



RESEARCH2REALITY

Shining a light on research & innovation.

Don't Let Innovators Block Innovation

An interview with Professor Philippe Aghion
Economist, Canadian Institute for Advanced Research

What drives innovation?

My specialty is innovation and growth, and I developed what we call Schumpeterian Growth Theory. It's a new theory of growth based on, inspired by some ideas of Joseph Schumpeter, and I did that in fact with a Canadian co-author, and I have been developing this approach, trying to understand what drives innovation – the creative destruction – associated with innovation and try from there to understand why some societies grow faster than others, why some societies grow and stop growing. And societies that don't innovate are societies that block new ideas. They are necessarily repressive societies, and so it's very important that you let new ideas come in. Of course there's always this contradiction that I want to bring new ideas because I want to have glory, or because I want to make a profit out of it. Once I make that profit, of course I don't like the idea that there'll be new ideas replacing my own ideas. That's the whole dilemma. And you have to have an organization or society that both encourages innovation, but doesn't allow people to get the rights from it to use those rights to prevent subsequent innovators.

What is wrong with the social elevator?

My feeling is that with a big problem in the US is that the social elevator - what I call the social elevator - is being broken. And whereas in Scandinavian countries in particular, they reconcile innovation while maintaining this aspect that you know education training is available to everybody at all stages of their life. Anything that prevents that, that's the problem that I see. Now there is only one danger with the very rich is that they use their wealth to prevent new innovators. But I think the big problem is to say I want to reconcile growth, with social mobility. And if fact, they go together. You see, whatever is good to educate everybody and rebounds, makes the creative destruction work better, and therefore generates more innovation based growth. I think there is a virtuous circle there.