1. Art entrepreneurship: an introduction

Mikael Scherdin and Ivo Zander

In many ways, the creation of art captures the essence of entrepreneurial activity. It is a genuinely creative process that finds its origin in the artist’s perception of highly subjective ideas, whose viability and ultimate impact on the art arena are surrounded by genuine uncertainty. The process of developing subjective ideas into tangible objects of art and convincing often incredulous observers about their aesthetic or other qualities is often arduous. From the artist’s perspective, it can be a process characterized by doubts, frustrations, and setbacks, requiring unusual persistence for arriving at the final product. It involves intellectual and practical development of the art idea, sometimes requiring the solving of hitherto unknown technical problems, as well as interaction with external observers to “sell” the novel idea and make it accessible to the intended audience. Ultimately, a few artistic ideas have the potential to radically alter perceptions about art and what are considered established, legitimate, and taken-for-granted artistic expressions.

Despite the obvious similarities between artistic work and entrepreneurial processes as they unfold in the business context, the two fields have remained separate in terms of both academic research and practice. The arts literature has mainly been concerned with art-related phenomena and occasionally dealt with the assumedly particular nature and dynamics of the art industry (for example Ormrod, 1999; Caves, 2000). Only rarely has there been interest in the entrepreneurial aspects of artistic work, perhaps because many artists remain fundamentally suspicious of anything that has to do with commerce and business. Entrepreneurship research on its side has traditionally focused on economic phenomena such as the creation of firms and the nature of the start-up process (for example Cooper, 2003; Davidsson, 2005; Landström, 2005), often from a practical point of view. Issues such as creativity, subjectivity, and the cognitive aspects of opportunity recognition have only recently been explored in some more detail (Baron, 1998, 2006; Scherdin and Zander, 2008).

There are signs of change, however, as there is emerging interest in
exploring the boundaries of the evolving domain of entrepreneurship research (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert and Katz, 2003; Hjorth, Jones and Gartner, 2008; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). The present volume found its origin in the intuition that the creative setting of art and artistic work must intersect with a number of phenomena dealt with by the traditional entrepreneurship literature, with ample opportunities for cross-fertilization between the two fields. It uses art and the art arena as the conceptual and empirical platform from which to probe the issues of novelty, creativity, and the meeting between the new and the old, ultimately producing a number of observations and findings that may contribute to the development of the entrepreneurship literature. In the process, it introduces the (some would say heretic) notion of artistic entrepreneurship as an equivalent to entrepreneurial processes observed in the business world, illustrating how established conceptual and theoretical work in the entrepreneurship literature can be of significant help in analysing and understanding the nature and dynamics of the art arena. In this way, what may be referred to as art entrepreneurship becomes the catalyst for change and development in both fields of academic research.

Following a brief and general introduction to the fields of art and entrepreneurship, this introductory chapter contains a set of short summaries of the individual chapters and contributions. While the summaries can only capture the main issues and arguments of each chapter, many of the corollary points and insights will resurface in the concluding chapter of the book. Some of the concluding reflections, extending into the traditional domain of entrepreneurship research, concern issues such as the nature of opportunity recognition and development, storytelling and the framing of new ideas, multi-level and differentiated selection pressures acting upon novel ideas, methodological openings, and policies aimed at renewal on the art arena.

ART AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP – SOME GENERAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The term entrepreneurship is most commonly associated with the discovery and pursuit of new business opportunities through the creation of business firms (Gartner, 1988; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). In reflection of this, and despite cautioning empirical evidence (for example Amit et al., 2000; Carter et al., 2003), the entrepreneurship literature has typically maintained a more or less explicit connection to individual wealth creation (Landström, 2005).

At the more fundamental level, entrepreneurship can be defined as

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undertaking something in the face of genuine uncertainty (Knight, 1921; Mises, 1949). This broader definition embraces the discovery and pursuit of any new idea or project that bends, stretches, or transgresses existing rules and structures (Holmquist, 2003), as well as the use of a multitude of differentiated “vehicles” for its realization (cf. Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). For example, new ideas and projects may be realized through the formation of non-profit organizations, work within established firms and organizations, or project teams of limited duration. Authors use books as vehicles to convey new stories and opinions, and, in the world of art, new ideas, projects, and philosophies are expressed in the form of art objects or performances. In many of these cases, the ultimate aim of entrepreneurial activity is only loosely connected to profit or wealth-creation motives, and emphasis instead is placed on the potential of emancipation or removal of perceived constraints in the individual’s environment (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009).

In the context of art, entrepreneurship is about the discovery and pursuit of new art ideas, using a multitude of artistic expressions and organizational forms as vehicles by which to express and convey these ideas to the public. This is a process that displays many of the characteristics that have also been associated with entrepreneurial processes in the business context. Closely reflecting the traditional focus on the individual in entrepreneurship research (Shane, 2003; Shane and Eckhardt, 2003), art and artistic processes have been intimately associated with the traits, psychology, and activities of the individual artist; a great number of popular accounts and penetrating biographies have explored the lives of individual artists and the connections between their life experiences and artistic production.

Artistic work is also about the introduction of novelty, which has remained central to the entrepreneurship literature (Schumpeter, 1934; cf. Kirzner, 2009) and figures prominently in popular perceptions about the role and achievements of great entrepreneurs. Inevitably, and just like in the business context, new art ideas are surrounded by risk and genuine uncertainty, especially when it comes to the introduction of significant new movements in art. Artistic ideas rarely come in fully fledged and developed forms, and it is difficult to perceive the ultimate art objects and reactions from the general public. Indeed, history shows how the reception of novel work by critics or art audiences ranges from the scandal to rave reviews (Lindqvist, this volume), and how the road to acceptance and recognition from the general public is often long and arduous.

While at the fundamental level artistic work and entrepreneurship in the business context thus display many similarities, the context of art appears to be distinctive in three respects (more detail on the similarities
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and differences will be found throughout this volume, especially the chapters by Lindqvist, Bonnafous-Boucher, Cuir and Partouche, Meisiek and Haefliger, and Barry): (1) it maintains a particularly pronounced focus on creativity and the production of novelty (Wijnberg and Gemser, 2000), and (2) it is concerned with the introduction of novel ideas and concepts that are de-coupled from immediate utility or profit motives (Bonnafous-Boucher, Cuir and Partouche, this volume). In many cases, artistic work reflects the mere joy of creating and expressing something new, a sense of wanting to communicate with and contribute to the cultural or wider development of society, or simply the urge to deal and come to grips with an artistic “itch” or possession that is still only rudimentarily perceived. This then makes for special circumstances in the meeting between the new and the old, where (3) the artist’s communication and persuasive efforts must rest on other means than proof of practical usefulness or profit potential.

Art and artistic processes thereby offer a distinctive and from a research point of view fruitful arena for studying the issues of creativity, novelty, and processes of transformation where the new seeks to position itself alongside or replace the established and conventional. These issues and processes are important study objects in their own right, especially as they tend to be taken for granted and thus have escaped systematic reflection and analysis among practicing artists and other actors on the art arena. Studying artistic processes unfolding under the marked or “acid” conditions of the art arena also promises to elucidate and elaborate on phenomena that are found at the core of entrepreneurship research. These then are the intuitions and assumptions that prompted and inspired the various studies that are part of this book.

INDIVIDUAL CHAPTERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The individual chapters of the present volume represent a first attempt to explore the fundamentals of what may collectively be termed art entrepreneurship – how artists and people engaged in artistic activities perceive of new art ideas, how these ideas are transformed into tangible objects of art and artistic expressions, and how they are ultimately accepted or rejected by the general public.

In the opening chapter “Artist entrepreneurs”, Katja Lindqvist sets the stage by exploring the similarities and differences between artists and entrepreneurs, addressing issues such as their traditionally ascribed characteristics, norm and rule breaking behaviours, and functions in the process of bringing original ideas into the realm of consumers and larger
society. The chapter indeed identifies many similarities between the two groups, including that of broader developments in the academic literature on both art and entrepreneurship. Of particular notice is the emergence and existence of sometimes open-ended artistic processes, involving both a collective of artists and the prospective audience in a process that could be labelled co-productive. This particular type of creative process should be observable also in the domain of other entrepreneurial ventures, specifically those dealing with social or cultural entrepreneurship, and emerges as an appealing concept to be explored in future entrepreneurship studies.

In their chapter entitled “The new and the challenge of the market or the non-instrumental function of creation”, Maria Bonnafous-Boucher, Raphael Cuir, and Marc Partouche probe further into the uniting and distinctive elements of artistic and entrepreneurial processes. They specifically propose and explore the fundamental distinction between creation and creativity, suggesting that while the work of the artist is intimately connected to creation, or uncaused action aiming at creation in and of itself, entrepreneurship as it is commonly perceived is concerned with creativity, which adds usefulness as one of its key defining parameters.

Drawing upon numerous examples from the art arena, the authors illustrate the fundamental and conceptually important distinction between creation and creativity, as well as how the world of art has come to explore and make use of the concept of the firm for both artistic and commercial purposes. A proposed typology of existing relationships between artists and firms effectively illustrates the distinction between the artist and the entrepreneur, yet at the same time documents the potential or perhaps already emerging fluidity between the fields of arts and business. While convergence of the two fields remains an open question, the conceptual distinctions made by the authors serve as a powerful starting point for exploring what artists and entrepreneurs in the business context have in common, and ultimately what they can learn from each other.

In the chapter entitled “Opportunity revelation: cogitative powers of the brain”, Mikael Scherdin takes a closer look at the concept of opportunity recognition as it has been treated in the traditional entrepreneurship literature and brings it into the context of artistic processes. Drawing upon advances in neurosciences and neurophilosophy, and specifically the distinction between cognitive and cogitative powers of the brain, he makes the argument that the traditional concept of opportunity recognition fails to capture the loosely coupled, internally driven, and open-ended processes that are typical of creative and artistic processes. An auto-ethnographic case study illustrates the emergence of an artistic concept as seen from the perspective of the practicing artist. In conclusion, it is suggested that the concept and process of opportunity revelation may be
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an important complement to more traditionally perceived opportunity recognition processes.

The chapter by Stefan Meisiek and Stefan Haefliger, entitled “Inviting the unexpected: entrepreneurship and the arts”, suggests that for a number of reasons art and artistic processes have a lot to tell about the creation and ultimate acceptance of novelty. Drawing upon the empirical cases of etoy and the MISSION ETERNITY project, they particularly emphasize the importance of the unexpected in artistic processes. While the unexpected is usually regarded as destabilizing and confusing, in the creation of novelty it has the opposite effect – it creates stability in the process that connects the emergence of new ideas with ultimate acceptance by external audiences. To support their idea, they insightfully argue that what is perceived of and accepted as novel manages to successfully balance the familiar and unfamiliar, and the valued and unvalued in unexpected yet meaningful ways. This balancing act is accentuated in the context of art, where both utility and the commercial aspects of creativity by tradition have been either absent or played subsidiary roles.

Meisiek and Haefliger further document how a community of artists can be highly beneficial in terms of embracing the unexpected and finding the fruitful balance between the valued and unvalued. Drawing a number of parallels to the extant entrepreneurship literature, the chapter concludes by identifying several areas where entrepreneurship research is likely to benefit from the study of art and artistic processes, including the (productive) role of the unexpected throughout opportunity recognition and development processes, the balancing of the new and the old in the development of novel business concepts, as well as the particular dynamics of entrepreneurial communities and the potentially unique effects on the unfolding and ultimate impact of opportunity recognition and development processes.

In a similar way, the chapter by Per Frankelius, entitled “Innovation processes: experience drawn from the creation of Dalhalla”, uses empirical observations from the cultural arena to critically assess existing perceptions and understandings of the concept of innovation. The chapter offers a detailed account of the long, arduous, but ultimately successful process of developing a new cultural concept, with a particular focus on multiple and multi-faceted selection pressures in the environment. The case also provides an illustration of how idea generators and project champions – in the present case opera singer Margareta Dellefors – play a critical role in overcoming various forms of resistance to novel ideas; yet, they may ultimately lose control over their created ventures. In conclusion, Frankelius draws attention to the fact that the traditional innovation literature, focusing primarily on technology and product development, has ignored
innovation in other parts of society such as art and culture. As the case illustrates, studying innovation in these settings may provide new insights into the unfolding and ultimate outcomes of innovation processes.

The chapter by Morten Søndergaard – “Distant relations: art practice in a global culture” – again widens the perspective by exploring the emergence of new artistic practices and how they are connected to the moulding of a global culture. Drawing on his experiences from cooperating with three artists, all of whom in various ways have explored the significance of distant relations in their work, he suggests that new and emerging forms of creative processes introduce new currents in Western culture. In this process, what is termed global sociological art is identified as creating a new language by which to approach and understand the integration and reconciliation of today’s global society. Søndergaard’s chapter opens the big and largely unexplored question of how existing structures of the art arena, including artists, galleries, museums, and various funding agencies, resonate with processes of globalization in the creation and selection of new art.

The penultimate chapter, by Daved Barry, entitled “Art and entrepreneurship, apart and together”, takes a closer look at similarities and differences between artists and art on the one hand and entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship on the other. He then proceeds to critically examine if and how art can inform entrepreneurship, and whether an “art of entrepreneurship” that accords with contemporary art thinking is possible. Based on an insightful distinction between the casually artful and the formally artistic, and what are referred to as different types of artmind (the two types are referred to as artmind and Artmind, respectively), the chapter provides several illustrations of how an artist’s way of thinking can benefit entrepreneurial and business-related decision making. A particular call is made for making more careful distinctions within the concept that is generally referred to as “art”, especially if the aim is to educate prospective entrepreneurs in artful and artistic approaches to developing and sustaining their entrepreneurial ventures.

The concluding chapter summarizes some of the main insights and ideas generated by the individual chapters, with a particular emphasis on new openings for research across the fields of art and entrepreneurship. Specific issues include the subjective elements of opportunity recognition, storytelling and framing in the introduction of novel ideas and concepts, project hijacking, differentiated and multi-level selection processes, and the use of the autoethnographic method. The concluding chapter also includes thoughts about what practicing artists can learn from applying an entrepreneurship perspective to their work, a section that contemplates implications for art policy, as well as the (in all probability) significant
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changes brought about by the globalization of art and the art arena. All in all, we hope the concluding reflections may set in motion new thoughts about the nature of creative and entrepreneurial processes, and inspire further research in the fields of art and entrepreneurship alike.

REFERENCES


