary

organizations (households and firms), basic markets, unit flow channels (supplier relationships), transvection channels (supply chains), and transvection channel groups, placing the marketing system on top. Studies of marketing systems (along with their mapping, their parts, and their processes) abound in macromarketing along with studies of the consequences of marketing systems on society (for a review, see Layton and Grossbart 2006). However, looking at the specific consequences of marketing is not the key goal for social marketers who instead wish to learn from particular results for the purpose of creating attitude and behavior change for the well-being of society. For macro-social marketers, learning is paramount and such learning can often come from systems analysis (i.e. learning systems). Such learning systems can be created through using systems thinking and systems methodologies (Checkland 2000).

## Systems Thinking

Systems thinking applies systems theory to complex situations through modelling, simulation and problem solving. A systems approach uses a top down approach to consider a whole structure before studying the means that establish this structure. A systems analysis then seeks to map the structure of a system, including its goals, resources, actions, control mechanisms, and regulatory aspects among other things (Skyttner 2005). It is big-picture thinking that balances short and long term interests while recognizing that factors within the system are interdependent and dynamic (Anderson and Johnson 1997).

Systems thinking (Checkland 1981) is appropriate for use in social systems where the researcher is dealing with ill-structured, messy and hard to define issues. This type of thinking can be used to analyse past events, clarify theoretical concepts, and address societal issues. Most importantly, though, systems thinking provides a methodology which helps to analyze the complex world in which we live in by creating an ongoing learning system which can then be passed on to stakeholders (Checkland 2000). For macro-social marketers, such a learning system could apply leverage to a wicked problem. This could ensure ongoing learning, as well as effective interventions over the long term.

The appropriateness of systems thinking and theory for considering behavior change was acknowledged from near its conception (Churchman 1968). Moreover, the breakdown of systems which tend to lead to wicked problems (Kennedy 2016) is the fundamental reason for systems studies (Bunge 1977). The adoption of systems research also does away with the micro/macro divide that is developing in the social marketing domain to move beyond mere holistic thinking to true systems thinking (Brennan, Previte, and Fry 2016). However, with the recent splintering of theory in social marketing, a conceptual debate has emerged over which angle is more appropriate for social marketing. As Brennan, Previte, and Fry (2016) propose, the theoretical assumptions of the systems view of Layton are not suited to social marketing because they assume causal relationships that can be found and dealt with

independently of the system. Unfortunately, this reading of their work does not consider the philosophical assumptions of systems theory which would provide the opposite interpretation. That being said, their assertion that much of the systems work in marketing is based on economic exchange holds true and speaks to the need for systems theory to be adapted for the social marketing discipline.

What follows then is the explicit conceptualization of a philosophical viewpoint, as well as a methodology for systems thinking which incorporates systems theory. The basis of the philosophical perspective stems from critical systems theory (Ulrich 1987), which takes a neo-institutional perspective and focuses on methodological pluralism, emancipation and critical awareness (Flood and Jackson 1991). This provides a more nuanced view of systems more suitable to social marketers. The methodology presented here takes into consideration Checkland's most recent methodology for soft systems thinking (Checkland and Scholes 1990) and incorporates other methodologies that are compatible from social marketing. What is presented in this issue is not the 'one' approach to systems research and philosophy for social marketing, but rather, many approaches. These approaches should employ the researcher's own ontology and epistemology in seeking new contributions to macro-social marketing. As a result, the authors in this issue take general a complementarist position (Jackson 1987). This issue shows that the systems concept includes many ways to approach the study of systems. By embracing the mutual benefit of these various approaches, macro-social marketing can offer unique contributions by combining systems thinking and systems theory.

## Philosophical Perspective – Macro-Social Marketing Thinking

Systems thinking is based on two key beliefs: emergence and hierarchy as well as communication and control. As such systems thinkers hold that systems are a part of a hierarchy of systems with higher levels being more complex than lower ones because new properties emerge in them that are not present at lower levels. Secondly, between hierarchies, there is communication and information flow (including feedback), which is used to constrain or regulate relationships, behaviors and processes as control mechanisms (Checkland 1981). Ontologically, this asserts that the world exists and is, at times, 'intelligibly ordered' (Laszlo 1972).

However, such ordering is socially constructed and historically and culturally bound (Checkland 2000). This is epitomised by the view that the researcher is inextricably bound by the research context because they select the boundaries, structure, processes and inclusions/exclusions of their focal system (Checkland 1981; Layton 2007). Systems boundaries define what is inside and what is outside of that system; however, these boundaries are contrived by the researcher according to their research objective (Ulrich 1987) and are essentially arbitrary (Mattessich 1978).

That which is not included in the focal system can be considered that system's environment. For instance, the activity or purpose of the focal system helps to define it as the focal system (which would change depending on the research question) such as the retail system in fast fashion issues. Its subsystems then are defined by describing the systems that help create and provide inputs to the focal system (suppliers for instance or customers). The driving system that controls the focal system is considered its suprasystem (the economy or government for instance). As such, these layers could move up or down, or become larger or smaller depending on the research question and knowledge of the researcher (suppliers or customers for instance, could become the focal system). The researcher, often based on their view of the research goal, also sets who within the boundaries of the system has power and control (Churchman 1970).

As such, researchers cannot claim to be an observer of the system and differing world views and learning environments will provide different interpretations of systems and how the function (Laszlo 1972). Essentially, systems thinkers are in some ways constructivist (Hoffman 1988). In the knowledge they construct, one can discover systems models and consensus (Holwell 1997; Van Gigch 1979). This agrees with the behavioral-ecological-systems approach to social marketing, which believes that an individual will have a different world view based on the influences and social layers which surround the individual (Brennan, Previte, and Fry 2016). It also supports a neo-institutional perspective found in social marketing (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014) which views the world as socially constructed and organised by sets of institutions (Rao, Monin, and Durand 2003). Social systems are a collection of those institutions that govern behavior, meanings, and legitimate power (Giddens 1984). Therefore, researchers using a systems philosophy need to specify the worldview that informs the research (Checkland 2000). That being said, it is also important that when a researcher sets the boundaries of a system, it remains stable enough to be differentiated from other systems to be studied (Marchal 1975).

Critical systems thinking additionally considers emancipation, critical awareness, and complementarianism (Midgley 1996). Emancipation considers all individuals (but especially the disadvantaged) within a society and seeks to improve their position and potential through inclusionary principles and procedures (Flood and Jackson 1991). This view is also taken by many social marketers and is exemplified in community based approaches to social marketing (Mckenzie-Mohr 2000), and co-creative social marketing processes (Domegan et al. 2013).

Personal improvements, such as quality of life, are temporally and historically bound. Accordingly, issues of power and how they might impact the definition of improvement need to be considered. This focus on the disadvantaged can be seen in macromarketing articles on social marketing also (Dholakia 1984; Chance and Deshpande 2009).

Complementarianism, as the second aspect of critical systems theory, asserts that multiple methodologies are

possible if the most suitable is used for the research purpose. An understanding and acknowledgement of the consequences of methodological choice are, however, needed along with the base values and assumptions of the system and the research goals (Midgley 1996). Such critical awareness means that assumptions are analyzed along with their consequences and origins. Questions concerning the researcher (such as motivation, control, expertise and legitimation of the research) need to be addressed. This would be accomplished rigorously by including all stakeholders (Ulrich 1987) and then considering all types of social marketing interventions (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Goven 2013).

## Macro-Social Marketing Methodology

Methodology provides the strategy used to design and make decisions about the methods used (Crotty 1998). This methodology as stated before takes a complementarianist view and so combines soft-systems methodology (Checkland and Scholes 1990), interactive management methodology (Duane et al. 2016), the socioecological framework (Collins, Tapp, and Pressley 2010), structuration theory (Giddens 1979), total systems intervention methodology (Flood and Jackson 1991), and chrematistics methodology (Kadirov, Varey, and Wolfenden 2016).

In these various frames, authors have offered differing ways of comparing or analyzing aspects within systems, within macromarketing, and in the social marketing literature. It is not claimed that this is a comprehensive review of literature, merely a selection of relevant literature and approaches. The methodology in this issue includes 1) developing an understanding of the situation, 2) creating conceptual models of the system, 3) debating the system map, 4) and acting. It is presented here linearly for ease of understanding but, as with systems analysis, is not a hard 'prescription' and can be used in part, whole, and out of order. Whatever suits the needs of the macro-social marketer should be used.

### *Develop an Understanding of the Situation*

First, as with an emancipatory and neo-institutional view, stakeholders need to be involved at every step of the research process. The voices of the disadvantaged may need to be favoured if power relations tarnish discussions. As such, developing an understanding of the situation is the starting point for the researcher (Duane et al. 2016; Checkland and Scholes 1990). Such an understanding includes the acknowledgements of the assumptions of the researcher and the social institutions and norms of which both the researcher, the stakeholders, and thus their systems, are a part of understanding the issue. Here, a social marketer might define the problem. However, with wicked problems, defining the problem may be too difficult. Instead, characterizing the problematic situation provides a learning system to comprehend the causes of the systemic issue at hand. For instance, if you consider the fast fashion industry, one might erroneously place the problem with only one of the

following stakeholders – customers, retailers, marketers, suppliers, or governments (Kennedy 2016). However, the problem of fast fashion is a system-wide problem with multiple perpetuating factors and so an understanding of the system in which it is a part and those factors is what is sought, instead.

Linear models are difficult to use for wicked problems. Accordingly, system mapping needs to be undertaken (Domegan et al. 2017). In understanding the system, the researcher will seek to map the system and its characteristics. There are multiple authors who have posited the characteristics that could map a system. Within systems literature, Van Gigh (1979) suggests ownership, actors, transformation processes, customers, environment and worldviews.

Layton and Grossbart (2006) review macromarketing systems research and provide a large table of components that can be defined in a system. These are based around environmental factors, initial conditions, boundaries and inputs, as well as components and outcomes. Much of Layton's recent work focuses on the emergence of markets and the properties which facilitate this inception and growth of structure and function within a marketing system. These come under the headings of exchange contexts; flows, roles; networks – structure, dynamics and; organising principles. He further suggests that there are three viewpoints for analysing a system. These are viewed horizontally or with a cross-section (as with a mall), vertically (by following the process stages of the system) or historically (Layton 2007, p. 231).

A total systems intervention approach suggests that systems metaphors be used to symbolize structure and its alternatives (Flood and Jackson 1991). Power, persuasion, participation and presence are also aspects suggested in the literature (Dixon 1999; Layton 2008). Structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984) is one option for understanding the structure and functioning or process of change in social systems. Change occurs through domination (power and control), signification (meaning creation), and legitimation (rights and obligations) within a system. These are enacted in a social system through communication, sanctioning and power plays. Such an approach has been applied in social marketing in understanding alcohol consumption (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014). An example of this type of an approach can be seen in this issue's "Addressing the Wicked Problem of American Gun Violence Consumer Interest Groups as Macro-social Marketers" by Aimee Huff, Michelle Barnhart, Brandon McAlexander and James McAlexander presents a model of interest group persistence which is based on exchange theory. Through internal and external strategies, they show gun violence prevention groups aim at influencing systems above and below them in the hierarchy including legislators and individuals.

Upstream regulatory influences are considered in a methodology for chrematistics, suggested by Kadirov, Varey, and Wolfenden (2016). Here, they suggest that parallel systems be explicitly considered in order to contemplate those "regulative influences on a marketing system's structure, and operations of market action perpetuated by actors with power/dominance" (p. 55). Further to this, they suggest (p. 55):

- Investigating the potential myopia with regard to community needs
- Studying the incidence of demand engineering
- Examining the commercialization of the basic necessities of life
- Assessing the operationalization of success

It has been suggested that mapping can be completed using multiple methods including the use of trade flows (Layton 1989), Bayesian modelling (Ekici and Ekici 2016), or with more participatory methods such as dynamic system modelling (Arquitt and Cornwell 2007; Richardson 2011), collective intelligence software (Domegan et al. 2016), or fuzzy system cognitive mapping (Meliadou et al. 2012) though others are available. These last three were successfully used to map systems in social marketing research (Domegan et al. 2016). Methods to collect data for this aspect can include interviews, focus groups, observation, document analysis, literature reviews, historical analysis or surveys (e.g. Collins, Tapp, and Pressley 2010; Krisjanous 2014; Duffy, Layton, and Dwyer 2017).

### Create Conceptual Models of the System

The name of this stage may be misleading at first, as one might think that in mapping the system to understand the problem, a conceptual model is created. However, within this aspect, it is important that the model is not a description of the real-world system one works with, otherwise the model negates the usefulness of comparing it with the real-world system map. The conceptual model should employ the minimum activities necessary for the system to accomplish its purpose (Checkland 1981). Other existing conceptual models can also be used here to create insight when comparing the two.

The social-ecological framework could be applied to look at the social forces at each level of the hierarchy and their power and influence in the situation (Collins, Tapp, and Pressley 2010). This approach was used by Joya Kemper and Paul Balantine in this issue in their article, "Formal and Informal Institutional Change: Tackling Obesity through Macro-Social Marketing". Building on the socio-ecological model, they extend it by including and dividing environmental factors into informal and formal institutions. They suggest that the environmental factors of availability, physical and some social structures come under formal institutions while other social structures and cultural messages are informal institutions. This provides another view to structure a system and identify its component parts and influences.

There are other macromarketing models of marketing systems (see Layton 2007, p. 236 for a review) but perhaps the most relevant conceptualisation from macromarketing for social marketers comes in MAS theory (Mechanisms, Actions, Structures – Layton 2015). This looks at the elements of human behavior of systems. Important to this are the interactions among social mechanisms, strategic action fields and

marketing systems. It is also important how these influence and are influenced by beliefs, behaviors and practices.

Kennedy (2016) applies MAS theory to social marketing for the first time, adding institutional norms as a layer between systems, MAS and actors. She posits that by changing institutional norms through social marketing interventions with MAS, a marketing system can be changed. MAS theory has also been used to uncover system actors and their shared narratives in social marketing (Kennedy et al. 2017). By analyzing the social mechanisms and action fields of the fast fashion system, the narratives help discuss the stakeholder power imbalances that perpetuate the system functioning and processes as they currently are. Lastly, Duhaime, McTavish, and Ross (1985) offer another model of use for social marketers. It shows factors leading to social change and includes enabling conditions, precipitating circumstances, societal motivation and actions that are embedded within one another and enable or halt social change.

### *Debate the System Map and Models, Then Take Action*

As a participatory process, all previous steps (if the methodology is used linearly) create resources to aid debate and create consensus between stakeholders for insight into the systems and situation. Such discussion with stakeholders reveals more about the actual system structure and dynamics than any of the other stages. Here ideas for appropriate changes are suggested by stakeholders and the potential consequences of those explored within the system. Consequences through feedback loops provide analytical insight and the ability to modify the original conception of the system situation. They help to identify appropriate areas to intervene and may include changes to structure, processes or attitudes (Checkland 1981).

Social marketing advocates a participatory process (Domegan et al. 2013). Previous articles have used a collaborative systems integration approach (May and Previte 2016). Such an approach regards stakeholder viewpoints as being equal, with none having the right to be 'right'. All stakeholders need to be heard, and each hold power and influence over others in the system. Coordination must be done. Critical systems heuristics offers one avenue for making sure that the vulnerable and disadvantaged are involved in the process (Ulrich 1983). A key question for macro-social marketers to address is whether the system is working for a particular group. Taking a critical heuristics approach, scholars can develop a theoretical path for disadvantaged groups to have their say and to be heard (Ulrich 1987).

"IM" is a software-facilitated thought mapping technique to help groups develop outcomes combined from inputs from individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. IM has been used successfully in social marketing to allow for this process to occur, specifically with regards to obesity (Duane et al. 2016) and marine ecology (Domegan et al. 2017). Domegan et al. (2016) give an excellent example of the use of IM to model a system, gain stakeholder engagement, debate and arrive at potential solutions. The systems software for IM allowed stakeholders' thoughts to be mapped and structured

according to the barriers to a sustainable marine ecosystem. The ensuing barrier map provided the structure and interrelationships for change and consequence in the system, its causal pathways. The outcome of debate providing clarity around the situation and a potential list of interventions or solutions.

An excellent example of much of the proposed methodology can be seen in this issue's article, "*When and How to Intervene: Conceptualizing The Epidemic Life Cycle of Wicked Consumer Behavior*," by Matthias Koch. Koch combines the metaphor of an epidemic with modelling of tobacco and soft drink consumption to create a learning system, which he calls "the epidemic life cycle." His analysis looks at the intersection of multiple systems, including the marketing and consumer behavior systems to provide practical and pragmatic understanding of where interventions may be positioned for wicked problems.

Finally, action is needed. This part of the process stems from the origins of soft systems methodology which is in action research (Checkland 1981; Checkland and Scholes 1990). As Checkland asserts, it is in making changes to the system that its true structure is understood. As an insightful example of action within the system for a wicked problem, see Anne Hamby, Meghan Pierce and David Brinberg's article, "*Solving Complex Problems: Sustainable Change through Social Entrepreneurship, Community Action, and Social Marketing*," contained in this issue. It combines multiple viewpoints for sustainable change. They posit that by using concepts from social entrepreneurship and community action research, a community will be better able to sustain change. This is proposed to result from community members becoming invested in the needed changes.

However, it would be timely to note that the methodology presented here does not have to be used in a linear fashion from start to finish. On the contrary, the macro-social marketer can use any of the proposed methodology at any time, and order it as makes sense for their situation. According to Checkland there are at least two possible ways of approaching a systems methodology. The first is methodology driven and focuses on creating an intervention. As such the approach may use the methodology as a 'recipe' and follow it sequentially. A second approach is situation driven and based on interaction with key stakeholders in an iterative learning process for long term change (Checkland and Holwell 1998). However, the key aim of this second approach is not to find a one-off 'solution'. Under a systems perspective, it is unlikely that one change will improve a situation without creating some unforeseen consequence. No, the purpose of the second approach is to create a learning system together with the system's constituents and then offer them for future intervention and planning (Checkland 2000).

### **Future Research**

In explaining a systems philosophy and methodology for macro-social marketing it is hoped that the domain may move forward more harmoniously. Especially for those new to the

area, this may be a good starting point for knowledge of systems in social marketing.

Future research in the macro-social marketing area needs to be undertaken on specific social marketing systems. While there are some studies that have been conducted that map areas of social marketing systems (see the obesity systems map – Butland et al. 2007), the following questions remain unanswered:

- Do social marketing systems have the same components as marketing systems? Do they have the same flows, and exchanges that are mentioned by Layton and Grossbart (2006)?
- What are social marketing systems' subsystems and suprasystems and how do they link to upstream and downstream marketing?
- How do social marketing systems interact with marketing systems and other social systems?

In the area of mapping specific wicked problem situations (such as with tobacco, alcohol or fast fashion):

- What perpetuating processes support these systems?
- How do they influence other social systems (e.g. family)?
- What are the consequences on other systems?
- How might we intervene and what would the consequences be?

Lastly, in considering the internal processes within a social marketing system:

- What are upstream/suprasystem processes?
- What are downstream/subsystem processes?
- What are the information flows, control mechanisms and regulatory institutions that govern interactions among social marketing system hierarchies?
- Are there more effective and efficient processes for internal social marketing system functioning?

It is hoped that these questions and the articles in this special issue in macro-social marketing will spark inspiration in macro-social marketers and a development in the field.

## Conclusion

This article set out to provide a conceptualisation of macro-social marketing systems philosophy and methodology. It has done so with a mixture of systems literature, macromarketing literature, and also social marketing literature. Research questions that have not yet been addressed have also been outlined. It is the hope that this article works towards creating a harmony in the emerging field of macro-social marketing, where a shared agenda may be reached, for the betterment of the field and the well-being of society.

## Author's Note

Ann-Marie Kennedy is now affiliated to University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

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### Author Biography

**Ann-Marie Kennedy** is a senior lecturer in Marketing at the University of Canterbury. Her research interests include macromarketing, especially macro-level social marketing, marketing ethics, and systems theory. She has published in the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of Social Marketing*, *Journal of Sociology and Public Policy*, and the *Journal of Business Research* among others.