Innovation and social creativity: the economic benefits of mass creativity (or a new site for exploitation) by YProductions

The traditional concept of innovation has shifted along the years, the ways people use the word have also varied. Generally used as a model for economic development, now it can be implemented as a way to describe a multitude of human, social or cultural forms of progress. Along the following paper we are going to analyze a number of discourses that hold that society can be turned into a potential source of creativity. Once this creativity is properly channeled and pushed towards the market it can be turned into innovation. We will also see how creativity has stopped being an entity hold by few to be conceived as the results of a collective and non-linear form of cooperation. There is no doubt that these changes can have a positive impact on the social realm, but we should not forget that the private sector will also see in this creativity a growing resource to be exploited. To understand this complex picture we will compare a set of different approaches to this reality, seeing what economic and work related transformations these models can have.

It comes as no surprise that a number of coporations and private firms are aware of the need to have systems of constant innovation operating as a strategy to gain competitive advantage and as a basis of economic development. For this reason a great number of businesses have incorporated R&D departments into their infrastructure, in order to, on the one hand, dampen the risk inherent to schumpeterian innovation, and on the other, to normalise innovation-based development by constantly introducing small scale variations. An important shift from Schumpeter's innovation model of innovation which he clearly described in the 50's is clearly discernible, as "the basic agent is no longer Schumpeter's innovative businessman, but rather, the company, the firm, which is linked to innovation and to the accumulation of production-linked knowledge" (Corsani, 2004:96). And so, the tendency known as "economic evolutionism", promoted amongst others by Richard Nelson and Sydney Winter (see Nelson & Winter, 1982) gathers relevance. Innovation and economic development are considered an endogenous element of production, as opposed to an exogenous one, as Schumpeter argued. In the following paper we will look more closely at this relationship inside/outside of innovation, and describe how businesses have gradually realised that they must be able to capture the creative flows that exceed the limits of R&D departments, in order to hold their position strong at the top of the wave of innovation.

Before arriving at this point it is nevertheless necessary to understand an extremely important shift that has severe consequences for the possibilities of formulating a theory that can help us understand the function of innovation in the field of culture. This shift will affect our understanding of universities as centres for the production of knowledge, their hegemony is gradually contested by social collectives, artistic processes, cultural spaces and a great range of new relations and formations of a social nature that have an indisputable potential within the field of the production of knowledge.
Although we have been able to ascertain that a great number of alliances between the business and the university sectors have gradually taken place, this fact has not prevented the latter being superseded by manifold cognitive alliances that have been generated by the proliferation of technological tools.

In certain cases, the university functions like an external R&D department for a number of businesses (especially in the computing and technology fields). This relationship that is established between the business and the academic sectors takes on a specific shape depending on the type of link that is established between the two. Examples of this are technology parks built around universities, such as Silicon Valley and Stanford University, or the private sector in the Basque Country and the Universidad de Deusto, or R&D labs in university campuses. In addition, a number of research parks external to business centres, such as the Research Triangle in North Carolina, have recently emerged. All of the above can help us understand, on the one hand, the extent to which businesses have interiorised the importance of research in order to promote innovation, and, on the other, the complexity of the relations and structures designed to capture and attract new forms of knowledge, that businesses aim to use in order to promote innovation, and so improve their competitive capacity.

In spite of all of the above stated, at the end of the Nineties a change took place, and the situation begun to be appraised in different terms. This was possibly motivated by the empirical identification of new models of net-structured labour, and by the realisation that it is not just universities that are prepared to produce knowledge, but society as such as well. With this last generalisation, we are hoping to introduce a complex debate, which we are aware we are not going to be able to conclude successfully, and within which what we have roughly and inaccurately termed the social, is gradually understood as a living being capable of producing knowledge and a source of creativity. We will use the term “social creativity” to refer to this reality, albeit conscious that at this time there is a great range of terminology in dispute with which this new reality is expected to be framed. If there is something worth mentioning at this point, it is that this phenomenon has been identified and described by thinkers that cover the whole range of the political spectrum. Representatives of both the

neoliberal right and the non-conformist left have looked for ways of describing what has even been considered a change in paradigm in the field of the production of knowledge.

In what follows we will attempt to understand what it is that is being referred to when this “social creativity” is mentioned. We will render the different ways in which it has been represented (mass creativity, social creativity, creative flows, social wealth, creative basins, social manufacturing, *millieus innovateurs*, general intellect, etc.), in so doing, will try to frame a polymorphous process, which mutates constantly and is, at the moment, in full emergence. What we will be able to discern with the help of all these approaches and descriptions, is the way in which society (which comprises forms of relation, affect, sociability, cultural exchange, counter- and subculture movements, structures of cooperation, antagonisms, linguistic forms, migrations, etc.) is to be understood as a productive base, as a space for the emergence and production of creativity, which, if understood properly, can be an excellent resource for the private sector. We will use the concept of social creativity as a category including many different denotations, which, albeit non-exclusive, in certain cases look to promote very different processes of sociopolitical reaction.

In any case, the one thing that is widely agreed upon is that this “social creativity” is an excellent basis that can help the processes of production of innovation (this is why it is sometimes confused with social innovation, a category that we will also analyse in this chapter) with a potential yet to be discovered. On the other hand, it will again prove evident that every time this social emergence or creativity is discussed, it is closely linked to cities and big metropolises (Rodríguez 2007, Bonet 2007, Florida 2002, Landry 2000). The latter are presented as ideal spaces for the generation of social flows and interaction and for the proliferation of cultural movements. And despite this, as we will later prove, this idea is not specifically located in particular geographical enclaves. The Internet is consolidated as a space of mass confluence and creativity that establishes new paradigms of communication and collective labour. In order to lay this out in a clear manner, we will proceed to index the different approaches to the notion of social creativity and so attempt to understand the differences between them and the particularities of each of them. This will not be an exhaustive analysis nor do we expect to present a dialogue between the different positions. Our aim is just to put forward the different configurations of the same process.

Creative basins and social wealth.

This understanding of the phenomenon was first produced in post-autonomist thinking. It has emerged under different names and always looked to emphasise the creative potential of society as a heterogeneous conglomerate of subjects, capacities and potencies. The first references to the concept are found in *Le bassin de travail inmatériel dans la métropole parisienn*e of 1996, by Antonella Corsani, Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri, who will refer to them as "basins of cooperation of immaterial labour" (see Rodríguez, 2007: 198). This definition looks to emphasise the fact that both factories and businesses have been superseded by forms of knowledge and creativity that reach beyond their limits. Basins of cooperation are hereby introduced as spaces that go beyond the notion of centres of creative research that R&D departments represent. This has been thoroughly argued in Emmanuel Rodríguez's "*Wealth and the City*":

"A great part of the work cycle that made up these businesses' effective production was not taking place in their premises, nor in those of the businesses contracted out. It depended on an imprecise space intersected by training circuits (both public-formal and informal), cultural tendencies and networks, as well as lifestyles. These spaces were called basins of immaterial labour (...) a vast plurality of agents, qualifications and knowledges that went well beyond the firm's perimeter." (2007: 198)

The economist Antonella Corsani has underscored the limitations of the factory and the Fordist space, and the ways in which this is superseded by a form of creativity that goes beyond its limited confines. She describes this as "the explosion of the factory, the distribution of new forms of cooperation within the interstices created by Fordist business, and, in short, the fact that innovation escapes the control of big business" (Corsani, 2004: 91). We can hereby discern that social creativity is not just an anecdotal or marginal phenomenon, but rather, that it lies right at the centre of a series of economic and social transformations that are about to take place on a global scale. Only when the latter has been realised, can the process, by which subjective production and mass creativity become the centre of the process of production, be understood. This is brilliantly expounded in the following passage, in which Corsani presents the ways in which this transformation will affect subjective processes:

"if during industrial capitalism subjectivity was to be left behind in the factory's lockers, in contemporary capitalism (...) it must be put to work. The passage from an economy in which invention/innovation was the exception, to one in which invention/innovation is the norm, entails a passage from spatialised time to the time of becoming." (Corsani, 2007: 48)

It is hereby clear that a process of economic transformation will be instanced which for its realisation will require modifications in the subjective disposition of all citizens. These will have to forget the Fordist fragmentations and separations: work/leisure, production/creativity, duty/pleasure, in order to feel fully creative and part of a larger process, in which the confluence of different subjectivities will be measured as wealth, a wealth with a social impact. Within this configuration, cities have an important role to play as they are considered the perfect spaces for these processes to take place. Rodríguez emphasises this fact when he argues that "the basins of cooperation are innate to metropolitan life, they constitute the prime matter of urban experience" (2007: 199). It is indeed in the metropolitan spaces, with their multiple intersections of agents, their economic flows and multiplicity of knowledges, where the potential of these creative basins are finally realised. These basins complement other economic and cultural dynamics which previously existed in the city. Depending on the type of relationship that the former establishes with the latter, they can benefit from the latter's unquestionable potential. Rodríguez points out that "alongside the great macroeconomic magnitudes there is a proliferating sphere of symbiotic relations, which can and must be understood as the social underground of wealth *tout court*" (2007: 190), that is to say, these creative flows can be understood as a source of value, or wealth, that is added to and sometimes promotes the forms of economic value already present in metropolitan centres. However, for the first time, "cultural wealth, the production of knowledge and innovation in a broad sense, surpass the field of public and private R&D institutes. This proliferation of cognitive production (...) takes place within a complex space that traverses formal institutions and businesses" (2007: 203). We can therefore conceive of this social creativity as a whole that exceeds existing institutions and categories, but which nevertheless has the capacity and the potential to be linked to all of them, such that it becomes a new resource that can be implemented or exploited as long as forms of appraising and segmenting this immanent whole are established.

In order to understand this new reality, the social must be understood not as a macro-element but as a proliferation of relations at different levels, whose complementarity supports the generation of these processes of immaterial collaboration. In reference to this, Rodríguez adds that "the notion of the metropolis as a conglomeration of heterogeneous subjects, capable of potentially inferring a greater power of innovation and creation, requires a molecular approach to describe social relations in terms of cooperation, and hence, of labour" (2007: 198). We can here discern the first great difference as regards the concept of social creativity. The analysis of the term from a labour perspective evidences the fact that if these relations of production are not understood as such, the possibility of them easily becoming the object of exploitation is hardly narrow, given that, even though they are

crystallising into a new resource, their appraisal and management will mainly take place within the field of private business. It is very important to keep in mind that in addition to constituting a new social phenomenon, these basins of cooperation have an extremely important potential for the production of value and wealth. Depending on the ways that access to these basins is negotiated, new labour paradigms, completely different from previously existing ones, will emerge. In reference to this last point, Rodríguez states that "it is not possible to determine one sole difference as motive or cause for the innovation and production of knowledge. What can be discerned is rather a conglomerate or cluster of institutions and businesses, as well as communities of interest, cultural tendencies, and, why not, lifestyles. It is precisely onto this space that a quasi-infinite set of positive economic virtualities is projected" (2007: 204). The said virtualities are disputed and their management models are determinant as far as the understanding of this creative potential is concerned. As Montserrat Galcerán has indicated, as long as social knowledge is not exploited by universities, social movements, businesses or institutions, it will remain latent. However, it is this exploitation of the potentialities of social knowledge, that which can be understood as innovation[1]. As a conclusion to this point, Rodríguez affirms that "in understanding innovation as the creation of *possibles* (which at the same time appear as a new field of virtuals) a brand new light is projected onto economic science. It is certainly doubtless that businesses have a prime interest in innovation inasmuch as it determines the market future. It is in relation to this that legislation on intellectual and industrial property has a pivotal and possibly unique function in allowing businesses to appropriate continuous and complex processes" (2007: 204).

To sum up: creative basins take shape in cities and urban centres and comprise a multitude of subjects, ideas, knowledges, forms of communication, sociability and values. These basins have a creative potential that exceeds the limits of factories and businesses, and they therefore become a new resource. Hence, they must be understood as a new form of labour, and their economic potential must also be analysed and correctly evaluated. The main aim of the private sector, institutions and universities, in relation to this latent wealth is to appropriate it by generating various channels for accessing it and by regulating it with intellectual property laws. But, despite their capture by the above mentioned organisms, these creative basins are still to be regarded as a form of social wealth that can benefit the whole of society. And lastly, it is precisely the moment at which this creative potential enters the market and is transformed into economic value that we can term innovation. The above sums up one of the different approaches to the phenomenon of social creativity. The

[1] This is a summary of one of the arguments that she presented in the lecture that she gave at the conference "Strategists in Barcelona" at the CASM in 2006.

approach that we will analyse in what follows is similar to the one treated in this section, but has different objectives.

Creative Classes

The first theory that we encounter when addressing the question of a new class consciousness is that by one of the most controversial authors to have analysed and written about the subject that we are hereby trying to define. Richard Florida, a guru and agitator of regional politics, has generated a theoretical body based on a series of indexes and statistics that allow him to measure the creative capacity of a city. If an urban centre gives a positive result in terms of levels of talent, tolerance and technology, it can happily consider itself lucky, as its economic growth is guaranteed. Otherwise, there is not much it can do. But let us first of all look at the way in which Florida constructs this hypothesis and his conceptualisation of this social creativity.

In his book “The Rise of the Creative Class” (Florida, 2002) the author states vehemently that “creativity is the driving force of economic growth” (2002:xxvii), and goes on to argue that therefore “the places with a flourishing artistic and cultural environment are the ones that generate creative economic outcomes and overall economic growth” (2002:261). Florida is the first author to closely link together economic development and cultural life, thereby generating new forms of understanding the role of culture and of evaluating its value. Needless to say, these flourishing sites, these spaces where creativity blooms, are populated by individuals who are, in short, the producers of this creativity. Hence, in Florida’s work, these creative individuals acquire a special relevance. He goes so far as to designate them as a new social class.

The value of these creative subjects is unquestionable, given that, following Florida’s argument, “regional economic growth is powered by creative people, who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas” (2002:249). Hence, one of the consequences that can be derived from this notion is the fact that the only requirement for implementing systems of regional growth is to attract creative people (we admit to not knowing precisely what this term should mean). Florida continues to argue that “greater and more diverse concentrations of creative capital in turn lead to higher rates of innovation, high-technology business formation, job regeneration and economic growth” (2002:249). It is worth highlighting the change in terminology from the term ‘creativity’ to that of ‘creative capital’. In this model, creativity is thoroughly instrumentalised and so becomes an economic resource. Florida goes on to argue that in order for this creative sphere to take place, in order to generate this creative capital, a “social structure of creativity” must be promoted, a structure

that will facilitate the creation of "an eco-system or habitat in which the multidimensional forms of creativity take root and flourish. By supporting lifestyle and cultural institutions like cutting edge music scenes or vibrant artistic communities, it helps to attract and stimulate those who create in business and technology" (2002:54). It is clearly discernible that Florida understands this new creativity as an economic resource that can be put at the service of the private sector. Culture hereby looses its autonomy and is no longer intrinsically interesting, but rather the opposite, it is a necessary element of the economic processes that it helps promote. In order for this social creativity to emerge, tolerant and open spaces must be created, and therefore most of the social urbanism and engineering that Florida proposes is specifically geared towards designing these kinds of spaces. It is indeed a fact that in any case it is a highly complicated if not impossible endeavour to design cultural cities, that is, to predispose a population to be more creative. However, Florida solves this problem by appealing to a new and emerging social class: the creative class.

This new social class obviously comprises creative individuals (as ambiguous as it may sound). And, unlike the working class, it is a class that enjoys high mobility levels and is therefore not linked for life to the same and only city. This is in part due to the fact that "creative people don't just cluster where the jobs are. They cluster in places that are centres of creativity" (2007:7). In other words, this new class prefers to live in places with high levels of creativity (which they themselves will generate) rather than in places with high employment rates. Hence they will advocate a wholly different set of values. It is worth pausing for a moment at this point and ask ourselves why the concept of class is being used when it has such a specific weight and such close links with the concept of labour. Florida seems to prefer to avoid this dialogue with the term's conceptual (and political) past and merely affirms that "a class is a cluster of people who have common interests and tend to think, feel, behave similarly" (2002:8). We have at this point to close the door tight on our cynicism and avoid any comments about the naiveté inherent to this notion of class. Criticism to this idea is so evident, that we will spare the reader the time to read it.

This new class, united by common interests rather than by political ideas or for social reasons, "prefers more informal, active, street level variant of amenities" (2002:259). On the other hand, if heretofore the working class worked for money, now the creative classes will do it for other reasons, as "creative individuals, from artists and writers to scientists and open-source software developers, are driven primarily by internal motivations" (2004:34). This creative social whole, this new class, does indeed work, and derives pleasure from it. Creative individuals find a genuine motivation in their work, as "money is an important but insufficient motivation" (2002:89), and "the best people in the field are motivated by passion" (2002:88). And so Florida identifies a supposed new social group, which is motivated by its

own creative drive, and whose interests are linked to art, culture, and street life. In other words, these creative subjects are not driven by a political ideal but by a lifestyle, and are always readily available to work for free. At the same time, this social class will be an important dynamising force in urban centres, generating economic growth and regional development. It is therefore not necessary to motivate these individuals, but rather to find ways to extract this wealth that is generated by their "being creative". In this regard, Florida emphasises "the need for new structures for systematically eliciting and applying creativity - such as large scale funding for basic research and an extensive system of venture capital, as well as a broad millieu for harnessing artistic and cultural creativity" (2002:22). It is precisely the forms of access to this social creativity (or creative class) that which justifies the economic existence of the forms themselves, given that, according to Florida, "'knowledge' and 'information' are the tools and material of creativity. 'Innovation', whether in the form of a new technological artifact or a business model or method, is its product" (2002:44). In other words, creativity is the prime matter of innovation. A shift is clearly discernible in this model, as it is the business sector that which will, up to a certain point, utilise the social as a resource, and so will outsource their R&D departments. Society thus turns into a productive element, and the social components that generate creativity, that is, music, art, film, and culture in general, are conceived in purely instrumental terms. The promotion of culture is therefore motivated by totally different reasons than those assumed to be heretofore.

Mass Creativity and Hidden Innovation

The notion of mass creativity has been mainly developed by the sometimes unclassifiable and always opportunistic DEMOS's co-director, Charles Leadbeater.. The term intends to question the idea that innovation is an exercise that only a few scientists, specialists, and researchers, specifically dedicated to the promotion of innovation itself, can manage to perform. Contrary to this, Leadbeater considers creativity and the potential for innovation to be contained within the social, and argues that the latter can take shape in numerous ways. We will link this concept of mass creativity with NESTA's notion of hidden innovation, which refers to all those forms of innovation that take place within the social, but that, due to their micro nature and their multiplicity, cannot be captured by traditional innovation indicators. We will look at two reports by NESTA: an article written by Charles Leadbeater titled 'Ten Habits of Mass Innovation' (Leadbeater, 2006), and the report 'Hidden Innovation' written and produced by NESTA (Nesta, 2007).

Leadbeater describes the "society of mass innovation as a place where creativity and innovation are everyday activities, practised in many settings, by many people. Innovation is

not just something done for the masses but by the masses" (2006:4). This democratisation of innovation partly entails a dehierarchisation of its practice and the recognition that, within the social, processes of research and of production of knowledge are indeed taking place, and that these can be, if not more, at least as interesting as the ones found within traditional R&D labs. And hence, according to this new conceptualisation of the process, "all backgrounds can be participants in innovation. Investing in widely spread tools for creativity - software that amplifies people's creativity - will be vital. We need to encourage a wider culture of 'citizen innovation[2]'" (2006:9). The creative potential that Leadbeater assigns to citizens requires to be fostered, encouraged and fed. Even though it is a fact that people as such have creative potential, Leadbeater thinks that, at this point in time, the latter is not being properly made use of, nor supported. One of the problems underscored by the author in this report is that of education, and his proposal includes changing the model of education. The whole of the system must be reconsidered, and we must conceive of "education systems designed for the innovation economy not the industrial economy. Mass creativity will thrive in societies with education systems that are curiosity-led, create high levels of self-motivation and promote collaboration between learners" (2006:10). This entails a radical change in the ways that education structures are conceived.

Interestingly, Charles Leadbeater argues that this new education system must integrate many of the values that have been traditionally associated with self-managed movements and collectives. This is in part due to the fact that many citizens have been raised and have grown up in a society in which this type of cooperative labour structures have been standardised. They have been naturalised, and the hacker ethic (sic) has become the norm. This is clearly discernible in Leadbeater's text when he proposes that we "imagine an education system for the generation that grew up using eBay and Google, MySpace and Wikipedia: participative, personalised, collaborative, always available" (2006:11). Other works by the same author reveal that the main part of his thinking is constructed out of these big models of open and participative production. He considers structures such as that by Wiki, or free software models, those which a new conception of innovation should aim at replicating[3].

Leadbeater foresees a complete change in paradigm as far as forms of understanding creativity and promoting innovation are concerned. These open models are nothing more than anticipants of a model of mass creativity which he later defines, and which is about to radically change the current models of production, their systems being that which is going to

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[2] Let us add as a reminder that this text has been written with the objective of offering recommendations for generating public policies capable of promoting innovation.
[3] For more information on this, please refer to the book, soon to be published, "We Think" by the same author, digitally available at http://www.wethinkthebook.net/home.aspx

suffer most alterations. "In the past, the assumption was that most big innovations would come from well-funded big companies, with big research budgets and the resources to translate ideas into products" (2006:13), however, right now these innovations are being created by collectives of anonymous citizens. "Now, increasingly disruptive ideas start in the margins, among passionate ProAm[4] innovators or small companies. Ideas are moving from the margins - YouTube, MySpace, Wikipedia - to the mainstream faster than ever" (2006:13). Leadbeater's notion of marginal spaces is certainly disputable, nevertheless there is no question that the speed at which certain products go from having a marginal relevance to becoming products of mass consumption is without equivalence. A pivotal element for Leadbeater is big business' capacity to identify these new sources of innovation, as big business is the only organism capable of high investment levels. He argues that large "companies tend to be wary of innovating in the small, emerging and marginal markets that often produce the biggest disruptive innovations. In those settings, creative consumers may be the only viable source of innovation" (2006:16). In order to promote innovation it is therefore crucial that big businesses and investment groups are capable of identifying this new reality, that they make use of social innovations and profit from them in the market. Leadbeater's model in part argues for the outsourcing of research, assigning it to collectives that are already developing this sort of projects, programmes and participative labour systems.

As regards the above stated, the report "Hidden Innovation" reminds us that "science-based innovation represents only one important dimension of innovation" (2007:4). Nevertheless, this does not contradict the fact that already a whole series of innovations of the same and higher relevance, are already taking place outside of this field. The concept of "hidden innovation" serves to explain this process, a way of describing all those micro-movements that take place on a daily basis and, due to their small size, nature or to the inability of traditional indicators to measure them, are not considered innovation. The report defines hidden innovation as "the innovation activities that are not reflected in traditional indicators such as investments in formal R&D or patents awarded" (2007:4). We can clearly discern that this concept is in part coined in order to justify bad results in the field of innovation within the UK, but despite this, it is still an important notion. The report goes on to affirm that there is a good number of "locally-developed, small-scale innovations that take place 'under the radar', not only of traditional indicators but often also of many of the organisations and individuals working in a sector" (2007:5). The criticism levelled at traditional indicators helps us understand in part why social innovation is such a recent phenomenon (the phenomenon per se is not recent, but its identification as a valuable resource is). It can also partly justify

[4] ProAm: Professional Amateurs. The term refers to individuals who carry out an activity as professionals, but who, due to lack of economic resources, end up by working as amateurs. Leadbeater has published a book on the subject which can be downloaded from http://www.demos.co.uk/files/proamrevolutionfinal.pdf

the difficulty in understanding and evaluating its potential's real magnitude. The report thus recommends the creation of much more flexible indicators, that include multiple variants, because "any single metric will not be sufficient to appraise a sector's innovation performance" (2007:23).

To conclude, we can affirm that the notion of mass creativity aims to reflect the fact that a great number of activities of a social and cultural nature exist, which are taking place in the most remote and marginal spaces of the social field. In order for this innovation to be rendered productive, it must firstly be identified by the more powerful economic sectors, which have the capacity to invest in it and adequately exploit its potential. It is therefore necessary to establish a new measuring system capable of registering this micro-level innovation, as well as a good system for accessing and profiting from it. We will finish at this point with a quote that we think perfectly describes the situation:
"Innovative capability, therefore, is largely to do with the ability to identify and exploit systematically the effects produced by new combinations in the existing stock of knowledge. This process has been called 'innovation without research' and echoes the recent emphasis on 'open innovation'; that firms should better utilise ideas from outside sources rather than always seeking to invent for themselves" (2007:17). R&D departments and universities are hereby clearly displaced from their hegemonic position in the production of knowledge and innovation, and society barges in looking to seize that position.

Consumer Led Innovation

Another category worth underscoring in this listing of new forms of conceiving the creative potential of society is the one called "consumer led innovation". This particular understanding of social creativity is quite removed from some of the models described above, insofar as it instrumentalises the social and clearly conceives it as a production promoting resource. This model, supported by authors such as Luke Georghiou, professor of Science and Technology at the University of Manchester, and Manuel Castells, argues that, in many cases, social agents are capable of perceiving new uses for existing commodities and are thus capable of creating new forms of sociability that require certain tools for their execution. In short, social agents and their relation to existing commodities can be a good source of inspiration for the private sector. And so these authors advocate a market no longer based on a closed structure of production, in which businesses develop new products created in their R&D departments and then look for ways of selling them to consumers. Contrary to this, businesses must be able to integrate the social as a source of research, identifying newly emerging necessities and the products demanded by a society which, in

order to constantly and creatively reinvent itself, needs new instruments to complete these mutation cycles.

In an article written for NESTA titled "Demanding Innovation" Georghiou has spoken of the necessity to listen to consumers in order to foment innovation within business. He goes on to argue that at this point in time we are "denying the critical role that both consumer demand and the market can play in promoting new innovations" (2007:4). Georghiou evidently does not conceive of innovation as a process that can only be generated within the confines of the lab and the research centre, but rather thinks of "innovations as the result of the creative interaction between offer and demand. Despite this, politicians have focussed to a large extent on ways of increasing the offer of innovation, and have been incapable of discerning the importance of demand in this process" (2007:4). This notion of innovation instances two different ways of understanding the process of the production of innovation based on the social. On the one hand, Georghiou refers to lead users, that is, consumers with very specific demands who will make use of innovations, even if these have a short market presence and their use value is not yet fully proven. On the other hand, users themselves will make use of technology in different and varied forms and will thereby create new ways of interpreting its objects, which in turn can lead to a better development of these products.

Let us first of all define this notion of the lead user, in order to better understand how it relates to the production of innovation. The term was first "coined by Eric von Piel in 1986 to describe users who voice important demands that later, be it in a month, a year, or in the future, become mainstream in the market" (2007:9). These are users willing to pay an extra price for novelty, aware that they are enjoying the first of its kind, an innovation. The first buyers of video players can very well serve as a good example for this kind of lead user, as it was just a few advanced users who, having had to make a decision between the two initial available formats in conflict (Vhs and Beta), promoted the use of Vhs. Thus, on the one hand, it was demand itself that which standardised the use of Vhs a posteriori, and at the same time, it validated the innovation of playing films at home. The important role that these users play has not only to do with certifying an innovation as such; they also foster its distribution within the social and thereby legitimise, in a certain way, the innovation.

On the other hand, by modifying their modes of behaviour, users generate new forms of relating to the technologies they use, and, on certain occasions, go as far as to invent new uses for which the objects were not previously conceived, but which, in the long run, will become their standard use. The book "The Information Society and the Welfare State" by Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen, describes this phenomenon as regards the use of the telephone. According to the authors, the telephone was on a first instance conceived in

order to send distress messages, and later commercialised as a security system. To prove this point, Castells and Himanen mention the fact that “even in the billing process, calls were listed as messages” (2002:62). It wasn’t until users started to “use the telephone as a tool of social interaction” (2002:62) that more ergonomic telephones were designed, and more attention paid to the quality of the telephone call as opposed to its effectivity as a tool for sending distress signals. More recently, a similar process has taken place in relation to mobile communication and the use of SMS (short messaging service). At first, the latter was designed as a system for verifying the mobile telephone’s internal operation, but due to its widespread use as a mode of communication, it has become one of the principal modes of using the mobile telephone. This would not have occurred if “a new culture of communication” had not been established, a culture “created by young users (...) which would later spread to other countries” (2002:63). The immediate consequence of this is that firms such as Nokia put on the market specific mobile telephone models which paid special attention to the messaging function above all others.

In conclusion, we have described the process whereby new forms of communication amongst human beings, different forms of sociability and more creative ways of interpreting available objects, constitute an important source, from which a private sector geared towards promoting innovation can profit. Nevertheless, this model clearly instrumentalises the social field, and perceives it as mass of consumers rather than one of cultural subject. This is the greatest difference between this and other previously described models, such as the so-called “creative basins” model, which proposed that it was in subjects’ potential that value lied, rather than in the market.

Social Innovation

The fact that a specific practice called social innovation already exists can at this point create certain confusion. This practice, albeit sharing some characteristics with some of the categories above mentioned, does not correspond ontologically to those defined in the present text as social creativity. The term social innovation is used for all market processes which are generated in order to give response to necessities of a social nature and innovations that are to have an important impact not just in the market, but also within the field of the social. This denotation of the term is gaining special relevance due to its relationship to specific practices such as fair trade, and because it offers a possible response to the phenomenon of climate change, a phenomenon heavily exploited by the media. This understanding of innovation has a schumpeterian component as regards the use that is made of the great irruptions in the economic cycles (important social changes) to generate processes of innovation. However, contrary to Schumpeter’s description, the aim of

these innovations is not just to have an economic impact, they also assume a different set of values and have no need for the individual entrepreneur in order to be carried out, as it is rather the social movements, non-governmental organisations, and other such collectives of civil society, that which provides the impulse for their development.

The report commissioned by NESTA and authored by Mulgan, Ali, Halkett and Sanders, called 'In and Out of Sync' (Mulgan, Ali, Halkett and Sanders:2007) underscores the acclaim that this type of innovations are having and focusses on the political significance of these notions. According to the authors, "social innovation has become a popular phrase with politicians and investors around the UK. This report is about how private and third sector organisations innovate to respond to social needs" (Mulgan, Ali, Halkett and Sanders, 2007:3). In the strictest sense of the word, social innovation in defined "as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs" (2007:9). Hence, social innovation has a very specific economic character, given that the success of this type of innovation does not just depend on its market impact, but also on its social significance. It thus creates radically new economic structures, which leave ample room for new agents to operate in. As the report clearly indicates, this type of innovations can "work in circumstances where normal commercial markets and existing public organisations have failed" (2007:9). On the one hand, the external character of this type of initiatives can be safely presumed, and on the other hand, their close relationship to semi-public organisations, such as non-governmental groups, is laid bare.

The fair trade market is, as we already mentioned above, a clear referent for this kind of innovations. It emerged in order to alleviate the damaging effects of the market on third world producers, and is a form of commerce that clearly aims to solve a social problem as well as to offer economic alternatives, and herein lies its innovative nature. In her article "Fair trade as social and economic innovation: the case of Mexico" Ana Isabel Otero (Otero: 2004), a doctorate candidate at UQAM, argues that "the principles followed by fair trade are social justice, solidarity and cooperation. Thus, fair trade cannot be simply reduced to a commercial practice" (2006:4). This understanding of fair trade as a feature of the processes of social innovation would not be possible if we didn't take into consideration the newly gained prominence of a series of new economic agents whose ultimate goal is not to financially profit from their activities, but rather, in more altruistic terms, they aim at social improvement or at leveling serious criticism at existing institutions. This is evident when fair trade goes from being a marginal initiative to becoming a mainstream commercial practice. According to Otero, "the maturation period of fair trade corresponds to the emergence of new social movements opposed to globalisation" (2006:5). In other words, this innovation is

in part consolidated by the support of a series of economic agents with a highly developed political awareness. Otero further develops this argument when she states that:

“in addition, there is a new generation of social movements with a radically new element in common: the instrumentalisation of the economy. Those who participate in this type of political mobilisation do indeed aim at redefining the economy in terms of their own set of values. Thus, economic transactions acquire a new social content heretofore forgotten. At the same time, this form of social movements takes shape within the context of the fragmentation of the nation-state, in which the latter is incapable of responding to citizens' demands”. (Otero, 2006:4)

The last point drawn about the fragmentation of nation-states is extremely important for a proper understanding of social innovation. It clearly demonstrates that social innovation is occupying spaces which were heretofore inhabited by the state apparatus. In certain cases the latter proved inefficient, and in others, they gradually disappeared due to economic cuts to the welfare state. The spaces left vacant have been filled by these new collectives promoted by civil society, which are capable of dynamising initiatives associated with social innovation. This they manage in part due to the financial assistance of public funds, but also, because they are accurately synchronised to the demands and needs that society presents. The notion of social innovation thus shares some features with the categories of social creativity previously described, as the larger part of these initiatives do indeed emerge in response to needs and changes that take place within the field of the social, but more importantly, none of them aim to exploit the inherent creativity that emerges but rather, to alleviate deficits and problems risen out of these new forms of recomposition.

Innovation as the Product of Social Creativity

In many of the different conceptualisations of the phenomenon that we have seen, social creativity is clearly understood as a resource that can be exploited or utilised, both for political and economic aims. Indeed, on this last point depends the wide range of sets of values with which the potential of these new cultural and social forms can be measured and understood. However, in order to be able to properly deal with innovation, that is in order for this innovation to be productive, social creativity must have positive contact with the market. We could at this point go as far as to argue that from a strictly economic perspective, innovation takes place as a product of social creativity precisely when economic profit from the latter is possible, whether it is by putting it in the service of communication or promotion campaigns for a specific place or region, or through commercialising a specific practice, or the transference of knowledge to private business, etc. We therefore reserve the term

innovation for the instances at which the different sectors have access to this creativity and turn it into economic profit.

These sectors do not necessarily have to be closely linked to the private sector. The latter does indeed compete with other areas that do also have the possibility of benefiting from social creativity, despite itself constituting one of the main spheres where this social creativity is exploited, which, as we have described above, is increasingly understood as a huge R&D department that is added on to the traditional spaces for the production of knowledge such as universities and research centres. Thus, it is not only the economic and financial sectors which aim to create forms of accessing this new resource, other sectors such as the technological, the cultural, the social, etc., can do so as well. And so a double process takes place, given that fields such as the cultural or the social, in addition to being producers of this social creativity, can at the same time, make use of the results that the latter produces. In so doing, a double cycle of production and consumption is generated, a process that is both extremely complex and interesting to analyse. This last point is important for understanding the erosion that old disciplines and economic spheres are increasingly suffering. Their porous limits converge with others, and it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate the social from the cultural, and the economic from the non-economic.

In order to turn this creativity into a source of innovation it is necessary to create adequate channels for accessing it. Some of these access channels can present themselves in the shape of incubators of cultural projects, specific public policies, programmes for the cooperation with businesses, crowdsourcing, amongst others, specifically designed to exploit this creativity. Once we start analising this new paradigm we can claim without doubt that all these processes that seek to capture social creativity are by no means marginal to the production process, these are increasingly becoming a central issue for business and economic development. This is the reason why we believe this is the right moment to start a reflection about how these flows are being captured and exploited, trying to trace and define the boundaries between participation and work, collaboration and exploitation. To conclude we also think that we should start thinking on strategies aimed at understanding the collective nature of this wealth, this would help us to return part of its value not only to the private sector but to the rest of social forces, helping to turn creativity into a source of social innovation.

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Rosa Nogués and Jaron Rowan

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