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NORTHRN LIGHTS AND BEYOND

A NORDIC APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT DESIGN SCHOOLS

As entrepreneurship rides along passages of global crossroads, it becomes evident that culture plays a great role in how entrepreneurship is perceived and practised across the globe. Customs, traditions and heritage matter – as well as social structure and welfare influence the role of entrepreneurship within a given society and culture – and within its education system.

This paper seeks to provide an insight into the particular characteristics and challenges of entrepreneurship education within the higher education programs at design schools in Denmark.

In the Nordic countries design is a big deal; aesthetically, functionally and business wise. Design is inherently part of the Nordic dna and how we live, work and interact is deeply rooted design. Our great claim to fame within this field emerged in the 1950s when masters such as Poul Henningsen, Arne Jacobsen, Alvar Aalto, Bruno Mathsson and many more pioneered Scandinavian Modernism within furniture design and other interior pieces, particularly lamps – all stemming from their architectural approach of democratic and industrially produced principals. And though these Northern lights still shine brightly today, they also represent a heritage struggle that runs as deep as the traditions: With such a legacy, how does Nordic designers today break free of that mould? (Hansen, Petersen 2015)

Luckily, a lot has happened on the design scene in the North since then, and the scope and field have broadened widely from a primarily architecturally based production to a much wider sense of what design and the creative industries can entail – from fashion and visual arts to graphic communication and design thinking. Margit Brandt pioneered an international Nordic style within fashion and today the fashion industry is in the top five biggest exports in Denmark, and the country is currently highly coveted in the international film and tv industry with numerous international awards to show for it. Sweden is the third largest exporter of music in the world and with mastodons such as H&M and IKEA, the thriving design industry helped Sweden gain its number one ranking for "creativity in business in Europe" in the business bestseller *The Flight of the Creative Class* (Florida 2005).

The Nordic countries are highly evolved when it comes to creativity and innovation and continuously rank highly globally, however, in terms on entrepreneurship the ranking is much lower (Lundström, et al 2008). Research conducted by Dr. Anders Lundström at the *Swedish Foundation for Small Business Research* alongside colleagues from Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland between 2003-2008 entitled *Entrepreneurship Policy in the Nordic Countries* indicates a lack of entrepreneurial initiative in a global comparison within most of the Nordic countries.

WELFARE – AN ENTREPRENEURIAL OBSTACLE?

Looking upon the Nordic countries - with its beautiful architecture, intriguing landscapes and both hip and historic culture; most of the countries being romantic, modern monarchies with quite a few "Most Liveable City in the World"-nominations and a lot of global attention-grabbing creative talent - it is difficult to understand what this lack of entrepreneurial spirit stems from. Surely here, with such innovation capabilities and access to knowledge and modern technology, the entrepreneurial mindset must be thriving? The short answer is: No. And the explanation for this conundrum is to some extent due to the Nordic countries large public sectors, high taxes and efficient welfare systems (Lundström, et al 2008). It may seem contradictory that a high level of social and financial security develops a decrease in risk-taking; however, this seems to be the case. The wealth in the Nordic region is fairly evenly distributed and the distance between rich and poor is much shorter than in most other regions around the world. From a social point of view, this is indeed a good thing – from an entrepreneurial point of view, this creates very little incentive to leave your well-paid, benefit-including, retirement-insured, 40 hours a week employment and head towards the risk-filled, unsure, unpaid adventure that creating your own business often entails during start-up.

Anne Kirketerp, postdoc researcher, at VIA University College in Denmark, experienced researcher in the field of entrepreneurship education, provides an interesting nuance to the question of welfare as an entrepreneurial obstacle: *"It isn't that people in the Nordic countries are somehow less willing to work hard than people in developing regions, judging by our creativity and innovation skills, we are quite driven. But starting a business may not be the most attractive option in an environment of highly challenging and interesting jobs, but we still need the entrepreneurial competences if we are to continue to advance our existing businesses and society at large."* Kirketerp challenges the notion that counting start-ups should be the primary way in which we measure entrepreneurship and that the entrepreneurial skills are valuable in a vast variety of contexts and should not simply be measured on the ability to register a business.

EDUCATING TOMORROWS LABOUR FORCE

This perspective seems to be one that is gaining ground in the Nordic approach to entrepreneurship. The traditional focus on economic value creation (Schumpeter 1932) as the primary objective of entrepreneurial activities has been challenged in recent years and it is stated quite clearly in the Danish governments *Strategy for Education in Entrepreneurship* that the entrepreneurial value creation need not be merely of the economical kind (Danish Ministry of Higher Education & Science 2009). The strategy also states its vision to be *"to provide an introduction to pupils and students in entrepreneurial thinking, develop their knowledge of entrepreneurship and develop their ability to act entrepreneurially"*.

Along the Copenhagen harbour the Danish Business Authority is situated and is run by Anders Hoffmann, the Deputy director general at the Department for Business Development and International Relations. The role of the DBA is to create the best conditions for growth in Europe and to make it easy and attractive to run a business in Denmark. Consequently, Hoffmann is a strong advocate for the governmental initiatives to promote entrepreneurship throughout the education system:

"Entrepreneurship education - if it is done right - an important driver of growth. Entrepreneurship education is shown to increase the life expected income of the students. The education can learn not only to get good ideas but also execute them. It is globally important not only for the Nordic countries, but here I think we are a bit more focused on the mindset of the education and a bit less on the classes in accounting and other more traditional ways of introducing entrepreneurship. We always need to be better. And now we need to focus on moving way beyond business plan competitions and focusing on the entrepreneurial method."

One of the major challenges currently facing entrepreneurship education is that as an academic, curricular subject Entrepreneurship is still in its infancy and there is a particular need for new ways to test and reward entrepreneurial behaviour and skills amongst the students (Kirketerp 2015). At the moment the way in which we conduct exams and evaluate student projects leaves a lot to be desired in terms of honouring entrepreneurship and their ability to apply an entrepreneurial mindset to problem solving.

Gazing into the future of the labour market provides a couple of clues as to why entrepreneurial competences are needed. According to The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies it is currently unclear whether or not Europe will be dominated by unemployment or a lack of jobs in the future. Several megatrends play into this from an aging population and globalization to automation and mobility, and with these trends a need for broad and flexible competences that allow for continuously changing needs of the labour market (CIFS 2013). Simultaneously, specialization and in-depth knowledge will be much sought after qualities in the future knowledge, experience and transformation economies (Pines, Gilmore 2014). Obviously this creates a paradox for the higher education institutions who need to be focused on providing students with the competences they will need, not simply on the day they graduate, but during the span of their careers – as well as playing a key role in providing the surrounding business life, industry and society with the labour force it needs to meet and tackle future needs.

DOES BUSINESS BELONG AT DESIGN SCHOOLS?

Arguably entrepreneurial competences can be identified in a broad spectrum of fields, however it holds particular significance to the design field in the quest to advance from mid century miracles to sustainable business ideas of the future. The design schools have had a longstanding tradition for an impeccable focus on creativity and craftsmanship and while creativity enables us to conceive new ideas and approaches, and innovation enables us to develop those ideas into viable solutions – entrepreneurship is the ability to execute and implement those solutions.

Else Skjold holds a postdoctoral position at Design School Kolding, her work and research has given her great insights in both design education and from within the design industry: *"I think entrepreneurship education at design schools is a very important skill to teach, but perhaps in a not so traditional sense. Already, design schools have been subjected to many political ideas about how to enter the knowledge economy, and today students need to achieve lots of skills that are not related to their own profession, such as academic skills, business skills, or PR- and marketing skills. Sadly, this has lessened their ability to be strong at designing - there is currently simply too few hours with practical training in design disciplines such as drawing,*

cutting, dying etc., and similar technical skills they need to be able to make a good design product. This development has evolved during the last 10-20 years, and now I think it is time to consider how to progress more cleverly, if we as a nation wish to support our strong tradition for strong design products. There is a reason why "Scandinavian Modern" became popular worldwide; it was based on local products, good craftsmanship and strong visions, and it was connected to the outside world".

In recent time, the level of complexity within education and various fields of study have increased dramatically with many new cross-disciplinary subjects being introduced and an array of teaching styles and didactic methods put into play. There is a need for establishing a beneficial balance between the competences at the core of the design field and the newer business related subjects. The need to establish a balance is to ensure that imposing new teachings, theories and methods mustn't be at the expense of the skillset needed to master the students' main field of study, but a supplement that enhances the students' capabilities, employability and ability to tackle the demands of their future careers.

Pernille Skov, the Director at CAKI Centre for Applied Artistic Innovation – an incubator for the arts education in Copenhagen with a focus on interdisciplinary, artistic innovation and entrepreneurship, suggests that *"Entrepreneurship education is important within the creative field because it can help increase an entrepreneurial mind-set and support the students' professional confidence by practising the ability to transform artistic skills into value for external stakeholders. When we teach entrepreneurship to students in arts education there are some basic skills, which needs to be taught as part of building up a professional practice. We focus on entrepreneurship as a way to strengthen students' and graduates' professional engagement and skills on the basis of their individual artistic qualifications. As such, we understand entrepreneurship as professionalization. This does not necessarily mean starting a private business. Rather it is a question of developing the skills of the individual, so that she or he will be capable of planning and realizing a professional working life."*

Christer Windeløv-Lidzélius, principal at Kaospilot – a Danish hybrid business and design school, with focus on multi-sided education in leadership and entrepreneurship adds: *"It seems to me that the larger trend goes towards having less of educations that teaches you to become an entrepreneur, but more as subjects (like for instance creativity and projects) which is introduced broadly with the hope to obtain two goals - one that more people will become (successful) entrepreneurs, but also that entrepreneurship as an approach to foster qualities we hold valuable - like democracy, cooperation, decision-making, problem-solving etc. Here entrepreneurship becomes a vehicle for larger objectives. The pros are of course that it is competencies that are in principle important for everyone and can be applied fairly broadly. The cons could be that entrepreneurship does not become an objective in itself, and as such is not considered a career and it becomes less of a priority. In Denmark what is needed is to create a system where transfer of credits and offerings in say a city can be easily be executed amongst different educations. Today there is still too many silos. Imagine a Kaospilot student who would take a course on biotech at the Copenhagen University and a small business class at say Copenhagen Business School and a design course at the School of Architecture. That could allow us to tap into the zones currently not available today*".

CULTIVATING AN ENTREPRENURIAL CULTURE

According to the report *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2010-2014* – an annual quantitative study that accounts for the Danish population's education in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial education is clearly on the rise in Denmark and has within only a few years gained ground in both primary school, high school and higher education. The study shows that although entrepreneurship education is currently far more theoretical than practical, it still furthers such competencies as self-efficacy and risk willingness. The GEM report also notices that the rise in entrepreneurship education has the side effect of an overall shift towards entrepreneurship culture being less a matter of life experience and more so a trending part of youth culture in general (Schøtt, Cheraghi 2014).

This is indeed good news. In my work as a cross-disciplinary lecturer (entrepreneurship, innovation, design, culture & trend) at the Copenhagen School of Design and Technology (KEA) I recognize the importance of not only developing students' entrepreneurial competences. Though I highly value this, the significance of establishing and enhancing an *entrepreneurial culture* has caught my attention in recent years (Clark 1998). In my elective *"REMIX Culture"* I particularly explore and emphasize developing students' practical, creative and entrepreneurial abilities as well an overall collective, entrepreneurial culture. During the course we focus on designing an *Effectuation* process that encourages the students to assess and utilize their own capabilities, network and resources - i.e. the *Bird in the Hand*-principle (Sarasvathy 2001). Furthermore, we highlight the value of collaborative effort and initiate activates that boosts an awareness of the course culture and their role in furthering a culture where creativity and the entrepreneurial mindset can thrive. During an evaluation survey conducted at the end of the course, the students were asked, *"To what degree do you believe that the REMIX course has strengthened your entrepreneurial mindset?"* the respondents collectively answered: *53% to a high degree* and *26% to a very high degree*. And *"To what degree do you believe that the REMIX course has strengthened the entrepreneurial culture of the group?"* the respondents collectively answered: *45% to a high degree* and *33% to a very high degree*.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP - NORDIC BY DESIGN?

Design schools in the Nordic countries have a lot on their plate: Our heritage provides a solid and inspiring stepping stone rooted in quality craftsmanship as well as a strong academic knowledge of the design field and its diverse usability. At the same time, design schools face a continuous need for implementing new approaches, methods, curricula and subjects to keep up with the industry demands and the rapidly expanding definition of what design is. Perhaps the notion of design as a process (Heskett 2002) is potentially a path into linking design and entrepreneurship that could be applied at Design Schools? And perhaps the strong traditions of Nordic design, innovation and creativity could provide a backdrop on which to cultivate a new entrepreneurial culture within the region?

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