

The Double-Edged Sword: Listening to Artist-Entrepreneurs in the West of Ireland

Susan Monagan

May 28, 2014

Between 2007 and 2013 European countries spent more than 6 billion EUR on supporting cooperation among EU countries in the areas of culture, creativity or creative industries...Culture and creative industries – including cultural heritage, performing arts, visual arts, music, books, architecture, and design - are currently among the most dynamic economic sectors in Europe. (Inspiring Creativity: Promoting Culture and Creative Industries Across Europe, 2013, p. 3)

Introduction

Throughout the world, there has long been an assumption that the arts and culture are valuable to local, regional and national economies. More recently, policy discussions have focused on the myriad ways in which 'creative economy' approaches that link economic vitality with artistic and creative activity can be integrated into economic development programmes. Though Ireland continues to struggle five years into economic recession, the country's culture and creative industries are seen as a bright spot on the horizon.

Despite the recent attention drawn to the potential of the creative economy, little research has been done to describe its application to rural places though these are often areas of great economic need. In many rural regions, a rich cultural life is an underdeveloped economic asset. Little research has been undertaken in order to understand the intentions of creative economy actors, whose motivations and objectives may appear irrational from a traditional economics point of view. Are they motivated by money, social justice, community

development – ‘all of the above’?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the experiences, motivations and values of artist-entrepreneurs working in the creative industries in the West of Ireland. The rural location may be a double-edged sword, creating opportunities as well as challenges. But the artist-entrepreneur, with one foot in the arts and the other in business, may be a sword that cuts two ways, uniquely positioned to develop and disseminate creative goods and services. The study listens to those successfully feeding the creative economy fires and may provide policy makers with valuable data pertaining to the emergence of twenty-first century cottage industries, gaps in educational programs, and innovative approaches to rural networking.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

I sought knowledge by asking the question: How do the artist-entrepreneurs in the West of Ireland’s creative enterprises make sense of their role and value their remote location? I conducted interviews with twenty-six artist-entrepreneurs who are engaged with arts-based enterprises.

This study hypothesizes that Ireland’s creative enterprises are often led by ‘artist-entrepreneurs’, individuals who successfully navigate the worlds of business and the arts and asks:

- How did these artist-entrepreneurs acquire their artistic and entrepreneurial skills?
- What meaning do they make of their role in their enterprise and their community?
- Are their specific values they are trying to impart through the work they do?

Though the West of Ireland attracts tourists and creative people, its resident population provides a limited market for the goods and services of its local artists.

- What challenges and opportunities do artist-entrepreneurs face in their remote location?
- What use do artist-entrepreneurs in the region make of networks with other creative people locally, nationally and abroad?

Relevant Definitions

I define 'rural' as it pertains to low population density communities well outside the artistic and economic influence of large metropolitan areas, such as Dublin. As I understand it, 'rural' is synonymous with 'peripheral' in Ireland.

The 'West of Ireland' as defined by the Creative Edge project, includes the counties of Clare, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal.

For the purposes of this study, the role of an 'entrepreneur' is understood to be to innovate, introduce new technologies, increase efficiency and productivity, or generate new products or services. The skills of an entrepreneur may include managing others, building teams of motivated people, raising funds, and marketing and promoting products or services.

I define an 'artist-entrepreneur' as someone who has made a significant investment in an arts related venture. This person understands himself to be an economic actor and has actively sought to acquire resources for his enterprise.

Often trained as an arts practitioner, this individual has moved beyond his personal art-making to manage an enterprise such as a gallery or performing arts venue.

Why this study...

I take the first person voice in narrating my experience of conducting this research. I bring with me my personal background and experiences, which have inspired my interest in pursuing this study. I acknowledge that these factors have influenced my selection of participants, method, and analysis.

I believe that inspired people, quality of place, and innovation are central to community development and this belief has led me to focus on projects that position cultural resources as key elements in development strategies. I would like to share the results of this study with those who have an interest in supporting rural communities in Ireland and elsewhere.

I want to use my background as an artist and my knowledge of research methods to make the experiences of artist-entrepreneurs more legible to policy makers. It is my intention that this study suggest approaches to policymaking and further research that support those artistic endeavors that interact with local communities.

Related Studies

Though the term 'creative economy' gained popularity through the work of Richard Florida, his work built on the foundation of the Creative City movement that began in the late 1980's

and was spearheaded by Charles Landry. Landry continues to seek to distill the essence of the creative place and, by invitation, has measured the creativity of cities (including Donegal and Letterkenny in Co. Donegal, Ireland) (Working for Talent, 2013) through their performance in ten areas, including: 1) openness, trust, tolerance and accessibility, 2) the place and placemaking, 3) strategic leadership, agility and vision, and 4) entrepreneurship, exploration and innovation, (Landry, 2014, para. 1).

The creative economy promise promotes the idea that attracting or enlivening creative people can turn around economically failing cities, neighborhoods or regions and has been embraced by those communities that are experiencing loss of population and dwindling tax revenues. Many rural areas have embraced planning that tries to both attract skilled workers and tourists as well as improve quality of life for local residents.

One downside of the creative economy approach is well documented by sociologist Sharon Zukin (1982) in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, an in-depth look at artists living in lofts in the SoHo district of Manhattan during the 1970's whose post-industrial design and lifestyle aesthetic became extremely popular. Artist-led gentrification, or the 'SoHo effect', as observed in other cities, can drive these same artists and long-time residents out of urban neighborhoods as property values rise and make homes unaffordable. Forty years later, the process of gentrification is well understood in urban neighborhoods.

Timothy Wojan (2007) and colleagues have sought to understand the characteristics of rural areas throughout the United States that consistently attract artists to live and work. The researchers have attempted to quantify the characteristics these places share and describe,

...nonmetropolitan areas, where a limited number of counties maintain or develop a distinct specialization in the arts. We document the emergence of these 'rural artistic havens' and identify county characteristics associated with the attraction of performing, fine, and applied artists (Wojan et al., 2007, p. 53)

These county characteristics include dozens of factors such as 1) population density, 2) university degree, 3) land in forest, 4) January sun, 5) wine county, 6) bike trails, and 7) non-profit organizations. These findings indicate the need for a holistic approach to developing strategies that promote culture and creative industries.

The challenge for rural communities planning to develop and leverage their creative resources is to negotiate an environment supportive of new artist-immigrants while honoring the traditions and culture indigenous to the locale. Rural communities are well-advised to discuss authenticity and the risks of compromising their traditions and dismantling the culture that makes them distinctive in the first place.

Wojan et.al. describe an artist 'tipping point' in counties that meet their 'rural artistic haven' definition:

The idea is that a minimum critical mass of artists or performers is required such that members of the community benefit from substantial interaction among themselves and the group is large enough to affect culture of the wider community. (Wojan et al., 2007, p. 56)

The authors suggest that it is possible that artists are more attracted to the presence of other artists and a specific lifestyle than to economic opportunities:

emerging havens are distinguished from other nonmetro counties by the level of

natural amenities. What appears to matter most is the opportunity for a high quality of life. ...Since highly educated workers forfeit the largest earnings premium by working in a rural area, the opportunity for a high quality of life can compensate for lower income. (Wojan et al., 2007, p. 69)

Nevertheless, artists in rural areas need to make a living and often this means a combination of attracting visitors to the rural location and pursuing external markets for their work. In *The Artistic Dividend: The Arts' Hidden Contributions to Regional Development*, written with David King, Ann Markusen (2003) uncovers evidence of artists living in rural areas of Minnesota (U.S.A.) and successfully tapping external markets

I showcase several artistic careers that are highly entrepreneurial — where the artist is not starving, working menial jobs or waiting for the next grant, commission or role but actively seeking diverse markets and venues for their work. Many artists directly “export” their work to customers, firms and patrons elsewhere, enabling them to live in the region, to contract work from other individuals and to generate work for and prompt innovation among suppliers. ... Artists, like firms, have locational preferences and gravitate towards certain regional economies.

For the artists showcased, I document how they have built their careers, why they decided to live and work in the region, and the ways in which their careers have enhanced the success of other individuals and businesses in the regional economy, (Markusen, 2003, p.3).

A 2010 study looked at the intersection of Europe’s cultural and creative industries and

entrepreneurship and provides a definition of a 'cultural and creative entrepreneur,'

someone who creates or brings to market a cultural or creative product or service and who uses entrepreneurial principles to organize and manage this creative activity in a commercial manner.

(The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries, 2010, p. 7)

The space between artist and entrepreneur may be described as a spectrum that an individual moves along, depending on specific circumstances, values, stage in career, etc. The artist-entrepreneur may hold the capacity to activate either the artistic or the entrepreneurial side of their skill set and may have the sensitivity and experience to know when to do so.

The tension between the creator of a cultural work and the entrepreneur, typical of many cultural and creative enterprises, is often seen in the desire to prioritise the cultural value of the creation with little motivation for generating economic value (creation-oriented), while the entrepreneur will prioritise the economic exploitation over its cultural value (growth-oriented)

(The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries, 2010, p. 7)

Though this tension may be found between two individuals, it may also be found within an individual and be both a motivating and inhibiting factor.

Method

The Qualitative Paradigm

This study is located firmly within the qualitative paradigm as I understand reality to be constructed – negotiated by the participants within a specific time and place.

"A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting."

(Cresswell, 1994, pp. 1-2)

My experiences, nature and orientation have led me to believe that reality is constructed and that because of constant change, relationships must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

I have found the interview method, as part of a qualitative inquiry, to be particularly effective in capturing the nuance of knowledge as it emerges from the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Though I did not follow his protocol exactly, I consulted Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*.

Partner

I intended my research to be useful to the Creative Edge, a project of the European Union's Northern Periphery Programme. This international coalition of researchers and economic development bodies has collaborated to support and learn more about the behaviour of the cultural sector in the peripheral areas of Sweden, Finland, Northern Ireland and the West of Ireland. I was in residence at the Whitaker Institute at the National University of Ireland at Galway for a five-month period, beginning in September, 2013.

The Creative Edge team understands creative people to be a key ingredient of a creative economy and chose to:

work on the challenges identified in focus groups and consultation in the peripheral regions as being of key concern to creatives i.e. accessing new markets, job opportunities, scalability, collaboration, information exchange, business development skills and affordable creative spaces. (Creative Edge, 2012, para. 8).

Following discussions with the Galway Creative Edge team, I proposed to interview twenty-five artist-entrepreneurs, living and working in the West of Ireland and engaged in producing cultural projects, products, events and services.

Recruitment

I sought a group of interviewees that would be balanced in terms of gender, represent every county in the West of Ireland and a range of art forms. Additionally, I sought out enterprises that would represent a variety of types of organizational mission: market driven, community driven, and artistic product driven. I sought interviewees who understood that their activities had a direct economic impact on their local community especially by creating jobs and/or attracting external funding. I limited the number of participants to twenty-five in the interest of time, knowing that the process of transcribing and making sense of the interviews would be time-consuming.

The Creative Edge team had conducted focus groups in the West of Ireland during a previous stage of research. The participants in these focus groups, as well as Creative Edge team members, became important sources of interviewee suggestions.

The final list of interviewees represented visual arts, crafts, events, theatre, dance, film,

music, festivals, general management, venue management, and artist management.

The Script

During the recruitment phase, I created a script of questions that would encourage the participants to talk openly about their experiences and sought to probe their values and priorities, and understand the way a rural location had presented each with obstacles and opportunities as well as unique approaches to networking. Though I asked a combination of scripted and open-ended questions, the goal was for all the interviews to be uniform enough to see trends and emergent issues and opportunities. I asked a handful of questions asking the interviewee to rank the importance of various situations from one to five. My intention was less to get a numerical answer and more to get the interviewee to think out loud as they tried to place a value. Examples of the questions are:

- Do you think of yourself more of an artist or an entrepreneur?
- How did you come by and develop your skills as an entrepreneur?
- On a scale of 1-5, five being “very important”
 - How important is it to you that [your business] to be engaged and connected to your local community?
 - What are some of the opportunities and challenges of being an artist in [your community]?

The Interviews

In late September 2013, I began the interviews. Interviews were scheduled and conducted at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. Most interviews were about an hour long and

were held in the interviewee's place of business or a public gathering place such as a hotel lobby. In two cases, the interview was held over the phone. With the interviewees' permission, I recorded all interviews.

The Transcript

I transcribed the interviews and then read them and reread them, looking for broad, common themes, and highlighting areas of salient text. I then clustered segments of the transcripts that appeared to be related. In doing this, I began to see that certain themes were emerging and I created headings for them. Not every artist-entrepreneur spoke to every theme. This thematic clustering exercise allowed me to focus, capture and begin to organize some of the meatier parts of the transcripts while seeing characteristics, concerns and ideas that these practitioners shared.

Findings Overview

A brief summary of some of the findings across interviews follows.

When asked if they bring more of the skills of an artist or an entrepreneur to their position/business, interviewees responded:

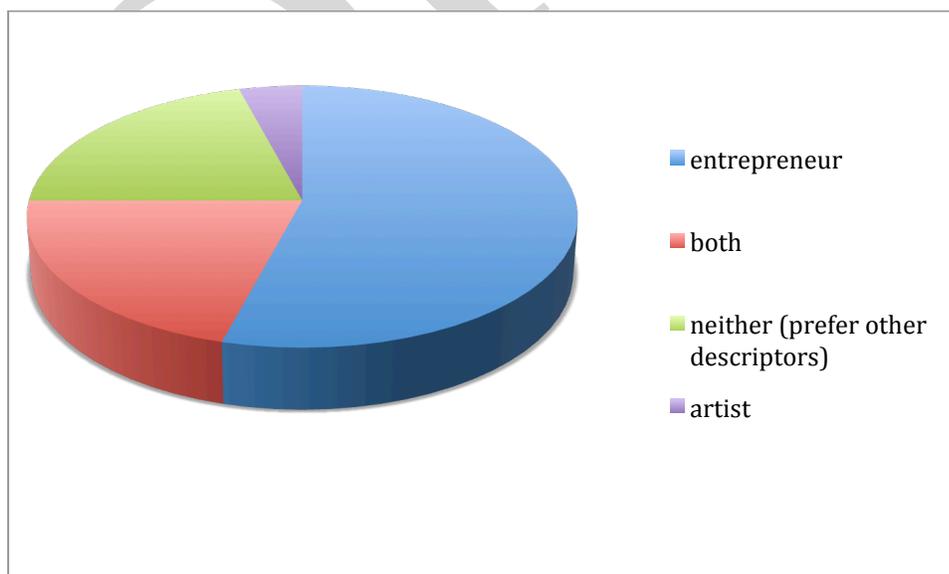


Figure 1.

When asked how they came by their artistic skills, interviewees responded:

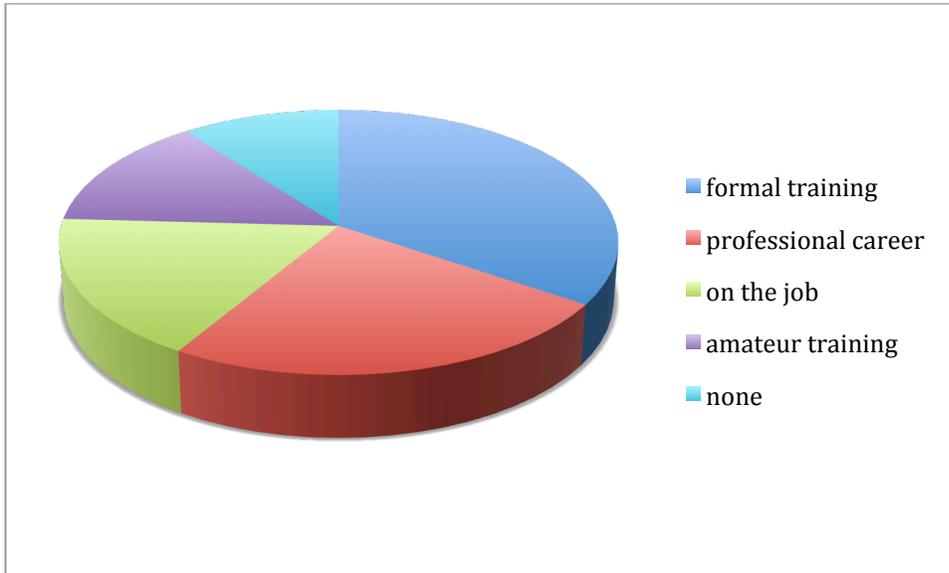


Figure 2.

When asked how they came by their entrepreneurial skills, interviewees responded:

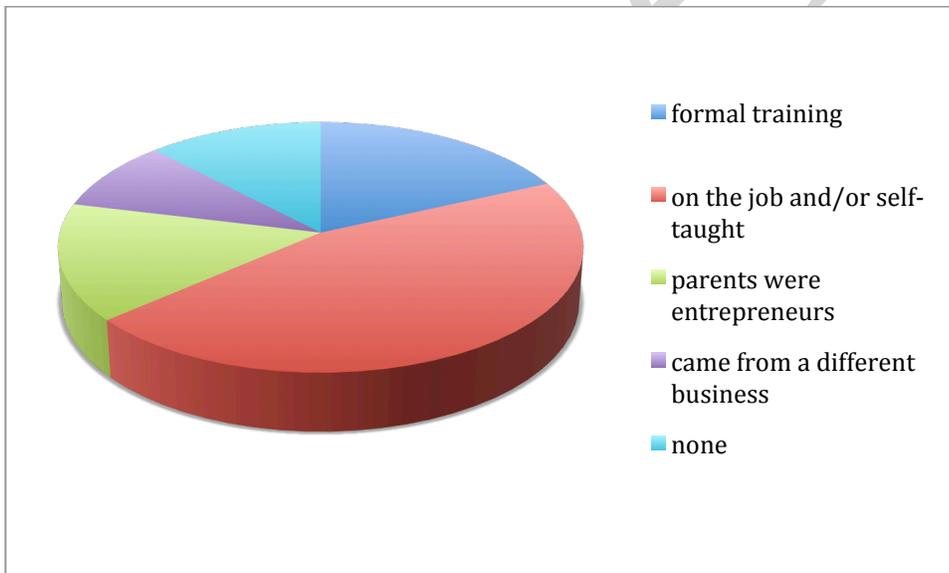


Figure 3.

I asked interviewees to give a ranking from 1-5 (five being the most important) to the following questions:

How important is it to you that [your enterprise] is financially stable?

The average response was “five”. Two thirds of all respondents stated that their organization or enterprise receives public funding.

How important is it to you that [your enterprise] be recognized, especially by the world outside your local community?

The average response was “4.5”. Respondents stated that outside recognition came in the form of national and international funding, media, and clients or patrons.

How important is it to you that [your enterprise] to be engaged and connected to your local community?

The average response was “four.” Level of commitment to the local community was typically tied to organizational mission.

When asked to describe the opportunities and challenges with which their rural location presented them, the respondents gave the following responses:

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lifestyle/landscape• Good, talented people to work with• Supportive, artistic community• Geo-located or otherwise specific funding• Small pond, less competition• Fewer distractions/more time/more	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isolation, expensive to travel• People won't pay for art and don't understand need for support• Low standard accepted, lack of professionalism• Easily pigeonholed• Nepotism

head space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emigration because of lack of opportunity • Dublin-centric nature of country <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Hard to get attention</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Hard to penetrate “the clique”</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Hard to get there to be seen</p>
------------	---

Many respondents suggested that national bodies such as The Arts Council, The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, and Theatre Forum could serve peripheral constituencies better by offering workshops and coming to see work in peripheral areas.

Themes

The following nine themes emerged from the work I did with the transcripts. The quotes from the artist-entrepreneurs share the nuance and complexity of their individual experiences while representing the responses of other interviewees as well.

The themes may be clustered as follows:

- Reaction and response to the economic climate
- Entrepreneurial attributes
- The evolving entrepreneurial role
- The values of artist-entrepreneurs

n.b.: I have represented the interview transcript text (the artist-entrepreneur's voice) in bold. Any other text can be assumed to be my voice as author of this paper, unless placed within quotation marks or in un-bolded, indented block quotes.

Theme #1: The Financial Context

Every interviewee spoke about the challenges of the current economic climate in Ireland and the constraints that five years of recession have put on their enterprise. Traditional sources of public funding have dried up and a decline in personal discretionary income means people have less money for ballet tickets or hand-made gifts.

we have to be really realistic about how tough the funding environment has become. I mean we've lost 25% of our revenue and our building is 50% bigger than it was. ...So there's real difficulties with that ...we would have had ten full time members of staff in 2008 and we now have three so there are real, real difficulties.

I think for me just the way the world is, in five years time, I just want to be in business. That's a goal for me.

Specifically, the economic situation has made funding difficult to predict so organizational planning cycles have been shortened. Enterprises are less proactive and more reactive than they were in the past.

the key thing at the moment is, with the funding structure in the country, you become short term and medium term thinking; you never know if your funding is going to come in next year or what's it going to be like

I find it's a lot harder for me nowadays to find that thinking space because you seem to be firefighting business stuff all the time. Whether it be cash flow or whatever

One of the most difficult things of the last few years is that there hasn't been any certainty, you feel that you're lurching from one kind of situation to the next...a lot of things are insecure and there's no real stability for planning.

A few interviewees suggested that the silver lining to the dark economic cloud might be that people are more willing to collaborate now than in the past. The head of a craft collective described the trajectory of his organization.

...It started out first with kind of a different group and then the boom time. I suppose it fizzled out. People were making money and kinda not thinking ...so now people are thinking a bit more and not making as much so ... it's a lot stronger group this time. We're hungrier.

The economic situation may be bringing latent entrepreneurial skills of leaders to the forefront.

Some of the creative management that we've had to apply to some of the crisis ..., there is an entrepreneurial flair to that...surviving is success in the current environment.

Theme #2

Entrepreneurial Attribute: Leading Others

Many interviewees spoke about their ability to lead, manage and organize others. Some embraced the leadership role, others performed it by default because the success of their enterprise required it.

I feel I'm a natural leader and I'm a natural manager. I suspect that I'm lucky that I have those skills innately to draw on.

Yeah, I don't shy away from organizing. ... I think there's an art in the collaboration

Creative people are not very organized you have to drive them on...

Theme #3

Entrepreneurial Attribute: Relationship to Risk and Challenges

Some interviewees described their ability to focus on an outcome without real concern of financial or personal risk. Pursuing an idea against significant odds seems to motivate some of the artist-entrepreneurs.

Because it was just this idea in my head ... I really didn't think about how. Blind trust, I really didn't think about it. I want to do this! If I had thought about it realistically? No way I would have done it. Impossible, like, ... If I think about that I won't do it. And then, then what? No craic! ... I'll figure it out, I'll figure it out! I'll *make* it happen, however it happens

I, sleep, dream, come up with these ideas and then try and find ways to carry them out. Through making new contacts or...being able to work on your own a lot and not to be afraid to go into new situations.

that was kinda part of the interest for me. It was unstable

Many interviewees described themselves as being motivated by challenges and having a restless nature. Being involved in multiple projects at once or in several different aspects of the organization is built into the artist-entrepreneur role; every workday is different and may demand different aspects of the person's skillset and personality.

I'm the type of person, If someone gives me a challenge I'll rise to it and say "yes" and I never think about how I'm going to get there but I'll find a way

I love new initiatives, I'm actually that kind of a person. I love challenges

I create my own difficulty because of what I'm putting into it. To achieve what we're trying to achieve. I could have an easier life I suppose but I enjoy the challenges.

Theme #4

Entrepreneurial Attribute: Lateral Thinking

Several interviewees described themselves as lateral thinkers or having the ability to think around an obstacle rather than butt up against it. Almost half of the interviewees have training in creative or performing arts and this exposure may have given them the ability to approach a situation from multiple points of view.

Because I was able to think laterally ... because I can think out of the box and creatively

Looking at problems from a creative point of view and not being defeated by them ...looking at things in a lateral way or from a different viewpoint.

Theme #5

Entrepreneurial Attribute: Approach to Learning

Though most of the interviewees perform business related tasks as part of their job responsibilities, only six have had any formal training in business. Most have learned business 'on the job' and have embraced lifelong learning as a way to maintain the skills necessary to keep their enterprise successful.

I am learning all of the time. You know I am always reading books on the subject. ...I have just been learning many systems and models.

And learning as you go along. This is really like running a business with all of the challenges that go along with that.

I have the business sense in my head ... It's not something that drives me but I learn how to do it. So it's like anything else ... constantly, constantly just learning how it works ...that's been going on forever for 20 years. You pick things up...

Theme #6

Role of Entrepreneur: Reactions

Questions about entrepreneurship produced a range of responses from the interviewees, some of them quite negative. Some interviewees wanted to distance themselves from the entrepreneur label because they associated it with for-profit business and they were clear that their enterprise's mission had aims other than profit. Other interviewees acknowledged that the pressures of their enterprise required them to behave as entrepreneurs, particularly in a challenging economic climate.

When asked to, I spent some time during several of the interviews, clarifying the entrepreneur role as I see it. I gave the example of the 'social-entrepreneur' concept that has gained currency and describes an individual who recognizes and seizes opportunities, such as resource acquisition and talent acquisition, to further an idea that will solve a social problem.

Following my description of this parallel role, some interviewees were more willing to consider themselves as entrepreneurs.

The whole organization is a business. I get vexed by people who think it's some sort of hobby. It's using those techniques.

The whole business side of things kind of annoys me to be honest. But you have to do it.

I think to survive now you have to use entrepreneurial skills. ...you have to think of new ways to invent and get money because funding has been reduced to such an extent. ... It's always, you have to think up new ideas. ... whatever you do you have to try and keep reinventing the whole organization in a way that you're going to try and get some return

Creative thinking and creative management, making the decisions that count that keep you successful. ...commercially driven but the principals that we've had to employ over the last few years are about getting to the same outcome. Although we're not a commercial organization, it's about finding a way to continue doing what we want to do.

Theme #7

Role of Entrepreneur: The Artist-Entrepreneur, an Evolving Hybrid

A few interviewees began to describe the particular space they inhabit between the arts and business. In the creative industries products may be difficult to describe or understand and markets are fickle and hard to activate. Artist-entrepreneurs identify their role as essential in bringing creative work to market, because they respect both the creator and the consumer. They understand the unique characteristics of artistic products and events are able to find an audience for the work and articulate the offering in an attractive and appropriate way.

Without being an artist I wouldn't know my business, I know my market because that's who I am. I make art; I know what's needed.

the skills of an entrepreneur but respect for the art, you have to understand how artists work and be able to facilitate the creative process and if you were to take a pure business line on it, I don't think it would work. There has to be heart in it as well.

Theme #8

Values: Relationship to money

The motivations of artist-entrepreneurs are complex. It does appear that although being economically viable is important, making a profit is low on the priority list of artist-entrepreneurs. They are motivated by the prospect of offering quality products and events and they understand the connection between financial stability and the future of the enterprise. Unlike more traditional commercial enterprises, the development stage of these artistic enterprises can last decades. Learning and transforming, rather than honing in to exploit a successful product, are stronger drivers for artist-entrepreneurs. Because of these proclivities, the artist-entrepreneur may be difficult to pin down as an economic actor.

this project has always been for me about the music I suppose my career has always been. It's not a career to make money it's a career to make music, art. If I had wanted to make money I would have gone to the bank like my dad.

It's difficult as a craftsman anywhere, it's like a vocation but you have to live as well. Look back and see if it's working for you. It's a different way of life.

I've never made a lot of money and I never will. Obviously it's not about that for me. If it was I'd be doing something else.

Understanding alternative notions of success is critical for those seeking to stimulate the activities of the cultural and creative industries.

The narrow model of entrepreneurship focused solely on commercial success does not seem to correspond to the cultural and creative industries for whom critical creative and cultural achievements are often more important. However, stimulating the development of entrepreneurial skills is needed for enterprise growth, market orientation, return on creativity, [etc.]

(The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries, 2010, p. 10)

Theme #9

Values: Making Art Accessible

Many of the artist-entrepreneurs interviewed for this study have strong personal philosophical foundations and some see themselves as agents for change within their communities. They care deeply about the artistic products and events that they represent and are troubled that this work may not be accessible to many audiences. They struggle to develop programming or products that are relevant to their local communities and will grab the attention of national and international arts audiences.

have to have buyin from our (local) constituents. Really, they're the people who come in every day, they're the people that we want to take on a journey and to be able to educate. We want them to engage with what we do and I think it's really sad when you have something world class like (our organization) and local people don't come in or don't like it or say "oh it's not for me I wouldn't go up there." I think it's a really, really terrible thing. So that's something I really want to try and put right

If I can get them through the door with my Trojan Horse, create the space to try new things, then I'm in business and they are warmed up and primed for some kind of change. Then it is up to us to broaden it and deepen it in a way that suits them. They enjoy the public ownership. I think a big problem for the arts is it is considered a 'Club' activity and its relevance as it becomes more clubby. We deliberately do the exact opposite. If we get public ownership and make them inclusive, ultimately that is the way to go

Recommendations

...CCI [cultural and creative industries], in particular SME's [small to medium-sized enterprises], have specific characteristics that may separate them from 'regular' entrepreneurship. They frequently operate in specific market conditions, produce goods that are 'cultural' by nature, work with people who are often more content-driven than commercially oriented and usually create very small enterprises (micro-SMEs) that may exist on the basis of permanent networks.

(The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries, 2010, p. 6)

The articulated experiences of the artist-entrepreneur can help integrate this role into programs that seek to develop the cultural and creative industries. What follows are some specific strategies that emerged from the interview process that may be useful in stimulating rural creative economies. Though these strategies are described with the specific Irish context in mind, they may have value to those seeking to understand rural creative economies in other regions.

Recommendation #1: Develop Cottage Industries

For many of the artist-entrepreneurs I interviewed, their place of work is their home. One of the benefits of a rural location is abundant, inexpensive space. Filmmakers, jewelers, musicians, photographers, and others across rural Ireland have workshops in their sheds where they make products that are sent all over the world. Some of these artist-entrepreneurs involve family members in production. Ireland's artist-entrepreneurs may be ushering in a wave of twenty-first century cottage industries that hearken back to the sites of production on the island in the pre-industrial age. The key difference is the role the internet plays in allowing these creators to connect with suppliers and a limitless number of potential

customers. In this way, Ireland's twenty-first century wave of cottage industries could be far more lucrative than its antecedent.

The twenty-first century cottage industry image can be exploited as a marketing strategy. In a search for authenticity, sustainability and health, a growing segment of the consumer market is interested in the provenance of the products and experiences they purchase. The narrative of a business has become an important benefit of the customer value proposition. In Ireland, these narratives can be connected to history, places and inspirational landscapes. Irish cultural products can put the consumer in direct touch with the rough complexity of small-scale production.

In *The Irish Edge*, Bradley and Kennelley (2013) argue that Ireland is uniquely positioned to compete based on authenticity and give evidence of several successful Irish firms, mostly in rural areas, that are already using place-based narratives to sell high-end textiles, specialty foods and one-of-a-kind tourist experiences.

The market for cultural and creative products and services are often characterized by unpredictable demand conditions. Entrepreneurs have to take heterogeneous, changing tastes into account. (The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries, 2010, p. 9)

In a fickle market, smaller-scale production can be a competitive advantage; firms can connect directly with their market, gauge its reaction to offerings and scale production up or down in response. Large companies struggle to be as quick and nimble and to present an authentic, human face to consumers.

Recommendation #2: Address Gaps in Education

The artist-entrepreneurs interviewed described gaps in their education. Irish educational institutions can begin to construct pathways toward careers in arts-entrepreneurship for learners of all ages. In addition to undergraduate degree programs, policy can direct the development of appropriate programs for secondary school-aged students as well as displaced workers. Coursework and interning experiences can include: project management, company management, artist management, producing (film, festival, theatre, special events) and resource development (fundraising, investment).

While less-experienced producers may have passion for the artistic products they represent, they may lack the technical language and instruments to make a persuasive business proposition.

Traditional investors and banks have difficulties apprehending the economic value of creative activities. At the same time, creative professionals often lack the necessary financial and managerial skills to show the potential value of the investment in CCIs. (Inspiring Creativity: Promoting Culture and Creative Industries Across Europe, 2013, p. 12)

Additionally, students pursuing fine and performing arts degrees can benefit from coursework developing the promotional and financial aspects of their future careers. As two artist-entrepreneurs said:

(you) Don't get the education in the business side of arts in college, you have to go and seek it out yourself.

why isn't there a business course in a college that teaches artists? It is nonsense! Where are they going to work?

Recommendation #3: Reframe Networking for the Rural Context

The following interview question sparked dialog about networking:

In what way does your location affect your ability to network? Can you suggest ways it has been positive/negative?

Most interviewees expressed frustration with the limitations of networking from a rural location and all located the center of Irish cultural networking in Dublin. Several felt shut out of opportunities open to those living in the capitol who were able to 'see and be seen' by other artist-entrepreneurs and funders. However, some innovative networking strategies emerged from the responses.

A few artist-entrepreneurs in the most remote areas of the West, described what I call 'Networking in Place'. This strategy involves bringing artists and patrons to their remote location and giving them an immersive, unforgettable and perhaps transformative experience. In this way, these artist-entrepreneurs have developed and maintained relationships with creative professionals all over the world. Social media platforms allow them to easily maintain relationships and highlight creative work. The manager of an artists' residency program described herself as having one degree of separation from the owners of some of the most prestigious art galleries in London, New York & Berlin.

Living in a small country with a limited market, twenty out of the twenty-six interviewees find it essential to network internationally. Several regularly attend international arts visual and performing arts expos and conferences. Festival directors bring international artists to Ireland, performing artist tour abroad, visual artists show their work abroad, and craftspeople exhibit and sell work in fairs all over Europe.

Given the EU's stated priority in funding cross-border cultural collaborations, Ireland's artist-entrepreneurs should keep an eye on future funding streams. By design, programs such as Peace IV fund cultural projects that involve Ireland's border counties and Northern Ireland. The European Regional Development Fund's Northern Periphery Programme funds border-crossing projects such as The Creative Edge collaboration.

Finally, some interviewees described leveraging local networks to the benefit of their enterprise and their community. Because of a lack of population density, local networks in rural places cross art forms and industry sectors, and require an open attitude about who a potential collaborator might be. Successful local collaborations have included those that link environmental issues, economic development, education and artistic expression, for example. Local networks tend to be thick and can be used to develop 'locovore' synergy.

Recommendations for Further Study

Given more time and resources, I would further pursue this study in the following ways:

- By determining the positive and negative roles and effects of specific public funding streams, such as taxes, small business support services, and arts councils;

- By creating case studies of the enterprises and the individuals, thoroughly researching the social, political and historical conditions of their locale, and placing the interviewees' experience within this broader context;
- By adapting Wojan et al.'s "rural artistic haven" construct to the Irish context.

In Conclusion: Why it Matters

Rural Ireland's artist-entrepreneurs are digging in and adapting to meet changing circumstances. The interviewees are involved, engaged leaders, contributing to the economic vitality of Ireland's rural areas. They are using their enterprise and the power of art to attract, celebrate and connect in areas that are economically and, in some cases, socially fragile.

These artist-entrepreneurs have a sophisticated worldview, and they live and work in a rural region for a variety of reasons, including a desire to live their values. These values include lowering the bars to participation in artmaking and art appreciation; the successful dissemination of creative work of excellent quality; and responsibly stewarding the finances of their enterprise.

A creative approach to leading our communities and considering solutions to our most pressing social problems is sorely needed. Policy makers in Europe can succeed in tapping into the potential of culture and creative industries by developing programmes that fan the fires of rural Ireland's artist-entrepreneurs.

Bibliography

- Aguiar, Luis.L.M., Tomic, Patricia, & Trumper, Ricardo (2005). Work Hard, Play Hard: Selling Kelowna, BC, As Year- Round Playground. *The Canadian Geographer* 49, no 2, 123–139.
- Bradley, Finbarr D. & Kennelley, James (2013). *The Irish Edge: How Enterprises Compete on Authenticity and Place*. Dublin: Orpen Press.
- Creative Edge (2012). The role of creative industries in economic recovery. Retrieved 20/5/14 from http://www.nuigalway.ie/cisc/research/creative_edge.html
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries (2010). Prepared for the European Commission Education and Culture Unit by Utrecht School of the Arts (HKU), the Netherlands.
- Florida, Richard (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Inspiring Creativity: Promoting Culture and Creative Industries Across Europe (2013). Published by INTERACT Point Vienna.
- Klein, Betsy and Walz, Jersey (2006). *Cottage Industry: Portraits of Irish Artisans*. Dublin:

New Island.

Know Cities: Knowledge Cities in the Atlantic Arc. Retrieved 21/5/14 from

<http://www.knowcities.eu/web/guest/partnership>

Landry, Charles. Retrieved 20/5/14 from <http://charleslandry.com/themes/creative-cities->

[index/](#) “Domains”.

Markusen, Ann and King, David (2003). *The Artistic Dividend: The Arts’ Hidden Contributions to Regional Development*. Published by the Project on Regional and Industrial Economics at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

Markusen, Ann and Johnson, Amanda (2006). *Artists’ Centers Evolution and Impact on Careers, Neighborhoods and Economies*. Published by the Project on Regional and Industrial Economics at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

Markusen, Ann, Gilmore, Sam, Johnson, Amanda, Levi, Titus, and Martinez, Andrea (2006). *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*. Published by The Arts Economy Initiative Project on Regional and Industrial Economics Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

Mitchell, Clare J.A., Bunting, Trudi E., and Piccioni, Maria (2004). *Visual Artists: Counter-Urbanites in the Canadian Countryside?* *The Canadian Geographer* 48, no 2, 152–167.

Rogers, Maureen (2005). Social Sustainability and the Art of Engagement—The Small Towns: Big Picture Experience. *Local Environment* Vol. 10, No. 2, 109 – 124.

Wojan, Timothy R., Lambert, Dayton M., and McGranahan, David A. (2007). The Emergence of Rural Artistic Havens: A First Look. *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review* 36/1, 53–70.

Working for Talent (2013). A webpage of Interreg IVC. Retrieved 21/5/14 from <http://www.w4t.eu/donostia-takes-second-place-in-the-creative-european-cities/>

Seidman, Irving (1998). *Interviewing As Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Zukin, Sharon (1982). *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.