

## **Alfons Cornella “Now is the moment to apply imagination to business and take advantage of the multiplying effect of technology”**



Over 1,300 people were present at Barcelona's Palau de la Música on 17th February to attend the Next “Business Imagination Fest”, marking a decade of predicting what will happen in the coming months. Next’06 was more dynamic and creative than ever, with excellent audiovisual presentations, live music and prestigious speakers. Prominent guests included Alex Tai, director of the new special tourism programme led by Virgin Galactic, as well as the President of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia, Pasqual Maragall, who was charged with closing the act.

Alfons Cornella, founder and president of Infonomía, opened the event with a brief overview of Next's objectives and his company's progress over the last 10 years as a network of innovators and a pioneering publication in the culture of innovation in Spain. Speaking in English, Catalan and Spanish (the latter two languages were both used by the Catalan speakers), he summarised the leitmotiv of Next’ 06 – “To prove that the combination of imagination and technology is the key to generating wealth and improving society” – and he described an ambitious future European Infonomía project, whose international dimension will mean English will be increasingly commonly used.

The other major project he announced for the coming months was to consolidate his network of innovators by creating a large-scale project-exchange network to promote interconnection between members.

This year Alfons Cornella was again the master of ceremonies for Next, introducing

each of the speakers and acting as the moderator of an event that was at all times characterised by an intelligent sense of humour, dynamic audiovisual presentations and video interventions and loquacious guests, who were reminded when the seven minutes granted for their presentation was up by the notes of an orchestra playing the tune of John Lennon's *Imagine*.

"In our opinion, the specific language we use to express ourselves at any one time is not important. What is important is that we are able to transmit ideas at a global level. Because the market is now the entire planet", stated Cornella. We think it is possible to mobilise the minds of the country with an imaginative project, with global intellectual magnitude. We have a lot to say".

He also explained how in the last decade Infonomía has detected and disseminated hundreds of innovative initiatives in all sectors "with one thing in common: they are all enterprising". And he highlighted that Next was a festival to "celebrate optimism for what is new. The energy of the enterprising. To celebrate that we have thousands of people willing to get to work and reinvent our economy, using innovation and imagination.

"I'm not saying that everything has been done", he clarified. "But we are on the right track. We need to work even harder, and multiply imagination with technology. It won't be easy. But we've got to do it. It's the world we're going to leave our children. And this is not just a rhetorical statement: it's the plain truth".

Cornella then explained, with the aid of different audiovisual presentations, how the origins of Infonomía go back to 1995, while he was working at ESADE and began to send out emails with his thoughts and soon discovered that "there were thousands of us".

He also paid tribute to "ordinary people who do extraordinary things", as it says in the Infonomía Manifesto, specifically the civil servant who in 1990 approved his application for a scholarship to what was then the National Science and Technology Plan, which "enabled me to go to the United States and learn things that we have applied here".

After the different speakers gave their presentations (which we will summarise

later), Cornella presented his conclusions before the President of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia officially closed the event.

He started by speaking against pessimism, highlighting the great amount of innovative initiatives in this country. The question is to make them known, as Infonomía does, because ““when we have gone to speak to many of these innovators, they have told us that it was the first time anyone here had been interested in hearing about these innovations, even though some may have been reported in the *Financial Times*”

“We need to speak more about this wealth of innovative initiatives in Spain, because they are responsible for a genuine silent revolution in our society and economy”, he said. “Let’s connect them together, let’s give them power in the form of projects to renew the country, in all those things in which we still have a long way to go, such as education, health, justice, etc. And let’s disseminate them all over the world. With my daring formula  $W=3(R\&D)$ ”, he urged.

He then commented on the need to “find a closer relationship between universities and business. We need a great national Business2University project”. Cornella was also committed to “putting hundreds of PhD graduates into business” and to “build an innovation system in the country”.

“An ambitious renovation of companies in this country is needed if they are to have a relevant role in the world – a national project. Without businesses there’s no future. The companies are the country and they should therefore receive greater social focus. A competitive society is the result of having competitive companies”.

In this context, he added, “I think this is an excellent time to create an innovative mental attitude in society in this country. We have the initiative, as has been shown, and we also have the people”.

And he highlighted some emblematic projects currently in progress, such as the 22@ district in Barcelona, or the BioCat bioregion. “But we need a comprehensive point of view to align all the efforts in the same direction”.

Finally, Cornella reminded the audience that the Infonomía project “will continue the struggle, often against generally accepted ideas, to promote the energy of the hundreds of innovators in the country. To learn from them, and, in what will be the

main focus of attention in the coming months, to link them together, connect you together, through a project exchange.

“Infonomía aspires to be in the top European league of innovation. It aims to become a project on a European scale. And that’s where we are”, he concluded.