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Intrapreneurial spaces to entrepreneurial cities: Making sense of play and playfulness

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Introduction

By drawing upon a diverse range of literature, this article aims to set out play and playfulness as an under-researched area in entrepreneurship. The conceptual lens applied is that of space and the city, from playfulness as a means to support intrapreneurial activity in the organization through to play and playfulness in the urban environment. This position paper aims to emphasize potential areas for research as pertinent to the special issue and, along with the collection of papers present here, aims to highlight news avenues for research into the space for creativity and entrepreneurial activity

The quest to understand the nature, process and practice of entrepreneurship and the extent to which it contributes to economic success is a diverse enterprise. As Ferreira et al. (2015) found in their literature across three decades from 1981, this is also an extensive field, with almost 1800 articles pertaining to entrepreneurship being identified across a limited sample of 17 journals. They identify five main themes ('Entrepreneurial process', 'Environmental and external determinants of entrepreneurship', 'Value creation and performance' and 'Methods, theories and research issues') and two other layers of subsidiary themes (Ferreira et al., 2015: 13). We might be mistaken for concluding that there is no place for play in this field of scholarship, given that there is no single mention of play in this review, let alone a ranking among the most common fields of enquiry in entrepreneurial research.

We contend that there is a need to explore the intrinsic value of play and playfulness in entrepreneurship and especially how our urban space can shape and support entrepreneurial thinking and enterprise. Although perhaps marginal to the field at large, progress has been made in understanding the pertinence of play to entrepreneurship (Chang, 2011) and, in particular, to unravelling the complexities that belie the simple dichotomy that is commonly drawn between play and work (Butler, 1990). The particular contribution of this article, and the wider collection of which it is part, is to reflect more directly on the role (and possibility) of playspace. Our position is that entrepreneurship may be viewed as a pursuit of opportunity using available resources; therefore, the nature of available space, and our ability to experiment, play, explore and shape it, should be appraised as a key resource and determinant for opportunity. Neighbourhood and locality provide the 'raw materials' for local enterprise and in many ways create a legacy for opportunities and creativity through which the entrepreneur may envisage future possibilities (Dobson, 2015). Furthermore, play can been seen as integral to the creative thinking that underpins success in a wide range of contemporary enterprises. As such, we wish to explore how cities may support experimentation, exploration and play through the beneficial presence of contested, uncertain and unresolved places.

For children at least, play is a fundamental right. Enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Rights of the Child since it was passed in 1989 is the commitment of:

'States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' and compelling them to 'respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity'.

This commitment to play carries more weight and extends an earlier declaration of the child's right to play that was produced in 1977, in advance of the International Year of the Child in 1979. At the very least, there is a role for entrepreneurship in realizing the challenging goal of the child's right to play, which innovative individuals and collectives have since pursued through their professional practice (e.g. City of Play).

Throughout the world, Article 31 has been understood as a whole in simple terms as the 'right to play' and has been utilized by those concerned to promote play on these terms. However, it is interesting to extend beyond this and consider the wider role of play as an activity that encompasses cultural life, artistic life, recreational activity and leisure activity. This, in turn, is an indicative of the challenge in precisely defining play, an issue that has vexed philosophers (Burke, 1971), other academic commentators (Petelczyc et al., 2018) and play professionals alike. The definition of play provided by the International Play Association is also very broadly conceived comprising of abstract proclamations (children are the foundation of the world's future) and historical comment (children have played at all times throughout history and in all cultures), while presenting it as a basic need, specifying its outcomes and asserting its import in the here and now (play is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time). More pertinently, it is expressed in terms of its qualities (play is instinctive, voluntary and spontaneous), which resonates strongly with the working definition that is used to define play by many national bodies. For example, the four national bodies that promote play in each of the nations within the United Kingdom subscribe to the very similar definition of the qualities of play that were proposed by the emerging playwork profession in the 1980s, that is, play is behaviour that is 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated'. In terms of our concerns with entrepreneurial space, this raises two issues.

First, the qualities of play resonate strongly with what might be widely understood as the mindset of the entrepreneur, that is, imagining new ways to solve problems and create value. The developmental value of children's play might be understood, among other qualities, to lay the foundations for entrepreneurship. Indeed, there is a body of work, which evidences the positive value of play on creativity for both children and adults; many analysts describe play and playfulness as intrinsic to creativity and innovation (Barron, 1988; Chang, 2011; Getzels and Jackson 1962; Taylor and Rogers 2001). Similarly, Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) and Kauanui et al. (2010) present play as something more than simply a specific and limited action, suggesting that it instead can represent a behavioural orientation in the performance of a wide range of activities. Notably, the realization of play value through creative endeavour is heightened among millennials and in the creative industries.

Second, it follows that the principles of what are determined to be a right of the child may be equally beneficial for adults and wider society as a whole. The understanding of adult play been pursued by Van Vleet and Feeney (2015: 640) who define play for adults as an activity or behaviour that (a) is carried out with the goal of amusement and fun, (b) involves an enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude or approach and (c) is highly interactive among play partners or with the activity itself. While some within the playwork profession have expressed concern at the adulteration of play (the overextension of adult influence on children's everyday play), there is a wider recognition of the value of play and playfulness beyond childhood, something that Lieberman (2014), for example, has asserted. The emergence of a specific focus on developing the play friendly city is not only a focus within the wider child friendly city movement but also may be understood as an attempt to move beyond it. Since play and experimentation are so intrinsically linked, we can envisage the role of a play friendly city as one that may encourage experimentation and therefore embodies some degree of flexibility. Experimentation resulted in the 'urban pioneers' of post-war Berlin appropriating spaces for informal enterprise and production and as such was tolerated by planners at the time who were seeking economic recovery (Dobson and Jorgensen, 2014). Urban activists encouraging creative trespass and interest groups concerned with urban psychogeography (Long, 2014) aim to develop multiple and personal cartographic narratives of the city which foster alternatives ways of seeing and using city spaces. This creative

expression through the urban experience has a deeper historical resonance with works such as Lefebvre's 'Right to the City' (1968) and the Situationist art movement of Guy Debord (Thomas, 1975) who both saw the importance in citizen's rights to shape, experiment and claim ownership of the urban environment. Once more, how these play friendly cities are to be realized requires new thinking, new visions and new approaches.

Problematizing productive play

Play/work is one of the many powerful dichotomies deployed in the academy and wider society to give order to, and to make sense of, the world in which we live. Our everyday lives abound with examples that reinforce this polarization, which is both temporal and spatial. From 'playtime' at school, to designated staff social spaces in the workplace; and from weekends affording regular and short-term opportunities for the worker to 'recharge', through to annual holidays offering less-regular, albeit much cherished, opportunities to 'escape'.

Work and play have the capacity for a much closer relationship as is argued by Lefebvre (1991) for whom the spatial realms of work and life are inseparable. OforiDankwa and Julian (2004) are not alone in contending that these are distinct realms, rather than states that can be positioned along a continuum. Their purpose is not to dispute pertinence of one to the other. Rather, they use Diversity and Similarity curves to demonstrate the paradox wherein more productive economic outcomes are more likely when play is harnessed in the workplace. The importance of this contention is heightened in times of economic stress when play is curtailed as an unnecessary expenses/ distraction, which Ofori-Dankwa and Julian contend exacerbates the problems that are being encountered. Some researchers have explored the role of play in work as a way of providing increased meaning and purpose (Porras and Hoffer, 1986), for example, in the repetitive tasks undertaken by factory machine operatives (Roy 1959). Petelczyc et al. (2018) reviewed the literature to present an integrative summary of the research literature on play at work, identifying both the antecedents and consequences of play, leading them to propose a research agenda that comprises both extensions of existing work and new fields to explore.

Intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial playspace in the entrepreneurial city

The entrepreneurial city may be understood through a variety of lenses. Strategies have incorporated arts and culture (Bassett, 1993), urban renaissance (Colomb, 2007; Porter and Shaw, 2013) and city marketing and branding (Paddison, 1993). According to Jessop and Sum, there are three defining features, that is, (i) pursuit of innovative strategies to maintain or enhance its economic competitiveness in relation to other places; (ii) strategies are explicitly formulated and pursued in an active fashion, with reflexivity part of the process; and (iii) utilization of an entrepreneurial discourse through which the city is presented and indeed marketed as entrepreneurial. In the context of this article, it is helpful to distinguish between intrapreneurship (entrepreneurial activity within an organization) and entrepreneurship (which we understand as being oriented towards the broader city). Of course, these are connected and intrapreneurship should be considered to be one of the key features of the entrepreneurial city.

Play in the intrapreneurial workplace

We can identify two quite different positions on play and intrapreneurship within organizations. First, the conventional understanding refers to the explicit embracing of play to achieve positive economic outcomes. Although this may be led or championed by individuals, it tends to be at least sanctioned and more often than not promoted by management. In effect, intrapreneurship through play is one of an array of tools that can be used to achieve positive outcomes within organizations.

However, an alternative vision of playful intrapreneurship is also possible – one which challenges management and appears to be countercultural. Butler (1990) refers to playfulness through the lens of troubling/queering in the workplace whereby routines may be gently disrupted to foster creativity: '"queering" is problematizing

apparently structural and foundational relationships with critical intent, and, within this, clowning is as legitimate a way of problematizing as more solemn means of turning the world upside down' (DiSalvo et al., 2010: 3–4). DiSalvo et al. explore the notion of playful disruption in the area of computing through work on Human Computer Interfaces. Therefore, playfulness is seen as an important tool for operational and design improvement in the area of computing and systems development (Maiden et al., 2004). Using the definition above, we might consider the role of the entrepreneur in an innovation ecosystem as 'problematizing apparently structural and foundational relationships' and a Schumpeterian view of the entrepreneur is most definitely a vanguard who provokes and disrupts the market. Play and playfulness for the entrepreneur is not just an aspect of creativity and innovation but also an entrepreneurial orientation and intention. The end result – positive outcomes for the organization – may be attained, but the means through which these are defined and achieved are outside the locus of control of management.

Towards the city as an entrepreneurial playspace

Similarly, two parallel positions can be specified for the wider city. As with Butler and the workplace, it is possible to conceive of a grassroots entrepreneurship for the city that works towards achieving goals beyond economic competitiveness. Through play, this entrepreneurial approach may inadvertently generate economic return, but its primary purpose is to enhance the social life of the city, often articulated as working towards the play friendly city.

Alternatively, and more conventionally, play can be utilized in the entrepreneurial city as a means of creating an environment that allows for the realization of unknown opportunity. Entrepreneurial urbanism is a term used to broadly capture recent processes of decentralization and has been mobilized by Harvey (1989) as a framework to describe the shift from 'local government to local governance' (Andrew and Goldsmith, 1998; Chapin, 2002; Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Ward, 2003). Spatial resources provide the 'raw materials' for local enterprise and in many ways create a legacy for opportunities and creativity through which the entrepreneur may envisage future possibilities and value propositions. Entrepreneurship may be described as the 'process of pursuing limitless opportunities using the resources currently at hand' (Bhale and Bh¯ale, 2013: 172);¯ therefore, the nature of available space (and our ability to shape it) may be seen as a key resource and determinant for opportunity (Dale and Burrell, 2008).

Landry (2011) makes the connection between play, creativity and the entrepreneurial city – but arguably describes the city of creative production and consumption and not necessarily a medium through which play and creativity are performed. Cities should therefore represent more than a cluster of conversion processes – they should provoke and inspire enterprising citizens. Play and playfulness can be seen as important elements of creativity and creative thinking. In this context, urban playfulness is about provocation, exploration and testing institutional, social or personal boundaries and norms.

The question remains as to how far the shapers of society can and do accommodate and encourage uncertainty and the need for flexibility, as new and articulable social virtues as well as a constraint in the creation of enterprise space and civic infrastructure. Beumer and Martens (2010) discuss key organizing principles from which policy tends to be prescribed from a cultural theory perspective. Of particular interest to Beumer and Martens is the world view described by Verweij et al. (2006) as a 'clumsy solution'. They suggest this has often been previously disregarded as not a coherent perspective 'because it dynamically and eclectically integrates aspects of all of the other [cultural theoretical] perspectives' (Beumer and Martins, 2010: 3217). Clumsy solutions to complex problems may be conceived in the following terms:

[...]those institutional arrangements in which none of the voices[...]is excluded, and in which the contestation is harnessed to constructive, if noisy, argumentation[...]it is an effort to outline which combinations of

interests, norms, perceptions, time horizons, strategies and emotions prevail in which particular social settings. (Verweij et al., 2006)

This is essentially an 'agnostic' (Butler, 1990) cultural perspective where narratives of the future are described as dynamic rather than static and where we must aim for 'explicitly presenting various basic assumptions, world views and ethical perspectives directing the course of events without assuming a completely "makeable" world' (Beumer and Martens, 2010: 3233).

Gilbert and Phillips (2003) explore characteristics of self-organization through the lens of performativity of urban citizenship. They assert that, in this context, 'performative citizenship is the practice of expressing and recognizing our rights and others' rights through the process of questioning, affirming, negotiating, and enacting them' (2003: 314). Harvey (2008) brings the notion of an emergent city vision to this discussion in suggesting that:

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship with nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is the right to change ourselves by changing the city. (2008: 1)

The means to transform is a level of mutability gained through performative citizenship and can be seen as an agonistic 'self-urbanism' portrayed not merely as viable or desirable but another type of human right. In 'Exploring the Unmaterial World', Wired (2000) describes architect Rem Koolhas' new virtual design studio that aims to reinvent city planning through means which appear to embrace entropic characteristics of uncertainty and continual mutation:

Koolhaas argues that as the global economy throws up ever more enormous development projects, which become ever more quickly obsolete, the design of a given city merges with the design of its decay. To Koolhaas, virtual architecture means designs or redesigns of human environments that don't resort to the tools of the construction industry: 'My ambition is to modernize and reinvent the profession by making use of our expertise in the unbuilt'. (2000: 1)

In this sense, we explore the intrinsic value of democratized and contested urban spaces as not just the building blocks for business enterprise but also in the shaping of curiosity, exploration and invention.

Conclusions

As outlined in this article, the notion of play has been all but absence in entrepreneurship literature (Ferreira et al., 2015) and therefore should provide a rich source of investigation for future studies. Here, we suggest that play and playfulness are intrinsic to the creative experimentation and risk-taking that are often associated with the entrepreneurial psyche. In order to help mobilize the notion of play, we invoke playspace and the locality for play as a necessary framework to locate studies. From the intrapreneurial workspace to the entrepreneurial space of the urban environment, we have aimed to explore a number of thematic areas.

From our outline of the essence of play in childhood, the article explores the problematizing of play as a productive element of work. It is perhaps here that the entrepreneur/ intrapreneur could be described as someone creatively exploring the 'middle ground' in the work/play dichotomy. Both the workplace and the city space are described as offering the building blocks for entrepreneurial activity, and therefore, encouragement in the playful flexibility of these may be seen as central to creative exploration and therefore innovation. The ability to express our right to shape the urban environment as a basic democratic right is traced to the Right to the City movement of Henri Lefebvre (and more recently David Harvey). In essence, this is about claiming our right to play and experiment with our surroundings in order to reveal new opportunities to use space and new ways to organize ourselves through it. Since 'organizational form' is simply an outcome

of the particular way, we organize ourselves in space to be product and create value, the right to find new means of organization, explored and revealed through playful experimentation of space, would appear to be an important one for the entrepreneur to celebrate and uphold.

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