



Reflecting on how artists-entrepreneurs make sense of the complexity of their double role

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Abstract

While artists are invoked as inspirational agents to renovate our managerial thinking, they also struggle with our rules when they act as economic agents to sustain their projects. The paper analyzes longitudinally a case study of an artist working also as an entrepreneur, and focusing on the ambiguity affecting the multiple roles played by the artist during the attempt to sustain her artistic vein in the entrepreneurial venture. Through the analysis of the longitudinal sequence of stages where creative and artistic imagination originate entrepreneurial ideas, the paper makes sense of the emerging ambiguity affecting the process through which each choice is built as part of an (un)coherent pattern. As an individual artist, as an entrepreneur, and a social actor, she does play multiple and conflicting roles. In what follows, the paper thus makes sense of the case to understand how the multifaceted dimension of artistic and creative roles clash sometimes with the managerial and entrepreneurial practices and what we can learn from this “failure”.

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1. Introduction

“I quit. It’s not time for entrepreneurs like me”.

With these words the entrepreneur opened his last interview. What was said with the cold tone of a normal business update was instead referred to the suffered decision to end his venture. In the last years, indeed, his creative, economic and social entrepreneurial aspirations did not align toward a common goal: being an artist and a “good entrepreneur” . The entrepreneur was constantly confronted with the difficulty of creating value in these different but intertwined domains: the creative, the market, and the social domain. For a long time, he leveraged the tension among these spheres as a tool to renovate his enterprise, but at a certain stage he was forced to end his business. For a while or forever, who knows?

The micro business in question was born in the mainland of a historical and cultural city in 2006, with the mission to become a cultural entity dedicated to narrative and theater for young audiences and it moved through a sequence of transformations that are exemplary of how art and culture remain a ground of management reflection, but are not yet explored and exploited as a source of management renovation.

The paper analyzes longitudinally the case study, focusing on the ambiguity affecting the multiple roles played by an artist during the attempt to sustain his artistic vein with an entrepreneurial venture. Through the analysis of the longitudinal sequence of stages where creative and artistic imagination originate entrepreneurial ideas, the paper makes sense of the emerging ambiguity affecting the double role of the agent. As an individual artist, as an entrepreneur, and a social actor, he does play multiple and conflicting roles (Lindqvist, 2017). In what follows, the paper thus makes sense of the case to understand how the multifaceted dimension of artistic and creative roles clash sometimes with the managerial and entrepreneurial practices and what we can learn from this “failure”. While artists are invoked as inspirational agents to renovate our managerial thinking, the case underlines how artists are

forced to navigate a space of ambiguity where different systems of values and beliefs come to a clash, with unforeseen consequences.

2. Artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs

Scholarship on cultural and creative entrepreneurship emerged as a subfield of the scholarship on the general theme of entrepreneurship and it has long been considered to have a narrow focus of interest on the specificities of entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). With time, however, it has gained more and more relevance for the study of entrepreneurship in other fields of knowledge because of both (1) the growing economic impact of the CCIs, and (2) their symbolic, social, and ethical value (Caves, 2000; Cunningham, 2004; Potts, 2009; Lhermitte et al., 2015; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Werthes, Mauer, Brettel, 2017).

Concerning the first point, CCIs are indeed recognized as an important revenue generation and job creation sector at local and national level (Konrad, 2013; Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013).

Nonetheless, CCIs are also relevant because of their symbolic meaning and social value, especially driven by the cultural dimension. As underlined by Throsby (2008: 219) “cultural goods and services are valued, both by those who make them and by those who consume them, for social and cultural reasons that are likely to complement or transcend a purely economic evaluation”.

CCIs drive the aesthetic turn of the economic and business world (Cattani, Ferriani, Godart, and Sgourev, 2021), and their cultural element is a key driver of change and innovation.

It is no surprise then that entrepreneurship in the context of CCIs gains special attention. The agent acting as entrepreneur in this context is at the center of a multilayered reality and a wide and complex set of situations, where specific characteristics of the cultural and creative sector are mixed with traditional entrepreneurial and managerial dimensions.

DiMaggio (1982) placed cultural entrepreneurs at the center of the cultural industry debate and underlined their multidimensional role. They feel the tension of being involved in a creative process that produces cultural and symbolic meanings for society (Jones et al., 2016) while they are in charge of their own sustainability (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000). Cultural entrepreneurship thus offers a vantage point to study entrepreneurship in the CCIs and also entrepreneurship *per se*. This is also in line with those streams of research which embrace a contextualized understanding of entrepreneurship as a socially and culturally embedded process (Lounsbury, Glynn, 2001; Lounsbury et al. 2019).

Cultural entrepreneurship thus entails both the experience of entrepreneurs making value of culture producing “experience goods with considerable creative elements” (Peltoniemi, 2015: 41) but also the process of culture making, through “processes whereby value is created across multiple and fluid repertoires and registers of meaning” (Gehman & Soublière, 2017: 61).

While entrepreneurship in the CCIs is a rich and evolving space of reflection, cultural and creative entrepreneurs struggle to match their economic goals and creative values (Werthes, Mauer and Brettel, 2018). The same adoption of “terms such as creative entrepreneurship, cultural entrepreneurship and arts entrepreneurship” (Patten, Stephens, 2022: 1) makes the reflection ambiguous and less impactful.

In the paper we try to reconcile this ambiguity, moving from a broader definition of cultural and creative entrepreneurs to a more specific idea of entrepreneurs working in the “cultural and creative context”. Following Patten and Stephens (2022), we define them as creative agents – both if they operate in more cultural or creative contexts - who also play an entrepreneurial role, facing the challenge of matching economic and creative goals with social purposes.

In the process through which they combine and find the right balance between their cultural and economic identities (Werthes, Mauer and Brettel, 2018), they face two challenges: the

complexity of the external environment, and the lack of competences supporting their strong motivation.

While the context urges them with multiple and different logics, offering sources but also constraints to their activity, entrepreneurs working in the cultural and creative industries do not always possess the right skills and know-how to sustain their creativity at an entrepreneurial and managerial level. The need to acquire the right knowledge is made more relevant by the small size of their ventures forcing them to embody both entrepreneurial and managerial roles (one of the authors, 2016) together with their prominent creative aspirations.

Therefore, while their creative competences give substance to the cultural project, running the enterprises ask them to manage a complex set of entrepreneurial and managerial processes (Leiserowitz et al., 2006; Sinapi & Juno-Delgado, 2015) living at the highest degree of vulnerability the balance between the production of cultural and symbolic meanings for society (Jones et al., 2016), their economic wealth (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) and the political role (Bayes 2022).

During the process of “forming, developing, and exploiting opportunities” (Lingo, 2020: 962), entrepreneurs working in the cultural and creative industries face these challenges at an extreme level, following patterns characterized by apparent incoherence and emerging ambiguity.

3. The case study: case selection, data collection and analysis

The study is somehow “revelatory” (*à la* Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2014) of how artists assuming entrepreneurial identities, face conflicting roles that impact on their ventures driving them to trajectories where managerial failure and creative success are inevitably intertwined . The value of the case is twofold.

First, the enterprise at stake unfortunately failed, and only a comprehensive view on the story of his artistic and business trajectory could actually reveal the complex and long term process through which the two identities can (or cannot) be matched. For example, the case can reveal the medium-to-long-term impact of a decision made in a time t on the following times and its cascade effect on the end of the enterprise, a thing otherwise difficult to observe in less complete views or shorter windows of time.

Second, both the story of the enterprise and the thoughts of the artist running it were particularly permeable. This was a necessary requirement to realize that the business and creative journeys did not always move in balance. This was possible thanks to the adoption of an in depth ethnographic approach, where one of the authors was able to observe the entrepreneur from the opening of the business onwards, choosing to be driven by a snow ball methodology.

These two characteristics allowed the authors to collect a huge amount of data that basically covered the whole life time of the enterprise:

(1) the 16-years archive of the business, with documents from 2006 to 2022, that included all minutes of business meetings, hundreds of market contracts and personal diaries where *everything that popped up in our mind was written, in order to not forget it* (entrepreneur's collaborator, 2018);

(2) observations from

- a. an immersed multi-year ethnographic study (Lingo, 2020), and
- b. three rounds of ethnography, one in 2016/2017, one in 2018/2019 and the last in 2022, covering both extraordinary phenomena such as one-time meetings with professionals and every-day working life;

(3) transcripts from 15 semi-structured interviews held between 2018 and 2022 with the entrepreneur, his partners and collaborators, and customers.

The different sources of data were analyzed differently: through the archival material we

reconstructed the factual history of the enterprise. Here, significantly important were the Board of Directors meetings' minutes, because they testified the formal trajectory of the enterprise. Observations were instead used to detect how things worked in practice and to capture the multifaceted behavior of the artist and entrepreneur in his everyday practices and processes (Watson, 2011).

The immersed multi-year ethnography, in particular, facilitated the identification of repeated difficult-to-observe patterns of behavior (Mair et al., 2016; Rojas, 2010; Yin, 2014).

Finally, interviews revealed the entrepreneur's thoughts and feelings connected to the business performance and his creative behavior. In this way, the adoption of multiple data sources supported not only the necessity of triangulating the data, but also that of disentangling the artist from the entrepreneur and the creative products from the entrepreneurial performance.

4. Mapping the story

The result of our inquiry is narrated in the form of a history that aims at emphasizing the discrepancies between the worlds inhabited by the artist and the requirements coming from his entrepreneurial role. Assuming the perspective of one of the co-founders leading the project until its final conclusion, we make sense of his multidimensional role. As an artist and a creative professional, he had the expertise and the strong will to push forwards his artistic and creative processes, as an entrepreneur he pursued his own business goals trying to sustain his own ideas, and as a cultural agent we had social aspirations. The result was a complex set of conflicting goals driving him along a process where all dimensions positively related to the artistic world, such as creativity and novelty of ideas, seem to be negatively related to the entrepreneurial success.

The history comes to be composed by a sequence of five phases where each phase is characterized by a change in the artist's stance towards her individual and social role. The

change of attitude comes from the interplay of her artistic, economic and social roles. From time to time, they prevail over the others and push the artist to change her action, assuming other roles and making sense of her previous choices in a process of self-reflection urging the artist one step after the other.

2006 – 200: Feeling the urgency to start the business

The bookshop is not a bookshop, but a business exploiting its activity through the selling of books among other cultural activities (entrepreneur, 2019).

The micro business was founded in 2006 as a cooperative with the aim of starting, managing, and promoting cultural services connected to narrative with a main, although not exclusive, focus on children and adolescents (Constitutive Statute, 2006). It was created by 5 partners - two booksellers, two theater actors and one psychometrist. All partners held previous experience of working with adolescents and were actively involved in commercial, cultural and educational activities offered in the bookshop and outside it, for example in schools and public libraries.

At the beginning, the bookshop activities and the collateral theatrical and psychomotor activities were on the same level, as indeed the cooperative form of governance was specifically chosen to hold everybody accountable for the overall performance of the business¹.

The cultural, financial and operational sustainability of the business was initially granted by the equal contribution of all members: the booksellers were to operate the bookshop and the promotion of reading-related activities, the theatrical actors were to take care of animated lectures and theater classes at the bookshop and in the city, and the psychometrist was to set up

¹ By overall performance we mean cultural, financial and operational performance.

workshops in the bookshop and at schools.

In its first years, the bookshop presented active space for cultural activities, since it counted a total of 230 square meters, 90-100 of which were dedicated to the bookshop in a strict sense, and 70-80 square meters were devoted to extra activities. There was enough space even for psychomotricity. The first business plan presented the logic of conducting many cultural and social activities in the bookshop (entrepreneur, 2019).

But soon after, our focal actor realized that *the workload was not the same for everybody* (entrepreneur, 2019). In particular, he felt the weight of taking care of the bookshop all-around, plus of managing the operational activities of the cooperative as a whole, while other members focused more on their creative area of action. This made him feel frustrated because he could not satisfy his cultural aspirations under the urgency of managing the business.

Despite the fact that the business was financially growing in this first phase, the point of view of our entrepreneur was that *yes, the business was growing, but not at a satisfactory pace to me* (entrepreneur, 2022).

He started thinking that he wanted to grow at a faster pace both culturally and financially, not only from the point of view of profit. As a consequence, he began scouting new locations that could better satisfy his cultural and social aspirations.

2008 – 2016. Investing in the narrative core

The second phase started when the enterprise moved to a new location. In 2008, the cooperative indeed moved the bookshop to a centrally located, less expensive, and smaller venue. The new place generously satisfied the entrepreneur's ambition to transform the bookshop into a space of social interaction focused on narrative.

The change can be synthesized into the claim *We do not sell books here, we create readers* (entrepreneur, 2019 and again 2022). Coherently with this aim, reading groups with “young readers” of diverse age ranges (9-11 years, 12-14 years, 14+ years) were established. Groups met once a month and discussed topics that delved into the young readers’ values and beliefs through narratives and stories (business partner, 2019). The new venue thus represented a *break* from the past that gave the entrepreneur the possibility to put into practice his conception of narrative as a powerful tool of education and social communication, coherently with the cultural and creative core of the enterprise.

A second *break* from the past was represented by the gradually decreasing involvement of the two theatrical actors, traced in the revenues on the company. As of August 2014, book retails accounted for the main voice of revenues of the company (Board of Directors, Sept 15th, 2014). And as of March 2015, the sales volume of the bookshop had increased by 16% compared to the corresponding time of 2014, while the revenues from the theatrical activities had decreased by more than 50% for the same time span (Board of Directors, April 13th, 2015).

While the theatrical activities were drifting apart from the narrative side, the bookshop celebrated its success receiving the most relevant National prize for children’s bookstore in 2015. The win gave the entrepreneur nourishment to push her plans for the cooperative, feeding his cultural and social narrative projects further, while deciding to outsource the operations management of theater activities (Board of Directors, Sept 14th, 2015).

2016 – 2018. Reinforcing the narrative core through entrepreneurial projects

In this phase the entrepreneur reinforced his creative “core” aspirations from the cultural and social perspectives. New narrative projects arose, opening a phase of entrepreneurial cultural creativity apparently freed of the operative constraints and financial disbalance suffered in the past.

New projects included the collaboration with local institutions on narrative education, the establishment of a publishing house dedicated to narrative for children and young adults, and the collaboration with a strategic consultant about the future of the business. Working with institutions like universities, foundations and museums reinforced the entrepreneur's self recognition as a cultural and creative entrepreneur, beyond the commercial role. While the establishment of the publishing house was in line with the original aspiration *not to sell books, but to pursue a cultural mission* (current business partner, 2019).

At the same time, however, two unexpected breakthroughs happened: first, he started developing the will to change the core of her business from children to adolescents and adults. Second, this reinforced the narrative turn of the business but exacerbated the conflict with partners taking care of non-narrative activities, bringing about a deep crisis that never bounced back. In September 2016 the cooperative came to an end and our entrepreneur remained alone as its unique owner and president.

September 2016 is a crucial date in the life of the company, a date the entrepreneur still recounts as the biggest turning point in the history of her business with sadness and regret. The space lost its multilanguage dimension: *many micro activities we used to do simply disappeared because I did not have the moral strength to implement them* (entrepreneur, 2021).

Consequences of the takeover were (1) a downturn on the creative side, (2) an increase of managerial tasks (becoming so overwhelming that in 2017 the entrepreneur hired a new working partner to help her manage the bookshop), and (3) serious financial issues. Cutting off the theatrical soul of the company meant giving up on summer camps, public readings, theater classes and psychomotricity workshops. That in turn sharply reduced direct and indirect revenues from people attending those activities and concurrently buying books at the shop.

As a consequence, *the fact that 2017 and 2018 didn't go well from the financial point of view made the bank very rigid. They turned off the taps and started asking me to return the money* (entrepreneur, 2019). The situation was so dramatic that our actor even considered the option of closing the cooperative and passing everything on to the publishing house (which was an independent organizational entity). On the contrary, he decided to sustain his cultural project further, and approached the issue of financial and operative sustainability differently, by looking for new partnerships.

In December 2018 everything seemed to be moving to a possible solution. The artist and entrepreneur was invited to join a project of urban regeneration based on the opening of a new museum with a special commercial area dedicated to host a number of innovative and culture-lead businesses. The bookshop thus moved to this new and more central location.

The location seemed to be perfectly coherent with the strategic course of the company, strongly based, at that moment, on the *idea of the bookshop as a social service to the community where it is located* (entrepreneur, 2021).

2019 – 2022. Aiming to play a social role

The move to the cultural hub had of course to be financially sustained and the entrepreneur was forced to look for extra economic support, signing a network contract with one of the biggest cooperatives operating in the National cultural industry. The financial support provided by the cooperative was so relevant that the entrepreneur changed the Constitutive Statue of his company to give full equal rights to the financing partner. As stated in the contract:

Participants in the network contract will respect the actual terms and obligations in the realization of projects to favor the common plan; they commit to periodically verify the implementation of the network program through the periodic analysis of the execution of

projects (network contract, 2018).

The new phase started under the expectation of entering into a strong partnership with the cooperative. The possibility to offer services such as guided tours for children and young adults in the museum of the cultural hub was attractive from a cultural, social and economic perspective. The entrepreneur was excited to offer her narrative and educational activities to a wider urban community and started a negotiation with the museum and the hub administrators to reach that goal. But things did not come to the hoped end. On one hand, the hub had long and complex decisional processes and offered inadequate financial support for externally provided educational activities, and on the other hand the network partner was not totally ready to be involved in those activities. Using the words of the entrepreneur, *the museum really likes our proposal for didactic activities, but when it comes to paying us, everything slows down* (entrepreneur, 2019). As time passed by, cultural constraints added up to the operating difficulties, as the *financing partner expects something from us intellectually and we feel constrained by it* (working partner, 2019). Creative and financial discontent canceled the initial enthusiasm of this new phase. The entrepreneur lost the freedom to prioritize personal projects, and had to respond to the financing partner's pressure. On top of that, the years of pandemic exacerbated the financial complex situation. Although the Italian government paid attention to independent micro cultural enterprises, the financial support was insufficient to reach sustainability. The decision to keep the bookshop open during the pandemic, moreover, forced the entrepreneur to give up part of the public financial support destined to closed retails. It was time to change again.

I have never wanted to participate in tenders because they force me to adapt creative ideas to the tender requirements, constraining my creativity. Anyway, last year I started to take part in

them because it is economically super convenient (entrepreneur, 2021).

While public tenders partially satisfied the search for better sustainability, during the lockdown the entrepreneur and her working partner committed to the creation of new narrative projects: podcasts and book trailers were some of those, summer camps for adolescents, and readings for adults, as *the lockdown gave us time to think* (entrepreneur, 2022).

Nevertheless, when new ideas come to the mind of the artist, time becomes the very scarce resource.

Time is what we missed the most, being caught in day-to-day operating tasks (working partner, 2021).

The fourth phase is a turning point in the entrepreneurial venture. The sequence of changes reveal a clear rationale: nurturing social and creative aspirations of the artist, while trying to reach economic sustainability of the company satisfying the entrepreneurial side of the agent. The new location thus perfectly fits the goal. It is a large space at the center of the city, and is supposed to offer a rich network of private and public partnerships.

But this is what is supposed to be in theory.

Phase five: looking to the future

The strength of this business is to create readers, that is for us to create citizens with critical consciousness, ready to see things profoundly. It is not something commercial, but more ethical-philosophical (working partner, 2021).

The last phase opens at the beginning of 2022, when the bookshop is definitely declared financially unsustainable. The various sides of the entrepreneurial journey emerged quite sharply during the last interview in April 2022. The entrepreneur evoked the choice of moving the bookstore to the cultural hub as the greatest mistake in her life, underlining the failure of the project both on the economic side, and on his cultural and social aspirations. The move was costly, and they could not find the managerial sustain that was initially promised by the cultural hub administration offices. Collaboration was in general difficult to manage, while energy was totally absorbed by managerial issues. The new space was apparently fitting the cultural and social aspirations of the artist. A hub conceived as an incubator and designed to hosting cultural and creative processes seemed to be the perfect environment for the artist to engage her audience, satisfying her cultural and social goals. Nevertheless, the museum partly reached its goals, and started suffering a number of problems that had a deep and negative impact on the business side of the artistic activity. The last three years were characterized by a huge reduction of the market, while inadequate marketing and communication campaigns further damaged the situation. At the end, the bookshop was forced to quit while the entrepreneur refocused her activity on her core competences, working as a cultural mediator and as a writer.

5. Discussion

As enunciated in the call, management scholars have a tradition of studies where the field of artistic and creative activities has long been considered as a fertile ground of application of managerial practices. In a reversed approach, the longitudinal reading of the story of an artist acting both as an entrepreneur and as a manager of her own business, suggests some critical reflections on how artists can be inspiring us to renovate our thinking or are forced to find a difficult balance in the middle of counterposing areas.

The first reflection is on the conflicting relation between exploring his own creativity and exploiting the business opportunities. Findings emerging from the story suggest that artists working as entrepreneurs build their own venture facing the challenge of an ambiguous match between their artistic goals and the satisfaction of their economic sustainability. As a result, the entrepreneurial life in a creative context is often made of ambiguous situations, where decisions seem incoherent and reflect the (im)possible match between opposing logics: that of the artist and the one of the entrepreneur. These two conflicting logics create a tension that is a challenge to face, but also drives the artist in his entrepreneurial venture, triggering new solutions and pushing him in a process of continuous renovation of her venture.

This happens in each phase of the analyzed entrepreneurial venture. If we observe the sequence of the entrepreneur's decisions and their effects on the life of the company, we see how the coexistence of apparently conflicting choices creates new obstacles to overcome, but these obstacles can become triggers to renovate the business strategy.

What is even more relevant is also the process through which the artist makes sense of his impossible situations ex post, making a narrative that on one side sustain her choices, while on the other justifies the pattern coherently with her story. The narrative adds value to the entire process, and contributes to justify the artist in her attempt to build his own project. (sources)

This tendency emerges clearly in our last meeting in April 2022, when the entrepreneur makes sense of her current position and recognises the value of her story: "I have the advantage (and disadvantage) of having faced a crisis for many years now [...] I had to reinvent myself many times. Being in a crisis makes you reflect more than others". In other words, he knows that he is failing, but he focuses on the positive value of "crisis", making sense of the process through which he is moving, pushing himself over his limits.

Other examples of the (im)possible march between artistic and entrepreneurial decisions are disseminated through each stage of the company. In phase one, the enterprise starts as a collective cooperative, setting the ground for diversified financial, operative and creative support to the bookshop. Different partners play multiple roles and embody the many facets of the company (narrative, theater, psychomotricity), facilitating the access to more than one market (e.g., private clients, families and schools). Furthermore, this market choice finds support in the availability of a large space where all partners can implement many activities. The prevailing logic seems then that of the entrepreneur, rationally looking at reinforcing the market and growing the business. But then, the managerial burden seems to overcome the creative freedom of the entrepreneur and her cultural role, preparing the field for a critical confrontation inside the cooperative and favoring the change towards the relocation of the bookstore. The desire to be alone again, pushing his creative dimension, seems to be uncoherent with the previous decisions, but is a necessary step.

In the second phase, the match between cultural goals and financial sustainability seems to be more satisfying to the entrepreneur and the success is officially recognised by both the market and the field gatekeepers (through the winning of the Andersen Prize). Nevertheless, tensions again increase in the company when cultural goals collide collectively, pushing the entrepreneur to lead the situation to a point of rupture. He feels the need to move his social aspirations to the front, adding a third dimension of value to his venture, but somehow pushing the partners to leave the project. Therefore, when partners leave the company, the cultural, financial and managerial balance is challenged again.

In the third phase, financial sustainability proved damaged by the decision of the entrepreneur to play alone, especially in a situation in which the market is not sufficient to sustain entrepreneurial investments in a phase where more financial sources are needed to support the financial operation connected with her partners' leave. This is when the entrepreneur starts

looking for other opportunities to reach the necessary sustainability that is now dramatically missing. The third phase is rich in terms of creative projects. The artist is involving a new partner in the company, while invests in new projects: a partnership with a relevant cultural institution, a rich program of meetings and talks with writers and editors coming from their main editorial suppliers, creative writing labs, and a slow but relevant shift towards a market of “growing readers”. Young and older adults are now more relevant and represent the complementary target to include, while the more ambitious project is the opening of a small publishing company devoted to publishing and distributing original children books in the Italian market.

All these projects play a fundamental role in the creative life of the artist, and support his entrepreneurial venture, giving substance to the project. Nevertheless, they are still inadequate to sustain the venture economically. The desired independence that was driving the previous decisions of the artist is unsustainable and the search for new partnerships becomes a necessary condition to guarantee the survival of the venture.

This search will drive the artist to design new changes exploiting the opportunity to join a project of urban regeneration, but also posing new constraints that will limit the creative freedom of the artists and will be detrimental in future.

During the fourth phase, the move to the cultural hub is made to nurture the entrepreneur’s social role but is also connected with the financial sustainability of the project. The hub is meant to work as a space of cultural activities engaging citizens and contributing to the social regeneration of the city. The hub offers the privileged access to a promising new target of users and contributes to enter in new partnerships. The museum is the center of a promised land of relationships that are opening new scenarios. Being close to the museum and taking part of a groups of innovative entrepreneurs (this is what is underlined in the official presentation of the project) means being strategically supported by the urban center boosting the creative

exploration of new creative opportunities. Nevertheless, this is also a necessary decision. Spaces are offered at a very advantageous price to attract newcomers and being close to the museum gives the possibility to enter in partnership with the largest cultural company operating in the cultural and creative sector and attracted by the position.

However, this decision will be at last defined as “the worst decision I made, ever” (entrepreneur, 2022). What we observe at the end is a cultural project totally reshaped from its initial purpose. The venture is going to end its life, and the bookshop will be closed. Cultural and social goals will be pursued in other forms, with the entrepreneur experimenting new ways of nurturing his cultural and social impetus. The new start is a collaboration with a publishing company as an editor and as a writer. He already published a novel, but now it’s time for new creative projects. “In the past I was too busy and could not find the time, but now I have plenty of time to write” he now remarks.

6. Conclusion

Entrepreneurial stories are unique combinations of decisions and actions, more often coherent but also sometimes incoherent with the original project. What happens if an artist plays her role also as an entrepreneur? Artists are often used as examples of creativity and innovation, which are also the major resources driving the process of innovation and leading the entrepreneurial venturing. If we look at these dimensions, our main actor fully presents the characters of the creative entrepreneur. At the same time, this story gives back to us the image of an irregular process where the choices of today are sometimes totally opposed to those of tomorrow. The story of our entrepreneur makes sense of the complexity of playing as an artist but acting as an entrepreneur living in a hybrid context where values, norms and beliefs are mixed together shaping constraints and opportunities.

This condition clearly emerges in some of the most critical moments of our story, emphasizing the opposition of goals and choices: autonomy vs growth, change vs stability, economic gains vs creative reputation, collective vs individual.

Many enterprises share stories of difficulties, opportunities, and changes, but “it’s not time for entrepreneurs like me” as the entrepreneur revealed to us. Making sense of the quote means making sense of the challenges of cultural and creative agents working as entrepreneurs.

First, cultural entrepreneurs are placed in a hybrid area where market, creative goals and the social and political context (Linvdquist 2017) define multiple spaces for the entrepreneurial, artistic and social action. If the market defines their competitive goals, resources and opportunities also come from the capability to navigate social and cultural domains of action. The need to navigate these domains exacerbates the complexity of the entrepreneurial role for the artist, where the search for novelty and the creative thinking of the cultural project (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000; Sherdin & Zander, 2011; Jones et al., 2016) amplifies the possibility to satisfy the market, while institutional and political contexts offer opportunities but also constraints to entrepreneurial freedom.

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