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Back to School: Triangulating City Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

City entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurial attitude and behavior of city authorities, can substantially be promoted by triangulation, i.e. by opening the city-citizen relationship for communities of knowledge such as universities. This paper reports on an experiment in Amsterdam, where civil servants, with their inherent focus on 'feasible' solutions, were co-learning with Master's students and researchers, with an equally inherent focus on the exploration of what is 'thinkable'. The results were 'achievable' outcomes meeting the demands of citizens. Critical success factors appear to be the organized disruption caused by the triangulation, the clear-cut occurrence of a comprehension phase prior to policy making and the combination of bottom-up approach and top-level support.

Keywords: city entrepreneurship, cooperative learning, city-university cooperation, communities of citizens, knowledge diffusion, mindful innovation

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Back to school: triangulating city entrepreneurship

Rik Maes, Bas Smit, Yeter Tan and Onno Truijens*

Abstract: City entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurial attitude and behavior of city authorities, can substantially be promoted by triangulation, i.e. by opening the city-citizen relationship for communities of knowledge such as universities. This paper reports on an experiment in Amsterdam, where civil servants, with their inherent focus on ‘feasible’ solutions, were co-learning with Master’s students and researchers, with an equally inherent focus on the exploration of what is ‘thinkable’. The results were ‘achievable’ outcomes meeting the demands of citizens. Critical success factors appear to be the organized disruption caused by the triangulation, the clear-cut occurrence of a comprehension phase prior to policy making and the combination of bottom-up approach and top-level support.

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"To be an entrepreneur on the side rarely works."
(Peter F. Drucker, Innovation and Entrepreneurship)

1. The dawn and challenge of city entrepreneurship

For decades, entrepreneurship research and practice were for the greater part embedded in the economic discourse, i.e. in relation to phenomena as start-ups, commercialization of innovations etc., despite the fact that other aspects, in particular psychological and social, are acknowledged in entrepreneurship theory (Sexton and Landström 2000). Rather lately, this narrow interpretation was widened to include so-called social entrepreneurship (Dees 1998, Mair and Noboa 2003, Mair and Marti 2004) and not-for-profit entrepreneurship (Spinali and Mortimer 2001, Gawell 2003). Continuing on the same course, Hjorth et. al. (2003) define entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon, a form of cultural innovation enacted on all scenes of human life (a “lifestyle”). This is in line with Schumpeter’s original stance (Schumpeter 1926) that all social phenomena, e.g. arts and politics, can be conceptualized as entrepreneurship, in itself the driving force par excellence behind societal change. Spinoza et. al. (1997) explicitly link entrepreneurship to everyday life: entrepreneurs are “human beings at their best”, contributing to the reconfiguration of society’s practices; in this sense, they see fundamental similarities between an entrepreneur, a virtuous citizen and a solidarity cultivator.

In its original meaning, *city entrepreneurship* relates to the promotion and development of inner city businesses: social entrepreneurship as a source for economically profitable activities within the inner city community and exporting to the surrounding economy. The primary perspective taken is an economic and not a social one; the private sector is the focus of this interpretation of city entrepreneurship (Porter 1995). Quite a lot of authors (e.g. Drayton 2002) correspondingly argue in favour of competition and competitiveness in the citizen sector. We depart from a less rigidly economic viewpoint and interpret “city entrepreneurship” in the context of the “civil society” (Ehrenberg 1999), the realm between the (local) authorities and individual citizens. One decisive phenomenon in this realm is the burgeoning self-organization of citizens via “communities of citizens” (Eberly 1994 and Goldsmith et. al. 1997). City entrepreneurship then pertains to active and joint engagements of individuals, communities, profit and not-for-profit organizations and local authorities in societal development at the level of the city, the city district and/or the neighborhood. This interpretation is in accordance with the societal understanding of entrepreneurship given above.

These days, cities are faced with multifaceted communal problems surpassing purely economic solutions. City authorities can no longer merely fall back on facilitating entrepreneurship by external parties (as was, roughly speaking, advocated by Porter 1995), yet have to demonstrate shared entrepreneurship themselves. Neither can they confine themselves to outlining their policy and subsequently monitoring its realization from the ivory tower of the town hall. Their role is to be distinct partners in differentiated entrepreneurial networks (Groen et. al. 2004), co-creating the future of their city. After all:

“At its heart, entrepreneurship is about the future. Not the future that has already happened and is therefore predictable (...), but the future that is barely imagined today and can only be known in the creation of it tomorrow. (...) For it is the task of entrepreneurship to partially discover and fully forge and implement through economic means the vision of a future composed of the diverse aspirations of millions of people to create the society we want to live in from the society we have to live in.” (Sarasvathy 2001b: 110)

The intention of this paper is to contribute to a cooperative model for successful city entrepreneurship, concentrating on the relationship between local authorities and (communities of) citizens. In the second section, we investigate the likelihood of city entrepreneurship by analyzing the (lack of) entrepreneurial orientation of city administrators and civil servants. Hereafter, we devise a learning approach to city entrepreneurship based on triangulation of the city-citizen relationship, i.e. by the introduction of a third partner (the university community) in the initial phases of the entrepreneurial process. Together, all partners involved work according to the principles of a “community of practice”. This point of view is substantiated in section four, where we elaborate on a joint experiment of the City of Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam involving 10 separate projects. Lessons learned and further conclusions are discussed in the subsequent sections.

2. City entrepreneurship: breaking up innate patterns

City entrepreneurship, as defined in the previous section, is a joint endeavor of different parties involved, including city administrators and civil servants. The attitude of the latter ones is not prone to entrepreneurial conduct. Part of the explanation can be found in their risk-avoiding style: entrepreneurship is about failure management (Sarasvathy 2001b), public administration about damage management. A further elucidation can be found in the contrasting behavioral orientations ‘causation’ and ‘effectuation’ (Sarasvathy 2001a). A causation type of behavior, archetypal for public servants, implies

that future uncertainty is managed by prediction (plans and forecasts). Conversely, effectuation, the distinguishing behavior of entrepreneurs, first and foremost tries to control the unpredictable future by a continuous and renewed change of goals and assumptions. In essence, civil authorities function according to the logic of prediction, entrepreneurs according to the logic of control.

Customarily, public servants experience (and legitimate!) their behavior as being mindful of their duties. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), however, have explored the concept of mindfulness in the broader context of ‘high reliability’ and other types of organizations. Mindfulness concerns the adaptive management of expectations in the context of the unexpected. Innovation, as a concerted venture into the unexpected, constitutes a vital theme for organizational mindfulness (Swanson and Ramiller 2004). Innovative initiatives, and hence an entrepreneurial mindset, are substantial constituents of any mindful response to emerging opportunities and changing conditions (Van de Ven 1993) despite the fact that mindfulness might, under these conditions, entail caginess and hence resistance to innovation and entrepreneurial behavior (Fiol and O’Connor 2003). Civil servants, faced with entrepreneurial necessity, too often resort to the latter reading of mindfulness to conceal their inherent rigidity or even their ideological aversion.

We consider breaking up fixed patterns as one of the constituent dimensions of entrepreneurship; it was at the basis of the experiment given an account of in section four of this paper. In many respects, easing away civil servants from their ‘natural’ attitude and position was a major challenge. We addressed this by (1) extending their habitual span of attention and by (2) transforming the entrepreneurial venture into a shared organizational and personal learning process. The latter aspect is dealt with in the next section.

Traditionally and in line with the causational behavior outlined above, policy making and political accountability are key to civil servants. As result, a focus on projects fitting in the city administration’s policy and standing a fair chance of being politically shepherded reigns, resulting in an overrepresentation of internally focused projects. We make a case for explicating the phase prior to policy making, i.e. ‘comprehension’: a sense making phase generating and pondering new, creative ideas and embedded in the broader society’s approval (Swanson and Ramiller 2004).

Articulation of this preliminary phase is not straightforward, as will be corroborated in section four when we report on our practical experiences: it requires a great deal of open mindedness, perceptiveness to "internal incongruities within the rhythm or the logic of existing processes" (Drucker 1993) and in general “hyper sensitiveness to the disclosive nature of human activity” (Spinosa et. al. 1997).

These are all qualities not often presupposed of civil servants, nor are citizens used to interventions of this type. Therefore, we introduced metaphoric thinking (Lackoff and Johnson 2003) as this is regarded as constructive when dealing with innovation and entrepreneurship, especially when there is a need for a radical rethinking of accepted and prevailing ideas and principles (Von Oech 1998).

The most functional metaphor was found in confronting the concepts of ‘thinkable’, ‘feasible’ and ‘achievable’. While outlining their policy, civil servants focus on what is politically feasible and deduce anything achievable from this unilateral focus. By starting with (or, in our case, going back to, as the projects were already selected in advance for practical reasons) the comprehension phase, we were able to broaden the initial one-sidedness and introduce ‘thinkable’ as the leading simile as will be demonstrated in section four. By directly linking thinkable to achievable, and hence to experiments with the citizens themselves, we were even able to stretch the limits of what was originally regarded as feasible.

To start in a creative and open-minded way from what is thinkable, is, generally speaking, not part of civil servants’ natural attitude. Neither are citizens accustomed to an approach where their own expectations are as vigorously challenged as the authorities’ policy. Consistently starting from an investigation of what is thinkable was, in some instances, looked upon as ‘organized disruption’. Cooperation with a community of knowledge, in this case a university and its fresh students at master’s level, is instrumental to make sure that the disruptive character of entrepreneurial thinking is maintained as leading principle. Further, transforming the local government-citizens relationship into an enduring entrepreneurial concerted action requires the initiation of joint learning projects. Both aspects are discussed in the next section.

3. Learning city entrepreneurship through triangulation

The starting point of the experiment, the results of which are discussed in section four, was that the authorities-citizens relationship could benefit at the operational project level from the contribution of a third party, in casu the university community. Very generally spoken, this external party could bring in detached knowledge and, through the presence of students, a fresh perspective. Conversely, this triangulation of the authorities-citizens relationship was equally beneficial to the students participating, as they could study the profoundly evolving organization-customer relationship both from a privileged position and in a societal context. They were, at the same time, invited to bring in their unspoiled vision: a promise often made but seldom fulfilled by their employers once they start their career. Fur-

ther, the triangulation was advantageous for the teachers/researchers involved as it enabled them to test their generalized theory on learning in the complex organizational context of a city administration; this type of double-loop mutual research/practice learning is heavily advocated in recent management literature (Huff 2000, Mahoney and Sanchez 2004, Pålshaugen 2004, Tranfield and Denyer 2004).

The initiative was set up as a learning experience, where all participants involved (citizens, administrators, civil servants, students, teachers and external experts) became members of a learning ‘community of practice’, “a joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members, bound by mutual engagement” (Wenger 1998; further standard references are Wenger 1999 and Wenger et. al. 2002). Communities of practice appear to be excellent organizational entities for government agencies:

“Government today faces unprecedented challenges, from rising citizen expectations to an expanding breadth and complexity of problems to address. These challenges require an increased capability for learning and innovation as well as a scope of coordination that are not afforded by current structures. (...) These communities of practice cross formal boundaries to bring together practitioners who are facing a common challenge—to learn from each other, to develop new solutions to problems, to find synergies across organizations, and to coordinate efforts. We argue that it is important to learn to recognize these communities, legitimize their work, and cultivate them more intentionally and systematically.” (Snyder and Wenger 2003: 2)

To further activate the interaction of the participants over the organizational borders, we consistently applied the Learning by Sharing model, as developed at the University of Amsterdam (see figure 1).

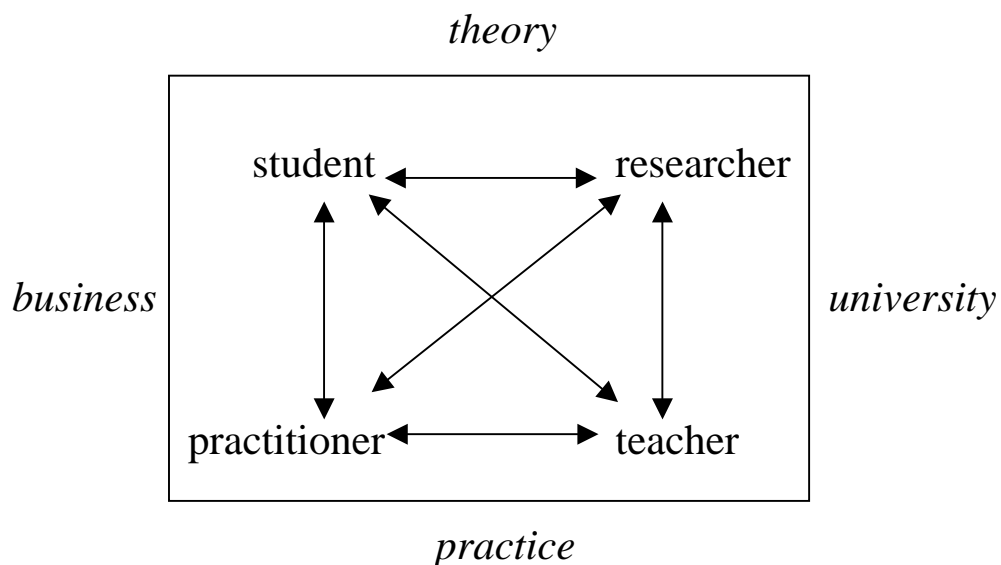


Figure 1: Learning by Sharing

Key to this model (Thijssen et. al. 2002, Maes 2003 and Huizing et. al. 2005) is the redefinition of the partnership between academics, business people (in this case: city administrators and civil servants) and their organizations. It is passing over the traditional teacher/student and practice/research dichotomies by discerning the interacting *roles* of teacher, researcher, student and practitioner; each participant is supposed to play a number of (ideally: all) roles throughout the learning life cycle. In effect, each person in each role is a co-learner! Practical results of applying this learning approach will be discussed in the next section.

4. The joint City of Amsterdam – University of Amsterdam experiment

In the Spring of 2004, a cooperation between the city of Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam started. The explicit goal of the cooperation was to confront the city's internal focus on what is politically feasible and the students' innate inclination to exploring what is thinkable, expectedly leading to achievable citizens-oriented results. Another confrontation aimed at was that of master's students with professionals working in real-life *and vice versa* (remark the unmistakable reciprocity!). Students enrolled in a Master's course "Information management in practice" were taking part in this joint city-university project. The choice for a societal context for a course in information management is in line with the emerging view on this discipline as basically contributing to the meaning of information for the organization and, what follows naturally from this line of thought, to the meaning of the organization for its entourage (Maes 2004). Besides, ample attention is more and more paid worldwide to the sensible application of IT, e.g. as in the case of Benetech (see end of reference list) by combining the impact of technological solutions with the social entrepreneurship business model.

The initiative was unambiguously supported by the mayor and aldermen, as well as by the city manager (who followed an Executive Master in Information Management program of the University of Amsterdam earlier in his career) and the chairpersons of the engaged city quarters' council. They made their support visible through active involvement in all phases of the experiment.

Students participating in this experimental course at the University of Amsterdam had diverse ethnic and social backgrounds; the 31 students represented 12 different nationalities, ranging from Surinam and India to ex-Yugoslavia and (yes!) the Netherlands. As such, they are a close representation of the multi-cultural city population. The professional organizations involved were urban services from the city of Amsterdam, ranging from by tradition inwards-focused services such as the documentary information department to citizens-oriented services such as the fire department. Students were unequivocal-

cally *not* engaged in a work placement program with the city, as this was supposed to kill their necessarily critical attitude and external focus. This setting was utterly surprising for the civil servants involved, as they continued calling the students trainees.

The projects were pre-selected and positioned as projects *together with* the city services *for the benefit of* the citizens. Examples of projects dealt with were the enhancement of social cohesion in a multiracial district via the application of IT, the investigation of citizens-directed applications of glass fiber infrastructure, the multimedia interaction of citizens and the fire brigade prior to the arrival of firemen at the site the fire, the translation of the individualization of the practice of sports into an adequate reservation system for a sports accommodation etc. In total, 10 projects were selected. One problem stumbled upon was that all projects were roughly defined beforehand by the city services. Hence, the comprehension phase of the projects was not the initial phase of the projects as it ideally should be. We circumvented this opening handicap by plainly and deliberately going back to the explorative comprehension phase, as demonstrated in the following (admittedly: simple and stylized) example of the sports accommodation project.

The original project definition was, schematically speaking, that of a manager of a municipal sports hall interested in a new software package for managing the occupation and availability of his centre: in essence a demand for a technical solution to a perceived inadequacy of the software package in use. A straightforward, customary solution would have been: (1) make an inventory of the information requirements of the manager and, if desired, of the other people responsible for the exploitation of the sports hall (together: the “customer”) and of the packages available on the market (the “supply”), (2) select the best package by matching the requirements and the functional specs of the package, taking into account financial and other constraints and (3) implement the package selected. This is, roughly spoken, the approach taken for years and in many organizations dealing with software package selection problems. By intentionally going back to the comprehension phase (and by switching from the ‘feasible’ to the ‘thinkable’ mindset), students were able to make the following alternative analysis, at the same time introducing the social entrepreneurial context of the original, narrow formulation of the problem.

It appears that the rental of the sports hall is mainly dealing with schools and sports clubs, with only some minor slots available for individual sportsmen. Further, the actual occupancy is rather low, as there are many “no shows”. On the contrary, considering present sports practice reveals that nowadays many more people play a sport, while the membership of sports clubs is dwindling. Besides, lots of these clubs are rather fake, as they consist of a small number of active

players filled up with non-practising family members and friends in order to qualify for the booking of the hall. Hence, one could consider an “Easy Jet”-like model, with flexible reservations, adjustable prices etc. and with e.g. an sms-service on lack of occupancy. Further, as the sports hall is almost permanently facing financial worries, one could consider special privileges for sportsmen participating in the exploitation of the hall. All of these (non-exhaustive) elaborations are based on the creative exploration of the potential meaning of the sports hall’s (future) information base. One step further in the analysis, and in actual fact introducing social entrepreneurial thinking, is to ponder the meaning of the sports hall for its neighbourhood e.g. in terms of its contribution to social cohesion, as it appears to be situated in a backward part of the city. This approach opens new perspectives in terms of inviting initiatives with local communities, groupings of young people, social workers etc. etc. A number of them were explored during the comprehension phase of the project, leading to clearly differentiated recommendations not only regarding the initial problem statement (the acquisition of a new software package), but more importantly regarding the embedding of the sports hall in the social texture of the city quarter and its subsequent organization, including the management of its occupation level (the latter one being the result of and instrumental to the re-positioning). Who said again that the management of information is a technical discipline, disposed of real-life relevance?

Furthermore, the whole program was, as alleged previously, organized and facilitated as a multiparty learning-by-sharing experiment. Through weekly joint meetings and an intensively used Quick Place learning environment, participants in our experiment were urged not only to learn from but as well to actively intervene in each other’s projects. There were no predefined class room sessions, as knowledge was brought in on demand: the entrepreneurial spirit was prevalent! The intensive dual coaching from the part of the university and the city’s project leaders was complemented with coaching by external experts; the main guideline followed (and stressed again and again) was the complementary nature of ‘feasible’ and ‘thinkable’, stretching each project to (and sometimes beyond) its intended boundaries.

A useful way to classify the ideas and interventions introduced in the different projects, without going into too much detail, is along the entrepreneurial methods as surveyed by Spinoza et. al (1997): (1) *articulation*, making explicit what was previously implicit within an ongoing practice but not yet noticed by everyone; (2) *reconfiguration*, making marginal aspects of practices dominant; and (3) *cross-appropriation*, appropriating practices successfully used in one context for use in another one. These methods can be considered as levels of ‘thinkable’ solutions. Of these methods, reconfiguration is said to be the “central disclosing activity of entrepreneurs” (Shotter 1998). Looking back at the 10 pro-

jects, it appears that all three methods have been tried out during the (re)comprehension phase. Articulation was the predominant method, leading to relatively minor yet easily accepted changes in the subsequent phases of the projects. Reconfiguration was explicitly aimed at and in some cases effectively attained (as in the fire brigade project by highlighting the dissemination of information to the fire engines on their way, in the project dealing with the modernization of the city ground lease information system by starting from the hitherto neglected external users of the system, etc.). In a smaller number of cases, cross-appropriation was used (e.g. in the above-mentioned sports hall project by bringing in the Easy Jet model, in the project elaborating the introduction of toll collection in order to reduce traffic congestion around the city of Amsterdam by circumventing all studies made during the previous decade and looking at working solutions elsewhere in the world, in the project investigating a city-covering glass fiber infrastructure by starting from modes of living of citizens instead of from infrastructural and economic considerations etc.). It became clear, not incomprehensibly, that reconfiguration and especially cross-appropriation are experienced as far more ambitious by civil servants and citizens alike and hence much more prone to resistance during the succeeding phases. In the case of the sports accommodation, e.g., we were not able to finally ‘sell’ the idea of the Easy Jet model to the managing team of the sports hall.

A last remark before proceeding to the lessons learned during this experiment. Of the operational roles discerned in innovative projects (Boer and During 2001), students and the third party ‘community of knowledge’ in general were in particular active as gatekeeper (collecting and channeling information about environmental shifts), as idea generator and as scout (surveying a specified yet unexplored field by collecting specific information). These three roles imply the gathering of information outside of the most obvious information channels; longer-existing organizations tend to be terrified by this prospect (During 1986: 161), to the extent that even customers (in this case: citizens) are over and over again studied in an inside-out manner thereby overlooking that meeting them in an outside-in way (and hence considering them primarily as human beings) is both more informative and engaging. The role as effective problem solver, including prototyping of a workable solution, was only played in the case of the fire brigade project, where a short term solution was implemented and a long term solution worked out. A role not mentioned by the aforementioned authors but of preeminent importance in the case of an officialdom is that of ‘agitator’(Gawell 2003), fully in accordance with operating in the forefront of the (peaceful) fight between ‘thinkable’ and ‘feasible’.

5. Evaluation

The results of the experiment were beyond expectations. A majority of projects were either immediately brought into the realization phase or considered as extremely prolific, mind-expanding contributions to the city's decision making process. Above all, the effects on the major participants involved were salient: (1) the public servants felt challenged by the confrontation with the community of knowledge formed by the students, the teachers and the external experts; (2) the students felt challenged by the appeal to match 'feasible' with 'thinkable' and above all to produce 'achievable' results; (3) all participants involved felt invited by the open 'community of practice' character of the cooperation. The overall project was experienced by all parties involved as 'organized disruption', a true watermark for entrepreneurial innovation.

The lessons learned basically pertain to (positive and negative) tensions between 'feasible', 'thinkable' and 'achievable'. In what follows, we expound some major observations as articulated by the major participants in the experiment:

By the city administrators:

- The experiment is perceived as a visible example of city-university cooperation in practice. This should be extended without losing the vigorous momentum generated in this small scale experiment.
- The experiment offers a clear indication that innovation is better off with bottom-up activities. In this sense, it can be directive for nation-wide initiatives such as the Innovation Platform installed by the Dutch government.
- All projects were fully supported by the city administrators. However, let the latter ones effectively adopt a project to make their engagement even more visible to the city organization. This is particularly important with an eye to the subsequent implementation and adoption phases.
- "Apart from the concrete results, the mutual observations are invaluable" (from an evaluation of a chairperson of a city quarter's council).
- The projects' initial objectives were too practical: make them aiming at higher aspirations. City entrepreneurship is not about doing things better, but about doing better things in the first place. In terms of 'feasible' and 'thinkable': go for the projects at the verge of 'thinkable'.
- All participants involved were enthusiastic, yet this might be not enough in the long run: how do you make everybody incessant eager?

- The uninhibited attitude of the students and their restless keeping on asking was a relief amid the day-to-day contacts.

By the civil servants:

- The encounters with the students (and in the background the university teachers and external experts) were confrontational by their external position and their emphasis on ‘thinkable’ solutions, yet valuable and eye-opening.
- Resigning from worn habits, especially leaving the frames of previously fixed policies is difficult; the contribution of the ‘community of knowledge’ was instrumental in this sense.
- The comprehension phase, involving citizens and ‘agitating’ students, should ideally precede policy making and not be a recapitulation after the initial definition of the project.
- Even in the case of triangulation, civil servants remain primarily responsible for the managerial and supportive roles of innovative projects (Boer and During 2001): problem owner, project leader, ambassador disseminating the results in the organization, reorganizer for organizational adaptation etc. Triangulation offers a chance and is not a threat to civil servants!
- The main problem is how to maintain the entrepreneurial spirit introduced through the triangulation. Persistent city entrepreneurship may need a long-lasting effort from the part of the civil servants and maintained full support by the city administrators.

By the citizens:

- The absence of a proper comprehension phase, as defined in section 3, makes that citizens have serious arrears when entering the project. A comprehension phase, where citizens’ expectations are primarily matched against possible (‘thinkable’) solutions should precede proper policy making.
- IT is more and more perceived as a matter-of-course artifact, contributing to the solution of day-to-day citizens’ problems.
- This experiment was based on city-generated projects. It is not clear how citizens can generate project proposals with a reasonable chance of getting accepted and effectuated. The presence of university teams might be helpful in this respect.
- The overall level of organization of citizens in communities is still rather low. This phenomenon is contributing to the relative lethargy of citizens regarding cooperation with the city government. IT might be instrumental both in facilitating citizens’ organization and in opening communication channels between them and the city administration.

By the students:

- It might sound paradoxical, but Master's students are not well trained in starting from thinking outside the scope of predetermined solutions: entrepreneurial thinking is not part of everyday university training, even to the contrary (as also diagnosed by Spinoza et. al. 1997).
- The initial confrontation with civil servants and especially the project leaders was hard: acting in a thought-provoking way doesn't mean that elementary principles of working in a project team and thorough preparation can be overlooked. University students are missing training in project management and the management of expectations.
- Effectuating outside-in working by contacting and cooperating with citizens was sometimes difficult, mainly dependent on the personalities of the students: in some cases, contacts with citizens was extremely easy and valuable, in other circumstances rather cumbersome.
- This experiment was an enormous challenge and a grandiose experience, especially by the entrepreneurial nature of the experiment itself: innovative, 'organized disruption' (sometimes resembling 'disorganized interruption') and learning in a diversified community of practice.

By the university staff:

- The experiment exhibited a clear need for meticulous coaching, where stressing the importance of working along the lines of 'thinkable' solutions was primordial.
- The contribution of the external experts was experienced as highly valuable, as they promoted practical relevance of the solutions chosen (and hence 'achievability') and effective working in project teams (and hence 'practicability').
- The management (and not the suppression) of the tension between 'thinkable' and 'feasible', but also between the students and the civil servants, was key. Even organized disruption has to be managed, after all! Hence, friction between participating students and civil servants should be handled as normal phenomena, in fact symptoms of this fruitful tension.
- This experimental course is part of the university program in business information systems. It appears that there is a clear lack of entrepreneurial learning in this program; this observation can safely be extended to (almost) all university programs. The latter ones are clear applications of disengaged learning principles, distant from true entrepreneurial programs as advocated by Spinoza et. al. (1997).

- All things considered, this was a highly demanding yet invaluable experience at the edge of society and university, where elementary relevance is more important than extreme rigor. One cannot teach entrepreneurial attitudes without being entrepreneurial in all aspects of one's own life.

6. Conclusions

The experiment reported on was experienced as highly valuable and got relatively high exposure, both inside the city organization and in society in general. Critical success factors were the combination of bottom-up approach and top level support (with a need to work outside-in from the very beginning to engage citizens), the situation of “organized disruption” created by the initiative and above all the triangulation of the citizens-city relationship through the introduction of the university. It was experienced in practice that openness towards the ‘thinkable’, a necessary attitude for entrepreneurial innovation, can substantially be boosted through this type of cooperation.

All participants involved got a real and above all deeper understanding of what being an entrepreneur entails: “her main competition will be not other businesses, but the old style of life she is changing” (Spinosa et. al. 1997: 173). Citizens are not customers of the city, yet constitute the city itself in its full diversity. True city entrepreneurship can only grow to full stature in the context of an entrepreneurial network involving all major and minor partakers alike. The establishment of this type of network, where the city authorities are eventually not the leading partner by definition, yet an influential and above all listening partner is the subject of the next edition of the joint City of Amsterdam-University of Amsterdam experiment to be started in the Spring of 2005.

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