

Innovation cultures – challenge and learning strategy

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A concept

In an effort to intensify the innovation processes the increased attention has been recently paid to analysis of the various models and schemes of innovation activities, their broader conditions and contexts. Besides the traditional concepts such as e.g. “science push – demand pull” model also the new innovation schemes have been developed that reflected the changed societal context of science and research. Such widely accepted concepts are e.g. *Mode 2* of the new production of knowledge (Gibbons *et al*) or *Triple Helix* (as Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff describe the matrix of government, business and research).

Innovation activities occur in the specific social and economic context and the cultural and political traditions of the respective national or otherwise defined community are reflected in them. The major role is played by the historically developed systems of education, culture, entrepreneurship, or governance. In this context, the concept of “innovation culture” may be applied into the analysis.

The concept of culture is strongly diversified. Usually we understand under culture a set of values, norms and practices. Recently the definition of culture by Clifford Geertz as a medium for creating and sustaining meaning (delivering the means for interpreting, understanding and evaluating communication and action) is commonly respected. In the context of innovations, we may ask how the main concepts and structures of innovation are understood, what place they occupy in the meaning and value structure of society and what are the effects for innovation practices. Innovation culture – as a distinct coherent set of values and practices – is tightly embedded in a broader culture of the specific national, social, and cultural communities.

All over Europe the need is felt to make “European” innovation culture more dynamic, link it more tightly to users and market, overcome the existing gap. Such efforts were politically conceptualized into “Lisbon strategy”. In this context, the whole European culture (as a set of shared meanings, values and practices) seems to appear under heavy pressure: Europe should be rigid, inflexible, stagnant. Europe allegedly practises too strong regulation and social protection. Largely recommended medicine: deregulation.

In the climate of overall pressure on application and commercial effects of research the “Central-European” model of education, research and innovation is often criticised. The academic and exclusive nature of education and knowledge production as well as rigidity and inflexibility of entrepreneurial environment are considered to be the most relevant weaknesses.

This criticism has manifold validity in the case of transitional CEEC considering their recent history. Transitional countries have still a relatively low innovation performance, but this situation may also be interpreted as an opportunity for determining the right innovation strategy for future. Hence the conceptual analysis of innovation trends in the world may be of an utmost relevance for them.

Core topics for conference agenda are:

- Is there anything like (Central)-European innovation culture? What are its strong and weak points? Does European culture have – unlike the other global players - a stronger inclination to preservation and stability/sustainability rather than to dynamics and change? Is an innovation inherently destructive? Innovation – preservation/conservationism – sustainability.
- Institutional setting: is Europe over-regulated? Is a higher degree of regulation and social protection a barrier to innovation?
- Scandinavian model: a high taxation - high social protection and yet an excellent innovative performance.
- CEEC innovation strategy: what segments of our tradition should be further developed? Tradition may be one of the key sources in innovation processes – it is at disposal for free. The successful catching-up countries from the past (East-Asian countries) have been working with tradition.
- How „science and research culture“ has changed recently? Commodification and commercialisation – a right way to innovation? Entrepreneurship and research – entrepreneurial university – science culture/business culture - PPP (public private partnership) activities – Triple Helix.
- Is science-push model (close to Central Europe tradition) to abandon entirely or may be developed in any way further? Especially applied for CEEC: when demand side is weak and access to advanced markets difficult – is a science-push model a full-fledged alternative?
- Reflecting (audit) society. Recently developed analytical tools for assessing and stimulating innovation performance: evaluation schemes, benchmarking, competitiveness/innovation indicators, a concept of capabilities. Their possibilities and limits.
- Innovation and culture. (Is there a principal contradiction between innovation and culture: innovation is creating a novelty while culture is more focused on preserving old?) Innovation as a cultural change. Should the present innovation performance have a strong cultural dimension (culture in a broader sense: meanings, values, attitudes, life practices) then what is needed is a fairly deep cultural change. Should we Europeans change ourselves – change our own identity? In which way?