

THOUGHT MARKETS FOR BETTER FUTURES

“Futures belong to those idiots who create and believe in them”

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Abstract:

The article addresses the claim that information and knowledge in rapid changing societies will need different exchange platforms or agoras. Technological and social innovations will change the information and knowledge platforms into “markets of thoughts”. Grounded in Castells’ “space of flows” a philosophical blueprint is developed. For Hospitality and tourism in particular and Entrepreneurship and Innovation Education at large this article includes and develops specific elements of the Finnish approach to education. Thoughts, markets and futures are interlinked through “spaces of flows or agoras”, their “merchants” and the orientation on the future. Evidence for this approach is collected from 6 case studies from France, the Netherlands, Finland and Romania.

Rector, Mister Chairman, and all participants to this opening session, I am honored to speak to you about Thought markets for Better Futures.

To start I apologize for a word in the subtitle quote. The word “idiot” used here doesn’t reflect psychiatric, psychological or even etymological meanings. On the contrary!! I have always used this word to express the capacity and capability to look, see and observe beyond the obvious and visible. To this article I use “idiot” for a person, whose visionary competencies are far beyond the common understanding. The word means more a signal, a compliment and a respect.

The Conference title gave me the opportunity to write and talk about the development of a framework that allows the use of innovation for designing futures. Futures design activities and actions require leadership in order to steer or navigate towards these futures. Innovations in technology especially in information and communication necessitate other, more innovative ways of organizing and implementing the social consequences. These changes and already visible outcomes and consequences lead us away from order and control societies towards fluid and chaotic habitats.

Such processes of change are ignited by socio-technological drivers and have very dramatic effects. As a result change is mostly countered and accompanied by the defense of the values of the past, economic resistance and political unwillingness. These contradictory and controversial aspects of innovation demand a new type of leadership. A new leadership is needed that enables the “de-freezing” of contrast, contradiction and conflict and allows the innovative to substitute the past. A leadership that is prepared to construct a continuum of complementary aspects and to seek co-existence in stead of conflict. A new leadership is needed to navigate the change towards the goals that were set out. And finally, we are in need of a new leadership to allow the change to “re-freeze” and

become the normal or common way. The new leadership will face a difficult task to balance the inclination of conservation and the drive to renewal.

At the end of the 19th century Louis Pasteur said: "Chance favors only the prepared mind" I think the new leadership needs to be prepared to envision the scout opportunities and grab the chance to introduce change long before it materializes in time, place or space. Scouting or finding opportunities means a continuous process of scanning. Scanning means looking beyond the obvious and the visible. During the scanning process opportunities are detected or created. The debate of "nature or nurture" in this field is hardly solved. However, both processes include preparedness, willingness, open-mindedness and rejection of judgment beforehand. My experience tells me that most people in challenging situations pull "the hand-brake" even before clarity of the situation is gained.

Taken the chance to exploitation will require change of the existing systems. The dissemination and implementation must be- see above- prepared well beforehand to enable prepared minds for acceptance. And the final step that gives the chance and change the roots to grow will be the creation of an accepted and supported "new agora culture"

Castells (1996) published his work on the Network Society in which he explains how information and technology will change the world and its socio-economic structures. A particular issue was the concept of "space of flows". He argues that global information networks will organize and co-ordinate the world economy in real-time and long distance. One could add that this will happen in the virtual world as much as the physical world. His views of the New Economy, Network Society and the Information Age reflect a "New Agora Culture"

In this perspective I would bring forward the idea of "Thoughts" as creative flows of the mind when working with information. Thoughts are not only the neurophysiologic processes of the human brain or between humans but also the activities and actions that taken place in and between computer systems and during the human-computer interactions. All these interactions can take place irrespective of time and place. The flows of "thoughts" connect the places and spaces where information is available, distracted, disseminated and used. Actually: I foresee that the flows of thoughts in the end will become a "New Agora" with a commonly accepted culture for value creation.

The New Agora of Thoughts –the new fluid and chaotic spaces- is full of promises for the users and providers awaiting fulfillment. Awaiting fulfillment points a finger at "the perspective of time" in the first place. Fulfillment includes always a future orientation which starts with an expectation of some kind. And there might come up a serious problem. Based on what information are expectations created or is there enough information to make realistic or rational decisions? Another issue could be the threat of informational overload and the process of sense-making and meaning. Already in the 70s Alvin Toffler spoke about infobesity and Nielsen (2003) speaks about info pollution. Nielsen tells his readers: "A steady dose of real-time interruptions is toxic to anyone's health". **In his book Infoglut, Mark Andrejevic (2013)** takes this problem a step further and explores the connections between these wide-ranging sense-making strategies for an era of information overload and "big data," and the new forms of control they enable

I foresee that new jobs and functions will arise. New merchants will arise in the Agoras of Thoughts. New merchants like the information broker, the competency broker, the virtual manager, the business integrator, the sentiment analyst, the neuro-marketer and the challenge manager are already in front of the gates (Warner and Witzel, 2004, Marshall et al. 2001))

The new jobbers will have the challenge to guide the experiences of the users and providers towards the reasoned expectations. The trade-offs between expectation and experience will provide a new area of socio-economic value extractions. Especially in the field of value-in-use extractions will be far more beneficial than value-in-exchange extractions (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005).

The value-creation activities cycle –promise, expectation, experience and extraction– becomes more and more intertwined. That means that more people are involved in the value creation process. In marketing we already speak of the many2many approaches in value networks. These approaches indicate that the buying processes aren't individual anymore but based in groups or communities. The dynamics of groups or communities are leading the understanding for new marketing approaches such as service dominant logic or for strategy approaches such as interactive strategy formulation of networks (Normann and Ramirez, 1998) or even galaxies (the competitive forces between networks). The involvement of multiple stakeholders, the developments of technology and the necessity of social innovations require the input of digital systems that allow the interactions between these stakeholders. As consequence, stakeholder will become –in many case stakeholders already are– co creators of the products or services. A good example can be found in www.mass-customization.de. The customer as co-designer of experiences will influence the value creation cycle dramatically and will have serious impacts on for instance Hospitality and Tourism. Mass customization and personalization of offerings in tourism are knocking on the door. An interesting challenge I would say.

I refrain from an interpretation of the concept of “better futures”. The problem is that it is not clear what is meant by “better”. Furthermore: the use of the plural futures indicates that more than one future can be foreseen. Indeed, this interpretation is correct. Mostly, when we speak of future, we mean a stage in time that we want to see. It's the preferred future. And in this interpretation it is not difficult to know what is meant by better. Better economic, social, relational, environmental aspects will be envisioned. Maybe, better political environments are included as well.

However, when we talk about what is possible in the future, and then we get quickly lost in speculations, guesses and “wet finger indications”. When we discuss the possibility of a future we get more and more confused. The likelihood of a future closes the mind's door very rapidly. Yet and undeniable, all these 4 futures exist –at least in theory. My experiences with students in several European countries and with colleagues from Romania-American University of Bucharest are clear evidence of the possibility to do very constructive thinking, working and doing in learning and teaching the futures described.

Futures can be developed as normative systems despite different opinions on preference, possibility, probability and plausibility. Those learning and teaching activities and actions are meant to forward and enable public discussions in the Agora of Thoughts – be it local, regional, national or even higher levels. They are not meant “to speak to the

truth”, rather they are meant for a preparations for the things to come. Actually, we know a lot about the futures. When we take in consideration our decisions that we have made recently –as an example- we know also that these decisions materialize in the future (Sardar, 1993) and therefore “colonize the future” And in doing so, we draw now on the norms and values that we want to see then.

The futures study technique of back casting and recently around casting present new ways of exploring opportunities –scouting and scanning- and different ways of exploitation. As described above value networks are being transformed into galaxies (Castells, 2001, Arsenault and Castells, 2008) Along with these techniques: see: www.hsctoolkit.bis.gov.uk come different teaching and learning methods. Experiences have gained in the field of design-thinking and design-based research (Liedtka and Ogilvie, 2013), competency-based curricula planning for the education of tomorrow (Zwaga and Zwaga, 2010, 2013), self-directed and self managed learning, collaborative learning integrated in computer-mediated environments (Dillenbourg, 2000; Christensen, 2010) Education therefore need to find new organizational formats that allow for trans-disciplinary learning, the stimulation and the existence of shared and distributed cognitions. Educational institutions must learn to adapt to these changing demands and build new bridges between the isolated areas of faculties, universities and other learning environments.

The focus of the educational approaches in Hospitality and Tourism in particular and Entrepreneurship and Innovation Education at large should be on the implementation of these futuristic developments. These novel ways must be implemented to pursue building the bridge between the overload of Grey Diamonds with PhD with a job and work and the needed supply of Green Diamonds with a PhD without work and a job.

Attitudes, skills and knowledge could be formed in totally different approaches within “Agoras of Thoughts” departing from Castells’ ideas. Academia is one important stakeholder in these agoras. However, without the cooperation of business, government, non government organizations and the media such agoras are more wishful thinking than reality (Carayannis and Campbell, 2011). The Quadruple Helix approach embedded in the “Agora of Thoughts” would permit the implementation of innovations –technological and social- for regional development policies and their design. Moreover, the embeddedness of regional development in “Agoras” opens the opportunity to exit the classic division between the population and its Government. It will open the door to Governance.

I finalize my key note by wishing the participants “a hell of a fight” with their thoughts. No, actually I wish the participants fruitful dialogues and a deep and intensive learning. And that you can go home with an “overload” of ideas.

Is this wishful thinking.....or are they thoughtful wishes? You decide!

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