Is money a dirty word?

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19 Is money a dirty word? The entrepreneurial worlds of art and sculpting

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Introduction

Artists, like everyone else, need to make sustainable livings, but they enjoy very little success in this regard. However, they often find themselves, economically, at the margins of our societies with only a few professional opportunities for employment. Most artists do not turn to museums, hospitals, law firms, schools or the public sector for employment after they have earned formal education. And many of those, formally trained or not, deliver excellent value in terms of critical, psychological and educational development and the mental and physical well-being of the societies they live in (Clift and Camic 2016; Daykin et al. 2008; Jenkins et al. 2021).

The artistic experiment *Is Money a Dirty Word?* explored the disappearance of certain art forms due to market forces and the historic conditions that enable art to be practised as a culturally significant, autonomous and valuable activity beyond, for example, capitalist market forces (Peters and Roose 2020; see Adorno 1947, p. 162; Vanderbeeken 2016). However, McQuilten (2013, p. 1) argues that financial resources are an important factor in 'personal, social and political lives' and questioned whether the division between market forces and autonomous art practices is reasonable. She reminds us that 'art, even in its most aesthetic and critical forms, is nevertheless entangled within social and economic systems' (McQuilten 2013, p. 5).

Although the entrepreneurial potential of the arts is widely recognised in cultural policy, this potential is also represented in cultural policy as 'external motivation, emotional distance, self-control, seizing opportunities, competition, individualism, and business' (Peters and Roose 2020, p. 4); many artists find themselves in marginalised positions in the business world. Therefore, money is sometimes considered a dirty word in the art world, and power structures and capitalist dominance are widely discussed topics in artistic communities (Sarantou and Karvinen 2021). However, the arts are closely linked to money, income generation and funding. Even the artists who want to distance themselves from money often count on receiving funding to achieve their artistic project goals. In addition, the business world is also gradually learning how to harness the power of the arts and integrate creativity in business and organisational practices (see Naiman 2021).

This artistic and design-thinking experiment investigated artists' attitudes after engaging in an empathy-hack with business mentors and service designers. The empathy-hack was based on the Self-Hack concept used for individuals to engage in life design and life-skill development. Self-Hack was developed by Creativity Squads (2019), a Finnish association established at the Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The concept was created during an active workshop in which individuals sought to solve the challenges,

roadblocks and bottlenecks experienced in everyday life by disrupting traditional ways of learning. Self-Hack is based on the concepts of design thinking (Stanford University 2018), positive psychology (Seligman 2002; Positive Psychology 2004) and creative confidence in the recreation of personal lives (Burnett and Evans 2016). The empathy-hack drew on this method and employed arts-based methods and storytelling to create deeper empathic experiences amongst the workshop participants.

The aim was to experiment with new possibilities of enabling artists to engage in the business world. New means for artists to find pathways towards sustaining their livelihoods were sought in a fast-changing world in which margins have become blurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a growing need to function and work in virtual spaces via the internet and mobile applications.

This experiment was part of the 35 experiments implemented in 2020 and 2021 by the project Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture (AMASS). The experiment explored how the arts can function as a vehicle for constructing entrepreneurial worlds, especially for artists who often operate on the margins of entrepreneurial environments. Furthermore, the experiment encouraged artists to improvise by delving into their own unique talents and abilities and collaborating with business mentors and service designers to take a bold leap and cross the divide between art and business worlds. Bringing art and business together in a multidisciplinary context, this specific experiment was one of five experiments conducted in Finnish Lapland as part of a testbed involving seven European countries.

Target population

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals and families found themselves isolated from the rest of the world. The pandemic resulted in further marginalisation of communities and individuals living on the peripheries of societies (Editorial 2020). This experiment sought to bring together artists and businesspeople with bold approaches and attitudes to engage in an empathy-hack. Eleven practising artists and designers (nine women and two men, aged 24–49 years), of whom some were geographically marginalised, lived in isolation, were removed from their families or experienced some form of disruption at the time of the experiment, collaborated to implement the experiment with a service designer (female, age 35 years) and a business consultant (female, age 42 years).

The experiment involved two experimental cycles. The five participants in Cycle 1 were linked, either as students or as researchers, to the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland. Cycle 2, with six participants, was initiated after Cycle 1 using snowball sampling and employed a global approach to overcome the North-South divide. The experiment's scope illustrates the far-reaching impact of online artistic initiatives that were prevalent during the global pandemic. In Cycle 2, the participants were linked, once again as researchers or as students, to either the University of Lapland or the University of Desarrollo in Santiago, Chile. It may be argued that, as university-linked individuals, the participants were not marginalised; however, all participants were living and working, like most communities and individuals in the world, in peculiar circumstances. More specifically, they were either international students and researchers living and working in remote locations or local students without access to usual university services or income-generation opportunities for their arts and design practices due to the global pandemic.

Most of the five participants of Cycle 1 wanted to practise and work with the arts but struggled with being able to sustain themselves (Figure 5.1). The creative artist-participants did not see how (and why) they could use their talents in entrepreneurial worlds or

Figure 5.1 One of the participants experimented with inexpensive materials for making jewellery, thus breaking with traditional 'fine' jewellery. Photo: Michelle Olga van Wyk.

engage with art markets. Therefore, in addition to developing their own unique (research) questions, the artists collaborated with a business mentor and a service designer to improve project planning and decision-making. The participants were challenged to explore how living in the margins could become an opportunity for growth and self-realisation.

Methodology and procedure

The project implemented arts-based action research (ABAR) approaches and experiments over two four-month periods, January–April 2021 and August–November 2021. The two research cycles were used to collect data via ten online workshops (64 hours in total) involving focus-group discussions and storytelling, online ethnographic observations and individual sketching, doodling and note taking. Each workshop cycle comprised five online workshop stages scheduled approximately at two-to-three-week intervals. The stages included (Figure 5.2) the following: (1) online introductions, during which the
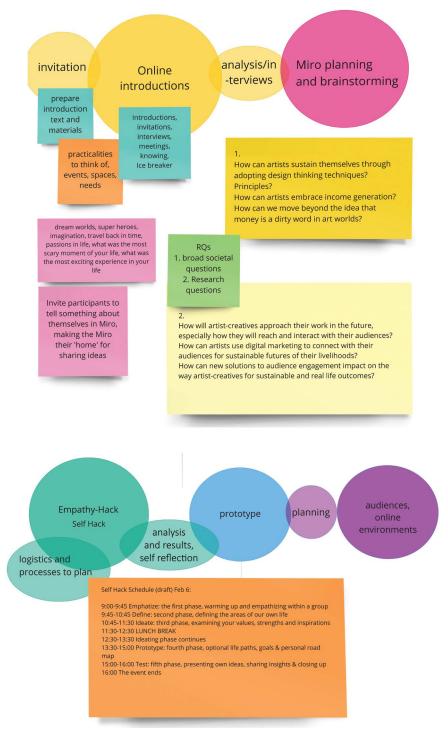
invitation

Online introductions

analysis/in-terviews

Miro planning and brainstorming

prepare introduction text and materials

practicalities to think of, events, spaces, needs

Introductions, invitations, interviews, meetings, knowing, Ice breaker

1.
How can artists sustain themselves through adopting design thinking techniques? Principles?
How can artists embrace income generation?
How can we move beyond the idea that money is a dirty word in art worlds?

dream worlds, super heroes, imagination, travel back in time, passions in life, what was the most scary moment of your life, what was the most exciting experience in your life

RQs
1. broad societal questions
2. Research questions

Invite participants to tell something about themselves in Miro, making the Miro their 'home' for sharing ideas

2.
How will artist-creatives approach their work in the future, especially how they will reach and interact with their audiences?
How can artists use digital marketing to connect with their audiences for sustainable futures of their livelihoods?
How can new solutions to audience engagement impact on the way artist-creatives for sustainable and real life outcomes?

Empathy-Hack
Self Hack

prototype

planning

audiences, online environments

logistics and processes to plan

analysis and results, self reflection

Self Hack Schedule (draft) Feb 6:

9:00-9:45 Emphatize: the first phase, warming up and empathizing within a group
9:45-10:45 Define: second phase, defining the areas of our own life
10:45-11:30 Ideate: third phase, examining your values, strengths and inspirations
11:30-12:30 LUNCH BREAK
12:30-13:30 Ideating phase continues
13:30-15:00 Prototype: fourth phase, optional life paths, goals & personal road map
15:00-16:00 Test: fifth phase, presenting own ideas, sharing insights & closing up
16:00 The event ends

Figure 5.2 Outline of the empathy-hack workshop process consisting of five key phases: online introductions, Miro planning and brainstorming, the empathy-hack, prototype, and audiences and online environments for dissemination.

participants had to discuss a personal place, present a photograph and engage in storytelling; (2) planning and brainstorming in the online Miro environment to develop individual research aims and questions; (3) the six-hour online empathy-hack workshop; (4) individual arts and design-based prototyping (six hours online); and (5) an exploration of online audiences and environments and the delivery of an arts or design portfolio outlining the developed prototype. This chapter focuses on the first research cycle, and the second cycle will be published elsewhere in the future.

The experiments were guided by the following overarching research questions: How can the arts function as a vehicle for constructing entrepreneurial worlds? How can artists living in the margins of entrepreneurial environments explore their own unique abilities to cross the divide between the art and business worlds? Is it possible to remove yourself as an artist from the power structures of capitalism? How can personal, artistic, creative and technical skills be developed to generate empathy and participant connectedness in online environments?

Ethical considerations

The ethical principles and guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity were followed throughout the course of the research. Ethical issues were considered at every phase of the research process, including data collection. The documentation of the experiment and the creative activities by the artists, the service designer and the business consultant only proceeded after informed consent was obtained from the participants. The participants had to submit formal applications to participate in the experiment due to the potentially sensitive nature of the empathy-hack, which required participants to delve into their current and past life situations during a global pandemic. The participants were encouraged to explore their own unique talents, skills and attitudes and to experiment with what could be, or even what ought to be, one's unique contribution to a fast-changing world. Crossovers between the worlds in which money means everything or is merely a dirty word were envisaged.

As the participants had to deal with their own life journeys, the project process could potentially be emotionally difficult. The facilitators were sensitive to never coerce participants at any point in the research process into sharing whatever the participants were uncomfortable with expressing. Ethical concerns, therefore, included not compelling the participants to share or deliver their project outcomes as potential good business ideas or to partake in processes that they were not comfortable with. In addition, the researchers avoided to coerce participants to reveal their novel business ideas. Therefore, the participants' portfolios were not digitally stored by the project facilitators. Presentation sessions enabled the participants to discuss and reveal the outcomes that they chose to reveal. The need for establishing a common trusted, empathic and sharing environment for the artists was central to the ethical conduct upheld in the experiment. Art making is a sensitive and ambiguous activity. The artists had to sense their ways through whether they were willing to share and reveal their processes of making, which usually involve risk taking, failures and successes.

Summary of assessment methods and outcomes

Projects involving artistic activities rarely report on evaluation practices for measuring project impact, and if they do, such reports resort to generalisations and anecdotes (Kárpáti 2020). Consequently, the value of this study lies partly in documenting the work and evaluation processes applied in the experiment. The assessment methods used

to evaluate the study impacts were based on the Stanford design thinking model (2018), which was used not only to directly guide the five-stage empathy-hack but to further assist the participants in developing self-reflective and cognitive skills. As Kárpáti (2020, p. 34) pointed out, 'engaging participants of an arts-based intervention in a Design Thinking process will result in sustainable improvement of cognitive, affective and psychomotor skill clusters'. The empathy-hack enabled the participants to define their problems at a personal level: what hampers or enables them to realise opportunities and how they can explore possibilities and solutions by embracing the arts, design and their own creative practices, skills and life experiences.

In addition, pre- and post-experiment interviews provided opportunities to examine the participants' attitude changes and personal development. Reflective interviews and qualitative online surveys, specifically life story interviews, were used to capture the participants' personal recollections of the important lessons learned and the experiences gained. Personal histories were used to encourage reminiscence, reflection and future life planning. Survey and interview questions included the following:

- How do you sustain yourself? How can art sustain the future of your livelihood?
- How do you use design-thinking techniques or principles in income generation?
- How do you interpret income generation? Do you embrace it, or is it a challenge?
- How do you reach out to and interact with your audiences? How do you use digital marketing to connect with your audiences?
- How can new solutions to audience engagement impact the way you envisage sustainable and real-life outcomes when dealing with income generation?
- How do you think this activity (the art experiment Is Money a Dirty Word?) could be scaled up at the business, community or municipal level? Can you reflect on this experiment and provide practical suggestions and activities?

In addition, multi-media self-documentation and portfolio presentations by the artist-participants were presented to the other participants, and mutual constructive feedback was shared at the end of each workshop cycle. The outcomes were disseminated via a website and social media (Instagram), the AMASS narrative platform, an exhibition, artistic performances, artist residencies and academic articles.

The outcomes of the experiment were as follows:

- Twelve participants developed life design maps based on the guidelines of the empathy-hack experiment.
- Twelve portfolio presentations in the form of videos and PowerPoint presentations were delivered during focus-group discussions.
- Two research papers and two conference presentations in 2021 (ICASS X 2021 and Pivot 2021) by Marija Griniuk (2021). One book chapter and a conference presentation (AMASS Conference 2022) by Michelle van Wyk (2021). One paper along with a supporting video was presented at the conference Arts in Society Research Network: Voices from the Edge – Negotiating the Local and the Global, 16–18 June 2021. This annual conference series is organised by the Common Ground Research Networks.
- Five artistic and storytelling-focused video productions (see the Appendix). One of the videos was on a unique artistic workshop by Marija Griniuk titled The Nomadic

Radical Academy. Griniuk facilitated the workshop and the video showed how artists can create unique experiences with sustainable communities. The video communicated the idea that sustainable art practices do not only entail making marketable products; rather, artists can generate income from service or experience offerings.

- The researcher and first author of this article participated in all the activities of Cycle 1, including the self-exploration of the empathy-hack. For Phase 4, the prototyping phase, she produced laboratory experiments based on bioart. The outcomes inspired an interdisciplinary collaboration between the researcher and researcher-technologist Tomi Knuutila. The outcomes were exhibited as part of a group exhibition by the BioARTech collective at the University of Lapland, a group of artist-researchers exploring the boundaries between bioart and digital technologies. The exhibition, entitled Growth, Death and Decay, was held at the Hämärä Gallery at the University of Lapland (Pietarinen et al. 2021).
- Workshop entitled Re-Stitching the Double Diamond: Visualising Thoughts, Perceptions, Apprehensions and Emotions through Improvisation and Materiality was held at the International Visual Methods Conference (December 2021).
- At least ten social media posts were posted on Instagram by the participants (@ismoneyadirtyword) and one researcher. Several blogposts were also prepared for the AMASS narrative platform (see Griniuk 2021; Kuo 2021). The blogs, photos and videos provided narrative and visual accounts of the project's artistic and media outcomes.

The participating artists' perspectives on engaging with entrepreneurial skills and knowledge clearly show that the artists, even after the experiment, had neither developed ideal solutions for income generation nor become more accustomed to the idea of money and the influence it may have on their lives and careers as artists. Some of the narrative accounts are quoted below:

> Everyone needs to get paid for the work that they do … everyone needs to get paid … it's really often the situation that I really don't have a clue what I'm even selling, but I'm just selling my hand style.
>
> *Participant, female, age 36*

> I don't produce objects as such or, well, there are some artefacts from interactions and performances, but it is mainly not that kind of artworks which can come into, let's say, interiors or become part of decoration … it demands some other kind of income which I do not have because I'm extremely unsuccessful with scholarships.
>
> *Participant, female, age 38*

> I'm more confident in saying what I need, which takes away this strange shame attached to talking about money as a creative because it seems that the assumption is that if you are in the creative field, you're going to struggle to make money, whereas now, you can say, you know, what I actually need to find or clarify my market and see or my initial step now is I'm working on a prototype, and I've got seven people I've identified that I can work with.
>
> *Participant, female, age 36*

In my opinion, [money is not] dirty because, for me, art is a kind of abstract compared with design because design you need a solution, you have to target a user. But, when I come up with an idea, I try to use my arts thinking. It's sometimes more emotional. But finally, I use these emotional ideas to create more concrete solutions, so for me, it's not a dirty word.

Participant, male, age 24

I think it's changed for me … being able to make a living off a creative practice that I love. Now I think I've got a starting point to actually engage conversations and being able to highlight what it is that I need. So that's a very different way to approaching a conversation because now even if the common thing is that you didn't know the answer, but now it's not a bad thing. It's not a dirty thing to not know the answer to how to get to your money. It's just that it's the beginning of your getting to your money.

Participant, female, age 36

The artists revealed several different positive attitudes towards wanting to know more about entrepreneurial practices, business models and marketing strategies. They were all interested in exploring more economically viable and sustainable futures. Markets will continue to pose challenges for the arts as they do in other fields of expertise. In all business fields, knowledge of users, customers, markets and competitors is needed to succeed, and these kinds of knowledge can be understood as the guidelines for validating your business ideas, which is an important entrepreneurial skill. Markets are also very diverse – for example, public finding is a kind of market in which many artists compete for income to realise their ideas. There are all sorts of other markets for artists, from selling products, one option mentioned by the participants, to selling creative and artistic services as designers, as mentioned by another participant.

Policy implications

The difficulty of generating a sustainable livelihood through the arts will continue to be a problem for the majority of artists. The situation will only be ameliorated when more focused actions and policies are implemented to substantially integrate creativity and the arts into business teams through multidisciplinary approaches. Key players, such as art schools, academies, universities and training institutes, should include practical courses built on the research forthcoming from experiments such as the ones discussed in this chapter. Such courses are best to be set up around real-life situations, offering learners opportunities to discover potential business avenues for their creative outcomes.

Many funding institutions are adopting multidisciplinary approaches and offering opportunities for artists – for example, to become valued members of highly successful and diverse teams. In addition, the North-South collaborations that developed organically through snowball sampling after the experiment's first cycle illustrate the broad impact that virtual workshops and initiatives can have in reaching individuals across margins, borders and other boundaries. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments must consider implementing policies that can strongly support artists – for example, by directing funding and new training initiatives that stimulate new art practices and audience participation through online initiatives.

Conclusion

The main outcomes of the experiment illustrated a kind of social sculpting that lasted while the experiments were ongoing. Although the long-lasting effects of these sculpting initiatives are unknown, and the experiments too short to create an immediate impact, the potential for mental growth and self-discovery offer avenues for ongoing research. The positive attitudes of the artists towards wanting to turn their creativity into better business, for sustaining themselves, and how the artists used the limitations of isolation as opportunities for growth and self-realisation, justify further exploration. Following the assumption that training and education institutions wish to prepare learners for sustainable futures the current research should be continued and adopted by such institutions to better assist artists to earn their livelihoods. In addition, different methods for this kind of social sculpting to activate entrepreneurial mindsets should be explored, tested and evaluated in follow-up studies.

The unique opportunities presented by the empathy-hack in virtual environments can be leveraged via interdisciplinarity. The virtual connectedness between the artists stimulated and supplemented in-situ practices, studio work, artistic performances and digital documentation practices, while the portfolio presentations created opportunities for constructive peer discussions. However, the outcomes of the experiments should be documented, analysed and understood when applied wholly in-situ, when artists immerse themselves in business environments and vice versa.

Artworks alone may constitute insufficient data for evaluating practices, but the digital documentation of the portfolios enabled the participants to present their artistic outcomes broadly and engage with online audiences while exploring and understanding their personal needs in shaping their own futures. As Shaw (Dweck 2006) proposed, 'Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.'

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