

28. Concluding remarks

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‘Can creativity be measured?’ Having sat through this conference I now wonder if we haven’t got the title wrong; shouldn’t it have been: ‘Should creativity be measured?’

From the policy perspective, there seems to be a link between creativity and innovation which makes creativity enticing to measure and possibly to foster. This if we neglect the dark side of creativity evoked by Roland Schenkel at the beginning of this conference: after all, if we are in the present financial crisis, we also have to thank the innovative and creative financial experts which have saddled our banking system with toxic assets.

But is this the right direction? Can we achieve with measures of creativity something better that we can achieve with measures of innovation?

I think of Jared Diamond’s fascinating description of the ingenuity and creativity of aborigines at a primitive level of development as even superior to that of modern man — he argues that New Guinea aborigines’ intelligence is superior to that of Europeans. What makes civilisation possible in some places and difficult in others — he says — is not the quality of its inhabitants but a set of local circumstances.

It is very likely that creativity is uniformly spread among human beings of all regions and status. One of Carlo Maria Cipolla’s five fundamental laws of stupidity makes a similar claim about, of course, stupidity.

What would happen if we measured creativity using some aggregate measure ‘A-la-Florida’? I very much suspect that we would discover that the country which is top in innovation, say the US, is also top on creativity. And that a country that is bottom in innovation, say Krakozhia, is also bottom in creativity. But this strikes me as odd.

I would believe, with Diamond, that inhabitants of unlucky Krakozhia, where nothing works, are much more creative than lucky Americans. Thus Krakozhians are creative, they need to be, simply to get on with their lives. Thus perhaps a composite country index of creativity is a bad idea.

Of course it would be interesting to look at enablers of creativity, although we are likely to find many of those already included in measurements of innovation or of competitiveness (regulatory climate, protection of copyrights, and so on).

The reflection of Florida on the role of 'tolerance' also deserves to be pursued. There are, probably, in our society 'animal spirits', such as Florida's tolerance, which possibly link to trust, and research is likely to find that a society which makes trust possible also makes the visible (bigger C) manifestations of Creativity possible. Today, researchers such as Robert Wilkinson and Kate Pickett link trust to equality, which opens up the fascinating possibility of social capital research; Would this imply that less unequal societies are more creative?

A story apart is the role of education. Does education promote creativity or inhibit it? The fourth grade slump was already mentioned at this conference (by Mark Runco). I would consider interesting measuring individual creativity — PISA-like — among young people to see if features of educational systems can be identified which promote creativity (or which do not annihilate it). Can creativity become a key competence which educational systems can nurture (see Hélène's Clark speech)? More reflection is needed on the topic.

Finally, I would like to thank the organisers of this conference, the staff of Teamwork, and our colleagues Cristina Marcone and Ernesto Villalba for making this even the success it has been.