THE CULTURAL INNOVATION

## A REPORT TO UNLEARN INERTIAS

April 2022 (v1)

GET STARTED

TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

The Triple Bottom Line is the mindset that aligns any type of business activity not only with traditional sustainability in economic terms but in balance with environmental and social factors.

In this document we are going to talk mainly about the latter, our area of expertise.

The social factor contemplates issues as diverse as the mental health of employees, inequality in access to consumption, the education of a community of users or the cultural impact of a given activity on society.
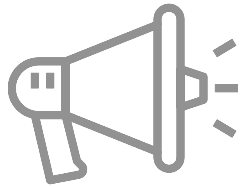
SOCIAL

ECONOMY

ENVIRONMENT
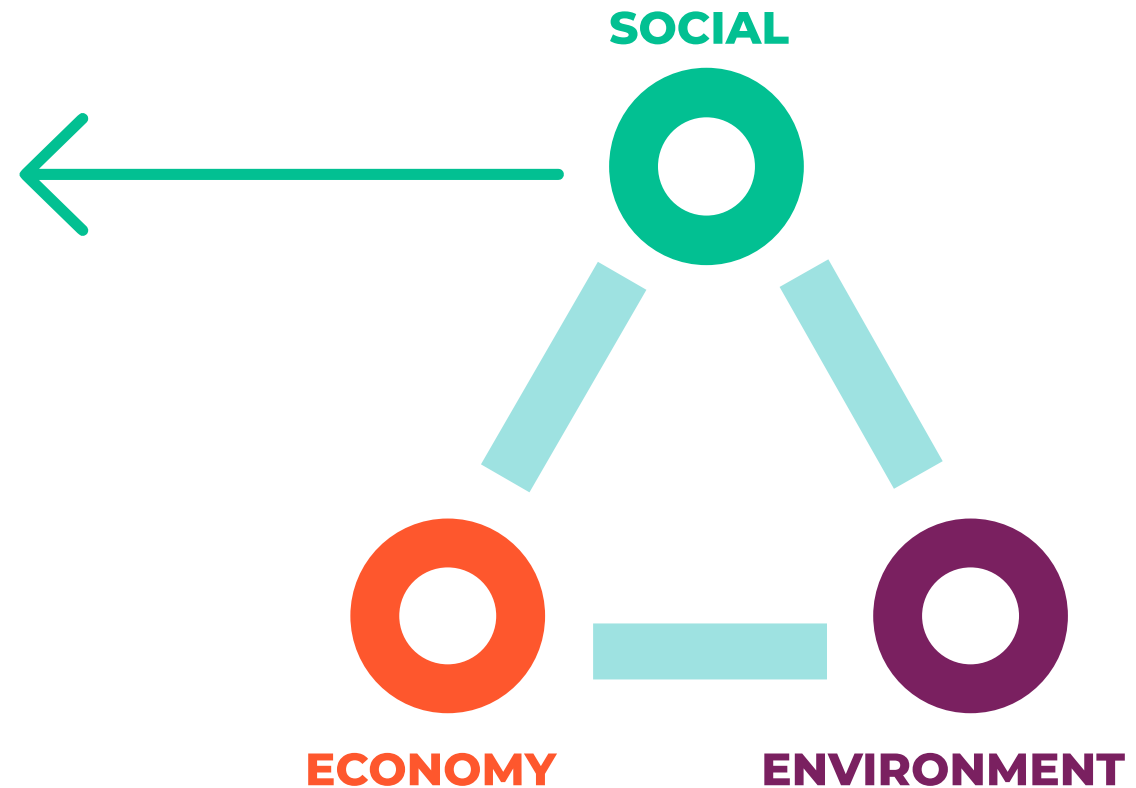
The UN Sustainable Development Goals help us to visualize the challenges around these issues and to measure our actions aimed at generating a positive impact.
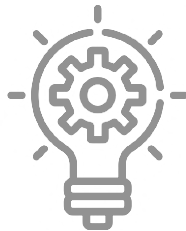
THE PROCESS

WE HAVE TALKED TO...

Communication Managers at SMEs

Museums Directors

Heads of Innovation Departments at Educative Center

Innovation and Communication Managers at Public Institutions

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

The conclusions you are about to read below are the result of a research carried out with a totally empirical approach, that is, focused on the experiences and stories of different people. Specifically:

> 1h interviews with new people contacted specifically for this study.

> Conversations with current clients and collaborators of our network.

> First-person experiences from projects carried out with these profiles.

Most of these people fit into the four roles shown on the left.

CULTURAL INNOVATION

"Recover the pause, because we live in the age of hyperculture, where there is no time to assimilate changes."

"The evolution of the habits and traditions that define a group of people, in response to the evolution of the context."

"Any initiative that improves the status quo of culture, that is, the set of values shared by a society."

"The action and interaction essential to turn ethereal reflections into future scenarios."

"Integrating into society the sensitivities of migrant people to understand and perceive reality in a richer and broader way."

"Changing the way a generation lives, through new ways of expressing and relating to each other, adapting to new needs and generations."

"The promotion of public meetings in which to inform, learn and reflect, where each person feels that his/her opinion is really valued."

"The way to learn to subsist, to be more sustainable and resilient."

"Education and communication in culture as a means to understand that it has a cost and to be able to end precariousness."

Todas las definiciones anteriores son respuesta de nuestras personas entrevistadas a la pregunta **"¿qué entiendes por innovación cultural?"**

Who came first to you? Your customers, users or community?

In order to start working on a strategy that seeks a social impact, we must never forget that people must be at the center.

A group of people with common interests and goals defines a **community**, but an organization can simultaneously have several communities: employees, users, customers, collaborators...

A frequent mistake is to organize experiences for these communities only thinking about the interests of our organization, without aligning in our strategy what these communities really need.

It is increasingly common to find that young people belong to many communities at the same time, joining and leaving them at their convenience, which is known as **fluid networks**. This breaks with the traditional image of the "faithful member" who belongs to a hermetic community to which he or she must be committed. Registration forms are replaced by invitations to Discord or Telegram.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, there was a company that was unaware that people from its audience was talking to each other in the posts of Instagram, because they were really motivated to share thoughts and connect.

Thanks to understanding that these people form a community, the company started to celebrate Designthons where these customers now feel useful, allowing the company to improve its own products.

Have you told your neighbor about your company?

A community that is normally invisible to any company is the **local community** of people who directly or indirectly interact with it due to its geographic proximity.

Endogamic marketing and fairs circuits lead us to very biased elitist narratives, so it is important to achieve greater sensitivity, considering those other narratives that are not predominant.

At a strategic level, it is fundamental to understand the nuances and needs when we want to launch our product or service in a new place.

It is ridiculous to think we are the inventor of fire when we arrive in a village where they have been doing the same thing you offer since forever, but without a cool name.

Citizen laboratories are a brutal mechanism to create shared spaces. The neighbors of a territory get together to reflect and create, in a **collaborative way**, initiatives in which they think about how they can improve their lives and their environment.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, a foundation was always traveling from its province to the capital to explain what they do, always speaking in the same forums, telling the same stories to the same people, with its associated transportation costs.

Thanks to the launch of a local call for proposals, they discover that in its region there are dozens of people interested in the subject and launch a citizen innovation laboratory to open up their areas of action.

Why does nobody understand your stories?

Let's face it: it's hard to connect with all these communities, tell them compelling stories and still maintain the essence of your business.

We quickly tend to use institutional and corporate languages, delivering the same message to our ministerial partner as to our user on the street, with whom we may trigger a great disconnection.

This is where **cultural mediation** comes in. This figure, common in areas such as museums, also makes sense when we talk about the culture of communities.

Their job is to **build bridges**, either thanks to new narrative codes or to new communication channels.

Of course, the best way for a community to understand what you want to say is to demonstrate it with **actions** (and only afterwards, telling them).

Imagine it

Once upon a time there was a museum where hundreds and hundreds of visitors passed by but, after their visits, their track was lost.

They set up a Discord server, managed by the cultural mediator, and all those visitors earned a direct channel with the museum, through which they could propose content, ask questions, schedule visits... Thanks to this digital channel, surprisingly, people from other cities and a younger audience began to join, who would never had approached the museum through a traditional way.

RESEARCH

Years of work to create something that nobody wants

If we ask our partners, friends or, even worse, employees, if our idea is the best in the world, they will probably say yes. Indeed, what are they going to say!?

To avoid months of dissapointment feeding only our ego, here we have the **User-Centered Research**.

It basically consists of talking to people, but with a method: through interviews, surveys, working groups... or even putting ourselves in their shoes for a given process.

This is the only way we will be able to identify "insights". An insight exists when several pieces of information that you had floating in your mind suddenly connect and become valuable information that allows you to make the right decisions for your business.

In addition, the world is becoming increasingly complex and what we discover today may not be useful in one year, so research must be a **continuous practice**.

For this reason, it is key to get into the habit of documenting every step taken in your research, for example through an open repository for your employees and even your community.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, a company had been selling the same service in the same way for a decade, to an audience getting older and older.

After organizing several working groups with young people from different backgrounds and habits, they discovered that these generations are also interested in their service, but they do not purchase it because the company looks old and with no clear values committed to the today.

Thanks to these insights, they decided to update the corporate identity, create new narratives and open communication channels.

Early bird catches more feedback

We can spend years reflecting, researching and arriving at all the above conclusions, but if we do not jump into the pool soon, perhaps when we do, there will be no water left (and we will have lost all that work).

We must understand that in contexts of high uncertainty, **not all formulas are magic**, so it is essential to go out and test our hypotheses early, realize what goes wrong and correct it little by little, based on the obtained reactions.

This philosophy is widely implemented in **flexible and agile structures such as startups** but, in more traditional organizations, which rely on a lot of bureaucracy and are afraid of experimentation, nothing is allowed to see the day light until it is perfect.

Let's intend to create safe spaces where we can "fail it" fast and cheap, learn from what our audience says about these experiences and, in the end, launch better and better versions of our service.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, there was a company that understood the value of user-centric research but didn't stop researching and thinking until it had the perfect product. When it finally became reality, it turned out that the market had changed and what was perfect two years ago is no longer valid.

This same company learns what an agile methodology is and, from the very first moment, puts the product in touch with the audience, listening their feedbacks and, this way, the product evolves in parallel with this audience.

TRANSFERENCE

Building bridges to the other shore

When we work in collaborative processes, either internally or with people from our community, one of the main challenges is how to integrate all that research and experimentation so that it really generates the impact we want to achieve.

The amount of knowledge that is stored in the drawers!

Sometimes projects do not go ahead due to lack of knowledge, time, team or resources. A good plan is the key to transfer them to the real world.

These work plans are called **methodologies**. The easiest thing to do is to replicate a methodology that has already been tested, since it worked in countless cases similar to ours (which there are). If our project is extremely special, **we can even invent our own**.

A methodology is just a coherent succession of planned steps in which we use different tools. A consulting process, a mentoring or a training program will always have a methodology, which may change according to our objectives.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, there was a university that was always organizing workshops and very original formats with its students, where they had a great time, did learn and came up with dozens of ideas with potential value. However, several weeks after each experience, they had already forgotten about them and nothing really transcended.

Thanks to the launch of a custom program, those students who really wanted to become entrepreneurs overcame demotivation and, with the help of one-on-one mentoring, validated whether anyone wanted to buy their ideas.

Learning in company

It is clear that we have talked about many concepts that are not only new but also constantly evolving: there are always appearing new methodologies, new tools, new ways of doing...

Let's avoid learning in a linear way, as if they were technical courses where you start "with nothing" and supposedly end up "with everything".

This knowledge is very much based on **soft skills**, those that do not have an instruction handbook. And how do we learn them?

A current trend is the creation of **continuous learning spaces** within an organization. In these spaces, information is constantly exchanged, the knowledge learned is organized (for example, through an internal repository) and training sessions are held in which the roles of teachers and trainees rotate.

Breaking away from unidirectional and specific training is essential to learn in a truly natural way concepts that, in addition, will be useful.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, a company had been outsourcing a monthly masterclass on a new technology to a training provider for years.

Employees were tired of these sessions because they didn't see the usefulness on what they explained so they became repetitive.

These trainings are now replaced by collective sessions where each employee is in charge of organizing the topics he/she controls the most. In addition, a gamified system is created, giving rewards to those who attend and to those who lead more sessions.

Innovation is not about putting VR glasses in a museum

We come to the end of this journey with an element that we leave to the end with all the intention, because too many times it is already wrongly placed at the beginning.

There is a lot of **technology** that helps us with all of the above: sometimes it is entirely digital, sometimes it is still analogical, besides countless software and online platforms. **Do we have to use them all? Of course not!**

It's good to know terms like "virtual reality", "big data" or "blockchain" but it is more important to know how to understand when a technology really makes sense in our processes.

We talk a lot about digital transformation, as a race to virtualize our world (before it collapses) but perhaps the concept of **technological mediation** is more appropriate. That is, empowering ourselves to decide when a technology makes sense for a real problem and when it does not.

Technology is the means, never the end.

Imagine it

Once upon a time, a museum heard that Virtual Reality was trendy and decided to install VR glasses with an immersive experience.

This implementation turned out to be terribly expensive to set up, to maintain and, on top of that, not very efficient, because it can only be tested in person and one at a time.

A mediator analyzed the problem and they discovered that building a virtual space in open source was ten times cheaper, funner and, in addition, allowed thousands of people around the world to connect.

Everyone loves becoming productive, innovative and sustainable?

When an organization:

- Understands its internal and external communities..

- Understands its changing context and constantly dares to experiment...

- Generates mechanisms to build bridges and learn...

- Uses tools and technology wisely...

Productivity improves because you work by leveraging your resources and tackling directly those problems worth to be solved.

There is more **room for innovation**, since you are thinking together with your surroundings, with a pluralistic view and a true intention to learn.

Your perceived **image gets fostered**, because it is not only being sustainable but also demonstrates it, showing commitment, sincerity and transparency.

Macedonia is a collective studio that designs experiences and strategies about social, cultural and educational innovation, merging both physical and digital worlds.

In Spanish, it means "fruit salad" so this is our name since each member of the network has a totally unique profile and when new opportunities arise we set together specific teams for each project.

This report was thought in the context of the Innocult mentoring program in which we were selected.

During this mentoring, we detected a great gap between the narrative that companies understood in regard to that of the other types of entities (foundations, universities, museums and public administrations) with which we were used to working.

The purpose of the report is to share these learnings so that they can serve as a trigger for organizations that want to evolve but do not know towards or how to do so.

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