

## Thoughts in a Nutshell:

It is time for innovation to take responsibility

**Innovation = inventive activity + impact + market success**

For decades, we have defined innovation as inventive activity + market success, thus placing innovation under the rules of the market economy.

If you, like me, have attended dozens of invention fairs, we share two insights:

1. Clever people develop excellent products that would make a real contribution to a 'better' world, what doesn't become true because nobody buys them; there is no market success, so by definition no innovation, but only an invention.
2. On the other hand, there are products which at first glance are almost impossible to beat in terms of uselessness and which hit the market like a bomb because they obviously meet a need. This is then innovation, even if the product only leads to more waste.

The myth of capitalism as a set of rules for our society is just about to be wiped out, just as communism 30 years ago and even earlier the aristocratic oligarchy took their leave. Perhaps we can finally dare to put innovation at the service of social and environmental responsibility. Perhaps, in a first attempt of the re-definition, we should retain the success criterion of the market, but add the impact that a new product has on our future. Like we did with vegetables, where we added taste and ecological footprint (= BIO, organic) to the cost criterion.

This makes ethical sense quickly. What itches is the question of feasibility.

Here are some ideas for promoting responsible innovation:

- a) Support mechanisms for innovation have a steering function. I hear moaning, bottom up should be innovation, not top down. But: we can emphasize to promote the development of sustainable products and services, both through targeted thematic calls and through a specific range of support services.
- b) Public procurement. Especially 'sensible' products have a hard time establishing themselves in the first few years, because you have to *think* when you buy them and often pay a little more. The criteria for purchasing in municipalities, cities and at the federal level can supplement the criteria of price and quality more than today with arguments of sustainability.
- c) Intellectual property. Before the invention comes the technology search, after the invention comes the patent and other protective rights. Paid services from the state can become cheaper or free of charge; patent examinations can be supplemented by sustainability criteria, which - if fulfilled - in turn lead to preferential pricing.

Of course, the role of the consumer continues to play an immensely important role. It is put to the test when purchasing power declines...

My vote here goes to the responsibility of public authorities. The role of the state must and will change in the coming years, whether through Corona or Industry 4.0, and once we have accepted this, these ideas may well be worthy of discussion.

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