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Computational Analysis of Innovation Discourse: Evidence from a Student Hackathon

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This article investigates how young participants in the Innovation Labs Hackathon, Romania' largest national educational pre-accelerator program, define the concept of innovation at the entry point into an entrepreneurial support structure. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of fields and forms of capital, and the concept of boundary objects, we argue that the Innovation Labs program functions as a boundary object and a site of symbolic positioning. The study examines how symbolic meanings are negotiated at the intersection of academic and entrepreneurial logics. Using a meaning-based recoding grid and cluster analysis applied to 316 open-ended survey responses, five repertoires of innovation are identified: Tech Enthusiasts, Problem Solvers, Symbolic Creators, Institutional Learners, and Social Creatives. These reflect distinct configurations of cultural, social, symbolic, and applied capital, shaped by both individual trajectories and broader field dynamics. Minor differences related to gender and prior hackathon experience suggest differentiated access to legitimate forms of expression and recognition.

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