# RENAISSANCE 4.0:
## networks and human relations for new innovation governance frameworks

*by Laura Martelloni, LAMA Development and Cooperation Agency*

*Increasingly, our world is characterised by complexity, fragmentation and disruption.*

While traditional systems of social, economic and political organization are being relentlessly eroded under the pressure of endogenous and global challenges, we are witnessing the rise of demands of innovation driven by social and environmental instances, where citizens call for an active and central role in shaping what is needed and meaningful to them.

Though it opens to a number of diverse approaches, models and scenarios of application, **social innovation** takes its root in this overall citizens-driven 'theory of change', grounding innovation at the crossroad between participation, co-creation and common good, and placing them as core engines for inclusive and sustainable growth.

All across the globe, we are seeing open and fluid groups of people organizing in ubiquitous communities around missions of social change, using physical and digital spaces and tools to unlock the inventive of peer to peer and horizontal collaboration.

Whether officially branded or defined by their founding nature and narrative, whether intentionally built on specific working, governance and business models or left in the hands of self-regulation and self-sustaining, these movements are becoming mainstream in shaping new infrastructures of innovation oriented to the common good and shared value.

The Impact Hub Network, FabLabs and Living Labs are major examples, providing unedited innovation models based on open access rather than on property, on shared values, and on an overall positioning that, while operating locally, is often oriented to global challenges and performed with an international breath.

*Almost unexpectedly, they are drawing a sound alternative to the dogmas of public and private sectors as places driving change, and are contributing to reinvent the how we look at and experience the 'new'.*

Transformative collective actions do not only need strong motivations. Increasingly, they require the design of unedited environments capable of hosting a highly connected, interactive and collaborative human network. They require ideation, discovery and creation processes able to navigate across chaos and order, divergence and convergence, shifting well beyond control and linearity. They require new frameworks for people to convene, build mutual trust and, ultimately, engage in common projects. All in all, they require to move from a rhetoric based on outputs and outcomes, to value a narrative based on experience.
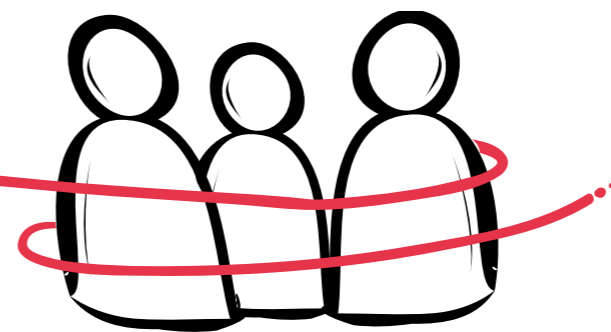
Today, we are in front of the **4th Industrial revolution**. Networks, economy of collaboration, artificial intelligence, digital fabrication and big data on the one hand, and growing societal concerns on the other hand, are putting a major question mark at the horizon of our productive model. The question is if and to what extent it can adapt to this changing scenario not only preserving jobs, but rather driving growth and wealth benefitting all.

If scenarios and effects are yet to be understood, the evidence is that production is now unhooking from the sole domain of economic actors and stakeholders, to become a lab of collective experimentation.

Driven by unprecedented technological capabilities and values of openness, sharing and collaboration, growing movements of people and organizations across the globe are experimenting with a radically new generation of methods, practices and organizational forms to develop sustainable and socially innovative products and services.

We use makers and open manufacturing as the memes of this emerging world, and although these terms reflect complex identities, they clearly call for an opportunity: that of creating a future that embeds democracy in production and inclusion in innovation.

So, how can we accelerate this transition?

For some time now, we have realized that our near-to-7 billion people world is actually a small one. As beautifully highlighted by Barabasi (2002), scientists have been recently learning to map our interconnectivity, pointing out the extent to which we are all connected to each other within a 'complex universal puzzle'. While this seems to confirm that no man is an island, scientists and network experts have also revealed something that, for many centuries in human history, has remained little

more than an intuition: every person is a door to a different world, but there are persons that open to much more worlds than others.

Surprisingly, new insights on complex networks such as the human brain, natural ecosystems, transport networks, the Internet and our global human network are putting a spotlight on a recurrent architecture, unveiling the existence of precise patterns and rules according to which such networks form, evolve and act.

Now we know that most complex networks are characterized by hubs - highly connected nodes that keep together all the others -, and that their presence within a networked system allows the latter to thrive. We know that **influencers** - whether they act in real or digital environments - play a crucial role in spreading ideas and innovations, and that the network topology within which they act is a crucial element to predict the diffusion and adoption of such ideas and innovations. Increasingly in our Internet of everything society, we know that the border between real and digital life is a slight one, enabling information that is invisible offline to become visible, allowing for unforeseeable discoveries.

Nowadays, networks are almost mainstream in the vocabulary of innovation. What remains yet untapped, however, is our capacity to decipher and interpret innovation as a result of a complex network of social and economic interactions, driv-

en by specific systems of values and beliefs, and capable of self-organization, adaptation to turbulences, and learning.

*We now have the unprecedented opportunity to create* **a new Renaissance**. *Against individualism and anthropocentric visions, innovation governance frameworks based on networks and on human relations can steer radically new patterns of change, enabling a collective, distributed project of self-empowerment towards an innovation driven by the common good.*