

Report roundtable in The Hague, Nov. 24th 2009¹ www.ethicsandtechnology.eu/NewManifesto

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During this New Manifesto round table, organized by the 3TU.Centre for Ethics and Technology, we had some excellent speakers whose talks gave rise to challenging discussions. Videos of their contributions, as well as some other outputs of the round table, can be found at the event's webpage. Therefore, I will here limit myself here to highlighting some of the discussion points and concrete examples that – in my modest opinion – seemed the most relevant and enriching for the New Manifesto in its current draft.²

Innovation and design

While the old Sussex Manifesto assumed a quite linear process from R&D to innovation, the New Manifesto recognizes that there are nowadays many different types of innovations and innovation processes, sometimes involving very different types of actors. Luc Soete, one of the speakers, already analyzed this change very well in a recent publication (Soete 2008). At the round table two very nice examples were given of such 'innovations new style' contributing to development goals:

- The first is the so-called *Life Straw*, one of the many design projects undertaken by students of speaker Prabhu Kandachar (Kandachar et al. 2007 – www.io.tudelft.nl/bop) from the TU Delft's faculty of Industrial Design Engineering. With a seemingly simple plastic tube (see picture on next page) people can drink safely from any water source, as a water purification device has been build into this drinking straw. The Life Straw has now been put on the market for \$3.5 each by a commercial company.
- The second example is that of innovative types of *female condoms*, prototypes of which were shown by Monique Deminint. She works for the Universal Access to Female Condoms program (UAFC, www.condoms4all.org). This program was created on request of African development organizations and is a joint initiative of NGO Oxfam Novib in collaboration with other partners. Until recently, only one type of female condoms was available, with clear setbacks such as its noisiness and high price. UAFC aims for a greater diversity at lower prices. This should reveal a hidden demand. A beneficial circle is expected from more choice to more demand, more incentives for local producers and hence more choice and lower prices (etc). The first prototypes were developed in Europe, but new varieties are now being developed in India. Needs and cultural aspects coming from the countries themselves are taken into account. The set-up of country

¹ I would like to thank the people of the STEPS for taking this important initiative of the New Manifesto project (<http://anewmanifesto.org>) and working together so pleasantly in organizing this round table.

² Any report of a rich round table discussion has to be selective by necessity. I regret not being able to do justice to all contributions made, both by speakers and participants. The choices made here are entirely my own and the report has not been proof-read or formally approved by any of the speakers or participants.

programs to promote its usage is done by local organizations. The female condom is expected to contribute to reducing HIV infections and to female empowerment.

These examples not only illustrate the diversity of innovation pathways and actors involved (like students and NGOs), but also the immense potential of design – already mentioned a couple of times in the draft for the New Manifesto - as an entrance point for bringing about the *technological* diversity that the New Manifesto seeks to promote.



The 'Life Straw' – an example of how good design can contribute to alleviating poverty



A female condom – more diversity in available designs can contribute to women's empowerment and HIV reduction

The role of the social sciences

Yet, so participant Sietse Vellema (Wageningen University for Life Sciences) warned, we should not make the mistake to think too much about innovation in terms of material artifacts. We should also not think about it in terms of big and new, which would be at the expense of important incremental changes and improvements. Since the word 'innovation' has these limited connotations for many people, he challenged the New Manifesto project to come up with a better term. He illustrated his argument by pointing out that the female condom may be an artifact, but it is also the material foundation for the way we deal with our social life, our sexual life, and our marriages. He urged the people from the New Manifesto project to take this social and cultural dimension of innovation seriously. "A lot of cutting edge engineering that we are doing in Delft is already incorporating that!", Jeroen van den Hoven was quick to respond. He said that there is really a whole body of knowledge about usage, participatory approaches (et cetera), incorporating insights from social scientists and anthropology. "It is being done, although more should be done obviously. But we are moving in the right direction." Kandachar added that "it may look like we put artifacts central, but it is actually about the needs of people." He mentioned a PhD thesis that one of his doctoral students will soon be defending. It is about health care and the doctoral student has designed so-called 'persuasive technology' to convince young women in rural areas to change their hygienic behavior, which he could not have done without insights from the social sciences. Also in the case of innovations like the Life Straw it requires a lot of design 'tweaking' to get it right in terms of usability, affordability, cultural aspects, etc. For example, a different design turned out to be necessary for small children, as they do not yet have enough sucking power. Kandachar's students hence do extensive (user/context) preparatory research, using social science methodologies. It seemed then

that people in the round table were actually very much in agreement with one another. Innovation scholar and economist Luc Soete (UNU-MERIT) had already touched upon it earlier in the round table, when he noted that diffusion elements must enter the innovation issue and that technical universities, compared with 40 years ago, now (have to) interact with other disciplines, like cultural anthropology. His feedback to the New Manifesto project team was that the 3Ds that are so central in it (i.e. direction, distribution and diversity) do not sufficiently include the possibility of social sciences entering the innovation process.

The role of ethics

To the importance of the social sciences Jeroen van den Hoven, scientific director of the 3TU.Centre for Ethics and Technology (3TU.Ethics), added the importance of ethics. Like the social sciences, this discipline is currently not mentioned explicitly by the New Manifesto project. Yet its importance is obvious considering the call of the New Manifesto project to pay more attention to distribution issues related to innovation – the distribution of benefits, as well as costs and risks. Also the question of the desirable direction in which to move is, Van den Hoven claimed, “squarely within the realm of ethics.” In his presentation he sketched a vision of ethicist closely collaborating with engineers and designers, in order to make sure that our designs and technologies– which are not value-neutral! – incorporate / materialize / embed our properly reflected moral values (see Van den Hoven 2007). “And for clever ethical design you have to drill down to the details of economics, technology and institutions”, he emphasized. The new grant program ‘Responsible Innovation’ (www.nwo.nl/mvi) of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) was mentioned by him as a ‘best practice’ of how to stimulate the right sort of research. This experimental and unique program demands that ethicists, social scientists and engineers/designers work together on socially relevant research projects concerning innovation. Such projects should be pro-active with respect to new innovations and take a ‘make’ perspective – meaning that even ethical reflection should contribute to concrete solutions. Applicants are also required to make a ‘valorization plan’ for the interaction with stakeholders during and after the research. And the project should have an international orientation. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the ministries that have invested in this program and hence problems of global justice and development are part of the agenda of the Responsible Innovation program.

“Who’s ethics should be influencing design? From the local culture? From us?” speaker Jasper Grosskurth asked after hearing this presentation. Van den Hoven readily acknowledged that this is an important question. But any collective action is always the result of stakeholders working together that are convinced by certain arguments. That is what ethics can do: make a solid case, ask people to look at the proposal and arguments and criticize it if they do not like it. But everybody is always using its own voice against his own background. Moreover, Van den Hoven added, often there are not life-and-death ethical issues at stake; often we talk about questions concerning ‘the good life’. Here descriptive ethics and social sciences can play a role in clarifying those good life issues and a diversity in technologies can be created to accommodate those different good life choices. It thus became obvious that Van den Hoven did not want to propose any specific form of ethics, but just made a call to think more about those ethical questions, just like the New Manifesto project is not proposing one very specific direction in which we should steer innovation, but just urges people to think more about the directions we are moving in.

Getting incentives right

Another interesting discussion topic during the round table – where ethicist Van den Hoven and economist Soete found a common interest – is the issue of incentives. It is not enough, Van den Hoven argued, to have ethicists like Peter Singer say abstracts things about our moral obligations to donate to poverty reduction. It is not going to happen. Instead we should “incentivize morality” – design our institutions in such a way that people have

incentives to do the morally right thing. As a good example at the global level of this approach he mentioned the plan for The Health Impact Fund, led by Thomas Pogge (one of the leading philosophers in global justice debates). According to the website of this initiative "To provide wide access, medicines need to be affordable-but low prices don't create strong incentives for innovators to invest in research and development." The idea is that this fund will be "an optional mechanism that offers pharmaceutical innovators a supplementary reward based on the health impact of their products, if they agree to sell those products at cost." (<http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/igh>). Soete endorsed the importance of incentives: "a tremendous amount of invisible markets exists. The whole issue is: how do you create them using incentives?" He mentioned a couple of examples at a more local level. One of these was that of a 'most beautiful toilet competition' that had apparently taken place in India. It changed the attitude of people towards using toilets; it all of a sudden became something highly fashionable. Another example that he mentioned is that of possible incentive schemes surrounding micro-credits. The person giving out micro-credit has an interest in being paid back. So life-insurance for the receiver of the credit is added to the scheme. But then you need to give this person enough incentives to stay healthy, so you need to promote hygienic habits. Et cetera. Soete called such incentives schemes "extremely experimental, it has to be local. What works in one village may not work in the next." Anthropologists need to work together here with engineers, economists, etc. "Then you avoid all these ethical questions, these have nothing to do with it", Soete claimed. Obviously Van den Hoven did not agree.

Incentives also featured in the talk of lawyer and ethicist David Koepsell. He pointed out that there exist a lot of assumptions on what the system of intellectual property (IP) does without empirical evidence. There are studies that point to countries that were innovative without having an IP system and there exists evidence of IP actually hindering innovation sometimes. So you can experiment with different IP systems which could give different directions to innovation. Koepsell proposed such experiments with intellectual property, inspired by the work of Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian economist, on material property (see Koepsell 2006 and his presentation on the webpage of the round table). Based on De Soto's experiences, he emphasized the importance of finding the best IP institutional design at a local/national/regional level. Soete raised a critical question about the comparability of physical capital that De Soto was concerned with and intellectual capital and David readily admitted that his idea required more work and testing. However, there may be other institutional incentives that we may use as well. Soete proposed prizes as an alternative strategy to motivate innovators: "You acknowledge in an ethical sense the contribution of the innovators, at the same time the knowledge becomes freely available." Koepsell added to this that he had read an article that models prizes versus patents. This article concludes that prizes do better, especially if there is a first, second and third place. This is because it is not a winner-takes-all thing, like patents. Esther Blom of the Delft Centre for Entrepreneurship shared her experience with an 'innovation-business-development game' for master students at TU Delft and the way it motivated the participants in the game. It also attracts a lot of participants from the community of African students at TU Delft. To which Grosskurth responded: "why not more of those prizes/challenges in the developing countries themselves? You do not need a jury from the west to pick out good ideas. That just adds costs."

Market, demand and needs

There is one other topic that I would like to highlight and that is that of markets, demand and needs – how we conceptualize them and how they are related to one another when talking about innovation for sustainability and development. It was never discussed at any length; I am just collecting bits and pieces here from several distinct moments during the round table. In his presentation Soete mentioned the direction of technological change nowadays on the EU, where there apparently exists a top-down vision of creating demand-

led / demand driven innovation. Furthermore, he pointed out that traditional innovation was driven by the top of the income pyramid, while now developing markets are one of the most motivating areas for innovation. This is purely the case in economic terms; it has nothing to do with power changes. Yet the New Manifesto project, so he interpreted, seems to refer to different sort of directions. The presentation of Jasper Grosskurth, who is managing a foresight project on technology in Africa, sketched a picture of rapid, out-of-control diffusion of all sorts of ICT-related technologies in Africa. The message seemed to be: we have no control over the direction. Later he nuanced this by saying that he meant to ask the question whether we as a Western society have any choice in what is happening there. People in African countries, individually and/or collectively, do have a choice. ICT innovations in Africa, so I gathered from his presentation, are very much market driven, with NGOs sometimes distorting those processes. An interesting anecdote that Grosskurth had picked up during his recent travels in Africa is that of entrepreneurs deciding not to set up a local internet café, as the business risk was too large that an NGO would come in to 'drop' 500 computers. The discussion about getting the incentives right was of course very much about markets too, about creating the right regulations, institutions et cetera that will give us better functioning markets in terms of what the markets contribute to desirable social developments. And about sometimes making sure that what people really need comes closer to what they desire or demand (as in the example of the most beautiful toilet competition). The female condom case was also interesting in this respect. Vellema noted towards the end of the round table that there seemed to be an assumption that at some time a technology becomes a public good. Why else, he wondered, would one want to advise the UN and other bodies about it. He said to be confused *when* a technology becomes a public good. "You can perhaps defend the female condom example as such, because it is related to health, pregnancy etc. But if you can leave it to the market, you do not need to write a manifesto", he claimed. Hence his question: "When does a manifesto become functional in actual strategies?"

Sustainability and consumption

Finally, it should be noted that one idea came back at several occasions during the round table, namely the importance of consumption limitation in the North as a way to make room for development in the South. It was, however, never discussed in-depth and nobody had any concrete suggestions on how to achieve it. How can one incentivise such consumption limitations, I wonder.

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