



Social innovation ecosystem in the field of cultural heritage: a definition

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Introduction

This paper is dedicated to define what is a social innovation ecosystem in the field of cultural heritage. The text is divided into three parts. Firstly, it aims to clarify what an innovation ecosystem is. Secondly, it seeks to apply this concept into the cultural heritage sector and to defined the factors and elements that compose it. Finally, a third section with conclusions about what is considered necessary to create the appropriate environment in which concrete projects in cultural heritage and social innovation can materialise. An alternative video-explanation is accessible via this address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iBaAqGqjCg>.

What is an innovation ecosystem?

We are speaking of an innovation ecosystem when we refer to a context, environment or medium in which innovation is favoured by a set of agents and multiple causes. Perhaps the most widespread example is Silicon Valley in the US, where research institutions (universities, technology centres), private investment, entrepreneurs and the state as a catalyst, have created ideal conditions for technological innovation. Innovation ecosystems are always created in these sectorial areas, where the influence of different agents is balanced and everyone contributes somehow to

the construction of the ecosystem, providing either investment, ideas or work.

As it is the case of the concept of innovation, we tend to associate the term “innovation ecosystem” to the technological area. The reason is that the language of innovation has been entirely co-opted by the scientific-technological and business area and functions almost as a synonym for innovation in these fields. Precisely social innovation is a concept that has been created to avoid that categorical restriction, which tries to put the focus of innovation on the social causes.

In conclusion an ecosystem of social innovation can be defined in the same terms as an ecosystem of technological innovation: an environment in which innovation is favoured by a set agents and multiple causes. The difference remains in its purpose, which is to cover social needs such as for instance equality, integration, education and a decent work.

The ecosystem of social innovation in cultural heritage

If we are talking about social innovation – which has already been defined in a previous paper – and more specifically about social innovation in the field of cultural heritage, its ecosystem would be defined by the following factors summarised in the Figure 1.

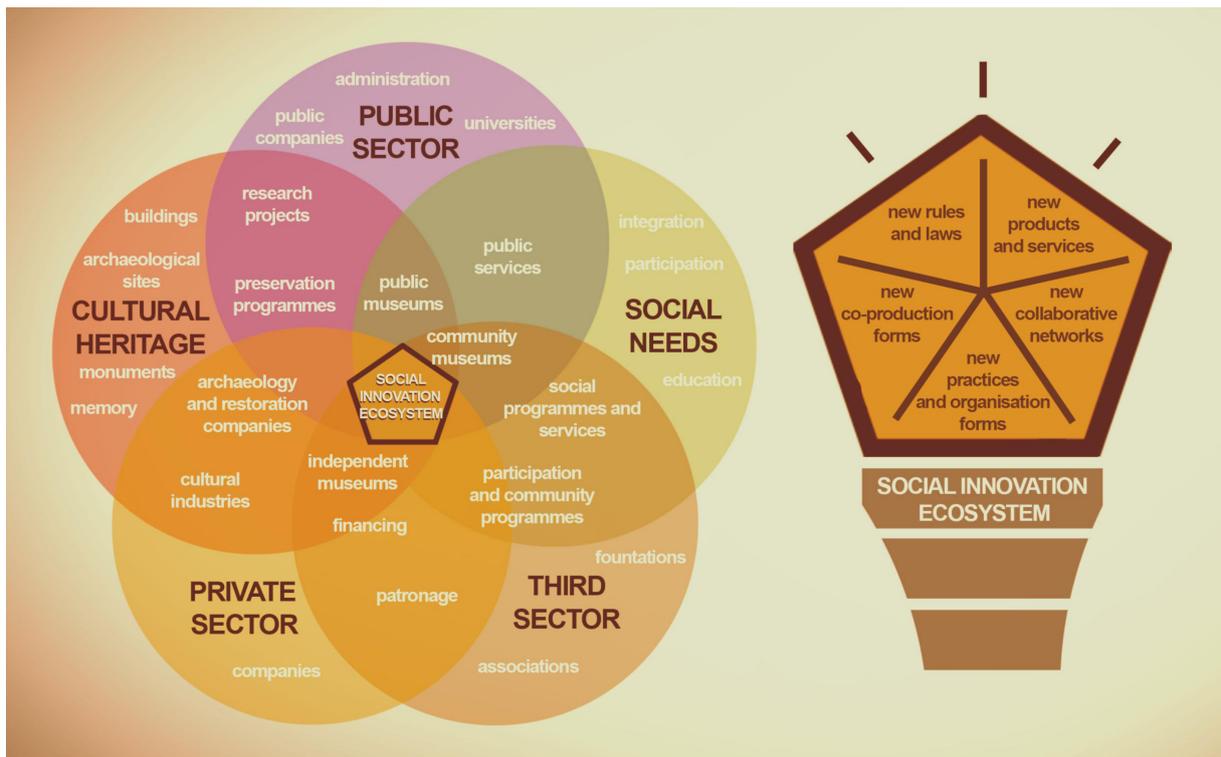


Fig. 1 Map of sectors and factors in whose confluence social innovation ecosystem is -in the cultural heritage field-

a) Factors:

1. Cultural heritage: in this case, the object that defines the action, processes, models or socially innovate services.

2. Social needs: education, integration, access to culture, democracy and participation to name just a few.

b) Sectors:

3. Public sector. Administrations, the usual holders of cultural heritage and also the ones who lay down the policy guidelines, established protection frameworks and who coordinate management programs. Most of the universities and technology centres belong also to this sector and are leading the research in the field of cultural heritage. Additionally part of the institutions dedicated to the promotion of heritage, such as museums, belong to this sector as well.

4. Third sector. This is the sector of social economy. In it we find different

legal organisation forms, such as associations, foundations, social economy enterprises, etc. Overall, companies and organisations whose main purpose is social and to which other strategies, models and processes are subordinated. A good deal of community and independent museums have some of these legal forms. Moreover, associations and foundations working in the defense, protection and promotion of cultural heritage also belong to this third sector.

5. Private sector. It consists of business organisations whose aims are lucrative. Anonymous, limited or business trust companies, banks and investment funds account for most of the economic activity together with the public sector. In the private sector is where the main sources of financing for the remaining sectors are. In the field of heritage we find here the so-called “cultural industries”, i.e. various forms of business management: museums, cultural centers, tour

operators, etc. In some countries private companies are more and more in charge of part of the cultural heritage management, especially in the field of archaeology or restoration, conducting work for the public administration and also other private companies.

The space where the meeting between all these sectors and factors occurs is what we call the ecosystem of social innovation in cultural heritage. Socially innovative projects on heritage would be those who, based on new ways of doing things –through asset management implementation services, covering models or processes– cover social needs while generating new types of relationships that incorporate citizenship to these processes. Effective management, social order and social transformation: a triple objective thus attained.

What does it take to create an ecosystem of social innovation?

First of all, a deeper reflection and definition of these concepts. Here we propose one, but it must be enriched and improved. For this purpose, a greater scientific and academic involvement is necessary: a further research in these fields, the results of which would be discussed by means of conferences, seminars, etc.

In second place, it is necessary to create experimental spaces in this field, where social entrepreneurs can test/err and learn without fear of being ousted or blamed due to their failures. Success can only be achieved after committing mistakes. Without bearing in mind this philosophy, it is impossible to create any innovation environment, whether social or else wise.

Establishing strategic lines: what is missing and what is irrelevant when creating an ecosystem of social inno-

vation in this sector? Certainly it's not a question of money. More likely what we are short of is entrepreneurs, private equity, public policies and citizen involvement.

Each sector should therefore contribute with the following measures:

Public sector: Support the creation of intersectoral spaces by reforming laws and regulations. Facilitate the establishment of joint asset management systems in which the encounter between all actors can occur. More open and collaborative universities, with transfer offices in the social field.

Private and financial sector: Support social entrepreneurship in the sector to assume greater corporate social responsibility and not only to invest in order to obtain tax advantage. More involvement in projects and more belief in what is achieved.

Third sector: Greater professionalism and involvement in other areas that are traditionally out of the imagination of social economy: i.e. investment, communication or marketing. Less dependency on public and private financing and self-managed forms of organisation. Encourage social participation and improve transparency. The third sector will certainly be the great laboratory of good practices in social innovation heritage.

In short: flexibility of the public sector and a more open university, awareness and social involvement of the private sector and convert social entrepreneurship in productive economy within the third sector.

Through www.hesiod.eu we identify projects and initiatives that are moving in these cross coordinates, as examples of social innovation heritage. If you have a project, you can do this online through our questionnaire.



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Accessible in: <http://hesiod.eu/heritage-social-innovation-observatory/>