

Comments on innovation in traditional sectors in Europe

Case study of Cocò&Design furniture: Need of an eco-system based on shared values

Last April I was invited by [Universitat de Barcelona](#) to give a talk at an Interregional Learning Event of the [TRINNO Project](#) in Tuscany, in the framework of INTERREG EUROPE program, funded by ERDF. The talk had the title: “Exploring how technology transforms the cultural experience of people: Lessons learnt”. During the presentation in the Arezzo Province Headquarters, we had the opportunity to know the case of a small company from Tuscany Region called Cocò&Design (www.cocoedesign.com).

Personal and authentic, original, linked to strong values of bio-ethic design, the Brand sells furniture products that are family-oriented. It is the particular position of the Brand over the explicit values of family-nature-quality, together with the strong component of simple and modern design, which provides this product with market opportunities. The company is small, with only a handful of employees, it has a web platform of quality, and it appears to be sustainable. Thus, provided that the product is already defined and well positioned, that the product is digitally marketed, and that the company seems to be sustainable, where is the room for innovation?

There is a need for a structured ecosystem with innovative processes for market development - specifically applied to this sector-, and there is a potential opportunity for the regional government to lead the innovation in these processes. This could happen, for instance, with an active implication of the public funders in the development of the so-called ecosystem that Cocò&Design is needing for the deployment of its Brand. The company itself is a very small actor and it will never have neither the strength nor the tools to create such an ecosystem. However, there is strong evidence that this ecosystem is latent. For this case, the eco-system is a real “eco”: companies, public entities and civic associations supporting the same values of family-nature-quality, in other different sectors, such as food, costume, culture, sports, etc.

Potential tools are not novel, and they could include fairs, social events, markets, etc., which would happen under a strategic explicit positioning of the region on these values. This ecosystem or network of stakeholders (public, private and individuals) could later become the actual platform of early adopters for the new products. In this way, the network would be an amplifier of the impact of the products in the society.

The processes here are the real innovation, and contrary to the classical industrial cluster approach, they could be designed in order to include not only large or small companies but also civic associations, municipalities, and in general all the stakeholders that are sharing the same values and that are interested in their preservation and their development. Examples of these processes could be: novel protocols for the integration of civic associations in the politic decision making, translational dialogs between industry and municipalities, advising for efficient policy making in the sectors, (re-)definition of strategic priorities, etc.

In summary, a direct capital injection from the region to the company will never create the desired ecosystem. On the other hand, the definition of innovative processes that facilitate the creation of the network will also facilitate the long-term sustainability. It appears that public institutions could have a leading role for the definition of the needed processes, since they are the natural linkers of all the stakeholders constituting the new eco-system.

Prof. Fernando Vilariño

Associate Director at Computer Vision Center

Associate Professor at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona