

Chapter 6

Multifactory: An Emerging Environment for a New Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

A Multifactory is a collaborative working environment, which helps its members to grow as entrepreneurs and to innovate as there is a constant exchange between members, and they share experiences and knowledge. A Multifactory is a self-regulated system, where few norms rule relationships between entrepreneurs and innovation comes from everyday interaction between members, which are independent under any aspect, but on occasion can act as if they were parts of a single huge company. Multifactories proved to be places that help a new generation of entrepreneurs to grow, as they count on immaterial assets and shared resources to develop their companies.

INTRODUCTION

Many people say do it yourself, we say do it together, make things together and share knowledge. Parade, M. (2013, July 15). Personal interview.

A Multifactory is a collaborative working environment composed by several economical agents, which can be entrepreneurs, SMEs, solopreneurs, freelancers, artists. Each of these economical entities is independent and autonomous, but they can interact as if they were part of a single huge

company. A Multifactory is usually established in a single huge shared workplace, like a former factory.

What really defines a Multifactory is the particular kind of relationships that take place between members and the presence of a bottom up governance system.

A Multifactory is not a Co-working space, nor a fablab or a makers space, but brings parts of the ideas behind these other concepts of shared working environment and puts them together.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8798-1.ch006

WHAT IS A MULTIFACTORY?

Multifactories are innovative working environments that are the expression of a new way to intend workplaces. Multifactories present peculiar characteristics, also if share several ideas and basic principles with Coworking Spaces, Maker Spaces, and FabLabs, as they all refer to concepts somehow coming from Sharing Economy. According to Focardi and Salati (2015), a Multifactory is a “shared working environment aimed at the production of goods and the supply of services, both in B2C and B2B fields, and is structured as a microcosm of many different economic agents.

These agents have separate properties and operate in an independent way, fully autonomous under an operational, fiscal, commercial, and strategic point of view. But at the same time, they are able to cooperate and share resources in such an integrated way that they can be considered divisions of a single large company. A Multifactory may be seen as an “Invisible Factory,” that is an archipelago of independent companies that can, if needed, operate as a single entity.

The economic subjects that constitute a Multifactory belong to a wide range of industries; they can be SME, craftsmen, or creative companies. They can operate in the art field, in the third sector, or in services (Architects, Web Developers, Video Makers, Photographers, Specialists in Communication, Consultants and free lances). Most of them are devoted to project, product, or distribution of physical goods. So a Multifactory contemplate an adequate fraction of the available space for production and prototyping purposes. The average dimension of the companies included in a Multifactory ranges from micro to small, as they are often start-ups.

They are companies that by structure, style and perspective are in a grey zone between the word of craftsmanship, the free lances, and the SMEs. They are a new class of economical subjects that

refer to past productive categories, but at the same time express specific characters.

To identify these companies in one word, the choice was to introduce the term “Litefactory.” It effectively expresses the “lightness” and flexibility of these economic agents, joint in their propensity to act in the production field”.

Multifactories are self organized workplaces, there is not a unified strategy, there aren’t supervisors and entrepreneurs autonomously lead their companies. At the same time, Multifactories are places where there is an organized network that links all the When they start common projects, the participation of each company in the joint project is completely spontaneous and organized on the basis of bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal agreements.

Multifactories also exemplify that a new way to be an entrepreneur is possible, through knowledge sharing and collaborative principles.

Multifactories are the proof that knowledge can be exchanged between people in a working environment, in order to obtain better working performances, and that this exchange is not based upon any special value engagement.

Multifactories are a kind of collaborative environments where free access to common resources and free exchange of knowledge between people are key factors in the establishment and development of economic activities.

As underlined by Focardi and Salati (2015) Multifactories are environments that prove that the concepts at the base of free knowledge sharing and free access to resources can apply to physical places and spread into “common” society, or people not involved in specific movements, or driven by a particular ethic purpose.

Multifactories also exemplify the social benefit of free knowledge sharing and how to make possible a tangible improvement in social assets through collaborative environments.

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