

‘INNOVATION’ AND ‘TRANSFORMATION’:

HOW DO THESE NOTIONS ASSIST IN ACHIEVING THE UNITED NATIONS 2030 AGENDA?

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Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

EU and Innovation and Transformation

- *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, September 2015)

Key question: How has European integration enabled deep understanding of how place-based (regional) innovation can deliver action on societal challenges?

Progress to date:

Yes to some: eg 1 and 8

No to others: eg 5, 13, 14, 16

Business as usual will not deliver...

... not just economic, also social & ecological





The Conceptual Journey (1)

1. Technical solutions will deliver the Goals - the laboratory is the start of transformation
2. Decoupling growth and energy and resource use
3. Need new modalities of finance, governance and public policy at all levels
4. Innovation is no longer linear, nor private, nor coherent
5. The role of Higher Education in the achievement of the SDGs
6. The Agenda of 17 Goals is too siloed and fragmented – better to focus on 4 themes: universal public services; livelihoods for all; climate action; and just relationships.





The Conceptual Journey (2)

7. Global governance: incapable of solving wicked problems – is this a matter of courageous values?
8. The possibility of ‘thermostatic’ institutions – legitimate, with authority and exploring solutions that have ‘plausible causal logics’
9. Interaction between state and non-state actors influences problem definition, solution identification & political opportunity - Dark Matter
10. Learning Partnerships make visible and advance the learning dimensions amongst the quadruple helix, working for transformation – lifelong & lifewide, learning cities



Innovation (1)

- Innovation was understood as a discourse about firm-level invention, creativity, problem solving and ‘creative destruction’
- Since the 1980s, an emerging focus on ‘systems of innovation’ – national, regional, local – still essentially ‘lab’ focused, a linear process leading to commercialisation
- However, from the 1990s, ‘Regional Innovation Systems’ has mapped the dynamic character of interaction amongst quadruple helix actors, a process of collaborative problem-solving
- Innovation policy has had 3 dimensions (at least):
 - a) commercialisation
 - b) innovation districts or precincts
 - c) Mission-oriented innovation – scaled projects to address wicked problems (the man on the moon)

... although the debates play out very differently across the globe





Innovation (2)

- Uncertainty prompts ingenuity, ‘situated and beyond ... the strictures of modern modes of thought’ ...
- Climate-related pressures for industrial transition drive socio-ecological innovation
- This adds up to a democratisation of innovation: the ‘square’ is ‘not only the place where the consequences of climate change and declining biodiversity will be felt most directly but also the place most given to broadening further participation and building in a spirit of trust-based and timely partnerships among all relevant actors addressing transformative innovation’. (Schwaag Serger et al 2023, 9) – also ‘grassroots’ innovation.





An Emerging Position (1)

- Time is running out. But we also need more time to build the consensus and the understanding. (eg. The policy dialogue aims to accelerate this process.) Without disrespecting 'island time'.
- The EU is very important:
 - a) as a site of practical and policy experimentation;
 - b) for its research output;
 - c) for its drive to address climate action (and the SDGs);
 - d) for its policy debates and specifically, Horizon Europe;
 - e) for its investment capacity;
 - f) as an example of how good global governance might develop.
- Complex political and moral questions cannot be resolved by technical solutions alone.
- Our approach to engaging with the EU is still dialogical and reflective.
- Recognising the challenges and the tensions of inter-governmental governance



An Emerging Position (2)

- Need to think carefully about the type of problem definition that is being addressed, and the choice of disciplinary perspectives to help understand it - market-driven mechanisms inevitably prioritise economic outcomes. More precise about how we make explicit about the problem definition we are dealing with in the reporting we do.
- Coalitions are crucial to outcomes – spanning the local to the global. Pointing to the forming coalitions is difficult and time consuming but necessary.
- Context matters. Recognising the specificity and to build the generalities across contexts.
- **Democratic innovation processes** are best understood as an ecosystem with multiple diverse actors contributing complementary sometimes contradictory knowledge and resources
- **Learning partnerships** are an integral part of innovation ecosystems.
- **Capacity-strengthening** – rethinking whose capacities and how to effectively do this recognising the existence of different knowledges and contexts (individual, institutional). What is it? Why it matters and how you do it?
- The importance of **self-reflexive thinking** as a key capacity.
- There is a concern to honour the community/communities. There is a place for the hard conversations (about not being in touch with the world, but we can help you address this.) What defines? Who represents? Who turns up?



An Emerging Position (3)

- Innovation is no longer as an exceptional act, but as a necessary goal for all of us and everything – a widespread means of generating change in which everyone can be involved, but also as necessary change itself. Business as usual is no longer an option.
- Policy itself is a governance innovation. And we think of governance across different scales. Not that governance does not technical dimensions.
- The tension between having to aim for 1.5 but also recognising that using 1.5 is itself a technical target, but we need to innovate to address it. It is a governance and social innovation problem.
- Just transitions are complex and difficult for the current generation to embrace, but this may no longer be for generations in the future.
- Therefore, the critical question for the next 2 days:
 - If our research demonstrates the importance of living in and with the tension between local and global...
 - ... how to build the kinds of coalitions/alliances that will commit to systemic transformation...
 - ... understanding that the uncertainty and 'not knowing' where innovation might lead is an experimental/learning process which needs partnership support...
- [and what can we learn about this from the EU?]

