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**Traces of entrepreneurship in  
the artistic context**

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# Traces of entrepreneurship in the artistic context

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**Abstract.** The interplay between the world of arts and that of business is at the centre of the present paper, where the processes of artistic entrepreneurship are investigated through the observation of a group of artists living the experience of founding their own cultural enterprises in the specific context of performing arts. The result is a picture of what the contemporary artists-entrepreneurs are: they act entrepreneurially guided by the respect of the integrity of the Art and assume the role of gatekeepers of the quality of their product, playing in the business world and challenging its logics and structures.

**Keywords:** cultural entrepreneurship, artistic entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, paradox, compromise, performing arts

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## 1. Introduction

The interplay between the world of arts and that of business is at the centre of the present paper, where the processes of artistic entrepreneurship are investigated through the observation of a group of artists living the experience of founding their own cultural enterprises in the specific context of performing arts.

Attracted by key words such as creativity and innovation (Sarri, Bakouros, Petridou 2010) that such a great importance have in both the artistic (Hagoort 2004; Nyström 2006; Loudon 2013) and the entrepreneurial experience, management studies increasingly focused on the investigation of the processes through which innovative and creative ideas are turned into entrepreneurial experiences in the art world (Scherdin, Zander 2011). The creative approach, an impulsion to break the rules and overcome the obstacles, together with the wisdom of the future are all attitudes emerging in many artists, in combination with more practical capabilities. The observation of the artistic process (Peterson, Berger 1997) thus became a consolidated field of research, in combination with the study of those capabilities supporting the artist in a complex set of activities addressed to implement the creative idea (Scherdin, Zander 2011). As a result, the *artist-entrepreneur* (Caplin, 1980; Calcagno, 2013) is identified as the pivot of a process, whose strategic relevance is reinforced by the chronic absence of public funds driving the artist to experience new forms of hybridisation with the economic world (Bakhashi, Throsby 2010). As a matter of fact, a growing number of artists are experiencing the double role of artist and entrepreneur, founding new ventures and collaborating with the world of business in many and innovative ways (Darsø's 2009; Scherdin, Zander 2011).

The question is then twofold: who are these professionals? how do they behave making sense of the processes through which artistic and entrepreneurial acts merge?

The paper<sup>1</sup> tries to let the managerial and entrepreneurial characters emerge from the ground. Focusing on the practices in use in the context of performing artists, the borders of a common ground made of entrepreneurial attitudes and artistic wisdom are identified, in order to present a real picture of artists-entrepreneurs' condition. Overcoming the mystification of the artist's figure recognised only as a bohemian

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<sup>1</sup> A first draft of the present research was presented at the 31st EGOS Colloquium, July 2-4, 2015, Athens, Greece.

character, the paper aims to be the mirroring-reality foundation on which starting a reasoning on the needs of the cultural enterprises founded and managed by artists-entrepreneurs.

The article is structured as follow. First, the authors focus on the theoretical evolution of the concept of artistic entrepreneurship, clarifying the twofold semiotic nature of cultural entrepreneurship. Thus, the field of research represented by performing arts sector and the case studies methodology are presented. The most significant words and meanings revealed by the interviewed artists-entrepreneurs are disclosed. As a consequence of the collection of empiric data, a theoretical abstraction is conducted in order to classify artists-entrepreneurs behaviours and actions. Finally, some general reflections about the content and the contribution of the present research are developed.

## *2. Theoretical background*

At the beginning of the nineties, Gartner proposed an ontological question: “Is entrepreneurship just a buzz word or does it have particular characteristics that can be identified and studied?” (Gartner 1990, 16). Years of theoretical and empirical investigation (Busenitz et. al., 2003; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Kuratko, Morris, Covin, 2011; Kalantaridis, 2004; Schoonhoven & Romanelli 2001; Sarasvathy, 2003; Venkataraman et al., 2012) testify the attempt to make sense of it through an intense process of research.

Nowadays, the same uncertainty emphasised by Gartner’s words can be seen as a central issue in the debate on cultural entrepreneurship (Swedberg, 2006; Lange, 2009; Zemite, 2010; Klamer, 2011; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2011; Scott, 2012; Kolsteeg, 2013; Konrad, 2013; Marinova & Borza, 2013; Mokyr, 2013; Enhuber, 2014; Uberbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015), widely recognised as a central subset of the entrepreneurial discourse. Is cultural entrepreneurship the new buzzy word? The absence of a shared semantic and the abundance of meanings attributed to the concept acts as an obstacle to the emergence of a common framework.

At a first glance, the literature on cultural entrepreneurship can be divided in two main streams of research, depending on the double meaning of the cultural dimension. As a first meaning *culture* refers to the sociological frame of reference identifying the set of habits, customs, traditions, and beliefs, which constitute a shared way of life in a specific historical and political context. As a second meaning, culture identifies a complex set of processes, products and actors involved in the

design, production and distribution of cultural and artistic goods and services. Associated with the two meanings of the word *culture*, two different macro streams of research in entrepreneurship emerge. Descending from the first sociological perspective, cultural entrepreneurship represents "the skill of certain entrepreneurs to use culture as a toolkit for constructing resonant identities and motivating resource-holding audiences to allocate their resources." (Uberbacher et al 2015, 926). Therefore, cultural entrepreneurship is instrumentally observed and practiced, as the process of storytelling that identifies and legitimates new ventures (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), not considering the specific industry where this process takes place, but using the adjective *cultural* to identify any kind of entrepreneurial process, whereas the entrepreneurs develop their own reputational role building up their story. The continuous evolutionary reality in the cultural sector suggests a new stream of research whose aim is that of analysing the processes through which artists and cultural actors become entrepreneurs (Aggestam, 2007; Hong, Essing, Bridgstock 2012; Bonin-Rodriguez 2012; Scherdin, Zander, 2011; Hagoort 2004; Markusen, Gilmore, Johnson, Levi, & Martinez, 2006; Preece, 2011; Beckman & Essig, 2012; Marinova & Borza, 2013; White, 2013; Welsh, Onishi, DeHoog, & Syed, 2014; Taylor, Bonin-Rodriguez, & Essig, 2015; Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Gartner, Roberts, & Rabideau, 2015). The considered investigation identifies cultural entrepreneurship as the practice of conception, production and marketing of "cultural goods and services, generating economic, cultural and social opportunities for creators while adding cultural value for consumers." (Zemite 2010, 79), adopting *culture* as the mission and using the market as an instrument to give value to the cultural ideas (Klamer, 2011). Following this approach<sup>2</sup>, cultural entrepreneurs (Marinova & Borza, 2013) combine their artistic qualities with the sense of business (Van der Ploeg 1999, Marinova & Borza, 2013). The economic sustainability of the cultural enterprise is then realised in coherence and not in contrast with their cultural vision (Zemite 2010).

Given these macro perspectives, the present paper refers to the specific context of cultural industries, investigating the role of the *artist-entrepreneur* (Caplin, 1980;

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<sup>2</sup> In this macro branch of research, in the art sector there is a general distinction between those not directly involved in the creation and realization of works of art, and those who are actively involved as artists. Referring to the latter, the chronic shortage of funds together with the relevance of artistic and creative processes in the world of business pushed a growing number of them to experience new patterns of professional development.

Calcagno, 2013), in her personification of the perfect example of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur fighting against adverse circumstances to promote her own idea. But reality is quite more complex than what emerges at a first glance. If under a certain condition artists and entrepreneurs seem to have so many similarities (Bonnafous-Boucher, Cuir, Partouche 2011, 31), inducing to state that “the entrepreneur has the capacity to trigger a series of phenomena ex nihilo or, in other words, to be at the origin of a complex series of events. This is also true for the artist”, on the other hand the artist is still struggling with the romantic image of a creative identity which is preserved by any form of contagion with the world of business and all the “not values” represented in the common perception, rejecting the idea of being identified as entrepreneur (Bonin Rodriguez 2012). Causes, consequences and possible resolutions for this emerged paradoxical situation represent one of the two major streams of the present investigation.

The second aim was that of identifying and analysing those managerial and entrepreneurial dimensions shared as a matter of fact by those artists who were able to play an artistic role while driving a cultural enterprise (Calcagno, 2013; Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012, Kunh & Galloway, 2013; Besana, 2012), performing a process of arts entrepreneurship (Renthschler & Geursen, 2004; Preece, 2011; Marinova & Borza, 2013).

### *3. Context and method*

The entrepreneurial dimension of the artistic activity is presented, focusing on the experience of those artists who live this hybrid condition of work, playing the double role of artists and entrepreneurs. More specifically, the paper analyses the context of live performing arts (circus, dance, theatre<sup>3</sup>), in which all the artists interviewed are working. The choice depends on three main reasons.

First of all, most of the cultural enterprises operating in the performing arts have been founded by single artists or artistic groups.

As a second reason, these enterprises are characterized by high levels of complexity in terms of organisational structure, and processes of production and distribution. Live performance context is characterised by the combination of different capabilities

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<sup>3</sup> In the present research the music sector has not been investigated because it presents some particular features that heavily influence the entrepreneurial conduction. For the same reasons, the lyric foundations are not object of the research.

and activities, where the product is realized through a mix of languages and practices, which are only partially connected to the artistic world and are all strategic to the final performance on stage.

Finally, artists operating in the context of performing arts have a special consciousness about their acting on stage, living a closed relationship with the audience. As a consequence, they develop a strong aptitude to being self-conscious, transferring it to the evaluation of their entrepreneurial activity, and adopting a relational approach that is fundamental in the entrepreneurial acting.

Once defined the field of investigation, three main research questions have been identified:

1. What does it mean being an “independent creator of performing art” today?
2. Which are the entrepreneurial features emerging from the observation of the processes implemented in their ordinary activity?
3. Being influenced by their artistic aptitude, how do they face the complexity caused by the multiple and heterogeneous activities required to conduct their entrepreneurial activity?

These questions have been investigated through a qualitative method of research (Meyers, 2009a, 2013b; Yin, 1989a, 2014b) and, more specifically, an in depth observation of the work done by a group of 11 artists-entrepreneurs, who developed their artistic project starting a new venture. These artists act in complex and hostile environments, finding a strong opposition. Nevertheless, they are successful in implementing their ideas both under an artistic and an entrepreneurial point of view.

Following these trajectories, the research has been structured in three rounds.

In the first round, a number of artists were selected (6). Our case selection strategy was driven by two main rationales.

First, practice commonality in order to increase cross-case comparability; we focused on performing artists who established a cultural enterprise and are concurrently operating within it.

Second, after a first selection of the artists we were in part “led by the phenomenon itself”, identifying additional cases through “snowball” logic as well. Following the approach suggested by Darsø’s (2009), we designed the data set in order to emphasize the variety of artistic experiences in the context of performing arts. For a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, a certain number of “not artistic” professionals involved in the entrepreneurial performing arts world and directly working with artists-entrepreneurs (cultural managers and specialised accountants in



cultural sector) were included in the list of interviewers. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were then conducted<sup>4</sup>, both in Italy and abroad<sup>5</sup>. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed and, in some cases, they were supported by the observation of the artists studied both in their artistic and entrepreneurial roles, during their daily organizational work, on stage during the performances, and in the backstage during rehearsals.

In the second round, data have been discussed and triangulated by the authors identifying emerging practices and key words used by the artists-entrepreneurs, and interpreting the meanings attributed to some shared practices. Coherently with the double role played by the artist-entrepreneur – acting as an artist and as an entrepreneur at the same time – the empirical research has been based on a method of investigation where the two dimensions have been analysed simultaneously in their reciprocal interaction.

The third round concerned the selection of four case studies for an in-depth investigation. The selection has been driven by the following three principles:

- Geographical commonality. Cases here analysed are all located in the North-Italy context in order to increase cross-case comparability;
- Complexity and completeness. The selected cases present a huge amount of different features, letting a business model emerge;
- Diversification in entrepreneurial strategies and conceptions. Even though common features have been identified, they have different causes, introduce different conceptions and result in different actions.

The four selected cases (Table n.1), are briefly presented hereunder:

- *Il Posto*: a company of vertical dance established in Venice in 1994. Internationally acclaimed and active, it is managed by the choreographer Wanda Moretti and the musician Marco Castelli. They combine their respective artistic capabilities to create appealing artistic fragments exploiting vertical spaces;

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<sup>4</sup> The authors would like to thank the following people for their kind availability and valuable contribution: Helle Bach (Dadadans); Marta Bettuolo, Stefano Eros Macchi and Marianna Martinoni (Teatro de Linutile); Rossella Coletto e Alessandra Valerio (Fondazione Cariplo); Elisa Cuticchio (Associazione Figli d'Arte Cuticchio); Lisa Gilardino; Valeria Giuliani (Pilar Ternera); Silvia Gribaudo; Alessandra Lanciotti (Materiaviva Performance); Valentina Marini (Spellbound Contemporary Ballet); Wanda Moretti (Il Posto); Ermanno Nardi (Industria Scenica); Luciano Padovani (Naturalis Labor); Caterina Pasqui (Situazione Xplosiva); Moses Pendleton (Momix); Irene Sanesi (BBS-pro); Giulia Staccioli (Katakò); Luisa Supino (Carrozzeria Orfeo).

<sup>5</sup> All the interviews were conducted encountering the interviewed personally, and in a few cases using Skype as a technological support.

- Kataklò: an Italian athletic dance company funded twenty years ago by the athlete and dancer Giulia Staccioli. It is also an academia and its shows are demanded all around the world;
- Naturalis Labor: a dance company located in Vicenza. Luciano Padovani, dancer and choreographer, created it 25 years ago and he still manages it with great success. Naturalis Labour acquired the audience popularity and the appreciation in the artistic dance world thanks to the specialization in tango dance;
- Teatro de Linutile: an independent physical theatre, academy and company of actors rooted in the patavini context. Directed by two actors, Marta Bettuolo and Stefano Eros Macchi, it is a sparkling cultural space whose heterogeneous supply is always linked with artistic quality and novelty. Since 2014, it has been one of the cultural enterprises that compose the cooperative TOP – Teatri Off Padova.

Table n.1: The four selected case studies

		Il Posto	Kataklò	Naturalis Labor	Teatro de Linutile
Enterprise Data					
	Specific activity	vertical dance	athletic dance theatre	contemporary dance and tango	theatre
	legal form	cultural association	brand managed by a s.r.l.	cultural association	cultural association
	geographical market	international	international	international	national
	foundation	1994	1995	1989	2006
	headquarters	Venezia, Italy	Bologna and Milan, Italy	Vicenza, Italy	Padova, Italy
Interviewed Data					
	Interviewed person	Wanda Moretti	Giulia Staccioli	Luciano Padovani	Marta Bettuolo; Stefano Eros Macchi
	role	artist-entrepreneur (with the musician Marco Castelli)	artist-entrepreneur	artist-entrepreneur	artists-entrepreneurs

	artistic role	choreographer	choreographer and dancer	choreographer and dancer	actress
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As it is possible to observe in Table n. 1, all the selected cultural enterprises have been established by artists.

#### 4. *Artistic language & entrepreneurial conduction in artist-entrepreneur's words*<sup>6</sup>

##### 4.1 *Wanda Moretti, Il Posto*

Vertical dance performances challenge gravity and use landscapes and the aerial dimension as a stage, which is consequently different from time to time. As the choreographer Wanda Moretti tells:

*"We have a structure, a choreography that is previously composed. It is like a score. You have that score, and you will play it. However, we do not have the same kind of context every time. This is the reason why we must convert everything, and consequently the dynamic of the movement will change in the choreography. The latter is forced to change every time we enter in relationship with the context."*

As a consequence, on one hand the choreographer's artistic research is independent from a particular location: thinking about the generic aerial context, Wanda creates choreographies following her personal artistic thought. On the other hand, she needs to enter in touch with the space, fitting her artistic language into a real context. As a consequence, the same performance acquires different nuances because of the different architecture in which it is performed. A renegotiation with the environment is artistically fundamental:

*" I have to assimilate it and assimilating us to it."*

The receptiveness regard to the context is transposed in the entrepreneurial conduction: as an alert observer, Wanda is ready to catch all the opportunities of interest for her enterprise and she is always updated about the changings in the environment that surrounds her activity.

Context, conceived as the sum of individuals, reveals a collective dimension that

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<sup>6</sup> The four case studies are described hereafter reporting the most relevant sentences and the most significant information collected during the interviews and during the analysis of other information sources (such as web sites, tv shows, etc.) in order to give voice to the process of sense making of the interviewees describing the practices of conducting an artistic enterprise. Every case study is presented describing two aspects: the artistic proposal's features individuated as influencing the business conduction and the artist-entrepreneur's roles and activities.

assumes the role of the activator of the entrepreneurial behaviour:

*"My entrepreneurial activity is more linked with a collective work that I pursue with Marco, for some aspects. I am not an entrepreneur as an individual, on the other hand I am an entrepreneur in team. My capability is really contextualized. In the context with Marco and my dancers, I activate that kind of role (the entrepreneurial) because in that situation I activate some capabilities, that I am not able to explain..."*

Additionally, Wanda recognizes herself first of all as an artist and instrumentally as an entrepreneur:

*"I'm an artist. Yes I feel an artist. I recognized myself in this idea more than in that one of being an entrepreneur... I am an entrepreneur in a secondary way. I am a secondary entrepreneur."*

These words reveal Wanda's caution in being associated with the figure of an entrepreneur. She identifies the causes of this prudence in her confusing and misrepresented idea of what an entrepreneur is. In addition to this, another motivation descends from the fact that her enterprise is not formally constituted as an enterprise, but just as a cultural association.

The consequence is the feeling of inadequacy when she acts as an entrepreneur in the business context, because:

*"I do not have a comparison with people like me... this makes me uncomfortable"*

On the other hand, this inconvenience is not shown in approaching managerial activities, recognized only as a tool for the realization of the artistic idea and the conduction of professional relationships with the world of business:

*"I like working with enterprises. I have the chance to test myself with different things. They are often new creations. I like working with them, I like every time a new creation is required. This is something interesting for me. I like to be used, in a good sense... you have the chance to measure your artistic language and you can compare yourself to some aspects different from the artistic and intellectual research."*

These relationships require a comparison with the others and a capability of problem-solving, aptitudes that Wanda normally exercises in the comfort-zone of the artistic sphere: during the realization of choreographies, Wanda has to face not only with the architectural constraints, but also with other non-artistic elements, such as ropes and harnesses conditioning dancers' movement. If they could be perceived as obstacles to the realization of the artistic idea, Wanda uses to looking over them, suggesting solutions that are the result of the harmonic compromise between aerial space, equipment and artistic idea.

## 4.2 Giulia Staccioli, Katakò

According to Giulia Staccioli's words, Katakò, from the old Greek "I dance by bending and contorting my body", was born from

*"the idea of creating a company whose driving force would be the athletic context born. I desired it would become a bridge, a dialogue between two worlds using the same tool, the body. In fact, the sport world and the dance one present some difficult in dialoguing."*

The dancer and choreographer had ripened the idea of converging sport and dance in one artistic language thanks to her personal experience: after having won the title of rhythmic gymnastics championship, she went to the States. Here, she joined the Momix and she artistically grew up under Moses Pendleton's guide. From Momix experience, she understood that

*"you do not have to put any boundaries because imagination can stretch everywhere. At the same time, setting some constraints with some objects, with something that creates interference, you have the chance to figure out something new."*<sup>7</sup>

The application of creativity in every dimension as the key to produce novelty combined with the attitude of "thinking big" allows the achievement of what seems impossible, or too hard to reach.

Giulia Staccioli's following these suggestions, introduced novelty in Italian cultural sector.

In fact, her artistic language is the balanced result of the dialogue between athletics, dance and theatre. It challenges physical and intellectual constraints and it depends on the synergetic synthesis of apparently different elements.

In 1995, when the company was founded, this artistic proposal was completely new and original in the Italian context. As Giulia remembers *"They (the commission of the Ministry of Culture) told me that the mine was not dance"*. In spite of the absence of institutional support, Giulia has continued to believe in her artistic project and she now asserts proudly:

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<sup>7</sup> Giulia Staccioli. (2010, November). Retrosena. TV2000. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WnZTG0IWNl>

*“Nowadays most of the dance companies and people who were inside that commission are doing something really closed to the mine. There was an official recognition and there is satisfaction in this.”*

Nevertheless, Giulia’s words reveal she became entrepreneur not because she wanted to, but because she was forced to.

*“L: How could you define your role? Are you an entrepreneur?”*

*G.S.: I am, even if I wouldn’t. Nowadays, I am entrepreneur less than before. There was a period in which I was more an entrepreneur instead of being choreographer. However, in our job (being a performing artist) we are always entrepreneur of ourselves...*

*L: Why you wouldn’t be an entrepreneur?”*

*G.S.: Because I don’t like it. I like the creative part of the process, I like making visible what was not visible...”*

From the point of view of the artist, being an entrepreneur is perceived as an imposition. At the same time, the choreographer *“always believed in self-management and self-production because they leave you the chance of being free to create.”* The desire of being the independent and unique owner of her art was a sufficient motivation to overcome the rejection of being an entrepreneur. According to Giulia, entrepreneurial duty steals time to the artistic process and to the visible realization of what is not visible. But then, entrepreneurial aptitude allows the artistic idea to gain the resources to be realized and spread.

The managerial categories and tools required to construct a solid structure are missing at the beginning of Katakò experience as an organization:

*“from the organizational point of view, everything was done in a non-professional way... My husband, who believed in this idea, and I involved some friends in the world of sport, and thanks to the shared determination in conducting this project and through the common help we worked on the first show. How did everything happen? We personally invested economic resources on equipment and costumes. We looked for rehearsal spaces asking who, between our personal contacts, had some spaces at disposition such as gyms and theatres. We did the rehearsals in the free time and in the weekends. For everybody this was a secondary activity...”*

These words let emerge how the collective dimension, especially in terms of shared vision and widespread collaboration, was fundamental. A network, recognizing the goodness of the artistic project, shared knowledge and both material and immaterial resources to develop Katakò project:

*“Some dear friends sustained my idea, such as Yuri Keki. He had just won the Olimpiadi, and he exhibited during one of my shows and this captured a lot of attention. The rest was by word of mouth.”*

The supremacy and the power of a good artistic idea compared with the organizational structure is a constant in the artist-entrepreneur's thought:

*"It has always been hard, especially at the beginning, to explain that artistic capabilities, artists' quality, the goodness of ideas and of the show can exist even without a solid and big organizational structure, such as the big production houses."*

Nevertheless, recognizing the importance of management activities as the tool to reach financial sustainability, Giulia Staccioli assumed these practices, but not without troubles:

*"I've always had difficult in having a management good in managing and smoothly pushing the company. This is the reason why we have always adopted self-management and self-production. This is real complex. A person arrives where her competences end; after this limit, other people have to be in charge of. But you have to find people who believe in your project and who do not want to change badly and undervalue it. They must support it..."*

Two aspects emerge from this declaration: at first, the artist-entrepreneur is conscious of her limits; secondly as an artist-entrepreneur she has to share her vision and get the people involved, if she wants to be surrounded by the right collaborators.

#### 4.3 Luciano Padovani, *Naturalis Labor*

The following Luciano Padovani's quote, impressed in the homepage of the website of the company, describes perfectly his artistic vision:

*"Dance is finally a naturalis labor, a work of the body, patient and necessary, a day by day hard work, a work that marks you out, a constructive one; natural like the gesture and the body that creates it, like the eye that sees it, like the time that spoils it... the artist's way and his social function, the research of simplicity and spontaneity."<sup>8</sup>*

The artistic research is translated into the ambition for the perfection: attention to details and gestures characterises the artistic proposal of *Naturalis Labor*.

As an example, one of the last creations, *Naveneva*, a danced theatre show for adolescents, has been structured in every single movement, expression and object used by the dancers on the stage even though, as Luciano Padovani stressed, dance shows for teenagers are usually not so much well-finished:

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<sup>8</sup> Homepage <http://www.naturalislabor.it/en/natlab/compagnia.php>

*“we invest a lot on it (Naveneva) in terms of choreographies, scenic design...A costume designer of La Scala created costumes for our performance...”*

Founded as a contemporary dance company, Naturalis Labor is now specialised in also another type of artistic language, more sophisticated and sought-after: tango dance. As a consequence, the dance company presents a twofold artistic soul, directed and mastered by Luciano, who creates artistic performances because of the “urgency to say” and “the desire of renovation”.

The dual artistic proposal is reflected by the twofold nature of its founder Luciano Padovani: he declares, without uncertainty, to be an artist and an entrepreneur at the same time, because to improve your art you must find the financial resources to support the development:

*“A dance company has the production of shows as its mission. For the production of show it is necessary to invest financial resources. More you want to maintain a good level of quality, more you have to financially invest in good dancers and fashion designers and so on...”*

The recognition of the importance of the non-artistic aspects is a process grown gradually. At the beginning, Luciano improved artistically, driven by his passion, while

*“now, as an entrepreneur, as a dance company director, I aim at some not artistic goals... The higher your artistic level is, the more demanding the economical aspects become. You build the entrepreneurial vision slowly. You acquit this consciousness working in the field.”*

The ambition of being requested by important theatres, as a confirmation of the goodness of the artistic quality, mixed with the necessity of been economically sustained to have the resources to improve the quality of the artistic ideas, pushed Luciano to make a strategic decision that would have modified the artistic proposal:

*“I was ambitious because I wanted to perform in more important theatres. Tango has been the tools through which I could do this. I reached what I wanted. Through the contemporary dance, this would not have been possible or I would have reached it harder. The way I conduct the thing was a little bit difficult, on the other hand it opened us some doors we would not have been the chance to cross.”*

These words reveal a respectful exploitation of the art that assumes at the same time the role of the reason why, the tool through which and the end of the process. Luciano left the artistic direction of the contemporary dance to the young and talented choreographer Silvia Bertoncelli and he tried to delegate some managerial aspects. The latter process was not so easy and effective:



*“When I call a theatre director, he knows me as a professional choreographer. When somebody else calls the answer is never so positive and interested. If it’s not me, the person is not taken under consideration. I have some troubles too sometimes, but I’m used to. I have a series of relationships and networks. This is the reason why it’s so difficult to introduce a new person in the management of the company.”*

This confession reveals a person-centric enterprise where the artist-entrepreneur cannot be replaced.

#### *4.4 Marta Bettuolo and Stefano Eros Macchi, Teatro de LInutile*

Graduated as actors, Marta Bettuolo and Stefano Eros Macchi, wife and husband respectively, established their cultural enterprise: a theatre producing shows and offering courses on the theatrical artistic language. Not having the theoretical competences to approach this new challenge, they have implemented their reality anyway:

*“We started from nothing: we painted walls without knowing anything about and not having a managerial organization. Nevertheless we discovered having a structured management was to be the only way to have success.”*

During years of hard work and dedication, the unconsciousness has evolved in consciousness, even if still nowadays, Marta reveals that

*“In some moments I asked myself: ‘am I able to do this thing?’ because I have only a humanistic background, I did an academy of theatrical arts. Is it what I can manage? Stefano is used to saying you need only common sense. The most of the people haven’t it. In fact, the few knowledgeable entrepreneurs use a lot of common sense, big ideas and a lot of curiosity.” (Marta Bettuolo)*

At first the common sense pushed the two artists-entrepreneurs to improve only the artistic aspects of their activity; thereafter they shifted their focus on the managerial activities. This consciousness has grown so much that, as Marta said

*“ Our objective is to make the others conscious that in an entrepreneurial activity there are so many not-creative workers which work allows the realization of the creative part. Because the creative part alone remains here (indicating the theatre), and from here it does not come out.”*

Managerial practices seem to be perceived as a fundamental support for the artistic proposal. Unfortunately,

*“A theatre like this one has not the economic resources to pay full time human resources. Consequently it is difficult to bring here professionals. We were able to give*

*us a structure, thanks to Funder35. The project offers a managerial assistance to make cultural enterprises able to give themselves a structure..."*

The quote reveals the urgency to get economic sustain, and at the same time and with the same importance, the necessity to implement the organizational structure of the cultural enterprise, introducing professionals to the field of art management. In 2014, beyond Marta and Stefano, other two people joined Teatro de LInutile: Marianna, in charge of marketing and fundraising, and Silvia, responsible for the organization and distribution.

Nevertheless, Marta declares:

*"What I find hard is having time to organise the artistic part maintaining quality in it, because at the same time I have to do many courses, to do marketing activities, to be a manager, to do everything the theatre needs. There is the necessity to have more human resources... We decided not to accept volunteers, and this is a choice. If someone works with us, we'll give him an economic reward. We hate the volunteer work, because the volunteers is like a crazy mine."*

Through Marta's words, timing emerged as a fundamental factor the artist-entrepreneur has to deal with.

In spite of missing time, Marta and Stefano do not sacrifice their ambition. As the marketing director Marianna Martinoni stresses, Teatro de LInutile thinks big, being receptive regard to the social context surrounding it. This practice is developed in the artistic sphere: in his role as director, Stefano Eros Macchi asserts Teatro de LInutile's artistic offer has always a focus on human behaviour and the relationships between individuals. As a consequence in their being entrepreneurs, Marta and Stefano are not totally product oriented, but they tune in individuals' needs.

Being an actress, Marta has developed a process of learning by doing that she adopts also in the entrepreneurial conduction of her activity. The artist-entrepreneur declares that roles are personally interpreted, and the process of interpretation is not the result of a long and complex elaboration, but almost the effect of an immediate and subjective approach in performing that particular character:

*"we try to live what results from improvisations and the rehearsals. I personally have a gut instinct. I act, making mistakes, so I try again, and so on... Maybe I try to bring the character to me more than me to the character."*

With these words reveals how the artistic practice is improved by making mistakes.

Reflecting more deeply on her artistic profession she declares:

*"I think the actor, or who lives this kind of life that combines the working time with the personal one, has more attention and is more sensitive about what surrounds him. The actor can perceive things from a different point of view."*

### 5. Theoretical implications

A first consideration emerging from the analysis of the interviewees is that the relationship between the artistic features and the entrepreneurial conduction of the firm is strong and quite complex.

In all the cases presented above, the interdependence between the two spheres emerges a matter of fact. Therefore, the nature of the cultural enterprise is dual, but at the same time, is an integral whole. At the same time, the behaviour of the artist-entrepreneur results from an intense dialogue between these two languages, differently from that is the common sense on it.

Who is the artist-entrepreneur nowadays? And how does the artist-entrepreneur behave?

The artistic academic background and the absence of an entrepreneurial and managerial education are the common ground of all the interviewed artists-entrepreneurs.

According to Sharon Loudon (2013) the absence of an entrepreneurial training in the educational paths of future artists produces resistance against the world of business, its language, and all the related activities. The present research depicts an evolution of Loudon's framework. The artists-entrepreneurs here analysed have a good relationship with the business world, even though they recognise the difficulties associated with their position and strongly declare the primacy of their artistic activity on the entrepreneurial and managerial staff. They manage and drive their enterprise considering art and culture as their mission (Klamer, 2011), and entrepreneurship and management as the tools through which reaching their aims in terms of sustainability and feasibility of the process of artistic creation. The creative urgency (Barrett, 1982; Calcagno, 2013) of producing art, the desire to be independent - that characterized entrepreneurship (Lumpkin, Dess 1996) - and to be the only owner of their own art, the certainty that their artful production could improve society (Inversini, Manzoni, Salvemini 2014), the artistic ambition (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012) – or the aptitude to thinking big- push them to embody an entrepreneurial and managerial behaviour in order to reach their artistic goals.

The coexistence of these two artistic and economic logics of practice (Eikhof &

Haunschild, 2007), generates tensions and paradoxical situations (Lindqvist, 2011; De Filippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007) within the cultural enterprise. If not well managed, some negative effects can emerge: when “the artistic logic of practice is economically utilized, economic logic tends to crowd out the artistic logic and, thus, erodes the very resources upon which creative production depends.” (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; 524). Injuring the art is what artists-entrepreneurs want to avoid, and this is why they declare to be first of all artists, and entrepreneurs for necessity.

The entrepreneurial condition is activated through the collective dimension.

It is identified as the condition through which the realization of the artistic performance becomes possible: there is a comparison with other artistic professionals, especially with their ways of interpretation, ideas, and physical and technical limits. The artist may make further comparison with those working on the technical side of the project, such as sound technicians, lights technicians, etc. To make this comparison productive, the artist cannot act only as an artist, but as an entrepreneur and a manager too.

Furthermore, the collective is perceived as the essential network of connections that allow the cultural enterprise to reach the market and pursue its activities. The collective takes the opportunity to realize the artistic proposal.

As a third nuance, the collective can be interpreted as the relationship with individuals and the society, urging the artist to perform as an entrepreneur.

Therefore, the entrepreneurial attitude results as the consequence of the interaction of the artist with others. The artist-entrepreneur’s role thus depends on internal and external factors. Is there any other exogenous driver causing the investigated practice?

The world of performing arts lives a persistent situation of crisis (Baumol, Bowen 1966), caused by two main reasons: public funds are insufficient to sustain a well-structured artistic programme, and cultural enterprises are managed unsuccessfully, moving towards a condition of financial failure. In addition, artistic success and public recognition are not enough to gain financial health (Turbide, Laurin, Lapierre, Morissette, 2008), and the artist is forced to look for alternative solutions to get the necessary funds to sustain the artistic process. These external conditions are both a weakness and a strength. They are a weakness because they do not encourage a positive attitude towards the aim of starting and managing an entrepreneurial activity. They are a strength, because artists are forced to develop their own artistic

enterprises, finding new ways to sustain their dream. Only the most motivated survive, adding the economic success to their artistic reputation. The situation of economic crisis functions then as a condition of “natural selection”.

Moreover, even if the world of cultural organisations is familiar to financial constraints, the recent worldwide recession represented a dramatic stroke (Turbide, Laurin, Lapierre, Morisette 2008), drastically reducing the number of job positions in the existent cultural organizations and pushing the artists to create their own independent reality.

Considering all these conditions, artists-entrepreneurs embrace the challenge as their usual condition of life, artistically and entrepreneurially.

In their artistic processes, challenges represent a normal condition connected to the desire of proposing new perspectives, breaking the conventional rules of the art world (Abbing, 2002), and starting an innovation process meant, in the Schumpeterian’s terms, as the generation of new combinations.

Translating this aptitude to the entrepreneurial sphere, artists-entrepreneurs challenge the economic constraints, starting their own business.

The challenge dimension emerges also in the professional relationship with the business world in which the artist-entrepreneur overcomes the language’s boundaries to establish a shared vocabulary and supporting the process of communication.

Challenge means change, when it leaves the ideal world and becomes a reality: artists-entrepreneurs, overcoming obstacles of different nature (Bonnafouss-Boucher, Cuir, & Partouche, 2011), enrich the world with new experimentation, acting as creative makers.

From an artistic point of view, they always look for renovation, recombining artistic ideas to create something different and unique. There is a constant fundamental injection of novelty in the artistic product, whose diffusion and consumption could trigger the origin of new ideas not only in the artistic sector (Art for Business, 2011). As a result, the necessity of artistic innovation, translated in a new artistic product, could be the origin of new recombinations outside the art world.

Uncertainty is the condition under which artists-entrepreneurs, as other entrepreneurs (Alvarez and Barney, 2007), perform, the situation in which opportunities are created because they do not exactly know the conditions in which they are going to operate. Artists-entrepreneurs are evolutionary professional, oriented to the future (Lindqvist, 2011). Discarding preconceived frameworks and

working in field, they discover how to perform in the business world and how it functions. Observing the process, artists-entrepreneurs select relevant data from the empirical experience and complete them with their personal meanings, re-reading and re-interpreting consolidated structures and processes. As a consequence cultural enterprises founded by artists have a very strong identity and their business model depends on the personality and the talent of the artist-entrepreneur (Inversini, Manzoni, Salvemini 2014).

The same interdependence is reported in management. The artist-entrepreneur shows an attitude to self-management, depending especially on the dimension of the cultural enterprise.

What emerged during the conducted empirical investigation is that especially during the start up stage, artists-entrepreneurs live a dilemma, being pressed by the need of being managerially supported in their artistic profession and the consciousness of not having enough resources to afford it, unless they reduce the investment in the quality of artistic projects. Facing this dilemma, they choose to focus on the artistic dimension of their work, assuming directly the managerial role or eventually sharing it with the team of artists. The artist-entrepreneur is then required to be also a manager, at least at the beginning of the activity, thus experiencing the great difficulty of balancing this role with the entrepreneurial activity and with the urgency of artistic creation. The emerging evidence is that instead of a separation of tasks, the artist-entrepreneur experiences a mixture of artistic-aesthetic and managerial-practical roles (Chong, 2002).

As a direct consequence, time is a vital resource to manage for both the cultural enterprise and the artist-entrepreneur. This is relevant then not only from an organizational perspective, but also in a wider perspective. Artists-entrepreneurs need to be sensitive to cultural, social and technological time changes, thus developing a particular sensitivity, which can be used in the entrepreneurial conduction. They implement this sensitiveness thanks to their artistic mind and approach.

At a first glance, the present investigation could seem based on the conception that the contemporary artists-entrepreneurs take advantage of the positive artistic aspects transferring them in the entrepreneurial sphere to gain success and a solid position in the creative industry. This process reflects what the business world approach in regard with the artistic one. However, what is revealed in the description of what the artists-entrepreneurs are and how they operate, is that at the same time Art – and the

values it incorporates- is the reason why, the product, the value and the end of the cultural enterprise established by an artist.

The faith in Art, the desire to make it visible for the others, being the without-constraints mediator of this dialogue, is the main motivation that pushes the artists to create their own independent artistic activity. Art is also the content of the product the artists create and in which they recognized themselves. In the management of the artistic and business activities, Art is the greatest guideline of the decision-making process. Finally, Art, and consequently its diffusion, evolution and growth, is the final aim that drives the artists-entrepreneurs in conducting their activity.

In the artistic cultural enterprise, the product, considered with the all values it incorporates, is also the mission and the vision of the enterprise. According with literature, the key words that characterize artistic world are creativity and innovation (Sarri, Bakouros, Petridou 2010). The present research confirms the presence of these concepts in the artistic entrepreneurship. However, it let emerged another common and constant keynote: integrity regarding the product that becomes the value invading all the aspects of the cultural enterprise.

## *6. Conclusions*

In a recent conversation, a cultural entrepreneur who succeeded in his editorial business, told the authors: “I went to a course organised by a major business representative organisation and they gave me just the same boring management frameworks. I’m able to understand them perfectly. I just wanted to find together a better solution to solve my problems, I don’t have time to spend in trivial things”. Why the managerial world is not able to give the right means to the cultural enterprise? Are the managerial approaches still based on mistaken hypotheses? Should the management re-think its tools starting from a real observation of those actors asking for real solutions?

The present investigation aims to provide a real representation of the artist-entrepreneur’s conditions, practices and behaviours. The words collected during the interviews, and the practices observed draw an image where the rhetoric of the artistic profession is balanced with the reality of the entrepreneurial behaviour. Some main aptitudes arise.

A first aptitude emerges as their desire to give sense to their own art through the development of a project which is both aesthetic and professional, and which aims to be economical sustainable; sustainability thus becomes a sign of recognition of the

artistic value. The aim of starting a cultural enterprise, even in a hostile environment, is lived almost in opposition to the world of business and to its requests. If art is commonly perceived as unnecessary, and is judged as economically unattractive, the artist-entrepreneur feels the impulse to react entrepreneurially sustaining the artistic idea. Artists then perceive themselves as “mavericks”, accustomed to overcome huge obstacles and constraints, strongly believing in the importance and forcefulness of their artistic products.

As a second aptitude, the observed artists appear to be free from the conceptual cage created by the practice of economic and managerial frameworks. They do not control these tools and they must invent and develop a self-customised way to manage their cultural enterprise effectively. Thus, they experiment different practices till when they find the right solution to solve a given problem, often translating some of the typical aspects of their artistic practice in the entrepreneurial conduction of their activity.

In their real world, made of artistic visions and professional inspirations, where reputation among the artistic community and sustainability in the economic context are both crucial to survive, they live many dimensions and experiment different paths, but they do refuse the rhetoric of the entrepreneurship. They are entrepreneurs but most of them do not like to be restrained in this conceptual frame, probably feeling a trade off between the two dimensions of their existence. Even when they accept to compromise they do not accept to loose control on their artistic project, thus refusing the idea of lowering the integrity of the project, living a sort of “controlled” compromise.

As a consequence, artists-entrepreneurs assume the role of gatekeepers, protecting the goodness of the Art they represent. They expose themselves in the name of this idea, also refusing economic opportunities and loosing a chance to increase the margin of their entrepreneurial activity. The ethic of the Art is the common value that associates and guides all the interviewed artists-entrepreneurs. It provokes a preconception of the artists-entrepreneurs as integer professionals that recognize themselves in the product they create and sell. In these terms, artists-entrepreneurs are still now linked with a romantic idea: they believe in what they produce and they respect and follow the values that Art incorporates. Protecting Art, they are gatekeeper of the quality of the experience through which people consume Art. Is this role recognized and appreciated by the audience, provoking a sense of trusting in favour of the artistic product?



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