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How the question of innovation is addressed by the social sciences?

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Abstract: Although innovation has today become a topical notion, given its fundamental importance in understanding the economy and the way our society adapts to its development goals, its characteristics and principles nevertheless need to be defined. While the 20th century was marked by important technological, political, economic and cultural changes, the current era seems to be increasingly bent on imposing innovation as a motor for the development of society. It is therefore important to understand how the question of innovation is currently being addressed, and in turn this involves looking at the different ways in which the innovative process is interpreted. Between the notional approach, which often remains vague and somewhat basic, and the theoretical approaches

that attempt to present different perspectives for ways of understanding the innovation process, the path of knowledge is very often compartmentalized by the different scientific disciplines. In this paper, we will attempt to show the tensions and combinations that exist between the different approaches adopted by the management sciences, sociology, economics and geography in attempting to understand the innovative process. To do so, we will focus our study on the firm and the territory (as the spatial dimension of innovation), elements that have already been the subject of numerous studies to understand the forces participating in the production of novelty.

Keywords: innovation, social sciences, processes, territory, firm, network, culture

While innovation may be defined in marketing as putting a new product onto the market (Jacques, 1993), others consider it the result of a process that begins with an invention (technical aspect) and ends with the social assimilation of the novelty or thing that is new (Alter, 2000). Consequently, one cannot dissociate the technical and social processes that contribute to the production of a significant change. The approach thus becomes more complex and integrates this practice in a socio-technical network (Calon, 2006) in which there is interaction between several technological, political, financial, human and even legal aspects. While innovation may be characterised by the production of something new (process, product, organisation, activity), a scientific study of it is not based solely on a presentation of the studies that have marked the history of technologies and social practices, but also includes the study of the process by which this change is constructed and takes place. In this paper, we will attempt to show the tensions and combinations that exist between the different approaches adopted by the management sciences, sociology, economics and geography in attempting to understand the innovative process. To do so, we will focus our study on the firm and the territory (as the spatial dimension of innovation), elements that have already been the subject of numerous studies to understand the forces participating in the production of that which is new.

Innovation and the firm

Generally speaking, classical economics considers that the firm is located at the heart of the production of that which is new and that to a large extent it possesses the resources to stimulate the creation of value. Thus the innovative process is studied internally where it is a question of understanding the factors that enable a firm to participate in this process. The work of Schumpeter (1999) is frequently cited to underline the vital role of the entrepreneur in this process. The personality of entrepreneurs, their capacity to take risks, their ability to develop a network of partners, and their inspiration and creative spirit are seen as major assets. Numerous articles have subsequently praised this entrepreneurial spirit to stimulate the economy and to demonstrate the leading role it played in the small- and medium-sized firms of the second half of the 20th century. Other studies, such as those of Mintzberg (2006), have examined the type of firms that, to a greater or lesser extent, are willing to innovate. Thus, between the divisional configuration (very compartmentalized, hierarchical and functional) and the adhocratic configuration (horizontal specialisation, small units, mutual adjustment, etc.), there are organisations that do not have the same disposition with regard to the production of new activities. Numerous studies (Richard, 1998) have thus tried to understand the difference in the success of firms, depending on the country, by exposing the difficulty of traditional firms (heavy, rigid, hierarchical) to adapt to a post-industrial economy requiring flexibility and an ability to adapt rapidly to new market rules. Toyotism is very often cited to explain the success of the Japanese model that had been able to innovate in the area of work organisation. The change in relations between management, executives and workers in a more participative approach, in which the latter group were more involved, seems to have played a significant role in reaching a more effective productive system but also in inviting the personnel to become involved in the innovation process. Innovation is thus no longer only the concern of the entrepreneur, but has become part of the organisational structure within which discussions are conducted on the most suitable model for producing a competitive advantage in an increasingly unstable market. The market is characterised by strong competition, increasingly short product life cycles and a perpetual race to create new forms of services and products to meet the diversity of market needs. Today adaptation is becoming a key factor in taking advantage of market opportunities where speed of action is a resource that makes the difference.

In this context, the organisation of firms becomes transformed to create a climate that is conducive to the production of innovations and that, in the rising knowledge economy, becomes the reference for creating value. The Taylorian, Fordist and mechanical vision of work is no longer subscribed to in the struggle to reach the lowest possible marginal cost. Historically, the dominant logistics model gave priority to a top-down and intrafunctional chain (from the manager to the engineer, to the foreman, to the worker) where the value produced is seen as depending on work being well organised from upstream (raw material) to downstream (marketing of product). During the 1960-70 period, the firm remained organised around the Fordist model since most of the production (of standardised products destined for general consumption) was based on the principle of the mass production line. Here again, logistics remained intrafunctional (see above), aimed at the

reduction of costs through mass production. What was new was the introduction of mass marketing where demand remained greater than supply, thus introducing a linear and top-down marketing chain (manager, design office, market studies sector, production sector, distribution, sales and consumption). As Deschamps (1997) points out, functional specialisation was dominant at this time, marked by a compartmentalised organisation and work performed in sequence, allowing for few changes around a global approach to the product and the project.

The 1980s were marked by important change heralded by the emergence of complexity sciences, the strengthening of the tertiary sector and the services economy, the spread of globalisation, the dominant role of financial capitalism and the important place occupied by megalopolises and regional territorialisation (Cohen, 2006). New principles were activated that clearly modified professional practices, giving priority to innovation as the motor for entrepreneurial dynamism. Also important to note was the development of new relations between science and technology reflected in the rise of techno-sciences and research and development in firms (Boly, 2004). These two worlds then combined more strongly to respond to market requirements and better meet the challenge of competition. Closer relations were also observed between research laboratories and economic activities (Richard, 1998), gradually modifying the links between universities, firms and the region. This permanent quest for innovation joined forces with the continuing progress of science in the nanotechnology and biotechnology sectors, the NICTs (new information and communication technologies) and composite materials. New public/private relations emerged, given that the State had to continue playing an important role in the innovative process of the country (Boyer, 1998). However, the major change came from the reorganisation of links between actors within this networked society (Castells, 1996) that modified relations between civil society, consumers, financiers, local authorities, the media and even between firms. The neo-classical vision of the economy was upset (Jokung-Nguena, 1991) by the introduction of the firm into a complex value chain where it was no longer through the simple interplay of supply and demand that financial transactions were settled and the value of goods was defined. There was thus a change from a linear conception of innovation to a more systemic approach, where the different elements in the innovation system interact in a creative manner (Brunell and Coe, 2001).

The emergence of this post-industrial society was reflected in a change in the vision of the market where the efficiency of the firm does not only depend on its productivity and capacity to decrease costs. Today, ability to adapt depends on the innovative capacity of organisations that must participate in a dynamic process of value creation by continually introducing new services and consumer goods. In this context, competitive advantage is negotiated in this knowledge economy (Foray, 2000) where it is a question of mastering, as far as possible, cognitive, scientific, technological and marketing resources with a view to proposing new product ranges not only in the hi-tech sector but also in the services economy where the role of the immaterial is dominant. The capacity for adaptation and reactivity is particularly important when the market becomes unstable, the product cycle increasingly short, and competition heightened, and when there are numerous relocations and changing alliances. We thus enter into a society of movement characterised by a

strong nomadism of objects and people and by increasingly strong flows between the different actors involved in the markets. Certain theoreticians (Velz, 1996) talk of archipelago economics when these flows are concentrated in and between the large metropolises that control the majority of professional resources and innovative capacities. This process spreads globally, reinforcing the links between firms, start-ups, VSEs and SMEs, territorial units, risk capitalists and business incubators with a view to promoting the creation of a substantial social capital (Lecoutre, 2008), an asset in the innovation process. For certain theoreticians (Boyer, 1998), investment in physical capital no longer constitutes the essential factor for growth. However, intrapreneurship becomes fundamental in promoting the emergence of a culture of innovation at the heart of firms qualified as learning (Nonaka, 1997). The constitution of a controlled social capital and the management of knowledge and skills in information intelligence systems, internal to organisations, are necessary for producing a clear competitive advantage.

In this context of “globalised economic warfare”, organisations must modify their conception of production by strengthening management and strategic marketing and by adopting a project approach. Following such a path reinforces the systemic approach of organisations where it is a question of managing value creation processes that favour more transversal relations between different departments. There is a move away from the functional organisation of firms towards a dynamic logistics chain (Lièvre, 2007) and the marketing of value with a view to changing the links between upstream and downstream, producer and client, and the firm and its environment. Similarly, the project approach is strongly reflected in the horizontal approach adopted by departments, decompartmentalising functional relations and modifying the links and powers between the actors engaged in a project (Mintzberg, 2006). In some ways, the project leader becomes the leader of this new organisation in an approach that is no longer linear and sequential in managing the different phases involved in the creation of a product, but competitive (Garel, 2003). A new entrepreneurial culture is built up where there is talk of total innovation (Deschamps, 1997) and innovation at every stage (Ramecourt, 2001), when every means at the firm’s disposal is committed to the perpetual marketing of new products that are increasingly adapted to the different expectations of the clientele. One of the important elements presented by theoreticians concerns the strengthening of communication and participation within organisations to lend presence to communities that are both learning (Mallet, 1994) and practical (Wenger, 1998) where it is around tacit knowledge and in the context of the daily experience of specific sectors that emerging strategies are able to appear in the presence of Metis-like thinking (Neiryneck, 2000). Beyond the necessity of rationally organising innovation around project groups, as evoked by numerous theoreticians, others suggest that innovation is not decreed but is the product of more lateral thinking, leaving room for uncertainty, the makeshift, cunning, chance, bottom-up reasoning and the hijacking of classical functions and associations defining the value and functions of products (Robinson, 2000).

This collective intelligence is not confined then to the R & D sector or the design office (closed to the outside/introvert) but affects the whole of the organisation that has to be more in contact and in relation with its internal and external environment. The challenge

is to strengthen the practical or ethnographic approach of the market so as to design products in phase with the social usage of consumer goods. From this perspective, design, as a practical approach to the product consumed and experienced, tends to impose itself as a new way of thinking about innovation, in the same way as the desire to introduce the customer to the innovative process as soon as possible. The notion of participative innovation has thus made progress in the world of firms, institutions and territorial units, modifying the way of thinking about change and value creation. In this regard, the work of Von Hippel (1998) opens up interesting areas of research to demonstrate the role of routine learning (learning by using, everyday innovation) and experimental learning (involving innovative consumers, lead users) in the creation of new products. The work of Akrich (1998) adopts a similar perspective, showing the creative role of users in their movements and their adaptations, extensions and changes with regard to the function of products. The separation between producers and users is therefore not as clear as that. In numerous areas, multiple mediation mechanisms develop that modify the traditional view of innovation.

This emergence of the post-industrial society joined forces with two cultural movements (hyper and post-modernity) that transformed customer behaviour and social and marketing practices. Thus for theoreticians of hyper-modernity (1) (Aubert, 2004), social life was marked by the increase in individualism, consumer-actors, hedonism and the leisure culture. The focusing on one's self, one's habitat and well-being gave rise to a society of individuals, always asking for more innovations, technological and logistic solutions and services to satisfy the perpetual demand for pleasure and individual advantages. Marketing (Cova, 2006) thus became involved in innovation procedures (alternative and relationship marketing, street and buzz marketing, one-to-one and micro marketing, the culture of services and quality...) to satisfy, in the best possible way, the demands of customer segments involved in very different consumer niches and experiences. The development of personal services (Gallouz, 1994; Flipo, 2001) continued to increase as innovation helped provide individuals with a range of different types of assistance (medical, domestic, information...). The trend is toward an inflation of innovations that are micro-structural (incremental or gradual), distinctive (design, serigraphy, mode), artificial (sales action on a micro novelty) and semiotic (symbolic association attached to a product aimed at a given public). For the theoreticians of post-modernity (2), the social life builds on the fragmentation of the great ideologies and the explosion of individualities seeking atmosphere, aestheticism, life experiences and collective excitement, controlled to a lesser or greater extent (Maffesoli, 1985). This explains the exaggerated importance attached to the spectacle, excesses, parties, and the consumption of every type of product, producing an intense sensational and emotional intoxication around a "fashion" identity. To the unstable individual of postmodernity, the marketing of services responds by the production of incessant cultural innovations whether this is in tourism, the cinema, television, computer games, gambling, food and other gadgets of over-consumption. Hyper socio-cultural innovations (1) and postmodern socio-cultural innovations (2) thus constitute an important market for developing consumer goods for the increasing number of individuals who wish to immerse themselves in a world of individual and collective cultural

experiences (Hetzl, 2002) and to surround themselves with multiple technological and human adaptations.

Beyond the description of these principles and processes that modify the relationship with consumer goods and organisations, sociology contributes to a better understanding of innovation. Indeed, the social aspect cannot be avoided if the innovative process is to be understood. Alter (2000) reminds us not to confuse invention and innovation. The latter is only produced if a significant social change is observed in social usage, reflecting an acceptable assimilation. There are thus social conditions for the emergence of a new practice or commercial activities that cannot be considered as simple conditioning. The public, in a perspective of co-constructing the acceptable, is involved in the process of socially assimilating the invention, the diffusion of which depends on the type of public and the generations and territorial areas involved. Similarly, the work of Callon (2006) enables us to understand the role of social aspects in the diffusion of new commercial and managerial practices within groups at work. Resistance to change is observable and requires putting into place a “translation” procedure so that the different parties involved agree to change their practices and incorporate a new organisation. The theoretical perspective involves taking a step back from the canonical approaches to innovation that present it as a rational and instrumental linear process. For Callon, this process produces conflict, resistance, alliances and different social appropriations depending on the identities constructed, the relationships with uncertainty and risk, and the acceptable strategies. Change is rooted in the field of values, life styles and organisational cultures. It is the subject of tensions between movement and stability, dramatisation and compromise where power struggles are played out according to the social positions of the different players in defining the acceptable equilibrium (Pages, 1993).

Whether it relates to the management of technological, biological, political, ecological or sports-related risks, the question of innovation cannot simply be thought of in terms of marketing a new product from an entrepreneurial standpoint. It is part of a more complex process of studying change where social, historical, political, legal and even geographical forces come into play. With regard to technological innovations or innovations relating to manufacturing processes, the writings of Crozier and Friedberg (1977) show that behind the notion of change, a “concrete system of action” is built up in organisations where role-plays are acted out between actors involved in power struggles to retain margins of uncertainty and to control their work space. Callon’s socio-technical analysis can be used to open up the perspective a little more in order to understand that innovation is not based on the standard diffusion model (where there is an irreparable separation between the innovation and its socio-economic environment). The profit-sharing procedure involving different actors in a complex chain of stakeholders makes it possible to understand the fragility of the innovation process that can continually be called into question by the interplay of tensions, lack of trust or suitable translation. We therefore go from the linear model of innovation to an iterative or spiral model to understand this erratic procedure that is continually threatening the sequential and mechanical vision of the approach. The perpetual adaptation of the innovative procedure thus becomes a fundamental principle among an extensive collection of actors and publics that continually reorganise the links

between market and technology. And as Akrich (1988) points out, what is innovative is “an organisation or group of organisations that promote interaction, permanent exchanges, and negotiations of every type that enable rapid adaptation”. Innovation therefore requires flexibility, negotiation, spokespersons, multiple mediations in an innovative system that is far more complex than that presented by the classical managerial vision (linear model). Little by little, it can be seen that the socio-technical environment, the market, space, and general society intervene and interact in the definition of the factors involved in the innovative process.

From the firm to the territory

The spatial approach to innovation has been the subject of considerable research aimed at understanding the temporal dimension of this activity. Different theoretical interpretations of the innovation process can thus be observed when speaking of relations between innovative systems and the geography of the location and diffusion of the new economic activities. Entry via product cycles (Vernon, 1966) shows that the economic value of innovations is greater in the areas where they originate. Central Place theory (Christaller, 1933), often referred to in spatial economics and economic geography, demonstrates the central role of interactions of proximity in relations between the centre and periphery in the context of the location and diffusion of innovations. The polarisation of activities, people and exchanges around large towns creates central places that stimulate the market and enable the periphery to benefit and profit from this polarised growth. However, several criticisms have been levelled at this theory’s mechanical and virtuous approach to links based on proximity, pointing out the presence of political, social and economic tensions between the centre and the periphery (Veltz, 1996). This author also demonstrates, with respect to this notion of archipelago economics, the vital role of large metropolises, capable of receiving and transforming information in this knowledge economy, thus enabling the appropriation of an active cognitive capital in the production of innovative resources. For him, however, the exchanges between these large metropolises and networked firms are stronger than those in a regional economy characterised by substantial exchanges between the centre and the periphery and the town and rural areas. The periphery and the rural areas do not benefit from this spatial diffusion. “Globalisation is drawing a new map of the world where the major centres are closer to each other than to their own hinterlands (translation)” The innovation process can thus be understood as being linked to these metropolitan dynamics that substantially contribute to the development of this new value chain in the post-industrial economy. In the same way as with firms, a dynamic logistics chain develops in the large metropolises where communication and cooperation between the captive actors play a central role in stimulating competitiveness among regions and reinforcing their specialisation.

This approach focussed on large firms and metropolises, however, must not overshadow research that shows the existence of innovative regions centred on medium-sized cities, industrial districts, clusters and competitiveness centres, in which the development of regional systems of production and innovation is concentrated (Crevoisier, 2008). While

the study of local productive systems (LPS) initiated by Marshall (Pecqueur, 1989) identified innovative territories anchored on the local area and capable of internally stimulating adaptations to market changes in a particular industrial sector; the studies conducted on innovative milieus (Aydalot, 1986) make it possible to address regional development more globally. In this perspective, the innovative process is attached to the presence of collective dynamics shared within a given territory. Beyond the reciprocal links, positive externalities, local cooperative arrangements, and knowledge shared among local actors, the challenge concerns the production of collective intelligence that enables everyone to participate in building up a localised cognitive capital. Consequently, the links between laboratories, firms, local authorities, universities, chambers of commerce, tourism, sport and other institutions constitute an important structural force for making areas attractive and reinforcing the collective identity of economic sectors, specific industries and identifiable professional practices. The notion of learning territory (Jambes, 2001) develops even more when regionalisation becomes important, strengthening the presence of a territorial intelligence as a motor for the development of local economies. There thus exists a specific territorial capital favouring the development of innovative processes that enable the production of specific resources capable of producing a competitive advantage. For Pecqueur (1996), this developing territoriality is based on the emergence of territorial intermediation between the different paths of actors in an economy of proximity. The innovative process is linked to the emergence of problems or groups of actors with similar preoccupations that stimulate the construction of this “intentional” territoriality (Lajarge, 2000).

This brings us to rethink the concept of regional innovation systems (RIS) by examining them as open systems (between anchorage and mobility) that draw their wealth from multiple contractualised external and internal exchanges. Crevoisier (2008) thus speaks of territorial processes of multi-local and multi-scalar knowledge. These thus become combinatory and cumulative in the varied and mixed networks that, following on from the approaches adopted by Callon (2006), allow envisaging new socio-technical associations favouring innovation. The approach to the innovation process is thus transformed since it puts the accent on the increasing importance of socio-cultural aspects (relations with the consumers and the other citizens in general) reinforcing the idea of total innovation developed in firms. The learning economy and region thus become the key to the development of these RIS that Florida (2005) has theorized about by underlining the important role played by “the creative class”, a group capable of stimulating the production of new innovative processes in the world of recreation as well as in high technology. Beyond the criticisms levelled at this theory (Shearmur, 2006), questioning the links between the creative class and economic growth, the current period has been marked by a renewal of RIS approaches focused on the study of emergent forms active in the innovative process. All this production of innovative territorialities is linked with the participation of territories in the postmodernity movement (Giraut, 2003; Debardieux, 2002). The latter results in breaking the functional and administrative networks of modernity, opening up the local-regional link to other forms of networks where identities and institutional arrangements are built up around the fringes and margins of the territories developed and are conducive to experimentation with new forms of economic, cultural and political

combinations. The ideas of Vanier (2008) are not so dissimilar when he develops the notion of inter-territoriality, going beyond reasoning based on sectors and administrative units to produce new territorial links and bridges between economic sectors, territorial structures and intermediary institutions.

Towards eco-innovations in an economy of proximity

While the challenge that faces many actors is how to produce infinite growth and develop still more innovations, other actors raise the question of the societal vulnerabilities attached to these practices by envisaging the emergence of another development model around sustainable innovations. The priority is not necessarily the economy but also concerns the quaternary sector, accessibility, social tourism, local development, and the fourth world. Against all the problems threatening stability at both the world and regional levels, this alternative model aims to put forward other innovative paths for imagining life in society, in the firm, in recreational areas or even in residential areas. Entrepreneurial innovation, from a productivity standpoint, is thus no longer the priority (Latouche, 2006; Passet, 2000). Instead, goals are becoming more axiological and must satisfy new quality principles. It is in this context that the eco-sciences and eco-technologies are emerging (habitat, transportation, etc.), aimed at improving relations between scientific disciplines, technologies and the environment. Similarly, eco-labels and the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been introduced with a view to rethinking innovations from a sustainability perspective. NGOs and other public actors are active in introducing governance principles in the management of innovations. Other economic principles are developing around more social, responsible, ethical, ecological and sustainable economics. Numerous innovations are spreading and changing the relationship with the economy: the priority given to shorter production lines, the AMAPs (associations for the preservation of small farm agriculture), permaculture (sustainable agricultural production), and social money (the “Robin” in France) are a few examples of this movement. In the same way, an eco-management of human resources is developing with a view to improving relations between work and social life, work and relaxation, workplace groups and the development of human capital. An entire economic activity is developing around eco-products¹ and eco-services² aimed at changing the social practices of our contemporaries in favour of a new lifestyle. Although this is not a new movement – it originated in part in the Californian movement associated with 1968 and the counter culture of the 1960s – its diffusion to society as a whole is what is important. This is taking place via social and cultural dynamics receptive to this movement. Within this movement can be found the “bobos” (bohemian bourgeois) (Brooks, 2000), the cultural creatives (Ray, 2001), the anti-globalists, environmental educators or neo-rurals who have become involved in this new world to defend an ecologically responsible life style. This movement also finds

¹ Dynamo radio, pedal-powered washing machine, natural paper made from blackberry bushes, ecological toys, mandala art, haybox,...

² Eco-service nappies, eco-painters, gustatory hikes to awaken the senses to country cooking, consultants in ecological engineering, eco-design, ecological dwellings...

a strong expression in recreational practices in a perspective of changing the relationship with consumer goods. Whatever the field - religion, art, tourism, sports or theatre - numerous activities and experiences are offered to promote personal development and to help people re-examine their relationship with collective life. Eco-discovery tourism, recreational eco-villages and eco-routes are a few examples of initiatives designed to change the relationship between the “here” and the “elsewhere”, the urban and the rural, hard and soft mobility options with regard to recreational activities, the individual and the group or the resort and local development (Berthelot, 2008).

Similarly, it may be thought that the territory and regions represent active geographical and structural forces used to plan balanced development. Transmodernity (Rodriguez, 2004) develops in transversality (historical, geographical, social and political) with the will to strive toward a lasting balance among territories. Local agenda 21 initiatives, territorial governance and mediation mechanisms, and territories with project approaches are part of this movement, given that the economy of proximity, the rural centres of excellence, the specific territories and resources, and the local systems of exchange constitute the vectors of this change in the approach to the economy and territorial practices. It is therefore a question of rethinking the links between the public, the private, and civil society, while taking into account the territorial resources available. Tourism (Bourdeau, 2007) is an example of an activity that is asking questions concerning the “good practices” to develop in a given territory in order to re-examine the question of “mobilities” and the place to be allocated to leisure activities and proximity tourism, as well as the links with local associative practices. There are also numerous plans to re-examine the question of territorial identities, the management of seasonal workers and career paths, and the role of local and cultural resources capable of being activated in a sustainable project. Imagination is therefore being solicited along with local actors and networks and pioneers of ecotourism innovations in an attempt to influence daily life in the local region. Many challenges concern the ability to define the relevant territorial unit as a vector for activating the territorial value of places enabling the strengthening of synergies between the different players involved. It was from this perspective that the work of Corneloup (2004) was conducted around the notion of localised cultural systems (LCS). To limit the conflicts between the different actors in a mountain recreation resort and to reach agreement on the territory’s strategic orientations, the development of an LCS enables a strengthening of territorial identity by inviting local powers to become involved in the development of emblematic cultural forms (Romanesque art, spa towns, fun parks, free style activities, well-being, etc.) depending on the market positioning envisaged and envisageable. Innovation is part of the capacity to locally imagine culture as central in the definition of the value and anchor point of a territory. The notion of translation (socio-cultural), in the sense used by Callon, may thus serve as a reference in designing new cultural forms of practice in a given territory and in preparing the collective acceptability of this emergent labelling. The capacity to create cultural links and capital within the transversal measures implemented by the LCS represents an important resource for planning bridges between marketing approaches and socio-cultural practices, developing recreational eco-practices and responding to the new expectations of the public.

The role of these cultural and territorial innovations is, in short, to provide an alternative way of looking at the innovative practices of tomorrow with a view to proposing an alternative model to the modern and postmodern form of innovation. By way of example, one may cite the study entitled “Nous les Alpes!” (CIPRA, 2007), which illustrates the activation of the trans-modern form in mountain areas. There are thus numerous examples that go back to the principles of this form of innovation: creation of an ecological chain of value; development of an ecological habitat and passive houses; setting up of collective transport systems and reopening of railway lines; creation of AMAP (association for the preservation of small farm agriculture) in Grenoble; orientation towards the constitution of a regional economy of knowledge and skills; reinforcement of an identity and a regional intelligence base; creation of links between tourist areas and local life; granting of power to women to solve local conflicts; strengthening of cooperation between town and countryside; support for firms to assume greater responsibility; promotion of participative approaches; development of specific resources; development of incentive schemes to encourage employees in a firm to cycle to work; renting of unoccupied second homes to tourists; re-establishment of former social networks in a commune, etc...

Conclusion

Beyond the particularities and specificities that distinguish firms and territories, a movement can be identified that characterises both and places innovation at the heart of their development strategies and policies. At the same time, however, the innovative process is marked by transformations and changes within this framework for action where, although the project approach seems to have gained a firm foothold, a complexity may be observed that places the innovative process in an interactive and rhizomic model. The challenge thus concerns understanding the way the innovative process is prepared and the way it develops, which is not obvious but based on many forms (archipelago economics, creative metropolises, industrial districts, learning communities, socio-technical networks, dynamic logistics chains, convergent engineering, etc.). These different forms must develop according to local and sectoral configurations that enable the emergence of links and interactions favouring the production of novelty. However, this vast restructuring movement that reorganises the framework for innovative action, and which is oriented toward total innovation, must not under-estimate the production of new rules for action embedded in the emerging sustainable society. These rules require a rethink of innovative processes in an economy of proximity that does not focus exclusively on technological innovations but on a series of actions (social, cultural, political, economic, heritage) giving back life and meaning to exchanges based on proximity economics.

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