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A Closer Look into the Scope of Arts Entrepreneurship Education: Is There Any Such Thing as the American and European Approach?

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Abstract

This study explores the notion, practice and potential differences of arts entrepreneurship efforts in the ways they are conceptualized and organized at higher education institutions in the United States compared to Europe. Based on a qualitative approach, the study's main data collection method was paired interviews as a means of facilitating sustained dialogue between respondents to provide more context into potential similarities and differences. Findings show that although there are differences in the ways programs are organized, educators across the Western world seem to share similar values and face similar challenges. Students must be taught to apply context-specific and career-relevant knowledge, develop analytical, critical and self-efficacy skills and take up agency and explorative behaviors that lead to the creation of value, all of which require entrepreneurial mindsets. A more general theory of arts entrepreneurship might pave the way for enhanced training of arts entrepreneurship educators and promote greater inclusivity in terms of cultural expression.

Introduction

For some years, the concept of the "artist-entrepreneur" has become popular. Seemingly at odds, the two roles can actually serve as a crucial opportunity to preserve aesthetic traditions in new ways, create new and innovative student outcomes and build new audiences.¹ According to Joseph Schumpeter, entrepreneurs pursue something nobody believes in and create something from new or unexpected combinations.² Just for that, they should be celebrated. And who is better at creating than artists?

Along with the desire to push artistic boundaries to try and fit the "artist" profession within an ever-growing capitalistic western society, arts entrepreneurship courses are being implemented in

¹ Gary D. Beckman, *Disciplining the Arts: Teaching Entrepreneurship in Context* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011).

² Joseph Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1934).

universities and higher education institutions across the globe that recognize their responsibility in preparing students for the difficult circumstances facing artists today.³ In a 2016 analysis, Essig and Guevara found 372 arts entrepreneurship course offerings at 168 institutions in the United States.⁴ These offerings are becoming popular in Europe as well.⁵ Still, the inclusion of entrepreneurship in undergraduate arts courses has remained inconsistent and surprisingly minimal throughout the years.⁶ Until a decade ago, U.S. universities that offered arts entrepreneurship degrees took 50-100% of the entrepreneurship component credits from existing business school undergraduate offerings.⁷ Many scholars today still worry about this, arguing that traditional entrepreneurship can only be applied to the arts up to a certain point before confusing intention beyond the point of recognition.⁸ One expects this has changed over the years, but the extent to which these changes have taken place remains unknown. This paper will provide further insight into the realm of current art entrepreneurship practice in higher education and will unveil key similarities and differences in the ways U.S. and European higher institutions teach arts entrepreneurship.

The expected differences in arts entrepreneurship teaching approaches and courses between the U.S. and Europe are likely to originate in some fundamental distinctions between the two continents. First, the way higher education institutions are funded differs between the U.S. and Europe. Financial support from some foundations in the U.S. has incentivized the development of arts entrepreneurship in some private education institutions, whereas public policy initiatives have influenced the development of cultural entrepreneurship programs in European higher education.⁹ Second, the individualistic dimension of culture impacts the entrepreneurship ecology of a country significantly: individualistic countries such as the United States promote individual initiative and tend to emphasize leadership over membership; individuals in these societies achieve independence by becoming entrepreneurs and creating new ventures where they can be their own bosses.¹⁰ On the other hand, individuals from countries rating high on the collectivism scale tend to define their self-image in terms of “we” rather than “I,” thus advocating for loyalty and mutual support over self-gain.

³ Gary D. Beckman, *Disciplining the Arts*.

⁴ Linda Essig and Joanna Guevara, *A Landscape of Arts Entrepreneurship in U.S. Higher Education*, Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship Arizona State University, 2016.

⁵ Jonathan Vickery, Mariangela Lavanga, and Ellen Loots, “Creative Economy, Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship: Questions for a Master’s Programme in its Adolescence,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 18, no. 2-3 (2019): 269-278, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022219831613>.

⁶ Ruth Bridgstock, “Not A Dirty Word: Arts Entrepreneurship and Higher Education,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 12, no. 2-3 (2013): 122-137, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022212465725>.

⁷ Gary D. Beckman, “‘Adventuring’ Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education: An Examination of Present Efforts, Obstacles, and Best Practices,” *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 37, no. 2 (2007): 87-112, <https://doi.org/10.3200/JAML.37.2.87-112>.

⁸ Kimberly Korzen, “Arts Entrepreneurship in Higher Education: Preliminary Inventories and Examinations,” *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 55-79, <https://doi.org/10.46776/jaee.v1.31>.

⁹ Linda Essig, “Same or Different? The ‘Cultural Entrepreneurship’ and ‘Arts Entrepreneurship’ Constructs in European and U.S. Higher Education,” *Cultural Trends* 26, no. 2, (2017): 125-137, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2017.1323842>.

¹⁰ Mutlu Çelikkol, Hakan Kitapçı, and Gözde Döven, “Culture’s Impact on Entrepreneurship and Interaction Effect of Economic Development Level: An 81 Country Study,” *Journal of Business Economics and Management* 20, no. 4 (2019): 777-797, <https://doi.org/10.3846/jbem.2019.10180>; Hofstede Insights, “Hofstede Insights Country Comparison,” accessed June 1, 2021. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>.

In this study, a review of recent literature on arts entrepreneurship has been combined with a series of paired interviews, each including one European and one American expert, to answer the following research question: *How can the differences in the current scope of arts entrepreneurship programs between the U.S. and Europe, if any, be explained?*

#	Role	Location	Date and length of the interview
1	Coordinator of cultural management M.A. program	Europe	5/12/2021 1:05:56
2	Assistant Professor of Arts Management and Arts Entrepreneurship	U.S.	
3	Professor and Chair of the Arts Entrepreneurship Department	U.S.	5/19/2021 1:09:55
4	Ph.D. fellow	Europe	
5	Coordinator of music education program	U.S.	5/20/2021 1:01:44
6	Music entrepreneurship lecturer and founder of event planning organization	Europe	
7	Assistant professor	Europe	6/01/2021 1:08:02
8	Associate director of national policy center committed to research	U.S.	
9	Professor of Arts Entrepreneurship, faculty member in the School of Music	U.S.	6/11/2021 1:11:14
10	Director of master's degree program in arts and culture management	Europe	

Table 1: List of interviewees, in chronological order and by pairs

Methods

The empirical research performed for this paper consisted of semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of arts entrepreneurship. This allowed for in-depth analysis of individual roles and beliefs as well as exploration of arts entrepreneurship from a subjective and context-specific perspective. An American expert was matched with a European expert for each interview. Paired interviews offered advantages consistent with what Roulston defined as the constructionist and transformative conception of an interview.¹¹ In this view, knowledge is co-constructed by both the interviewer and interviewees as a way of generating meaning and discussing research topics, and the dialogue generates “enlightened” understanding while also somewhat dismantling the asymmetric relationship usually found between interviewer and interviewee. Ten arts entrepreneurship scholars were recruited through snowball sampling and came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Interviews centered on three main themes: personal experiences within the arts entrepreneurship field (including skills being taught, type of students and personal definitions of the subject), perceived discrepancies between the United States and

¹¹ Roulston, Kathryn, *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2010).

Europe, and questions regarding the future of arts entrepreneurship education, including potential obstacles and further development. The coded transcripts were analyzed and organized thematically.¹²

Arts Entrepreneurship

Currently, no unified theory of arts entrepreneurship exists within the field's premier journals, nor a clear consensus on the term itself. The terms "arts," "cultural," and "creative" entrepreneurship are often used interchangeably, although they seem to hold slightly different meanings.¹³ The more narrowly-constructed "arts entrepreneurship" is more prevalent in the U.S., while the sector-wide conception of "cultural entrepreneurship" is more prevalent in Europe and Australia.¹⁴ However, the distinction between "cultural" and "arts" entrepreneurship can be seen mostly in the way the discipline is being taught. In Europe, cultural entrepreneurship seems to veer towards organizational leadership, whereas arts entrepreneurship as it is understood in the U.S. emphasizes individual artists behaving entrepreneurially.¹⁵ However, in recent years scholars as well as educators in Europe have started to embrace the notion of "arts entrepreneurship" while referring to entrepreneurial behavior in the arts, either by artists or their supporters.¹⁶ Correspondingly, in Europe, the notion of "creative entrepreneurship" is in place to indicate the value creation mechanisms specific to entrepreneurship in cultural and creative industries.¹⁷

Most attempts at theory development seem to agree on arts entrepreneurship as a construct on a continuum from career self-management to new venture creation in addition to "a way to approach professional employment in the arts in a creative manner that will generate value for individuals and groups inside or outside traditional arts employment domains."¹⁸ In a similar vein, Schediwy and colleagues argue the practice of entrepreneurship in the arts is characterized through the identification of opportunities that enable the fulfillment of an artistic mission while simultaneously creating value for a potential market.¹⁹ Value creation, but also value translation, is essential for artists entering the market, as they must translate the aesthetic value of their creation into something a market can understand.²⁰

These aspects of value creation in arts entrepreneurship resonated with our respondents. An American professor of arts entrepreneurship (Respondent 3) defined the practice as:

¹² Themes included qualitative verbal expressions and patterns of recurrence and evaluation or associations within these themes.

¹³ Jason White, "Toward a Theory of Arts Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 4-24.

¹⁴ Essig, "Same or Different?"

¹⁵ Shoshannah BD Goldberg-Miller, "Creative Toronto: Harnessing the Economic Development Power of Arts and Culture," *Artivate* 4, no. 1 (2015): 25-48.

¹⁶ Francesca Rivetti and Mirella Migliaccio, "Arts and Entrepreneurship: Disentangling the Literature," In *Entrepreneurship: Trends and Challenges*, ed. Silvio Manuel Brito (London: IntechOpen, 2018): 11-21.

¹⁷ Maureen McKelvey and Astrid Heidemann Lassen, "Knowledge, Meaning and Identity: Key Characteristics of Entrepreneurship in Cultural and Creative Industries," *Creativity and Innovation Management* 27, no. 3 (2018): 281-283.

¹⁸ Beckman, "'Adventuring' Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education"; Gary D. Beckman and Linda Essig, "Arts Entrepreneurship: A Conversation," *Artivate* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.

¹⁹ Laura Schediwy, Ellen Loots, and Pawan Bhansing, "With Their Feet on the Ground: A Quantitative Study of Music Students' Attitudes Towards Entrepreneurship Education," *Journal of Education and Work* 31, no. 7-8 (2018): 611-627, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1562160>.

²⁰ T. Shepard Bryan and David Harris, "The Aesthetic Value Exchange: A Potential Framework for the Arts Entrepreneurship Classroom," *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 25-54.

Being able to speak the language of business to the dominant culture in order to make sure that your creative solutions are fully implemented and that you can communicate to others the value that you bring.

Respondent 4 agreed and discussed how he often saw language from the business world introduced into the arts. He then gave his own definition, saying:

Entrepreneurship is about identifying problems and solving them to create some sort of environmental, social, aesthetic or economic value.

Respondent 5 fed into this definition in the interview, stating that the role of artist entrepreneurs is to create value that does not currently exist:

That's why you're put on this earth, to create value for other people. And it's broadly defined; economic value, making money is part of it, but it can be cultural, social value that gets us into, you know, social entrepreneurship.

Building on the definitions given by the interviewees, arts entrepreneurship can be looked at as a discipline meant to spread a creative practice broadly to allow individuals to make a living from that activity. Furthermore, the cultural, social and economic value originating in creative practice can contribute to the development of a more regenerative society. Lastly, it can be inferred that, despite the diverse approaches taken towards arts entrepreneurship, the same ideas and attitudes are ultimately adopted. This said, even though different labels are used to describe the field, the material being referred to remains the same.

Arts Entrepreneurship Education

Educators in universities around the world have been trying to define what an effective arts entrepreneurship program should look like.²¹ Although there still remains controversy around the idea of whether an entrepreneur can become such by learning and not simply relying on fixed personal characteristics, a key assumption underlying many of these programs is that the former is indeed possible.²² The question, then, is how can entrepreneurship be taught to artists? Seemingly at odds, the combined roles of artists acting as entrepreneurs (or enterprising artists) actually serve as a crucial opportunity to preserve an aesthetic tradition in new ways, create new and innovative outcomes for students and build new audiences simultaneously.²³ Still, if we expect artists to embark on an entrepreneurial journey without losing their artistic identity, they must be taught how to do so.

Bridgstock argues that entrepreneurship curricula cannot simply be imported from business schools, as the practice of entrepreneurship in the arts is significantly different in terms of the artist's drivers

²¹ Bridgstock, "Not a Dirty Word"; Korzen, "Arts Entrepreneurship in Higher Education"; Vickery, Lavanga, and Loots, "Creative Economy, Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship."

²² Indeed, it has been shown that the effect of general education as measured in years of schooling on entrepreneur performance is positive. See Mirjam Van Praag, Arjen van Witteloostuijn, and Justin van der Sluis, "The Higher Returns to Formal Education for Entrepreneurs Versus Employees," *Small Business Economics* 40, no. 2 (2013): 375-396; and Justin Van der Sluis, Mirjam Van Praag, and Wim Vijverberg, "Education and Entrepreneurship Selection and Performance: A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Journal of Economic Surveys* 22, no. 5 (2008): 795-841. At the same time, education as such is not a sufficient condition for individuals to start behaving entrepreneurially as suggested by Michael Gielnik, et al., "Action and Action-Regulation in Entrepreneurship: Evaluating a Student Training for Promoting Entrepreneurship," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 69-94.

²³ Beckman, *Disciplining the Arts*.

and aims as well as the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities, contexts and processes.²⁴ Therefore, it is imperative that arts entrepreneurship educators tailor their curricula to facilitate the merging of an art framework to one that is more business-like but without exaggerating. A somewhat perfect balance seems to be the only option – without the business component, generating enough revenue for surviving may be a struggle. Conversely, without the arts component there will be very little compelling aesthetic value that a venture can actively present to a consumer.²⁵ Previously, the lack of consensus on a clear entrepreneurial theory and on how such a theory could be translated into an arts practice has led arts administrators down a path of least resistance by equating “entrepreneurship” with new venture creation instead of envisioning the term in an arts context.²⁶ This has changed.

An iterative process of assessing existing literature and empirical evidence made us aware of three major components desirable in arts entrepreneurship education: specific and relevant knowledge, useful skills and a mindset that supports entrepreneurial behavior.

Remembering, Understanding and Applying Context-Specific and Career-Relevant Knowledge

Because artists today are faced with a particularly precarious labor market (due to the worldwide surplus of art in the market, which depresses market prices and interest), administrators and faculty in fields like arts entrepreneurship have begun to acknowledge the need to make arts training more responsive to the professional realities students face after graduation.²⁷ In many cases, students start studying art without any background knowledge of professional requirements and conditions, and they do not seem to know the basic challenges they face after graduation and seem to lack self-reflection.²⁸ Respondent 6 experienced this with his students as well:

They (students) want to be musicians, they want to be stars. And sometimes they think a bit naively.

For Respondent 5, such observations were familiar:

In my experiences there is that naiveté with students feeling like they just can deliver the goods, so to speak, if they're just exceptional in one narrow genre or focus of music, and that's going to be enough to get them where they want to go. Of course, we know it's not that simple.

To some extent, entrepreneurship can be perceived as a compelling narrative for students navigating the arts. For Respondent 5, arts entrepreneurship programs are crucial, as they provide:

an explanation or alternative view of this starving artist thing that is not as simple as “we're going to give your child a degree and then they won't be marketable enough to fit into an

²⁴ Bridgstock, “Not a Dirty Word.”

²⁵ Bryan and Harris, “The Aesthetic Value Exchange.”

²⁶ Beckman, “‘Adventuring’ Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education.”

²⁷ Marco Thom, “Crucial Skills for the Entrepreneurial Success of Fine Artists,” *Artivate* 5, no. 1 (2016): 3-24; Jonathan Gangi, “The Synergies of Artistic and Entrepreneurial Action,” *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 45, no. 4 (2015): 247-254, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2015.1088912>.

²⁸ Thom, “Crucial Skills for the Entrepreneurial Success of Fine Artists.”

existing future that someone has concocted for them.” But actually, there are opportunities they can create for themselves. And you see the world more optimistically like that.

Learning activities can become effective if they provide students with career-relevant knowledge of the specific contexts of arts fields and sectors as well as with more general career knowledge. Today, arts entrepreneurship educators in higher education teach students how to manage resources in different cultural environments and how to valorize cultural and creative goods and services—all the while under demands for efficiency and effectiveness within the context of particular industries.²⁹ This is in line with literature suggesting the path to successful arts entrepreneurship is dominated by the development of a strong and adaptable career identity, which is defined as the individual’s definition of self, their motivation, personal meanings and individual values.³⁰ Since students in the arts sector tend to have uncertain career patterns, it is essential that in arts entrepreneurship programs they understand the potential contexts they may find themselves in and learn skills to help them not only form a career identity but also benefit from such. Therefore, the career relevance dimension of arts entrepreneurship education combines the ability to apply knowledge with analytical skills; American and European educators are both aware of this fact.³¹

Analytical and Evaluating Skills

Placing students at the center of the learning process is rather common in arts entrepreneurship programs due to the artistic centrality of courses requiring students to leverage their artistry and creative energies.³² By the time they enter the workforce, students are expected to understand and successfully thrive in the environment they function in—along with being able to adapt their cultural model according to the circumstances. This requires analytical and critical skills. For Respondent 5, these were crucial:

You have to know the context to be sensitive to what's possible and what you can control and what's out of your control. You have to know how to navigate this entrepreneurial thing within you while also remaining affiliated in good standing with the larger organization.

In some cases, these skills are life skills or people skills that come naturally and require a certain mindset. In others, they are tangible skills taught through specific courses. Cultural entrepreneurship degrees, Respondent 10 explained, are designed to provide exactly this combination:

I think, first of all, it's highly important for managerial skills to be developed. Then, we also speak about trying to deliver a specific mindset. Not only the entrepreneurial mindset but also the capacity to understand and analyze the cultural environment at the international level, which means realizing that “I'm an artist but at the same time, I need to scan around a little bit to see what happens also in other sectors.”

Respondent 9 endorsed the idea of training students “to be arts managers, or business managers, cultural managers, but then also (to) think like an entrepreneur. So, they can be flexible and adaptive in any situation

²⁹ Vickery, Lavanga, and Loots, “Creative Economy, Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship.”

³⁰ Bridgstock, “Not a Dirty Word”; Schediwy, Loots, and Bhansing, “With Their Feet on the Ground.”

³¹ Ben Toscher, “Entrepreneurial Learning in Arts Entrepreneurship Education: A Conceptual Framework,” *Artivate* 8, no. 1 (2019): 3-22, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17217.92007>.

³² *Ibid.*

they find themselves in.” The notion of flexibility as a core skill was echoed by a fellow American professor, Respondent 8:

We've known this through decades of research on artistic careers [that] artists have to behave entrepreneurially. They have to be nimble. They have to be flexible. They have to wear many hats and often shift gears throughout their careers.

The need for artists to embrace flexibility emerged as a consequence of the lack of full-time and permanent employment opportunities for artists. Therefore, with many freelance and self-employed career opportunities available, artists must operate like entrepreneurs to successfully meet the multifaceted commercial and opportunity-driven challenges.³³ Respondent 3 added:

In the United States, 10% of the U.S. economy is creatives. That means 90% of the people aren't creatives. The 90% of the people are the people that the artists and designers need to talk to, and they need to talk using the language of business. So, I tell students that why they're learning business principles, theories, practices and methods is to be able to ensure that their creative solutions are not diluted.

Through arts entrepreneurship programs, students can then learn to self-manage and accurately position their value and the value of their creative outputs vis-à-vis the surrounding culture. With their interdisciplinary elements, both U.S. and European programs encourage students to look and act outside the box, and to acknowledge their value and successfully communicate it to their audience.

Creation (of Value) by Means of an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Encouraging exploratory behavior is crucial for entrepreneurship students, as it teaches them to recognize opportunity and gives them a chance for individual exploration and assessment.³⁴ The ability to translate creativity into business terms protects the artist by ensuring that their work does not lose its value and is perceived by the prevalent culture exactly as it was intended. Respondent 9 elaborated on the notion of value:

Our product is the aesthetic product, and it has so many forms of value. As entrepreneurs, we're trying to create value and then exchange it. I think you have to be very strategic with how you communicate the value of the artistic product that you're trying to sell because if you don't, it could be very bad.

The idea of promoting an entrepreneurial mindset that is open and flexible, rather than pushing students to mimic the prevalent culture's idea of what an entrepreneur should look like, was supported by Eastern Europe-based Respondent 1, who mentioned some skepticism regarding use of the word “entrepreneurship”:

I'm very careful using this word, I don't really like it. We have a tendency of saying that being an entrepreneur is being able to write a project to get, you know, public money, public support, which is not really that.

³³ Thom, “Crucial Skills for the Entrepreneurial Success of Fine Artists.”

³⁴ Beckman, “‘Adventuring’ Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education.”

Respondent 1 preferred using the phrase “entrepreneurial mindset” instead:

I'm saying mindset because we don't consider being like, you know...you don't need to have a company, but you need to be able to get your stuff together, right?

When asked how they approached entrepreneurship in the classroom, Respondent 4 replied as follows:

My message is bringing this [entrepreneurial] mindset to a lot of different aspects of the working world or the artistic world, as opposed to just the traditional sense of we're going to equip you to go out and become a freelancer or create something from the ground up.

Through exploration, current students are encouraged to come up with creative solutions to problems on their own. Such an approach aims to push students beyond their comfort zones and urges them to make use of networking, negotiation, resourcefulness and communication skills that will ultimately lead to finding an audience to put these entrepreneurial skills to the test. According to Toscher, such an approach should enable students to explore, choose and act in order to facilitate entrepreneurial learning and develop an entrepreneurial mindset.³⁵ In sum, the process of value creation refers to the ability to do something new with information received. For example, it could refer to an active re-framing of the concept of “arts entrepreneurship,” implying that students are pushed to critically analyze the different theoretical definitions of the term and encouraged to look at entrepreneurship as empowering them (students) to achieve *their* goals—not simply the traditional idea of profit-seeking as the core of entrepreneurship.³⁶ Increasingly, these student goals are not restricted to creating personal artistic value, but equally value to society. Overall, the thought of entrepreneurship as a deeply divisive term goes beyond the differences between the United States and Europe. Trying to profit off creativity is tricky everywhere: as with any dual goal, it is easy to lose sight of the fundamental desire driving one to create art and instead focus on economics. That said, although it is important to be wary of the risks, an artist must always be aware of the value he or she is bringing into the world. It is not necessary that, after graduating, young artists start acting as entrepreneurs, but developing an entrepreneurial mindset is an important part of the process that starts during education.

Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in the United States and Europe

Research on differences across arts entrepreneurship curricula between the United States and Europe is limited. The most exhaustive was developed by Essig, who looked at the conceptual development of “arts entrepreneurship” in the U.S. as differentiated from “cultural entrepreneurship” in Europe and Australia. She found a greater focus on sector-wide workforce development in Europe compared with a focus on individual artists’ training and behaviors in the U.S.³⁷ We attribute the origins of the most fundamental differences to different takes on what entrepreneurship is about, definitional particularities and diverse educational funding structures.

³⁵ Toscher, “Entrepreneurial Learning in Arts Entrepreneurship Education.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Essig, “Same or Different?”

Conflicting Perceptions of the Entrepreneurial Persona

Entrepreneurship has been part of the North American higher education curricula for over fifty years.³⁸ In Europe, the venture capital industry did not establish itself until the mid-1990s, and with it came the insertion of entrepreneurship within curricula of higher education institutions. Furthermore, Europe's legacy of small and medium-sized businesses contributed to the idea of placing the notion of entrepreneurship within an SME's (small- and medium-sized enterprise's) context, rather than in reference to growth-oriented ventures or companies like it is in the United States.³⁹ Together, the presence of a cultural tradition not favoring entrepreneurship education and the rigidity of the university system (when changing courses and curricula, for example) have led to a European lag in the establishment of entrepreneurship programs compared to the U.S.⁴⁰ For example, this lag is reflected in the basic definition of the entrepreneur itself, and how this definition affects the way arts entrepreneurship is taught by educators and perceived by students. Respondent 4 explained:

In the dominant cultural narrative, the entrepreneur is the equivalent of the hero. So, in lots of American common narratives, it's all about the entrepreneur, but my experience here in Europe is that it's not as common.

Respondent 7 also noticed a difference in the way the concept of entrepreneurship is applied across countries and cultures.

To be an entrepreneur in this country [southern Europe] is not considered a safe job. I think in the U.S. it's very different. They have a long tradition of entrepreneurship, and their education system is completely different. It is more centered on practice, [while] historically our education system is focused on theory. Maybe it's a cultural problem.

Overall, Europe seems to maintain a greater emphasis on group rather than individual efforts in the common, higher-level narratives. At the same time, the notions of the "enterprising individual" and "enterprising behavior" are becoming predominant in the discourse in Europe. Enterprising competencies are less associated with the commercial business approach than entrepreneurial competencies and more geared toward creating than appropriating value.⁴¹ Still, Respondent 4 noticed that in some parts of Europe the "American" mindset seems to have taken over. Talking about a colleague who teaches in a country in northern Europe, he commented:

She also encounters the same thing, like you might in the United States, in that she does an exercise in her entrepreneurship course where she has her students draw an entrepreneur, and she frequently gets people coming up with Elon Musk, which is your stereotypical mythological entrepreneur example.

³⁸ Karen Wilson, "Entrepreneurship Education in Europe," *Entrepreneurship and Higher Education*, (2008), available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1392369>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Donato Iacobucci and Alessandra Micozzi, "Entrepreneurship Education in Italian Universities: Trend, Situation and Opportunities," *Education and Training* 54, no. 8 (2012): 673-696, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911211274828>.

⁴¹ Loi, Michela, et al., "Entrepreneurship Education at the Crossroads: Challenging Taken-for-Granted Assumptions and Opening New Perspectives," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2021): 123-134, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F105649262111042222>.

However, this one-dimensional notion of the entrepreneur as someone like Elon Musk is not a notion shared by every American. When asked about his own teaching, Respondent 4 stated:

I don't get hung up on this definition of entrepreneurship added with arts so small that it's about being a solopreneur. I'm more interested in entrepreneurship and arts entrepreneurship as a creative mindset, as a part of design challenges and problem solving.

The idea of promoting an entrepreneurial mindset that is more open and flexible, rather than pushing students to embark in platitudes about what an entrepreneur should look like, was also supported by Respondent 1, who mentioned her skepticism around the use of the word entrepreneurship. She preferred using the term "entrepreneurial mindset" instead.

Students' representations about entrepreneurship matter in how the goals and impact of entrepreneurship education are defined.⁴² Overall, despite the initial knowledge that American culture tends to idolize entrepreneurs, the interviewees seemed to be dismantling the notion of the entrepreneur as a hero who relies only on their own abilities. Rather, the interviewees embraced the idea of an entrepreneurial mindset that can—and should—be adopted by everyone, in every field. This may distinguish specialist entrepreneurial education (as in the arts) from the more general approach developed in business schools.

Arts Versus Culture

When it comes to arts entrepreneurship in technicalities, there is a strong tendency for such a curriculum in the U.S. to be offered through arts or liberal arts units rather than through management programs, as is more common in Europe.⁴³ Research conducted by affiliates of Arizona State University's Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship found that only sixteen institutions had arts entrepreneurship located primarily within a business school or department. Thom reported that while 5% of UK institutions and 2% of German institutions offered arts entrepreneurship training in their arts degrees, approximately 37% of independent colleges of art and design in the U.S. offered some arts entrepreneurship programming.⁴⁴ In U.S. colleges, many arts entrepreneurship degree programs are exclusively centered on one arts discipline and have entrepreneurship (or some other phrasing of the term, such as entrepreneurial studies) as a concentration, elective option or track in a degree program.⁴⁵ This is not the case in Europe, where arts entrepreneurship programs use methods from management studies to critically reflect upon the values that influence local and global art practices.

Thus, it appears that in Europe, cultural entrepreneurship has developed as a subset of management and leadership studies, rather than from within arts disciplines.⁴⁶ What the U.S. calls arts entrepreneurship, Europe usually refers to as cultural entrepreneurship. This was corroborated by Respondent 4, who stated:

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Essig, "Same or Different?"

⁴⁴ Marco Thom, "The Entrepreneurial Value of Arts Incubators: Why Fine Artists Should Make Use of Professional Arts Incubators," *Artivate* 4, no. 2 (2015): 51-75.

⁴⁵ Korzen, "Arts Entrepreneurship in Higher Education."

⁴⁶ Essig, "Same or Different?"

If I were to compare it based upon entrepreneurship in [northern European countries] and what's being taught here, I could say that "arts" is not used as much as "cultural entrepreneurship."

Respondent 8 agreed:

I think that in the U.S. there isn't a tradition of having academic programs named culture, it seems to be less frequent. It's just not a commonly-used expression in the U.S. "Art" seems to be the preferred term.

Respondent 9 also attributed the different uses of the term to the location adopting it, saying that:

In the U.S., we have sort of an informal cultural and creative industries sector, but we don't have it in the formal sense, as some of the European countries do.

According to Respondent 2, one reason for this could be a lack of policy defining what culture really entails. One respondent even voiced the concern that in the U.S. "an official cultural sector" is nonexistent. This lack of terminology regarding culture then leaves the U.S. with the term "arts entrepreneurship," which—although still complex—covers a narrower range. Respondent 2 continued:

The other part is, academically, it's a struggle to reconcile "culture," which is one of the hardest terms in the English language to define, with entrepreneurship, an equally difficult term to define. So, I think most people kind of stay away from it. They go with what they know, because it's easier to do that here in the U.S.

Unfamiliarity with the "culture" term did not seem to resonate with the European interviewees. Respondent 10 claimed that:

culture should include arts. First of all, think about the ministries of culture where their purpose is to manage the cultural sector, including all the arts institutions. Here, we speak about fine arts or visual arts when we speak about culture. It is a broad term and it should include, from the very beginning, the arts.

This perspective sees culture simply as a more inclusive concept rather than a more complex one. Respondent 1 had her own take on the difference between the terminology of arts versus culture:

We have this tendency of calling "culture" everything that is produced by people as a form of expression. There is no other more philosophical or fundamental reason on why these terms are different.

Funding Structures

The most noticeable difference between the United States and Europe in terms of arts entrepreneurship education is the way it is funded. The origin of the funding has an impact on the way education is being organized, and expectedly on the content of programs and courses. In Europe, many arts entrepreneurship courses are part of higher education that relies on public support, while in the United States, some private foundations provide financial support to some arts entrepreneurship programs at private universities. When asked about the funding of arts entrepreneurship programs in the United States, Respondent 2 emphasized that, from a policy perspective, arts funding is up to the states to decide. However, arts funding will be rarely allocated to arts entrepreneurship education.

Europe relies on national or pan-European incentives derived from public policy. Additionally, the majority of the institutions offering arts entrepreneurship courses in Europe are public. When asked if, and how, the public sphere is able to influence arts entrepreneurship curricula, Respondent 4 discussed how public institutions must serve the public mission of educating the future generations through the achievement of broader social goals and cultural awareness. Respondent 4 compared his experience in public universities in northern Europe to the private sphere curriculum previously described by Respondent 3 during the same interview:

Obviously [Respondent's 3] institution and their history and their values, they've built that up themselves. In the public sphere you also have another set of factors that might influence you in that respect.

Respondent 1 further discussed the implications of public funding, describing her experience teaching in public higher institutions in European countries:

Let's just say they are more socialistic countries; more social welfare is highlighted, and artists are having different protections. So, this idea of entrepreneurship is implemented differently.

One consequence of the difference in funding structure is that tuition fees differ considerably between higher education institutes and universities in Europe and the United States. It may be expected that students who pay higher fees may expect higher value for their money, and thus an education giving clear guarantees of employment. However, this was not expressed by the interviewees, nor did our findings suggest different viewpoints on students' employability options between European and American educators.

Discussion and Conclusion

Even if a unified definition of arts entrepreneurship is absent in both theory and practice—along with its agreed-upon lines of content, teaching formats and learning objectives—the current scope of arts entrepreneurship as a discipline entails creating something of newfound value rather than simply translating ideas into enterprises. According to respondents from the United States and Europe and triangulated with recent literature, arts entrepreneurship education ideally comprises three major learning objectives: (a) remembering, understanding and applying context-specific and career-relevant knowledge, (b) developing analytical, critical and self-efficacy skills, and (c) encouraging student agency and explorative behavior that leads to value creation and requires entrepreneurial mindsets. Despite being aware that entrepreneurs are idolized in American culture, the interviewees from the United States emphasized the idea of entrepreneurship as a mindset promoting flexibility, self-efficacy and critical thinking skills, in line with European educators.⁴⁷ Programs in the U.S. tended to cater to artists specifically (hence the common label of “arts entrepreneurship”), whereas various degrees offered in Europe are open

⁴⁷ See Stephen Rueff, “Creative Freedom: Arts Entrepreneurship as a Mindset,” *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 2, no. 1 (2020): 48-52, <https://doi.org/10.46776/jaee.v2.57>; and Josef Hanson, “Developing and Evaluating the Arts Entrepreneurship Profile: A Systematic Approach,” *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* (2021): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2021.1919586>.

to both artists and non-artists who have a desire to work in the arts and cultural sector (“cultural entrepreneurship”).⁴⁸

The interviewees all saw arts entrepreneurship as a field still in its development phase and spoke about an urgent need for more unity. The lack of a formal, empirical theory means that the discipline is being interpreted in numerous ways. This is not necessarily a weakness, nor should it be resolved immediately. The broader-based conception of art is helpful as it pulls together parts and judgments of art from a myriad of contexts and “raises it above the fray – it allows us to theorize a broader definition based on the ‘working out’ of evolving issues.”⁴⁹

Our study may have shown more unity than one would expect. Interviewees from both Europe and the U.S. stressed how important it is for artists to develop entrepreneurial (enterprising) skills. Such skills may differ across institutions, depending on the programs’ specific focus, but they all involve the same elements: the ability to develop a flexible, adaptable mindset and the ability to understand and critically analyze the surrounding environment and act upon it. In particular, a unified opinion about current challenges was voiced. First, due to the newness of the arts entrepreneurship field, it can sometimes be challenging to find individuals that have professional experience and can deliver relevant content to students. Second, arts entrepreneurship education is faced with the task of rendering it more inclusive, equipping all students with the entrepreneurial mindset that allows various forms of cultural expression to become valuable.

Beckman has already advocated for a new conception of entrepreneurship as an inclusive, empowering philosophy that transcends disciplinary bounds and leverages both the intellectual and artistic self.⁵⁰ If educators and researchers strive to keep the discourse open and are willing to welcome new perspectives, we can begin to let go of the inherent Eurocentric approach that distinguishes current arts entrepreneurship practices, with the hope of making the discipline more inclusive.

Arts entrepreneurship education faces a particular challenge. On one hand, it frequently places students at the center of learning and prepares them for uncertain career paths and demanding labor market conditions. This could lead them to become self-centered and encourage them to engage in harsh competition solely to be able to make a living from their art. On the other hand, although the programs encourage students to avoid being too attached to their creative practice, they simultaneously motivate them to recognize their inherent value as critical thinkers and self-managers, and to share this value with their audience.

Current arts entrepreneurship curricula focus on students’ artistic skills, and the emphasis on specific mindsets seeking to create value (rather than just appropriate it) may be empowering. In both the contexts of the United States and Europe, educators give proof of successfully preparing young creative individuals to address many of the challenges contemporary societies face. The notions of individualism and heroics common to traditional perceptions of entrepreneurship are mostly absent in current arts

⁴⁸ Essig, “Same or Different?”

⁴⁹ Gary D. Beckman, “What Arts Entrepreneurship Isn’t,” *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education*, 1, no. 1 (2014): 10, <https://doi.org/10.46776/jaer.v1.15>.

⁵⁰ Beckman, “‘Adventuring’ Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education.”

entrepreneurship curricula. While arts entrepreneurship educators used to borrow insights from business schools, they currently seem preoccupied with integrating a more specific interpretation of entrepreneurship in their programs in which an open entrepreneurial mindset takes center stage. One day, business schools may seek guidance from arts entrepreneurs in developing educational programs that support creative, flexible and inclusive entrepreneurship.

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