THE RISING OF HUMAN-BASED ENTERPRISES IN SPAIN, AND THE SELLING OF ‘INTANGIBLES’

Hugo Valenzuela García & José Luis Molina González
Departament of Social and Cultural Anthropology
UAB, Barcelona

PE18. Anthropology of knowledge business IUAES, August 2013

RESEARCH CONTEXT

• Project “New Economy 20+20” by the Spanish Ministry
• Sample: 20 companies (in Spain).
• Team: 7 anthropologists (Madrid, Mexico DF, Barcelona…)
• Ethnographic Research on “human-based enterprises”
  • Companies where the ‘human factor’ is put in the center.
‘ARCHEOLOGY’ OF THESE ENTERPRISES

- Fordism
  - Post-fordism
    - Flexible production
  - Communication Era + Transport revolution
  - Post-executive enterprises
    - A context of economic crisis
    - Self-employment
    - Knowledge is highly commoditized (intangibles)
    - Routinization of innovation
WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY ‘HUMAN-BASED’ COMPANIES?

Companies that emphasize the human side of their organization from different points of view:

From inside – horizontal management, relaxed” work environment.
  • Care to social relationships within the enterprise

From inside – good relationships with clients, suppliers and other stakeholders are privileged.
  • Selling policy, environmental friendly.

An active policy of social networking- they foster interaction between actors.

Bring into the human dimension in product design, workspaces, technology.

Incorporation of Social Sciences and Humanities – as sources of distinction and wealth.
SOME ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES
CULDESAC: “LABORATORY OF IDEAS”

Creative space of “design, communication & experience”.

• Young staff (under 30).
• “Horizontal” management.
• Empathic, iconoclast, and collectivists, conformists.
• Playful attitude
• Cooking and eating together = togetherness
• There’s another way to do things
• Clients: Zwarovski, Aston Martin, etc.
FUNKY PROJECTS

"There are people who innovate in technology, but we innovate in the relationship between people, so that relationships are more exciting and fun..."

“We do have a knowledge and cross-value through which we innovate putting people first”

• A guru that preys ‘social transformation’ (not a la Marx)
• Agitation for innovation, deconstruct to construct.
• Following in the footsteps of BMW, Apple, Google, Whole Foods, Microsoft, Starbucks ...
  • Clients: Texaco, Sarah Lee, Infojobs, Telefónica, Philips, etc.
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEpH6ILV_xI
VERKAMI: CROWDFUNDING LEADERS.

- Promotion of artist projects through popular funding
- Reciprocity, empathy, “democracy” of creativity by the way of Internet
- Social networking
MONVÍNIC: WINE’S CULTURE

A glocal combination

• Slow-food.
• Production of proximity.
• More than 5000 types of wine
• Environmental friendly … but expensive!

…
KEY ASPECTS

• Innovative enterprises: social focus.
• Diversity within the "human-based" label
• Horizontal self-management
• Flexible and multidisciplinary teams
  - Incorporation of humanistic knowledge in a disruptive way
• Small scale companies.
• Physical spaces that display the idiosyncrasies.
• Economic profit is not the only goal
• **Reciprocity** based on the moral commitment with the projects
• Dense **empathy** and shared beliefs
• Relevance of **meaningful work**
• **Learning** and knowledge are prioritized and valued.
• **Blurring** separation between the “world of work” and the “world of life”.
• **Young**, international, high education profile
FEW CRITICAL REMARKS

• Do we face a new paradigm of work and labour relations?
  • Or maybe is another subtle step of commodification?

- Mass production of material goods
- Custom, flexible production of material goods
- Mass production of experiences
- Custom production of experiences

• Florida’s “creative class”: super-entrepreneurs of self-exploitation by other means?
  • No better panopticon than oneself.
  • Are they contra-cultural or alternative?
  • … they work for big Capital.
  • Non-alienated work?
    • Family, social, personal costs are high.
  • Horizontal management.
    • There are still owners and employees…..
THANK YOU!