

Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education 2013

Creative Industries: a new sphere of activities for the University of the Arts? Aspirations, challenges and restraints of creative industries in the context of management education

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Abstract

As industrial societies are about to change towards a knowledge-based service-economy, it becomes necessary to develop and apply new entrepreneurial ideas. In this context, cultural efforts are also being scrutinized and located in the economic concept of creative industries. How does higher education in the arts deal with the demands of creative industries? In this context, the concept of employability will be examined. The University of the Arts Bremen as well as the Federal State of Bremen have made it their aim to professionalize arts students and to facilitate starting a creative business. Some of these activities will be illustrated.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education conference.

Keywords: creative industries; management education; arts; employability; professionalization; start-up business.

1. Creative industries as a new field of activity for graduates of arts universities

Creative industries as part of the economy are relatively new and therefore not yet entirely defined. While the American academic Richard Florida (a widely recognized source) chooses a rather socio-professional approach when speaking of creative classes like artists, scientists, designers etc. (Florida, 2002), the EU and Germany take market segments (e.g. advertising, architecture, arts, design, film, music, television) as a basis for a definition

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(Söndermann, 2009; European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2012). Following the so-called three-sector-hypothesis, the cultural field is divided into three sectors (Weckerle, Gerig, & Söndermann, 2008): the public sector (state), the intermediate sector (civil society) and the private sector (economy). Artists and their cultural and artistic production form the centre of the entire cultural scope of all three sectors. Creative industries' public sector includes essentially state-run institutions (e.g. theatres, museum), while the intermediate sector constitutes non-commercial organizations or persons (e.g. associations, foundations, patrons) performing cultural tasks of social interest, like, for example, running artists' workshops. The private sector incorporates market-oriented creative enterprises. Here, creative industries will be defined as the entirety of market-driven artistic/creative subsectors.

Creative industries' economic overall development (number of business-start-ups, gross value added, total revenue) looks positive – on a European and on a German level (Estonian Ministry of Culture, Latvian Ministry of Culture, Lithuanian Ministry of Culture, 2011; Müller, Flieger, & Krug, 2011; European Union, 2012). These results lead to specific socio-economic aspirations, not least fed by specific transformation processes and their consequences: industrial societies are about to change towards a knowledge-based service-economy. The development from an industrial production society to one that is knowledge- and service-based is a progression that had been predicted by Fourastié as early as the 1950s (Fourastié, 1954) but should not become apparent until the 1980s (Masuda, 1980). Deregulation, globalization and the evolution of new information- and communication technologies reinforce the transformation of formerly national and industrial-bound economies towards internationally oriented service economies. This process is accompanied by changing forms of employment. While industrial enterprises were marked by regular and enduring employments, employment in the service economy tends to take on highly varying shapes like, for instance, project-based jobs. As a result of such new ways of organizing human work, permanent employment and linear professional biographies decrease in importance. Instead, professional self-employment is more and more required today. Especially creative industries are characterized by these phenomena and, moreover, with regard to new forms of employment they are considered a blue-print for other industries (Kleine, 2009).

This change, amongst other things, entails the requirement of quickly developing and applying new entrepreneurial ideas. In this context, cultural efforts are also being scrutinized and located in the economic concept of creative industries. This new subsector appears to be an ideal pattern for the future: by combining their creative/cultural competence with economic expertise, many young and well- educated creative professionals take their future into their own hands. On closer inspection though, not every aspiration will be fulfilled. While it is true that European studies provide evidence that creative industries are marked by “highly innovative enterprises with a huge economic potential”¹ (European Commission, 2010), contributing 3.3% to the EU-gross domestic product (GDP) and providing employment for about 6.7 million people (European Union, 2012), problematic developments become evident nonetheless. In Germany, the aspired creation of employment within the scope of national insurance could not be achieved to the extent hoped for – at least in particular regions (Senate Administration for Economy, Technology and Women's Issues, 2009) Furthermore, the income situation of creative workers is, in parts, precarious, a fact even surprising particular industry experts, e. g. the Federal Association of Communications Designers (Büning, Breitfeld, & Schönfish, 2011).

How do artists behave in the competitive arena of creative industries, which are, on the one hand, exceptionally interesting (chances for growth), on the other hand though rather volatile (highly competitive market)? After all, aesthetic ideas and concepts as well as artistic visions of creative workers are often difficult to translate into economic action. Moreover, the artist's attitude towards his work as a marketable product is required. Thus follows that anyone aspiring to be commercially active and to survive in the arts' competitive arena is bound to think and act in an entrepreneurial way in some respects. Results show that management knowledge presents an important determining factor for an artist's entrepreneurial success indeed (Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, 2009; Grüner, 2012; Konrad, 2010). Anyone entering the competitive arena can only survive by knowing and acting by the rules. To do this, the artist needs relevant knowledge and skills as well as the willingness to apply them – in an entrepreneurial way.

¹ Translation Anke Schmidt

Arts universities are required to place more emphasis on their graduates' professional life, not least on grounds of the Bologna Process. The concept of employability has attracted support (preparing students for the professional life after graduation) as well as criticism (commercialization of higher education). Nevertheless: as creative industries are part of graduates' potential occupations, universities of the arts should open their curricula, integrating courses dealing with the demands of working in this professional sphere.

However, the question remains in which way arts universities want to help their students with acquiring such knowledge and attitude. How do current governmental policies on higher education want this point to be interpreted? What are the implications of the Bologna concept of employability and how do they relate to higher arts education? How might possible approaches to professional practice be implemented? These questions will be treated in the following discussions.

2. The concept of employability and higher arts education

The concept of employability as part of the Bologna Process has been subject to many debates in Higher Education policy. The Bologna Process derives its name from the Bologna Declaration (Bologna, 1999) signed by ministers from thirty European countries in June 1999. This declaration formalized an agreement already made in Sorbonne in 1998, namely to create a homogeneous and thus more competitive European Higher Education Area. Since then, ministerial meetings continue and aims and measures are being gradually developed, concretized and/or added. Today, forty-seven countries take part in this process.²

The concept of employability as part of the Bologna Process is widespread, but its popularity is, as Wolter (2008) points out, "negatively correlated with its precision." Although in Germany the concept of employability is mostly perceived to be one of the central aims of the Bologna Process, there is no evidence of that in the Bologna Declaration and its follow-ups – employability, at first, is merely mentioned in relation to the Bachelor degree which is meant to be "relevant to the European labour market" (Bologna, 1999). The discussion about the proportion of university education and practical relevance, however, is an old one, dating back to the Framework Act of Higher Education of 1976 (Teichler, 2008) – even though this particular debate has not been finished yet, the recent success of the term employability is surprising and might be due to labour market politics.

The aim of teaching employability strategies is to enable graduates to find employment and, once employed, to act and behave in a competent way. What kind of competencies might reach this goal though, is discussed controversially (Teichler, 2009a). Moreover, the concept, in all its indeterminacy, seems to have been reduced over time: from the above mentioned "qualifications relevant to the labour market" (Bologna, 1999) to occupational capability in the sense of life-long learning (Salamanca, 2001) to the mere ability to be employed (Bucharest, 2012)³. Following this, the current concept of employability addresses the employment system uncoupled from specific occupational fields of action and instead singles out key competencies like flexibility and adaptability (Schaeper & Wolter, 2008). This reduction is dangerous, for it implies the assumption of causality: once such isolated key competencies have been gained, a person will definitely find employment (Banscherus & Wolter, 2012). Schaeper & Wolter (2008) strongly advise against the idea that employability can be reached without professional skills, highlighting the importance of retaining subject-specific professionalization in the concept. Teichler (2009), in a similar vein, points out that the term employability is misleading, as it neglects the relation between study programmes, competencies and professional relevance. This article follows the above argumentation: professionalization is a vital part of employability. However, it is a matter of proportion.

Now, how does this concept go together with higher education in the arts?⁴ The demands of creative industries differ from other economic sectors in that they are not so much marked by dependent employment. The arts graduate's working profile will be a portfolio career, a mixture of self-employment, part-time-employment and short term contracts. In contrast to fine art graduates, designers are more likely to be employed (Ball, 2003). To be able to

² Cp. Bologna Process - European Higher Education Area <http://www.ehea.info/>

³ Cp. Schubarth, Speck, et. al (2013: 18-19); Wolter & Banscherus (2012: 27)

⁴ Here, the term "arts" refers to fine arts, design and music.

survive in the creative industries, students should be prepared for professional practice and thus see themselves as soon-to-be-entrepreneurs, a category that many students of fine arts are put off by due to a strong suspicion towards business education (Rees, 2010). There is evidence that fine arts students are torn between “a desire to make work that [doesn’t] compromise artistic integrity or principles and the need [...] for substantial income” (Rees, 2010). Furthermore, artists tend to regard financial income as a subordinated aim: creative work is more about the process than the exchange of material products (Clark, 2012). This rather reluctant attitude towards a business management mindset might also apply to students of other artistic subjects. Ball (2003) has shown that many arts students have unrealistic ideas about what they will be doing after graduation, or they refuse to think about it, and that they possess underdeveloped enterprise skills. The German BDG Salary Survey of Communications Designers (Maser, Schwabe et.al., 2012) notes that 76.44% of designers questioned do hardly or not at all feel commercially prepared by their alma mater. Taking this into consideration, the importance of furnishing arts students with management skills and legal knowledge for their later professional life becomes evident, even more so as studies show that in Germany the number of self-employed businesses in arts has increased by 2% in 2010 with an upwards trend for the years to come (Söndermann, 2012). That means that arts graduates will be thrown into an increasingly competitive market. Additionally, students ought to be able to train professional practice by cooperating with free-market companies, or, in the case of musicians, with different orchestras. Concerning key competencies as part of the concept of employability like, i.a., flexibility, ability to communicate and team work, Clark points to surveys showing that especially art and design graduates are actually well equipped with those competencies, and, accordingly, “could impress those human resource managers if they wanted to” (Clark, 2012).

A more deep-seated problem regarding higher education in the arts lies in the restructuring of traditional degrees like Diplom or Magister to the Bachelor-and Master degree structure. As the Bachelor, with an average duration of three years only, is meant to be a qualification for the job market, higher education has shifted from an input-oriented education concept to one that is obsessively outcome-oriented. The introduction of learning outcomes, that is, predefined abilities and knowledge that a student should have acquired when finishing a module, poses an immense problem for arts education. While certain learning targets like craftsmanship/techniques in music, fine arts and design are objectively measurable, the development of an independent artistic profile is highly subjective and simply not quantifiable (Jacobs, 2009). An artistic personality can only grow by means of investigation, experiment and reflection. How can these processes possibly be defined beforehand in a learning outcome?

Rogoff (2006) cuts right to the chase of the matter: “One shudders at the thought of increasingly ‘professional’ artists [...] whose schooling is aimed at producing prescribed museum-quality exhibitions, performances, exquisitely professional displays of cultural resistance, perfectly honed critically positioned texts worthy of publication. One shudders not because this is dull – though it is certainly that – but because the idea of being able to foresee the expected outcome of an investigative process is completely alien to the very notion of what ‘education’ is about.” Producing streamline artists trained for the market, empty of any individual personality, must not be the target of higher arts education. Furthermore, artistic development needs something else: time. And time, in the light of the relative short time of study, is a scarce commodity.⁵ For academic staff this presents a balancing act: on the one side they want to provide their students with enough time to investigate, on the other hand they feel obliged to prepare them for the realities of professional practice (Rees, 2010). Referring to employability, the Lisbon Declaration (2007) postulates that learning outcomes provided by universities must be described more clearly and that universities are to track graduate employment. While graduate surveys can be helpful for an insight into graduates’ careers, it would be fatal to restructure study programmes based exclusively on these results, as Teichler (2009) notes: “If more former students from arts universities are able to earn their livelihood by decorative arts instead of artistic work, there is no need to conclude that study programmes should henceforth concentrate on preparing students for decorative arts activities.”⁶

⁵ There are exceptions to the rules though. The *Common structural guidelines of the Länder for the accreditation of Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses* (2003, amended 2010) states that a longer duration up to six years of the Bachelor for arts and music universities may be granted – as the case may be.

⁶ Translation Anke Schmidt

To conclude: The old discussion to which amount universities are responsible for educating their students for the labour market is being continued by the Bologna implementation of the vague concept of employability. While some perceive it to be a dangerous reduction to mere isolated social and personal competencies with the aim to shift responsibility of graduate employment to individuals and universities, the inclusion of professional relevance, as important as it is, poses a challenge for higher arts education. While it is certainly necessary to furnish arts students with subject-specific management skills for their first steps into (self-) employment, the outcome-obsessed structure of the Bologna reform demands a balancing act for academic staff, as they want to give their students free time to develop an artistic profile as well as prepare them for real life. Then again, extremely professionalized artists might turn out to be streamline products created for a market that is all too ready to use its influence on higher education reforms. The tightrope walk between adapting to the employment system in, as Teichler (2009b) puts it, a “‘What would you like?’ attitude”⁷ on the one hand and an “‘ivory tower’ mentality” on the other hand remains a major challenge for higher education in general and higher arts education in particular.

3. Current developments of entrepreneurship in the Federal State of Bremen and at the University of the Arts

Compared to graduates from other study programmes, arts graduates are above-average in starting a business. Start-up businesses in this area and their demands regarding means of facilitation differ substantially from other economy subsectors. The University of the Arts Bremen as well as the federal state of Bremen have developed specific instruments to professionalize arts students and to support business start-ups. Entrepreneurship can indeed be defined as a subcategory of professionalization. In Germany, three out of four start-ups in the creative industries are founded on a one-man/one-woman basis. In other economic sectors, this pertains to only two out of three start-ups (Kohn &ewel 2011). Those structures lead to the creative industries predominantly consisting of micro-size enterprises and freelancers (German Federal Ministry of Business and Technology, 2011). The fragmented structure of creative industries might be due to the start-ups’ conceptual designs focussing on the entrepreneurial personality, to serving regional market niches and due to comparatively low margins (Ibid.). As a consequence, professional networks are needed as to be able to handle projects that would go beyond a single person’s capacity and to exchange experiences. Moreover, compared to other sectors, micro-size enterprises have difficulties with implementing their own marketing activities, so that externally organised network meetings with potential clients, cooperation partners and measures for cluster marketing play a crucial role with regard to entrepreneurial success.

In Bremen, the event series of the “Klub Dialog” facilitates networking between the individual protagonists. Here, creative industries’ entrepreneurs are given the opportunity to present their businesses and professional experiences on a regular basis. Moreover, this is the place to network. Klub Dialog, a registered association, functions as a mouthpiece for creative industries in Bremen, calling attention to the particular needs of creative professionals. The association’s further projects are also meant to support culture and creative industries. “Klub Dialog” is sponsored by the City Council business development unit (Wirtschaftsförderung) and by the European Regional Development Fund. At the same time, “Klub Dialog” itself functions as a funding tool, as it can make unrestricted use of the subsidies. Those are invested in cultural and creative-industry-related projects. „Plattform I2B“ serves as a networking platform for business enterprises in Bremen. Events always include a panel discussion and are organized with regard to diverse subjects. Subsequently, a get-together takes place. For creative professionals, this platform provides the opportunity to establish ties to classic business enterprises, to win them as partners for collaboration or as potential clients.

The Federal State of Bremen, in cooperation with the Bremen University of Applied Sciences’ U-Institute, provides a facilitating programme especially tailored for start-ups in the creative industries: the “Ideenlotsen” (“Idea Pilots”): a selected group of start-up entrepreneurs is given the chance to develop their start-up ideas. The programme is divided into three parts: First, the start-ups involved are to network, so they can exchange ideas and learn from each other. Secondly, participants are coached with regard to their individual ideas. They take part in workshops. Thirdly, they are placed in further training sessions chosen by themselves. The Ideenlotsen differ from

⁷ Idem

classic start-up consulting in that here, focus does not lie on writing a business plan. Bremen's classic promotion tool is presented by "BRUT - Bremer Förderprogramm für Unternehmensgründungen" (Bremen Promotional Programme for business start-ups). During 12 months, participants acquire knowledge in economy and law; they prepare a business plan and adapt their business idea to the market. Creative start-ups looking for an office can contact the Zwischenzeitzentrale (ZZZ) – ("Interim Centre"), an agency mediating rentable empty buildings on favourable terms. Since disused buildings often have their own charm, providing fertile soil for innovative start-ups, many creative businesses have indeed started that way.

Besides the above mentioned activities, Bremen offers an additional variety of start-up consulting options tailored for particular target groups. These options though are divided into small sections. Therefore, a potential future sphere for activity should lie in the creation of interfaces between these many start-up consulting programmes, one aim being to establish synergies, the other one an intensified communication of start-up activities in Bremen.

The University of the Arts Bremen provides study programmes in the fields of Design, Digital Media, Music and Fine Arts. Graduates will be mostly active in the creative industries. One important feature of entrepreneurs in this subsector is their comparatively young age. Oftentimes, graduates either start their business immediately after their last exam or they start working as freelancers. This might be based on the fact that the University of the Arts attaches great importance to the development of an artistic personality, which can best be refined in one's own business than in regular employment. Additionally, the strong competition for jobs on the labour market and the general decrease of regular employment enforces those self-employed activities. Concepts for start-ups predominantly fall under the category of service, so that the need for seed capital is lower than in other sectors. Hence, graduates are able to start a business without having to financially prepare for such an enterprise by means of a long-term regular employment. Therefore though, creative entrepreneurs, in contrast to other disciplines, have less professional experience when starting a business – but the demands to be met are the same as in other sectors. On that account the University of the Arts assumes responsibility by having developed an extensive programme designed to prepare students for their professional life. Thus, study offers are deliberately focused on praxis. The percentage of practical seminars is considerably higher than in other fields of studies, which renders cooperation with businesses and institutions possible. During these collaborations, students learn to implement projects right from beginning to end. In addition to artistic examination, presentations, contract negotiations, budget planning, measures for communication and public relation are some of the tasks to be mastered. This integrated concept of employability is supplemented by courses on professionalization as a fixed part of the curriculum. Here, basic tools are learned, for instance forms of business organization, contract design, acquisition, copyright, marketing, insurance and fiscal law. On a theoretical and practical level, strategies for establishing an individual artistic position on the free market are developed.

The University of the Arts Bremen has recognized the importance of networking and business management for its students. Therefore, regional and national cooperation projects with businesses, institutions, galleries and music ensembles are increasingly being integrated into the study programme. Networks thus generated provide a first basis for students to jump the first hurdle after graduation. Furthermore, the University of the Arts offers fresh graduates the opportunity to take their first steps into their professional careers in the rooms of the "start-up laboratory", consisting of eight co-working spaces, each leasable for two years and a mentoring programme. Moreover, the start-up laboratory serves as an interface to facilitating programmes of the Federal State of Bremen. In collaboration with other universities and institutions, the start-up laboratory will be extended, so that co-working spaces will not only go to graduates from the University of the Arts, but also to persons from other disciplines with the aim of concentrating different start-up mentalities.

In a nutshell, creative industries present an important field of activity for students of arts. To be successful in this economic subsector though, the artist should be able to see his work as a marketable product. In the case of fine art students, there seems to be a general reluctance towards economic mindsets. However, the Bologna concept of employability must be implemented in higher arts education in one way or another. While this article has indicated the difficulty of the employability concept together with the danger of false consequences, it also pointed out that professionalization in the sense of subject-specific preparation for life after graduation must be part of this concept. The University of the Arts Bremen has realized that for its students, networking with businesses and institutions is as important as teaching business management skills. Thus, the State of Bremen's collaborations and offers in this sector are partly being embedded and extended into study programmes and graduates are offered co-working spaces for their first steps into the free market.

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