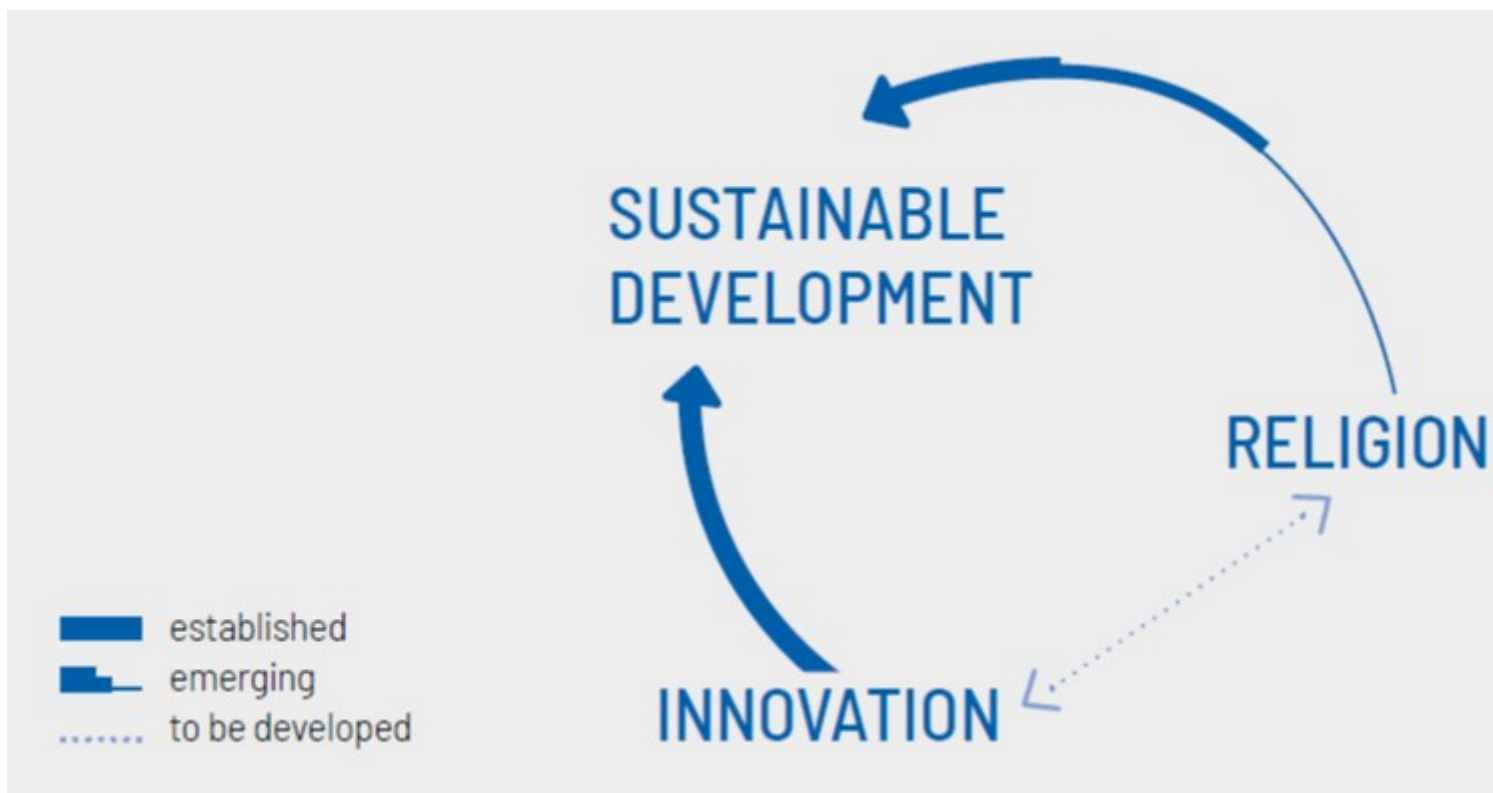


Religion for a better innovation

July 16, 2019

Three reasons why religious freedom matters and is key to sustainable development

In 2015, the [Pew Research Centre](#) estimated that 84% of the global population, equivalent to approximately 6.1 billion people worldwide, subscribed to a religion or denomination. It should come as no surprise that individual believers and faith-based organisations contribute in ample ways to economic growth and innovation processes conducive to [sustainable development](#). Yet this promising landscape is tarnished by evidence of a progressive [crack-down](#) on religious freedoms at the hand of governments worldwide. In this context, protecting and promoting religious freedom and freedom of belief is more important than ever before.



Through its research and action, the Centre for Religious Studies of the Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento, Italy, aims to demystify the contribution of religious traditions and communities to innovation in culture, society, science, technology, politics and the law. Religious freedom and

diversity are key to fuelling innovation. These are the reasons why you, as an individual, organisation or business should care about religious freedom:

1. **Fierce global competition** calls for inclusive and innovative diversity management, able to **attract talents** and retain them through effective social welfare policies. **The promotion of religious freedom and diversity through corporate values and practices can thus allow companies wishing to be on the cutting edge to stand out from the competition.**
2. The UN Sustainable Development Goals urge us all as citizens, institutions and companies to be proactive vis-à-vis the challenges of our not-so-distant future. The protection of religious freedom and diversity, in the form of **pioneering policies and practices**, can become a key feature of corporate identity, **improving companies' reputation** in the eyes of the public, **attracting novel partners, instigating broader policy change and impacting overall economic results.**
3. Fridays For Future is only the tip of the iceberg. **GENERATION Z** – namely youth born in the late 1990s and raised with a smartphone in hand – **shows a keen interest in politics.** Youngsters today are more informed, more competent and less naive. 65% look into the manufacturing processes of the products they purchase, 80% outlaw companies involved in scandals, 70% buy branded products that they consider ethical. **Freedom, integrity and values matter to Generation Z and this consideration reasonably extends to religious freedom and diversity.**

Corporate culture can play a key role in protecting religious freedom, thereby also promoting innovative processes. The role of **religion in innovation** is only one of the three key aspects presented in the position paper recently published by FBK-ISR Centre, which seeks to unpack the complex relationship between religion and innovation. The other two elements concern **innovation in religion** – namely how religious communities and practices understand change and innovation and how they enact processes of renewal or transformation – and the **religion of innovation**, a reflection on the possibility of innovation discourses to assume quasi-religious connotations.

OUR TRIANGULAR MODEL OF RELIGION AND INNOVATION



INNOVATION IN RELIGION

How is innovation being understood, experienced and practised within religious traditions and communities of faith or belief?

RELIGION IN INNOVATION

How do religious traditions and communities of faith or belief contribute to innovation in the areas of culture and society, science and technology, politics and the law?

RELIGION OF INNOVATION

Has the vocabulary of religion itself become a resource for quasi-religious innovation its own system and belief?

From the triangular model on religion and innovation stem **11 recommendations for research and action:**

friend or foe approach.

such is neither a friend of innovation. Diverse religious communities and sub-communities and, indeed, different religious leaders of the same faith have very different attitudes towards innovation. Moreover, such attitudes are open to change. Apart from the longitudinal dimension, also

take into account that, to some extents, religious communities and sub-communities and individuals are already contributing to innovation processes. Conversely, the foe approach should be taken in the opposite direction as innovation as such is neither a friend nor a foe of religion.

Take the context into account.

To avoid unwarranted generalisations that undermine the quality and outcome of the encounter of religion and innovation, action research in this field should be aware of, and systematically heed, the normativity and context-relativity of innovation, the social and cultural context of religion, and the religious and social context of innovation.

or belief.

Do not think of religion as a simple, homogeneous and easily describable phenomenon, but rather think of it as a diachronically and synchronically diversified phenomenon that resists essentialist definitions. Making an effort to think of and approach religious diversity as a resource rather than (just) as a problem may improve

**the lab to the market”
model of innovation.**

Action research in religion and innovation can track, assess and develop alternatives to the still predominant linear (unidirectional) frameworks in innovation research. In many cases – in particular with regard to the areas of social and cultural innovation, but also for innovation in science and technology

and responsibility.

Action and research in religion and innovation can conceptualise innovations in terms of collective agency and responsibility. This requires a focus on both users and providers in innovation processes, as well as on their interactions. Such a focus may benefit both researchers and innovation activists: researchers

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Pursue multi- and interdisciplinary research and combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Given the complexity of the interactions between religion and innovation, action research in this field should experiment multi- and inter-

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in politics and the law.

In addition to social, cultural, scientific, and technological innovation, the scope of action research in religion and innovation may be fruitfully broadened to include less explored areas, such as innovation in politics and the law. In this field, it is promising to study and experiment how the diversification of religious identities, practices, and strategies is questioning

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value systems and the ways in which they are challenged by scientific and technological novelties.

Research and action in religion and innovation should explore the argumentative potentials inherent in the value systems proposed by religious

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think of economic,
technological, social
and cultural innovation as
interrelated processes.

Scientific and technological innovation may occur in response to societal needs and challenges. Vice versa, social and cultural innovation processes may be triggered by the introduction of novel technologies and the diffu-

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Employ an iterative
and dialogical approach
in the identification of
problems and challenges.

In individuating societal challenges, action research in religion and innovation should seek a sustained dialogue with innovation activists and diverse religious communities. Such a participatory approach may con-

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and to opponents
of religion.

Action research in religion and innovation should be sensitive to the arguments pro and con innovation attempts and take into account what opponents of change and innovation have to say in support of their positions, without discarding opposition and resistance to innovation as irrational from the out-

A global future of innovative and sustainable economies cannot eschew freedom of religion or belief. Only if diversity is respected, fostered and promoted, interfaith understanding and peace are possible. Within this framework, **religious freedom is good for business. Governments, civil society and, last but not least, businesses should join forces in promoting freedom of religion or belief.**

Here follows a brief presentation of “**Religion and Innovation. Calibrating research approaches and suggesting strategies for a fruitful interaction**”, position paper of the Center for Religious Studies, Fondazione Bruno Kessler, with the contribution of its Director Marco Ventura and of the researchers [Isotta Rossoni](#), [Boris Raehme](#) and [Valeria Fabretti](#).

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<https://magazine.fbk.eu/en/news/religion-for-a-better-innovation/>

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