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From admiration to abhorrence: the contentious appeal of entrepreneurship across Europe

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Although entrepreneurship seems to offer a universal economic solution, there are some doubts about whether it is universally attractive. We argue that entrepreneurship is a socially constructed concept and consequently the meanings, and hence the appeal, of the enterprise will vary internationally. We argue that how entrepreneurship is understood affects how attractive it seems. Accordingly, we investigated the meanings of entrepreneurship by analysing a range of metaphors of entrepreneurship gathered from schools across Europe. We found that both the meaning and understandings of the practices vary considerably. For most, the concept of entrepreneurship as an engine of the economy is attractive, but for some, the practices of entrepreneurs were considerably less appealing. We find links between national socio-economic contexts and attractiveness. We argue that culture and context seem to influence the social constructions of entrepreneurship and hence the attractiveness of entrepreneurial options. We also find that the pedagogical national narratives of the entrepreneur stand in dynamic tension with the performative national processes of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: culture; entrepreneurship; metaphor; social construction; international; appeal

Introduction

At times, the heroic entrepreneur appears hegemonic such that entrepreneurship seems to be an object of all economic aspiration. Since the early 1970s, we have seen the appeal of economies based on big business gradually diminish (Greene, Katz, and Johannisson 2004), so that the promise of entrepreneurship has replaced the old logics of economies of scale (Teece 1993). As countries perceived that big business can no longer provide the desired economic prosperity, there has been a shift towards encouraging the enterprise. Indeed, Audretsch and Thurik (2001) consider this new era to be the entrepreneurial economy, described as the political, social and economic response with the capacity to engage in and generate entrepreneurial activity (Wennekers et al. 2007). This perception has contributed to a belief, even a faith (Anderson, Drakopoulou-Dodd, and Scott 2000), that entrepreneurship is the panacea for various economic and social problems. Such admiration of entrepreneurial outcomes may well be justified, but entrepreneurship requires entrepreneurs. Yet, we know much less about how appealing entrepreneurship is for individuals. This is important because the attractiveness of an enterprise is surely related to how many choose to become entrepreneurs, as well as influencing who these individuals are and who they wish to become through entrepreneurship. Moreover, enduring opinions about the desirability of an enterprise may be formed early in life, and there are strong reasons to expect variance across national (and other) divides. Accordingly, our research question is 'what are the perceptions held about the entrepreneur by young people across cultures'?

We argue that the appeal lies in how people understand entrepreneurship; in how, and in what ways, they value or demonize the enterprise. Such evaluations are broadly cultural and hence notoriously difficult to measure. Verheul et al. (2002) note how culture is largely

unobservable and can only be studied through various verbal and non-verbal manifestations. The metaphors that people use for entrepreneurship are one such manifestation; metaphors present a penumbra of associated meanings and are useful for dealing with ambiguity (Hill and Levenhagen 1995). Capturing meanings helps us know whether, and how, the enterprise appeals, contributes to our own understanding of the enterprise and is useful for knowing how the enterprise should be promoted. In short, we attempt to span the gap between the socio-economic enterprise discourse and individual perceptions of entrepreneurship.

To try to understand how, and if, the enterprise appeals, we use a social constructionist approach. Coviello and Jones (2004) describe this emic approach as one which is culturally specific, in contrast to an etic approach, which is culturally universal. This seems appropriate because, as Ogbor (2000) argues, different 'truths' are associated with different cultural, historical and ideological orientations and experiences, and we want to know whether entrepreneurial appeal varies across countries. We use metaphoric language to examine the meanings of entrepreneurship held by our respondents; as Clark and Dear (1984) point out, language is used to create reality. Language, in particular metaphoric language about entrepreneurs, offers a clarification of the meanings attributed to the phenomenon. Steyaert (2007) calls these metaphors 'contextualised sensibilities'. Our point of departure is that understandings of entrepreneurship are not universal, but are differently conditioned by the cultural experience of respondents. Thus, we asked the respondents to provide us with metaphors of entrepreneurship. Metaphoric descriptions that draw out the complexity of entrepreneurship allow us to develop a picture of what meanings are attributed and how entrepreneurship is understood. Metaphors carry meanings, because metaphors 'share the meanings we ascribe to our reality' (De Koning and Drakopoulou Dodd 2010, 35). Steyaert (2007) agrees, pointing out how a social construction of entrepreneurship is conceptualized through linguistic forms such as metaphor (see also Ogbor 2000). We now discuss the processes by which meanings are constructed, contested and metaphorically construed.

Entrepreneurial hegemony and resistance by the entrepreneurial self

Underpinning the hegemony of entrepreneurship is an assumption that it is uniformly desirable across space for individuals and societies alike. Indeed, Ogbor (2000) suggests that the ideology critique of entrepreneurship discourse remains one of the last taboos in organization discourses. Entrepreneurship is thus argued to attract as an ideological and cultural given. Jones and Spicer (2005) explain this attraction process by the Althusserian (Althusser 1971) dynamic of interpellation, whereby an entrepreneurial subject is 'hailed' by the ideology. In essence, the subject recognizes and is recognized by the ideology and becomes a subject of that ideology. There is now accumulating evidence that, in at least some cases and in some places, this process has been successfully enacted by some entrepreneurs (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson 2007). For example, Anderson and

Warren (2011) describe how the charismatic Michael O'Leary of Ryanair uses entrepreneurial discourse, and hence ideology, to dramatically play out the role of the successful entrepreneur.

However, Jones and Spicer point out how this view over-determines the power of ideology. As Ritchie (1991) put it, it becomes a self-sealing discourse, a tautological circle of self-justification and fulfilment. This tautology can be explained by the vagueness and the capacity of the entrepreneurial concept (Anderson and Starnawska 2008). Anderson (2005, 591) suggests that entrepreneurship is difficult to conceptualize because it is a transformative condition.

When we talk of entrepreneurship, we treat it as noun, an objective thing; when we talk of entrepreneurs, we treat them as in a state of being – she is an entrepreneur. Neither of these is a true or accurate account. Entrepreneurship is a process of creating, not a thing in itself.

Hence, the thematic power of the concept embraces this capaciousness to mask these teleological qualities. In discourse, entrepreneurship appears as both descriptor and explanation. It presents a quasi-explanation and a demonstration, but one drained of specificity and a priori true. Rehn and Taalas (2004) make a related point about how the entrepreneurial society in this discourse is synonymous with the morally upstanding society (Anderson and Smith 2007; Smith and Anderson 2004), but also point to the significant amount of circularity in this account.

Even so, and in spite of the strength of this socio-cultural discourse, there is no good reason to assume that individuals within different societies and with different cultures will all respond similarly to any discourse. That is not to say that we are not influenced by prevailing cultures. Indeed, Korsgaard and Anderson (2011) argue that entrepreneurship is enacted socially, using socially informed actors to engage within a milieu that can be understood socially. But societies and cultures vary; Fayolle, Basso, and Bouchard (2010), for example, argue that American culture values entrepreneurship more than French or Scandinavian cultures. As Down (2006) argues, the meaning of entrepreneurship is constructed by the juxtaposition of the individual and society. Indeed, any enactment of entrepreneurship is the conjunction of perceptions about the self and circumstances (Anderson 2000). It seems then that ideological discourse may shape national cultures, which in turn may shape individual's perceptions, albeit not in a simplistic, deterministic fashion.

Entrepreneurship scholars appear to agree that the level of entrepreneurial activity and the propensity to entrepreneurship vary across countries and societies (Aldrich and Martinez 2001; Rees and Shah 1986; Blanchflower 2000; Blanchflower and Meyer 1994) for a number of reasons, including economic (Baumol 1990), institutional (Harbi and Anderson 2010) and cultural reasons (Busenitz, Go'mez, and Spencer 2000; Pinillos and Reyes 2011; Freytag and Thurik 2007). Thomas and Mueller (2000) argue that culture may condition the potential for entrepreneurship, thus generating differences across national boundaries. Berger (1991) explains that culture serves as a conduit to entrepreneurship, whereas Timmons (1994) proposes that a favourable environment for entrepreneurship is one that prizes entrepreneurship. Morrison (2000) describes this as the regionally different symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurship and culture.

Hayton, George, and Zahra (2002, 33) tell us how 'cultural values indicate the degree to which a society considers entrepreneurial behaviours, such as risk taking and independent thinking, to be desirable'. Erez and Earley (1993) explain that culture provides a cognitive framework that endows meaning and values to motivational variables, so that cultural value orientations shape which objectives are desirable or not.

Most entrepreneurship research has been generated in the USA, which calls into question its transferability to contexts with distinctly different cultural, social and economic climates (Thomas and Mueller 2000).

Culture may represent an ideology, offering ways of making sense of the everyday within the norms and mores of a society (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson 2001). But, how can entrepreneurship, an individual act imbued with personal attributes and intensely particular, even idiosyncratic, actions be reconciled with an 'everyman' positive and universal, social attitude towards an enterprise culture? Culture is a background condition that is never universalistic; aspects may be individually taken up or rejected. We might even suppose that entrepreneurship is admired as a concept for others, but rejected and shunned as a practice for themselves. Moreover, it is likely that how entrepreneurship is understood, or what is understood as entrepreneurship shapes its attractiveness. Individually, people may be influenced by ideologies, but they are, on the whole, sentient, self-reflective and cognisant beings capable of judgement. They are not to be ideologically shepherded into a Greek chorus eulogizing enterprise, especially an Americanized version. Of course, as Mitchell et al. (2002) point out, entrepreneurs engaged in solving similar problems and faced with an increasingly similar global environment may develop a common entrepreneurial culture. Nonetheless, they argue that although some parts of entrepreneurial thinking may be universal, the pervasive influence of local culture, values and norms of entrepreneurship within countries and cultures may dramatically impact any 'universal' values and norms that may exist. So, we should expect individual and cultural variability in the attraction of enterprise. Indeed, even McClelland (1961), often portrayed as the archetypal personifier of entrepreneurs (Gartner 1989, 54), saw entrepreneurship as a cultural variable. Similarly,

Ogbor (2000) suggests that the prevailing social, historical, political and ideological systems and norms in a contemporary society foster or inhibit the 'spirit' of entrepreneurship. Accordingly, its appeal may similarly vary.

Culture and thought

This issue of national culture shaping the appeal of enterprise forms our research problematic. Culture, manifested as a particular national, social and historical context, may influence how people think about entrepreneurship (Davidsson 1995). We want to know whether there are differences, across Europe, in the national dispositions towards entrepreneurship. Do young Europeans understand entrepreneurship in a similar way? We see this as an important issue because young people will not only become the future, but they are also tomorrow's entrepreneurial supply (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack 2009). How much, or how little, and in what ways they admire and approve of enterprise will shape how much they themselves want to be entrepreneurial. Yet, if they believe entrepreneurship to be distasteful, they may not want to emulate the entrepreneurial change makers of today.

Culture, for Williams (1971), is the system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced and experienced, but Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson (2001) found that the effects of culture are notoriously difficult to capture. To try to address this problem, our conceptual platform is social construction, which takes due account of how people interpret and use the relatively abstract notion of culture. Moreover, social construction emphasizes how meanings create values (Chell 2000). Using this perspective, Steyaert and Katz (2004) note how entrepreneurship has very different meanings in different places. Moreover, meanings and values also vary over time. In the 1980s, although entrepreneurs were the heroes of media (Nicholson and Anderson 2005; Radu and Redien-Collot 2008), they were also a euphemism for economic criminals in the USSR and Communist China.

We believe that cultural understandings can be accessed and tapped into by the use of metaphors. Metaphors play an important process role in how we learn and think about a phenomenon (Drakopoulou Dodd 2002) and provide a tool to 'generate insight into how things are' (De Koning and Drakopoulou-Dodd 2002, 2). In explaining one thing in terms of another, metaphors bring to the surface cognitive qualities. But, metaphors can be more than alternative illustrations of an aspect of a phenomenon, act as more than an inductive inference and do more than invoke a transfer of sense from one thing to another.

Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) shows that metaphors provide insights into how their users perceive their own reality; thus, metaphors can create realities, guide future action and reinforce experiential coherence. Thus, cognitive or conceptual metaphors are argued to be a matter of thought rather than merely of language. Lakoff and Johnston (1980) argue that metaphors actually structure meaning. They provide the example of 'argument is war' and illustrate this with several metaphors such as lost or won; attacked and shot down weak points in the argument. Although argument and war are very different things, these metaphors are seen to actually structure how we think about argument. This is a structural way of conceiving and is much more powerful than a literal metaphor (same meaning) or a dead metaphor (cliche') such as table 'leg'. When our respondents told us that entrepreneurs were 'lions', we take this to mean that entrepreneurs behave bravely rather than alluding to spraying on trees! Lakoff and Johnston see such conceptual metaphors as culturally based definitions of assumptions of what is thought to be real. Thus, metaphors tap into and draw out from the ambiguities within the capaciousness of the entrepreneurial concept we discussed earlier. Consequently, establishing what metaphors young people use highlights what they understand as the various qualities of entrepreneurship. Asking to ascribe metaphors to entrepreneurship behaviours provoked our respondents to tell us what and how they 'think' about entrepreneurs, and, as we have discussed above, metaphor discourse provides special insights into cultural understandings. As we have argued in a related study: 'Metaphors, where the characteristics of one thing are attributed creatively to another, have previously been shown to be a rich repository of socially constructed meanings' (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack 2009, 127).

So, to address our research question, we analyse the metaphors used by young people to describe entrepreneurship and also address the question 'what are the perceptions held about the entrepreneur by young people across cultures?' Data were collected from 498 respondents in seven European countries (Cyprus, Eire, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the UK) and we used the metaphors to investigate, compare and contrast the perceptions of entrepreneurs held by our respondents. Respondents included high school pupils, parents, teachers, local support agencies and entrepreneurs themselves. The findings presented in this paper demonstrate strong and significant differences across cultures. They contribute by extending our understanding of how entrepreneurs are perceived, by elucidating the extent and nature of divergence of social constructions of the entrepreneur across national boundaries. Consequently, the findings have implications for how an enterprise should be encouraged. Finally, this study shows how powerful metaphor can be as an approach to developing

understanding about perceptions. This is especially useful when researchers want to compare understanding across different social, cultural and national groups. Our earlier analysis of this data-set, for example, revealed that ‘across the European Schools environment, the entrepreneur is a conflicted social archetype, simultaneously perceived as an aggressor and a winner, a victim and an outsider’ (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack 2009, 129). Our aim in this paper was to explore more deeply the positive and negative perceptions of the entrepreneur, which we felt were inherent within the data-set’s metaphors.

Methodology

We investigate, compare and contrast the perceptions of entrepreneurs held by respondents from seven countries, which represent the four points of the European compass and are diverse in terms of growth rates and the degree to which they are mature or emerging market economies¹. In so doing, we continue the EUROPE study’s exploration of educational environments for entrepreneurship, presented in, inter alia Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack (2009), Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes (2013) and Drakopoulou Dodd et al. (2011).

All 498 respondents were asked to provide five metaphors completing the sentence ‘an entrepreneur is like...’. As Table 1 shows, this generated a total of 1680 responses, since 62 respondents did not provide us with data. All metaphor data were translated into English by native speaker researchers also fluent in English. The data were then collated into an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate coding. Literal expressions and null responses were removed from the spreadsheet at this point. Some 548 metaphors were literal descriptions of the entrepreneur, typically some kind of adjective describing an attribute that the respondents associated with the entrepreneurial identity (e.g. ‘wealthy’, ‘shrewd’, ‘hard working’, ‘greedy’ or ‘just a normal person’).

Around a third of our total responses were thus unusable, and from this we conclude that more precise instructions should have been provided about the difference between a metaphor and a literal description.

Of these 1132 usable metaphors, about 35% were provided by 255 school pupils, 27% by 100 teachers, 14% by 63 parents, 19% by 62 entrepreneurs involved with the schools and 5% by 18 school-related local business association members and/or enterprise education administrators. The pupils were aged between 14 and 19 years. The rationale for the multiple stakeholder samples was to capture a rounded perspective on the perceptions of enterprise within diverse European secondary education environments.

The constant comparison method was used to analyse these metaphors, with multiple rereadings of the data. Given the nature of the research question, a basic analytic frame was used to sort metaphors into those that were deemed by the research team to be mostly positive, mostly negative or essentially neutral. Many metaphors were codeable only given the comments with which respondents qualified them, so that ‘cats’ were perceived to be positive when the metaphor was justified with ‘don’t like to be managed’ and negative when cats were described as ‘shrewd and ruthless’. This simple frame permitted us to access the full richness of the linguistic data in our subsequent exegesis, in which we reflected on the relationship between language, entrepreneurship and the socio-cultural context of our international respondents.

To probe more deeply into the origins of these value attributions, additional focused hermeneutic analysis was also performed on a selection of metaphors clustered around the theme of natural analogies using six sub-categories. For example, the fox, often with added description, ‘sly and cunning’ (UK), was categorized as ‘clever’. However, if the fox was ‘attacking the chickens’, the metaphor was classified as ‘ruthless’, along with sharks. Vultures were mostly categorized as ‘parasitic’, and lions largely as ‘brave’. We also encountered some cultural difficulties in understanding the metaphors. ‘Cucumber’ was offered by a number of Polish respondents, and we were at a loss in classifying the metaphor. Fortunately, we were later told that the metaphor is an eastern European way of describing freshness and newness. Thus, we had to be acutely aware that metaphors themselves are culturally formed and located.

Table 1. Total metaphors samples by country.

	Cyprus	Greece	Ireland	Italy	The Netherlands	Poland	UK	Total
Usable respondents	44	68	26	54	94	35		
Total metaphors	2102	6313	2298	2422	9823	7168		
Literal responses	4798	7319	4664	6554	8			
Unclassifiable metaphors	1302	0	122	19				
Usable metaphors	1631	6559	1042	3623	4172	1132		

Findings

Broad patterns

Before presenting details of what was present in the collection of metaphors, it is worth noting what was absent; the anticipated metaphors we did not encounter. Remarkably, there was no mention made of heroes or heroic figures at all. The mythic figure of the ‘poor boy made good’ was also conspicuously absent. Metaphor gender was always masculine, with the exception of a single maternal image, which was also one of the very few examples of a nurturing metaphor. Given the prominence of these themes in earlier studies of entrepreneurial literature, their absence within our extensive sample was surprising.

Our value-based coding revealed that, for five of the countries studied, between 70% and 82% of all entrepreneurial metaphors reported were positive in nature, suggesting strong cultural support for at least some aspects of entrepreneurship (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, we find quite substantial variance in the proportions of positive, negative and neutral metaphors. The proportional commonalities between the UK and Ireland are quite striking, with very few negative metaphors. A similar pattern exists in two of the three Mediterranean societies, Italy and Cyprus. Finally, the two most eastern countries in the study, Greece and Poland, also show some similarity, reporting the highest levels of negative metaphors and the lowest percentage of positive metaphors. We will now explore the nature of these positive and negative metaphors.

Positive metaphors

Table 2 presents positive metaphors of the entrepreneur and demonstrates the importance of this type of value overall, but especially for the UK, the Netherlands, Ireland and Italy. The Irish metaphors were dominated by perceptions of the entrepreneur as a creative star, as ‘visionary leaders’, as ‘inventors’, ‘artists’ and ‘dreamers whose dreams come true’. Indeed, for the Irish respondents, more than 50% of the predation metaphors are broadly positive, depicting the entrepreneur as a lion which is variously ‘brave’, ‘courageous’ and ‘leader of the pack’.

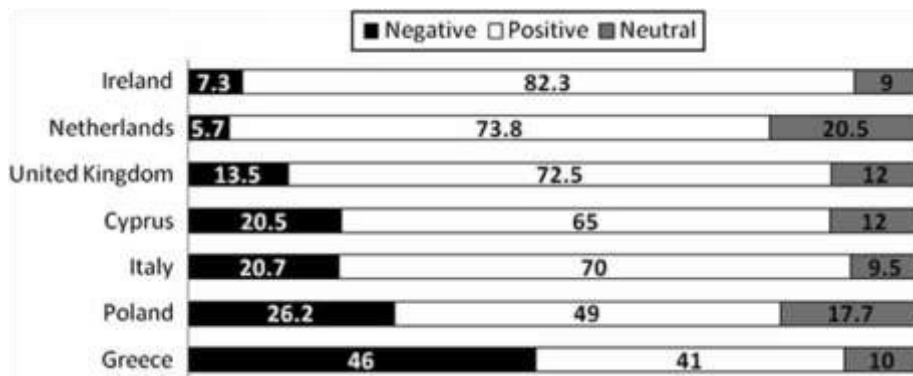


Figure 1. Percent metaphor value by country.

Table 2. Positive metaphors of the entrepreneur.

Country	Number	Positive metaphors (%)	Examples
Ireland	56	82.3	Bright and illuminating rainbows
The Netherlands	180	73.8	Lubricating oil of economy
UK	124	72.5	Poets. They must invent new ideas and turn them into something profitable
Italy	71	70	The wings of freedom
Cyprus	99	65.5	A ship with a good captain. They know where the ship begins its voyage and where it docks. They have targets
Poland	111	49.3	Hunters – they are persistent on their aspirations for a success
Greece	73	41	Conductors of the orchestra
Total	714	64.2	Percentage of total sample

The Netherlands' data were remarkable for their consistency; very many respondents supplied exactly the same metaphors, which was not the case for other countries. Prevalent among the metaphors supplied by the Netherlands' sample are those which present the entrepreneur as an engine of growth: 'motor of economy'; 'lubricating oil of economy'; 'propellers of economy' and 'promoters of economy'. Also important was the concept of the entrepreneur as a risk-taking pioneer and as an 'initiator' or 'catalyst', with the notion of an 'all-rounder' also appearing quite frequently.

For the UK, like Ireland, the dominant positive metaphor theme uncovered in our analysis is that of the entrepreneur as creator: 'creative, like a bird building a nest'; 'creative as an artist'; 'creative people like an artist who has a good idea'; 'a box of ideas ready to explode' and 'Poets. They must invent new ideas and turn them into something profitable'. The UK sample also provided a range of positive metaphors which depicted the entrepreneur as a creator of growth. Examples include: 'a seed because it grows into something big'; 'a plant sprouting new roots' and 'a bowl of dough expanding'. This is intriguing, as there are no UK metaphors whatsoever which depict entrepreneurs as engines of economic growth. We conclude that creative enterprise growth, in the UK, is valued as an outcome in itself and not simply for the new jobs and other community benefits it brings.

Several UK metaphors relate to the entrepreneur as some form of catalyst, echoing the creative themes discussed above. One student, indeed, provided three catalytic metaphors, including 'logs on a fire – only certain logs will help make the flame grow and burn bright'. There are also many vivid images of the persistent, innovative, creative entrepreneur, tackling something different from other people: 'salmon swimming against the current'; 'birds leaving the main bird formation'; 'a fish swimming against a shoal'; 'a breath of fresh air' and 'quiet revolutionaries subtly disturbing the status quo'. Metaphors of predation are also quite frequent for the UK sample and are largely positive in nature, such as 'tigers, take risk, go for the bite'; 'entrepreneurs are like sharks in the sea. If they stop moving they die' and 'early birds that get the worm'.

Positive Italian metaphors include many ('brave') captains as well as other symbols of success such as 'luxury cars'. The literal responses for Italy, which could not be subsumed into the metaphor analysis, contained many occurrences of the words 'shrewd' as well as 'wealthy'. Italians also perceive the entrepreneur positively as a social animal, such as a 'friend', and as an important contributor to the national economy, a hard working bee or ant acting as an engine of growth: 'basis of the national economy'; 'roots of the economy'; 'wings of the economy' and 'engines of the economy'.

Positive metaphors for the Cypriot sample include perceiving entrepreneurs as 'stars, shine brighter than the others and stand out' and as 'idols – you admire them for their courage'.

Leadership metaphors were also an important Cypriot motif, most of which were positive in nature: 'Coaches of a team. They help the players play correctly (they lead)'. However, the most predominant positive metaphor for the Cypriot respondents was that of the entrepreneur as an engine of economic growth: 'The A and Z of their country's economy' (three respondents); 'The oxygen for the country's economy' and 'The lever of the machine called "economy". They put in operation the economy of a country'. Cypriot warrior metaphors positively emphasize bravery and the ability to face danger: 'Fighters. They fight for the survival of their company'.

Polish data contain a large number of quite benign hunting metaphors: a pride of strong, wise, lion-like leaders, as well as cunning and shrewd foxes and cats. Entrepreneurs are also seen as brave, tough, sharp warriors or as weapons. Some of collective insect metaphors from Poland, which we mostly classified as being neutral, take on a positive qualification by emphasizing that such insects work for the common good: 'ant in the ant-hill; their hard work creates well-being and future of their country'.

The small subset of positive Greek metaphors focuses on the entrepreneur's leadership role as well as on their function as engines of economic growth. Almost non-existent within the Greek data-set are metaphors which depict the entrepreneur as possessing any business skills or as acting as creators.

Negative metaphors

The Greek sample is dominated by a highly negative perception of the entrepreneur as an aggressor. Although this is present for all countries, the negativity and animosity exhibited by the Greek sample are very pronounced indeed. The language used is also striking: 'murderers', 'thieves', 'fraudsters', 'pimps' and 'vampires' are all typical of the large group of metaphors which show entrepreneurs exploiting others. This exploitative image is also present in the very large predation cluster, which contains many parasitic and scavenging metaphors, such as 'vultures', 'leeches', 'carrion crows' as well as the more predatory 'sharks' or 'wolves'.

Some of the Polish metaphors in this cluster come close to those of Greece in their portrayal of the entrepreneur as ruthless, exploitative and parasitic, like a leech, a hyena or a vulture; a thief, a fraudster or a tyrant. Some

parasitic metaphors ('leeches' and 'ticks') are reported by the Italian sample too, and there are also a handful of references to exploitation in the Cypriot material. The Cypriot data also contain a handful of negative leadership images ('tyrants', for example), but, paradoxically, also to 'slaves', struggling to survive and succeed in a threatening economic and competitive environment. The scant number of negative metaphors from the UK echos this theme of victimhood, as when a respondent portrays entrepreneurs 'fleeing from the darkness of their internal inferiority perceptions, running from the past' (Table 3).

Unlike other nations, for the Netherlands three individuals proffered a list of metaphors which were negative in their entirety – containing some very pejorative terms, such as 'exploiter' and 'slave-driver' – and all other respondents presented only positive images. Elsewhere in Europe, individual respondents mixed up negative and positive

Table 3. Negative metaphors of the entrepreneur.

Country	Number	Negative metaphors (%)	Examples
Greece	82	46	Leeches, because they suck the blood of the employees
Poland	59	26.2	Stone – insensitive to the needs of others
Italy	22	20.7	Leeches
Cyprus	31	20.5	Foxes – they try to sell their products in a treacherous way
The UK	23	13.5	The historical titanic, the discovery shuttle
Ireland	5	7.3	Hares, running about all over the place
The Netherlands	14	5.7	Profiteer
Total	236	21.2%	Percentage of total sample

representations of the entrepreneur into a complex and contradictory image. The Netherlands data suggest a much more personal and straightforward view of the entrepreneur: most people see only their positive aspects and a small minority see only their negative connotations.

Natural analogies

So far, we have shown that there are some positive and fewer negative perceptions of entrepreneurs. We have also looked more closely at which metaphor is employed, so as to discern some more subtle points. This presentation of findings concludes with an exploration of the cluster of natural analogies, which we found to be grouped into six main sub-themes: parasitic, ruthless, clever, brave, opportunistic and feral.

These picture a highly competitive environment, with overtones of Tennyson's nature 'red in tooth and claw'. There are no hints of a benign environment, but more about struggles and winners, with the law of the jungle being predominant. It is noteworthy that this picture is strongest in Poland and Greece and weakest in Ireland and the UK. Here, we see an initial indication that the harshness of the economic environment may impact on perceptions of the entrepreneurial role. Our subsequent analysis will consider further the implication of this suggestion (Table 4).

What we find particularly interesting about the extent of these natural metaphors is how they draw our attention to the 'system' thinking behind the metaphors. Earlier, we discussed how Lackoff and Johnston explained about 'argument is war'. Here, we see the entrepreneurial environment as understood, thought of and described in Hobbesian terms as nasty and brutish and where the fittest survives.

Table 4. Natural analogies of the entrepreneur.

	Parasitic	Ruthless	Clever	Brave	Opportunist	Feral
Ireland, 7	0	1	0	6	0	0
The UK, 12	2	3	0	3	3	1
Cyprus, 12	2	6	0	1	2	1
Italy, 12	0	1	0	10	1	0
Greece, 33	7	13	6	4	2	1
Poland, 37	11	6	11	5	0	4

Note: highest counts in bold.

These findings suggest that the entrepreneurial role is differently viewed as more or less beneficial by the country. For Poland, for example, 11 of 37 see the role as parasitic and none see it as opportunistic. In Greece, 13 of 33 see it as ruthless, 7 as parasitic, whereas 2 see it as opportunistic. Clearly, in these two countries, entrepreneurship is seen to play a different type of role, one redolent with cynicism and even with scorn.

There is, however, some grudging admiration for entrepreneurial bravery and most manifest in Italy (10 of 12), Ireland (6 of 7) and the UK (3 of 7). This seems to imply an appreciation of the risks associated with enterprising. Interestingly, only Poland (and Greece) see entrepreneurs as clever!

Discussion of findings

Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are value-laden social constructions which have substantial differences across Europe. Although largely admired, the entrepreneurial role is seen both negatively and positively. Thus, the status of entrepreneurs across Europe is problematic. Perhaps the most graphic example of a country-specific value conceptualization of the entrepreneur is that found in Greece. This indicates a profound mistrust and vilification of entrepreneurial activities; these are conceived of as criminally exploitative by their very nature. 'Entrepreneur' seems to be quite literally a dirty word in the Greek educational environments.

Some indication of national groupings of proximal social constructions can also be perceived. A north-western European tendency to see the entrepreneur as an innovative star in their own right is noticeable (the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands), as well as a Mediterranean emphasis on the collective economic benefits of enterprise, which offsets entrepreneurs' individual aggression. In all our sample nations, we see an admiration for what entrepreneurs do as change masters, pioneers and innovators. Approval for the social contributions made by entrepreneurs as engines of wider economic growth is also evident, especially in southern and eastern cultures. Other aspects of the entrepreneurial process which receive approval include persistence and hard work in the face of risk. But there is also some chagrin about the nature of the practices, its potential for exploitation and predation, which tempers the admiration and in some cases vilifies entrepreneurial practices. Hence, it appears that entrepreneurship is almost universally admired as a process for driving the economy, but the agents of change, the entrepreneurs, are much less likely to be the objects of esteem.

It is interesting to reflect on how our findings relate to our discussion on the hegemony of entrepreneurship. There is evidence in the metaphors of some reproduction of entrepreneurial discourse. We note how strongly the economic contribution of enterprise is presented. Moreover, many metaphors emphasize how entrepreneurship produces this economic benefit; the bravery, the creativity and hard work shine through to differentiate enterprise from other forms of business. But, the discourse is not reproduced in its entirety; we saw no mention of the entrepreneurial hero. What we do see in the metaphors is a candid distinction between outcomes and process. Although entrepreneurship is admired for what it produces, there is much less approval for how it is produced. The individualism that characterizes entrepreneurship practice is held up for disapproval. Many metaphors were deeply pejorative of opportunism, not seeing opportunity, but instead seeing profiteering and parasitic behaviour. Interestingly, we note a correlation between countries with higher levels of growth and more positive metaphors. Perhaps this illustrates how meanings are shaped by experiences and how discourse does not directly translate into cultural values.

Our findings indicate significant similarities in cultural patterns of the entrepreneur, as well as quite specific national idiosyncrasies, and what appear to be indications of cultural groupings. It is interesting that such patterns of both contingency and universality have been observed in other socio-cultural elements of entrepreneurship, most notably entrepreneurial networking. Klyver, Hindle, and Meyer (2008, 344) have suggested that this can be described both as variform universality, 'a general relationship that holds across countries, but which is moderated by culture', and as functional universality 'where relationships are the same within groups' of countries.

We argue there is ever more substantial evidence of variform universality in social constructions of the entrepreneur, as uncovered by metaphor analysis. Broad meaning patterns are shared across many countries, but the subtleties of meaning, emphasis and significance, nevertheless, vary from place to place. Equally, there is some evidence that some social constructions may cluster in international groupings of countries. In this instance, it appears as though the more affluent north-west of Europe exhibits quite a consistent core of value-related social constructions of the entrepreneur. Similarly, the enhanced importance of societal values is noticeable in the south and east of Europe.

If this is the case, however, then we must also begin to ask more clearly what factors drive such variform universality. What socio-economic patterns of difference and similarity have emerged in relation to entrepreneurship and national cultures? We would argue that no single explanation is likely going to be able to account for the divergences in social constructions of the entrepreneur across national cultures, given the

prevalence of eclectic theories in other areas of international management research (e.g. Dunning 2000). A detailed consideration of these topics is clearly beyond the scope of this study. The most we can aspire to here is to point in what seems like plausible directions. We hope that by briefly exploring various approaches, perhaps some signposts emerge, however tentatively.

To that end, we will briefly reflect on our findings in the light of other theories and evidence. We will begin by considering the relation of entrepreneurial praxis and intention (using data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor and the wider EUROPE study itself) to metaphoric social constructions of the entrepreneur. Next, we will consider economic indicators, before moving on to compare our findings with Hofstede’s international cultural variables. In the light of this discussion, a concluding theoretical explanation of entrepreneurial admiration and abhorrence across cultures will be attempted, drawing on the work of post-colonial literary theorist, Homi Bhabha (1990).

First, it is instructive to consider Figure 2, in which we present the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s two main indicators, total entrepreneurial activity (TEA) and percentage of established ventures, the percentage of positive metaphors from our own analysis and the intention to find a venture, also reported by the EUROPE study respondents.² (Both the figures from the EUROPE study have been divided by 10, in order to combine these key trends on the same scale.) As this graphic comparison indicates, although the measures of TEA and established ventures appear to show a lagged relationship to each other, no obvious patterns emerge in connection to our own data. Specifically, the percentage of positive metaphors revealed by our study does not map onto trends for entrepreneurial intention and activity, as measured by the EUROPE study and GEM (Minitti, Bygrave, and Autio 2006).

Once again, we find that the entrepreneurial process – or performance – cannot be directly connected to local cultural admiration or abhorrence for the entrepreneur. This should not, perhaps, come as a great surprise. Hjorth (2008) has argued that cultural homogeneity does not de facto lead to universal entrepreneurial practice. We would argue

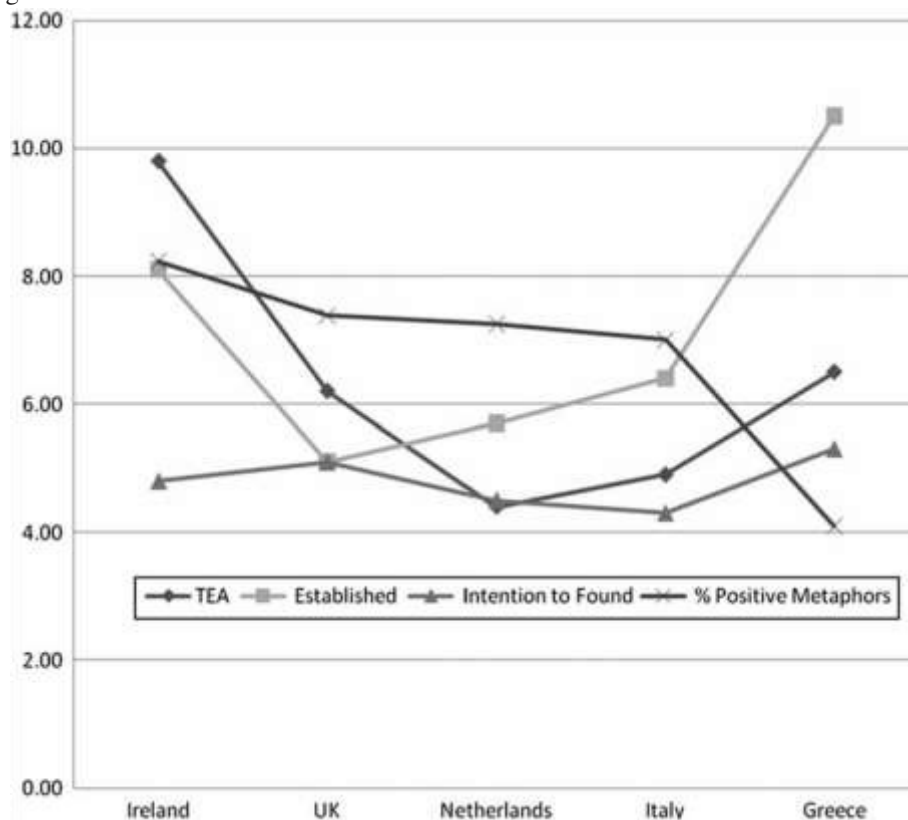


Figure 2. Entrepreneurial intention, activity and perception.

that, equally, cultural diversity does not de facto lead to clearly patterned divergence in entrepreneurial practice.

GEM statistics provide examples of how cultural homogeneity, to the extent we can say there is, does not simply produce corresponding entrepreneurial activity. Historical, geographical and social (including linguistic) ‘similarities’ do not necessarily translate into similarities in culture and everyday practices. (Hjorth 2008, 321)

Can we, nevertheless, develop some deeper appreciation of possible roots for this cultural heterogeneity in perceptions of the entrepreneur? The nature metaphors suggested that munificence of the local environment may be relevant in shaping the degree of negativity, and even predatory brutality, of some entrepreneurial metaphors. Considering the GDP per capita for 2005 for the seven countries in the study and the economic growth rate, alongside our findings for the percentage of positive entrepreneurial metaphors, further evidence emerges to support this view (World Bank 2011).

As Figure 3 shows, there is a noticeable relationship between the trends for income per capita and that for metaphor positivity. This relationship does not hold for the economic growth rate, however. Although helpful only in suggesting probable connections, we believe that the data do indicate a link between a history of relative economic munificence and positive perceptions of the entrepreneur. Interestingly, the implied future munificence of a high growth rate does not seem to be related to cultural admiration of the entrepreneur,

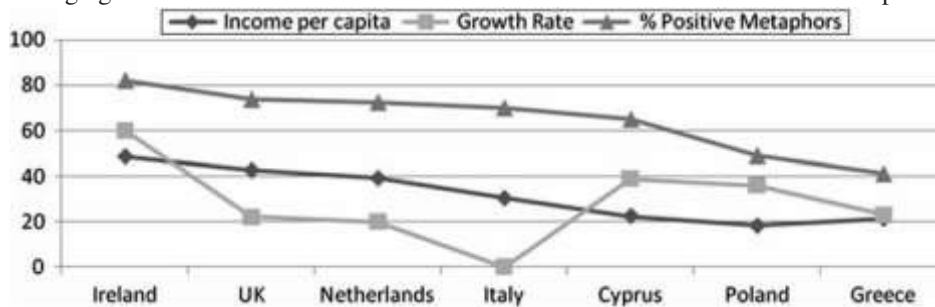


Figure 3. Economic indicators and positivity of metaphors.

which suggests that it is towards the national economic heritage that our analysis should be turned.

Hofstede’s work has long been influential – although far from unchallenged – in the study of national cultures,³ focusing on specific elements of national culture: power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance (1984; 2005). When mapped against the findings from our study, as Figures 4 and 5 show, patterned relationships between admiration for the entrepreneur and three main cultural factors emerge ([http:// www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php)).

The comparison provides some initial indication that the lower power distance a culture enacts, the more positive the perceptions of the entrepreneur. Equally, the more collectivist a culture is, the more negative its perceptions of an entrepreneur. There is also a connection intimating that countries with very high levels of uncertainty avoidance are more likely to construct negative discourses of the entrepreneur. This final point gels well with our other indications that an emphasis on heritage, perhaps at the expense of a future pioneering focus, may reduce favourable perceptions of the entrepreneur (who is, after all, an agent of change). As a broad guide of trends, it does seem as though some fundamental issues around the nature of specific societies impact in a systematically patterned way on the positive–negative social constructions of the entrepreneur. And it suggests that issues of power, collectivity and fatalism are implicated as driving national differences in this case.

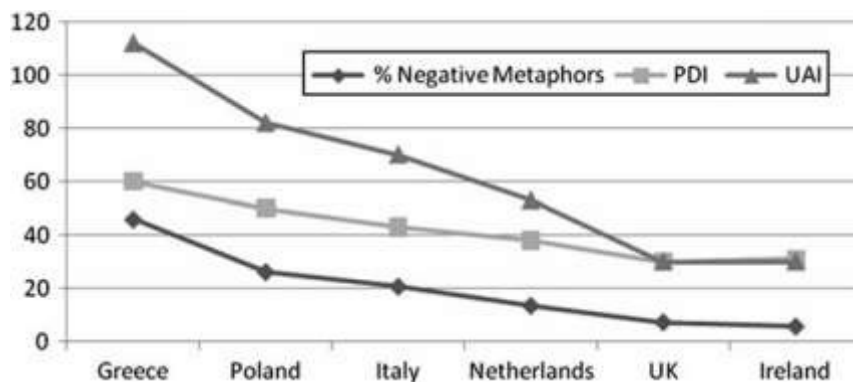


Figure 4. PDI, UAI and negative metaphors.

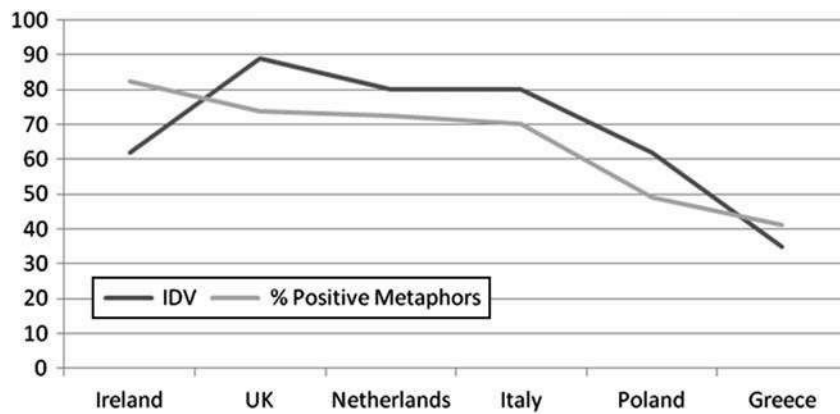


Figure 5. IDV and positive metaphors.

We reiterate that these patterns indicate no more than feasible trends, given their exploratory (and non-statistical) nature. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that national structures of power, collectivity, domination and traditional (economic) heritage may be implicated in the articulation of (relatively) positive or negative discourse of the entrepreneur. Individualist societies, and those with lower power distance and lower uncertainty avoidance, seem to construct more positive metaphors of the entrepreneur. Collectivist societies, and those with higher power distance and higher uncertainty avoidance, seem to construct more positive metaphors of the entrepreneur. We note that no link between this discourse and the quantity of entrepreneurial intention and action appears likely.

Conclusions

Perceptions about entrepreneurs and images of entrepreneurship are not uniform across Europe. In sum, the European perception of entrepreneurship is generally that it is a very good thing indeed. But, when we come to explore how entrepreneurs are socially positioned, we see a marked divergence from the Americanized hero. Many admire them and hold what they do in great esteem, but there are distinctive national patterns in the approval and disapproval. It seems that those countries which have benefited most from the economic fruits of entrepreneurial drive are also those where entrepreneurship is most admired. The entrepreneur is viewed most positively in societies at ease with individual success, with permeable power structures and with the least reliance on traditional modus operandi and rules. And yet, there seems no connection between even very positive perceptions of the entrepreneur and the volume of entrepreneurial action and intention.

Scholars from the field of international business (Frenkel 2008) and entrepreneurship (Georgiou et al. 2011) have recently recommended that the search for deeper theorization on these topics seriously consider the work of post-colonial writer Homi Bhabha. Perhaps best known for his work on hybridity, Bhabha (1990) has also argued for a narrative understanding of the nation, which emphasizes the role of discourse – especially metaphor (1990, 291) – in speaking the national culture as both pedagogical and performative. His work recognizes the inherent liminality of culture, its intrinsic doubleness and the importance of matters to do with dominance and alterity: ‘from the margins of modernity, at the insurmountable extremes of storytelling, we encounter the question of cultural difference as the perplexity of living, and writing, the nation’ (1990, 311). This has considerable resonance with the above discussion, which highlighted power, tradition and economic well-being as formative of entrepreneur discourse, as well as divergence between performed entrepreneurship and constructed perceptions.

Following Bhabha’s approach, we wonder whether the socially constructed metaphors narratives of the entrepreneur are learnt as mainly positive or negative, for a given nation, through pedagogy. These pedagogical stories of the entrepreneur seem ripe with meaning-laden metaphors of creative stars and rapacious predators. They are, although constantly re-articulated, experienced as continuous with, and consistent with, a stable national narrative. The role of education systems in retelling such national narratives is also significant (Jack and Anderson 1998; Anderson and Jack 2008) so that the secondary schools in our study can be also partly understood as mechanisms for the articulation of national narrative (Huddart 2006, 188–199). The value-laden metaphorical stories of the entrepreneur – both positive and negative – are, we argue, transmitted pedagogically.

However, the performative aspect of nationality entrepreneurship exists in some tension with this. What entrepreneurs do and what entrepreneurial practices are enacted may indeed, as our study has highlighted, be at variance with what we learn our national culture to be. The learnt cultural constructions of entrepreneurship, and

the enacted praxis of the entrepreneur, exist in a dynamic tension. Bhabha has described such processes as ‘the agonistic, ambivalent movement between the pedagogical and the performative that informs the nation’s narrative address’ (1990, 305).

Perhaps, given the nature of entrepreneurship as a challenge, a creative force for change, we should not be surprised to find that the pedagogical national narratives of the entrepreneur stand in dynamic tension with the performative national processes of entrepreneurship. In addition, the resonance of Bhabha’s approach with the findings of this study indicates helpful narrative approaches leading towards a deeper, more nuanced conceptualization of entrepreneurial cultures. It is ever clearer that the labyrinthine manifold of enterprise culture and entrepreneurial praxis is more tangled, multiplex, diversiform and nonlinear than has been appreciated to date. Most importantly of all, the complex, multi-faceted diversity of international entrepreneurial cultures should act as a firm warning against hegemonic and universalistic readings of entrepreneurship.

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Notes

1. The data were collected as part of ‘European Universities Research on the Promotion of Enterprise Education’, a Socrates-funded study, coordinated by Professor Joseph Hassid of the Pireaus University, in Greece. The E.U.R.O.P.E. project was carried out in the context of the Socrates programme – Actions 6.1.2. and 6.2. ‘General activities of observation, analysis and innovation’. We are grateful to the project co-ordinator for making these data available to the research team, and to all the project partners for data collection.
2. GEM data were taken from the 2005 study, as this was the year in which the metaphors were also harvested. Unfortunately, no GEM data are available for Poland or Cyprus (Minitti, Bygrave, and Autio 2006).
3. See, for example, Shi and Wang (2011) for an overview of recent debate.

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