

Capturing Frugal Innovation: Towards a Handbook on the Crossroads of Technology, Entrepreneurship and Global Sustainable Development

11 – 15 February 2019 Lorentz Center @Oort

The workshop 'Capturing Frugal Innovation' was aimed towards bringing together authors of the handbook on frugal innovation and other experts in the frugal innovation debate. During the workshop, participants (1) peer reviewed each other's draft chapters, (2) discussed key messages/goals/issues, target audiences and coherence of the handbook, and (3) discussed the future perspectives of frugal innovation (producing a future research agenda). The workshop was also aimed to stimulate cross-fertilization and lay foundations for multidisciplinary collaborative research initiatives within the frugal innovation community.

During the workshop, the participants worked on a Handbook on Frugal Innovation. This Handbook will be published in 2020. The workshop delivered significant outcomes for (1) the improvement of the contents of existing draft chapters, (2) a more coherent and consistent overall structure of the handbook, and (3) adding new chapters on topics which before the workshop had remained 'below the radar'. Also, during the workshop the ambition has been expressed to intensify the frugal innovation network among those present and beyond by (1) developing a portal or other sharing device through which frugal innovation scholars across the globe can easily contact each other and exchange ideas for and results of their scientific work and propose collaborative work (the LDE Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa is currently picking up this challenge), and (2) organizing annual meetings (changing host locations across the globe) on sub-themes within the research field, bringing together leading scholars in that field. Concerning the latter also an application for another NL Workshop (smaller setting, Snellius) is considered.

The central theme of the Workshop was 'Capturing Frugal Innovation'. The reason for this title was that with existing innovation theories the technological and societal manifestations which are referred to as 'frugal innovation' cannot be fully understood or captured; we may need new concepts and possibly theories to understand this innovation phenomenon. In the sub-group and plenary discussions more clarity has been created about the distinctiveness of frugal innovation and the theoretical notions and perspectives that may be needed to capture frugal innovation. It was agreed by many – on base of scientific arguments – that frugal innovation is distinctive from other forms of innovation. In the various draft chapters for the Handbook which have also been discussed during the workshop first steps have been made or authors have been challenged to go beyond descriptive studies of empirical manifestations of frugal innovation and delve deeper into the theoretical understanding of frugal innovation.

The NL workshop has therefore contributed to a further awareness of the importance to go beyond the empirical and in many of the subgroup discussions this was discussed at detail. As such then the workshop – bringing together leading scholars on frugal innovation – has given a major impetus to bringing this agenda forward and providing a forum in which first steps towards a better theoretical understanding of frugal innovation could be discussed. The multidisciplinary setting has been an important impetus for this development (see also below).

What we as organizers observed - and was also received as oral feedback from participants – was the growing awareness among the participants that a multidisciplinary approach towards the topic is necessary to understand frugal innovation and that participants started to realize that they really could learn from colleagues who approach the topic from a different disciplinary angle or through a different analytical lens. By having also many sub-groups discussions in which scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds sat together to discuss each other's draft chapters, many of the authors of the chapters have become inspired by receiving ideas, criticism and suggestions from different angles and lenses. Most of the authors felt pleasantly surprised with this, apart from the fact that they highly appreciated the time that was available to discuss their chapters at length.

A further 'aha' moment for us as organizers was the Open Space, which raised many good and inspiring ideas on the future agenda of the frugal innovation and has raised a lot of input as well for the final chapter of the Handbook which will be on 'Future Perspectives' in frugal innovation research. From the participants we only

received positive oral feedback, people felt 'heard' and 'appreciated', and really liked the timing of the Open Space, which took place after three intensive days of discussion in workshops and plenaries which followed a much more conventional format. The interaction with invited non-academics during the Open Space was also experienced as 'refreshing' and 'inspiring'.

The program contained both lectures, discussions and other elements.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were structured in a similar way: 'inspiration' keynote lectures (with much time for Q&A afterwards) followed by breakout group discussions in smaller groups (either 4, 2 or many small groups), focusing on different themes – relating to the handbook – each day (key messages/goals/issues, target audience, peer feedback on specific chapters, coherence). At the end of these three days there was a recap session with presentations and a group discussion.

On **Thursday** an Open Space discussion took place, facilitated by the Lorentz Center. The central theme of this day was 'frugal innovation: future perspectives and global challenges'. This was a new format, and it worked out very successfully. The organizers will certainly recommend others to try this format.

The **Friday** program was aimed towards what steps to take next with regards to the handbook. On this day, the program ended early.

Overall, the format was experienced as successful. It was intensive but we felt as organizers that the intensive setting was much welcomed by the participants. The unique location and setting which allows for almost a sort of 'mini-sabbatical' was highly appreciated by us and the other participants. In the academic careers of most of us – after having completed a PhD – there is hardly any time reserved and available anymore for having such intensified contacts and exchange with fellow researchers. Conferences and congresses do generally not allow for such intensive and in-depth exchange. For a next time we would like to explore the opportunities to create and make better use of 'informal spaces and moments of exchange', and reserve more time in the program for this.

We want to express our great appreciation for the staff at the Lorentz Centre, who guided us excellent through the preparatory stage by asking critical questions and giving expertise based suggestions which really improved the format and contents of the workshop. And the organizational and logistic support before and during the workshop was really top.

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