



## Empowerment by imitation

Conference paper by Hamza Safouane

Imitation is the surest path to progress. This may be a heresy to some, but it is a fact to many. Originality is pretentious and authenticity is non-existent, but imitation is unavoidable, even when trying the opposite. Copying, parroting, aping are what makes us human. Children who have everything to learn do it by mimicking. The art of creation is nothing but a reflection upon what was written, painted, filmed before. The freedoms and hopes earned through the revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring owe everything to imitation.

Entrepreneurs know this all too well. Apple did not invent the digital music player, nor the tablet or the smart-phone. It built upon existing, albeit much less glamorous, products. The Schumpeterian distinction between the replicative entrepreneurs and innovative entrepreneurs does not eliminate the inherently incremental nature of creation. The two legs of human race are invention and imitation.

It is, therefore, a futile endeavour to re-invent the relationships between entrepreneurship and civil society in fostering a stable and socially just development of society. There are countless initiatives across the world, including the Arab countries, where associations promoted the combination of social and economic objectives to achieve fairer development such as the advancement of women entrepreneurship, the reduction of youth unemployment, the transfer of knowledge, etc.

The paths to fair development may involve different social initiatives and projects, and businesses, but the recipe changes little: a modern governance model where representative democracy enables institutional mechanisms of consultation of civil society in fostering local social and economic initiatives. Public authorities should, in other words, institutionalize mechanisms that bring together citizens to decide on the local territorial development. Partnerships between civil society and local public authorities favour the emergence of an economic ecosystem that provides assistance to start-ups and small businesses as well as their stability through time. It is empowerment through co-construction and co-decision.

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