Innocamps obstacles and enabling policies

This brief note is, in part, the fruit of an intensive discussion around the Innocamp idea that occurred at the INFU – Innovation Futures workshop held in Berlin on October 29, 2010. In the following I will use a scenario about the future to help reveal some potential options for policy in the present.

Innocamps in the Learning Intensive Society (LIS)

The date is: 2030. The place: the imaginary scenario of the Learning Intensive Society[1]. In this scenario Innocamps have become diverse and ubiquitous, part of a social and economic system that is no longer organized into firms and workplaces, but in projects and communities. As described in the Documentation of the INFU Visioning Exercise[2], this is a radically different world; one where the financial, health care, education, research, justice, production and even spiritual systems have been transformed.

At the core, the most basic level of what is produced, what is traded, what is valued – are the activities that today, in 2010, we would call learning. Learning predominates as the main (proportionately most important) flow and stock of wealth. Learning is the main form of investment, the "production process" that occupies the most time and resources in society. Learning is dominant like industry was once dominant. It is the predominance of learning as an activity that has made Innocamps one of the central institutions of 2030. Like in the industrial era the firm was the dominant institutional form for organizing industrial activity, in the LIS Innocamps are the main way of organizing learning.

Why are Innocamps so central to the functioning of the Learning Intensive Society? The answer is to be found in the radically different socio-economic conditions that define the LIS; a difference that can be illustrated, in part, by the roles now played by learning and innovation. In the context of the Learning Intensive Society of 2030 the meaning of these two terms has changed profoundly from the industrial era. Perhaps the most striking difference, one that is hard to even comprehend from the point-of-view of 2010, is that the production of value (things, ideas, experiences) is largely outside a hierarchical framework.

This means economic output is embodied in unique creations, not mass products. Both the value and content of these unique creations arises primarily from the personal, self-referential attributes of the product. Unlike income, which is obviously measured and understood using a hierarchical scale or an iphone which can be evaluated primarily using hierarchical metrics related to: functionality, status, price; unique creations are in large part not comparable in hierarchical terms. Unique creations are primarily heterarchical.

Happiness is a good example of something that is heterarchical – although there are many common attributes to happiness and some metrics may be shared, the happiness of

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[1] Miller, Riel, (2006) "Equity in a 21st Century Learning Intensive Society: Is Schooling Part of the Solution?", Foresight, Emerald, Volume 8, Issue 4. See also Miller, Riel „Rules for Radicals" series at www.rielmiller.com
[2] See http://untilweseenewland.com/2010/10/29/infu-innovation-futures/

one person is not really comparable to that of another person. Whose happiness is better or worse, higher or lower, more or less genuine, more or less valuable? Thus, in an economy and society where much of the value production is related to specific moments of identity and community creation, the role of hierarchical processes and products is no longer the same. This has profound implications for the nature of what is produced and hence how production is organized.

In the LIS only a very small fraction of investment (financial and time) is in products or services that are be created using the organizational approaches of scale economies or enterprise based shared overheads. The old industrial economy is still around, immensely productive and in its narrow, mass-oriented way fantastically innovative. It was sort of ironic, but the decline in importance of innovation in terms of resource allocation was partly due to the success of industrial innovation policies and advances in so-called knowledge management. Now proportionately fewer engineers and fewer firms dedicated to producing mass-products are able to supply those industrial inputs still essential for daily-life, but like agriculture in the 20th century the locus of activity has moved elsewhere.

Most innovation today is far away from the engineer's technical refinement or the manager's organizational efficiency of specialized conception and execution or even the pooling of back-office costs across many "employees". Innovation today is more akin to the acquisition of "wisdom", it is the process of personal identity creation, the learning that gradually defines the social creature called a human. As such LIS innovation is primarily heterarchical and happens through what might be called "refinement of taste": the learning that occurs during a person's voyage through life. It is the nature of the content of value creation that privileges Innocamps as a way of organizing "productive" activity.

Innocamps, like firms in the industrial era, are the enabling organizational form that fosters the immense, murmuration[3] like fluidity of the LIS. Innocamps are that ubiquitous coming together of people, the easy, almost costless birth, death, entry and exit that marks the fluidity of creative communities, inspirational idea colaboratories of the LIS. When you want to do something, engage in a learning activity, you create or join an Innocamp – which may last a few minutes or years, may address the customization of one of your avatars or your "innerpage" (the personal virtual-self repository), or may call on hundreds of millions of people to take on a major ecological initiative or eradicate a disease.

Innocamps are collective processes, running the gamut from ephemeral subjectively motivated and focused experiments to immense resilient and path-dependent projects, but always deeply influenced by the collective nature of both sense making and meaningfulness. Such collaboration can only work because of three sets of critical changes:

1. One was expected and well underway back in 2010, this was the rapid improvement in all of the technical aspects of the Internet. Here it was simply a

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[3] See video of a murmuration http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIzIcH2q6Vo

question of the continuation of existing trends, the successful extrapolation of better and cheaper connectivity and connected interfaces along with the growth of web sites, social "web 2.0" interaction, and data-information-knowledge of all kinds. Web interfaces became smaller, more mobile but also more "natural" with seamless language and movement interactivity. Even the ecological footprint, in relative terms, of all these electronically run gadgets improved, particularly once the server farms of the "cloud" were moved into cold, sun-energized orbit. Lastly, as expected, "desktop factories" (sophisticated three dimensional printers using a range of new and old materials), significantly reduced international trade in manufactured goods, even in the construction sector.

2. Much less expected and much more important as an enabling change was a paradigmatic break, a step-change in decision-making capacity. The easiest and most obvious historical comparison was the introduction of universal numeracy and literacy in the industrial era. As we know from this historical example (one that is still underway in many industrializing parts of the world), altering the ambient capabilities of the population as a whole also transforms the potential for new forms of economic, social and political activity. As it turns out this type of change was once again what really made the difference with respect to the operational practicality of the Innocamp murmuration as a way of organizing everyday life. The key breakthrough was the introduction of something called Futures Literacy. Futures Literacy significantly improves people's capacity to "use the future"; breaking the hold of industrial era habits of planning and risk management by providing a workable and meaningful alternative. This was the critical ingredient for letting go of the "firm-job" way of organizing productive activity towards much more fluid, spontaneous and improvisational organization around task based activities. Today we no longer colonize and lock-in the future as a way to justify today's actions by tomorrow's expected outcomes. We have also shifted as rigorously and systematically as possible towards diversification and fault-tolerance as a risk management approach, away from the fail-safe and path-dependent methods that were given such pride of place in the industrial, material obsessed social orders of the past.

3. A third part of the Innocamps murmuration story of today is an inter-dependent system made up of a constellation of new institutions and norms. As it turned out the creative destruction of the industrial era's decline was much more violent and devastating than expected. As usual the dead hand of the past weighed heavily[4] and throwing it off was not only costly but required a passing of generations. Emergence was painful, involving significant reallocations of power and of the people in power, but it happened. The most prominent features of today's system are:

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4 Marx, K., (1852), The 18th Brumiare of Louis Napoleon, "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like an nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language."

a. **Cybercitizenship** is granted automatically to every person providing an anchor for the dominant forms of "belonging" (responsibilities and rights) and wealth that are institutionalized predominantly through (see below) Identity Based Communities (IBCs) and Knowbanks.

b. **Identity Based Communities** (IBCs) are the primary form of belonging or being part-of a community, IBCs exercise the legitimate use of force, in both physical and virtual communities, mostly through the imposed requirements of in-kind taxation in order to be "part" of a community.

c. **Knowbanks** and human capital accounting systems enable the ownership, control and transparency/sense-making of your "lifelog" – the detailed life-record and virtual-self repository that collects, from birth, what you have done and are able to do [note: Knowbank assets are the basis for credit systems and the profusion of different monies and the peer-to-peer payment systems tied to Cybercitizenship and Knowbank accounts, there are no more central banks].

d. **Universal Web Index** (UWI) is a post-Google non-commercial, collectively financed universal library-archive that operates in conjunction with **U-Sense**, a global, public service that uses iterating and folksonomic semantic transparency to make UWI " Search Able".

e. **It's-a-deal** (IDA) is the global contracting infrastructure, based on a massively reconstructed contract laws and new IBC federated recourse mechanisms, that provides modular, re-useable, index-searchable contracts that provide an easily accessible and inexpensive way of establish different forms of ownership and revenue sharing (automatically identified and paid by the **Universal Revenue Sharing** service (U-RS) according to the embedded contracts) for both virtual and non-virtual "outputs".

f. **Evaluation Vector Infrastructure** (EVI) is the regulated assessment system, connected in a variety of formal and informal ways to IBCs and Knowbanks, that is designed to provide a trustworthy platform for the constantly changing mix of sources and criteria for judging/assessing – the EVI infrastructure is explicitly grounded in the dual need to provide a: i) countervailing mechanism to the dangers of the "power-law" (monopolies) and ii) verifiable "third-party" peer-to-peer assessment platform (the core of the scientific method), even if such evaluation is largely applied to heterarchical processes/outcomes the need for countervailing mechanisms (anti-monopoly, etc.) is even more critical since knowledge is still power and evaluation is still the power to judge.

g. **The "residuals" or legacy systems** are all of the scale economy, administrative (command and control, conception and execution) and "national" institutions that still continue to function – are necessary but

> not dominant with respect to the functioning of everyday life (like agriculture in the industrial era) – the boundary lines were largely defined by the catastrophic collapse of industrial era institutions but also by the parameters set by the current LIS institutions.

Innocamp obstacles

The LIS scenario helps to identify at least three significant obstacles in the present to the consolidation of an Innocamps murmuration type learning society:

1. The way we use the future – to command, control, plan – which leads directly to the second major obstacle;
2. Administrative systems, that punish failure and are premised on a belief that the "right answer" exists;
3. Fear and defensiveness in those parts of the world experiencing a relative decline in status and hopes and ambitions in those parts of the world experience relative gains through convergence to the "industrialization norm".

Basically, as Machiavelli put it long ago: "It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not readily believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them."

What to do now?

The imaginary LIS scenario does not take into account either the likelihood of such events coming to pass or the desirability of such a world. Probabilistic and value based considerations, certainly important for decision-making, are not the current topic. What the LIS scenario attempts to do is sketch aspects of a world with a distinct and different operational capability – one that makes the ubiquity of Innocamps a logical part of the socio-economic system. Thus the analytical focus of this scenario is on learning as a constant, plural, transparent, capacity enhancing activity that sustains the rest of the system.

As already indicated the advent of such a system is not envisaged as the outcome of some easy, rational process guided by prescience, wisdom and effective coordinated planning. Again, without pretending to offer any view regarding probability, the precedents for taking a rational path are non-existent and existing hopes for such a leadership directed fantasy can be blamed, in part, on claims made ex-post by past-winners to justify their acts and status. And although the self-organizing patterns of the Innocamp murmuration are not complex from an algorithmic point-of-view, meaning such patterns can be reproduced on the basis of a set of specified parameters, both the conditions for such a system as well as the actual outcomes of the real system as it emerges, instantiating novelty, are indeed complex.

So what conclusions can we draw from this exercise for the rational, planning based policy approaches that are dominant today and shape the choices made by decision-makers? There are things that we can do – in other words what is our "stance" towards emergence? Policy is about agency, in the present.

One thing is to sponsor more Innocamps and engage in more analysis of why such exercises succeed and fail, why they may or may not have implications for the way society is organized, things about the future, etc. The Innocamp experiment shows all of the attributes of the hope, imagination and energy that humans bring to problem solving. The Innocamp even seems to have the potential to go beyond the parameters and limits of creative problem solving – looking for answers – by encouraging the exploration and discovery of new questions. Intensive learning environments enable people to share their knowledge and hopes, to invent and escape, to apply and test, to experiment more than once. From this perspective the Innocamps are privileged learning environments – hot houses for the interactivity, observation, analysis and finding new solutions.

An Innocamp is clearly a tool, a method, a process for fostering the learning that is innovation. Such learning can be applied to the challenge of industrial innovation – to solve the problems of production and consumption as we define these activities today. These are of course laudable goals because they promise to, amongst other things, reduce the environmental cost of what we do in daily life, to improve rate at which people participating in educational systems acquire skills, to make cities and homes and hospitals more "human". The question is – can the pursuit of industrial innovation foster learning that goes beyond industrial problems solving? And perhaps even more critical does this way of fostering learning eventually undermine or contradict learning that is not just aware of extra-systemic emergence but can let go of existing systems to nurture discontinuous novelty, potentially alternative and one day ascendent/dominant systems?

These questions would not be particularly pertinent if the existing system was not showing significant signs of dysfunction. One of the more striking aspects of current economic policy is the subservice, or narrowly focused functionalist rationality that defines and implements innovation as industrial competitive achievement. For the most part the difference between innovation as learning and innovation as a means to the end of production efficiency and market success is ignored. Except, insofar as learning is required for industrial forms of innovation. The INFU – Innovation Futures workshop held in Berlin on October 29, 2010 as well as the actual Innocamp experience that served as inspiration for the workshop are no exception. Both the workshop and accounts of the Innocamp experience illustrate the extent to which the distinction between learning as innovation and innovation as competitive achievement remains largely unproblematized.

Per se there is nothing wrong with this tension, indeed it could be seen as one of the important insights from the process. Furthermore this tension is in large part just a symptom of the tensions that are evident in the kinds of strengths and weaknesses attributed to current socio-economic systems and policies. The point of this brief note was to look at the ways in which the Innocamps concept at the core of the INFU – Innovation Futures workshop held in Berlin on October 29, 2010, might be inscribed in an alternative, imaginary story of the future.