

Module 3: Design Thinking, Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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An Introduction to Design Thinking and Social Innovation

Given its complex nature and the interdependencies of today’s challenges, achieving social and human progress requires new tools, new approaches, collaborative actions, and a ‘maker’ mindset.

Tackling these challenges requires not only top-down actions from the government but also bottom-up engagement and innovative local actions taken by citizens and community groups.

Citizens and community groups have more responsibility than ever in creating, catalyzing, and implementing actionable solutions to the societal challenges in a time of constantly transitioning and evolving world.

Moving from ‘Taker’ to ‘Maker’ Society: Power of ‘Crowds’

The quest towards understanding how to increase the role of civil society in solving social problems, sustaining and improving the wellbeing of the people beyond increasing the monetary term welfare has triggered the interest in so-called ‘maker society’ (Ates et al., 2019).

The growing number of citizen-led initiatives and their impacts make us believe that citizen-led initiatives are capable of increasing the

social wellbeing, challenging the status quo and triggering change on a large scale in almost every area of life. It is imperative now to explore the power of society and to promote best practices which provide socially innovative solutions. ,

Among these socially innovative solutions that have been built/adopted/created relatively recently are including time banks, local currencies, self-help health groups, new kind of cooperatives, platform cooperatives, do-it-yourself movements, neighborhood gardens, participatory budgeting systems, Wikipedia and the Open Universities, microcredits, charity shops, fair trade movements, community energy farms, community courts, repair cafes and sharing economy practices.

All these examples demonstrate the substantial shift in the conventional understanding of the power structures between citizens, NGOs, public institutions, and corporations. According to the conventional understanding of individuals and citizen groups, policymakers, government authorities or political leaders are supposed to carry out the 'necessary' works on behalf of the citizens. In accordance with this line of thought, citizens are considered to be passive stakeholders who only express their needs and wait for the decision makers to fulfill those need, which we call 'taker society.' Fortunately, there is a growing consensus on the obsolescence of conventional development policies and immense need for the emergence of a 'maker society', which bring about their own solutions to the challenges they face.

Small size social innovations driven by the member of the respective 'maker society' are making and will make incremental changes in our daily life. On top of that, small but steady improvements that incorporate minute activities from daily life bring the society closer to the idea of a collective wellbeing and suit human nature better than radical changes.

As proven by the promising examples of grassroots initiatives, without taking the society on board, and without challenging the current conventional understanding of development, there is a limit of economic or social development that can be achieved. That can also be seen as a distinctive feature of this new era.

One of the characteristics of today's world is a rapid change in almost every area of life which entails well designed innovative, and sustainable solutions. In this sense, resilient societies which are capable of adapting themselves to the changing environments by introducing permanent solutions are seen as a key component of the new era.

There are numbers of challenges today's societies are confronted with: socio-ecological transformations, a democracy that fails to provide for all persons within a country, an aging society, unequal distribution of wealth, and exclusive growth. Given its complex nature and the interdependencies of today's challenges, achieving social and human progress requires a new mind-set, new approaches, collaborative actions, and a "maker" mindset. Tackling these challenges requires not only top-down actions from the government but also bottom-up engagement and innovative local actions from a country's citizens.

Researchers and practitioners are convinced that the public services and top-down solutions we inherited from our grandparents, in which people are considered as passive consumers of those services, are unsuitable and unsustainable given the context of the challenges ahead (Gerometta et al., 2005). This fact highlights the need for a shift from a "taker" to "maker" society where citizens take an active role by directly participating in developing different forms of socially innovative actions, institutions, and social relations.

'Designer Society' and Social Innovations

One of the main features characterize Innov-active (innovative and proactive) society is designing capacity. Innov-active society refers to societies which are taking an active part in either designing, implementing or funding processes of social innovation.

In order to achieve that, citizens individually or collectively, institutionally or non-institutionally, take a proactive stance in developing socially innovative solutions in order to cope with the challenges they face at the local or global level.

Notwithstanding, societies are failing to address the challenges they face and are not eager to participate in developing innovative solutions, lacking the feeling of responsibility, in expectation of top-down solutions and actions from the public sector, which we call "taker societies."

Kirwan et al., 2013; Moulaert et al., 2007; and Mulgan et al., 2007 considered social innovation as "a process of collective action and social transformation that pursues the development of new forms of governance, community formation, participation, empowerment, and capacity building".

When it comes to a socially innovative services, product or process related to Sustainable Development Goals, *design thinking* plays a crucial role. *Design thinking* in term os Sustainable development goals refers to determining "hot-points" of the innovative solutions, asking the right question, understanding the

need thoroughly, properly identifying the challenge, exploring the necessary resources and forming a process structure.

Given these challenges, greater civilian involvement in collaborative and participative problem solving, as well as their direct participation in developing state-of-art solutions are becoming crucial more than ever.

Designer Mindset: a crucial ingredient of successful social innovation

Design is considered as a crucial ingredient of successful social innovation. As a particular discipline, the design emerged as a response to the need of adapting technological artifacts to human needs, behaviors, and measures, which made it one of the creative disciplines that are active in social innovation (Emilson et al., 2014).

Encompassing systematic thinking, prototyping, co-creating and visualizing, design approach has proven to be a useful tool in social innovation thanks to user-centered perspective, the involvement of stakeholders through participatory design and rapid prototyping (Murray et al., 2010a). On the other hand, the design must be adapted to the new landscape in order to avoid naïve and superficial approaches (Hillgren et al., 2011).

Design approach also refers to a social capacity involving collaboration, sharing common values, trust as social virtue and requires appropriate tools to address the particular issues. Visualization techniques, for instance, supports the involvement of diverse stakeholders in the process, a user-centered approach to complement top-down methods, fast prototyping to rapidly test models in practice, and systemic approaches to food, energy and care systems (Hillgren et al., 2011).

Another version of the design is called participatory design which requires direct involvement of people in the co-design of the product, service, or processes.

Designer society, referring to a proactive society capable of identifying their own needs, co-creates solution alternatives using necessary design tools and platforms, collaboratively. Accordingly, designer society is expected to use appropriate tools from the initial stage of a problem in finding solutions. Without proper 'thinking routines' and appropriate tools in place, we cannot expect the society to embark on a quest toward an issue, detect the underlying causes of the problem, and develop innovative solutions by using limited resources. Design Thinking is described as a process for creative problem-solving and can be used in almost every area where 'design' is necessary. As Tim Brown put it, "Design thinking taps into capacities we all have, but more conventional problem-solving

practices overlook that. It is not only human-centered; it is deeply human in and of itself. Design thinking relies on our ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that have emotional resonance as well as functionality, to express ourselves in media other than words or symbols ..." (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). As seen, being equipped with the design mindset and looking at the issues from a designer's lens would massively change the way we solve problems or develop solutions.

Social innovation design is a collaborative process combining contributions from several stakeholders, including citizens, entrepreneurs, professional designers, public servants, or academicians. One crucial characteristic of social innovation is that it often emerges from collaborations between actors from different sectors and disciplines (Emilson et al., 2014). Subsequently, citizens and community groups can be characterized as the essential players of the participatory design process. Instead of designing for people, designers within the participatory design tradition involves the people concerned and design with them, starting from their own experiences and desires (Emilson et al., 2014).

Societies are expected to embrace their responsibility during the participatory design process and realize "how design plays a crucial role in exploring new possibilities to create a more sustainable, equal, and just world" by addressing issues on both an individual level and a systemic level (Emilson et al., 2014).

Acknowledging that design approach is a crucial component of social innovation, various platforms are emerging around the world, accommodating design sprints, brainstorming, ideation, prototyping events, and functioning as a hub for collective intelligence. In the form of social innovation labs, living labs or citizen labs, design platforms play the role of that R&D labs played for technological innovations.

Since social innovations contribute to social and human wellbeing, beneficiaries -citizens and social groups- are supposed to play a proactive role in the designing process of social innovations under various domains. Proactive role in the designing process includes but not limited to problem identification, expressing the need, prototyping, testing, ideation of alternatives, participating in the co-creation process of public institutions, NGO's or universities.

This course is also aiming at to create a platform which accommodates necessary materials related to design process on how to develop socially innovative products and services. By doing that, this course intends to equip you with necessary knowledge to play an active role in shaping your own environment and futures.

Maker Society

Given the challenges including changing social needs, aging societies, unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, limited natural resources, urbanization, increasing population of the world, and globalization; moving from 'taker' to 'maker' society seems to be an imperative rather than an alternative. A new generation of "social makers" using open source innovation models, available collaboration platforms, and crowdsourcing is expected to drive a big wave in societal well-being.

Unlocking the potential of the society and exploring new ways to increase the role citizens and community groups in solving social problems, sustaining and improving the wellbeing of the people beyond increasing the monetary term welfare has triggered the interest in so-called 'maker society.' In his book of "The rise of the creative class" Florida (2002) makes the point that the world is changing dramatically since the industrial revolution and contrary to previous experiences, the current one is shaped by a creative class, rather than conglomerates, industrialist or big corporations. Although Florida (2002) referred to "creative class" as a new social class with a particular emphasis on "fundamental economic driver," it can also be understood as innov-active societies solving social challenges cooperatively in a view to enhance life quality and improve social wellbeing. Along with Florida (2002), Manzini and Staszowski (2013) also highlighted this emerging phenomenon, what we call maker society, as "an active and collaborative attitude driven by several social and economic factors, enables people to establish direct links between interested peers and opens new opportunities for meaningful activism and effective collaborations, which in turns collectively creates a large and deep wave of social innovations".

We have to acknowledge that achieving a 'maker society' is very challenging since it requires a set of activities, fertile environment, engagement of stakeholders, appropriate tools, dedication and enthusiasm, and most importantly a substantial personal, societal, and global renewal. It is key for any country to increase the capacity of a society to act by nurturing tomorrow's social innovators and entrepreneurs from today by empowering them with appropriate tools and guidance.

Social Entrepreneurship as a Mean to Achieve SDGs

A growing number of citizen-led social innovations around the world are reflected in the forms of social entrepreneurship. As bottom up solutions, social

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entrepreneurship is gaining more attention due to their promise of alleviating social problems such as poverty, discrimination, or exclusion (Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2013). In a 'maker society,' social entrepreneurs have the potential of playing a significant role by sustainably introducing innovative solutions. There is a growing number of socially innovative entrepreneurs around the world who are pursuing novel solutions by addressing issues in diverse fields, including education, economy, health services or renewable energy systems. These grassroots initiatives are mostly launched by a group of local people or dedicated citizens who want to build up a business around a social need.

In terms of economy, there is a growing consensus among pundits that logic of passive consumption is challenged whilst engendering a new kind of community-based economy which relies on vast network of maker spaces, hacking clubs, and online peer-to-peer (P2P) design collaborations are pointing the way to a different kind of participatory and networked economy (Kish, Quilley, & Hawreliak, 2016). In line with that, (Anderson, 2013) argues that the maker movement has the potential to challenge established business models.

Community gardens, purchasing groups, time banking, community supported agriculture systems, number of sharing economy practices, community energy hubs, innovative interest groups, citizen journalism, local currency movements, serious games, participatory budgeting, community energy hubs, social cooperatives, new ownership models, block chain for social good, citizen science, do-it-yourself movements, repair cafés and many other forms of social innovations are some of the promising examples of how maker societies contribute to society by considering itself as an essential part of the solution.

Assignment

Please give at least 3 examples of services or products developed and introduced by so called "maker society" in your neighborhood.

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