

**RIAS CONVENTION DUNDEE
SCOTTISH INNOVATION - A CULTURAL DILEMMA TODAY
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I am going to talk about Innovation.

The enthusiasm and spirit of Scottish innovators and enterprise is staggering. My namesake, also known as 'Coppertop', invented hyperlink - and is endlessly promoting the culture of innovation in Scotland. Without innovation and adaptability to new situations, societies die.

Innovation is to create something totally new, and often, innovation is seen as techno-centric. However, innovation is also about how to lead, organise and deliver.

Innovation's opposite is imitation.

cf Japan from the late 60s where much development was not innovation but appropriation and imitation. We have seen the same happening in China over the past couple of decades.

Imitation is seen an excellent business method!

Consider the Developer who is a pioneer - he gets an arrow in his back.

The presumption is that Developers with this approach do not survive.

So developers do not lead. This can work against architects who are genuinely searching for better solutions or paradigm shifts in spatial organisation, environmental behaviour etc.

It is an irony that many developers fail not from being innovative, but through over-gearing their companies.

Imitation is a business method that is used to catch up.

And when imitated quickly, is often marketed as if it is 'innovative'.

Innovation is not always dependent upon R&D.

Consider Japan's 3% GDP invested in R&D and the level of new ideas/products - the results do not appear to match the investment.

R&D should be seen as investment to gain and/or make knowledge.

i.e. £s invested leads to knowledge

Innovation is then knowledge that delivers £s!

Note: Investment in technology and education alone does not necessarily deliver.

Consider Soviet Union, and a time when USSR had more investment in R&D than US, yet failed to turn this into economic strength.

WHAT ENABLES INNOVATION?

NEEDED:

1. Market Creation that allows, supports and then exploits innovation

UK and Europe do not create enough markets. And there is a lack of markets at present.

Consider music and film where we seem to do well - is this linked to the young and thus the 'new' - are these markets renewed from older models, or technology driven.

Decision makers need to understand this - innovation without markets leads nowhere.

2. Public Procurement needs to recognise and support this

Public procurement is circa 16% of EU GDP. At the moment it is spent on the “cheapest”. There is a need for Public Procurement (ironically held back by the Private part of PPP) to promote innovation by purchasing it.

Consider competition v innovation.

Refer to Ian Ritchie’s role in the new Civic Justice Centre, Manchester, where ‘breaking the rules’ enabled a great building to come to fruition - a proper architectural competition based upon a thorough and fully approved brief - even though we (Ministry of Justice - then known as the Dept of Constitutional Affairs) stayed inside Treasury limits. It was possible because of the full backing of the Lord Chancellor. A genuine architectural competition; a solid brief, and no complaints!

A pity that there was an embargo placed upon this by the incoming Lord Chancellor - four years delay in promoting this success story - years lost when other projects promoted by other ministries could have benefitted from this exemplar. This potential destroyed by pettiness of personal politics rather than promoting a solution - one which will help promote a healthy procurement method for government and benefit all through better design and architecture.

Create many more new companies.

R&D Capacity of existing companies is not the only answer - it is more of old fashioned route.

Create innovation by creating new - everything is an open mind and an open condition. Prejudice is the devil of innovation.

3. Mobility of People - in their heads, not necessarily their bodies.

(‘on yer bike’ Tebbit, Thatcher Govt. 1995)

The industrial revolution led to transport infrastructure and people moved.

The Scots not only led the world in transport innovation, but they built it as well (mobility).

The knowledge society seems not to have reduced physical mobility, yet clearly it can.

Perhaps energy limitations will redefine mobility in tandem with information exchange technologies. The question of physical mobility will become far more difficult (environmental concerns) - certainly pan-Europe and inter-continental travel.

Innovation requires mobility of the mind not the body.

We all accept that employment (jobs) will be more dynamic - their significance in the marketplace will be evolving far more quickly.

Consider the question of Pension Investment structures generally in each European country - they do not allow transfer to other countries.

Since the post-war ‘birth’ of the consumer culture, looking at the way we have innovated: new products and tools have been governed by:

- where and who is the customer;
- the customer is god.

Is this not old-fashioned?

Customers are the beginning of innovation, not the end.

The innovator has to anticipate their future environment.

Therefore only listen to the consumer if you do not know what is happening today.

The consumer/customer does not know what he will be doing tomorrow.

4. RISK - More Entrepreneurs - Business Angels and Venture Capitalists are vital

They have the skills and knowledge of those who are prepared to take risks. These people, with financial muscle, have learned to celebrate failures as well as winners. Without understanding failure, risk will never be on the agenda.

EU and our society in general are producing a “No Risk, or Zero Risk” society. Everything is controlled which means no one is responsible and everyone can sue anyone about anything that is apparently beyond their control.

The rise of Health & Safety issues, of multi-layers, of ‘stakeholders’, mitigates against innovation. (reference Wood Lane Station compared to RSC Courtyard Theatre). Trust is less prevalent, and as a result, individual performance is diminished, and accountability transferred. This is the management ethos which is endemic in our society and it does little to encourage innovation.

‘RISK’ FREE EUROPE

Governments, and EU, have to create the ‘over-arching architecture’ of our society. It is done through ‘legislation’ and by investing in the direction they want society to go.

There is a need for creative, innovative and pro-active legislation from government which recognises that through innovation we fabricate and frame our society’s future. Present UK government seems to have little appetite for it.

ARCHITECTS

Architects, together with all those involved in the creation of our built environment, can and perhaps should try to make evident the fact that design and environmental concerns are the same issue in a new synthetic design methodology for the 21st century.

While striving for appropriate and beautiful architecture, we must also act with compassion and with a social conscience.

We need to make metaphorical intelligence and humanity evident in our designs.

The process of architecture is fundamentally concerned with providing society with better technical, environmental and aesthetic solutions for different types of shelter for different human activities.

A new optimism must be based upon working better with people and the environment - not attempting to dominate them, but acting with them, with local sensitivity and global awareness.

In this, architecture has a significant role to play as a mediator between culture and commerce; and perhaps can give some signposts as to how we may make progress in rebalancing our present “civilised disequilibrium”, where ideology or technology or social organisation are clearly out of sync with each other.

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