

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

CCSL investigates the possible links between grass roots innovations and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. It discusses the potentialities of collaborative everyday life creativity (the creative communities) in generating and diffusing new and more sustainable ways of living in the urban environments.

In 2007 CCSL has investigated created communities in Europe, Brazil, India and China.

CCSL AFRICA has been launched in June 2008 with the challenge of verifying if this attitude exists in Africa, discussing what would be the form that these concepts can assume there - with a **special focus on its emerging urban societies** – and working on how to make them more accessible, effective and replicable.

Through a partnership with African design schools, CCSL AFRICA intends to organise a series of workshops in different African regions, targeted to local NGOs and civil society organisations, researchers and government actors. The aim is **empowering and inspiring local communities** to take action **towards sustainable lifestyles**, by showing real cases that are done by normal people all around the world.

The first workshop is planned to take place in February 2009 in Cape Town, South Africa. Other three other workshops are foreseen to take place in other African countries in the following months.

CCSL is part of the Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles, supported by the Swedish Ministry for Sustainable Development, within the United Nations 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (Marrakech Process).

Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles in Brazil, India and China

Qualitative results (goals and results achieved in terms of content)

One of the original CCSL goals was “to explore and adapt the creative communities concept to non-European contexts”, taking into account that in Brazil, India and China, the terms “community”, “creativity” have meanings that are different, sometimes very different, from the ones adopted in the definition of creative communities in Europe.

We have indeed assumed that the term “creative communities” could be considered useful in spite of the different contextual interpretations of the terms. In fact, we have assumed in the beginning of the project (and later verified along the project development) that **in Brazil, India and China there are groups of people who organise themselves to solve everyday life problems or to open new possibilities in the new urban environments, and in so doing invent and practice sustainable ways of living.**

If this assumption is acceptable, as the initial working hypothesis, and it has turned out as a valid hypothesis, then we need an expression to name it by. That is, we need to name cases of grass roots innovation for collaborative, sustainable ways of living (where the emphasis is on the adjective “collaborative when referring to the process, i.e. the groups of people working in collaboration, and the expression “sustainable ways of living” indicates the motivations and the specific qualities of the results).

Given all this, we can assume that the expression *creative* can be used to distinguish them: “groups of innovative people who are inventing/managing original solutions in emerging urban contexts”, i.e. the new kind of initiatives we are searching for here¹.

¹ These very general statements cannot be made in the same way for all the countries considered. In fact, for instance, in India and Brazil, the expression “creative community” gives a name to initiatives that would otherwise risk being

At the conclusion of the CCSL project, the main findings can be described as follows:
Good Ideas Spread Worldwide. Creative communities are all very deeply rooted in specific contexts. But the *service ideas*² on which they are based, can spread – and some of them are spreading - in different, even very different, contexts.

In practice, this means that, in different contexts, a service idea can be roughly the same, though its motivations and social meaning are very different from case to case. Indeed, the research work conducted in the 3 countries has unveiled certain clusters of services ideas that can be also related to the Creative Communities cases found in Europe, as shown in Fig. 4 below.

Even if motivations can be very different, in emerging countries, as in Europe, reciprocity is one of the most important characteristics of creative communities. Creative communities cases must necessarily be based on a reciprocal relationship among the actors involved. In emerging countries, it excludes for example initiatives based on a charity approach.

Creative Communities in emerging countries include cases related to micro-entrepreneurship. The logic of CCSL project was that of provoking the discussion about creative communities in emerging countries based on the creative communities as observed in Europe (EMUDE). If in one hand, we observed that the same service ideas appeared equally in both contexts, on the other hand, something different, specifically related to emerging contexts have appeared: cases related to micro-entrepreneurship, revealing a new sub-system of grass roots social innovation in everyday life.

This finding causes an important change in terms of the point-of-view we have used so far to analyse Creative Communities cases: EMUDE has always looked at the cases from the final user point-of-view (*demand*). Now, for emerging countries, we have also to consider the point-of-view of the *offer*.

While in Europe creative communities initiatives are mainly based on motivations derived from the demand side (emerging from a specific demand of services from the final user), in emerging countries, a different mix of motivations appear, more related to the production side, emerging from the offer of specific services that groups of people organise and put forward on a micro-entrepreneurship basis.

Not all cases of micro-entrepreneurship in emerging countries can however be considered as creative communities. The main filter is that of quality of life, related to a vision of a sustainable society. In emerging countries, micro-entrepreneurship, are small, localised productive activities directly affecting the quality of life, offering a source of income that guarantees the inclusion of groups of people in the economy, conferring social quality and re-establishing the social fabric.

hidden in the shadows of the existing, in some ways similar but in many ways different, ones related to poverty eradication programmes and the development of under-developed communities.

In China, vice versa the situation is different from the Brazilian and Indian ones, and the similar expressions (relating to grass roots innovation for local development and poverty eradication) have not yet been consolidated. In this context, the introduction of the expression "creative communities" enables us to leapfrog directly to a concept map where the new phenomenon of innovative groups of people is specifically considered (in parallel with other initiatives that are in some ways similar, but also very different).

² **Creative communities, services and services ideas.** To deal with the issue of creative community up-scaling, it is useful to introduce the supporting concepts of *collaborative service* and of *service idea*.

We have seen that creative communities are cases of everyday life collaborative creativity that generate ways to solve problems or to open new opportunities. In other words: they are organizations that produce results for all the participants, i.e. -forms of service. For this reason we can call them: *collaborative services*. In other words:

Collaborative service: a service that, to exist and to be effective, requires some form of community.

Every creative community, considered in its complexity, is by necessity deeply rooted in a local social and physical context. The same is true for the corresponding collaborative service. But for this service, as for every service, we can recognize and outline a kind of structure that is less context-specific and that is called the *service idea*. More precisely:

Service idea: the system architecture and the partner positions and motivation that characterize a service and enable it to exist and, perhaps, be effective.

The importance of the notion of service idea is given by the fact that it permits to separate what can be reproduced (because non context-specific), if the conditions are given, from what cannot be reproduced (as the creative communities and their related collaborative services).

The meaning of “community” changes deeply in the different contexts. In the European experiences the communities we refer to are “intentional communities”: new social organizations emerging from a long process of individualisation (and, largely, as forms of reaction to it).

Vice versa, in emerging countries, the communities we refer to in CCSL can be seen as a balance between continuity with still existing traditions (families, villages, neighbourhoods, etc.) and the innovation needed to face radically new conditions of life (and the challenges of sustainability). In each country, this balance can be different, but in each one of them it will result in the up-dating of traditions, i.e. the use of traditional social organisations as building blocks for new forms of social network (in the framework of which collaboration, mutual help, sharing and, more in general, community building can be up-dated and re-interpreted).

Cases of social leapfrogging. In emerging countries, collaborative behaviour patterns still exist in different traditional forms (inside families, villages, neighbourhoods, etc.). At the same time, main stream thinking on modernization, following the patterns of existing mature societies, considers that these living traditions are condemned to disappear, swept away by an “inevitable” individualization process.

On the contrary, in the CCSL perspective, we assume a different idea of modernization, where new forms of cooperative behaviour, creative communities, appear as cases of *social leapfrogging*. That is, as cases of social innovation where groups of people move directly (or, in any case, very fast) from traditional forms of collaborative behaviour to new ones, responding to the needs of contemporary everyday life (avoiding the phase of extreme, unsustainable individualisation that characterizes existing mature industrial societies).

Visions of better ways of living. We have assumed that in emerging countries, creative communities can be seen as a non linear evolution towards modernization, i.e. cases of *leapfrogging in the social development process*. However, these “leaps” require some ideas on where to leap: a new idea of wellbeing that must be perceived as better than the one achieved through a more linear process. If this is true, the kind of wellbeing that creative communities generate has to be perceived as better than that proposed by the normal “modern” solutions³. This means that this community-based and context-related wellbeing must be attentively and effectively communicated. And wider visions of what life could be like, if it were widely accepted and diffused must be produced.

In other words: effective communication and scenario building are crucial to give these promising cases the possibility to last over time and to spread. New design tools and new sensibilities must be developed to make it possible.

Anticipations of sustainable lifestyles. For many years in emerging countries, cases of grass roots innovation have been seen, *mainly* as a topic to be dealt with in association with rural village economies and/or of poverty alleviation.

On the contrary, in the CCSL perspective, we look at them in terms of *creative communities*, i.e. in terms of collaborative everyday life creativity that may anticipate possible sustainable lifestyles in urban environments.

Social And Environmental Implications. Creative communities are promising cases of social innovation towards sustainability. In fact, by solving some everyday life problems collaboratively, they propose and put in practice ways of living which have a positive social impact and, generally speaking, a reduced environmental footprint.

In the emerging countries the implications of creative communities require further analyses and discussions. On the social side, the discussion focuses on the meaning of modernization: creative communities are associated with an idea of modernity that is not the mainstream way of thinking either in emerging countries or in the most industrialised ones,. On the environmental side, the implications of creative communities must be analysed in depth and this must be done in a systemic way. Moving from here, clearer directions on how to improve the creative communities’ environmental potential have to be outlined.

Technology And Design Can Help. In order to gain support creative communities must be recognized, reinforced and communicated in an adequate manner. In addition, their accessibility, effectiveness and long term survival must be facilitated by appropriate sets of products, services and communication programmes (the enabling solutions).

In the emerging countries, technology and design can help in enabling new creative communities to emerge, to become more accessible and effective and, finally, to spread. Appropriate enabling solutions and supporting platforms have to be conceived and developed, bearing in mind the local specificities and the global opportunities of experience exchange. A new generation (and a new market) of enabling products and services will appear.

Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles in Africa

Qualitative results (goals and results achieved in terms of content)

General conclusions:

Premise

In the following notes we will articulate some qualitative results emerging from our activities in Africa. But, in doing that, before proposing some punctual, specific conclusion, we have to shortly outline the general picture that gives to the specific African activities and results a clearer meaning.

CCSL Africa is the third step of a journey in the rich and promising field of social innovation worldwide. The research team who made this journey started in Europe five years ago (thanks the EMUDE research, supported by the 6th Research Framework of the European Commission, 2004-2006), continued in Brazil, India and China (thanks to the support of the TF on Sustainable Lifestyles and UNEP). And, finally, it arrived in Africa one year ago.

In these five years of work on this topic we discovered that the original intuition of the existence, in Europe and in the most mature industrialized countries, was correct. And we better understood that *creative communities*, intended as groups of people inventing and practicing new and more sustainable ways of living, were specific aspects of a larger wave of social innovation. In the same period, it happened that the social innovation topic, and therefore the one of creative communities, became more and more relevant worldwide: they entered in the agenda of high level policy makers and, most importantly, they moved from being a collection of promising cases, toward being the building materials of a coherent vision. The vision of a possible, viable, sustainable society.

Background observations

Social innovation is a process of change where new solutions emerge from a variety of actors directly involved in the problem to be solved: final users, grass roots technicians and entrepreneurs, local institutions and civil society organizations.

This kind of innovation has always existed. But now there are good reasons to say that its role is expanding and will expand in the next future. Previous experiences show that social innovation flourishes when two contemporary conditions are given: when society is facing difficult problems and when some new technologies, having spread in it, open new and (partly) still unexplored possibilities. Both these conditions are particularly relevant today.

Social innovation drivers. To motivate the forecast of a future larger role for social innovation on basis of the first condition (existence of problems to be solved) is even too obvious (the dimension of the present crisis, and the related social, economic and environmental problems, have been largely debated).

The second condition too is very obvious today. In fact, in the last decades our societies have been invested, worldwide, by several waves of technological innovations: from distributed computing, to Internet and to mobile phones. Even if these technologies have been very quickly “normalized” (for instance, nobody today will say that the use of mobile phones, per se, is a technologically advanced solution), they still present potentialities that users, in their everyday life experiment and transform in new, viable solutions. And new solutions, based on the unprecedented forms of organization that the new networks make possible, will appear.

In general terms we can assume that a (potentially) *positive interplay* between technological and social innovations is taking place and is becoming a powerful promoter of sustainable changes: technological innovation opens new opportunities (in terms of unprecedented forms of organizations) and social innovation mobilizes diffuse social resources (in terms of creativity, skills, knowledge and entrepreneurship).

Promising cases. Looking at the cases of social innovation we are referring to, we can observe that they challenge traditional ways of doing things and introduce new, different and more sustainable ones. Of course, each one of them should be analysed in detail (to precisely assess their effective degree of environmental and social sustainability). However, a first glance, we can recognise their coherence with some of the fundamental guidelines for sustainability: many of them have an unprecedented capacity to bring individual interests into line with social and environmental ones (one side effect of their search for concrete solutions is that they reinforce the social fabric) and they generate new and more sustainable ideas of wellbeing (a wellbeing where greater value is given to the quality of the social and physical contexts, to a caring attitude, to the search for a slower pace in life, to collaborative actions, to new forms of community and to new ideas of locality – we will come back on this point later).

Precisely because these cases suggest solutions that merge personal interests with social and environmental ones, they should be considered as *promising cases*: initiatives where, in different ways and for different reasons, people have been able to steer their expectations and their individual behaviour towards more sustainable ways of living and producing.

Creative communities. Behind each of these promising cases of social innovation there are groups of people who have been able to imagine, develop and manage them. A first glance shows that they have some fundamental traits in common: they are all groups of people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living. And they do so recombining what already exists, without waiting for a general change in the system (in the economy, in the institutions, in the large infrastructures). For this reason, these groups of people can be defined as *creative communities*: people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living.

A second characteristic, common to these promising cases, is that they have grown out of problems posed by contemporary everyday life such as: how can we overcome the isolation that an exasperated individualism has brought and brings in its wake? How can we organise daily functions if the family and neighbourhood no longer provide the support they traditionally offered? How can we respond to the demand for natural food and healthy living conditions when living in a global metropolis? How can we support local production without being trampled on by the power of the mighty apparatus of global trade? Creative communities generate solutions able to answer all these questions.

Visions of sustainable qualities. At a first view, these grass roots innovations generate a constellation of solution ideas that very different, very local and deeply rooted in the different contexts where they have been generated. Nevertheless, looking at them as a whole, some larger images start to emerge: a new *agro-food system*, based on organic food and on the direct connection between consumers and local farmers; a new welfare, the *active welfare*, based on

the participation of the interested people; a new *idea of city*, based on the dynamism of its inhabitants, on new forms of neighborhoods and public spaces. And so on. In short something is happening that goes beyond the specificity of the individual cases and indicates larger perspectives.

As a matter of fact, a new global culture is emerging worldwide. It promotes, at the same time, diversity, locality, openness and connectivity but also, and most important for us here, some promising, and radically new, ideas of wellbeing: the quality of physical and social environments, with the rediscovery of *commons*; the quality of relationships with the rediscovery of *communities*; the quality of being active with the rediscovery of *individual* and *social capabilities*; the quality of time with the rediscovery of *slowness*. All these new qualities are based on some traditional ones, re-interpreted in the present context. All of them, to be appreciated, require a *human scale*, that is, they require *small (comprehensible, manageable) systems*. At the same time, today, given the high level of connectivity, these small systems can (and must) be *open*: open to the interactions with wider flows of people and ideas that characterize contemporary global society.

Emerging countries specificities

Creative communities are mainly appearing in rapidly changing contexts characterized by diffused knowledge, a high level of connectivity and a certain degree of tolerance. These contexts can be found in the mature industrial societies, but not only there. In fact, we can also observe that, in the globalised world, there are vast urban and rural-urban areas that can be described in the same terms (if we agree to adapt their meaning to the new circumstances). They are rapidly changing contexts (a lot of people are moving from villages to the cities), with a certain degree of tolerance (if only because nobody can exercise a strict control on such a changing society). As far as regards diffused knowledge and creativity, we can find very interesting hybridizations between traditional culture, new behaviours and advanced technologies.

Speed of change and social innovation. As a matter of fact, attentively observing the African contexts where we have done our research, we observed interesting cases of collaborative organisations. Similarly to what we found in Brazil, India, China, the African cases too are based on hybrid traditional-contemporary forms of communities and answer to different kinds of problems: from collaborative social micro-enterprises to community-supported agriculture and community-based tourism, from neighbourhood cultural centres, to purchasing groups. Of course, their cultural and social meanings and motivations differ from the ones we can find in Europe and USA. In fact, the different role of tradition and existing social networks lead to different meanings of the terms “community” and “creativity” and, similarly, different weights of economic needs over other social and environmental ones generate different motivations. Nevertheless, we can observe that the “solution ideas” on which they are based are more or less the same.

In fact, given that the changing conditions of life (from villages and subsistence economy, to cities and market economy) are affecting increasing proportions of the population in emerging countries, some western experiences (of how to live in a city) may stimulate the adoption (and adaptation) of analogous ideas in the new emerging urban environments. Vice versa, it may be that the persistence of traditional ways of thinking and doing in the new metropolises will constitute an extensive reserve of social and cultural resources, and also generate new ideas on sustainable ways of living: ideas that, in turn, could be adopted in (and adapted to) western societies.

In conclusion, we can say that where this kind of grassroots innovation takes place is not a question of being a mature industrial country or not, of being rich or poor, of being in the East, in the West, in the North or in the South. It is simply a matter of speed of change: wherever changes are fast and deep, creative communities appear, and, once they have been generated, they move around and re-localise (i.e. adapt to the specificity of the different contexts) in other places: a movement of ideas and experiences that can go in all directions, from North to South, from West to East, and vice versa.

Solution ideas move worldwide. Before going on in our discussion on this point, we have to introduce a useful concept: the concept of *solution idea*, meaning the organisational and economic model that explains how a collaborative organisation works; what its systemic architecture is like: who the involved actors are and what their motivations, relationships and economic and non-economic exchanges are.

The notion of solution idea is important because, when, as we are doing here, we discuss how collaborative organisations spread and replicate, we have to bear in mind that, in reality, what replicates are not these highly localised cases (with all their local characteristics), nor the creative communities who generated them (since they are un-replicable groups of people). What do spread are solution ideas that, case by case can be adopted by different groups of people and adapted to different contexts.

In practical terms, behind the highly localised promising cases that we can find in different places in the world, there are the solution ideas on which they are based. And these solution ideas can move around and find new contexts where they can be adopted, adapted and re-localised. We can synthesise this process considering, in particular, the different local combinations of two basic elements: the existence (or at least the memory) of *traditions* and the possibility of using (in an appropriate way) an existing *set of technologies* (in the form of *products, services and infrastructures*).

Traditions as social resources. Creative communities build their solutions (i.e. answer to the questions posed by contemporary life) using as building material whatever they can find. That is, existing ideas, accessible technologies and living traditions. This means that they often present some similarities with ways of doing and thinking proper to pre-industrial cultures: the old market; the grand parents' vegetable gardens; children walking to school as in "the good old days"; the sharing of tools and equipment that was the norm before the advent of our present consumption-oriented society, and so on. But, looking at the cases and their motivations more carefully, it clearly appears that the "past" emerging in these cases is an extraordinary, absolutely up-to-date, social and cultural resource: it is the value of neighbourhood sociality that enables us to bring life and security back to a neighbourhood or a village. It is the sense of season and local food production that can put today's unsustainable food network back in order. It is the value of sharing that enables us to lighten the burden of apparatus and make the specially equipped spaces we require available... In the end, it is a heritage of knowledge, behaviour patterns and organisational forms that, seen in the light of current conditions of existence and current problems, may constitute valuable building materials for the future.

Re-interpreted technologies. The majority of promising cases at issue here utilise "normal" technologies (i.e. what is considered "normal" today in many countries). However, very often they utilise them in an original way, by putting products and services normally available on the market into a new kind of system. For example, they generally use the telephone (and sometime the computer and the internet) just as any ordinary member of society can do. Nevertheless, we must stress how important these "normal technologies" are. In fact, though few cases make use of sophisticated services and products, very few of them could have existed without (at least) a telephone.

Having said this, we can add that these technologies, however modest they may be, however normal they may be considered, still have largely unused (and even unimagined) potentialities: mobile telephones, just to take the most commonly used communication device worldwide as an example, have mainly been used until now as communication enablers. However, they also have great potential as system organisers in order to solve specific problems (to send money where there are no banks, to get information on the markets, to integrate medical and veterinarian care).

In conclusion, although it is true that the use of information and communication technologies as enablers for new forms of organization is still at the very beginning, some creative community inventions can be seen as very advanced. In other words, they are at the cutting edge of

socially-led systemic innovation, where existing, normal, technologies are used to create brand new systems and organisations.

Specific conclusions

Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles Africa (CCSL_A) is based on the experience of the Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles (CCSL) project. CCSL' main objective was to investigate the possible links between grass roots innovations and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. More precisely, it discussed the potentialities of collaborative everyday life creativity (the creative communities) in generating and diffusing new and more sustainable ways of living in the urban environments of emerging countries (with a focus on Brazil, India and China).

CCSL sought to compare some European experiences with ones that can be observed in the growing urban populations of emerging countries. In particular, three major topics were considered: (1) the nature of the groups of people who generate these innovations (the creative communities); (2) their role in promoting new and sustainable lifestyles (the promising cases) and (3) the possibility to make these promising cases more accessible, effective and replicable, thanks to some appropriate initiatives (the enabling system).

CCSL AFRICA challenge was to verify if this attitude exists and is workable in Africa. And if yes, discuss what would be the form and particularities that these concepts can assume in the African continent, with a special focus on its emerging urban societies. And, moving from the promising cases, verify the nature and characteristics that enabling systems would have to assume to make them more accessible, effective and replicable in this contexts.

From sustainable lifestyles to sustainable livelihood...

One of the main differences in the starting hypothesis between CCSL Africa and the previous investigations made in China, India, Brazil and Europe was to shift the research of promising cases from a focus on growing middle class in mature and emerging economies to the less advantaged part of the society. Millions of people in Africa (and in the world) search for livelihood strategies using, as they can, their local resources and social capital (i.e. their existing social networks). CCSL Africa observed such cases in Africa and analysed if and how some of them can be seen as seeds of viable, sustainable ways of living, in other words, if livelihood strategies can generate sustainable livelihoods?

From the previous CCSL investigation in emerging countries and before in Europe, middle class appears to be the group of the population where concerns and actions towards sustainability is more likely to take place. Although very diverse and heterogeneous, middle classes shared the insurance to overcome basic need while at the same time still facing the challenge to improve their daily condition, especially in emerging contexts. They represent a potential (because of their relative economical stability but also their access to information and education) of attention and transformation towards new and more sustainable ways of living. Better quality of life is including for them living in an healthier and less polluted environment, accessing better quality food, living in a safe and more friendly neighbourhood... all topics related to environmental and social sustainability. At the same time, their economical power is not high enough to give them full access to the best standards of equipment and comfort, raising their attention to alternative solutions based on sharing or pooling of goods and mutual help.

This potential attention to sustainability issues is less direct considering more disadvantaged groups of people as focused in CCSL Africa project. The obvious necessity to cover basic needs leave less space and attention to consider sustainability issues. Potential synergies between increasing quality of life and attention to the quality of the environment are also more critical. The imperative of income raising is not always compatible (and even sometimes opposite) with the reduction of impact and the social emancipation.

Sustenance and transitory solutions...

The shift of the focus from sustainable lifestyles to sustainable livelihood brought to consider an increased number of initiatives that could be qualified as 'transitory' solutions³ in terms of sustainability. For instance the traditional and more recent initiatives based on creating value and employment through recycling material are win-win solutions combining sustainable benefits (developing recycling) with social benefits (creating employment). But if certainly relevant in the current difficult context and surely advantageous in terms of sustainability, many of these solutions cannot be regarded as they are as ideal models for a sustainable society.

Two main issues should be discussed here. The first question is concerning the fare and ethical nature of the initiative. Children, homeless people or even unemployed people collecting empty bottle and cans in the streets or sorting trash to extract recyclable materials allow these people to raise some income and find a way of subsistence. But conditions of work, levels of remuneration, stability of incomes, etc, should be carefully considered to appreciate the possibilities of these initiatives to evolve towards 'ethical' jobs. The very notion of 'income raising' indicates actions taken to ensure temporary subsistence. In other words, they can be regarded as 'transitory' solutions towards sustainable ways of living only when the evolution and emancipation of the individuals is embedded in the organisation of the solution. Self-managed collective composting or recycling initiatives, partnerships with public authorities in order to establish public services for collecting and sorting trash with citizen participation are example likely to evolve towards a fare sustainable situation.

The second question is regarding the effective reduction of environmental impact generated by the initiative considered. Decorative arts and crafts made of reused trash materials; flower pots made out of old tires; benches and dog kennels built out of reused wood pallets, etc, find sometimes justification in the fact that waste due to overconsumption find a second use instead of being trashed. It is here important to consider if this second use is substituting a use of primary resources or if it is a process of creation of additional goods (art and craft, flower pots or benches) that would not have been produced instead. Here also, they can be considered as 'transitory' solutions if they promote applications that substitute the production of new goods, encourage a parsimonious use of materials and divert from the position of compensation of overconsumption.

More middle-down initiatives...

The series of cases of social innovation collected in Africa confirmed the conclusion of the CCSL investigation in emerging countries: 'good ideas spread worldwide' and similar patterns of service ideas found in Brazil, India, China and Europe were also found in Africa: Collaborative neighbourhoods; Active welfare services; Local food networks; Smart mobility systems, etc. Even if local socio-cultural and economical context are very different, the CCSL research hypothesis of finding recurrent solution with the same socio-organisational structure outlining sustainable ways of living common to urban contexts worldwide can be confirmed.

Beyond these overall similarities, the initiative found in Africa reveal also some specificities. In particular, they seem to be more often related to the intermediation of a third party such as an NGO or a local authority. Whereas in Europe and also in China the cases collected were characterised by being the result of self-standing initiatives of the creative communities developing alone their solution, in Africa, and till some extend in India and Brazil creative communities benefits often from an external technical support. The diffuse creativity, the entrepreneurship and the willingness to solve problems remain a grassroots initiative in both situations. But the availability of NGO with a strong experience in disseminating social innovation, engaging collective self-supporting actions, catalysing project on the one hand and, on the other hand, bringing technical support, appropriated knowledge and financial contribution plays an important role in facilitating social change even considering the scarcity of resources and the difficulties of the local context.

This advocates in favour of developing such 'enabling structure' to foster social innovation in general. It should be made taking especially care of embedding sustainability issues as an

³ The question of transitory solutions was already raised after the CCSL project particularly in Brazil and India. See D'Silva S. and Jégou F., 2008. From sustenance to sustainable living in India, Elements of vision based on collaboration with local NGOs. Changing the Change design research conference, Torino.

essential component of the enabling process. In particular, typical obstacles should be watched in the design of these enabling solutions. The urgency to solve current problems often leads to promote development towards the current unsustainable western-like model of society. The generation of immediate income raising activities may close people into a passive attitude with no possibilities of empowerment and emancipation in these activities. Unconsidered support may overcome the engagement of the communities and lead to dead ends and collapse of their enterprise, etc.

Ubuntu as grounding concept of African collaboration...

The notion of community and collective engagement in Africa is often related to the concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* represents a specific and complex form of solidarity embedded in the African culture. It differs from a charity in the sense that who receives has the obligation to respond and who gives should never deny this right to respond. It differs also from barter since no value equivalence has been attributed to both parts of the exchange and equal reciprocation is not expected. *Ubuntu* can be described as a non power-based exchange. Nobody feels indebted from what he received or is likely to lose his face if he doesn't give it back. No one feels empowered from what he gave or entitled to expect any kind of determinate feedback.

If *ubuntu* is very present in the African discourse and a promising concept to ground the design of community-based solutions, it is mostly referred to traditional solutions. New projects such as many of the cases collected during CCSL Africa: *collaborative neighbourhood* or *active welfare services* based on participation and mutual help; *community enabling centres* providing a mix of social, cultural and entrepreneurship oriented supports in less privileged areas; etc are intrinsically expressions of *ubuntu* principle but doesn't seem to be perceived as such for the moment. Although, *Ubuntu* is a very powerful and inspiring concept to organise solutions based on participation, mutual help or exchanges and some useful basic design principles could be extrapolated from it and be used as guidelines:

- Relations come first: enabling relationships is perceived as more or equally important as equity or convenience;
- Inclusion prior to the quality of the result: inclusion of all the community is more important than the result of the collective action and it is likely to be more profitable at the end to decrease quality expectations of the solution in order to enable more people to keep the collective rhythm;
- Emancipation rather than empowerment: empowerment is a change in who has got the power for a more balanced equilibrium but it is still a relationships based on power. *Ubuntu* is aiming at emancipation where no power shifts are implicated;
- Show the value of community: the participation process should be enhanced and made visible in the design of the solution to show explicitly the benefits of a community-based organisation;
- Design the opportunity to respond: a solution designed in the spirit of *ubuntu* should foresee an opportunity to respond for who gets the benefit of the service;
- Elective participation: *ubuntu* should be limited to elective participation where individuals are encouraged to take part in the community but still respected if they don't.

Enabling micro-enterprises...

One of the main findings of CCSL in Brazil, India and China was the verification of a link between sustainable lifestyles and micro-entrepreneurship, revealing a new sub-system of grass roots social innovation in everyday life in the investigated countries.

In Africa, micro-entrepreneurship is pervasive in all the everyday life. It is a very dynamic informal sector that seems to provide more employment and contributes more to the GDP in many African countries than the formal sector. It is also a social fabric of local production places diffused in the neighbourhood with close loops and short transportation circuits between users and providers, interwoven relationships and an important potential of adaptation to any local opportunities.

The scarcity of resources and of economic power in this informal economy put the emphasis on solutions based on the repair of goods or the reuse of materials and constitutes potentially a more sustainable model of production. A all range of micro-entrepreneurship in Africa demonstrate an important potential for 're-design' prolonging the life of products and materials in

particular disassembling goods and reusing them as spare parts or finding ways of making use of materials keeping as much as possible the state of elaboration in which they are.

This potential in terms of sustainability is given mainly by the restrictions of the context but it is not said that this orientation to sustainability will remain if these micro-entrepreneurship get business improvement opportunities. They use recuperated materials mostly because first hand material is not available or not affordable. Looking closer at working practices reveals often no particular attention to optimise the use of materials. And sometimes the very fact of using second hand material seems to entitle to waste it. In other words, the environmental sustainability that can be recognized in part of these micro-businesses and grassroots entrepreneurship is strongly related to their transitory status but it is not embedded in the definition of the activity in itself. Actions should be taken to raise awareness among these entrepreneurs of the current sustainable value of their activities and to investigate conditions for which these environmental qualities may remain and be further developed.

In terms of social sustainability, micro-entrepreneurship based on the use of local resources and social capital ensure livelihood to millions of people in Africa (and in the world). But as for environmental aspects, not all these micro-businesses initiatives have the same potential to generate sustainable livelihood.

As already mentioned before, the working conditions in this informal sector are generally very poor in terms of working hours, safety, children involvement, etc and it is not said that those initiatives have a potential to evolve toward an improvement. If they meet better market opportunities or if they improve production process or management, they are likely to upscale toward more structured companies but probably based on the same or similar working conditions.

Some of them on the contrary are more aiming at dissemination and emancipation of the work force and represents a 'constructive' dimension for the society. Cases collected during the CCSL Africa workshops show characters of what can be called 'enabling micro-entrepreneurship': self-construction projects developing in training initiatives to disseminate the know-how of building houses with the help of the community; art and craft centres using part of their cultural actions and equipments for capacity building activities; social centres promoting enabling businesses such as training home gardening or trading seeds for private orchards...

A particular incentive should be made to distinguish and promote preferably these types of enabling, participative, emancipating and community-based micro-entrepreneurship.

Cases of social 'leapfrogging'...

Many of the observed cases during the CCSL Africa, as promising cases and the creative communities are new forms of cooperative behaviour and can be interpreted as cases of social leapfrogging. That is, as cases of social innovation where groups of people move directly (or, in any case, very fast) from traditional forms of collaborative behaviour to new ones, responding to the needs of contemporary everyday life (avoiding the phase of extreme, unsustainable individualisation that characterizes existing mature industrial societies).

In the case of the *community-based tourism*, villages in rural areas organised to give access to their current way of living to external visitors. They propose to take part to their day-to-day activities, from collecting food, cooking to taking part to signing, dancing or even to ritual moment, hosting them in their own houses and offering their own life as a touristic and cultural experience. The passage from traditional living to the valorisation of traditional living as a touristic activity represents a radical shift in the mindset and a reflexive activity. But in practical terms, the evolution appears smooth and continue: the daily routines of the village goes-on in a similar way as they were before. In fact, the quality of the community-based tourism is directly linked to this continuity: the smoother the transition, the more the experience will be original and appreciated by the visitors.

But many of these cases pointed as interesting leapfrogging opportunities and promising new and more sustainable ways of living by the CCSL Africa project were hardly recognisable as cases by the local experts because they appears in their eyes too near to what appears as traditional or informal solutions.

In mature economies, leapfrogging represents an important effort to recreate social cohesion and diffuse solutions based on exchange, sharing or mutual help. In Africa, the leapfrogging is

more often a change in the mindset to look at current situation from different point of view, to recognise sustainability patterns in what is perceived as mainstream, to operate slight changes in normal traditional situations to raise collective awareness on how advanced they are in terms of sustainability.

Supporting human-based dissemination...

CCSL Africa aimed at exploring how the promising initiatives collected could be strengthened and in particular how a design-driven approach could support the social innovation for sustainability.

A large part of the cases collected in Africa are involving a third party. They maintain the overall characteristics of the grassroots initiatives observed among the creative communities in other part of the world: community participation; self-management; collective responsibility; bottom-up entrepreneurship; etc. But whereas creative communities generally start their project alone at a very small scale and integrates external supports (subsidies to support a part-time staff; a place to host the project meetings...) only in a second time when the initiative has been launched and is facing consolidation or up-scaling issues, in Africa, more grassroots initiatives are from start the result of a collaboration with a third party: NGOs working on development support a youth group to set-up urban gardening or aggregates women to start self construction or set a social centre in the neighbourhood, etc. Universities (i.e. "New media for social change" department at Cape Peninsula University of Technology) or public authorities (i.e. the City of Cape Town stimulates many grassroots initiatives with a potential of job creation) are also playing that role of third party initiator. They provide the initial idea of the activity that could be developed and along with it, they often propose processes and capacity building, tools and rough material, technical and management support, etc.

They represent an important capital of knowledge and methodological approaches to support and replicate social innovations. Deeper investigations would allow to extract recurrent good practices and to formalise them into guidelines. Design skills would there be useful to improve and facilitate this replication process by:

- analysing the focused initiative from a service design point of view and improving it's usability;
- involving current promoters of the initiative with potential new adopters in hand-on, participative co-design of a dissemination toolkit;
- facilitating the communication of the toolkit and the design of explicit tools, procedures, instructions lists...

Design schools as enabling centres...

CCSL Africa identifies different lines of consolidation of creative communities as a valid approach for sustainable ways of living. Top-down approaches are needed to create the appropriate conditions to enable the bottom-up grassroots initiatives to mature quicker and better diffuse into the social fabric. In particular the constitution of enabling structures is considered, playing a range of roles from local observatory of sustainable ways of living to public agency supporting social innovations and even to incubator/accelerator of creative communities initiatives.

The collaboration with design schools and universities started as a side activity in CCSL reveal to be very fruitful and promising in that sense. It was repeated and intensified in CCSL Africa involving these structures as main local partner. They complete a series of activities in each local venue of the project in a very satisfactory way that indicates them as promising structure to assume this role of agent for social change.

It is therefore recommended to encourage design schools and universities to promote research and support activities in favour of social innovation for sustainability.

In particular the following activities should be encouraged:

- exploring and documenting local initiatives of social innovations;
- developing criteria and assessment processes to evaluate the effective benefits in terms of sustainability and improve it;
- collaborating with grassroots promoters of these innovations to improve them and make them more accessible and appealing to larger share of the local population;
- developing method and tools to approach up-scaling of the most promising solutions by supporting their dissemination by the population itself;

- promote experimentation at larger scale and explore how clusters of social innovations processes could create systemic changes at the territory level;
- developing a community of practice fostering exchanges and cross fertilisation within a network of similar centres in design schools and universities;

2.3.2 Policy recommendations

In the following notes we will articulate some policy recommendations emerging from our activities in Africa. It has to be said that, as elsewhere and more than elsewhere, African countries and regions are very different. Therefore our recommendations are necessarily rather general. Nevertheless they indicate some directions that should be followed to create more favorable condition for promoting, consolidating and diffusing promising social innovation cases.

1. Consider social innovation as a major driver towards socially and environmentally sustainable ways of living: in Africa, as everywhere else, people creativity and entrepreneurship is the most abundant resources to be valorised in a process of transition towards sustainable ways of living and, at the same time, towards viable solutions to present daily problems.

2. Create a “favourable environment” in order to give the possibility to social innovation to flourish and, at the same time, when new solution ideas appear, to support them and to orient them in the most favourable way. To do that requires a *new governance*. That is governance with both a new general approach and new, specific tools. More precisely, what this new governance should be able to do is:

2.1 To promote a correct balance between tolerance and control. The idea is that “the new” can emerge only if the context is tolerant (i.e. is capable to accept it). Nevertheless, some rules have to be given to make the new solutions more trustable and durable in time.

2.2 To promote horizontal relationships between innovative groups of people in different places and countries. The idea is that the best way to start a new initiative is to see how other people in similar conditions did it. The first step in this direction is to create a database of promising cases and good practices.

2.3 To support the conception and development of appropriate enabling systems. The idea is to deliver a dedicated set of products, services and communication artefact in order to empower people capabilities to start new initiatives and, when started, to maintain and to manage them in a more effective way. In practical terms, in many cases, enabling systems can take the form of toolkits: packages of tools and instructions that could permit to group of people to adopt, and locally adapt, different solution ideas.

2.4 To support the use of mobile technologies and digital services as enabling platform to make innovative solutions possible. As a matter of fact, mobile phones are spreading fast in Africa. They can be important tools to support several daily life activities. This possibility can be promoted and new useful services can be conceived.

3. Consider schools as possible *agents of change*. This is a particular but, potentially, very effective choice to be done. In fact, students and teachers can promote social innovation in several ways: from developing diffuse field researches on promising cases, to spreading new ideas in families and in neighbourhood, to actively participate to the co-creation process of new solutions. Between the different kinds of school that could be involved, a particular role could be played by the design school where the capabilities needed to develop specific and localised toolkits can be found.

Policy recommendations: some background considerations

The starting point of our policy recommendations is the following statement: creativity and collaborative attitudes cannot, by definition, be imposed. Creative communities are very delicate social organisations and every intervention from outside puts their equilibrium at risk. The collaborative organisations that they generate are deeply rooted in specific places and communities and the idea of reproducing them in different contexts seems to be very difficult. Nevertheless, looking at them more attentively, it appears that something can and should be done to consolidate them, to make them more accessible and enable them to be replicated in an easier way, without losing their original qualities.

Bottom-up, top-down, peer-to-peer interactions. Creative communities and collaborative organisations have been described until now as *bottom-up* initiatives: actions “from the bottom” that give rise to promising cases of social innovations. However, a closer observation of their evolution from initial idea towards more mature forms of organization indicates that their possibility of long-term existence, and often even of the starting move, depends on complex mechanisms, and that the initiative taken directly by the people concerned (bottom-up interaction) is often supported by information exchanges with other similar organisations (peer-to-peer interaction) and by different kinds of intervention by institutions, civic organizations or companies (top-down interaction).

For instance, a micro-nursery exists thanks to the active participation of the mothers and fathers involved. However, it may have been started looking to the experiences of other groups (and eventually interacting with some of them) and it may be backed up by specific top-down initiatives and enabling tools, e.g. a guide-book indicating, step by step, the procedure to be followed in starting up and managing it; local authority support in assessment (to guarantee its conformity to established standards); the support of a centralized service (in case of educational or medical problems that cannot be solved within the nursery itself).

This example, like many other similar ones that can be given, tell us that creative communities existence (their starting up, their daily life and their possible improvement) usually emerge out of a complex interplay between bottom-up, top-down and peer-to-peer interactions. Therefore, even if the creativity and collaborative actions cannot be planned, something can be done to make their existence more probable, lasting and capable of spreading.

New governance tools. It is possible to improve a context’s capacity to support creative communities and collaborative organisations. To do that *new governance tools* have to be developed to facilitate the regeneration of specific context traditions, to foster an appropriate technological infrastructure, to cultivate new talents (new skills and abilities) and, above all, to generate a favourable social, political and administrative environment. To move in this direction, a main problem appears and derives from the very nature and spirit of this social phenomenon: these collaborative organisations, even if they are mostly the result of bottom-up initiatives, in order to provide guarantees for further development, at some point have to be structured by a top-down framework.

In particular, top-down interventions shall occur to establish an operative framework within which creative communities promoters and users find the necessary guarantees to adopt these as everyday life services. If we take for example the micro nurseries, the responsibility of the children safety, hygiene conditions, adequate care, the punctuality of the service, etc are serious issues that require the backup of an institution that guarantees its quality, requiring thus top-down measures.

These top-down measures must thus be able to establish conditions for *trust* among promoters/users of a collaborative organisation. And, to do that, the needed governance tools shall be able to balance, in a very sensitive way, between tolerance and control.

The local authorities’ role is therefore that of creating and implementing *enabling systems*: systems of rules, communication artefacts, infrastructures, services and products able to stimulate and support social innovation initiatives. These enabling systems major role is the one of reducing the threshold to start a new initiative and to facilitate its organisation and implementation. But, on the basis of what it has just been said, it is also the one of legitimating some appropriate forms of control and, most importantly, integrating the lack of trust.

In this perspective, information and communication technologies in general (and mobile technologies in particular) could become a very powerful tool to facilitate the shift from the present rigid and mainly hierarchical governance models, to more open, flexible and horizontal ones. Thanks to these new, network- based governance models the needed balance between tolerance and control could be established in the most sensible way. And thanks to them, creative communities existence could be more effectively promoted, supported and helped to become a mature form of social innovation.