Reconsidering Innovation

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Reconsidering innovation – dreamed potentials and the value of professional practice

Abstract

Innovation and reforms seem to be on the agenda everywhere, not least in political attempts to reorganize the public sector in ways that are supposed to enable our welfare societies to survive economic turmoil and sinister future prognosis. This paper examines how classical anthropological theories and debates about change, myths, and othering can help us rethink theoretical approaches to innovation in organizational studies, and the concern is especially to consider the implications that our "innovation myths" can have for public employees and the valuation their work. The argument in the paper is that innovation is better understood as a perspective (a prism) than as a product or a process, and that this perspective tends to "other" people who's work is not visible as a positive asset in a budget, but may be visible as a positive contribution in people's lives. The way in which that point is made, is by taking the reader along on a journey through a fieldwork that changed my own understanding of innovation, made me look for alternative theories to address cultural understandings of change and continuity in organizational settings, and brought me back to myths of creation, Claude Lévi-Strauss and the debate about people without history.

Introduction

Late modern societies seem extremely preoccupied if not even obsessed with innovation (Welz 2003) and newness (Campbell 1992), and several researchers have pointed to different norms obliging people to be creative, innovative and joyfully desiring and producing newness in the world (Campbell 2011; Stavrakakis 2010).

The public sector is no exception when it comes to desiring newness. Across Europe as well as in other Western countries, the future of welfare societies is being debated politically and in the media not least in

relation to the increasing gap between income and expenses in the state budgets, and much hope is being directed towards innovation and growth to solve the problems and close the gap. It is however not a new thing that politicians have in different ways been preoccupied with getting more for less in the public sector.

The market imaginary of lowest possible prices

The neoliberal dreams of reforming, improving and renewing the public sector have since the 1970'es and 1980'es to a large extent relied on the market and its competitive structures as a model and an inspiration believed to lead to efficiency, because markets were expected to regulate themselves towards lower prices (Marshall 1991), why the public sector was believed to benefit by saving money when contracting out and installing competitive interaction where possible (Greve and Hodge 2010; Hartley 2005; Lund and Vaaben 2014). One might be tempted to go as far as saying that these attempts to optimize the productivity of the public sector by reorganizing it in the image of the market, corresponds to the economic understandings implied in what Sahlins has called a "Western Cosmology". This narrative has clear references to neo-classical economic theory and even to Adam Smith's "invisible hand" supposedly transforming the rational choices of individuals into a mechanism benefitting society as a whole. When it is appropriate to talk about this economic understanding as part of a "cosmology", it is because this neo-classical economic idea of "the market mechanism" has according to several researchers become widespread to such an extent that ordinary people in their daily lives talk about supply-demand and take for granted that free markets create wealth, secure low prices and organize the flows of value in a way that benefits society in the best possible manner (Carrier 1997:2–3; Polanyi 2001:76; Sahlins 1996:367). Thus, the neo-classical economic theories have popular cousin in the social imaginary of many people in the Western World, and the organizational arrangements based on these theories go largely unquestioned. In the remainder of this article I will not address the neo-classical economic theory as a theory to be confirmed or rejected. I will rather concentrate on its popular cousin, the social imaginary, that legitimizes certain ways of organizing work and flows of value.

To do this I have found help in Jason Glynos's and David Howarths writings. Coming out of the Essex School, they suggest analyzing regimes of practices, including the political attempts to transform or stabilize them by using 'logics' (2007,15). They explain how political attempts to change or stabilize social practices, draw on the driving force of fantasmatic logics, that have quite a bit in common with ideology, in the sense that it represents a complexity reducing and legitimizing narrative:

Fantasy operates so as to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social

relations. It does this through a fantasmatic narrative or logic that promises a fullness-to-

come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome – the beatific dimension of

fantasy – or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable, which

might be termed the horrific dimension of fantasy (Glynos and Howarth 2007:147)

Like Glynos and Howarth I do not see fantasmatic logics as false pictures or illusions, to be pointed out in order to come up with a more realistic interpretation. I am not interested in discussing what is real, and what is illusory. Rather I see fantasy as doing its ideological work by delivering complexity-reducing representations of the world, representations that can take the form of narratives with good guys and bad guys in it, and these representations of the world are also part of the world they represent, as they are used as reference and legitimization to act upon the world in order to reach an imagined goodness-to-come (Vaaben 2013).

With this in mind the popular cousin of the neo-classic economic theory is analyzed as a fantasmatic logic that points out the market as an organizing principle which will secure the best possible economic solutions for everyone. This fantasy legitimizes competitive organization and practices and demonizes other social practices such as e.g. obligations, alliances or reciprocity that can disturb or the free competition (Lund and Vaaben 2014). It also legitimizes practices of seeking to maximize one's own benefits – because, by getting the best deal for yourself, you are actually taking part in the market mechanism, and that is imagined to benefit all.

The Network imaginary of innovation and win-win

But since Polanyi, Carrier, and Sahlins have written about these market-inspired social imaginaries, organizational fashions have changed. In the private sector ambitions of creating innovation and growth are being linked to new ways of organizing work. New words such as co-creation, swarm-creativity, open innovation and innovation partnerships have emerged, implying that collaborative forms and network organization contain some sort of innovative or creative potential (Chesbrough 2006; Gloor 2005; Greve and Hodge 2011; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Vaaben and Lund 2013). All these new words suggest that collaboration, rather than marketization and competition, is the way to go, if you want to organize you way into getting more for less.

The political ambitions of creating innovation and growth are also increasingly directed towards the public sector, which has for many years had a reputation of being static, inefficient and far from innovative (Sørensen and Torfing 2011a). Countless reforms have been launched in attempts to reorganize it, in order to create innovative solutions. But in spite of the fact that politicians are usually *not at all* interested in creating growth in the public sector, many of the words and organizational fashions have been widely

incorporated in the public sector as well. The emphasis in public organizations at the moment seem less on saving money by imitating the market in order create competition and aim for low prices, and more on attracting or *creating new* money and resources by organizing in ways believed to spur innovation, creativity and win-win-situations through collaboration, partnerships and network forms of organization (Klijn and Teisman 2003; Koch and Buser 2006; Sørensen and Torfing 2011b). The question is whether a new economic understanding with new economic fantasies attached to it may be emerging in organizational theory as well as in the broader public?

Several researchers have tried to characterize such a possible new social imaginary or a new "capitalist spirit", a spirit which in contrast to the Weberian original is not about saving money and postponing wants (Weber, 1992 [1930]), but quite contrarily is about being obliged to constantly desire and chase new wants (Campbell 2011; Stavrakakis 2010). In accordance with that spirit, what is legitimized is no longer a person who saves up money before spending them and benefits the market mechanism by trying to get the best possible deal. The good citizen is more likely a desiring optimistic consumer or producer, who believes in future growth, and who dares sending his or her money in circulation to help the wheels running and the economy growing. This economic understanding too has become widespread among ordinary citizens to an extent where it has become common sense, that when people lose faith in "the economy" they stop spending and taking risks, and then everything stalls. The development of the economy and the faith in it can be followed in the evening news, where reports about the current status of the competitiveness and other financial matters are broadcasted to everyone interested (Clark, Thrift, and Tickell 2004; Sum 2009). This spread of financial matters and growth issues to the broader public is what makes it relevant to talk about a new "economic cosmology" or a new fantasmatic logic. It is also what makes Appadurai look for the "ghost in the financial machine", and makes him talk about how a new capitalist spirit with clear parallels to magic, have spread beyond the financial world in a way that legitimizes attempts to read the future, and gamble or speculate on its development in an attempt to obtain "grace outside of all human effort" (Appadurai 2011). This legitimization of gambling, investments and other ways of attempting to obtain something without having to work very hard for it, is also the central belief or dream expressed, when people advocating innovation believing that it will solve the problems in the welfare state. We all have to "work smarter, not harder", it is said.

However, as Stephen Gudeman has warned us, the financialization and uncritical belief in an expanding economy, can easily be used to legitimize a lack of concern with equity and distribution of resources. Creative destruction is believed to yield profit, which is then believed to magically distribute itself in society

a way that benefits all (Gudeman 2010). So why, Gudeman asks sarcastically, bother about equity, as long as the economy is expanding, and everyone (in principle) gets more?

What I am trying to explain is how new "economic cosmology" or a new fantasmatic logic centered on a belief in the possibility of creating something out of nothing through collaboration has become a new inspirational source to much organizational theory – not least theory about how to renew the public sector and get more for less.

This shift in "economic cosmology" has some implications for the ways in which the public sector and the people working in it are seen and valued. In the first cosmology, where the market mechanism is imagined as a Godlike self-organizing principle that is best left alone and at a safe distance from politics, the public sector is accordingly expected to concentrate on non-marketizable areas, and to help protecting the market against distortions caused by cartels, corruption and other illegal attempts to escape free competition. But with the second economic cosmology challenging, the public sector is not just expected to stay away from the market, it is also expected to create links to and partnerships with the market. The public sector is expected to locate and invest in "growth engines", which believed to be able to pull society out of the crises, when activated properly. Things, places, people and phenomena as different as women, Asia, infrastructure, green technology and public-private partnerships have all been pointed out as possible engines of growth, often as an obvious attempt to attract investments (Vaaben 2013). This means something to the ways the public sector (if you can now talk about distinct sectors at all) is allowed to interact with its surroundings, and it means something to the ways in which the work being done by public employees is valued, and this is what the rest of this article is about.

The field

Before I take you through the journey of my fieldwork, I should say a few words about the two projects I was following in my attempts to explore innovation. Both of them were examples of attempts to reorganize in order to create innovation, and both of them had collaboration as the organizing principle believed to benefit the process. Both were also presented to me as "innovation projects", but it is quite debatable whether or not this was an adequate description. Therefore both projects were so to say examples of the second fantasmatic logic, centered on a belief in the possibility of creating better solutions through collaboration.

Case 1

One of the projects I followed took place in an elderly home, and was centered on ideas about co-creation, public-private partnerships, and user-driven innovation. The ambition was that the municipality would create partnerships with different companies, and by allowing the companies to bring their technology and expertise into an elderly home, which was supposed to be used as "living lab" it would be possible to innovate elderly care. The project had obtained state-funding, specifically addressed to user driven innovation, and was administrated by three successive project leaders from the municipality. The project consisted of 8 sub-projects each of them organized as a partnership between the municipality and in most cases a smaller company. In this article, attention will primarily be given to one such sub-project which was about the use of *disposable heating pads* in elderly care. This sub-project was probably not the one, that the project leaders would have chosen to represent the project as a whole, but for my purpose it suits well.

Case 2

The other project was about renewing the lifestyles of young people in an "outskirt" community, where drugs, alcohol, smoking and crime played a far too great role in local young people's lives, and not least death's. The project was organized as collaboration between a number of departments in the municipality and the Police. It is debatable whether or not the arrangement was actually a project, although presented to me as such. It had no budget, and it was not planned to end. But it did have a project leader, and she was the one replying to my email-call for cases of "collaborative innovation". Not many others talked about innovation, except when asked. The aim with the project was to find new and better ways of preventing local youth from abusing drugs**,** alcohol or cigarettes or starting a criminal career. The group assigned this task had quite quickly decided to tour all the schools in the area with a number of workshops directed at certain age groups, and similar workshops were held for the parents on the following evenings. During the years, the project group changed and refined the workshops, and took quite controversial methods in use. E.g. they decided to play aloud to all the pupils and their parents a recording of an emergency call from a young man who is during the recording being beaten up by a group of young men, because of a conflict over a girl.

Looking for innovation

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I was eagerly looking for innovation. I was part of a research project, which had obtained funding to examine drivers and barriers to innovation, and in order to meaningfully decide whether something had driven or been a barrier to innovation, I found it necessary to decide whether or not innovation had occurred at all. I had consulted different innovation theories to guide my search, but the number of definitions of the concept of innovation is enormous. However, most researchers

agree in defining innovation as something (perceived as) new, and further that this newness should be a result of a purposeful action and should somehow be implemented, have made a difference or have brought about some sort of discontinuity in order to qualify as innovation (Osborne and Brown 2005:121; Sørensen and Torfing 2011a:29; Van de Ven et al. 2008:9). This emphasis on radical breaks with something previous is sometimes linked to the term "creative destruction" (Osborne and Brown 2005:123) introduced by Joseph Schumpeter, the economist often considered the founding father of innovation theory (Gudeman 2010; Hagedorn 1996). In this way innovation becomes something that differs from other types of change by being more radical, and by breaking with or even breaking down something rather than developing something in a continuous manner.

However, while in theory it sounds pretty easy to go out and search for purposeful actions, creating newness which breaks with something previous, it turned out in practice to be quite complicated. The projects I was following involved hundreds if not thousands of people, depending on who to count, and all these people were disagreeing with each other about most of criteria mentioned. While some people were definitely purposefully acting to create newness, others we only reluctantly involved or even resisting the projects, and what some people perceived as radical, ground-breaking innovations, others saw as hot air or a new word for something they had done for ages. Who's purpose should I focus on? Who's perception of newness counted? Which context was I supposed to hold a possible "newness" against in order to decide whether or not there was a break? Eventually I ended up finding it impossible and absurd to try to decide whether or not the projects could qualify as innovation or not. And in the following I will describe in a few more details how I reached that conclusion.

Innovation as product, process or prism

My first attempt was to look for innovation as a product – not necessarily a material product, but rather an outcome or a result of a process. Something I would be able to point out and label innovation, so that I could move on to explore it's possible drivers or barriers. As I was unsuccessfully looking for purposefully produced newness breaking with something, I was gradually discovering I was not alone with exactly that agenda. In the first project I was following, the project leaders had the exact same challenge. They too worked in a funded project with a specific aim: innovation. They felt a huge pressure on them be able to report some "innovation" back to the fund who had invested all these money in the project. For this reason the project leaders were just like me eagerly looking around to spot innovation, and they spent much time discussing what was or was not appropriately to be called innovation and why. Especially the sub-project abut disposable heating pads had caused them headache, primarily because the product involved had not changed at all, why the project leaders found it quite difficult to spot an innovative outcome of exactly that

process. One such discussion took place in an interview with two of the project leaders, one was in the midst of taking over after the other, and I interviewed them simultaneously:

Project leader 3: "Well, I'd say it would have been innovation, if he had developed his product […] so I don't think it's a product innovation. I think it's a concept innovation in the sense that he manages to involve the staff [at the elderly home] and simply challenge their way of thinking and their way of working with the residents."

Project leader 2: "That is actually what I consider as having the largest potential, but it is totally unintended. Totally! Because it doesn't really matter what product he would have had, as long as he was able to say: "let's take each resident and ask: how can I help this person?""

Project leader 3: "Then you might also say that it is a market innovation, and that is probably what has been the most motivating aspect for many of the companies: finding out whether they could get access to this market."

Project leader 2: "I agree, that's why they got involved at all."

Project leader 3: "The ambition in the project has been product development, because that is what has been on the agenda in the project […] but seen from where we are now, it makes perfectly sense, and well, yes, it's the idea with the project: that the companies can see a market in the municipality. That's why we have this collaboration. But the municipality wants to get life quality out of it, and the companies want to get money out of it."

In this conversation the criteria used by the project leaders in their attempt to decide whether the sub-project could qualify as innovation, are very similar to the ones I found in the different innovation theories. The project leaders too are looking for something perceived as new and which is produced purposefully. First they direct their attention to the product itself, and then they look for other outcomes in the form of a new way of working with the residents or a new market for disposable heating pads. In all three attempts to spot innovation, they have their emphasis on the outcome of the process, but depending on which outcome they pick, they reach different answers to the question about whether or not the subproject can qualify as innovation.

The owner of the heating-pad company too, was quite keen on presenting the sub-project as innovation, and he definitely described how the heating pads and the process around them had transformed the ways in which the staff at the elderly home worked, and how that had happened by breaking with something previous or prevailing:

"They [the staff at the elderly home] are very locked in their daily routines and ways of doing things […] In fact, it wasn't until the last part of the project where we met once a week, where they were forced to be torn out of their daily life and come down here, away from the department in a weekly meeting: "How is it going?", "Who are you using it on?", What do you do?", "What are your experiences?" […] What I

experienced was – and one of them said it, herself in an interview as well – that she felt she had become more attentive to the situation and life quality of each resident. Instead of just nursing, they had been forced to take a step back and see: "What am I supposed to use this heating pad for?" And then you're forced to look at the residents and say "What is it that they are struggling with? What problems do they have? And how do I think I can help by using a heating pad?" because they had been taken away from the habitual nursing-humdrum".

In this quotation innovation is definitely described as something happening through breaks or disturbances, and in the same moment the staff and the work, they perform, is described as static even rigid. In fact, the working life of the staff at the elderly home is pictured as being in a stable and unchanging "state", until disturbed by the heating pads, causing innovation to happen. innovation is still in some sense pictured as an outcome. The attentive way of working is the outcome. But in another sense, the company owner also exemplifies a more process-oriented understanding of innovation. That approach does not define innovation as an outcome, but rather seeks to describe innovation as a *process* with certain characteristics, such as openness, attentiveness and willingness to change according to the input one gets.

Again there are enormous amounts of contradicting theories about how an innovative process can be described (Vaaben 2013:97ff). A very popular theory, which I came across on several occasions during the fieldwork, was Carl Otto Scharmer's "Theory-U", which quite a few of the informants had read or heard about. According to that theory, innovation is about listening "in a deep way", and acting instantly on the input you get (Scharmer 2011). That theory captures not only the organizational fashions about user driven innovation and employee driven innovation, it also captures an organizational longing for presence, focused attention and "being listened to". This focused attention on the here and now is becoming increasingly difficult in organizational settings where both managers and employees are expected to network and collaborate and have their attention everywhere else but in the here and now. What the company owner and the staff ended up doing in the example was listening or seeing in an explorative and attentive way, and acting on the input. So with that perspective in mind one could argue that while it might be questionable whether or not the output ended up being innovation, the approach or the process could in some sense qualify according to that approach, because of way in which the residents were being listened to. But on the other hand if the same theory was used on the employees rather than the residents, the picture becomes much more blurred. In a way they *were* listen to: they were asked questions, and the company owner was interested in listening to their answers and their experiences, but on the other hand they were *not* being listened to – or at least not attentively, because the description of the static and rigid daily humdrum, expressed in the quotation above matched the experiences of the employees themselves very poorly.

The staff and the managers at the elderly home did in no way experience their daily working life as static. In fact they all experienced their work as very dynamic and shifting, although they had different opinions about, whether or not that was a good thing. Many of them complained loudly about the amount of changes taking place on top of each other the whole time. *"We don't have time to go in depth with anything at the time being", "If there could be just one month without changes", "We never know whether a change actually makes a difference, because something else has always been changed, before we get to the end of a project".* Like in Justine Pors' analysis of school management, the employees at the elderly home saw innovation projects as managerial noise, that didn't really have any impact on anything (Pors 2011). To them they were "paper-projects" dreamed up by people behind desks far away from the reality they knew. But other employees were talking about innovation as something good, and as something they were used to engaging in. The elderly home had gained a reputation for being an "innovative elderly home" and had on several occasions functioned as a "living lab" or had in other ways participated in innovation or research projects of various kinds, and some of the employees emphasized that if you could not function in a shifting environment, this was not the place for you to work. In order to work at this particular elderly home, you would have to be able to work in a dynamic and experimental way and to cope with shifts and changes the whole time.

This issue of change and continuity was not just about the staff at the elderly home having difficulties recognizing descriptions depicting their work as a static "state" remaining as it was until disturbed by something external. In fact I will argue that the implications are much larger than that, and in order to make that point, I will turn to the other case, where a number of employees from the municipality and the police were trying to make the local youth break with a party culture of drinking and drug-abuse. Several ways of addressing the youth and their parents had been tried: e.g. the project group had made an interview-movie with a local young man who had been imprisoned three times because of serious violence and they had decided to play aloud to all the 8th graders and their parents two recordings of phone calls which the police had in their files. The idea was that the movie and the phone calls could give a realistic and scary picture of the kinds of social circles one could get trapped in, if not taking care in night life as a young person. Especially one of the phone calls made a huge impression on the listeners, every time I heard it played: It was absolutely horrible to listen to. On the recording a young man calls up the police with a trembling voice, asking for help, as some people are coming after him because of a conflict over a girl. A police car is sent, and the policeman stays on the line talking to the young man, during the 10 minutes it take for the police car to get there. During that time, 6-8 young men arrive at the house, force their way in, find the man and beat him up with a baseball bat. All is in the recording. The trembling voice, the screaming, the sound of a door breaking and many feet on stairs, the sound of the phone falling to the

ground still switched on and of the baseball bat hitting the young man again and again. Every time the recording was played aloud the listeners (typically around 30-50) went dead quiet for several minutes before anyone dared talking again. No doubt this method was somehow experienced as new and experimental and as breaking with some previous methods used in preventive measures. But in fact the people in the project group didn't care whether or not what they did was innovation or not. They didn't care about renewing or breaking with previous practices within the field of preventive measures. They were interested in creating a break within a completely different field: the field of young people's drinking habits, and nobody knows whether that was accomplished. So would the project have to succeed in their intended effort to change drinking habits among the local youth in order to qualify as innovation or would renewing methods do, although that was not the intended purpose?

The whole idea of deciding whether or not the projects could on a general level qualify as innovation seemed increasingly absurd. But in my opinion, this absurdness also had some important implications to the theory of innovation and to the notions of change and continuity. Some of the reflections made by one of the employees in the drug-department can help illustrate these theoretical implications:

"working together out here is not a new phenomenon, but it is probably the first time it has been so structured. In many cases we have been working together in some schools about something for a period of time, and then we're gone again. But I think it is the first time, we are working together about something lasting, and I think that's new. Now we make a joint effort, which is supposed to continue! I just hope we can keep up, because our society is changing the whole time, and the youth is moving the whole time. So what we have made for the 7th and 8th graders I think is really good now, but I'm not sure it's good in five years from now. Then it probably takes something else."

This drug consultant is not only drawing attention to the same point as the staff at the elderly home: That there is no such stable "state" which remains the same until disturbed. He also points out that the order of change and disturbances has become so commonplace, that doing something continuous, actually stands out as new! Based on the theories about innovation being based on breaks and disturbances breaking with something prevailing, one might argue that what the drug-consultant is advocating is not innovation, but change, since he obviously prefers developing things over time in a continuous manner. But one might also move on and ask, what would actually qualify as innovation, in a context where there is no stable state to break with or disturb? If it has become a habit to innovate, how then do you break with that habit? Innovate faster? Stand still? Or take a step back? In this perspective the whole relationship between what changes and what remains becomes tossed around. Innovation is the habitual, and doing something continuous becomes innovative.

In that way, it not only became clear to me, how absurd my initial ambition about pointing out innovation was, it also became clear that I had to look much more into ways of understanding continuity and change. It was not possible to give a meaningful answer to whether or not the project had resulted in innovation, nor was it possible to decide whether the process was innovative or not. In some sense it was and in another sense it wasn't, depending on how I looked at it.

When someone (e.g. me or a project leader or a company owner) looked at the project or part of it and decided to call it innovation, it revealed very little about the actual project and quite a bit more about the way it was being looked at. My point with the analysis is, that innovation is not something which exists out there to find. It's much better grasped as *a perspective on something*. Innovation was not something to look *for* or to look *at*, it was something to look *through*. Further, when you adopt that innovation perspective, you point out something as innovation, and simultaneously you point out something as the old or static context from which it stands out. In this sense, the innovation perspective functioned like a prism. When you look through it, it splits up the world in new and old, dynamic and static, depending on whether this splitting gaze was directed at products or processes. But when you remove the prism again, it turns out that this splitting was all in the observer – not in the observed.

It not only became absurd to try to "find innovation" as if existed out there to find, it also became clear that different people experienced changes and stability in very different ways. I would even go as far as saying that people's experience of something – or someone – as static or dynamic, had much more to do with a choice of perspective than it had to do with a "neutral judgment" of whether or not something had "actually" changed. It became more and more complicated to just answer the simple question about whether or not anything had in fact changed. To some employees "paper-projects" made absolutely no difference. What made a difference, according to them, was the daily work centered on nursing and taking care of a person's needs. But to others (e.g. the company owner) it was opposite. To him this daily work was an unchanging "state", and the difference was made by his disturbance of it. When the owner of the heating pad company decided to look at his project *as* innovation, he simultaneously produced the staff as the static Other – irrespective of whether or not that was an adequate or recognizable description of those people and their work.

All these thoughts and reconsiderations, rang in a peculiar way very familiar to me, as the western World has a long and rich tradition of producing static Others, and anthropology has a long tradition for writing about it. Before turning to the other case, I will therefore jump back and take a look at some of these writings.

Innovation and the debate about "People without History"

Gisela Welz has already argued that the understanding of innovation might benefit from anthropological perspectives on continuity and change, and she briefly points to the debate about people without history in the following phrase:

"Both so-called primitive cultures outside Europe and peasant societies within Europe were regarded not just as peoples without history but also as cultures impervious to change. The ability and willingness to transform oneself was considered a mark of modernity alone, a notion that to some extent required unchanging and static "other" cultures as a foil and contrast" (Welz 2003:257)*.*

Welz uses the comparison to explain why anthropologists may be so reluctant to engage in research about innovation, but I would like to draw upon the same comparison and take my analysis in a different direction. I am interested in finding out if there is something to learn from the ways in which anthropologists have dealt with issues of continuity and change in the wake of the debate about the so-called "people without history".

In the anthropological self-examination throughout the 1980'ies a massive wave of writings about how Europeans (not least anthropologists) had been positioning other people as static, although this wasn't actually the case. Among these works can be mentioned Eric Wolf's famous work "Europe and the people without history" (Wolf 1982) and Johannes Fabians "Time and the Other" (Fabian, 2002 [1983]). The point made is that Europe has to a high extent based its self-image on the idea that *we* are the dynamic ones, developing over time, while *the others* have remained on the same "state". Kirsten Hastrup has explained how this fantasy of time and change became linked to ideas of place, so that "back in time" more or less became the same as "far away" (Hastrup 1999:31). In that way, Europeans imagined that e.g. Australian aborigines or other people far away were somehow living in a way similar to how they themselves lived back in e.g. the stone age, why Europeans could in principle travel out in the world and meet an earlier version of themselves.

What Hastrup also draws attention to, is how the modern European perspective on time and change, places the development of civilization in the hands of humans. Where the fate of humans have in other cultures been something grasped with reference to God or Nature, History became in the European imaginary an "art" in the way that human (not God) were believed to have created or accomplished it (Hastrup 1999:15). In this way Europeans went from imagining human civilization as an imitation of a divine order to seeing human civilization as an accomplishment for which humans themselves were responsible. Humans (in Europe) became in their own understanding the creators of their own history.

The mythology of time and creation

But Wolf and Fabian were not the first anthropologists to have noticed how understandings of time, positioned some people as static. Claude Lévi-Strauss had already taken up the issue twenty years earlier, and he draws attention to the ways in which myths play part in the understandings of time. Instead of talking about societies with or without history, as if some societies chance while others do not, he suggest talking about different cultural ways of dealing with change:

"I have suggested elsewhere that the clumsy distinction between "peoples without history" and others could with advantage be replaced by a distinction between what for convenience I called "cold" and "hot" societies. The former seeking by the institutions they give themselves to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development […] It is tedious as well as useless, in this connection to amass arguments to prove that all societies are in history and change: this is patent. But in getting embroiled in a superfluous demonstration, there is a risk of overlooking the fact that human societies react to this common condition in very different fashions. Some accept it, with good or ill grace, and its consequences (to themselves and other societies) assume immense proportions through their attention to it. Others (which we call primitive for this reason) want to deny it and try, with a dexterity we underestimate, to make the states of their development which they consider "prior" as permanent as possible" (Lévi-Stauss 1966:233–234).

Lévi-Strauss is in other words arguing that the differences between the societies in question have less to do with whether or not they actually change, and more to do with differences in ways of *seeing and understanding* change. One type of society being very preoccupied with change, and the other type of society pretending that change never happened or were always meant to happen. Throughout his authorship Lévi-Strauss has made several structural studies of how myths play part in the latter way of dealing with change, and several other anthropologists have also explored mythical time and related it to understandings of change.

Mythical time is often illustrated with reference to Australian aborigines and "the dreaming". The dreaming is a mythical time which is in some sense a "past" or a history telling about the accomplishments of the ancestors, but simultaneously it is an everlasting "present" or perhaps a sort of always returning "eternity" manifesting itself in the landscape, where rocks, trees etc. bear witness to what happened/always happen in the dreaming. In his book "At home in the world" Michael Jackson describes how Australian aborigines deal with existential questions through myths, and he describes how change are woven into the myths and in that way made permanent or handled as if they were always meant to happen (Jackson 1995:35–36, 55–

56, 152). In a similar way Peter Gow, writing about myths in Amazonas, explain how myths are doing the work of reformulating change, in ways that secure the continuity and development of the system, but they do it through ceaseless transformations, why you can bump into Amazonian myths about e.g. air planes and other "modern items" (Gow 2001:288). So while the appearance of stability is upheld, this is done through transformations. Referring back to Levi Strauss he writes:

"The myths are not in Lévi-Strauss's view intrinsically stable, until they are disturbed by history. Quite the opposite, they exist because of history, they exist to dampen down the effects of disturbances in order to maintain the coherence of meaningfulness. The myths generate the appearance of stability, an illusion of timelessness, that cannot be affected by changes in the world, but they do so by means of their ceaseless transformations, which marks their very historicity as objects from the analyst's point of view" (Gow 2001:11)*.*

The mythical time is thus way of seeing (or rather *not* seeing) change. Myths are if anything appropriately analyzed as fantasmatic logics reducing complexity and legitimizing change by slipping it into the myths without drawing too much attention to possible "breaks" with something former. The myths, according to Lévi-Strauss, played the role of a mediator, enabling people to deal with the big irreconcilable oppositions such as life and death, past and present, us and the Others (Lévi-Stauss 1994:225). This ways of reconciling the irreconcilable through mediating myths is quite different from what we saw happening in the empirical examples. What seemed rather to be the case with the "innovation gaze" was that the past and the present was not to be mediated, but was rather split up and juxtaposed in order to highlight the differences between now and then or between a dynamic and a static approach. Rather than attempting to dampen down the effects of disturbances, the stories told by e.g. the project leaders and the company owner seemed much more focused on drawing attention to exactly the tensions between past and present or between a static and a dynamic approach in order to highlight and expose disturbances or breaks.

Now, the society I have been dealing with, would of course, according to the terminology of Lévi-Strauss, be labelled a "hot" society, and one might even argue that the temperature has risen further, since Lévi-Strauss's writings in the 60'ies. But on the other hand, some of the employees also reacted to the external changes in a "mythical" manner by claiming that whatever the management had come up with, it was just a new word for something they had always done. So definitely there were different understandings of time at play simultaneously, and my agenda is not to categorize the public sector in Denmark as either a "hot" or a "cold" society.

But I do want to argue that both "hot" and "cold" *ways* of seeing change were involved simultaneously, and my point is that these ways of seeing or not seeing change have consequences for the people looked at with these different gazes. The way in which innovation and newness is celebrated and even demanded, subtly as moral obligations as Campbell and Stavrakakis suggest, or quite openly when managers or funds "demand" innovation in order to be able to document that the money were used for the right purposes, have consequences that are some ways similar to what happened when Europeans emphasized their own historicity on the expense of the ones being made static in the process.

What I am suggesting, is, that the modern Western obsession with innovation has a lot to do with how we understand time and change, and what myths or narratives we tell about our own role in it. We might choose to look at the obsession with innovation and change as a "modern mythology". Our modern mythology, however, does not have as its purpose to incorporate or conceal change, but is rather a mythology that *exposes change* and draws attention to both the newness and the "innovation heroes" seen as the driving forces behind it.

In this way some people's work is split out as if through a prism and illuminated as innovative, while other people's work remains in the dark and becomes the static background from which the new stands out. The new and the old, the dynamic and the static Other are created through the same gaze.

But as I have argued, one might just as well have turned the "prism" in another direction, and someone else might have stood out as innovation heroes. The public sector in Denmark is full of stories about the "fire-soul" which is an untranslatable term referring to a lonely hero with his/her hart in the right place struggling against the systems to for the right causes making a real difference for real people in need. If *making a difference* for someone is understood as creating change, these people would certainly stand out as heroes of change, or even innovation heroes, depending on for whom a possible "break" with something previous should be visible. This was exactly the way in which the employees at the elderly home saw the situation. They regarded all the paper projects as having no effect on real life, while they experienced their own work as making a difference for real people in real life. But seen from an administrators perspective this "difference" is not visible – at least not as a difference, that will solve the problem with the gap in the budgets.

With this in mind it is time to turn back to the transformations of the welfare societies, addressed in the beginning of this article.

Mythology, time and creation of imagined surplus

In 1986 George W. Downs and Patrick D. Larkey wrote about how the search for Government efficiency in an American context was comparable to Melanesian cargo cults in the sense that reforms were repeated again and again without necessarily leading to the desired results (Downs and Larkey 1986). Cargo cults have become a popular concept in anthropological literature as well as in movies and novels an example of how cultural rationalities turn out to be based on false assumptions, and the point is that just like Melanesians failed to attract airplanes loaded with cargo by building landing fields for them, government have failed to obtain efficiency through imitating the market (ibid.).

But the market is by no means the only "cult" being worshipped in these years. As written in the beginning of this article, hopes of being able to close the gap between income and expenses in future of the welfare states are no longer solely being directed at markets believed to secure the lowest possible prices for whatever goods and services the state has decided to buy.

What we see now is how decision makers in the public sector are not simply preoccupied with getting as much as possible for the money they have to spend, but also that they are focused on attracting, accessing or creating *new* resources through the potentials and surplus value imagined to reside in certain ways of organizing work. These new imaginaries are not relying on competitive organizational structures in order to let the best man win a contract or a job. Rather this logic relies on the possibility of creating win-win, so that everyone gains, because new value or a surplus is imagined to be grown in the process of collaboration, so that 2 + 2 can equal 5.

Among the organizational forms imagined to hold such potentials are different forms of collaboration and network forms of organization, and especially words like co-creation, swarm-creativity, open innovation and innovation-partnerships suggest that new things, new solutions or new surplus value is believed to be supported by such collaborative arrangements. The state fund, which supported the elderly care project financially, had exactly this approach to innovation. An economist administrating the fund explained:

"Well, we have had some standard criteria for all the applications coming in. Of course it would have to be user-driven innovation, and it should be user-oriented. And then it would have to be collaboration between companies and organizations, preferably both public and private [...] and then it should preferably hold some perspectives, something that can be carried on subsequently, and which should preferably lead to something innovative - some innovation and growth and employment in the long run".

The criteria of the fund illustrate how the use of the money is thought of as an investment – not as a purchase of something already known. What the economist is looking for is collaborative partnerships or networks believed to hold a potential for developing into innovation, growth and employment. In the first

part of the quotation she emphasizes the user-centeredness and in the latter part she emphasizes how the investment in these projects is expected to be able to help solving the problems in the state budget.

What these ways of organizing work are aimed at is therefore not carrying out tasks that are already decided or known to be there. Quite the contrary they are primarily aimed at the creation of *new* value or new ways of working that might prevent old and known expenses from being there. This way of trying to get more for less is not about activating the market mechanism in order to press prices for known goods or services, it is rather about spotting and investing in potentials.

In the elderly care case, the whole project was such an investment. The project had obtained funding from the state fund and was supposed to "deliver" either innovation through partnerships and co-creation or knowledge about what it would take to be able to deliver on such collaborative innovation. For this reason the project leaders and managers were constantly looking for outcomes that could "count as innovation".

But exactly the outlook for innovative potentials, that might save the economy and close the gap in the public budgets, has the consequence that some people's work is seen as a promising investment in the future, while other people's work is seen as a heavy burden on the state budget.

A lot of the professions traditionally carrying out the work in the public sectors of so called welfare societies, such as nurses, teachers, preschool teachers, social workers and other easily fall into the latter category. Their work makes a difference in people's lives, but their work is not visible as a making a difference in the budget balance.

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