

ANTONIA introductory speech for FLN Launching event

Budapest - Tesla Lounge 28th March 2017

On behalf of the partnership, that gathered here today to publicly launch this project, I'm pleased to introduce it to the ones who might not be very familiar with it, and might wonder what this pretty large group of people, from 9 European Countries will actually be busy-in during the coming days... the coming months & years.

It all started from MUSE, the newest science museum in Italy. In 2013 we opened the first fabrication space housed in a museum in Italy, since we believe that "Fabrication Laboratories" are not just new places, new fashion & trends for geeks, but they are innovative workspaces, in which the digital manufacturing tools are available to the public, and where people implement practices of sharing knowledge, for the purpose of technological innovation and collective services.

In this respect, Fablabs we believe could become a key structure for innovative manufacture, for "bottom-up" and open innovation.

We then conceived the idea to focus on this sort of places, to strengthen their role as knowledge and capacity activators, as societal hubs, and also as business promoters.

This idea was welcomed and shared by the other 8 partners in Central Europe, that greatly contributed to develop what became the project that we're launching here today: FABLABNET.

Already in the name, this project clearly expresses its very meaning: it is made-up by a Network of partners who collaborate. To build up a network means to link and put into relation different individuals & the more the connections among the knots of the web are, the better will be the efficiency of the network in sharing and developing innovative ideas (as Greg Horowitz put it in "The Rainforest" [The Rainforest: The Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley, Regenwald, 2012]).

Cooperation - in fact - is at the core of this project... to cooperate among partners, but also among stakeholders, among us - the people - is crucial to the overall, balanced development, to overcome the social and economic challenges we face in these days.

Cooperation has never been so crucial in shaping solutions to global uncertainties. Fostering collaboration across stakeholder groups, both public and private, is key to driving economic growth -on the one hand, while ensuring social inclusion - on the other.

Through the network, the FabLabNet will connect various organizations and individuals from different fields: industries, education, society and politics, to support the effective development of innovation within organizations and impact both locally and transnationally on socio-economic conditions.

The subtitle refers to the aim of this project: "Making Central Europe more competitive by unlocking the innovation capacity of Fablabs within an enhanced innovation ecosystem".

In other words, the main objective of the project is to demonstrate Fablabs key role in the innovation process, and serve as an engine of inspiration and attraction of new talents, thanks to the circulation of a selection of the best format and practices at the international level.

The goal of FabLabNet project is to contribute to the development of a new manufacturing model - the most distributed and within reach - through a number of transnational actions. These actions will aim for building, supporting and reinforcing the subjects that deal with innovation in some specific regions of

Central Europe, acting and fueling the so-called innovation ecosystems. FabLabNet, therefore, put in close contact small and medium sized technology companies, educational institutions (colleges and vocational schools), research centers and - in the case of MUSE - museums - as well.

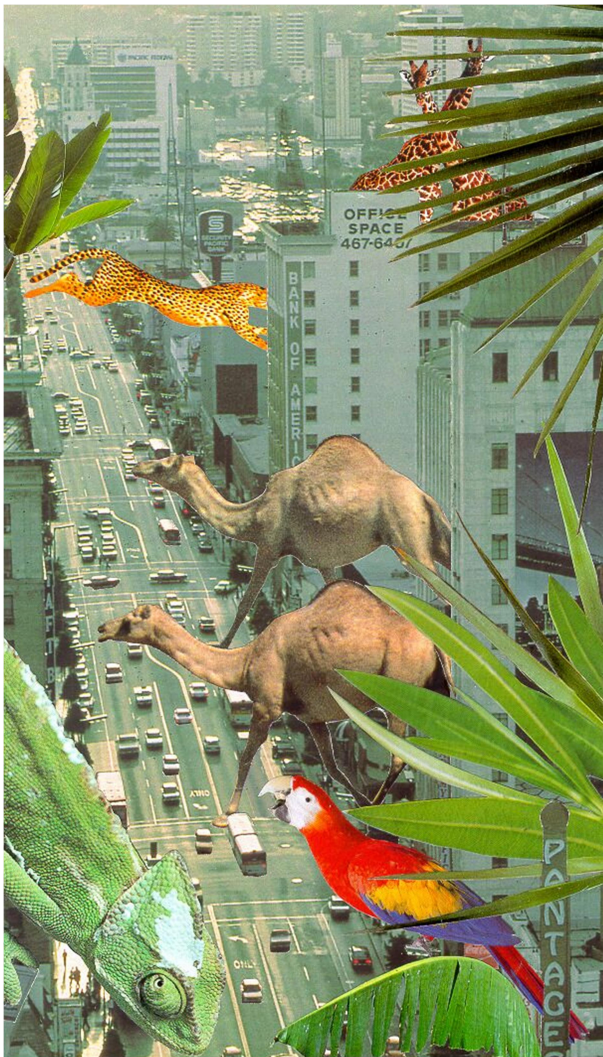
In the long run, the result we wish to obtain is the increase in the competitiveness of the Central European companies, thanks to the contribution that the Fablabs will give to the digital transformation of business, in the context of Industry 4.0.

A further outcome will be the recommendations made by the partners on the basis of their practical experience gained during the project, referring to the territorial development strategies (the SMART SPECIALISATION STRATEGIES); these recommendations could serve to guide local policies.

In this way, we hope to contribute to the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution”.

Here, allow me just to mention that in the entire Western World a technological development: a technological revolution started, that will fundamentally alter the way we live, we work, and we relate to one another.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution will change not only what we do, but also who we are. It will affect our identity and all the issues associated with it: our sense of privacy, our notions of ownership, our consumption patterns, the time we devote to work and leisure, and how we develop our careers, cultivate our skills, meet people, and nurture relationships.



Collage. Courtesy arch. Alessandra Tomasi

Last year World Economic forum Founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab in his keynote speech said:

“We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors, to academia and civil society.

Already, artificial intelligence is all around us, from self-driving cars and drones to virtual assistants and software that translate or invest. Impressive progress has been made in artificial intelligence in recent years, driven by exponential increases in computing power and by the availability of vast amounts of data, from software used to discover new drugs to algorithms used to predict our cultural interests. Digital fabrication technologies, meanwhile, are interacting with the biological world on a daily basis. Engineers, designers, and architects are combining computational design, additive manufacturing, materials engineering, and synthetic biology to pioneer a symbiosis between microorganisms, our bodies, the products we consume, and even the buildings we inhabit.”



Collage. Courtesy arch. Alessandra Tomasi

In these years we witnessed increasing de-materialization and digitalization; knowledge is also becoming mainly digitalized. However, learning and knowledge are strictly linked to “the making”, to the use of our hands. Cognitive anthropology shows that the hand function in the homination process and the cognitive abilities development of our species is the bridge between the inner thought and the outer environment - between us humans, and all what is around us. Hands allow us to know, and therefore also to participate in the process of the technological development of the 4.0 industry.

We believe that Fablabs contribute in several ways to this process of innovation:

- To foster social innovation - for being inclusive hubs, and communities aggregators
- To support economic innovation – by promoting bottom-up, collective business
- To foster educational innovation – by promoting life-long learning, offering what for Homo sapiens is the basic condition of “learning by doing”.

If on one side, Fablabs will thus enhance knowledge by hands-on activities, on the other they will open up to future work possibilities.

Like the revolutions that preceded it, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential to raise global income levels and improve the quality of life for populations around the world.

As the economists Brynjolfsson and McAfee pointed out "the revolution could yield greater inequality, particularly in its potential to disrupt labor markets. As automation substitutes for labor across the entire economy, the displacement of workers by machines might exacerbate the gap between returns to capital and returns to labor. However, it is also possible that the displacement of workers by technology will result in a net increase in safe and rewarding jobs".

We cannot foresee at this point which scenario is likely to emerge, and as we frequently witness that the outcome is likely to be some combination of the two. However, as Klaus Schwab declared “in the future, talent - more than capital - will represent the critical factor of production”. And he adds: “The Fourth Industrial Revolution can compromise humanity’s traditional sources of meaning – work, community, family, and identity – or it can lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a sense of shared destiny. The choice is ours”.

Therefore, Fablabs could play a pivotal role creating networks and offering their space for inspiring creativity and innovative ideas, fostering entrepreneurship, welcoming different communities to dialogue and share knowledge. Knowledge, is key factor for a better future.

In the end, it is all a matter of people and values. We need to shape a future that comprehends each and every one of us by putting the people first in each respect, and by empowering them. The Fourth Industrial Revolution may indeed have the potential to “robotize” humanity and thus to deprive us of our heart and soul. Looking at it in a positive way, however, as a complement to the best parts of the human nature expressed in creativity, empathy, stewardship, it can also lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny. We all have an obligation to strive to make the latter possibility prevails.

Innovation must be rooted in knowledge: training & education, life-long learning are essential.

Borrowing a couple verses from the poem of Hungarian poet Yosef Attila, I wish to remember that learning, no matter if via formal or informal education, is crucial for individual’s emancipation and societies’ development:

*“If Mr Antal Horger’s pleased
our poest’s grammar study ceased
folly’s
jollies*

*no high school, but a Nation I,
although he like not, by and by
shall teach
shall teach”.*