

Creative entrepreneurship as common good for the city.



By Jacob Urup Nielsen

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Preface.

For a number of years I have worked with cities and creativity across Europe. I have specialised in participatory processes through my work with British Council's FutureCityGame but also worked extensively with creative entrepreneurship and specifically the way it relates to place. I was born in a capital but grew up in a smaller city - Aarhus in Denmark - which prides itself of being the world's smallest metropolis. Coincidentally, Aarhus was one of the places, I ran a series of creative entrepreneur clubs from 2010 to 2012 under the auspices of British Council's Young Creative Entrepreneur programme. For this work, I was fortunate to work with some bright and entrepreneurial interns¹, who all put lots of energy into this work. Finally, I have worked for the Danish Centre for Culture and Creative Economy on a big competition, Creative Business Cup, and most recently set up Centre for Cities and Creativity which focuses on how creativity can enhance life in cities. I feel privileged to get the opportunity to share some of the thoughts and learning from all of the work I have taken part in.

1 Wazir Ilyas Abdulrahman, Rasmus Hamann and Nicolai Juhler

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Imagine a city where artists, poets and other creatives earn healthy salaries. A city where artists and creatives are seen as problem solvers and suppliers rather than ornamental figures we support as a benevolent society.

I have structured this think-piece in the following way. In order to understand how artists and creatives can contribute to our cities, I will first reflect on my understanding of the terms *culture* and *creativity*. I will then discuss how I see creative entrepreneurship as a way of applying creativity. I will then look at how a specific intervention, the creative entrepreneur club, can be used strategically to harness creativity for specific outputs in a city. Finally, I will share three key elements for using creativity for creative entrepreneurship successfully in the city and discuss the pros and cons of working in a smaller city.

When talking about the domain of *creativity* and *culture*, I find it useful to reflect on the usage and meaning of the two terms. They are often used interchangeably and loosely arts but a tighter definition will serve well in trying to identify new ways of working with this area.

Culture is for me the broader set of norms in a given community and also the expression of the identity and values of that community. Culture can rarely be led back to a single individual and is the result of a plethora of intertwined outputs. *Creativity* is the ability to make completely new things, often with a reference to the cultural frame which the artists work within. Where *culture* is usually descriptive, *creativity* is much more often prescriptive in setting norms, defining culture. Everyone of us is creative to some extent but artists and creative entrepreneurs choose to let creativity be the prevalent attribute of their work.

Can we just demand culture to be useful?

For me creative entrepreneurs are also artists. Entrepreneurs, however, distinguish themselves from other artists by creating value beyond their own need – it's more than just a one-man-band. For an entrepreneur there is an ambition from the outset to create value on a larger scale. The value is not always financial but can also be aesthetic or social. I think it is problematic that many definitions of entrepreneurs focus on their innovative streak as this is also characteristic of most artistic endeavours. Because being innovative

does not necessarily make you entrepreneurial.

When talking about *creativity*, some authors distinguish between a *narrow creativity* and a *broad creativity*². The narrow creativity is what often is seen as the arts and the domain of professional artists; where creativity is a main attribute of their work. The broader creativity is the creativity we see in all walks of life, the janitor who finds new ways of collecting waste, school chefs finding new ways of presenting school dinners. I am preoccupied with how we can blend the two. How can we ensure the creativity of musicians, painters, fashion designers is applied in local communities, across a neighbourhood and in the surrounding city. How we can ensure that the narrow creativity spills over into the surrounding community and ensure a positive osmosis between creative entrepreneurs and the community? Exactly the process of using the narrow creativity for a broader creativity is an entrepreneurial effort in my perspective.

A concrete event for working with creative entrepreneurs.

In my experience, *club events* where creative entrepreneurs share their experience of doing new work is an important element in this. The format I have found successful was when an experienced outsider entrepreneur, someone from out of town, a fashion designer working in sustainability, a DJ spreading his mixes via social media or a publisher giving editorial freedom to youngsters, share their business story for the first part of the event and this was followed up by an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to discuss the presentation in terms of the local conditions in their city.

Harnessing creativity.

You may ask why club events have been fairly successful where I have worked? As people we behave differently, speak differently depending on the context we are in, ie. there is a certain set of norms and phrases connected to being a colleague, a different set of norms and phrases connected to being a parent, yet another set of norms and phrases connected to living in a specific city. I will argue that creative entrepreneurs also behave differently depending on the location they are working in; and their business models need to be fine-tuned to their context. One of the most important and often overlooked conditions is the prevalent narrative of that city. This needs to be considered for project

² See for example Charles Leadbeater, What Makes Cities Creative?, http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/files/data/kb/cc_-_charlie_leadbeater_think_piece.pdf (accessed 21/10-2012)

descriptions, target audiences and funding applications. Also creative entrepreneurs will need pitch their offer or product to ensure that these things are taken into account. With the rise of digital, place will play a different but not necessarily a smaller role – connections will be one of the key levers that successful entrepreneurs apply to their business – connections to customers, collaborators, consumers.

In other words the three quintessential ingredients in creating a successful environment for creative entrepreneurs are **location**, **connections** and **communication**.

First and foremost creative entrepreneurship always takes place in a physical **location** and with a certain market, physical or virtual, in mind. It is important for entrepreneurs and policy-makers not to underestimate this. Physical locations have certain attributes tied to them such as skilled labour force, funding opportunities and stakeholders. The physical location will also in many cases be the predominant market place both due to proximity in terms of delivering physical tangible goods but also because the creative enterprise will have a higher profile in the location where they are based due to the networks they are invariably part of through their employees, suppliers, etc.

Secondly, **connections** and networks are important. Creative enterprises need as much as any business or individual to work with their networks strategically in order to create success for themselves. From Creative Entrepreneur Club Aarhus we learned that the opportunities for creative entrepreneurs to connect to their peers was quintessential. It gave entrepreneurs the opportunity to learn from others who were also working with a business where the essence is often an intangible idea. It gave inspiration in terms of business models and sometimes created mutually beneficial collaborations. Finally, the entrepreneurs have greater clout in challenging prevalent funding structures if they address local authorities as a group rather than as individuals. It is not only the local connections which are important. As the EU-funded project FutureCityJobs has recently shown, international networking and sharing of best practice between cities can also be extremely fruitful.

Thirdly, **communication** must be remembered by anyone working with creative industries either as an entrepreneur, an investor or civil servants. For creative entrepreneurs to succeed with their offer, the world needs to understand their offer. The messaging needs to be targeted to the main target audience but entrepreneurs also need to consider whether

there are other secondary audience segments who could provide a steady income stream. Civil servants and politicians who want to create the right preconditions also need to communicate accurately and timely to entrepreneurs who are often preoccupied with getting their business up and running. They should ideally constantly be in a dialogue of presenting their offers and listening to what challenges creative entrepreneurs are facing in the city. Shared services and support mechanisms should be mobile and flexible and follow the creative entrepreneurs.

Working in smaller cities.

Different cities offer different opportunities. In my experience, smaller cities are often closer knit and on an official level often centered around a strong public sector. In many places, one or two sectors have a predominant influence on the economy. When starting up as an entrepreneur in such a place it is important to understand these forces within the local economy. I believe that successful entrepreneurship can just as well happen in smaller cities; but of course the criteria for success needs to be set at the right level and the business model needs to match these objectives.

Smaller cities often offer better connectivity to people in general as it is more likely that you through your networks know people who can assist you or offer advice with growing your business. In addition, the rise of digital and the long tail in internet commerce gives new chances for creative entrepreneurs in smaller cities. High quality internet connectivity is becoming a key factor for the success of many creative industries.

Final words.

We should still have artists whose main occupation is to crystallise the *zeitgeist*, artists who focus their efforts on creating aesthetic beauty. However, as I have argued above we need other artists and creatives with artistic background to work with the challenges across our society. We need to harness the creativity for the common good of our cities.