

Dismantling the Neoliberal Order How Inspiration Economy Can Address Inequality, Instability, and Ecological Crisis?

Mohamed Buheji

Founder- International Institute of Inspiration Economy -Bahrain
Socioeconomic Institute for Advanced Studies (SIAS)- Rwanda

Email: buhejim@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the contrasting paradigms of Neoliberalism and the Inspiration Economy (IE), analysing their core principles, socioeconomic impacts, and potential for transformative change. The study employs a systematic comparative methodology, evaluating both frameworks in terms of governance, labour dynamics, social welfare, and environmental sustainability.

The author also explores how Trumpism emerged as a populist reaction to neoliberalism's failures, blending nationalism with selective neoliberal policies while rejecting its globalist tendencies. The paper then investigates how the Inspiration Economy offers an alternative pathway, emphasising grassroots empowerment, ethical production, and well-being metrics over GDP-centric growth. This work set a path for governments and decision makers on how to transform towards inspiration economy practices and mitigate neoliberalism's adverse effects.

Key findings suggest that while neoliberalism concentrates wealth and undermines social cohesion, the Inspiration Economy fosters inclusive, adaptive, and ecologically balanced development. However, challenges remain in scaling IE models, particularly in shifting entrenched consumerist mindsets and institutional resistance. The paper concludes that integrating IE-inspired policies—such as inspiration labs, community-based enterprises, and cultural incubators—could recalibrate economic systems toward equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Since this research contributes to the ongoing debates about post-neoliberal futures, it proposes actionable strategies for policymakers seeking to transcend austerity-driven paradigms. It recommends a staged transformation from neoliberalism towards economies that are based on abundance, not scarcity models, similar to inspiration economy. This demands bold moves that shake up a world drowned in entrenched corporate power, short-term political cycles, and institutional inertia while it is facing intersecting crises—climate collapse, AI-driven labour disruption, and democratic

erosion. It is a must move for the world's stability and for the revival of the meaning of coexistence with our fellow human beings and other plant creatures.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Inspiration Economy, Socioeconomic Transformation, Sustainability, Creative Economies, Post-growth Paradigms.

1.0 Introduction

The global economic landscape of the 21st century remains deeply shaped by neoliberalism—a paradigm rooted in deregulation, privatisation, and market supremacy. Since its ascendancy in the late 20th century, neoliberalism has been credited with driving economic growth and globalisation, yet it has also exacerbated inequality, financial instability, and ecological crises, Gledhill (2007). The 2008 financial crash, rising populist movements (e.g., Trumpism), and climate emergencies have exposed the limits of this model, sparking urgent searches for alternatives. Among these, the Inspiration Economy (IE)—a framework prioritising human creativity, social equity, and sustainable development—emerges as a compelling counterproposal. Buheji (2016)

This paper examines the ideological and practical tensions between neoliberalism and the Inspiration Economy, arguing that the latter offers a viable pathway to address the former's systemic failures. While neoliberalism reduces human agency to market logic, IE reimagines economies as ecosystems of collaborative innovation, where value is measured in well-being, cultural resilience, and ecological balance, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2025). Drawing on how IE principles—such as community-led innovation labs and ethical production networks—can dismantle neoliberalism's austerity-driven orthodoxy. Buheji (2018), Buheji and Ahmed (2025).

The study is structured in four parts: First, we dissect neoliberalism's core tenets and critiques, including its role in fuelling populist backlash. Next, we introduce the Inspiration Economy's theoretical foundations, contrasting its human-centric approach with neoliberal austerity. Third, we compare their policy outcomes, demonstrating IE's potential to reduce inequality and foster sustainable growth, Buheji (2021). Finally, we address implementation challenges and propose strategies for integrating IE into post-neoliberal governance. Gledhill (2007), Buheji (2016),

By interrogating these paradigms, this paper contributes to a pressing debate: How can societies transition from extractive capitalism to economies that inspire, include, and endure? The answer, we suggest, lies not in reforming neoliberalism, but in replacing its logic with one that prizes collective potential over private profit.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Neoliberalism: Core Principles

Neoliberalism is a political-economic philosophy that emerged in the late 20th century, largely as a response to Keynesian economics and the welfare state models that had dominated many developed countries after World War II.

The principle focus is on deregulation. Neoliberalists believe in reduced government intervention in the economy. This includes removing regulations on businesses, financial institutions, and labour markets. The belief is that less regulation fosters competition, innovation, and economic growth. Hence, free trade barriers to international trade would be one of the main characteristics of this economy. i.e. no tariffs and quotas is used to promote competition, lower prices for consumers, and increase economic efficiency. Gledhill (2007).

Neoliberalism also calls for more privatisation, i.e. transferring ownership of state-owned enterprises (e.g., utilities, transportation, healthcare, education) to the private sector. The argument is that private companies are more efficient and responsive to market demands. This also brings with it fiscal austerity, i.e. reducing government spending and debt. This often involves cutting social programs, public services, and investments in infrastructure. The goal is to balance budgets and reduce the role of the state in the economy. Gledhill, (2007).

The power of labour unions is considered a threat in Neoliberalism, as the goal of this principle is to ease hiring and firing workers, which is believed here it would give more flexibility for businesses. This is seen as increasing labour market efficiency and competitiveness. This helps to emphasise individual responsibility and self-reliance, rather than collective action or government support. Harvey (2006)

2.2 Key Impacts of Neoliberalism

Proponents of Neoliberalism argue that neoliberal policies lead to faster economic growth by promoting investment, innovation, and efficiency. However, others see it that these neoliberal policies exacerbate income inequality by favouring the wealthy and powerful, while weakening social safety nets and labour protections. Venugopal (2015).

Critics also argue that deregulation of financial markets by Neoliberalism can lead to instability and crises, as financial institutions take on excessive risks. Besides, many see from recent history that many austerity measures led to cuts in public services like healthcare, education, and social welfare, which disproportionately affect the poor and the vulnerable. As Neoliberalism also sees no problem with the reduction of environmental regulations, the world can suffer more with an increase of pollution and resource depletion.

Critics argue that the focus on economic efficiency and market forces can undermine democratic values and institutions. The effects of neoliberal policies can depend on the specific economic, social, and political context in which they are implemented. These neoliberal policies have been implemented in different ways and to varying degrees in different countries. Venugopal (2015).

In summary, a neoliberal economy is characterised by a focus on deregulation, privatisation, fiscal austerity, free trade, and flexible labour markets. While proponents argue that these policies promote economic growth and efficiency, critics contend that they exacerbate inequality, instability, and environmental degradation.

2.3 Trumpism as a reaction to Neoliberalism

Trumpism refers to the political ideology and style associated with Donald Trump, characterised by populism, nationalism, anti-establishment rhetoric, and a rejection of traditional neoliberal policies in some areas. The drive in Trumpism is to prioritise the American industries through tariffs and "America First" policies. The movement is focused on direct appeals to working-class voters, often framed as battling elites. Thus, it comes with anti-immigration sentiment and with a willingness to increase deficits (e.g., tax cuts, stimulus spending). Buheji (2025b)

Both Trumpism and Neoliberalism have similarities in being both focused on reducing business regulations and tend to oppose expansive social welfare systems. However, in general, scholars argue that Trumpism is a reaction against neoliberalism's perceived failures (e.g., outsourcing, inequality), even as it adopts some of its pro-business policies. Buheji (2025b)

2.4 Comparison between Neoliberalism and Inspiration Economy

2.4.1 Summary on Neoliberalism Principle and Impact

Both neoliberal and inspiration economy are contrasting approaches to economic and social development. Neoliberalism uses deregulation, privatisation, fiscal austerity, free trade, flexible labour markets, and individual responsibility to create impact and socioeconomic change. This change starts with maximising economic efficiency, competition, and individual wealth creation through market-based mechanisms. Venugopal (2015).

Neoliberalism gives a minimal role for government intervention in the economy, with a focus on maintaining law and order and protecting property rights. This means only a limited social safety net, with an emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance. These principal views human capital as an economic actor that can be developed for the labour market. Thus, neoliberalism focused on GDP growth, inflation rates, trade balances, and other macroeconomic indicators as metrics of Success. Venugopal (2015).

After more than half a decade, researchers now see that neoliberalism has increased income inequality, despite claims by the country to be the source of economic growth. It also brought with it more financial instability, reduced public services, environmental degradation, and erosion of social cohesion. Critics even go further than neoliberalism can exacerbate inequality, undermine social safety nets, lead to financial instability, prioritise economic efficiency over social well-being, and disregard environmental sustainability.

2.4.2 Summary on the Inspiration Economy Principle and Impact

Inspiration economy (IE) focus on fostering the human potential, creativity, innovation, and social responsibility to drive economic and social progress. IE focus on creating a society where communities, organisations or individuals are inspired to explore potential opportunities within their seen or hidden resources to solve problems, create value, or bring in development that improves the status of 'quality of life' for themselves and others. Buheji (2016), Buheji (2017), Buheji and Ahmed (2025)

IE sees that the role of government should be in identifying complex challenges that help are identified to bring together multi-sector, multidisciplinary teams to bring development in it through what is called 'Inspiration Labs' (IL), Buheji (2019). The IL labs play an active role in creating an enabling environment for innovation, creativity, and social entrepreneurship through learning by exploring, learning by doing, or through education, infrastructure, and supportive policies. Buheji (2018), Buheji (2025a)

IE work on creating a strong social safety net for communities by using the non-financial wealth within the targeted society to provide them with what brings them more opportunities for development without being dependent on financial resources only, regardless of their economic circumstances, Buheji and Ahmed (2018). This principle views human capital as holistic beings with inherent worth and potential, going beyond their economic productivity. It seeks to foster their well-being, creativity, social consciousness and give them a deeper meaning for their life.

The metrics used to measure the depth of IE focus on bringing qualitative changes in people's lives. It measures the improvements in social cohesion, creating sources of inspiration within the targeted community, environmental sustainability, and deep innovation, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2025). Therefore, despite IE being a new concept that has just finished a decade since its being theorised by Buheji (2016) it is expected to bring in increased human flourishing and well-being, greater social equity and inclusion, sustainable economic development and greater resilience and adaptability. Buheji (2021)

Critics of IE say it is still a new concept that has not been tested at the government level. For some, they consider IE as a difficult principle to implement due to its reliance on subjective factors and complex social dynamics. Besides, it requires a shift in mindset and values, which can be challenging to achieve. Buheji (2025a)

In Summary, Neoliberalism and the Inspiration Economy represent fundamentally different approaches to economic and social development. Neoliberalism emphasises market efficiency and individual responsibility, while the Inspiration Economy prioritises human potential, creativity, social well-being, and sustainable development. Thus, introducing elements of the IE approach in the present economy might help to balance and shape the overall trajectory of the society targeted.

3.0 Methodology

The approach of this paper is focused on a systematic evaluation of both Neoliberalism and the Inspiration Economy, drawing insights and lessons from varying contexts. The author ensures the difference in the outcomes of each concept. The comparison focuses on the techniques and practices that were employed by both principles.

The paper identifies the similarities and differences in how Neoliberalism and Inspiration Economy approach problem-solving, Buheji (2017). Then, the effectiveness of different strategies is evaluated based on outcomes related to community development, social welfare protects, etc.

4.0 Application & Analysis

4.1 How Inspiration Economy help in the Transformation from Neoliberalism?

During the last half-century, neoliberalism has created a growing social divide in the countries that have implemented it. Thus, it is not a surprise that in countries as USA, the long-term Gini-coefficient trends lost their status as welfare states. Being typically profit-obsessed principle, neoliberalism has affected the financial, environmental, consumption, social divide, and military domains. During the last half-century, neoliberalism ironically acted mostly against the interests of the West itself. This gave more chances for China and Asia to develop, and the overall global social welfare to be further delayed.

On the other hand, the inspiration economy focuses on the reassessment of the socioeconomic status of any community and bringing solutions that lead to creating models and establishing a novel development formula. These original, innovative formulas enhance and raise the capacity to exploit the hidden socioeconomic opportunities within the problems experienced or foresighted. Buheji (2017)

Besides (socioeconomic re-assessment), and (formula enhancement), Inspiration Economy theories focus on productivity, capacity enhancement, impact factor and outcome, Buheji (2022). When inspiration economy theories are embraced, governments or communities would have the capacity to weigh down choices that lead to the development or exploration of inspiration currency. Buheji (2021)

Neoliberalism concentrates wealth in corporate elites, while the Inspiration Economy empowers grassroots innovation, supporting community-based enterprises (e.g., cooperatives, social businesses). Inspiration economy sees that governments can fund cultural and tech incubators instead of relying on deregulated financial markets.

Through focusing on cultural resources that favour fair trade and ethical production, IE can help reduce the dependency on exploitative global supply chains while preserving indigenous knowledge and wisdom in modern economies. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2025)

Thus, IE offers a path away from neoliberalism by replacing financialization with creativity-driven growth, empowering local communities over corporate globalisation and focusing on well-being, not just profit. The key is valuing human potential, culture, and inspiration opportunities over austerity and deregulation.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Implications of this Paper

The Inspiration Economy is an emerging paradigm that emphasises creativity, human potential, cultural value, and innovation as key drivers of economic growth, contrasting with neoliberalism's focus on deregulation, privatisation, and financialization. By shifting toward an inspiration-based model, countries can reduce dependency on neoliberal policies and foster a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient economy.

The implication of this study is that it highlights the contrasts between Neoliberalism's market fundamentalism with IE's focus on human potential and creativity. Besides, this work analyses Trumpism as a paradoxical backlash against neoliberalism that retains some pro-business elements. Proposes IE as a systemic alternative, emphasising case studies where community-driven innovation succeeds. It identifies challenges in transitioning from neoliberal to IE models, including institutional inertia. Thus, the results is that more policy insights can be offered for fostering inspiration-based economies (e.g., redefining success metrics beyond GDP).

5.2 Beyond Neoliberalism—The Promise of the Inspiration Economy

The neoliberal economic paradigm, with its emphasis on deregulation, privatisation, and market fundamentalism, has profoundly shaped global development over the past half-century. While proponents argue that it has driven efficiency and growth, the

evidence reveals a legacy of deepening inequality, financial instability, environmental degradation, and social fragmentation. The rise of populist movements like Trumpism—which simultaneously rejects and co-opts neoliberal policies—underscores the growing disillusionment with an economic model that prioritises corporate interests over human well-being.

In contrast, the Inspiration Economy (IE) offers a transformative vision for socioeconomic development, one that centres around the human and community capacity, collective potential, and ecological sustainability. Unlike neoliberalism's narrow focus on GDP growth and market efficiency, IE fosters systems where value is measured in terms of social cohesion, cultural resilience, and equitable opportunity. By leveraging community-driven inspiration, ethical production networks, and alternative metrics of prosperity, IE provides a framework for addressing the failures of neoliberalism without sacrificing dynamism or progress.

5.3 From Extraction to Regeneration and from Scarcity to Abundance

Neoliberalism's reliance on deregulation and privatisation has led to exploitative labour practices, environmental harm, and financial volatility. While IE promotes regenerative economies, where local knowledge, circular production, and cooperative enterprises replace extractive capitalism.

The myth of “individual responsibility” that neoliberalism focused on has eroded social safety nets and exacerbated inequality. While inspiration currency can work only based on exploring opportunities that are shared, or when collaborative multidisciplinary problems are approached through what is called inspiration labs.

Neoliberal austerity has starved public services, from healthcare to education, under the guise of fiscal discipline. This is due to the scarcity hypothesis of this capital-based economy principle. The drive for free trade has often meant race-to-the-bottom labour standards and fragile supply chains. IE advocates for investment in community well-being, through a mindset that the world is full of abundance. Thus, it recognises that long-term prosperity and the sources of non-financial wealth depend on nurturing human and ecological capital. Therefore, IE supports place-based economies, where cultural heritage, fair trade, and sustainable practices strengthen community resilience.

5.4 A Call for Systemic Transition

As a thinker and a developer of the inspiration economy concept, one has to admit that the shift from neoliberalism to an Inspiration Economy will not be easy. The world has gone so deep into entrenched corporate power, short-term political cycles, and institutional inertia, which pose significant barriers. Yet, the urgency of our intersecting crises—climate collapse, AI-driven labour disruption, and democratic erosion—demands bold alternatives.

This transition can start by bringing policymakers, entrepreneurs, and civil society to work together in specially designated problem-solving or development labs. Decision makers can also experiment with IE models that bring in community wealth-building initiatives. Gradually, people would start to redefine economic success that is beyond GDP by incorporating metrics like social cohesion, quality of life balance initiatives, etc. Such programs need to be supported by media, education and cultural narratives that celebrate cooperation over competition.

The Inspiration Economy is not a utopian fantasy but an actionable pathway that can be tested in different sectors that impact the cycle of the economy and socioeconomy directly and indirectly. By learning from these examples and scaling their lessons, we can build economies that don't just grow, but inspire, include, and endure. A world with a stable future requires us to develop or adopt more economic principles that are not built on scarcity and fear, but on abundance of ideas, solidarity, and shared purpose. The question is not whether neoliberalism will end, but what comes next.

References

Buheji, M (2016) Handbook of Inspiration Economy. Bookboon.

Buheji, M (2017) Understanding Problem Solving in Inspiration Labs, American Journal of Industrial and Business Management, 7, pp. 771-784,

Buheji, M (2018) Nudge Theory vs. Inspiration Economy Labs- Comparing the Depth of Influence on Socio-Economics Behaviours, American Journal of Economics; Vol. 8, No.3: 146-154

Buheji, M (2019) Understanding the Economics of Problem-Solving. A Longitudinal Review of the Economic Influence of Inspiration Labs- Three Years Journey on Socio-Economic Solutions. American Journal of Economics 2019, 9(2): 79-85.

Buheji, M (2021) The Theory of Inspiration Economy- An Introduction. International Journal of Entrepreneurship. Volume 25, Special Issue 1, p. 1-12

Buheji, M (2022) 'In Pursuit of Inspiring the World' through Socio-economic Problems Solving- A Measure for Seven Years of Inspiration Economy Journey, International Journal of Inspiration, Resilience & Youth Economy, 6(2). pp. 61-84.

Buheji, M (2025a) Applied Sociology & Advancements of Inspiration Economy, International Journal of Applied Sociology; 15(1): 1-6

Received: 2 July 2025

Revised: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 6 July 2025

Copyright ♥ authors 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.16143377>

Buheji, M (2025b) Creative Destruction and Trumpism: Building an Anti-Fragility Framework that Absorbs Disruption and Chaos, International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, Vol 6, Issue 4, pp 10939-10946.

Buheji, M and Ahmed, D (2018) Exploring Inspiration Economy, AuthorHouse, UK.

Buheji, M and Ahmed, D (2025) From Theory to Practice: Leveraging Anthropology and the Inspiration Economy for Community-Driven Solutions, International Journal of Management Sciences and Business Research, Vol. 14, Issue 1, p. 25-43.

Buheji, M; Mushimiyimana, E (2025) Capability Approach vs. Inspiration Economy and their Socioeconomic Relevance: A Comparative Study, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation, Vol. 6 No.2, pp. 831-839.

Gledhill, J. (2007). Neoliberalism. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, 332-348.

Harvey, D (2006) A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Oxford University Press, 2006

Springer, S., Birch, K., & MacLeavy, J. (2016). An introduction to neoliberalism. In *Handbook of neoliberalism* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Venugopal, R. (2015). Neoliberalism as concept. *Economy and society*, 44(2), 165-187.