

THE SOCIAL SIDE OF INNOVATION IN THE CASE OF AN “ENGAGED” UNIVERSITY HUB

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Purpose – The paper combines contributions from the service ecosystems perspective, the social innovation and the civic university approaches, to analyse an emerging phenomenon occurring in the East area of Naples (Italy) and involving the implementation of a knowledge intensive hub in the San Giovanni a Teduccio site of the Federico II University. The study aims at providing an insight in the innovation and knowledge transfer mechanisms engendered by the Federico II University San Giovanni Hub (SGH), herein also referred to as the “Hub”, by detecting the most relevant performance indicators in the framework of service and social innovation conceptualisations.

Design/Methodology/approach – Following the civic university approach, the main research question guiding the investigation concerns whether the San Giovanni Hub third mission experience can be considered both a social and a business mission in nature. Hence, the analysis emphasises the specific patterns characterising the Hub and the related policy instruments and entrepreneurial experiences (i.e. Apple, Cisco, Deloitte) implemented within it. Therefore, technology and knowledge transfer characteristics in the case of the SGH deserve a specific notice.

In order to achieve such purposes, a qualitative analysis has been performed by means of a case study methodology on the SGH, where data have been gathered by participant observation, narrative documents and 25 in-depth interviews to the main stakeholders of the Hub. The rationale for the selection is a peripheral and less developed urban area hosting a knowledge-intensive site and the target population is derived from the Stakeholder map of the San Giovanni Hub, mainly involving: Academic staff working in hub, supporting staff, firms located in the area or connected by relational proximity, Apple Academy and Digita Academy organisational staff, students sample; Local government representative; further primary Stakeholders; selected entrepreneurial organisations located in the surrounding area.

Findings – The investigation on the role of the University as partner and collaborator in peripheral/deprived urban provides a thorough understanding of: i. the nature of the Hub in terms of service innovation; and ii. the innovation strategy implemented or planned by the university governance and local government institutions according to civic university purposes.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable) – The gap to be filled and the contribution to the theoretical framework reside in assessing the value co-creation of a knowledge intensive site embedded in a peripheral and less developed urban context.

Practical implications (if applicable) – The outcomes of the analysis can be used as a valuable tool for both the University governance and managers of local urban institutions to promote or enhance knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial activities in the selected area.

Originality/value – By blending together contributions drawn from social innovation and the civic university perspective, our study attempts to provide an insight in the innovation and knowledge transfer mechanisms engendered by the SHG, eventually detecting relevant qualitative indicators in the framework of service and social innovation conceptualisations.

Key words (max 5): Social Innovation, University Engagement, Service innovation

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