



NOVATION

Critical Studies of Innovation

II NOvation Forum

«Reimagining Innovation for the Public Good»

Reflections from the II NOvation Forum

In a world increasingly captivated by the allure of technology and rapid innovation, the II NOvation Forum, held at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), stands as a critical and inspiring milestone. Under the theme «Reimagining Innovation for the Public Good», students, practitioners, and scholars from across the globe gathered to question the prevailing narratives of innovation and to explore alternative futures grounded in social justice, sustainability, and collective well-being.

Building on the foundations laid during the inaugural Forum, the second edition reaffirmed NOvation's mission: to establish an interdisciplinary community around the study of innovation, scholar-led community, a slow-science research endeavour that critically examines innovation as a deeply political phenomenon. It called for a shift beyond the mere deployment of emerging technologies, embracing the social, historical, and ethical dimensions of innovation practices. More fundamentally, it challenged the ideology of "innovation-speak" (according to Vinsel and Russell 2020 book, «The Innovation Delusion») that pervades contemporary policy and academic discourse, inviting us to rethink who innovation serves and how it can truly contribute to the public good.

THE OPENING VISION: A CALL FOR RESPONSIBILITY

The Forum opened with a powerful reflection: innovation must cease to be an end in itself. Societies have too often mistaken technological acceleration for progress, neglecting the social costs and exacerbating inequalities. Participants were urged to recognise that science is but one among many knowledge systems and that unchecked valorisation of technological change risks deepening existing injustices.

In hosting the Forum, UFPR positioned itself as a leading institution in fostering critical debates on innovation in Latin America. Emphasising traditions such as Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Social Technology, the Forum enriched global dialogues with vital Latin American and Brazilian contributions.

DIALOGUES ACROSS BOUNDARIES: THE ONLINE PANELS

The Online Panels showcased a remarkable breadth of critical perspectives. Alf Rehn provocatively explored "innovation pornography," highlighting the fetishisation of novelty without meaningful substance. Alan Irwin examined the fences that separate and connect STS and innovation studies, while Mariano Fressoli discussed how open innovation models might be reclaimed for social good.

A particularly rich session moderated by Cornelius Schubert explored the philosophical dimensions of innovation imaginaries. Samuele Murtinu defended human imagination against AI's rise, Ryan MacNeil critiqued toxic techno-economic optimism that eclipsed environmental concerns, Lee Vinsel unpacked the construction of the "knowledge economy" in 1990s U.S. policy, and Les Levidow explored how grassroots innovation can counter technocratic dominance.

Across these interventions, a common thread emerged: the urgent need for more socially engaged and realistic understandings of innovation. Participants called not for less innovation, but for "better innovation"—more inclusive, imaginative, and conscious of human and ecological systems.

EXNOVATION, FRUGALITY, AND GOVERNANCE: NEW HORIZONS

Subsequent panels introduced new directions, such as "exnovation"—the deliberate discontinuation of harmful technologies and practices. Rick Hölsgens and Karina Maldonado-Mariscal demonstrated how exnovation can foster social renewal through critical unlearning.

Sheikh Fayaz brought insights from emerging economies, arguing for "secondary innovation" and frugal practices as vital tools for inclusion. Monica Edwards Schachter called for a renewed theorisation of innovation governance, stressing the multiplicity and political weight of the concept.

These sessions illuminated paths toward diverse, grounded models of innovation rooted in democratic governance and local realities.

KEYNOTES AND ROUNDTABLES: LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

June Sekera's keynote, «Inverting Power», powerfully reframed innovation governance. Contrasting top-down market-driven energy systems with bottom-up community control, Sekera revealed how collective action and public economy frameworks are essential to secure universal access to goods like renewable energy.

Complementing this, Vincent Blok explored the philosophical and ethical dimensions of distributed innovation, questioning the anthropocentric assumptions embedded in mainstream innovation models and proposing a bio-centred perspective to better align technological development with ecological imperatives. Pierre-Benoît Joly added further depth by analysing the co-production of innovation and governance, stressing the need for more inclusive, democratic frameworks that resist the capture of innovation by narrow technocratic interests.

The Forum's roundtables anchored these reflections in empirical realities. Gabriela Bortz and Regina Oliveira da Silva discussed Latin American experiences of innovation policy, critiquing the persistent gap between rhetorical promises and genuine public benefit. Another roundtable addressed strategic sectors, with Silvestre Labiak, Wagner Ragi Curi, and Ednalva Felix das Neves highlighting some promising public policies, the university extension, social technologies, and solidarity-driven innovation as crucial tools for addressing systemic inequalities.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: TOWARDS A CRITICAL COMMONS

The II NOvation Forum demonstrated that critical inquiry into innovation is not a luxury but a necessity. In a world shaped by overlapping crises — ecological, social, political — innovation must be reimaged as a field of political struggle, ethical reflection, and collective creativity.

By building bridges between Northern and Southern critical traditions, embracing interdisciplinarity, and valuing 'slow science', NOvation is nurturing a global commons of critical innovation studies. The forthcoming thematic issue of the NOvation journal, the strengthening of scholarly networks, and the enthusiasm expressed by participants all testify to the vitality of this movement.

Inspired by the words of Amartya Sen, *we need to be the first boys—or girls—to imagine better futures* (Sen, 2015). The II NOvation Forum brought us one step closer to that collective reimagining. The road ahead is vast, but the community now forming is equally vast in its ambition, hope, and commitment.

Let us stay connected, stay critical, and continue imagining innovation for the public good.

II Forum Organizing Committee

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