

***Time to imagine a different world....It is time to re-think our worldview and how we are in the world. It is time to re-think creativity and innovation***

*A worldview: The story or narrative we tell ourselves. How we understand our place in the world. Our way of seeing, being and doing in the world at any specific historical period.*

Everything is changing, including our worldview. This does not happen often in history but when it does it is both frightening and exciting. Frightening because we don't know what's coming, exciting because it offers us the possibility to re-imagine and create a future that is more sense making and sustainable for us a human beings. History shows us that a worldview, that is the way we see ourselves and our place in the world, is not an absolute truth but an idea, a construct, an imagination, and as such does not last for ever, worldviews, and their paradigms, come and they go. The medieval worldview placed god at the centre of the universe, the industrial worldview placed science and technology and the present market capitalist worldview places continuous growth and profit at the centre. When a worldview is no longer fit for purpose we have to change it. New social, technical, economic and environmental forces are making the present view obsolete, and so it is time to re-think our beliefs, practices and behaviours and, by default, the role and place of Design. While God, Science or Money have all been at the centre of our paradigm at different times, I believe that people will and must be at the centre of our next worldview and I believe that the social innovation movement shows us how.

### ***From the industrial to the social***

*From product innovation to social innovation*

What is social innovation? Social innovation, unlike product innovation, is about social needs and aspirations and social solutions, rather than product needs and product aspirations. The benefits are to society as a whole, to the collective rather than the individual, to us as citizens rather than to us as consumers. Our challenge today is not to make yet more products but to solve the many social challenges we are facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century including health, welfare, care of the elderly, new learning and schooling, unemployment, transport, the environment etc. Social innovation is about solving problems but it is also about developing new possibilities towards more sustainable ways of living. Global examples of social innovation, facilitated by the new widespread digital and social technologies, are everywhere from new co-housing solutions to car sharing to local time banks to farmers markets and community gardens to neighbourhood elderly and child care. The many examples worldwide can be found on websites such as Social Innovation Europe (SIE) and Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS). Both highlight the theory and practice and examples globally of social innovation.

Social innovation is very different to product innovation not only in *what* it creates but also in *how* it creates and *who* does the creating. In terms of the *how*, social innovation is a process of change where new ideas emerge from a variety of actors: final end users, grass roots entrepreneurs, local institutions, private companies, the public and third sector. In terms of the *who*, given that it is a social solution, such as neighbourhood care of the elderly or a new way to connect patients to the health system, it must involve all the stakeholders to develop a meaningful solution. Unlike the industrial era it is not about doing things *to* or *for* people but about doing things *with* people and *by* people themselves.

### ***Distributing complexity***

*From economies of scale to ecologies of scale*

Rather than trying to control complexity through top down command and control hierarchies, social innovation shows us how to embrace complexity. Social innovation's inclusiveness, decentralization and distribution of creativity and innovation, beyond experts, managers and administrators, democratizes the process of experimentation, learning and the capacity for continuous adaptation. Democratizing creativity and innovation throughout the system raises the capacity and capability of everyone to think and act collectively in the moment and to solve problems, and in so doing, offers a better possibility of living effectively in an increasingly diverse, complex and unpredictable world. Perhaps, however, its most radical potential for the future lies in the fact that more people doing more together creates more.

The myriad of *micro stories* emerging from the social innovation movement, related to what it innovates, but perhaps more importantly, how and who innovates, points towards an alternative socio-economic development model. Rather than a development model of continuous growth and profit, dominated by big corporations and big centralized production and big energy, we can begin to think about a more sustainable development model based on locally distributed and decentralized economies and decentralized energy. Such a model would capitalize on local production and consumption, based on local resources and local knowledge. A development model, based on a more human scale that empowers people, boosts local shops and activities, reduces commuting, builds resilient communities and offers a deeper quality of life and experience. However if small is once more beautiful, it does not, as in the past, mean cut off and isolated. The new information and digital technologies now mean that such a distributed development model can be both small and local *and* open and connected, based not on economies of scale but ecologies of scale, ecologies of local economies. This could offer us a more sustainable society in terms of a more human, humane, resilient and empowering society? **A sustainable society where more connected people doing more collectively creates more.**

### ***Scarcity to Abundance***

*From less is more to more is more*

The decentralization and distribution of creativity and complexity and a more decentralized, localized but connected development model, frees up people, our most abundant resource, to

create and innovate. In essence more people doing more, generates more. Imagination, creativity, ingenuity are not perishable. The more you use these, the more you have. *Less is more becomes more is more.* This, however, radically challenges our present worldview or paradigm based on scarcity and competition and offers us a new narrative based on abundance and collaboration.

The scarcity principle states that there is not enough to go round and therefore we must fight each other to survive and that there are winners and losers. Such a worldview places competition as the main driver of progress. This is then justified by a popular Hobbsian Darwinism of the survival of the fittest based on a view of man's nature as nasty and brutish and mean. However Darwin did not state this, on the contrary, he argued that evolution depended upon diversity and adaptability and that survival of the fittest referred to those able to adapt, to co-operate and to collaborate. Nature may have taught us to fight and compete but it has also taught us to share, to care, to collaborate and to love, qualities that become paramount in complex and connected societies. To summarize, less people doing more and owning more increases scarcity, more people doing more and owning more increases abundance. Scarcity comes from competition and perpetuates competition while abundance comes from collaboration and perpetuates collaboration. This is the evolutionary leap we must make. *“When faced with a radical crisis, when the old ways of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, an individual life form or a species will either die or become extinct or rise above the limitations of its condition through an evolutionary leap”* A New Earth, Eckhart Tolle

### **A Virtuous Circle**

Our present worldview, the narrative by which we live, is now bankrupt: economically, morally and environmentally. Social innovation through its many projects and practices promotes a new way of collectively doing and being in the world. However, despite growing and numerous examples worldwide, they are often emptied of meaning and remain largely invisible and marginalized because they do not fit into the present obsolete narrative based on growth, profit, scarcity, individualism and competition. However a virtuous circle is emerging in which all the micro stories based on social innovation projects and practices are contributing to a new single meta narrative or worldview based on abundance not scarcity. This potential new worldview, fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both comes from and drives social innovation. Social innovation offers us this new worldview which, in its turn, gives visibility and meaning to all the myriad of micro stories happening worldwide. To take the necessary evolutionary leap, we need to work towards this virtuous circle in which numerous micro stories support a meta narrative of abundance based on complexity, connectivity and creativity.

## A new narrative for a new age



A paradigm as a set of practices contained within a philosophical and theoretical framework