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**Bend but don't break: a case
study on the cultural
entrepreneurial process in the
publishing industry**

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Bend but don't break: a case study on the cultural entrepreneurial process in the publishing industry

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ABSTRACT

Research on cultural industries has attracted considerable interest on cultural entrepreneurs as agents in complex interaction with multiple and evolving contexts. The study aims to capture the complexity and intensity of these relationships, exploring entrepreneurship as a journey driven by cultural and social dynamics on one side, and economic needs on the other.
The investigation is an inductive inquiry carried out through an in-depth analysis of a single revelatory case in the publishing industry. Focusing on the relational process through which the entrepreneur and the context are co-created, the paper analyzes the entrepreneurial journey through the identification of three major stages: *Divergence*, *Identity construction*, and *Institutionalization*.

Keywords
Cultural entrepreneurship, co-creation, narrative

Introduction

Cultural and creative industries are seen as important local and national sectors of revenue generation and job creation (Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013). They are defined as the ones "that produce valuable experience goods" (Peltoniemi, 2015: 41), first because they are made out of a certain amount of creative elements, and second because they impact the large consumer market via mass distribution. At the center of the cultural industry discourse, cultural entrepreneurs play a fundamental role (DiMaggio, 1982) as individual agents who carry the weight of being both producers of cultural and symbolic meanings for society, and economic entrepreneurs in charge of their own sustainability (Lampel et al., 2000).

Previous literature has highlighted the tensions between artistic ambition and financial gain as one of the inherent characteristics of cultural industries. Moreover, cultural entrepreneurs need to continually balance their ambition to offer a culturally valuable product to the consumer market, with the need to be socially identified in well-known categories (Alvarez et al., 2005).

As a consequence of opposite roles and conflicting ambitions (Islam et al., 2016) cultural entrepreneurs represent both individual agents and the expression of the collective network of actors supporting, and legitimating their cultural and business processes.

By embracing the idea of collective as a network of relationships (Daskalaki, 2010; Montanari et al., 2016), the study aims to capture these relationships, which drive the cultural entrepreneur in the search of opportunities and reduction of tensions and limitations.

The paper explores cultural entrepreneurship as a journey (Garud et al., 2014a) driven by cultural and social dynamics, and economic needs.

The investigation is an inductive inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) carried out through an in-depth and longitudinal analysis of a single revelatory case (Yin, 2009) in the publishing industry. The analyzed company is based in the North-East of Italy and plays a three-dimensional role as an independent bookshop, a small publishing house, and a cultural center working with a large no-profit organization.

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This case study constitutes a meaningful point of observation, opening a perspective on the entrepreneurial journey examined through the entrepreneurial narrative (Garud et al., 2014a). The micro dimension of the firm emphasizes the dynamics of interaction between the cultural ambition of the entrepreneur and the issues of sustainability challenging him, and stress the responsiveness to treats and opportunities deriving from the changing context, and directly absorbed by the entrepreneur.

For our research purposes, we reconstructed the entrepreneurial journey along 12 years, since the foundation of the company till its most recent stages of transformation. We selected a panel of 13 years archival data from 2006 to 2019 and immersed ourselves in a two stages observation: a first 8-months observation in 2016/2017 and a second 8-months analysis in 2018 and 2019. Data collected were verified through a number of interviews to some of the people related to the company, both inside and outside. Focusing on the relational process through which the entrepreneur and the context are co-created (Garud at al. 2014a), we let the entrepreneurial journey emerge, describing the entrepreneur's engagement in three roles: bookseller, editor, and cultural mediator.

Our study reveals three main dimensions labeling major stages of the entrepreneurial journey: *divergence*, *identity construction*, and *institutionalization*.

Theoretical framework
The literature on cultural entrepreneurship can be analyzed in terms of the relationship between the entrepreneurial agent and the context in which agency is played. We can then define the entrepreneurial process in terms of individual action or collective co-production, moving from closed business plans defining the stages of a process totally controlled by the entrepreneur to an open narrative (Garud et al., 2014a), making sense of a process involving multiple and a multifaceted context. Cultural entrepreneurship can then be analyzed looking at the position occupied by the entrepreneur in the context, and observing the entrepreneurial process in terms of its narration. Following these two dimensions, we can organize the literature around two major blocks: the relationship agent-context and the nature of entrepreneurial choices.

Entrepreneurial agents and their context
Placed at the center of the cultural industry debate (DiMaggio, 1982), cultural entrepreneurs face a multifaceted set of conditions shaped by public regulations, institutional rules and competitive dimensions where symbolic dimensions play a fundamental role. The analysis of cultural entrepreneurship reflects this complexity, emphasizing either the agency of entrepreneurs or the role of the context in determining entrepreneurial choices. In the agent-centric perspective, cultural entrepreneurs need to manage the tension of being both producers of cultural and symbolic meanings for society (Jones et al., 2016), and of being at the same time economic entrepreneurs in charge of their own sustainability (Lampel et al., 2000). As a result, the agent-centric perspective brings entrepreneurial agency to the forefront, but at the cost of underemphasizing the role of multiple contexts in which agency is played (Zahra & Wright, 2011). On the other hand, in the context-centric perspective (Garud et al., 2014a) the context shapes opportunities, and traces patterns of action for the entrepreneur.

Adopting a more balanced perspective, the constitutive approach identifies different ways in which entrepreneurs and their environments are co-created or narrated (Garud et al., 2014b; Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), and moves from a mainstream economic perspective, which is concerned mostly with resources acquisition or creation (Alvarez, Barney, & Anderson, 2013), to a fully contextualized understanding of entrepreneurship as a socially and culturally embedded (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) process.

The nature of the entrepreneurial process
With the adoption of a more balanced perspective, the entrepreneur assumes the role of a mindful actor who tries to contextualize his/her strategic action through ongoing narratives. As Lounsbury and Glynn (2001: 560) pointed out, cultural entrepreneurs "continually make and remake stories to maintain their identity and status". These stories describe a dynamic process, which unfolds overtime in a sort of "journey" (Garud et al., 2018). During the journey, entrepreneurial narrative continually

evolves, changes, and adapts as it is revised to gain and maintain legitimacy in response to changing organizational (internally) and environmental (externally) conditions (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010).

The entrepreneurial journey is then made of actions and stories, experiences and meanings, things done and of the narratives built around them to gain and "to regain legitimacy" (Überbacher et al., 2015) over time. Three different efforts support the journey: *relational*, *temporal* and *performative* (Garud, et al., 2014a). Through their *relational* efforts, entrepreneurs forge linkages across social and material elements; through their *temporal* efforts, entrepreneurs speak to the unfolding nature of their journey by referring to different accounts of the past, present, and future; and through their *performative* efforts, entrepreneurs trigger action and engagement even in the midst of changing objectives (see also Garud et al., 2018). All these facets suggest that the entrepreneurial figure has the ability to intervene in the world and this process of acting and re-acting is part of their narrative. Therefore, two major dimensions characterize the action of cultural entrepreneurship.

First, cultural entrepreneurship entails not only culture *taking*, through the appropriation of available cultural and institutional resources, but also culture *making*, through "processes whereby value is created across multiple and fluid repertoires and registers of meaning" (Gehman & Soublière, 2017: 61).

Second, cultural entrepreneurship entails a continuous process of actions and reactions, and entrepreneurial agency is collective and relational, incorporating a constant revision of choices emerging in the relationship with the context.

Case Selection and Methods

The inductive inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was carried out through an in-depth analysis of a single revelatory case (Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2009) in the publishing industry. The investigated company is placed in the North-East of Italy. It has been founded in 2006 as a cooperative by 5 partners - two actors, two booksellers and one psychomotrist - with the mission of becoming a cultural center for young generations. The project was culturally and economically sustained by three areas of activity: a bookshop, a theatrical school, and educational workshops.

In 2014, the company has entered a crisis due to cultural and economic reasons. The cooperative's president and the other partners had different visions about the future cultural value of the business, and the three areas of activity started having a different weight in the annual revenue of the overall business. In 2017 the crisis led to a division among the partners: the only one that survived this break-up and who is still working as owner and president of the cooperative is the agent investigated in our research. This cultural entrepreneur lays now a three-dimensional role, managing an independent bookshop and a small individual publishing house (since 2017) and aiming to position himself as a cultural mediator working in cooperation with a large no-profit organization currently involved in a urban regeneration project (since 2018).

The selected case study gives a meaningful perspective on the entrepreneurial journey for a number of reasons.

First, the case offers a certain number of significant changes of entrepreneurial trajectory, due to the continuous interactions between a strong cultural ambition and the issues of economic sustainability.

Second, the micro dimension of the case study allows us to highlight the interplay of entrepreneurs and environments in the meaning making process of the entrepreneurial journey. The cultural entrepreneur immediately reacts to context's threats and opportunities with high permeability both under the cultural and the economic point of view.

Third, we were able to build the necessary trust to enable the collection of longitudinal data on this individual and group's entrepreneurial actions across time and within a context.

Data collection and analysis

We collected data in multiple phases, to trace and describe the changes occurred in the entrepreneur's journey from 2006 to 2019. We selected a panel of 13 years archival data, immersed ourselves in a two-round ethnography, and conducted interviews. Major strengths of the empirical investigation refer to the quantity and quality of data collected, that we organized in a single research database.

Table I. List of sources and brief description

Sources	Description
Current archive material Panel of 12 years archival data (from 2006 to 2018)	All the documents of the current business archive of the cooperative have been collected and analyzed, aiming at reconstructing the activity of the cultural entrepreneur in the most complete way possible.
Observations • 2016/2017 10 meetings, 50h 10 random observations, 15h • 2018/2019 11 meetings, 16h 30min 10 random observations, 15h	Realist ethnography took the shape of both participant and non-participant observation in two moments in time (2016/2017 and 2018/2019). Two main types of phenomena were observed: special meetings that the authors were invited to and every-day working life. Notes were taken about the cultural entrepreneur's behavior in all the events, in order to better position him in the context of his situation and to test in real life what emerged from written data and interviews.
Interviews 11, 14h 30min	Interviews were held in October 2018 - May 2019. Key informants were selected to provide a more nuanced idea of the entrepreneurial journey. The lens here was on connecting facts coming to light from desk and field research to entrepreneurial vision, both internally and externally to the business. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and in the case the interviewee did not want to be recorded, accurate notes were taken by the interviewer.

Of all the archival material (table II), the most significant documents were the Board of Directors meetings' minutes and the work contracts, because they testify the entrepreneurial trajectory of the case study at the level of decision-making and every-day operations.

Also the internal regulation, the statute, and the business plans have been highly significant because they needed to be changed, respectively, in 2010 and in 2018.

Table II. List of consulted archival documents

Kind of material	Period covered
2 Statutes	2006 and 2018
2 Internal Regulations	2006 and 2010
13 Annual Reports	2006-2018
27 Partner's meetings	2006-2018
62 Board of Directors meetings	2006-2018
2 Business Plans	2006 and 2018
2 Memoirs from the current business partner	2017-2018
1 Network contract	2019
231 Paper contracts, like work contracts, books' supply contracts, librarianship lessons contracts, artistic performance contracts, theatre shows contracts, etc.	2006-2015
Tot 340 documents	**2006-2019**

Observation was another important source of data. In the first (2016/2017) and second round (2018/2019) of 8-months ethnographic research we had the opportunity to capture the cultural and economic behavior of the entrepreneur in his natural habitat, with partners, clients of all ages and stakeholders. Moreover, we were invited to single out multiple meetings concerning turning points of the cultural entrepreneur's journey. We observed 25 hours of consultancy in July 2017, when the entrepreneur and his partners worked on the revision of the business strategy; and 4 hours of a networking workshop among social entrepreneurs.

Table III. List of observed meetings

Kind and number of meetings	Participants	When	Duration
5 meetings about storytelling and accessibility of art collections in an important foundation of the territory	Selected foundation employees from 3 different departments and 2 cooperative partners	2016/2017	25h
5 internal meetings with a strategy consultant about the bookshop as a brand, as a physical space and as a business formula.	Cooperative staff	2017	25h
An animated reading	Group of children	2018	30min
Two "ask the editor" meetings	All kinds	2018	1h each
Three young reader meetings	Group of teenagers	2018/2019	1h each
Two bulletin meetings	Adults (parents and teachers)	2018/2019	1h each
An "ask the author" meeting, in the context of a literature festival organized annually by the local university	All kinds	2019	2h
A workshop about social change held in the museum	Social and cultural actors in the area, both profit and non-profit	2019	6h
A meeting among cultural cooperatives in the territory organized by the local control body	Cultural cooperatives	2019	4h
20 random observations of the entrepreneur's behavior in his bookshop	Clients (both children and adults), business partner, business collaborator		1h 30min each
Tot 41 observations		**2016-2019**	**95h 30min**

We conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with a total of 10 respondents. The mean interview length was 1 hour and 20 minutes. All interviews but two were tape recorded and transcribed *verbatim*, producing 12 hours and 30 minutes of recorded material amounting to approximately 90.000 words. Among the 10 respondents, 4 were people working in the bookshop; 2 worked for it as consultants; 2 were clients; 1 person was an artist/illustrator from the publishing industry and the last is the director of a cultural institution strictly connected with our entrepreneur's environment.

Table IV. List and duration of interviews

Interviewees	Number of interviews	Duration
Chairperson	2	5h
Former business partner	1	1h
Current business partner	1	1h 30min
Current collaborator	1	1h 20min
Client n.1	1	1h
Client n.2	1	1h
Strategy consultant	1	1h

Projects consultant	1	1h
Artist in the field of childhood literature	1	40min
CI Director	1	1h
Tot	**11**	**14h 30min**

We conducted the data collection and analysis in tandem to benefit from the picture emerging from recursively iterating theoretical conceptions and empirical material (Klein & Myers, 1999). Our data analysis is thus an iterative three-steps to generate process theory (Langley, 1999).

Focusing on the "relational work" (Montanari et al., 2016), we studied longitudinally all the episodes, activities, and collaborations along the entrepreneurial process, describing the entrepreneur's engagement in his three main roles: bookseller, editor, and cultural mediator.

First, we used an open coding procedure to discover meaningful narratives in the textual data at our disposal (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Second, consistent with the principle of abstraction and generalization (Klein & Myers, 1999), we spent considerable effort in the theoretical abstraction related to the narrative's elements emerged in the first empirical step and the idea of "projective stories" (Garud et al., 2014b). The theoretical framework of the narrative approach to the entrepreneurial journey offered by Garud et al. (2014a) well suited the business we analyzed because it had always used narration as a core work practice both in its literary and theatrical soul, and, as a strategy to create its entrepreneurial path.

The third step involved a critical reflection on data interpretation in the light of today's situation.

Chronology of events

To company is born in 2006 as a cooperative specialized in childhood and adolescence. Two partners used to work in the bookshop, two in the theatre and one in offsite educational activities. All of them were involved in didactic activities in schools and libraries.

> The Cooperative aims to start, manage, promote and in general intervene in cultural services: didactic, reading, playful, recreational, educational, social, sports, with reference to the potentialities of narrative in implementing these activities. We address mainly, although not exclusively, children and adolescents. (Statute, 2006 and 2018)

Sustainability issues raised since the beginning: the original location provided enough space for in house promotion and theatrical activities, but was too expensive.

In 2008 they relocated to a smaller location. From a financial point of view, things went better, but there was no lack of criticism towards the insufficient space to play workshops or animated readings.

The financial gap between the contribution derived from books and theatre started growing more and more.

> The councillor expresses her concern for the scarcity of scheduled shows for the theatre company in the next months. (Board of Directors, 19th May, 2014)

> The president underlines that as of 31st March, 2015, the sales volume of the bookshop has increased 16% on 2014, while the theatrical activities decreased more than 50% on 2014. (Board of Directors, 13th April, 2015)

The Andersen Prize in 2015, an important recognition as the best Italian children's bookstore, emphasized this. This sanctioned the crack between the literature and the theatrical area and pushed to the dissolution of the team in 2017.

The cooperative's president decided to take over the company, and, to temporarily abandon the theatrical experience and to promote a series of projects on the literature side. Among these, there was the establishment of a small individual publishing house for children. This was perfectly in line with the original mission.

> The core business of the bookshop is not to sell books, but to create readers. It is a cultural

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mission. (Current business partner)

From here on, the cultural and economic issues drove him to a number of important changes: in the same year, he hired a new partner with the role of employee who should take back in hand all the cooperative's theatrical aspirations; and then he relied on strategic external consultation to slightly modify the business identity. In 2018 he relocated the bookshop to a more central position in the city, and he signed a network contract with a new financial partner.

Our analysis is based on the iteration between these empirical observations and abstract conceptions. The data show three periods of redefinition of the strategy.

The first period goes from the constitution of the cooperative to the tensions between the partners (2006-2014/2015). The second goes from the indisputable division of the partners (culminated in 2017) throughout the problematic new life of the business as a solo business (2015-2018). The third started in 2018 with the relocation to a new very central point of the city and is still open.

Findings

At a first observation, the case study offers a perspective on the dynamic interaction between the strong cultural ambition of a group of entrepreneurs and the issue of sustainability challenging them. Entering in the details of data, three major mechanisms emerge, that mark main stages of the strategy to face cultural goals and economic needs. These are both forces driving the evolution of the company and steps of the entrepreneurial journey, and are defined s as: *divergence*, *identity construction* and *institutionalization*.

Divergence

In the *divergence* stage*,* the entrepreneurial agent articulates cultural entrepreneurship as a collective accomplishment through a distributed (Daskalaki, 2010) and inter-temporal approach (Gehman & Soublière, 2017) both internally, to his associates, and externally, to the social and economic context. Our data analysis showed a significant ability among the initial entrepreneurial team to reflectively distribute its cultural ambitions, and the activities it performed to gain stability. In order to do this, they positioned themself at the periphery of established practices, combining expert knowledge on infant literature and theater practices. Nevertheless, they also actively worked to explore their possibilities and boundaries as a collective.

Under the *temporal facet*, this mechanism initiated a process of divergence by which entrepreneurs gradually moved to a situation of partial disagreement on their peripheral position highlighting the need for a change. At the beginning of this stage, the collective of cultural entrepreneurs behaved as a close group of partners able to trigger actions and engagements thanks to their multiple and diverse networks. At the end of the stage these forces were spinning out the group and pushed them to find a new organization of their diversity.

The reflective dissension mechanisms could be also viewed as *relational effort* (Garud et al., 2014a), since each member explored and leveraged their personal distributed network in different directions. By doing so, the group of cultural entrepreneurs repeatedly highlighted the differences between the assumptions on which the company was based (to be a *unicum*) and the reality of the cultural space that they lived.

The *performative* lens underlines that one reason to change direction in the journey was related to the identification of the core trajectory of the business: theater, books or both? This question let emerge the need to justify the organization of power around the issue of driving the business on sustainability. The initial possibility to continuously diverge, allowed the group to experiment different formats, partnerships and strategies, but ends up with the problem of defining the roles of each actor and the cooperative as a whole.

Table V. Divergence: illustrative evidence

Relational facet	*Material* They introduced the novelty of going beyond the territorial limit of the city toward an Italian scale, I would say. (Artist)

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	Social network We ask to entrust the financial and administrative management of the theatre affairs to an outsourcing agency, to have a better management of costs. (Board of Directors, 9th February, 2015)
Temporal facet	Certainly I would never say that they are just a bookshop, but a cultural center in the sense of a point of reference for people and for everything concerning childhood. (Artist)
Performative facet	The strength of this business is to create readers, that is for us to create citizens with critical consciousness, ready to see things profoundly. It is something commercial, but more ethical-philosophical. (Current business partner) It was inevitable that they had the collaborations with the public library for kids, because since years they specialized themselves on childhood. (Artist)

Identity construction

In the *identity construction* stage, the agent overcomes tensions and dualities by renovating the entrepreneurial narrative, coherently with the idea that cultural entrepreneurs "continually make and remake stories to maintain their identity and status" (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001: 560). Our research shows that the cultural entrepreneurs felt the spinning movements emerged during the divergence phase as threatening not only the business sustainability, but also the identity of the company. Therefore, in parallel with reflective dissension, they engaged in a process of identity construction. This was a really tough moment, characterized by unsolved tensions among the collective about the identity of the cooperative and resulting in a final split between the partners. The construction of the identity has materialized in a mechanism of projection and re-launch of entrepreneurial narratives: that means a process through which one of the entrepreneurs created the contours of a new future to redirect the business by giving new meaning to past events. In this narrative mechanism of going back to the future, the past of the business was interpreted as to become a publishing house and a cultural center. Indeed, the links within the previous groups faded into a progressive "cut of the dead branches", that is of what was not connected to the new narration of the future (all pushed on the literature side of the activity). Left without partners, the cultural entrepreneur started leveraging co-creation practices with other actors of his own network, and imagining a possible process of institutionalization. The bookshop started to involve children, clients, retailers, then also universities and several museums in its identity construction process, while rebranding itself as "bookshop for growing people", an idea emerging during the consultancy meetings to strengthen the cultural mission and the sustainability of the business.

This is also the stage when co-creation practices are experienced on a stable basis. Activities like the book readers club for young people, reposition the bookshop at the center of its social and cultural environment, where the store attracts activities and people. The divergence was inverted in a more centripetal movement, with the involvement of the audience in the co-creation of the narrative. To sustain this phase, the cultural entrepreneur repeatedly engages himself in searching for a new approach to financial sustainability, which drives him to look at the institutionalization as a possible solution.

Table VI. Identity construction: illustrative evidence

	Material We want to give something to this city. (President)
Relational facet	*Social Network* The problem is that if he acts alone, things do not work. I think it is a problem of identity, he should think to even more collaborations. (Projects consultant) The energy of the original entrepreneurial group was higher than today. (Client 1)

Temporal facet	So you really do want communicate the idea that the bookshop is not just for children's literature. (Strategy consultant) The entrepreneur has gone from definition of the bookstore as a shop for children to a shop for "growing people". (Projects consultant)
Performative facet	The reading group of young people is an active part of the bookshop. I would like to produce something with them, like book trailers. (President) Here there is a total intellectual honesty towards who comes to buy a book. (Business current collaborator)

Institutionalization

In the *Istitutionalization* stage the old tensions are overcome, but other tensions emerge, and a new co-created story rises as a dynamic process that offers novel opportunities to engage differently within the cultural context.

Reason to support the institutionalization is twofold. On one side, the company needs to find a better financial sustainability. This means opening new collaborations, widening the potential audience, and abandoning the image of a bookshop for children in a small province. Venice represents the opportunity to enter in the "high culture" scenario reaching new audiences: tourists, adults, and cultural professionals. The city is a perfect scenario to reach an international market and its institutional setting is also the place where the entrepreneur had his first professional experiences. On the other side, the entrepreneur is looking for new competencies and professional resources to renovate his own company. The emerging claim is that selling books is not enough. They try to occupy a position in the city as cultural entrepreneurs in a wider sense, extending their competencies, and going back to the divergence that characterized the first stage. Nevertheless, this is not the same situation because the book – produced, commercialized, narrated - is now the only strategic core of the company.

The process is open and new tensions emerge while desired goals are not reached yet. The institutional world brings a number of political dimensions that are out of control and the entrepreneur faces a complex set of events whose cause-effect relations are ambiguous.

Table VII. Institutionalization: illustrative evidence

Relational facet	*Material* We realize that, after the relocation to the new building, people from the city consider us differently. (President) The relocation to the new site has maybe come in a period of big changes for them, so I see it as a way to sanction those changes. (Artist) It is strange to think them at the new location, so central and strong. I would have preferred them more decentralized, their prior location was perfect to me. (Artist)
	Social network I would like to take charge of the museum teaching with re-elaborated versions of the visit experience using narrative. (President) [because] the narration in the museum is really confusing, they say this absence of narration is made on purpose, but to me it is just messy. (Current business collaborator)
Temporal facet	In my mind, their recent participation to the Festival of the Illustration held in this powerful and well-known foundation of the city of Venice has confirmed their recognition as the bookshop for illustrated books for children in the city. (Artist)
Performative facet	Our institutional and financing partner expects something from us, and we feel constrained by it. (Current business partner)

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| | The museum really likes our proposal for didactic activities, but when it comes to pay us, everything slows down. (President) |

Tentative conclusion

The analyzed case study represents an extreme example of the complexity of the entrepreneurial process in the context of CCIs. The micro-dimension of the company does not reduce the meaning of the observation. On the contrary, it makes it a paradigmatic case where the complex interplay between the entrepreneur and the context reaches the greatest degree of visibility. The entrepreneur is instantaneously reached by any external variables, from large events to minimal changes. No obstacles are opposed to the shifts affecting him and producing high uncertainty. The process of co-evolution is a continuous, rapid, and reciprocal adaptation. No space is left to rest. Action is needed and actions and reactions come at an increasing pace.

In a situation like the one we observed, two major facts emerge and confirm the narrative approach (Garud et al. 2014) used to make sense of the case study.

As first evidence, the process of strategy making of the entrepreneur is rooted in continuous search for innovations. These are experienced through prototypes and facilitate reflection, in the attempt balance cultural strategy and economic performance. Nevertheless, contradictions emerge when the entrepreneur is forced to change existing rules. When he is confronted with the hypothesis to define an economic value for the role played as a book consultant for students and educators, he feels the pressure of reputation and goes back to the origins of his job, referring to examples coming from a past where economic crisis and competition were absent from the scene. Even tough he is conscious about the demanding conditions in which he lives now; the fear is that of not being recognized as reputed member of the cultural world. He first resists to the idea of changing the rules, but then he makes sense of the hypothesis and finds a compromise that could satisfy his need to sustain the entrepreneurial activity and his aim to maintain a difference from the commercial role of a simple bookseller: "My job is creating readers, not selling books".

As a second evidence, the entrepreneur moves on the temporal dimension, shifting from past to present to future in a process of legitimization and sense making that eliminates contradictions. If in the past the change of location and the movement towards a new space was perceived as an impossible and desperate mission, when this choice comes true the entrepreneur makes sense of it evoking the need to start new partnerships, finding new resources and gaining economic sustainability. These are all real issues and they perfectly justify the choice. Nevertheless, the entrepreneur finds a way to put them in a frame of perfect coherence with the past choices, even when they are not perfectly matching one another.

These first conclusions open a perspective on entrepreneurship *tout court*. The world of business is looking for a better connection with the words of art and culture. This takes the forms of a stream of "art for business" processes where the arts are exploited as a source of reflection, consultancy and improvement for business. The paper enriches the discussion on the cultural role of entrepreneurs, as social and cultural agents co-defining their context of action.

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