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From Policy to Knowledge-in-Action: Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Vietnamese Higher Education from a Social Philosophy Perspective

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the transition toward a knowledge economy, universities are increasingly positioned as central actors in national innovation systems. In Vietnam, policies promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education have expanded rapidly in recent years. However, most analyses focus on policy implementation and economic outcomes rather than the philosophical foundations of knowledge and creativity. This paper examines innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese universities from a social philosophical perspective, drawing on the works of Habermas, Durkheim, and Marx. Using policy discourse analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, the study explores how knowledge functions as a social force shaping human creativity and collective development. The findings suggest that university innovation policies should be understood not merely as governance instruments but as mechanisms for socialising knowledge and empowering human agency. The paper proposes the concept of “knowledge-in-action” to explain how knowledge becomes a form of socially responsible creativity. It concludes that universities in Vietnam must move beyond instrumental innovation models toward a humanistic and socially embedded knowledge ecosystem.

KEYWORDS: A Social philosophy, knowledge society, innovation, entrepreneurship, higher education.

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalisation and digital transformation, innovation and entrepreneurship have become central drivers of economic growth and social development. Across the world, universities increasingly serve as engines of innovation by producing knowledge, cultivating creativity, and connecting research with social needs. Vietnam is experiencing a similar transformation. Higher education institutions are expected to function not only as teaching organisations but also as centres of research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. National policies, such as the National Startup Program and the strategy for higher education development, emphasise the role of universities in strengthening the country's innovation ecosystem. However, much of the current discussion of university innovation remains primarily policy- and managerial-oriented. Innovation is often measured through quantitative indicators such as patents, start-ups, or commercialisation outcomes. While these metrics are important, they do not fully capture the deeper philosophical meaning of knowledge and creativity in academic life. From a social philosophical perspective, innovation represents more than technological advancement. It reflects human beings' capacity to transform knowledge into socially meaningful action. Universities, therefore, function as spaces where knowledge, society, and human creativity interact. This paper aims to reinterpret innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education through the lens of social philosophy. By integrating philosophical insights with policy analysis, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how knowledge can become a socially transformative force.

2. Knowledge and Creativity in Social Philosophy

Social philosophy has long emphasised the relationship between knowledge, human agency, and social development. Classical thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, and Habermas offer important insights into how knowledge functions within society. For Karl Marx, human creativity is closely linked to labour and production. Human beings distinguish themselves from other species through their ability to consciously create new forms of social and material reality. Innovation, therefore, reflects a fundamental aspect of human existence. However, when knowledge becomes purely instrumentalised by economic systems, creativity may lose its emancipatory potential.

Durkheim approached knowledge from the perspective of collective consciousness. He argued that knowledge is not merely the product of individual reasoning but emerges from shared social values and interactions. Universities thus play a vital role in shaping collective intellectual culture. Habermas introduced the distinction between the "system world" and the "lifeworld." In modern societies, economic and bureaucratic systems tend to dominate social life through instrumental rationality.

In contrast, the lifeworld represents the realm of communication, culture, and shared meaning. When knowledge becomes excessively instrumentalised, it risks losing its communicative and emancipatory functions. Innovation in universities therefore, cannot be reduced to technological

progress alone. It should also be understood as a communicative process through which knowledge becomes socially meaningful.

3. Innovation Policies in Vietnamese Universities

Vietnam has implemented a range of policies to promote innovation and entrepreneurship within universities. These include national startup initiatives, innovation centres, and policies that encourage university-industry collaboration. Such initiatives aim to integrate academic research with economic development. Universities are expected to contribute directly to the national innovation system by producing research outputs and supporting entrepreneurial activities among students and faculty.

Nevertheless, policy discourse often emphasises economic efficiency and technological commercialisation. Innovation becomes framed primarily as a mechanism for economic competitiveness rather than a broader social process. This emphasis reflects what Habermas describes as the dominance of system rationality. When innovation policies focus solely on economic indicators, the social and humanistic dimensions of knowledge may be overlooked. A more balanced approach requires recognising universities as social institutions where knowledge is produced, debated, and shared. Innovation should therefore be understood as a process that connects intellectual freedom with social responsibility.

4. Results and Discussion: Policy Implementation and Startup Ecosystems in Vietnam

4.1. Strategic Policy Orientation under Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025)

The promulgation of Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025) marks a significant shift in Vietnam's strategic vision for higher education and national innovation development. The resolution identifies education, science, and technology as key pillars of national modernisation and emphasises the need to transform universities into centres for research, innovation, and knowledge creation.

A notable feature of this policy orientation is the repositioning of universities within the national innovation ecosystem. Higher education institutions are expected not only to train skilled human resources but also to contribute directly to scientific discovery, technological development, and entrepreneurial activity. In this context, innovation becomes a strategic function of universities rather than a supplementary activity.

Resolution 71 also highlights the importance of institutional reforms to strengthen university autonomy, academic freedom, and research capacity. These reforms are intended to enable universities to operate as dynamic knowledge institutions capable of generating new ideas and technological solutions for national development.

From a social-philosophical perspective, the policy orientation reflected in Resolution 71 represents a transformation in the conceptualisation of knowledge in Vietnamese higher education.

Knowledge is increasingly viewed not simply as an educational output but as a productive social force that shapes economic development, cultural transformation, and intellectual progress.

4.2. National Student Startup Program and the Development of Entrepreneurial Education

Alongside this strategic policy transformation, Vietnam has implemented several initiatives designed to promote entrepreneurship among students and young researchers. One of the most influential programs is Project 1665/QĐ-TTg (2017), which supports students' entrepreneurship until 2025. The project seeks to establish a nationwide ecosystem that encourages students to develop entrepreneurial ideas and transform academic knowledge into innovative products and services.

According to official policy objectives, the program aims to achieve several key targets:

- Ensuring that 90% of university students receive training in entrepreneurship and startup skills before graduation;
- Requiring that all higher education institutions develop plans and programs to support student entrepreneurship;
- Promoting the establishment of startup clubs, innovation laboratories, and incubation centres within universities;
- Strengthening collaboration between universities, enterprises, and venture capital organisations.

These initiatives reflect an effort to integrate entrepreneurial education into the broader mission of higher education institutions. Universities are increasingly encouraged to create learning environments where students can experiment with ideas, develop prototypes, and engage with real-world innovation challenges.

4.3. Emerging Startup Ecosystems in Vietnamese Universities

Since the introduction of Project 1665, Vietnam has witnessed a growing number of startup-related activities within universities. Many institutions have established entrepreneurship support centres, startup incubators, and innovation competitions to encourage student creativity. Large universities such as Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, and Foreign Trade University have organised annual startup competitions and innovation programs that connect students with investors, businesses, and research organisations. At the national level, the National Startup Day for Students (SV-Startup) has become an important platform for promoting entrepreneurial culture among young people. The event brings together universities, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and investors to share experiences and support innovative student projects.

These developments illustrate the gradual formation of a university-based innovation ecosystem in Vietnam. Universities are increasingly functioning as spaces where knowledge creation, technological experimentation, and entrepreneurial initiatives intersect. Nevertheless, several challenges remain. Many

startup projects developed within universities remain at the conceptual stage and struggle to scale into sustainable businesses. Institutional support mechanisms also vary significantly across universities, leading to uneven development of innovation ecosystems.

4.4. Interpreting Policy Development through the Knowledge-in-Action Framework

The interaction between Resolution 71-NQ/TW and Project 1665 reveals a broader transformation in Vietnam's educational philosophy and innovation policy. On the one hand, Resolution 71 establishes a long-term strategic vision that positions universities as central actors in the national knowledge economy. On the other hand, Project 1665 operationalises this vision by encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives among students and academic communities. However, a purely policy-driven approach to innovation may risk reducing creativity to administrative targets or economic indicators. The philosophical challenge, therefore, lies in transforming innovation policies into meaningful intellectual practices.

The concept of knowledge-in-action proposed in this study offers a useful interpretive framework for understanding this transformation. Knowledge-in-action refers to the process through which theoretical knowledge is translated into socially meaningful practice through creativity, dialogue, and collaboration. From this perspective, university entrepreneurship programs should not only aim to produce startups but also to cultivate creative citizens capable of applying knowledge to address complex social challenges. Innovation thus becomes a form of socially responsible action rather than merely an economic activity.

These empirical developments highlight the dynamic relationship between innovation policy and knowledge production in Vietnamese higher education. While policy initiatives have created important opportunities for entrepreneurial activity, the deeper challenge lies in transforming these initiatives into sustainable intellectual practices. In response to this challenge, the following section introduces the knowledge-in-action model as a conceptual framework for understanding how universities can integrate innovation, creativity, and social responsibility within the knowledge society.

5. Conclusion

Innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education represent more than policy initiatives aimed at economic growth. From a social-philosophical perspective, they reflect the evolving relationship among knowledge, society, and human creativity in the transition toward a knowledge-based economy. As universities increasingly participate in national innovation ecosystems, the meaning of innovation must be reconsidered beyond managerial or purely economic interpretations. This study has argued that innovation policies in higher education should move beyond instrumental approaches toward a more humanistic understanding of knowledge. Drawing on insights from social philosophy and policy discourse analysis, the paper emphasises that knowledge is not only a resource for economic development but also a social force shaping intellectual freedom, creativity, and collective progress. In

this sense, universities function as spaces where knowledge is produced, shared, and transformed into meaningful social action.

The concept of knowledge-in-action proposed in this study provides a useful framework for connecting academic knowledge with socially responsible creativity. By emphasising the integration of research, education, and community engagement, this framework underscores the importance of translating theoretical knowledge into practical, socially beneficial outcomes. Innovation in universities should therefore be understood not simply as technological advancement or startup creation, but as a broader process of empowering individuals to apply knowledge in ways that contribute to society. Ultimately, Vietnamese universities have the potential to become key actors in building a knowledge-based and innovative society. Strengthening academic freedom, fostering collaborative learning environments, and encouraging socially responsible entrepreneurship will enable universities to transform knowledge into action and creativity into sustainable social development. may enable higher education to serve not only as a driver of economic development but also as a foundation for humanistic and sustainable social progress.

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